

Revelation – Lesson 5

How to Interpret Revelation

1. We should pay careful attention to the context and the time frame of the book.
2. We should use easily understood verses to help us understand verses that are harder to understand.
3. We should interpret apocalyptic language figuratively unless we have a compelling reason to do otherwise.
4. Similarity of speech does not imply identity of subjects. (The same image can be used to depict different subjects.)
5. Dissimilarity of speech does not imply distinctness of subjects. (Different images can be used to depict the same subject.)
6. We should always carefully study how the same symbols are used elsewhere in the Bible, while keeping Rules #4 and #5 in mind.
7. We should not add symbols to the text.
8. We should pay careful attention to any explanations that are given in the text.
9. Sometimes a literal person, place, or thing is later used as a figure for a similar person, place, or thing.
10. Sometimes a figurative number is also a literal number.

How **NOT** to Interpret Revelation

1. Make sure that our interpretation has no particular message for the initial readers of the book who were suffering persecution and praying to God for deliverance. Ideally, our view of this book should create *panic* rather than provide *comfort*.
2. Make sure that our own generation, and not anyone else, is the focus of this book.
3. Make sure that our interpretation includes signs pointing to the end of the world.
4. Make sure that we ignore the context of the book. We should study each verse as if it is the only verse in the Bible and without regard to history.
5. Make sure that we ignore the time frame of the book, no matter how clear it is or how many times it is repeated in the book.
6. Make no efforts to be consistent in our interpretation.
7. Ignore the symbols in the book. Instead, we should always interpret the text with *rigid literalism* — except when we don't.
8. Ignore the Old Testament.
9. Ignore the rest of the New Testament.
10. Treat the book of Revelation as two books — a first book with letters for the first century church, and a second unrelated book with a vision about nuclear bombs.