

The Message of Revelation

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Over the past few years as I have witnessed my skills as a Bible teacher improve—particularly my engagement with not only the Biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek, but also engagement with secondary and tertiary resources—I have found myself become increasingly nervous, if not perturbed, when people use the word “revelation.” There are many people who teach from the Scriptures, either in the Christian *or* Messianic world, who seldom engage with the Biblical text they intend to teach. Rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to prepare them, mold them, and guide them to the resources and with the tools such people need to be adequately prepared—such people instead may rely on “revelation.” (This is particularly true of those from Pentecostal and/or charismatic backgrounds.)

Certainly, each one of us (especially teachers) should have committed enough of God’s Word to our hearts that should we be forced to speak up—without having prepared anything—we will be able to speak the truth and voice an opinion (1 Peter 3:15). Yet, it is often when we come to those difficult parts of the Bible where spur-of-the-moment “revelation,” *whatever that may be*, will often always come up short. Some of us have to be willing to say, “Let me get back with you on that,” and then return to the office and crack open some books. While we should certainly all be open to God’s Spirit to show us new things, “revelation” can sometimes be a very poor excuse for performing adequate exegesis. Sometimes, pawning things off on the Holy Spirit is an excuse for nothing less than laziness.

Over the past ten to eleven years (1996-2007), I have witnessed a great deal of such “revelation” in the Messianic community concerning the very Biblical book that bears this name. Sometimes when a new wave of Middle East peace negotiations would take place, I would witness new, and sometimes contradicting interpretations of the Book of Revelation. While I would be forced to deal with a new point of view, and in some cases be given a few things to consider that I had never heard before, I more than often witnessed people taking *parts of* the text of Revelation and then force-feeding a prophetic interpretation that may not have a substantial basis when other parts of the book were considered. Some of these interpretations were “here today, gone tomorrow,” and fluctuated with the ever-changing flow of global politics.

In the Book of Revelation, the text begins with John in exile on Patmos (Revelation 1:9) and ends in God’s redeemed Creation (Revelation 22:3). Throughout the text of Revelation one sees a great deal of imagery relating to God’s judgment dispensed via seals (Revelation 6:1-17; 8:1-5), trumpets (Revelation 8:6-9:21; 11:13-19), and bowls or vials (Revelation 16:1-21). One sees references to 144,000 sealed servants (Revelation 7:1-8; 14:1-5), two witnesses (Revelation 11:1-14), a beast coming out of the sea (Revelation 13:1-10), and something referred to as Babylon (Revelation 17:1-18:21). There are *many* different opinions regarding what these things are, or represent.

Anyone who has been subjected to some of the “pop” prophecy teachings of the past twenty years is no doubt aware that there are many interpretations available regarding the Book of Revelation. All one needs to do is go to a Bible bookstore’s prophecy section and there will be timeline charts available on the Book of Revelation. Each teacher who claims to specialize in “prophecy” often has his or her own chart as well. Each chart—be it pre, mid, or post-tribulational—will place these judgments in a particular order, and may even have these judgments approximated by when they will take place in accord with Daniel’s Seventieth Week (cf. Daniel 9). Furthermore, some of these charts may even have a date on them such as 20XX for the Second Coming of Yeshua the Messiah.

While judgments, beasts, and God’s wrath are certainly major themes of the Book of Revelation, why is it that Revelation chs. 6-18 are what often get most of the attention? Certainly, is it not true that Revelation chs. 1-5 and chs. 19-21 are also important? Why does it seem that those who address prophecy are often **more concerned** with God’s vengeful judgment upon Planet Earth during a rather short period of time, and the identity of the antimessiah/antichrist, then things such as Yeshua’s revelation to John (Revelation 1:4-19; 4:1-5:14), the actual return of the Messiah to Planet Earth (Revelation 19:1-21), the reality of eternal punishment upon sinners (Revelation 20:11-15), and the glories of the eschaton (Revelation 21:1-22:9)?

One of the most pertinent questions that I believe each person who studies prophecy needs to answer is: **Is God more concerned with the Forces of Darkness than the Forces of Light?** Many people, whether they are aware of it or not, often answer “yes” to this question! These are the individuals whose examination of prophetic Scriptures are often so focused on trying to figure out the timing of the Second Coming complete with Date X, the exact order of the seal or bowl judgments, and how current political regimes play into these prophecies—that they forget what God’s primary mission actually is. Somehow, whether they are consciously aware of it, such people believe that God’s primary mission is to see the rise of a worldwide beast system on Earth (Revelation 12:12-13)—because whenever “prophecy” is discussed, that seems to be all that is discussed.

No one should deny the stark realities of the Book of Revelation, and the evil that is going to be present when the Tribulation period comes. A world government and world dictator are going to arise. But I would dare say that these are only side effects or a poor Satanic imitation of what God actually wants. God’s primary mission is not to allow Satan to control the Earth for a short season. **God’s primary mission is to see individuals reconciled to Himself through His Son, Yeshua the Messiah, and His corporate people fully restored.** God wants His people empowered to perform mighty tasks so that all might come to a knowledge of Him. This theme is not something hidden in the Book of Revelation, nor should it be something difficult for us to understand:

“At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God” (Revelation 4:2-5).

Yeshua’s *apokalupsis* to John is one where He is revealed to him in all of His majestic glory at the right hand of the Father. Sitting around the throne are creatures, continually saying “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 4:8). The elders sitting around the throne “lay their crowns before the throne and say: You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (Revelation 4:10-11). I believe that when John is called into Heaven by the Lord (Revelation 4:1), he was actually taken from the First Century into the distant future where God’s judgment of the wicked and vindication of the righteous have already occurred. When John is shown Yeshua in His total supremacy, I believe it is no different than how the Book of Revelation ends, with the New Jerusalem coming down to Earth:

“No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 22:3-5).

The Lord certainly desires all people to spend eternity with Him in this wonderful place. It is by no coincidence that just as the Holy of Holies was originally to be a perfect cube (Exodus 26:2-8; 1 Kings 6:20), so is the New Jerusalem also a perfect cube (Revelation 21:16). Indeed, the New Jerusalem is intended to be the *greatest expansion* of the Holy of Holies. But rather than simple memorials such as the Ark of the Covenant being present—God Himself will be there.

The challenge of understanding the principal message of Revelation is that it *does not* involve the rise of the beast system or God’s final judgment on humanity. The principal message of Revelation is seeing God’s plan for the ages finally realized. The Messiah is going to return. Israel is going to be restored. The righteous from all ages and generations are going to be given resurrected bodies and are going to be rewarded for their faithfulness. We get to return to the

paradise that God originally gave Adam and Eve. We get to see our Lord in all of His magnificence reigning over a universe that is truly “good”¹!

In order to see these things, we have to understand the imperative of the Book of Revelation: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life” (Revelation 22:17). The Holy Spirit within us today should empower us to fulfill the Divine mission that God has assigned us. As the Lord calls people to Himself, He often has to use us as human vessels to accomplish this. Let us also not forget that Yeshua taught, “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). While we can assert that this concerns the prophesied restoration of all Israel—God’s Kingdom *goes beyond* Israel and extends into eternity.

Understanding the true message of the Book of Revelation—its depiction of Yeshua sitting upon His throne, its encouraging word of Divine vindication over evil, and ultimately the blessings and profundities of the future eschaton where there will be no sin, disease, pain, or suffering—is something that is often missed today, even in our Messianic movement. In a movement where we should strive to truly see the big picture, and understand that our mission to see others come to faith in Yeshua is *by no means* inconsistent with God commissioning Ancient Israel to be a testimony of His goodness, we often fall far short. Instead, we often suffer from a “nuggets theology,” where teachers compete to have the latest, greatest, so-called “revelation” that is often devoid of any serious examination with the big issues. Too much new “revelation” concerns the Book of Revelation, and it almost always avoids the principal thrust of Yeshua’s revealing to John: “Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book” (Revelation 22:7).

That “prophecy,” while certainly involving a message of the future, also had a message for those living in the late First and early Second Centuries who first received Revelation, and should have relevancy for **all generations of Believers**—regardless of whether we are in the Last Days or not. The Prophets of the Tanach were raised up by the Lord to call the people back to Him and back to obedience. The prophetic message of Revelation should likewise **do the same**. Revelation should have relevancy for us *beyond* what it says about the Tribulation period, antimessiah/antichrist, false prophet, or the fall of Babylon. The prophetic message of Revelation should cause us to wonder if we truly remember that God is most concerned about His people, and that *all* would come to a knowledge of the salvation He has provided in Yeshua.

The next time you hear the “latest” interpretation of the Book of Revelation, ask the teacher if he or she truly understands the message of Revelation. Is the teacher concerned that all being taught spend eternity with the Lord in that “Holy of Holies” New Jerusalem? Or is the teacher claiming a new “revelation” that may not take into consideration God’s prerogatives for His people? These are valid questions for us to consider.

I believe that when we can finally understand the most important parts of Revelation—that we will be ready as His people to see *all* of Revelation finally come to pass. Until that time is upon us, we have much work to do.

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version* (NIV), © 1984, published by International Bible Society.

¹ Cf. Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31.