

Excerpt from *Revelation from 30,000 Feet: Reclaiming the Most Abused and Misused Book of the Bible*, by Jon Korkidakis

Introduction

It was a dark and stormy night, at least that is the way I remember it. I was eight, maybe nine years old and my younger brother and I were hanging out with the three neighbor kids around our age who happened to live in the unit below us. Since they lived so close to us, it was natural for us to get together, and from the first moment we met the family, they told us they were Christians.

For my brother and I, this was our first human contact with evangelical Christians. Our background is Greek Orthodox, so coming into the relational sphere of this type of believer at such a young age was a totally new experience. In fact, at first it felt other-worldly. Throughout their apartment were plaques of bible verses, a couple in particular from Proverbs saying something about disciplining children. Most disturbing at the time were the belts that hung from a particular plaque as if they were weapons lined up at the ready.

On this particular night in question we were gathered in the family's living room when the father called all the kids together. As we sat there he began to recount for us the predictions of the Bible, especially from the Book of Revelation. As he presented us with the judgments that awaited anyone who would deny God, each neglected warning escalated into a new and more severe punishment. I can remember the overwhelming feeling of dread that came over me with each passing minute.

To say it was a frightening experience would be a classic understatement. At no point in my young life had I yet encountered a world fraught with potential evils and demonic oppression, let alone a wrathful God. The idea of a cosmic war with the soul of humanity as the prize for the winner was beyond my young imagination at the time. To hear this taxed my ability to fully understand its ramifications or even to comprehend its veracity.

The apex of the evening was a call from the father to believe in Jesus. My brother and I, traumatized by the scenario that had been presented, easily made professions of faith, due mostly from a desire not to be thrown into the lake of fire, more than anything else. Motives not entirely pure but necessary in our young and impressionable minds.

Looking back after these many years, there are two things that stand out from that particular evening. Even though I personally became a committed follower of Jesus some years later, I cannot recall to this day any mention of Jesus' sacrificial love, or anything for that matter resembling a gracious Gospel presentation. Based on my first encounter with evangelicalism, the experience was one of terrifying horror and judgment. My earliest profession of faith was provoked more by fear than persuaded by love.

For my brother, though, it had a devastatingly traumatic effect on him. To this day, he harbors negative views of God or anything resembling church or religion. His disdain for all things spiritual became a noticeable part of his life and the way he lived it. It even became one of the factors that caused us to grow apart, even though we were very close for most of our childhood and teen years. For him, such a spiteful and vengeful God is not worthy of belief, let alone worship.

I can't tell you how discouraging it has been to watch my younger brother reject everything that I have come to not only personally believe, but dedicate my life to. My faith took me to a life as a pastor and as a professor in a College and Seminary for almost thirty years. Though I committed my life to proclaiming the Gospel, the one person who refused to acknowledge or recognize my life's work, was my only brother.

Sadly, our story is one of many. Though the names of those affected may be different, the outcome for those who have been traumatized by misrepresentations masked as interpretations of the book are legion. Over the years in ministry and teaching, I have been privy to countless stories of how the Book of Revelation has been weaponized to the detriment of others. I've heard of elders telling young people not to finish their education, get married, have children, and a host of other life transitions because the rapture was going to happen at any moment. The number of young people who put their aspirations away as they awaited the rapture is tragic to say the least. Imagine the hurt, pain, and discouragement as they missed opportunities in life for something that never came.

To make such claims that suspend a person's life, is nothing less than a form of spiritual terrorism. Unfortunately there are those who gather in huddled groups with their charts and timelines and watch world events to see how closely their predictions align with Revelation's prophetic voice. Did you know there is even such a thing as rapture anxiety¹? It seems we continue to ignore at our peril the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:36 stating that no one, not even Jesus himself, knows the time or the hour of his return.

To make matters worse, there is another side of evangelicalism that is troubling. That is the faction that relishes the day when God's wrath is poured out. There is something perverse and unsettling about those who are gleefully looking forward to the earth being turned into a smouldering heap of rubble. We do recognize that there is going to be an accounting for those who propagate evil and we know that one day God will put all things right again, but that is in divine hands, not ours. Any sensitivity to the heart of Jesus will grieve for those who continue to harden their hearts, not relish their demise.

For many others, Revelation is utterly mysterious. Its wild imagery and shocking pictures of violent judgment make it a book that many are hesitant to read, let alone attempt to fully understand. Coupled with the ongoing struggles our world is experiencing along with the voices

of fear-inducing proclamations from certain spiritual leaders, it is little wonder that the book creates a sense of anxiety in the hearts of many. When I was a pastoral intern, I served under a pastor who refused to ever preach from Revelation.

The subtitle of this book is, “Reclaiming the Most Abused and Misused Book of the Bible.” This book intends to make good on reclaiming the heart and original intent of John’s writing. Embedded within the ethereal and surreal components of the book are profound truths that either get buried outright or completely ignored. Truths that are not only transforming, but timeless in their message of hope.

I have often wondered what would have happened had my brother never been exposed to the misguided delivery of Revelation at such a young age. It is a question devoid of an answer at this point, but it has been a motivation to present Revelation in a more comprehensive way, that presents the difficult passages in the context of John’s original intent.

¹<https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2023/04/21/rapture-anxiety-is-thing/> Viewed on June 19, 2024 at 8:42 pm.