



Stuff They Didn't Teach Me In Sunday School



Episode 181 - Secret Code Book or Key to Unlock the Future? (Revelation)

Apocalyptic Literature

The book of Revelation is highly symbolic. It uses bizarre images and symbolic numbers to convey its message to Christians to stand firm in obeying God and resisting Caesar's edicts. Some have mistakenly taken it to be Christ's revelation of future events in human history. But it is a letter written in code to encourage Christians being persecuted by the state and martyred for their faith.

- What danger would there have been for anyone caught reading or carrying John's Revelation if he had written it in a straightforward manner?
- What advantage did using code offer John and the original Christian readers?
- What difference does it make whether we read Revelation as a letter meant for a first-century audience or a prophecy written for us today?

Emperor Worship

One of the great trials Revelation's original audience faced was emperor worship. This practice arose out of conquered eastern territories like Persia rather than the original Roman homeland. It posed little problem for those who believed in a multitude of gods or for an exempt religion like Judaism. But for other citizens like Christians, it demanded the emperor be recognized as lord and god—something Christians could not and would not do.

- What advantages does religious toleration offer Christian citizens and their congregations?
- Why do "tolerant" people often view Christians as being "intolerant"?
- In what ways should we stand out as intolerant like the early Christians?
- Why does the church often prosper and grow when it is most severely persecuted?
- How would a Christian find courage to stand firm in the faith, especially when faced with persecution and even death for his/her faith?

Symbolic Numbers

Crucial to understanding what Revelation meant to its original readers (so we can apply it to our own lives and times) is to understand the symbolism of the numbers it uses. Reading those numbers literally can lead to great alarm such as reading Revelation 7:4 and believing there will only be 144,000 saints in heaven. For your convenience we include here a list of symbolic numbers and their meanings.

3 = the spirit world (good or evil)

7 = perfection/completeness

3 ½ = imperfect, evil
(3 ½ years = 42 months or 1260 days)

4 = the earth

6 (1 less than perfect 7) = evil, incomplete

666 (three 6s) = evil from the spirit world

10 = all, enough

12 = complete, the church

1,000 = highest completeness (used 20 times)

Be sure to check out *Explaining All the Scary Stuff in Revelation* at www.mensnetwork.com for more details.

Download a bookmark containing these and other Revelation symbols at <http://www.lhm.org/downloads/downloadfilemnw.asp?ID=2104>.