

Revelation Revolution

The Overlooked
Message
of the
Apocalypse

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Beauty and the Beast

Have you seen those television programs with ordinary people like you and me bringing unheralded antiques and heirlooms to be appraised by experts? Most of the time the attic yields no surprise treasures, but occasionally an object of fine art once relegated to some dust-filled niche is converted from an overlooked ugly duckling into a highly regarded beautiful swan.

Suddenly an object that was thought to have little or no value is transformed into a priceless work of art. The parables of a treasure hidden in a field (Ma 13:45) and of a pearl of great price (Ma 13:45-46) illustrate how such a discovery can reveal the riches of the kingdom of heaven.

Almost 15 years ago, I found myself face to face with the spiritual riches of God's amazing grace—an unbelievable, almost too-good-to-be-true grace that I had never experienced. For more than three decades, my religious experience had devalued and diminished God's matchless grace, causing me to be oblivious to the true treasures hidden in the field of Holy Scripture, a field whose terrain I thought I knew so well.

The riches of God's grace revealed the futility and bankruptcy of what I came to call *Bad News Religion*. I eventually subjected all my religious convictions and values to the standard of God's grace, and in so doing my entire world was turned upside down.

William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury (1942-1944) once explained how human efforts often reverse the values of the kingdom of heaven. Temple said it is as though someone slipped into the department store of our lives during the night and reversed all the price tags. The next

morning those things of real value that should carry expensive price tags are now regarded as cheap trinkets while virtually worthless items carry price tags that indicate they have enormous value.

My experiences as a captive in the swamps of religious tyranny and oppression, combined with an addiction to prophetic addiction cheapened the Book of Revelation, running it into the ground with misuse and abuse. I did not realize that legalistic prophecy-mongering took me on a predictable, same-old, same-old religious journey. Parroting what I had been taught about prophecy, I misunderstood, misinterpreted, misapplied—and missed the Book of Revelation! I knew only one way to understand its symbols and message. For me, the real message of Revelation was lost. God's grace turned Revelation right side up, and revalued this profound and meaningful book. God's grace engenders revolutions in our lives; God's grace is all about new life, new and fresh perspectives.

From my early years in elementary school, the so-called “end times message” of the Book of Revelation informed my entire view of human history as well as my own personal present and future. Many years later, I discovered this “end times message” interpretation of the Book of Revelation, which my family accepted without reservation, to be a teaching that had beguiled many others for well over a century. I learned that the layman's term “end times message” referred to eschatology, the study of last things. The theological roots of what my family believed to be esoteric knowledge about eschatology, based upon the Book of Revelation, went back to a man named John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). William Miller (1782-1849) was one of Darby's peers who came to similar conclusions about biblical prophecy (another layman's term for eschatology), eventually proclaiming, as a result of intricate calculations, the year 1843 as the date for the second coming of Jesus Christ. When the specific date selected in 1843 passed without divine cooperation, Miller and his followers set a new date in 1844. Eighteen forty-four became known as the “Great Disappointment”—destined to be but one of many failed predictions for the second coming.

Ellen G. White (1827-1915) was a follower of Miller and founded the Seventh Day Adventist Church in the aftermath of the Great Disappointment. White's teachings, as with so many others, were based on eschatological interpretations of the Book of Revelation—with such teachings always holding followers in suspense, as true believers in such teachings presume that apocalyptic events may break out at any moment. Common to virtually all prophetic teachers is some kind of assurance or promise for their followers of divine protection or immunity from the horrific “end times” events described in the Revelation.

By the 1870s, Darby's teachings became known as dispensationalism, a method of Bible interpretation that grew in popularity, not only in Adventism, but among fundamentalist Protestant churches of the time. While dispensationalism proposes much more than a particular view of eschatology, the popular impact of the prophetic implications of dispensationalism are significant. Toward the end of the nineteenth century prophecy conferences started to be a staple feature of Protestant fundamentalist churches in North America, with Cyrus Ingerson (C.I.) Scofield (1843-1921) emerging as a leading advocate of dispensationalism. Scofield eventually published his *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909), one of the first Bibles to have a human interpretation of the divinely inspired message of the Bible printed alongside biblical passages. Unfortunately, many who accepted the teachings of dispensationalism failed to adequately discriminate between Scofield's “inspired margins”—his interpretations that were printed in marginal notes—and the actual inspired Word of God.

Then came the twentieth century, a century filled with preachers and teachers who applied the prophetic “end times message” to the generation to which they ministered. Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952) founded Dallas Theological Seminary in 1924, an educational institution that, among other contributions, attempted to give academic credibility to the eschatological ramifications of Darby's end times methodology. As the twentieth century unfolded, many continued to popularize the “end times message”

of dispensationalism, with Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye being perhaps the two most well-known popular eschatological authors.

Hal Lindsey's best-selling books included *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), followed by *There's a New World Coming* (1973) and *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon*. Tim LaHaye followed in Lindsey's footsteps with his enormously popular *Left Behind* series. With his fictionalized messages about the end time, LaHaye distanced himself from the ongoing and obvious criticism that dispensational predictions had all failed. Once again, as with Scofield's marginal notes in his reference Bible, the vast majority of *Left Behind* readers took LaHaye's fictionalized narratives as gospel truth, failing to question the bankrupted methodology that generated his sensationalized books.

I grew up in this prophecy-saturated religious culture. Beginning in the second grade, I lived in constant apprehension and fear of an impending doomsday. My family and I believed that "the end" could come at any time; we were convinced that we always lived in a window of a "few short years" from the events surrounding the second coming. I did not treasure the message of Revelation, I feared it. The specific "end times" interpretation I was taught exercised enormous power over me and many others. Decades later God's grace completely changed my understanding of Revelation—from a book to be feared to a book to be treasured. God's grace helped me to find the authentic message and unique Messenger of Revelation and in the process to discover what it has to say about the real agenda of performance-based religion.

I was not alone in my experiences. In his book *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Philip Yancey shares his childhood experiences growing up in a church that sponsored annual prophecy conferences. Yancey relates that these conferences "revealed" that a ten nation European Common Market would fulfill the prophecy of the biblical beast with ten horns. "What sticks with me, though, is not so much the particulars of prophecy as their emotional effect on me. I grew up at once terrified and desperately hopeful."¹

Today millions continue to be enslaved by “just-around-the-corner” interpretations of the Book of Revelation. Some live in fear within cultic groups where apocalyptic anxieties allow leaders to combine irresponsible prophecy teaching with authoritarian control, while others experience the rigors of prediction addiction (prophetic teaching that turns into a religious addiction) within churches that generally teach sound doctrine but corrupt and cheapen the gospel with irresponsible speculation. In either case Revelation is used by religion as a club to control and intimidate.

In my experience, the eschatological implications of the Book of Revelation were anything but good news; a far more accurate definition was that such convictions were my worst nightmare. In fact, when I was young, the shallow and illogical interpretations of this precious book often contributed to literal nightmares, causing reactions similar to those of horror movies.

The power of God’s grace eventually dismantled my former understanding of Revelation. I came to see that Revelation was not about an out-of-control-beast I had to fear; rather it was all about the beauty of God’s amazing grace and the sovereign power of the Lamb.

Why do I presume to write about the one book that many believe to be the most complex and controversial of all books of the Bible?

For many years my relationship with God was in large part dictated by what I was taught about the Book of Revelation. Wild and preposterous prophetic teaching pretending to be based upon the 22 chapters of Revelation in turn formed the pages and chapters of the story of most of my life. I was forever looking to future events and predicted dates that were misinterpretations drawn from Revelation. I was focused on a Jesus who would return, rather than the one who had already come and conquered on the cross: the risen Lord, the head of the church, who is always with His people. Millions of people still suffer from similar eschatological interpretations of the message of Revelation, and it is my prayer that God will use *Revelation Revolution* as one of His tools to rescue them.

I attended the school of prophetic hard knocks, not only experiencing what a twisted understanding of Revelation produced in my life, but also observing what that eschatological teaching did in the lives of tens of thousands of others. I now see that such prophetic teaching is much like a drug, providing an incredible rush while also being the source of the depression and disillusionment that inevitably results from unrealized and unfulfilled expectations.

God's grace intervened in my life and liberated me from the fear and bondage that is the product of religious manipulation of the Book of Revelation. By God's grace, I came to see that the views I had cherished, believed, and taught amounted to a sleazy religious carnival where prophecy pundits and pushers sell their prophetic potions.

Along with its equally seductive cousin of religious legalism, prediction addiction had been the language of my life, the drum beat of my religious soul. Prediction addiction is an obsession, a compulsion to continually seek exhilarating "fulfillments of Bible prophecy" in current events of the day. In my experience, the bondage of legalism combined with an addiction to prediction gave meaning and order to my world while at the same time being the perfect one-two punch religion needed to control me. Legalism told me what I had to do in order to earn God's love and the kingdom of heaven. Prophetic teaching assured me that people who did not do what I was convinced the Bible taught would experience the plagues of Revelation; and, on the other hand, if my works were acceptable to God, I would be saved from those plagues.

The two evil cousins of religious legalism and prediction addiction work hand in hand; where one flourishes the other cousin is surely to be found in the same general vicinity. They feed off of each other. They both lead to religious captivity, as religious legalism and prediction addiction eventually control those who buy into their premises and beliefs.

It is only fair to note that what I propose as a revolution to the popularly accepted understanding of the Book of Revelation should not be

accepted without careful scrutiny and study. I don't propose a new legalism; but rather in these pages I will urge that we read the Book of Revelation for all its worth, reading it as it was written, reading it as it was intended, rather than accepting cultural adaptations and interpretations of its inspired message. I contend that the Book of Revelation has been cheapened, tarnished, twisted, and perverted by eschatological teachings, and that many have become addicted to the promises and drug-like rush of such prophetic teachings.

In my experience, both teaching and believing in an "end times" message of the Book of Revelation gave me an artificial high. I was persuaded that I knew what the future held: this esoteric knowledge felt like theological insider trading. I had eschatological "hot tips" that others needed to know. It turned out that all the promises were just fool's gold that glittered, but had no value.

God's grace patiently helped me to deconstruct bogus perceptions and slowly construct a new reality, the real message of Revelation. My reading, research, and study of this amazing book has taken me all over the biblical and theological map, considering the trail that others have blazed in coming to terms with the message God gave to John. By His grace God has mercifully opened my eyes to the real Revelation, a new (for me) Revelation that helped to explain my experiences in the school of religious hard knocks. In my case, *Revelation Revolution* emerged out of the ashes of the religious ghetto I had inhabited, a place where tragedy and heartache are the product of religion's pills and potions.

I offer *Revelation Revolution* 1) as a Christ-centered remedy to the sensationalism of prophetic teaching and 2) from a compelling sense of duty in an attempt to spare others the inevitable loss of faith in God that is invariably left behind in the wake of such flawed and failed teaching. I am grieved to see that the same old broken-beyond-repair methodology of prophetic teaching continues to tease and allure millions into its destructive clutches.

Breathtaking and lurid preaching about Revelation fills churches and crusades. Books written from such a perspective sell like hotcakes, and videos that predict the future based upon the Book of Revelation are successful because they cater to the human desire to be special and to know something others don't about the future. The seductive appeal of discovering the "true meaning" of prophetic minutia can blur and obscure the central truth of this critically important book.² This cheap and tawdry sensationalism is nothing more than fortune-telling and palm reading masquerading as "biblical teaching."

Sensational predictive preaching and teaching about the Book of Revelation is but one of the many tools used by legalistic religion to control its followers by keeping them ever vigilant and on edge about some eminent event, such as the Rapture.³ In order to maintain its control, religion keeps moving the finish line as to "when" the prophecies will happen. The focus in such cases is almost exclusively on the future. By contrast, authentic Christianity proclaims the second coming, but always in the context of the freedom we now have in Christ, because He has already conquered on His cross and is now alive as the risen Lord.

Revelation Revolution is designed to open eyes, raise suspicion, comfort those who are or have been afflicted by prediction addiction and afflict those who are comfortable with dogmatic, specific, and literal interpretations and "fulfillments" of the message Jesus reveals in these last pages of the Bible.

The greatest revelation in my life has been that God's grace is sufficient for my life: all of it. The clash between God's grace and my long-term views of the Book of Revelation was an apocalyptic, titanic confrontation. My flawed ideas came crashing down like a house built upon sand (Ma 7:26-27). That's what Revelation had been for me, an accumulation of ideas, speculations, interpretations and predictions—a house of cards with no firm foundation. For over three decades the message of the Book of Revelation convinced me that I was in a never-ending race to be found

faithful at the soon-coming second coming, and so my life on earth consisted of earning my own salvation by deeds. There was no doubt in my mind that if I didn't "get right" I would "get left." As long as I misunderstood the Book of Revelation, I accepted predictions and date setting as a part of my life; failed predictions would all simply be re-issued by extending the goal line to some even more future and far off date.

In my case religious legalism and prediction addiction teamed up as a lethal one-two religious punch. While they both may exist apart from one another, they are cousins in the sense that they are religious co-conspirators. They contribute to one another, leading to the same kind of religious captivity. I experienced the "combo platter" of religious legalism and prediction addiction; and while they go together like rice and beans, or hamburgers and french fries, they may be "served" as a la carte selections, independent of each other. Not everyone who is captivated or seduced by prediction addiction finds themselves in a church that authoritatively controls and manipulates. And there are many who are captives of religious legalism who do not believe in any of the eschatological notions of "end times" teaching.

Other than that Jesus Christ would return to this world, upset and looking for vengeance, Jesus did not have the leading role in the Revelation I was taught as a young man. And, amazingly, this "Christ-lite" view of Revelation was taught in His name—effectively diminishing and devaluing Him. This same watered down interpretation of Revelation is still being preached, taught, and published widely today, in the name of Jesus.

Political and historical events and people, past and future, had the lead roles in the Revelation I once knew, with Jesus far from center stage. The Jesus of the Revelation of my past was a far-off, future Jesus, not one who had already conquered on His cross and who was already reigning in my life and in the lives of those who trusted in Him. Seeing Revelation through the eyes of grace, with a Christ-centered filter, revolutionized this amazing book for me. It's my prayer that this same focus will do the same for you!