

## The Prophetic Uncertainty Principle

Perhaps no other area of human knowledge has provided more head-scratching surprises than Physics. It has brought us such oddities as Black Holes, Planck's Constant, The Theory of Relativity, String Theory, and the whole realm of Quantum Physics. The area of Quantum Physics alone has uncovered a zoo of strange particles and energies.

One of the significant finds dating back to the birth of Quantum Physics in the late 1920's was a law that now bears the name of its discoverer... The Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. Heisenberg demonstrated that it is impossible to know the exact momentum and location of an electron, for example, at the same time. He showed that as one of these factors is measured with greater accuracy, the other is known to a lesser accuracy. This law does not arise out of our inability to measure both of these characteristics at the same time, but is inherent in the nature of particles on the quantum scale.

It isn't just that we don't know these things, but that we cannot know them. Because of the work of Heisenberg, one of the things that physicists know for certain is that they cannot know these factors for certain. What irony!

Well, as we undertake our study of Revelation, I want to lay out a parallel rule. Here it is:

### The Prophetic Uncertainty Principle:

We cannot – at this time – fully understand the end-time prophecies.

Just as with the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, it isn't just that we haven't figured them out yet, but that we cannot figure them out at this time. We can be certain of this.

This "Prophetic Uncertainty Principle" does not just spring up out of my own frustrations at not being able to unravel all of these mysteries, but actually comes from two separate end-time prophecies – one from Daniel, one from Revelation.

## Daniel's Sealed Words

In Chapters 10, 11 and 12 Daniel was shown many momentous events, most of which he just didn't understand. He knew they were important, but he had no frame of reference to begin unraveling the puzzle. Then in verse 6 of chapter 12 he heard one of the men in his vision ask an angel the very question that was plaguing him. "How long will it be until these

amazing events come to an end?” In reply, the angel issued a solemn oath in God’s name stating that it would be 3-1/2 years. Then he added, “As soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed.”

At this point in the story Daniel was more confused than ever. “I heard, but I could not understand,” he wrote. So he interjected his own question to clarify things. “My Lord, what will be the outcome of these events?”

If he thought he was going to get an answer that would help him understand, he was sadly mistaken. “Go your way, Daniel,” the angel said, “for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time.” Daniel was not going to get his information.

If we find parts of Daniel 10, 11 and 12 hard to understand, we are in very good company! From Daniel’s day onward, men and women of God have tried to iron out the wrinkles of these prophecies. They have tried to force the words to fit their patterns of thought, their interpretations of history. But despite these efforts, the one thing that has not emerged from their effort is clarity. The words still confuse, the flow of characters still baffles.

“These words are concealed and sealed up,” the angel said. And so they are – locked away, sealed by God himself.

However, just as the meaning of the words is now opaque to us by a deliberate decree of God, so the angel pointed forward to a time when the words would be **clearly understood** as a result of a deliberate revelation by God. “These words ... are sealed up until the end time.”

Lest we have any confusion as to what “end time” he was referring to, the angel proceeded to describe the events that would be taking place – the conditions that would exist – at the time when the words of Daniel’s prophecy would finally be made clear.

“Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand.”

**It will be during a time of ultimate decisions – a time when the people of the world are dividing themselves into just two camps – when the righteous are becoming more righteous and the wicked are being confirmed in their wickedness – that the vision recorded by the prophet Daniel will finally be understood.**

That time is yet ahead of us.

I find it interesting that only one group will understand. Knowledge is usually considered “portable.” If an engineer in Australia makes a notable discovery that helps explain a chemical

reaction and publishes a paper on that discovery, any competent engineer anywhere else in the world can read about that discovery and put that knowledge to work. Knowledge – once revealed – can easily spread without regard to borders, languages, nationalities or moral standards. It is this very “portability” of knowledge that gives rise to the trade of industrial espionage – with some people trying desperately to keep information secret, while others try to pry out these secrets for their own benefit.

But this case is different. God will reveal the meaning of these prophecies not to the most educated, not to the most curious, not to those who think themselves deserving, but to the ones who are “purged, purified and refined.” The only issue in question is one’s moral standing before God. Do you want to understand these prophecies? Do you want to be among the group that God can trust with His secrets? Ironically, this is one case where studying the Bible (in and of itself) will not crack the code.

The very words “purged, purified and refined” are indicative of a harsh, thorough cleansing process. “Purged” materials have gone through a rigorous testing to determine the untrue and eliminate it. “Purified” products are those that have undergone extra chemical or mechanical processes to eliminate impurities. “Refined” products have been altered by the application of extreme heat in a manner that improves upon the base product while eliminating undesirable components or traits.<sup>1</sup> As we will see in our study of Matthew and Revelation, God is about to send upon the world a great time of trouble. This trouble will fall on God’s people in the form of privations, hardships and persecutions which will drive them into a deeper relationship of love and dependence upon Him. It will be a time of smelting away the dross of our characters so that Christ may be seen more clearly in us. As a result of submitting to God’s will during this early time of distress, the “saints” will be “purged, purified and refined.”

Daniel points to these people as the ones to whom God will finally reveal the last of His end-time truths.

### **Revelation’s Open Book**

Revelation tells this same story. In Chapters 6 and 7 we see the early time of trouble – that time of tribulation against the church that is instrumental in God’s hands in producing the 144,000 bond-servants. Then in Chapter 10, just as the Great Time of Trouble begins<sup>2</sup>, a mighty angel is seen descending to earth with an open book in his hands. Ellen White identifies this book as “that portion of the prophecy of Daniel which related to the last days.”<sup>3</sup> The open book is given to God’s people, who find the information sweet, but the experience bitter (Rev 10:10). They are then told that they must prophecy again to many nations, tongues and kings.

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<sup>1</sup> Note too that purging, purifying, and refining are external processes that are applied to a substance. These results are not ones that we can produce on our own. The external forces and conditions to bring about these results are in God’s control.

<sup>2</sup> This is a conclusion that we hope to demonstrate in the course of our study.

<sup>3</sup> 2 SM, p105

So we see in Revelation the same process of divine revelation that we see in Daniel. Just as soon as the Servants of God have undergone the needed preparation, they will be given an essential understanding of the end-time prophecies. This information will be the basis of their testimony to humanity during the Great Time of Trouble – a time when each person is choosing their eternal destiny.

### **Back to the main point**

So why is it important to lay out this Prophetic Uncertainty Principle? Well, here are a few good reasons:

1. It is not uncommon to meet those who think they do have all the answers. The Prophetic Uncertainty Principle assures us that they are mistaken.
2. We are humans – and as a result of that condition, we tend to fall into all the traps of pride and self-sufficiency that are common to humans. It's vitally important as we undertake this study to realize we don't know everything. We must never give others the sense that we can provide all the answers, because all the answers haven't been revealed yet.
3. It's important to note that we will never figure out all these prophecies, because they won't be "figured out" at all. They will be **revealed**. To be among those to whom God makes these prophecies clear, we must pay more attention to our dependence on God than to our scholarship.

In Daniel 11 and 12 we see the emergence of "those who have insight." I am no Hebrew scholar, but wondering just who these people are, I dug into this phrase a while back. There are a couple of meanings implicit in this phrase. One is that these are people who have understanding. Another is that these are people **who help others** to understand.

It is my prayer that as you share with others, you may be blessed as one who helps others understand.