

Prologue

*I'm not a martyr, I'm not a prophet
And I won't preach to you But here's a caution:
You better understand That I won't hold your hand
But if it helps you mend Then I won't stop it
Go on and save yourself And take it out on me
~~~~~Audioslave, Cochise*

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There have been thousands of godly men over the centuries who have written books and commentaries on the book of Revelation. Many were better men than I, more learned and more devoted. I cannot help but think that if the Apostle Paul was the chiefest of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), what does that make me? Yet, I cannot also help but think that "to whom much is given, much shall be required" (Luke 12:48). And God has generously provided time and environments for my studies.

We live in a day and age where the advancements of learning, science and technology and the economic and political turmoils have made a fresh look at the Revelation necessary. I have never been one to interpret the Bible using the headlines from the New York Times. I find that type of Biblical interpretation rather specious and disingenuous. Often that interpretation goes toward the aggrandizement of the one doing it--as if he/she has some special and profound connection to God, fashioning themselves the conduit of God's message afresh to the world. Forgive my skepticism.

There are, however, events going on in this world today that many overlook; events that are setting up the schema--the paradigm--from which the Revelation's prophecies become alive. There can be no question that John's visions dealt with major global themes--politics, economics, religion, ecology, science and technology. The great commentators of the past didn't have the benefit of knowing where these events would progress. As brilliant as their studies were, we have the advantages today of almost instant knowledge and information. We know what is happening everywhere and we know it in real time. Yet, just as Caesar Augustus' motives for tax collection were for his own purposes, God redeemed Augustus' deed to fulfill His word. It was Augustus' greed that sought to tax the people (Luke 2:1-7). But God used that to bring Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem, 70 miles away from their home, that the old testament prophet Micah's words may be fulfilled which were written 700 years earlier,

"But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

~~~~~Micah 5:2 (KJV)

This is, I believe, how God works. He takes the free-willed deeds of people--some who love Him, some who don't--and redeems them toward His purposes. Is that not the meaning of the oft quoted Romans 8:28? "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Notice, it doesn't just say things believers do. It simply says "all things." I believe that many such deeds have taken place and are still taking place in the world today. These are deeds that may seem unrelated, inconsequential even coincidental to Christians, but that are actually profoundly relevant and are being used by God as pieces on a chessboard to bring history to its apocalyptic conclusion. I will try to draw many things together from history and culture to weave them into a tapestry showing the handiwork of God behind the scenes to fulfill His word. And just as there are instances in the Scriptures of prophetic words being spoken by people whose spiritual condition is unknown (e.g., Balaam in Numbers 22-24; The High Priest in John 11:51-52) so I will use quotes from various songs to illustrate salient points here.

The book of Revelation gives us the church's vision of the conclusion of human history. From it, we know that Jesus has a plan that didn't end at the cross of Calvary and His subsequent ascension because that same day it was made clear by the mouth of the two angels at His ascension that He was coming back,

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

~~~~~Acts 1:11

Indeed, since that day almost 2000 years ago the church has been awaiting His return and crying out with Paul, "maranatha" which means "come Lord" (I Corinthians 16:22)!

Finally, a word to my fellow Christian scholars and theologians: I wish to preempt any words you may have for me by saying at the outset that I am not seeking to make this a display of my theological skills, my knowledge of languages, or to impress you with citations of obscure readings and source material. The profundities and depths of God's Word have been too long hidden beneath the bushel basket of high academic scholarship, lost in the pages of commentaries, linguistic works, lexicons and pastoral aides that too few eyes ever set upon. To be sure, I am thankful for the work that has been put into those invaluable resources and I have often made great use of them, finding great pleasure in learning of insights and research that I could not hope to ever undergo myself. Though this volume is not one of those, I do believe those in ministry may make great use of this study. But I devote it to the service of God's common people and am not ashamed to take my station among them. I take to heart Paul's exhortation,

"For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the

things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

~~~~~I Corinthians 1:26-31 (NASB)

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Servant of the Lord