

Understanding Prophetic Scripture

What's the Nugget

Biblical prophecy is meant to enlighten

Biblical prophecy is meant to reveal

Biblical prophecy is always true but not
always literal

An Example

**When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie
That's amore'.**

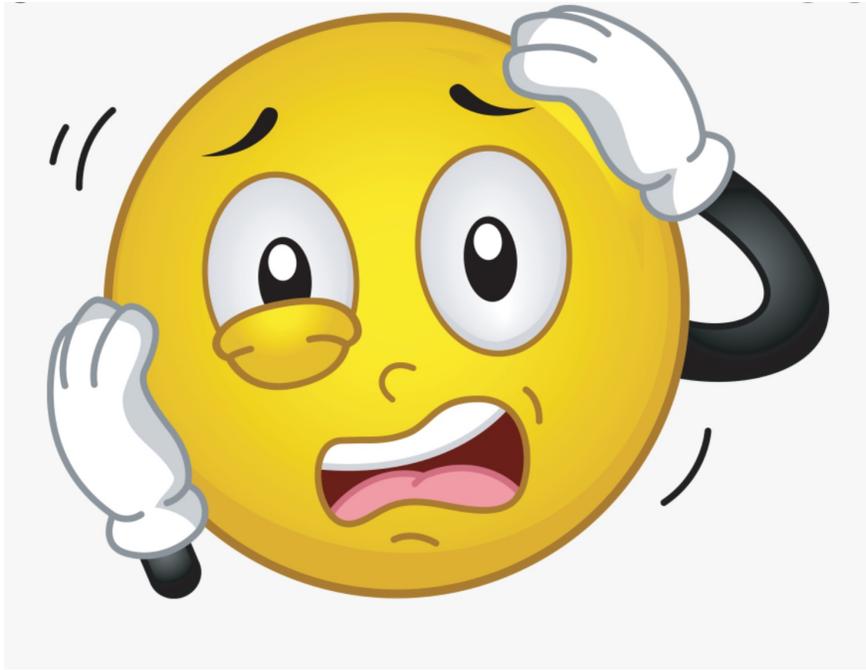
Does the moon actually hit your eye when you are in love?

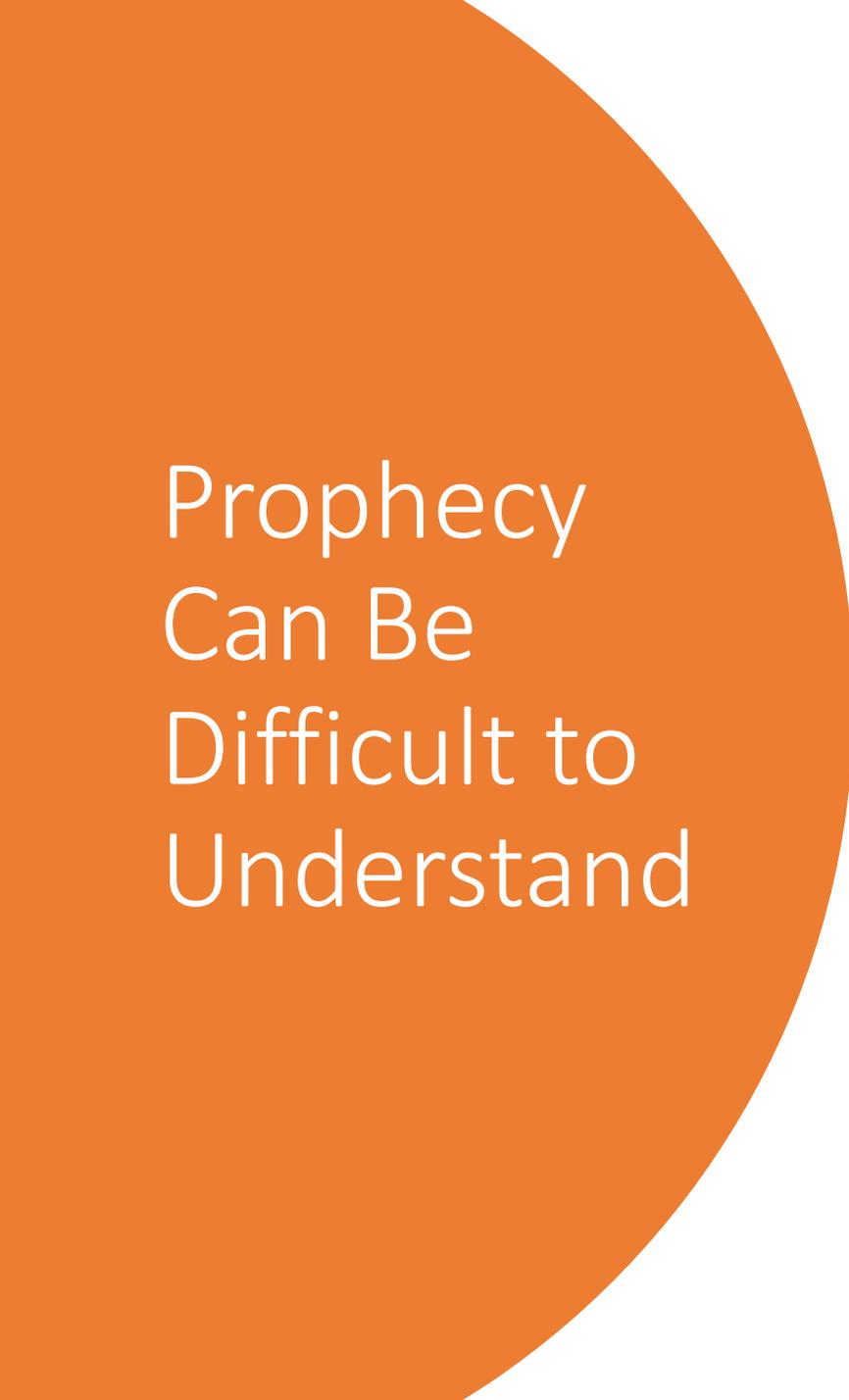
Does the moon ever strike your eye “like” a big pizza pie?

But, we know exactly what the song writer meant.

Love is unstoppable. Love can knock us over. Love makes a huge impact on our life. Love is “like”...

How Does Reading Prophecy Make You Feel?





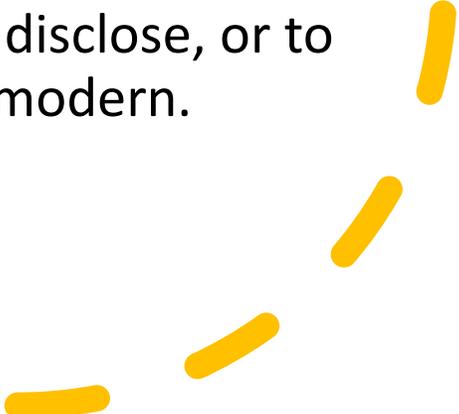
Prophecy Can Be Difficult to Understand

While it is true that prophecy can be confusing the real intent of prophecy is to REVEAL not to hide.

We see this clearly in the title of the last book in the Bible, Revelation. The word translated as Revelation is “apocalypse.”

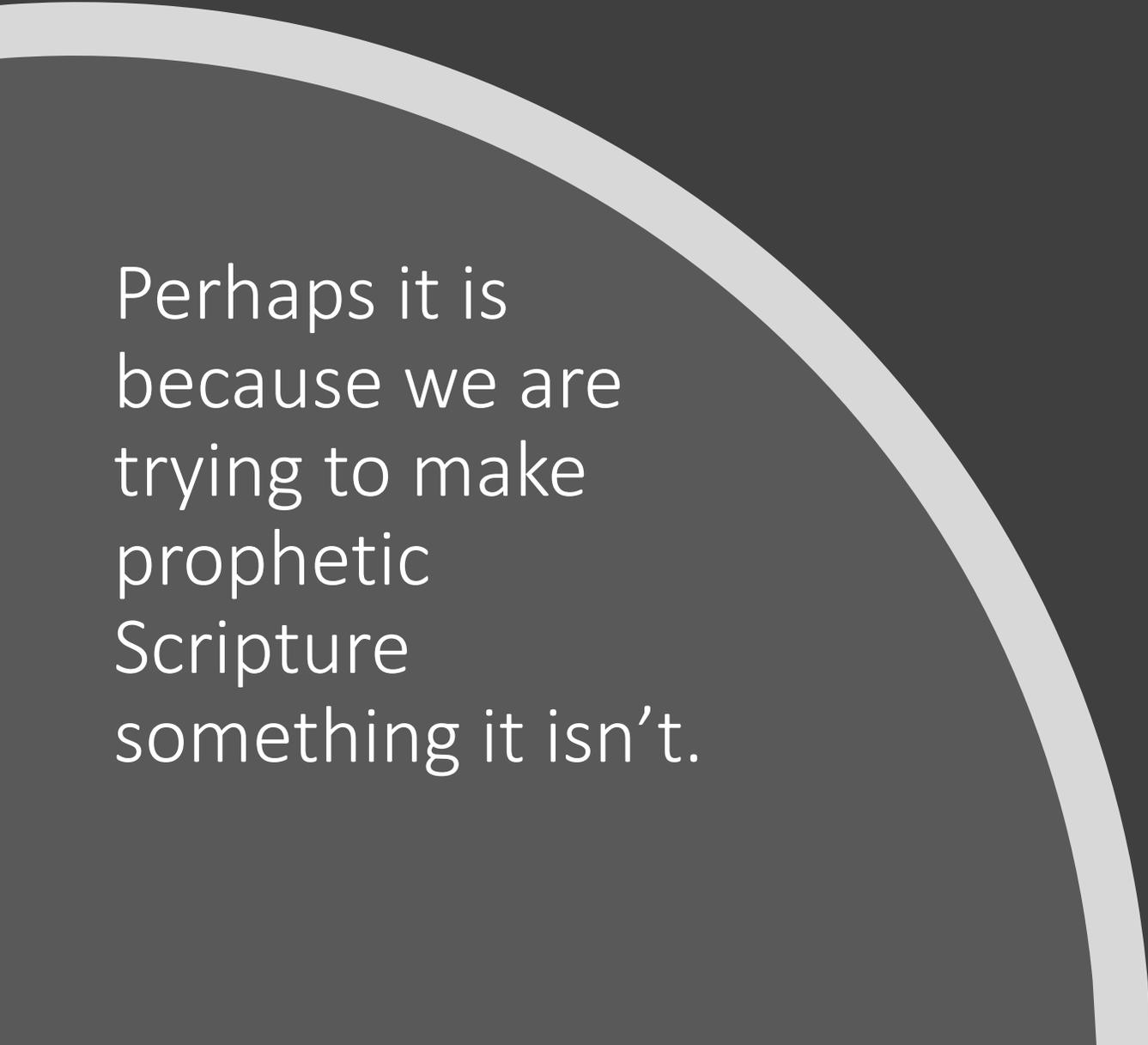
We often associate apocalypse with disaster but that’s not the original meaning of the word.

In the Greek **Apocalypse** means to uncover, disclose, or to reveal. Its usage as “a cataclysmic event” is modern.



So, if prophecy is meant to reveal why don't we all feel like this when we read prophecy?





Perhaps it is
because we are
trying to make
prophetic
Scripture
something it isn't.

Sometimes it's literal.
Sometimes it's
figurative.



Is it figurative or literal? That's the question!

Does the passage make sense in a normal reading?

Is the type literature we are reading historical narrative, song, poetry, or apocalyptic in nature?

Let's look at why literature type is important.

Literal Narratives

Parts of the Bible are literal. We are told facts that are true and that document occurrences as they literally happened, for example, Jesus' trial and crucifixion. Another example of a literal passage is the stoning of Stephen.

We also know that the Temple was a literal structure because we know where it was located based on physical evidence and non-Biblical accounts confirming the literalness of the narrative.

We also know that certain people were real living literal characters because there is a wealth of evidence supporting their authenticity, King Herod, Caesar, Pilate, etc.

Historic empires, kings, countries, rulers, wars are also verifiable and so they can be understood literally.

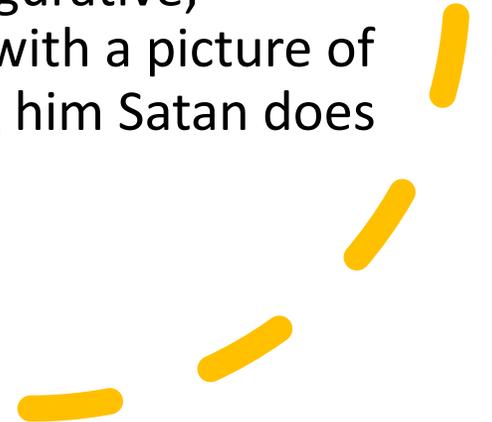
Parts of the Bible contain in addition to historical literal narratives, song, poetry and figurative language.

Consider how Satan is described in the Bible.

- The serpent
- The snake
- The father of lies
- The beast
- The red dragon
- The fallen star

All of these descriptions are true but not literal. Satan is literally a fallen angel not a serpent, a snake, a dragon or a fallen star.

But these descriptions of Satan, although figurative, provide a richness, fullness and provide us with a picture of the extent of his evilness that simply calling him Satan does not.

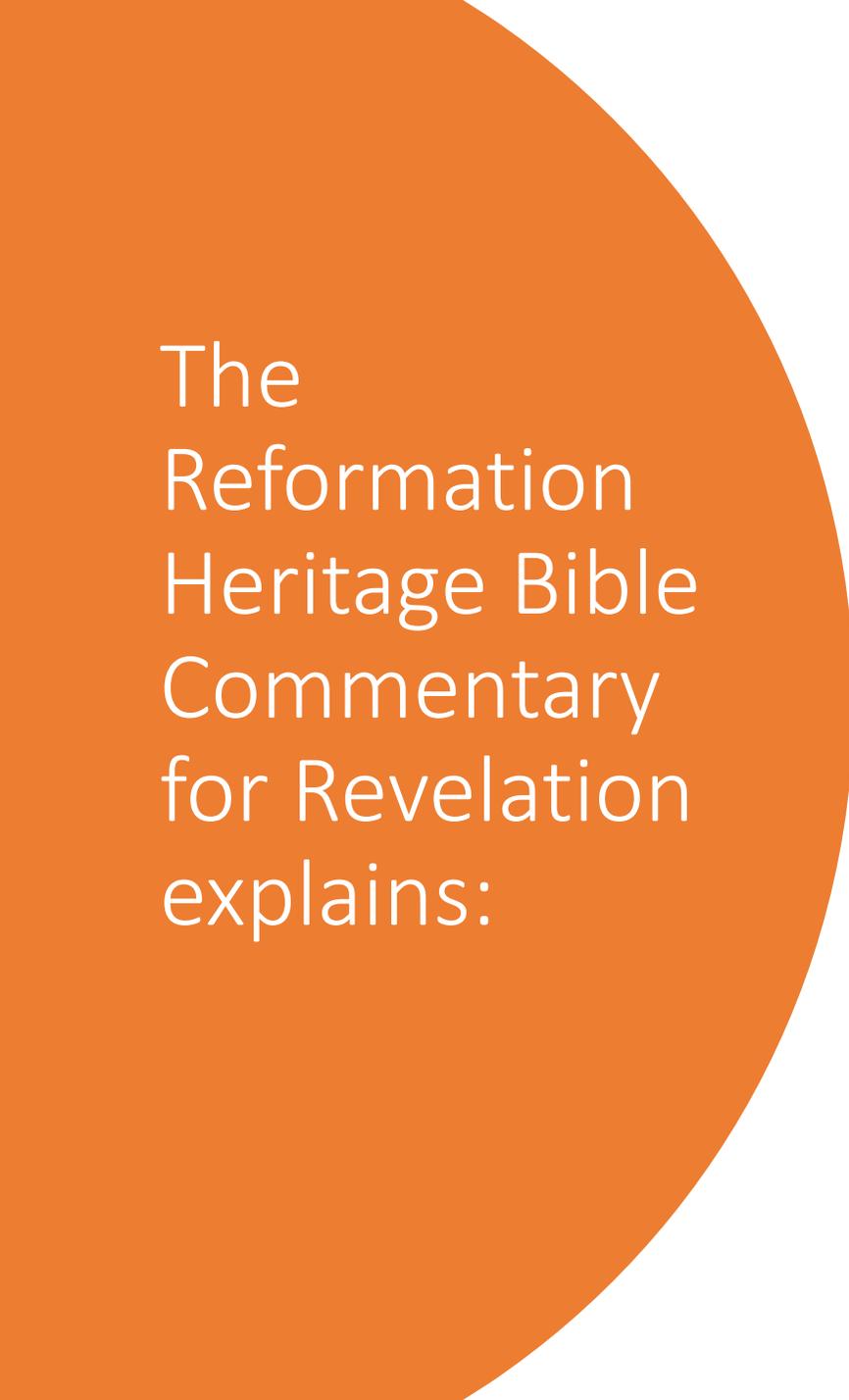


Can something be both true and figurative?

The following statements are figurative but convey truth:

- It's raining like cats and dogs.
- He has a heart of stone.
- All roads lead to Rome.
- Everybody loves her.
- Everybody hates him.
- Though our sins be as scarlet they are washed white as snow.

These figurative statements enhance our understanding because they appeal to our emotions as well as to our intellect.



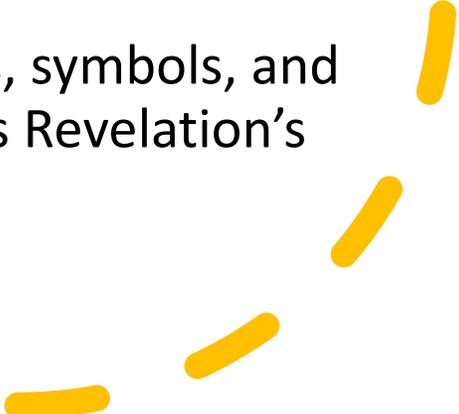
The
Reformation
Heritage Bible
Commentary
for Revelation
explains:

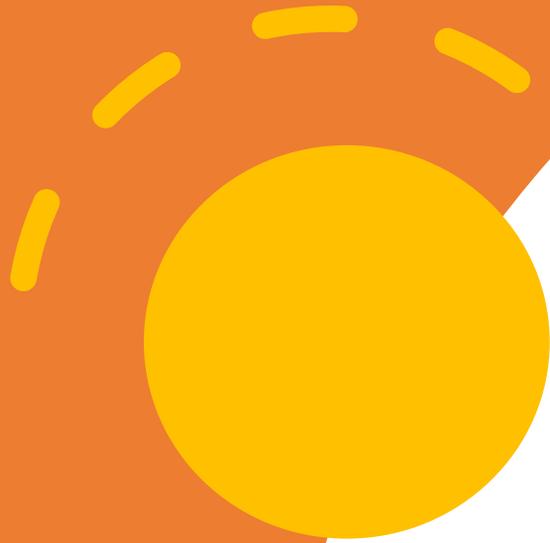
To many readers, Revelation seems to be a mysterious or even a closed book.

With a quick glance one discovers bewildering images that are hard to understand.

Part of the confusion results from reading Revelation apart from its context. The book was written to a specific culture and knowing that context helps us recognize how John and his first century readers would have understood it.

Only when we know the Biblical allusions, symbols, and vocabulary that John freely employs does Revelation's meaning begin to come into focus.





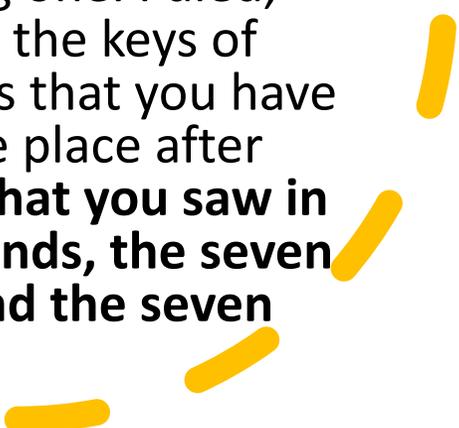
We can often gain a more robust, meaningful and memorable understanding of a Biblical truth when it is expressed with apocryphal language.

Apocryphal language and imagery can also help us experience the text more fully.

Consider the
example of the
description of
Jesus found in
Revelation
chapter 1

Revelation 1:12-16, “Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.”

Revelation 1:17-20, “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. ²⁰ **As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.’”**



Understanding the symbols

Verse 20 tells us that the seven golden lampstands and seven stars are the churches and their angels (ministers).

We know that Jesus often referred to himself as the Son of Man.

In ancient cultures the old (white haired) were revered for wisdom and leadership.

Fire and furnaces were used in refinement (the removal of impurities).

In the Scriptures God's voice is often described as the sound of roaring waters.

The sun is a bright, powerful, burning, life sustaining celestial object.

Putting it together...

Jesus is seen in the midst of the churches protecting them (holding them in His hand) and leading them and their ministers. He is the center of the church. He is the head of the church.

Jesus, as God become man, has the wisdom of age, the knowledge of experience and the power of divinity.

Jesus will “refine” us. He will make us pure. He will remove (pay for) our sin making us righteous before God.

Jesus is the brightest, highest, grandest, life giving and life sustaining person. He is God Himself.

This is the God whose revelation we are about to hear, see and experience!

Summary

Prophetic Scriptures are sometimes written in literal historic narratives and sometimes in figurative apocryphal language.

In both cases the intent is to provide the reader with an understanding of who God is, what God is doing and to create in us a saving faith.

The take home nugget: Like literal historic narratives figurative apocryphal scripture is TRUE although not necessarily literal.