



“The Future ”

Rev. 1:1-3, 19

Lesson 12

In A Nutshell

Have you ever read the book of Revelation? If you have, what percentage of its material do you think you understood? All agree that Revelation is a difficult book of the Bible to interpret correctly. Four major approaches have disagreed on how to go about doing so.

The preterist approach adopts the view that the book of Revelation is largely an apocalyptic description of events that were in the past from John’s perspective, who wrote it at the end of the first century. The view relies heavily on the Olivet Discourse. Christ tells His disciples that they would see Daniel’s abomination of desolation (Matt. 24:15), which the preterist sees as the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, and that their generation would not pass away until all was fulfilled (v. 34). However, accounting for all of Revelation’s prophecy, as well as that of the Olivet Discourse (the Second Coming for example), in terms of first century history is simply impossible. It also fails to take John’s explicit description about the content of his book seriously (“things which must shortly come to pass” [Rev. 1:1]; “the things which shall be hereafter” [v. 19]). The disciples saw an abomination of desolation in A.D. 70 that Daniel called the destruction of the sanctuary (Dan. 9:26), but that was but a type of the future one he prophesies (v. 27). The generation Christ mentions is the Jewish lineage (Matt. 23:37-39); Israel has a future in the plan of God.

The symbolical approach to interpreting Revelation stops short of finding history that corresponds to the content of the book. The idea is that the symbols, events, and characters of Revelation have only spiritual significance, which of course they do, but not any historical significance. Here again, John speaks of writing about events that happen.

The historical approach is less popular today than it was in previous generations. It says that John wrote about the future from his perspective, but the past from ours. This idea has the advantage of taking John’s description of his book seriously, and it provides more history from which to find parallels with the content of the book. But the approach is still difficult to accomplish, and it fosters multiple changes of interpretation as history shifts over time.

The futurist approach believes that Revelation’s content is about historical events that are in the future from our perspective. It is the only approach that can (1) read Revelation simply and chronologically, (2) treat it as normal prophecy, (3) account for the Bible doctrine of Israel’s future, and (4) avoid the square-peg-in-round-hole problem of the other views.

To The Testimony!

Interpreting Bible Prophecy

Ezek. 37:15-28 1. In order to understand what the Bible says about the future, we have to know how to interpret passages of Scripture that seem to be making predictions about the future. This prediction of Ezekiel's prophecy utilizes a symbol of two sticks. Mormonism teaches that the two sticks are the Bible and the Book of Mormon becoming one authoritative revelation for God's people. Matthew Henry wrote that the two sticks are the Jew and Gentile becoming one in the church. What did the author Ezekiel think the sticks were? How are the Mormon and Mathew Henry methods of interpretation the same, and how are they different?

Isa. 61:1-11 2. Christmas season is a great time to think of the nature of Bible prophecy. Messianic prophesies told us that Christ would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14), that He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), that He would suffer Roman execution (Psalm 22), and that He would do so for our sins (Isaiah 53). The words Messiah and Christ refer to His anointing by the Holy Spirit, which began especially at His baptism (Matt. 3:16-17) and continued on through His public ministry (Luke 4:1). Filled with the Spirit, Jesus was an amazing teacher, and in Luke 4 He gave a lesson on the nature of prophecy and its fulfillment. In verse 21 He says, "this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." What Scripture was He referring to, and how had it been fulfilled that day?

Dan. 9:20-27 3. The literal nature of interpreting the symbols of Bible prophecy is perhaps best seen in Daniel's prophesy of 70 weeks. The week in this passage is the number seven, a symbol that represents seven years, but the literal specificity of the prediction is nevertheless truly amazing. In summary, the prophecy states that 70 weeks of

years have been ordained for Daniel’s people, Israel, and his holy city, Jerusalem, a total of 490 years. Ezra received the command to restore and build Jerusalem in 457 B.C.. 49 years later (7 weeks), Nehemiah put the finishing touches on the rebuild. A total of 483 years later (7 + 62 weeks), Jesus Christ began His public ministry in 27 A.D., the last year the Jews celebrated the Year of Jubilee in Palestine. Three and a half years later, He was crucified on a Wednesday, the preparation day for the Passover in A.D. 31. What would the 490 weeks accomplish, and how do we know that the last 70th week is still future?

Things to come for everyone—the future of the world

John 4:1-6 4. Now that we have come to understand the role of a parenthesis in Bible prophecy, finding ourselves between the two predicted comings of the Lord, it is important for us to consider how the parenthesis we are in comes to an end. Clearly, that end is the day of the Lord’s judgment and vengeance (Isa. 61:2; Zeph. 1:18). Will believers of this age have to endure that end? Why or why not?

1 Thess. 4:13-18

2 Thess. 2:1-17

5. Significant future events are listed in chronological order in the chart below. Match each event with the Bible prophecy passage that predicts it will happen and with what God’s purpose may be in planning this event by drawing connecting arrows between the columns.

Event:	Passage:	Purpose:
The Rapture of the dead and living in Christ.	Daniel 9:27	Satan marshals the enemies of Christ from our age against Him.
The 7-year Great Tribulation period—Daniel’s 70th week.	2 Thess. 2:3-4	Initiate the antichrist’s attack on Israel ultimately resulting in their salvation.
The rise of the antichrist and his kingdom.	Matt. 25:14-30	Rescue Israel; destroy antichrist; bind Satan; begin to reign on earth.
The antichrist makes and breaks the covenant—abomination of desolation.	1 Thess. 4:13-18	Reward faithful saints of previous ages with kingdom privileges.
The second coming of Christ to earth and Armageddon.	Zeph. 1:14-18	Resurrect believers of this age to escape the Great Tribulation judgment.
The millennium 1000 year reign of Christ on earth.	Rev. 20:7-21:8	Separate millennial mortals as sheep and goats; new heaven and earth.
The rebellion of the nations, judgment of sheep and goats (GWT), eternity.	Rev. 19:11-21	Judge the earth for its sin, while accomplishing the salvation of Israel.

Things to come for each one—the believer’s future

- 1 John 3:1-3 6. We see the doctrine of imminence in John’s expectation of seeing Christ again. As a very old man, he did not write of seeing Him after his own death, but rather “when He appears” (1 John 3:2).
- 2 Cor. 5:1-10 But even more important than John’s faith in imminence was the effect that seeing Christ again had on him as an individual believer (v. 3). Describe that effect, and then explain how Paul’s teaching on seeing Christ again encourages the same effect in us.