

The Book With A Blessing

To the best of my knowledge there is only one book in the Bible whose introduction includes a specific blessing for anyone who reads the book. Ironically, this blessing is found in a book that many Christians tend to avoid. That book, of course, is the book of Revelation:

Revelation 1:3: “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”

As you can see, God promises to bless those who read Revelation or who have it read to them. There's also a blessing for those who “keep those things which are written therein.” That word “keep” is the Greek word *tereo*, which means “to attend to carefully, take care of, to guard.” In other words, God promises to bless those who read the book of Revelation and who pay careful attention to what it says.

There's something else unique about this book. While the Bible is full of verses that command people to not tamper with God's Word, this is the only book that includes a specific curse for anyone who dares to alter its contents. This can be found at the end of the book:

Revelation 22:18: “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

Notice the tremendous severity of this curse! Now, this curse isn't directed at those who misunderstand the prophecy or have trouble figuring out what it means. What it is saying is that if anyone tampers with the text of the prophecy itself and removes a portion of it, God will *remove their name from the Book of Life* and condemn them to the Lake of Fire for all eternity. In other words, tampering with Revelation and altering its contents is as great a crime in God's eyes as taking the Mark of the Beast! It's a very serious matter.

So, then, God promises to bless those who read Revelation and pay attention to it, and He also threatens eternal damnation on anyone who dares to tamper with its text. That tells us that there is something very special about this book. God clearly wants His people to be familiar with what it has to say – after all, that's the whole point of Revelation 1:3!

Yet there are a many people today who simply do not care about prophecy. Some of them say that they are “pan-millennial”, meaning “it will all pan out in the end, so why should I care?” Others say “Well, all of this end-times stuff doesn't really impact the way I live my life, so why does it matter?” There are still others who are simply intimidated by the book and are confused by the *many* different ways it has been interpreted. They see no reason to get mixed up in something that complex and controversial.

So why should we care about Bible prophecy? The simple answer is *because God wants us to care*. We see that right in Revelation 1:3, but that's not the only verse that teaches this. Jesus Himself had this to say when He was asked about matters relating to end-times:

Matthew 24:3: “And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign

of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you."

Notice that Jesus didn't say "Oh, don't worry about it! All that end-times stuff is going to pan out in the end anyway, and it really doesn't have any practical applications. Just focus on serving God and you will be fine." That's what a lot of people believe, but that's not what Jesus said! In fact, what He actually said was "Take heed that no man deceive you" – and He then described in great detail the events that would foreshadow His Second Coming. He *wanted* His disciples to know what was going to happen *so that they would not be deceived*, and He wanted them to be watching *because it could happen at any time*:

Mark 13:34: "For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.

35 Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning:

36 Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.

37 And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."

Notice that we don't see any trace of Jesus saying "Oh, just don't worry about it. Life is too short to be focusing on things like that." He actually told His disciples not once but *several times* that they needed to be watching! Saying "oh, it doesn't matter; it will all pan out in the end" is *not at all* the same thing as understanding end-times prophecy and being watchful for the return of Christ.

Some people say "There's no reason to study all of this end-times stuff. As long as you're ready you will be fine." That sounds wise, but it is actually a very foolish thing to say. After all, *what are you getting ready for?* According to Preterism, Jesus came back thousands of years ago. According to Post-Tribulationism, the Church is going to have to endure seven years of Hell-on-Earth. According to Dominionism, the Church is going to conquer the world with the gospel and usher in an age of peace. According to Pre-Tribulationism, Jesus could return at any moment and remove the Church from the world. There is no such thing as "being ready" in a generic sense. Is Jesus going to come back soon, or is He going to come back in the distant future, or has Jesus already come back, or is He never going to come back at all? Is the Church going to conquer the world, or is the Church going to be removed from the world, or is the Church going to go through the worst period that the world has ever seen? If you don't understand end-times prophecy and have no idea what is true and what is a lie then how could you possibly "be ready"?

Jesus said to be wary because many false Christs would come in His name. If you don't know the truth then how can you tell a genuine Second Coming from a fake one? Do you know enough about the return of Christ to tell the genuine article apart from a fraud? If your knowledge of end-times prophecy is "I'm sure it will all pan out in the end", then the answer to that question is *no*. People like Harold Camping have destroyed the lives of many people with false end-times prophecies precisely because those people did not understand what the Bible teaches. Other people have actually murdered their own children because they thought the Tribulation was starting and they wanted to save them. People's lives have been utterly destroyed because they did not understand this subject and were led astray by false teachers. If you do not know the truth then you are open to being deceived by the next charlatan who comes along – and don't think that it can't happen to you. Just because you didn't believe one lie doesn't mean you won't find the next one convincing.

Paul echoes this very same idea. He did not want the Thessalonian church to be ignorant:

1 Thessalonians 4:13: “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

Notice that Paul did not tell the Thessalonian church “Hey, don't worry about all this prophecy stuff.” No, what he actually said was “I would not have you to be ignorant.” He *wanted* them to understand the doctrines that surround the Second Coming. Paul, like Jesus, was *against* this “pan-millennial” idea. He wanted them to know what God had to say about the Lord's return and he wanted them to comfort each other with these teachings. In fact, in Paul's second letter to them he repeated that idea:

2 Thessalonians 2:1: “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,

2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?”

Paul didn't want them to be deceived by false or erroneous teachings, and he expected the Thessalonians to remember what he had taught them. Each time the Second Coming is mentioned we find God urging us to pay attention and hear what He has to say about it! I find it interesting that one of the last things Jesus does in the Bible is bless those who “keep” (*tereo*) what He had just revealed about end-times prophecy:

Revelation 22:7: “Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.”

(You can almost hear Jesus saying “P.S.: This Revelation stuff is important! Pay attention to it.”)

I've already explained what that word “keepeth” means. God is very clear on this point: He wants us to not only *care* about end-times prophecy but to also pay attention and *understand* it. After all, how can we possibly avoid being deceived if we ignore the subject altogether? How can churches tell the truth apart from lies if they don't know anything about the subject?

Yes, it's true that Revelation has been interpreted in many different ways. Since God clearly wants His children to understand Revelation, doesn't it seem likely that Satan would go out of his way to spread confusion, doubt, and distrust over this subject? After all, if people aren't paying attention

anyway then spreading lies is a great way of suppressing the truth!

It is also true that the Second Coming is not an easy subject. Revelation is not a simple book, and it took years of concentrated effort before I finally understood what it was saying. It was difficult but it was worth it. As the Bible says, "Seek, and ye shall find." If we seek the truth we will find it. That doesn't mean that it will be easy, but we need to remember that we do have help: God has promised to give wisdom to all those who ask for it, and we have the Holy Spirit to guide us into truth. We're not in this alone. If we apply ourselves then God will be there to help us.

Today is actually a great time in history to begin studying eschatology (the study of end-times) because there are so many great resources available. If you're new to this subject, a great place to start is *Footsteps of the Messiah* by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum. He begins by explaining the rules that he uses to interpret Scripture, and he then consistently applies those rules to all of the prophetic passages that are throughout the Bible. He takes each passage, quotes it, applies the rules, and then shows the interpretation. It's a very easy book to read, and it's easy to see how the author arrived at his conclusions.

My point, though, is that there's nothing Biblical or godly about what people call "pan-millennialism." It is *not* God's will for us to adopt a "who cares?" attitude to this subject – or to *any* Biblical doctrine, for that matter. These days it's common for people to say "Let's just stick to the major truths; they're all that really matters." Frankly, God is not amused. The Lord did not give mankind a 3-page booklet that outlined the major truths and then say "Just stick to these and you'll be fine." Instead He spent thousands of years writing a 1000+ page book that was filled with all kinds of truths, and He expects us to know and believe *all* of it. This idea that we can ignore most of what the Bible says "because it's not core truth" does *not* come from God. Do you really think that the Lord is up in Heaven thinking "Boy, I sure hope My Church ignores 90%+ of what I had to say"?

Finally, let me close by saying that the study of eschatology is important for another reason as well: without a good working knowledge of the subject there are many Bible passages that just won't make any sense. For example, take this passage:

Matthew 25:1: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

9 But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not."

This is a pretty well-known Bible story, but people misinterpret it all the time. They approach this passage thinking that they already know what it means, and in doing so they gloss over all of the important points and arrive at an erroneous conclusion. First of all, notice that these 10 virgins (or bridesmaids) are waiting on the bridegroom to come. Right away we have a problem because the

Church is always represented as the *Bride*, not as ten bridesmaids. Nor is the Church in danger of being excluded from her own wedding – in fact, it's impossible for the wedding to happen without her! This passage isn't talking about the Church at all. It's actually talking about a very *different* group of people.

Plus there's the odd deal surrounding the lamps. Back in ancient times lamps used oil as a fuel, and in the Bible oil always represents the Holy Spirit. When these 10 bridesmaids started waiting all 10 of them had oil; the problem was that the groom tarried for so long that 5 of them ran out. This presents a huge problem because this story is saying is that half of these people *ran out of the Holy Spirit*. In other words, they originally *had* the Spirit, but they eventually lost Him and were caught empty-handed when Jesus returned. Since they lacked the Spirit at the moment of Christ's return, Jesus left them behind and rejected them.

However, Christians today *can't* run out of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is sealed within us and cannot be lost. We can offend the Spirit and grieve it, and we can even ignore the Spirit, but we can't lose it. Moreover, having the Spirit sealed within us means that our salvation is assured and cannot be lost. Christians don't have to worry about doing something wrong, losing the Spirit, and then having to scramble to get saved again; that's not how it works. All of this is evidence that the story isn't talking about the Church at all, but instead is aimed at a very different group of people in a very different period in history. Once you understand the events that surround the Second Coming then this passage makes a great deal of sense, but without that understanding these verses are a real mess.

(For the record, these verses are actually talking about Tribulation saints. In all of history the only group that has ever been given the Holy Spirit as a permanent gift is the Church. In the Old Testament it was a rare gift that – as in the case of Sampson – was easily lost. When the Church is Raptured things will change. It is not possible for someone in the Church to lose their salvation, but in the Tribulation it *will* be possible. Those who are saved during that terrible time in history will need to hold on to what they have lest it slip away.)

Another passage that seems bizarre is this one:

Matthew 25:31: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: . . .

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? . . .

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: . . .

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life

eternal.”

If you don't understand the events that surround the Second Coming then this whole event seems strangely redundant. Is Jesus really going to take all the righteous people out of Heaven and all the wicked people out of Hell and then judge them again? Why would people who were *already in Heaven* be so shocked at what Jesus had to say, and why would the people who had already been burning in Hell be amazed that Jesus was upset with them? It seems rather pointless to judge people who had already gone on to everlasting life or everlasting punishment! Why would He regather everyone just to give a short speech and then send them right back where they came from?

The answer is that there's a great deal more going on here – but that only becomes apparent once you understand all the events that surround the Second Coming. (These verses are talking about judging the *living*, not the dead. This judgment is not the same as the Great White Throne judgment, but that is a subject for another time.)

Here is an example from the Old Testament:

Isaiah 65:17: “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

18 But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.

19 And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

20 There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.”

At first it's easy to think that this is talking about the New Heaven and Earth that are created after the Great White Throne judgment (which is another set of doctrines that few people are familiar with). However, we have a problem: verse 20 tells us that there are still sinners and people still die. It is true that people are living such a long time that someone who dies at the age of 100 is considered to be just a child, but the point is that *people still die*. Yet the Bible tells us that at the Great White Throne judgment the Lord will put an end to sin and death! So what, exactly, is this passage talking about? (The answer is that this is about life in the Millennial Kingdom – a period in history when things will be very different from the way they are today.)

Here is another odd passage:

Zechariah 14:16: “And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.

17 And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.

18 And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

19 This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.”

Here we see God saying that one day all of the nations of the world will be required to go to Jerusalem every year to worship God and “to keep the feast of tabernacles.” If any nations refuse to go

then God will curse them by withholding rain. This is not just unexpected; it is astounding! In all of history nothing like this has ever happened. Just when is this going to take place? How does it fit in with God's plan for history? Is there really going to come a day when the entire world will keep Jewish feasts?

There are answers to all of these questions, but you have to work to find them. Let me close by saying this: those who have a “who cares?” attitude will never find the answers. Those who seek wisdom, however, will find it – and they will also find many amazing truths that they never knew existed. As Christ said, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” (Matthew 7:7-8)