

## *Introduction to the Book of Revelation from the Hebrew Mindset*

Welcome to the study of the Book of Revelation from the mindset of a Hebrew. I want to make it clear right up front that the Hebrew Messianic Community, for the most part, takes the dispensational view of the book of Revelation. Dispensationalists use a literal interpretation of the Bible (where grammar has its place and most of it can be taken literally) and believe that divine revelation unfolds throughout the narrative. The Dispensational view of the book of Revelation believes the end times and the Tribulation are yet to be fulfilled and will occur in the future. They take their viewpoint from the belief that the book of Revelation was written in or around 95 A.D., during the Roman rule of Domitian, when John was a prisoner of Domitian's on the island of Patmos. They also believe the seven years of Tribulation are the missing 70<sup>th</sup> week of years in the book of Daniel 9:24-27. The preterist viewpoint believes the book of Revelation was written by 68 A.D., the year Nero killed himself, and there was a widespread rumor that was circulated that Nero, because he was thought to be a god, would rise from the dead just like the antichrist of Revelation. The preterist takes the belief that all the judgments of the book of Revelation (seals, trumpets, bowls) were levied on the Jews who did not accept Christ in Judea by the time Titus Vespasian conquered Judea and scattered the rest of the Jews among the other nations of the world in 70 A.D. Some preterists claim that the "Parousia," "the LORD coming in the clouds" was a sign of judgment for the Jews throughout their generations. So, Jesus coming back in the clouds was the ultimate rejection by God of the Jewish nation: therefore, they were no longer God's people. Only problem, Jesus didn't appear to all of the earth in the clouds in judgment before 70 A.D. We will cover the viewpoint of the Messianic Community (dispensational) first and then where there are sharp differences with the preterist viewpoint, I will try to explain the preterist viewpoint.

The disagreements over the meaning of the book of Revelation and its timing are nothing new. The early Roman Catholic church believed that the events of the Tribulation portion of the book of Revelation were completed by the end of the great war of the Jews and the Romans under Titus Vespasian in the year A.D 70. This passed on to Martin Luther's followers and they, too, believed that the tribulation portion of Revelation had been fulfilled. This is the dominant view of the Catholic and the Lutheran churches today. The Scofield Bible (early 1900's) was influential in bringing this "new" dispensational view to the world of fundamentalists and evangelical Christians. Other various viewpoints are believed by different groups of people, for example, "historical premillennialism" (the Church will experience the Tribulation instead of being raptured) and "amillennialism" (no future reign of Christ on a political throne of David in Jerusalem, thus no fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant). We will not touch on these at all.

When I began my research for this study, I was overwhelmed by the amount of material that was available for the study of the Book of Revelation in magazines, books, the Internet (not all of it is true-surprise, surprise!), commentaries and YouTube. YouTube has a plethora of prophets who say they have heard from the LORD and the events we are experiencing today are related to the end times and the book of Revelation. Of course, not all of these so-called prophets agree with one another. I have taught the book of Revelation two times before this study in two different formats. The first time I shared in the teaching of a two-year Precept Upon Precept study and the second time was an 11-week Living Proof Ministries' (Beth Moore) study. For this study, I plan to use all the many ways I've learned to study and teach the Bible and the information I have gleaned along the way. This is not an inductive study, but I may from time to time use these methods to teach you something I want you to know, and the inductive method of learning is the best way to learn it. The

inductive method is to first do a thorough job of observation, then interpretation and lastly, application. It is not a topical study, but we will study many topics along the way. It is not a study of history, but there is much history in it. This study will be primarily designed around seeing the Book of Revelation through the eyes of someone with a Hebrew mindset in the first century. The Messianic Jew of the first century (those Jews who believed Jesus to be their Savior from sin and their Deliverer from God the Father's wrath), had a deep understanding of Old Testament prophecy and could clearly and rapidly identify the imagery that was used in the book of Revelation. The study of this book with this kind of information is purely background that we might not normally have in our normal teaching. This understanding is not magical and it is not absolutely necessary for you to properly read and understand the book of Revelation, but most of it is delightful! For example, the first century Jews would have looked at other apocalyptic literature, gaining insight into comparing the other apocalyptic writings to the book of Revelation. They would also have understood the animals or beasts seen in the book of Revelation to represent human or angelic rulers who were in charge of the other nations. The phrase "The LORD's Day" had a different meaning to them, maybe differing from our understanding, because to them, the LORD'S Day, was the day of the shofar (trumpet) and the shofar sounded judgment (Zeph. 1:14-16). They would have understood that Christ's raiment in Revelation 1 was very similar to the clothes of the high priest in the Temple of YHWH and also reflective of the dressing of a king. This would have symbolized to the first century recipients of this letter that Jesus was both priest and king, and held the unique office of the Messiah.

So, why in the world, if I've taught this book twice already, and there is already so much information circulating out there concerning this book, would I want to teach it again? And why, for heaven's sake would I write another study? I'm so glad you asked that question. In the Fall of 2015, I joined a group of Believing Christians who were studying the Hebrew language with the intent to read the original text of the Bible in the Hebrew, without the bias of the Greek language, culture, and the Greek Hermeneutics method of study, that is and was used in its' translations.<sup>1</sup> This was okay for the Old Testament for it was written originally in Hebrew and we have copies of the Scripture in Hebrew. However, the New Testament, as far as we know, was written in Greek and not Hebrew. In other words, for us studying the book of Revelation, it came to us in the Greek language, not the Hebrew. However, there is material available on the New Testament Greek text translated into the Hebrew, called the B'rit Hadashah. For our purposes in studying the book of Revelation, having the B'rit Hadashah gives us who can't read the Hebrew language, a source that we can go to and see the English translation of the Hebrew right next to the Hebrew translated from the Greek language. The B'rit Hadashah is online and if you choose to use the B'rit Hadashah, one of the websites is <http://www.sarshalom.us/resources/scripture/asv/bible.html>.

So, I didn't get my exact objectives met with taking the class, but I did come away from the class fascinated with what I learned about the first century Jewish believers and how they saw the Scriptures through their traditions, culture, and other writings.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From material received in class from linguist, Dr. Cap Hensley, New Life Evangelical Church, Aurora, CO, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> What does this kind of translation, the B'rit Hadashah mean? The Greek/Hebrew scholars took the New Testament Koine Greek manuscripts and translated them into Hebrew. Those same Jewish translators tell us that the translation from the Greek to the Hebrew restores all of the Hebraic perspective and understanding that was lost to the Greek language. Then after this, the translators took the B'rit Hadashah and translated the Hebrew into the other languages of the world.

Another question you might have in mind is why would I write a Bible study on Revelation according to the Hebrew mindset when it was written to the churches in Asia Minor. Let me explain the background: those, who were in Jerusalem for the celebration of Pentecost the year Jesus died and rose again, and heard the Gospel message and took it back to the far reaches of their world, in this case to the cities of Asia Minor, were the first Christians and they were Jewish. The churches in Asia Minor became mixed groups of Hebrew and Gentile Christian converts. Paul, in his missionary journeys first went to the synagogues and spoke and reasoned with the Hebrews first. Why did he go there? They probably had their own scrolls of the Scripture and he was passionate about saving his own people even though he was Christ's chosen minister to the Gentiles. Jesus told the disciples right before he ascended after His resurrection, to go into all the world and be His witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:8). The same word used for "messianic congregations" is the same word used for Hebrew synagogues. The Greek word used for church is ekklesia, but does not mean anything more than "a gathering" or a "crowd." In the Hebrew, Messianic congregations are called kehilot. The early churches were small gatherings in individual homes more like home synagogues than churches, today.

What are some other ways we can look at the book of Revelation and glean more than just the events happening?

We can reference the 800 cross references of Revelation to the Old Testament Tanakh.

We can look at the details of the Hebrew tabernacle, outlined for us in Leviticus. We can also study the concept of Covenant and how God always works with His own through Covenant. We will be referencing both of these topics many times throughout our study.

We will see a thread that is woven all the way through the Scripture and also through the Book of Revelation in the tabernacle's lampstand with seven lamps, often referred to as the menorah. "Menorah" is the actual Hebrew Word for this lampstand with seven lamps, not seven candlesticks as in the KJV. The menorah is pictured on the Israeli flag today. In Leviticus, the menorah is in front of the Holy of Holies' wall (or curtain) of separation between God and Man. In the book of Hebrews, after the death of Christ, the wall has been split open, signifying that Man now has access to God directly. The menorah is still in front of the Holy of Holies, but there is no longer a wall of separation, but direct access of the Believer to God Himself.

We will find reference to satan in the Old Testament in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. In Isaiah, he is called "Daystar, son of the morning," and is the one who said in his heart, 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most-High.'" He is called the King of Tyre in Ezekiel, and you will discover from this chapter that he was formally one of the angels that covered God's Throne until iniquity was found in him. For his pride, God kicked him and one-third of the heavenly host who sided with him, out of heaven. Satan and his devils (fallen angels) show up big time in the book of Revelation. Satan shows himself to be the ultimate counterfeiter. In Revelation, we see him mimic the Trinity with his unholy trinity. While investigating other books of the Bible, we will see him counterfeiting God throughout the whole of Scripture.

In this study, we will look at the use of Gematria. Gematria is using numbers to represent letters to spell out names and to purposely veil a meaning. There was a rabbi in the 12<sup>th</sup> century who believed that the Messiah's actual name was Menachem based on the gematria of the Hebrew word used for "branch" in Zechariah 3:8. He paired this with the name used for "comforter" in Lamentations 1:16. The numerical value of the Hebrew word for Menachem "branch" is 138 and the Hebrew word for

tzemach “comforter” is also 138. This will become very important when we study the mark of the beast in part 3. One of the reasons the preterists believe the book of Revelation was written to the Christian Jews still in Jerusalem in 68 A.D. was because the name “Nero Caesar” in Hebrew gematria adds up to “666.” The early church was under heavy persecution. Their writings circulated to the Jews in Judea, if confiscated, could condemn them. The writings identified the number of the Beast to be “666.” So, in their understanding, the “beast” would be Nero or perhaps Rome itself. They were to be watchful and extremely careful. When we get to mystical Babylon, many of you will wonder if Babylon is Rome, or Jerusalem, or Babylon, or maybe even the USA. When speaking of the beast and Babylon in Revelation 17, the angel present tells us the mystery of the woman and the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads, and the ten horns. We are told in 17:9 that the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. There were seven hills of Rome. Rome was also known as the “Little Babylon” during the first century church time.

Along with the gematria, we will look at the practice of wearing “phylacteries” or “tefillin” during the morning prayer. Phylacteries are a set of 2 small boxes that hold portions of God’s Word in writing. The Jews would tie the boxes on the head and arm. Again, this will become very important when we look at the mark of the beast in part 3.

The Greek word for “revelation” is apokalupsis. The negative connotation that this word has to do with ominous catastrophes or disasters is a misnomer. It does not represent doom or the end of the world. In the Hebrew translation for the Greek word apokalupsis it simply means “to uncover something that was hidden.” John uses his visions and also symbols to describe what he saw. These visions and symbols would be very familiar to the Jewish people of the day. We will reference other apocalyptic books both within the Scripture and outside the Scripture. We can learn a lot about the culture during the time the Revelation text was being written, by looking at the other apocalyptic texts that emerged in the culture 100-200 B.C., such as the book of 1 Enoch. In 1 Enoch, “The Son of Man” from Revelation 1 is described with the term the “Head of Days.” You will start to see in our study, the association of the “Ancient of Days” of Israel in Daniel, the “Head of Days” in 1 Enoch, and the “Son of Man” in Revelation.

The book of Revelation is also structured uniquely. First off, it is the only book of the Bible that promises a blessing to those who read and hear the words of this prophecy and also heed the things that are written in it. My professor for the Hebrew course I took online says that this blessing at the beginning of the book of Revelation and the six subsequent blessings in Revelation are a picture of the beatitudes. He claims that these seven blessings are a literary device that helps to explain John’s vision. This is called “chiastic” structure. We will definitely look at this. There is a Journal provided for you in Part 1, **Appendix B**, for you to write down God’s blessings that you have received from reading Revelation. Also, seven is a key number in Revelation and we will see it used many, many times along the way.

We are given a divinely inspired outline in Revelation 1:19 as to the structure of the entire work. Revelation 1:19, says this to John: “Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.” Revelation 1 speaks of “the things which you have seen.” Revelation 2-3 of “the things which are,” and Revelation 4-22, speak of “the things which will take place after these things.” This is remarkable. We are given the outline for the interpretation of time or order of all things in this book. In addition to this, we see seven “after these things” in the run of the text, giving credence to the sequential timing of the events in this book.

We find very early in this book that there are a lot of metaphors and similes used. Similes necessarily compare two things using words such as “like” or “as.” Metaphors compare two things without using these words; they imply the comparison without using the words “like” or “as.” For example, Revelation 1:10 “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.” Was it a trumpet sound that John heard? It could have been, but it also could have been something else making that sound and it was the only way John knew how to describe it.

There is much symbolism used in Revelation as well as the similes and metaphors described above. The word for “a sign,” or “to signify” is “semaino,” and means “to make known by some kind of sign.” In the NASB the word ‘signified’ is replaced with the word “communicated.” At least two of the commentators I read used these two words, “sign” and symbol,” interchangeably. An example of a sign or a symbol is the seven-tiered lampstand used in the seven letters to the seven churches. God was going to take away their church’s lampstand (menorah) if they didn’t do what He asked. Yet, in Revelation 4:5, we see that the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne (the menorah) were symbolic of the seven Spirits of God. Could the first reference to the lampstands of the seven churches, be real lampstands or were they symbolic of the Spirit of the Lord’s presence in those particular churches?

We will see many names Christ is called throughout the Book of Revelation and many titles to which He is referred. The titles used in Revelation 1 are used again in chapters 2 and 3 when he is communicating to His “called out ones” not only in those seven churches of Asia Minor but to all the “churches.” We will see Him as the Lamb of God who was slain in chapters 4 and 5, and He is referred to as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and as the only One Who is worthy to break the seals. This Lamb breaks the seven seals in chapters 6 revealing God’s wrath against Mankind’s sin. Christ is then seen as the Lamb all the way through to chapter 19, when He is also revealed as the One Who comes riding on a white horse and He is called Faithful and True. Here He is also called the Word of God, KING OF KINGS, and LORD OF LORDS. Finally, in chapters 19 through 22, we will see Him as the Judge of all the earth and the Bride Groom, who comes to claim His Bride, the Church. The Great I AM is the memorial name of God given to the Israelites for all generations. He is the “Being One.” And it is in this use of the “Him who is, and who was and who is to come” in 1:4 that the Jewish people find their claim to the book of Revelation as pertaining to them first. They view themselves as the only people in the pre-incarnate Christ history who have had the Great, I AM of the Bible, as their God.

Before we end with this introduction, I want to make a statement that I believe, and I would like you to think about this statement long and hard. I believe, as do many others, that God is not done with the Jewish people and the church has not replaced Israel (Replacement Theology). After the seven letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, there is no mention of the church until we get to chapter 19 and the Bride of Christ. What we see instead are the 12 tribes of Israel taking center position on the world’s stage. If this is the case and I believe that it is, when God specifically says in Revelation 7:4, 144,000 from the tribes of Israel, 12,000 from each of the tribes, I believe he is referring to the 12 tribes of Israel. It’s plain to me. I don’t see any similes or metaphors here. I know there is another group of people who do not believe those Israelis who have come back to the land a second time in 1948 (Reference Isaiah 11:11-16) have any bearing as God’s people today. In this study, we will look at the covenants given to Israel in the Old Testament and we will look at the New Testament covenant that He made with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah in Jeremiah 31:31. This is what He says to Israel in Ezekiel 36:22-32, “Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. I will vindicate

the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. The nations will know that I am the LORD,' declares the Lord GOD, 'when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe my ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you. I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations.”

This Book, this study, is being written with the ultimate goal for you to have intimacy with Christ and for you to “BE READY.” The Bible from Genesis to Revelation is a love story of redemption and the Bride readying herself for her wedding day, so that she might have intimacy with her husband. For the Jews, depicted as the wife of Jehovah throughout the Old Testament, of whom He divorced, He will redeem her (for as many as will believe His provision of salvation for them) as He has redeemed you and me and He will graft them back into Vine (Romans 9,10,11).

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\*The Preterist viewpoint is that God has divorced the Jewish people for their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. Jesus coming in the clouds (the Parousia) is a reference to the judgment of Israel carried out by Rome, just like the judgments on them carried out by Assyria (Northern Kingdom) and Babylon (Southern Kingdom). The invasion of Judea by Titus Vespasian in 68-70 A.D. and subsequent enslavement of the few survivors were the end of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the New Covenant.