

Editorial: Forget 'secret code'; turn to clarity

January 23, 2014

"This book unlocks the secret code of the Scriptures."

If I had a nickel for every news release I've received promising to unlock the Bible's "secret code," I could buy a slew of books I'd actually like to read.



Editor Marv KnoxIf you have gumption and gall, you can make money selling secrets to unlock divine deadbolts. Pitch this book idea: "This spiritual secret will turn God Almighty into your personal genie. (You'll get free wishes for eternity!)"

Years ago, a friend insisted people love wacky religion. He said we could spend a weekend brainstorming religious ridiculousness. We'd come up with a mysterious message so intriguing we could launch our own church, collect a fantastic following and (of course) acquire fame and fortune. Fortunately, we chickened out.

Years later, I stumbled upon a simple situation that tested his hypothesis.

Remember Y2K? Leading up to the year 2000, twitchiness and goofiness abounded. Folks worried all hell would break loose on 01/01/2000.

Lessons on the Apocalypse

Our church's Bible study material capitalized on the mayhem. The lesson series that began Sunday, Jan. 2, 2000, focused on apocalyptic literature, the so-called "End Times" passages from books like Daniel and Revelation. You would've thought all Christians made a millennial resolution to go to Sunday school. We hauled in chairs, and folks sat so close men blushed and women scrunched up against their husbands.

Silly me. "You're here because we're going to study some of the Bible's most intriguing chapters," I told them. "For millennia, Jews and then Christians have pored over these passages, seeking divine secrets about the end of the world. Well, the Holy Spirit inspired the authors to write clear messages for the first people who received them. Through the ages, the Spirit preserved those words, infusing them with meaning for each generation. And they still provide insight. But the notion they endured thousands of years and only possess social and political meaning for the year 2000 is arrogance of biblical proportions."

Those words launched a Sunday school ensmallment campaign. The next week, 30 percent of the class returned. If I'd been clever like authors who promise to unlock the Bible's secret code, they would've come back for more. "And next week," I could've promised, "I'll reveal the 'mark of the beast' and identify the 'whore of Babylon.'" Our discipleship pastor would've had to move me to a bigger room.

Of course, the Bible contains mystery and intrigue. Some parts are downright confounding. And can I get a witness to the fact some passages are subject to interpretation, which has spawned myriad denominations?

But here's the deal: The Bible is perfectly clear on what really matters. At least, we can be absolutely certain about where we stand before God and how we should live. You can think of examples. These verses sustain and guide me:

Divine standing ...

- “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...” (Romans 3:23).
- “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).
- “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).
- “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).
- “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13).
- “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).
- “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).
- “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

Faithful living ...

- “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

- “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-39).
- “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).
- “‘I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me’” (Matthew 25:35-36).
- “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19).
- “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:4-7).
- “And now these three remain—faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13).