

The Rapture, the Tribulation, and Millennialism

I have always felt uncomfortable with firm and definitive statements stitched together from a selection of Bible passages about what we can expect towards the end of the age when Jesus returns. A recent booklet has brought this to a head (1).

I think the problem for me has to do with the nature of prophecy. When speaking to Aaron and Miriam, God said “Listen to my words. When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord (2).”

This thought is echoed by Paul. “We prophecy in part... now we see through a glass darkly,” or in a recent translation, “Now we see but a poor reflection in a mirror (3).” Remember that mirrors in Paul’s time were not the clear reflectors we have nowadays.

I think we need to remember these statements about the nature of prophecy when reading Daniel, Revelation or Paul’s predictions. It is all visionary. Same with the book of Isaiah, which was “The *vision* concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw (4).” The future is uncertain. Treat the book as such, and don’t try to make it yield more than it should.

Biblical prophecy comprises dreams, visions and riddles to my mind. I love it. The clarity of Moses’ experience was the exception.

I had a period of vivid dreams when I was in Intensive Care, brought on by the powerful medication. The visions were so real that I could recall them a year afterwards (5). Indeed, one of them was a recurring dream, that I was lying in a bed in a hospital ward! It was only because I overheard a doctor in my supposed dream using very long and complicated words to another patient out of my sight that I wondered to myself whether I was dreaming or perhaps this was real. I decided to believe it was reality, which turned out to be helpful towards my recovery. It was good to know what was dream and what was actual. Note the element of confusion in my experience.

Some people in the Bible seem to have operated well in hearing from God in dreams. Joseph and Daniel in the Old Testament are good examples, and also Mary’s husband Joseph in the New. We note that the instructions to go ahead with the wedding, to travel to Egypt to escape from Herod, and the later one to return to Israel all came to him in dreams (6). Jeremiah operated more in riddles that God showed him. Ezekiel seems to have majored on daytime visions. John’s Revelation came on Patmos on the Lord’s day while he was in the Spirit. Often the phrase is, The word of the Lord came to ..., which sounds like a thought or a spoken voice from God. There was considerable variety in how people heard from God.

Personally, rather than trying to combine prophetic insights from various passages into a timeline of future events surrounding Jesus’ return as some do (seldom satisfactorily), I prefer to be open to a number of things that I might experience, whether it be 42 months of difficulty, being killed for my faith,

or being caught up into the air (7). Our call, it seems to me is to trust the Lord and obey him whatever happens, and hold our heads high rather than being fearful (8). I want to leave questions of future events, his rule and matters of timing to the Father, as Jesus asked (9). There's an important job for me to do here and now in the meantime, and I should focus on that. The danger of too much speculation is that I might take my eye off the ball.

I don't think that confident statements about future apocalyptic events help us, even if they are carefully woven together from Scripture. We need to ponder these things in our hearts as Mary did rather than making pronouncements (10). See what you think.

David Pennant

Notes

1. What to do if you Miss the Rapture, www.timefortruth.co.uk
2. Numbers 12:6-8
3. 1 Corinthians 13:9 & 12
4. Isaiah 1:1
5. David Pennant, 36 Days in Intensive Care : my struggle with delirium, 2019, Kindle available from Amazon
6. Mathew chapters 1 & 2
7. Revelation 6:9, 11:2 etc, 1 Thessalonians 4:17.
8. Luke 21:28
9. Acts 1:7
10. Luke 2:51