

Chapter 1

The Year 2000

Come with me to the year 2000. It's not so far away, you know. What will life be like in the twenty-first century?

Picture the place where you will work. Imagine the futuristic vehicle you will own - maybe your personal space shuttle! And fancy the exotic new food to tempt your taste buds. Will there be enough to feed us all?

Will our cities be centers of commerce and culture - or playgrounds of rats and gangs? Will we enjoy peace on earth - or suffer the horrors of doomsday?

We are brimming with curiosity about the future. But, even more, we crave security. We need to know what's ahead for us and our loved ones. And we can know more than you may think.

Will Jesus return to earth by the year 2000? Many believe He will. Others wonder whether nuclear war will erase the human race first. How can we know what's waiting around the corner? Who can we trust to guide us into the future?

Whenever my wife Nellie and I shop for groceries, we see the colorful tabloids at the checkout counters. You've seen them too. Sometimes the supermarket psychics offer us bold, new predictions. Often they simply recycle the same headlines from the year before. Many disappointed readers have learned not to put faith in their forecasts.

We get more trustworthy information from God in the Bible. Knowing the end from the beginning, our heavenly Father has unfolded our future in the prophecies of Revelation. This last of Scripture's sixty-six books was recorded about 96 A.D. by the apostle John while exiled on the remote island of Patmos. It's full of exciting and essential information for us today.

Would you like to discover God's plan for this planet? Then join me as we explore Revelation's fascinating forecasts.

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Perhaps you've been avoiding Revelation. Many Christians recoil in fear from its beasts and dragons, hailstorms and earthquakes. But there's no reason to be afraid.

I am reminded of that dark and stormy night long ago when Jesus walked on water. Picture the scene. While gale-force winds roar at the frightened disciples, the raging Sea of Galilee threatens to swallow them alive. Now a ghostlike figure appears. And it's moving toward them! Their fear becomes heart-pounding panic. Just when their doom seems sealed, the floating phantom speaks with the Master's comforting voice: "It is I; be not afraid." The storm is stilled.

What an experience! The object of terror turned out to be a revelation of Jesus, their friend. This is what we find with the book of Revelation. All anxiety vanishes when we read its opening words in chapter 1, verse 1.

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants - things which must shortly take place."

You can now see why we need not fear the book of Revelation. It simply reveals the Lord Jesus Christ and His blueprint for our future. Our time invested in this book will be richly rewarded. Look at verse 3: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near."

Would you like to claim these special benefits reserved for you in studying this book? Then let's get started right now. First I'll introduce you to Revelation and explain the secrets of decoding its symbols. Let's read verses 5 and 6: "From Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Here we see Jesus presented as our Saviour, risen from His death for our sins. How comforting to find the blood of Christ right here in this book which is famous for its beasts. This is the same gospel of salvation so near and dear to every Christian - Jesus the Lamb of God.

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A number of years ago a lighthouse was being built on the rockbound coast of Wales. With the building nearly completed, legend has it, one of the workmen stumbled and fell back through the scaffolding to the rocks below.

The other workmen, shocked at what had taken place, didn't dare look down for fear of being unnerved by the sight. Heavyhearted, they backed down the ladders, but to their surprise and happy relief, saw their fellow workman lying upon a mound of grass, shaken and shocked. Bruised, to be sure, but not seriously harmed. Beside him lay a dead lamb. A flock of sheep had been wandering by, and a lamb had broken his fall.

A Lamb broke your fall! A Lamb broke mine - the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world! This is the revelation of Jesus we find in the last book of the Bible.

However, Jesus offers the lost human race more than salvation from sin and membership in heaven's royal family. He also rules the kings of the earth. Because He pilots this planet, we're not left to the mercy of governments and terrorists. We need not fear their threats or bombs. Bad things will continue to happen to both good and bad alike. We are living in the midst of a controversy - a conflict between Christ and His enemy, Satan. But friend, nothing happens down here without our Lord's permission. As the song goes, "He's got the whole world in His hands" in spite of its potential for trouble. That's welcome news, isn't it?

Revelation also proclaims the Lord Jesus Christ as the soon-coming King of glory. Notice verse 7, still in the first chapter: "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, and they also who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen."

The second coming of Jesus is the great climax of all the books of the Bible. Especially Revelation, which explains through its prophecies what's in store for us before Christ's return.

Before we decode the symbols of this book, let's learn a lesson from Pearl Harbor. Who could ever forget that December day when Japanese bombers swooped from the sky

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and swept us into World War II? America was caught completely by surprise. But it didn't have to happen that way. You see, United States intelligence had cracked the secret Japanese code. Daily we intercepted messages about an ominous and imminent offensive in the Pacific theater. Yet, incredible as it may seem, nothing much was done to prepare Pearl Harbor for the impending attack. America was asleep that fateful Sunday morning.

We had cracked the code. But we didn't heed the warning. What a shame!

But the United States learned its lesson. We finally put to practice information gained from breaking the code. Six months after Pearl Harbor came the dramatic turning-point, the Battle of Midway. From secret intelligence received through decoding, American pilots knew the precise location of the vulnerable Japanese carriers. With that crucial information we reversed the trend of defeat and went on to win the war.

You can see the lesson for us today. Decoding symbols won't prepare us for the battle ahead. Not unless we put into practice what we discover in the decoded message. We could become expert Bible scholars, yet be lost for not applying what we learn about Christ and His truth.

Are you with me? Now let's find out how to decode these symbols of prophecy. First we must realize that personal opinions, however interesting they may be, contribute nothing to our study. Peter the apostle tells us that no Scripture is open to private interpretation. We only confuse ourselves when we bring our own baggage into the study of the Word. How much better to accept what God offers and follow where He leads.

We learn so much from children! A friend of mine has a little boy named Stevie, who loves to go places with him. Anyplace at all, it matters not where, just so long as he can be with Daddy. Whenever Stevie sees his father heading for the door, car keys in hand, he pleads, "May I go with you?" Only after they start on their way does he ask, "Daddy, where are we going?" Are we willing to trust our heavenly Father and go

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anywhere the Bible leads us? Then we're prepared to decode the prophecies of Revelation.

Just how do we mine the treasures of God's Word? By comparing scripture with scripture. One text unlocks the meaning of another. And since all sixty-six books are linked together, we need to search the whole Bible to understand Revelation.

Now shall we go for a test drive? We hear so much about the beasts of Revelation. What does a beast in prophecy mean?

To decode this symbol we'll visit the book of Daniel. We find special help here in Daniel for understanding Revelation. That is because this book is the Old Testament companion of Revelation, sharing many of the same symbols. Let's read chapter 7, verse 23: "Thus He said: The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on earth."

So beasts represent kingdoms, or nations. We use the same symbolism in our world today. For example, you know that the United States is symbolized by an eagle. England by a lion. Russia is pictured by a bear. And so on.

Do you see how much satisfaction there can be for you in decoding prophecy? It's simply a matter of probing the Bible to find explanations of its symbols. Simple enough, wouldn't you say?

Let's proceed with our study. Maybe you've noticed that most of the beasts - the nations - of Bible prophecy emerge from water. What then could the symbol of water represent? "And he said to me, The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues." "Revelation 17:15.

There you have the answer. Water means people - multitudes of people. Once again a Bible symbol is echoed in our everyday language. You've heard the expression "a sea of faces." Large crowds of people are described as an ocean. So beasts emerging from the sea represent nations arising from an area of crowded population.

With one important exception, the beasts of Revelation come from the sea - that is, they originate among the crowded

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countries of the Old World. Let's learn about this special nation in the famous "mark of the beast" chapter, Revelation 13. After reading the description of this unique beast in verse 11, we can decode its meaning. "I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon."

What nation does this beast represent? Well, let's fit the pieces of the puzzle together. First, the time setting. This new nation is involved with the final mark-of-the-beast struggle immediately before the coming of Christ, so it's obviously a last-day power. A relatively new nation.

Why does this country arise out of the earth rather than the sea? We learned that water represents an area of many people, so earth would symbolize a new territory away from the crowded Old World of Europe and Asia. Just as soil contains some water, but not much, the nation springs up where there are some people - a few scattered natives, perhaps. We have a new country born on a new continent.

This nation differs from already established powers in another way. Instead of wearing crowns on its horns, like other beasts, it has two horns without crowns. So this New World nation without a crown is not a kingdom. There is no royalty to rule by force. We have here a new form of government. Could this New World republic be the United States?

There are some striking indications. Even the description of a beast with horns like a lamb reminds us of the American buffalo. What do these lamblike horns represent? Christ, of course, is referred to as the Lamb. What was His idea of government? "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Mark 12:17. This calls for clear distinction between the government and the church.

In the Old World, church and state formed a unit. Sometimes the government controlled the church. Often it was the other way around - the church ran the government. But America is different. The first amendment forbids Congress from interfering with religion, in order to be fair to everyone. In order to be free.

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Now notice something else about our New World republic. Revelation 13 describes its power to lead the whole world. The United States is the most influential nation on earth. What a responsibility!

Unfortunately, the Revelation indicates that America will take some unexpected turns in the near future. The lamblike nation reverses its gentle manners and behaves like a dragon. Evidently some unusual and distressing events will soon occur in America.

What is going to happen? We'll decode the future of the United States in the seventh chapter of this series, "Bloodstained Stars and Stripes." Don't miss that vital study.

Whatever may be waiting for us between now and the year 2000, thank God we don't have to worry about it. Our world may seem out of control, but it's not. God controls our destiny. However confusing and discouraging the outlook may be, remember He will protect His children and fulfill His gracious purpose for our planet.

And the same God who guides this world can bring harmony to your life. No problem of yours is too big for Him to handle. He sustains the stars. And nothing that disturbs your peace is too small for Him to notice, for He organized the tiny atom.

Are you struggling to save your marriage? There's hope and help in Jesus. Have finances forsaken you? Are you hounded by pain or guilt or loneliness? Take heart. Our Father in heaven loves you dearly. Jesus can meet your every need.

But the Saviour won't force Himself on you. He patiently waits for you to ask Him into your life. Here's His gracious invitation: Revelation 3:20. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

How much the Saviour enjoys this fellowship with us. Just as we cherish the companionship of our loved ones. The story is told of a little girl from the city visiting Grandma's farm. After a wonderful morning riding horses, they enjoyed a picnic lunch by the river. Then they explored the woods behind the

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farmhouse. Following supper, they cuddled for stories beside the crackling fireplace. All too soon it was time for bed. As Grandma tucked the yawning girl under the covers, a sudden crash of thunder jolted them both.

“Grandma!” cried the child. “I’m scared! Can I sleep with you?”

Of course, Grandma was delighted to carry the little darling to her room in the darkness. As they settled off to sleep, one last question came. “Grandma, is your face turned toward me?” Assured that it was, the little one found rest at last.

Friend, as the thunders of final crisis roll across our land, we need not be afraid. The book of Revelation assures us Jesus is with us. And His face is always turned toward us.