

**THE INFLUENCE OF ISAIAH 60-66 ON THE MESSAGE OF
ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE IN REVELATION**

Roy A. Bradley

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Dr. Timothy Fox
Knox Theological Seminary

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Approaching the Book of Revelation

There is a tradition claiming that Plato had an inscription above his house¹ that read, “Let no one ignorant of geometry enter under my roof.”² For Plato, geometry is not merely pragmatic, as modern educational philosophy holds, but rather is to be “commended primarily for its *formative capacity*”³ contributing directly to the well-ordered soul, which, for Plato, constitutes the virtuous man. Geometry, on the ancient view, had more to do with soul-craft than with engineering. With this view in mind, we can interpret Plato’s inscription as essentially saying, “If you want to learn philosophy, you must approach the study with the right moral disposition and requisite intellectual skill.”

This anecdote provides a helpful analogy to the study of Revelation in that it, too, must be approached with the appropriate disposition and requisite knowledge. But in this case, it is the one well-versed in (and perhaps we need say the one who also “delights in” [Ps. 1:2]) the Old Testament⁴ scriptures, especially the Prophets, who is ready to understand the message of Revelation. “Scholars estimate that as many as 278 out of 404 verses in Revelation contain references to the OT and that over five hundred allusions to OT texts are made in total.”⁵ It is thus

1. Or, in some versions, above his Academy

2. Interestingly, the Arab mathematicians of the early Medieval era “thought that the inscription above all Greek schools loosely read, ‘Let no one who has not learned Euclid’s *Elements* enter here,’” given the dominant influence of Euclid’s work up to the end of the nineteenth century. To know geometry was to know *Euclid’s* geometry. Kevin Clark and Ravi Scott Jain, *The Liberal Arts Tradition: A Philosophy of Christian Classical Education*, Revised ed., with a foreword by Peter Kreeft (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2019), “Geometry.”

3. Clark and Jain, “Geometry.”

4. Hereafter, the term “Old Testament” will be designated with the abbreviation “OT.”

5. G.K. Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 1.

safe to say that without at least a solid familiarity with the OT, one would be hard-pressed to make much sense of John's apocalyptic-prophetic message in Revelation.

Among the many OT allusions present in Revelation, prophetic material from Isaiah, in particular, features prominently. This is not surprising, since "the book of Isaiah was one of the most influential biblical forces behind the formation of both Jewish and early Christian eschatology."⁶ Isaiah's prophecies, particularly in chapters 60-66, provide a substantial source of imagery and symbolism that plays heavily into the message of eschatological hope in Revelation. This can be demonstrated by tracing Isaiah's influence on Revelation in the following three themes: the Church as the true Israel, Christ as divine warrior, and the vision of a new heaven and a new earth.

The Church as the True Israel

Isaiah 66:7-8 (7:14; 26:17-27) → Revelation 12:1-6

In Revelation 12:1, John describes a "great sign" that "appeared in heaven": a woman arrayed with the glory of heavenly bodies, draped in the sun, the moon below her feet, and crowned with twelve stars. In the subsequent verses (vv. 2-6) more details emerge that bring into greater focus the image of the faithful community of believers on both sides of the coming of Christ in history.⁷ Scholars debate the source(s) of John's imagery here, and two main theories have emerged from the discussion. First is the view that John is drawing from a pagan myth source, of which several versions circulated in the ancient world. Secondly, a more tame view is

6. Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and Their Development*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, The Library of New Testament Studies 93 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 14.

7. Charles E. Hill maintains that Rev. 12:1-17 "seems to give us a hermeneutical key for much of the book." Charles E. Hill, "Revelation," chap. 25 in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized*, ed. Michael J. Kruger (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 538.

proposed by others arguing that “the imagery and story line can be explained on the basis of OT allusions and the Christian tradition.”⁸ Jan Fekkes takes an eclectic view by claiming that Revelation 12 “reflects a combination of pagan myth, OT prophecy and Christian tradition.”⁹ Regardless of the degrees to which each one of these sources were employed, it is our immediate interest here to tease out the evidence of John’s use of OT prophecy, specifically the latter prophecies of Isaiah, as a significant source of imagery in Revelation 12:1-6.

The woman in this vision is “pregnant, and crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth” (v. 2). The connection between the woman of Revelation 12 and the believing community is based on an OT precedent first made clear in Genesis 37:9, wherein the celestial bodies (sun, moon, and eleven stars) serve as metaphors for Jacob, his wife, and the other eleven tribes of Israel, respectively.¹⁰ In the context of Isaiah the image of a woman (=“bride”) is used to symbolize Israel as a *restored* people. Isaiah 61:10 describes the one who greatly rejoices in the lord as a bride adorned with the “garments of salvation” (||“robe of righteousness”) by her faithful bridegroom. Likewise, Isaiah 62:1-5 uses the image of a bride as a picture of redeemed Israel: “Her righteousness goes forth as brightness” (v. 1) and she will be given a new name—“My Delight is In Her” (v. 4); and in v. 5 the simile of marriage is employed to emphasize the relationship between God and his people whom he has saved.¹¹

8. Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, 177–78.

9. Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, 178. Leon Morris argues that appealing to a myth source is unnecessary, since the symbols can be explained purely in terms of OT allusions. See Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Leon Morris, vol. 20, Tyndale Commentary (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 1987), 153.

10. Beale, *Revelation*.

11. This wedding metaphor is gloriously picked up and expanded in Revelation 19:7-8 and 21:2.

Further, in connection with the vision of the woman in Revelation 12 as a pregnant mother, Isaiah likewise portrays Israel as a mother to the restored future remnant of Israel, “an image freely mixed with the image of Israel as a bride.”¹² In Isa. 66:7-11, the process of the restoration of Israel is couched in striking childbirth imagery, which connects it thematically to the vision in Revelation 12:5, wherein the woman gives birth to a “male child” who is “caught up to God and to his throne.” The terminology of childbirth in Isa. 66:7-11 is abundant, solidifying the poetic image: “labor,” “gave birth,” “pain,” “delivered,” “born,” “brought forth,” “womb,” “nurse,” “consoling breast.” Here, the “new city” emerges from the old as a child brought forth, not incidentally, but by the surety of promise: “shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb?” (v. 9). Likewise, the birth of the divine child by the woman, who is under the threat of harm from the dragon, indicates the instrument by which God will renew his people—it will be through the “one who is to rule (lit., “shepherd”) all the nations with a rod of iron” (Rev. 12:5), a clear allusion to the Son in Ps. 2:9 and an intertextual reference to how Jesus is described in Rev. 2:27.

The complexity of this image of a woman emerges gradually when considered in its prophetic context. It functions to represent a whole cluster of referents, ultimately linking back to Eve, whose seed will crush the Serpent’s head (Gen. 3:15). The woman also pictures Jerusalem (=Zion; Isa. 66:6-9; Gal. 4:26). Furthermore, as we have already seen, she represents the faithful followers of believers and, at the same time, the corporate mother of the Messiah, and of individual believers (Gal. 4:31). It is clear, then, that we should understand the woman of Rev. 12 to be the Church, and thus we can say with Hippolytus (3rd century) that “[by] the ‘woman

12. Craig S. Keener, ed., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary on the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 752.

clothed with the sun,' he [John] meant most *manifestly* the Church, endued with the Father's word, whose brightness is above the sun"¹³ (emphasis mine).

The allusions to the imagery of the woman and childbirth in Isaiah provides the prophetic context to understand the thrust of Revelation 12:1-5 and helps to establish grounds for the eschatological hope rooted in the Church's identity as the true Israel. It is encouraging to realize that this radiant woman shining in the heavens "depicts us, the Christian Church, as God sees us in light of Christ's redemptive work."¹⁴

Christ as Divine Warrior
Isaiah 62:2-3; 63:1-4 → Revelation 19:11-16

Revelation 19:11-16 initiates another vision wherein the heavens open¹⁵ to reveal a white horse, followed immediately by a description of its rider (vv. 12-16). Among the features of this horseman described in this passage, we are told that "on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself" (v. 12b). These crowns are crowns of victory, and the unspecified multiplicity of crowns serves as an antithesis to those worn by his enemies symbolized by the dragon and the beast.¹⁶ We know that the dragon and the beast also wear crowns (12:3; 13:1), but theirs are numbered—seven for the dragon and ten for the beast, representing their powerful, but limited (=finite), influence as temporal rulers in the world and

13. Hippolytus, *On Christ and Antichrist*, 61, quoted in Hill, "Revelation," 538.

14. Richard D. Phillips, *Revelation*, ed. Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken, Reformed Expository Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: P&R, 2017), 343.

15. A scene often indicating divine judgement (cf., Rev. 4:1; 11:19; 15:5)

16. Beale, *Revelation*, 410.

whose defeat is sure, for “he will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty” (v. 15).

The crown image symbolizing the ultimate victory of the divine warrior also extends to the faithful who are awarded crowns of their own, and thus share in the battle and the victory won by the conquering “King of kings, and Lord of lords” (v. 16): “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne” (3:21; cf., 2:26-28). This imagery portrays Christ as a warrior who wages war against his enemies and gains the victory through the exercise of divine, ultimate judgement. The primary purpose of his coming is the destruction of evil, which is symbolically pictured in terms of ancient warfare: white horses (v. 19:11, 14), blood-stained garments (v. 13, 16), armies of heaven (v. 14), and sword (v. 15).

The secret name referred to in 19:2 alludes to Isa. 62:2-3, where the restored city will be given a “new name,” along with a crown, linking back to the image of the divine warrior teased out above. In fact, there is an entire cluster of ideas here, similar to what has already been shown regarding the image of the woman in Rev. 12. Here, the victory-name-marriage cluster links Isaiah 62:2-3 and 65:15 with Rev. 19:7-8 and 12. The “new name” given to the newly redeemed Israel is unmistakably matrimonial—“Marriage” (Isa. 62:5)—relating directly to the marriage motif in Rev. 19:7-8. Additionally, Isa. 65:15 speaks of a “new name” that will be given to God’s “servants,” which is also the language used in Rev. 2:12, where the “one who conquers” will receive “a white stone, with a *new name* written on the stone *that no one knows* except the one who receives it.” This reference seems to explicitly relate to the secret name of Rev. 19:12—“both allude to Isa. 62:2-3 and 65:15, both speak of a name which is in some sense confidential, and both speak of a new name having been written which no one knows about

except the one who receives it (2:17) or Christ Himself (19:12).”¹⁷ There is a certain mystery and depth to this divine warrior-husband who enters the battle, secures victory over evil in righteousness, rescues the suffering woman, and delights in his glorified bride as the husband who is called “Faithful and True” (19:11).

The image of God’s wrath as a winepress in Rev. 19:15b alludes to the prophecy of Isa. 63:3: “He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty” parallels “I have trodden the winepress alone....I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath.” In both instances a description of this warrior figure’s garments includes the image of being blood-stained (“crimson” [Isa. 63:1]; “red” [63:2]; “dipped in blood” [Rev. 19:13]). In Isaiah, the winepress metaphor is employed through a question raised about this figure who “comes from Edom, in crimson garments from Bozrah” (63:1): “Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress?” (63:2). In reply, the warrior accepts the suggestion of the prophet, but metaphorically (the winepress of God’s fury), not literally. In ancient Israel, the juice of grapes was trodden out by workers’ feet, which would often cause some of the juice to splash onto their garments (cf. Gen. 49:11). In the same way, this is the manner in which the divine warrior will stamp out his enemies with fury and bloodshed. If there be any doubt about the sobering severity of God’s judgement on sin and evil, let it reckon with this image of the winepress. G.K. Beale writes: “Christ’s conviction of the impious will lead to his destruction of them, which will be as thoroughgoing as the crushing of grapes in a winepress.”¹⁸ The foil between those being crowned with victory and those being trampled in defeat is dramatically

17. Beale, *Revelation*, 411.

18. Quoted by Phillips, *Revelation*, 549.

established, causing the reader of John's vision to long for the protection of being known by this divine warrior who comes to execute judgement and rescue his bride.

A New Heaven and a New Earth

Isaiah 65:17-18 → Revelation 21:1-2a; Isaiah 60 (52) → Revelation 21.22-22.5

John's breathtaking vision of a "new heaven and a new earth" in Rev. 21:1 is another example of an explicit allusion to Isaiah, who had already prophesied that such an event would take place (65:17; 66:22). The dependence is quite clear.

Isaiah 65:17

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.

Revelation 21:1

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

The language of "a new heaven and a new earth" is exactly the same in each instance, and there is an obvious parallel between the notion of "former things" being forgotten (Isa. 65:17b) and the earth having "passed away" (Rev. 12:1b). The reference to the sea being "no more" suggests the annihilation of evil and the chaos it brings. In 13:1, the sea is represented as the source of evil and the source from which the beast comes.¹⁹

In both passages, the immediate focus of this new creation becomes the new city, Jerusalem. In Isa. 65:18, this new Jerusalem is said to be "created" by God (explicit creation language), and in Rev. 21:2 the new Jerusalem is said to be "prepared as a bride" (explicit marriage language), which also, though less explicitly, takes us back to the creation narrative and

¹⁹ Morris, *Revelation*, 232.

the marriage between the first man, Adam, and his wife, Eve, who was “prepared” for him.

Jerusalem is both a place and personified representation of the people who live there; “the new Jerusalem is thus a bride because its residents are a bride (19:7).”²⁰ This culminating image looks back to OT revelation and provides assurance of the fulfillment of this promise of God for the redemption of the entire cosmic order, which especially includes as its climax the consummation of the marriage of Christ and his Church.

In this new and glorious city there will not be a temple, for it will not be needed—the “Lord God and the Lamb will be its temple” (Rev. 21:22). John also records that there will be no need for the heavenly bodies to give light, as in the original creation (21:23). Here Isaiah anticipates one of the most sublime notions to be revealed in this vision, namely, “that the heavenly Jerusalem, illuminated perpetually by the radiance of the Divine Presence, shall need neither light of the sun by day, nor of the moon by night, but shall be sufficiently illumined by the direct and primary light which streams down upon it from God himself.”²¹

Eschatological Hope

Jesus’ earthly ministry centered on the message of the coming Kingdom of God. This Kingdom of God has a paradoxical nature. There is a sense in which Jesus ushers in the Kingdom of God through his life, death, and resurrection. But if the Kingdom came with him, and Satan has been conquered, then why is there still spiritual conflict, sin, and death? Why is it not obvious that the Lord is reigning supreme now? Herein lies the difficulty. The Kingdom is here in a real

20. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary on the New Testament*, 772.

21. Donald Maurice Spence-Jones and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary (Psalms-Malachi)* (Public Domain), Isa. 60:19. They suggest the germ of this idea is found in Isa. 24:23.

sense, but has not yet been fully realized, or consummated. That will happen on the Last Day, when Christ returns as Warrior, Judge, and Lamb, to redeem the true Israel, the Church, his Bride. Jesus' parable of the tares teaches that the Kingdom of God is "present but hidden,"²² implying that the act and process of redemption is not merely an instantaneous and perceptible reality.

The coming of the Kingdom that Jesus preached was unrecognizably different than how the Jewish hope conceived it. It was primarily spiritual, not political. "The enemies of God's Kingdom are now seen not as hostile evil nations as in the Old Testament but spiritual powers of evil.... In some way beyond human comprehension, Jesus wrestled with the powers of evil, won a victory over them, that in the end of the age these powers may be finally and forever broken."²³ This is the Christian hope: that the Kingdom of God *has* come on earth, and *will* come to restore all things. The Christian hope is teleological in nature—we are to understand our past and present in terms of the revealed, ultimate, cosmic purposes of God in the end: "Behold, I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:5). All our current trials and triumphs are to be situated squarely within the context of this eschatological truth.²⁴ John Piper reminds us that "the person who knows that his destiny is glorious and certain will be free to live the most radical life of love and sacrifice here on earth."²⁵

22. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Revised ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 95.

23. Ladd, 65.

24. This mode of thought is also endorsed in other NT letters. For instance, Paul employs eschatological truths for pastoral purposes in 1 Thess. 4:13-15 and 2 Thess. 2:1-12 to encourage the frail believers in Thessalonica.

25. John Piper, "Behold, I Make All Things New." A sermon preached at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN, 26 April 1992. Accessed 16 October 2021. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/behold-i-make-all-things-new>.

The main pastoral thrust of John's letter is an exhortation to faithfulness in the midst of active suffering in anticipation of inheriting a final and complete salvation. We must remember that the kingdom of this world, as taught throughout Christian scripture, is becoming the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ (Rev. 11:15). Though we do not yet see it fully manifested, we put our hope in the promise of God to consummate of all things under Christ, and expect to live in glory with him in the new heavens and new earth. This is the cosmic view of redemption. Christ did not suffer, die, and rise from the grave just to save sinners from death and hell (though he has certainly done that); he conquered death itself and all its company, redeeming the entire created order from its curse of sin and death—and he is returning to set the seal on his new creation. Because of this, the faithful Christian can live knowing his future is sure, and that “he who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thess. 5:24). Hallelujah!

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