

## Revelation Part 25A

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1. **Introduction:** Today is a special topic day. During last Sunday's lesson, a thought occurred to me that I want to share with you today.
  - The vast differences (almost opposites) in the interpretations of Revelation caused me to wonder if there had been similar interpretation difficulties with prophetic scripture in the past.
  - The thought that came to me during class was that yes, I knew of one clear example.
  - This lesson is a result of thinking about that example. Here is my initial question.
2. **Is There an Example in Scripture of Opposing (almost opposite) Interpretations of Prophecy Similar to the Divide over the Preterist/Futurist Divide Concerning Revelation?**
  - The answer is yes! Actual OT Prophecy about Messiah was centered on two almost opposite views of what Messiah would be like and what His primary activities would be.
  - Both views were deeply embedded in Scripture. The two views are (1,) the Victorious Warrior Messiah and (2.) the Suffering Servant Messiah. Messiah means "Anointed or Chosen One."
3. **Some Scripture about the Victorious Warrior Messiah:** Psalm 110:1-7: This is a prophecy of Messiah sitting at God's right hand until his enemies are made a footstool, ruling amid his enemies.
  - Isaiah 63:1-6: Imagery of the Divine Warrior traveling in greatness, strong to save, and defeating enemies through his righteousness.
  - Isaiah 9:5-7: Depicts the Messiah as a "Commander of Peace" (often translated Prince of Peace), ending war through divine power.
  - Zephaniah 3:17: Describes the Messiah as a "Mighty Warrior" who saves and brings victory.
4. **Some Scripture about the Suffering Servant Messiah:** Isaiah 53 (specifically 52:13–53:12), describes a messianic figure who is despised, rejected, and bears the sins of others. This passage highlights both vicarious substitutionary suffering (Isaiah 53:4–6) and voluntary submission (Isaiah 53:7).
  - Isaiah 52:13–53:12: This core text details the servant's suffering, rejection, and ultimate vindication.
  - Isaiah 42:1-4: The humility of the servant and His mission to bring justice.
  - Isaiah 49:1-6: The servant is called from the womb to restore Israel and be a light to the nations.
  - Isaiah 50:4-11: The servant's obedience to God despite experiencing suffering and rejection.
  - Matthew 8:14-17: Quote from Isaiah 53 to identify Jesus' ministry of healing as fulfilling the suffering servant prophecy.
  - 1 Peter 2:21-25: A quote from Isaiah 53 connecting redemption to Christ's suffering and death.
  - Psalm 22 (a prophetic picture of crucifixion) and Daniel 9:26 (predicting the Messiah would be "cut off" but not for himself).
5. **The Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52-53):** His Nature would be gentle and humble. He would be despised, and rejected. He would bear the sins of others, bear the death penalty due those sins, and receive God's wrath due those sins. He would provide a vicarious sacrifice for those who believe.

- He would maintain silence before false accusations. Through voluntary suffering and death, he would do whatever is necessary to provide salvation for those who believe.
6. **Jesus' Time on Earth:** Historically, many Jews' concept of the suffering servant was that the term referred to the nation of Israel as a whole, suffering in exile. The term did not refer to an individual messiah. Most Jews were steadfast in their view that Messiah would be a conquering, victorious warrior whose first function would be to free them from Roman occupation.
- The predominant Jewish expectation was that Messiah would be a human of David's lineage (no thought of a divine Messiah) —an "anointed or chosen one" who would liberate Israel from Roman rule, restore the kingdom, and bring peace. The focus was on Messiah freeing them from Rome and enabling them to return to governing themselves.
  - But there was a remnant in the country (God always preserves a remnant for Himself) who believed the prophecies about Messiah as a Suffering Servant.
  - Some Jews believed there would be two Messiahs, one being a victorious warrior, the other being a suffering servant.
  - But no one seemed to grasp that one person having both a divine nature and a human nature could simultaneously be both suffering servant and a victorious warrior.
  - Decades would pass before a more complete understanding of Jesus' divine and human natures and how He, His earthly ministry, and His sacrificial death fit the prophetic picture painted in the OT.
  - The view that Jesus Christ possesses two distinct natures—fully divine and fully human—united in one person was formally established as orthodox doctrine at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.
  - Most Jews during Jesus' incarnation expected a human victorious warrior Messiah who would restore something like David's victorious and prosperous kingdom. In other words, he would give them physical safety and prosperity. We understand. We too desire physical safety and prosperity.
7. **But the true issue is not what we desire but what God intends:** From the beginning, God's intention and desire has been to have a holy people to live in His presence in eternity. Because of Adam and Eve's sin, all their descendants (i.e., all humanity) became contaminated with sin, incapable of themselves of becoming holy.
- To achieve His plan for a holy people, God, of necessity, would have to somehow eliminate sin from humanity.
  - God's plan to accomplish that goal was established before the foundation of the earth. The plan required a "kinsman redeemer" capable of creating a way to restore sinners to holiness.
  - The functional key to the plan was that One of the Trinity (the Son) would take to Himself a human nature and would in His human nature live a life on earth of total obedience to the Father.
  - When the time was right, He would become the perfect sacrificial "Lamb of God" who could and would bear both the death penalty due and the wrath of God due the sins the sins of all

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who believe in Him. In that way, freed of the burdens imposed by their sins, believers would be ready for the final step of becoming holy as God intended from the first.

- All humanity sins and falls short of God's glory. Believers are sinners saved by grace who are destined to be made holy as God is holy and live in God's presence in eternity.
8. **So where are we in answering our question?** At the time of Jesus' incarnation, the prophetic message about Messiah was such that it could reasonably be interpreted by godly, knowledgeable people in more than one way, none of which could reveal the full story.
- Most Jews of the time expected a victorious warrior messiah. A few expected a suffering servant. Most expected messiah to be human. A few expected messiah to be divine.
  - As far as I have been able to determine, no one expected the truth - a Messiah having two natures, one wholly divine, the other wholly human with no mixing or interference between the two natures. Both His divine and human nature were under the control of His divine "I." He was and is "one Person with two natures."
9. **Comparison:** OT prophecies about the anticipated Messiah were misinterpreted because (1.) it was not recognized that Messiah would have two natures, one wholly divine, the other wholly human (most believed Messiah would be fully human); (2.) nor was it realized that Messiah would come, live on earth amongst us for a time, and then in His human nature be scourged and crucified until dead; (3.) would arise from the dead 3 days later; (4.) would return to the Father in heaven; (5.) at the right time, He would come again to earth as Sovereign.
- We face a similar dilemma in interpreting Revelation. Knowledgeable, godly people can reasonably come to different conclusions about what Revelation means. Like the Jews expecting Messiah, there are different opinions concerning prophecy about Jesus' return and what happens between His first and second coming.
  - But godly, knowledgeable people should always recognize they may be wrong. We have before us the example of the Jews at the time of Jesus' incarnation. They had all the OT that prophecies before them, but they drew wrong conclusions from those prophecies.
  - The tragedy was that they used their faulty understanding to deny Jesus is Messiah. They told Pilate to let Jesus blood be on them and their children. They got their wish. One of the occasions of fulfillment of their wish was the 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.
  - Since they were unable to understand how the "suffering servant" and "victorious warrior" prophecies could both be true, they chose one or the other.
  - Most first century Jews chose the "warrior" Messiah prophecies as truth and ignored the suffering servant prophecies. When Jesus appeared, the highly educated scribes and Pharisees rejected Him as Messiah because He didn't fit their anticipated "warrior" pattern.
  - As I have studied the various interpretations of Revelation, I can't help wondering what are the blind spots that enable us to have interpretations that are so amazingly different.
  - Consider the simple question "is Revelation mostly about things that have already happened, or almost entirely about things yet to happen?" The answers you get are wildly different and each is held tenaciously by those who believe and defend them.

- Most Jews who knew and thought they understood the prophecies about Messiah were confident that Messiah would be a human warrior who would free them from the Roman occupation. Jesus didn't fit that picture. They rejected and crucified Him.
10. **Conclusion:** We should be very cautious about declaring that we know we have the correct interpretation of Revelation. Our example for caution is the Jews who were wrongly confident they knew the correct interpretation of the prophecies about Messiah.
- First century Jews acted on their conviction that the lowly, peaceful Jesus could not be Messiah. We see their attitudes in Matthew 27:24-26.
11. **Matthew 27:24-26:** *So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.*
- We never want to be found in that boat. Their conviction that they knew and understood the right way to interpret prophecies about Messiah caused them to deny Him.
  - We should regularly and fervently pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us to truth and guard us from error.