

The Book of Revelation – A Word About Literalism

# The Song of Solomon Illustrated

(For our literalist friends.)

“How beautiful you are, my darling,  
how beautiful you are!

...Your eyes are like doves behind  
your veil...

...Your hair is like a flock of goats...

...your teeth are like a flock of  
newly shorn ewes...

...Your lips are like a scarlet  
thread...

...Your temples are like a slice  
of pomegranate...

...Your neck is like the  
tower of David... built  
with rows of stones  
on which are hung a  
thousand shields...

...Your two breasts are  
like two fawns,  
twins of a gazelle  
Which feed among the  
silies...

...Your lips, my bride,  
drip honey... honey and  
milk are under your tongue,

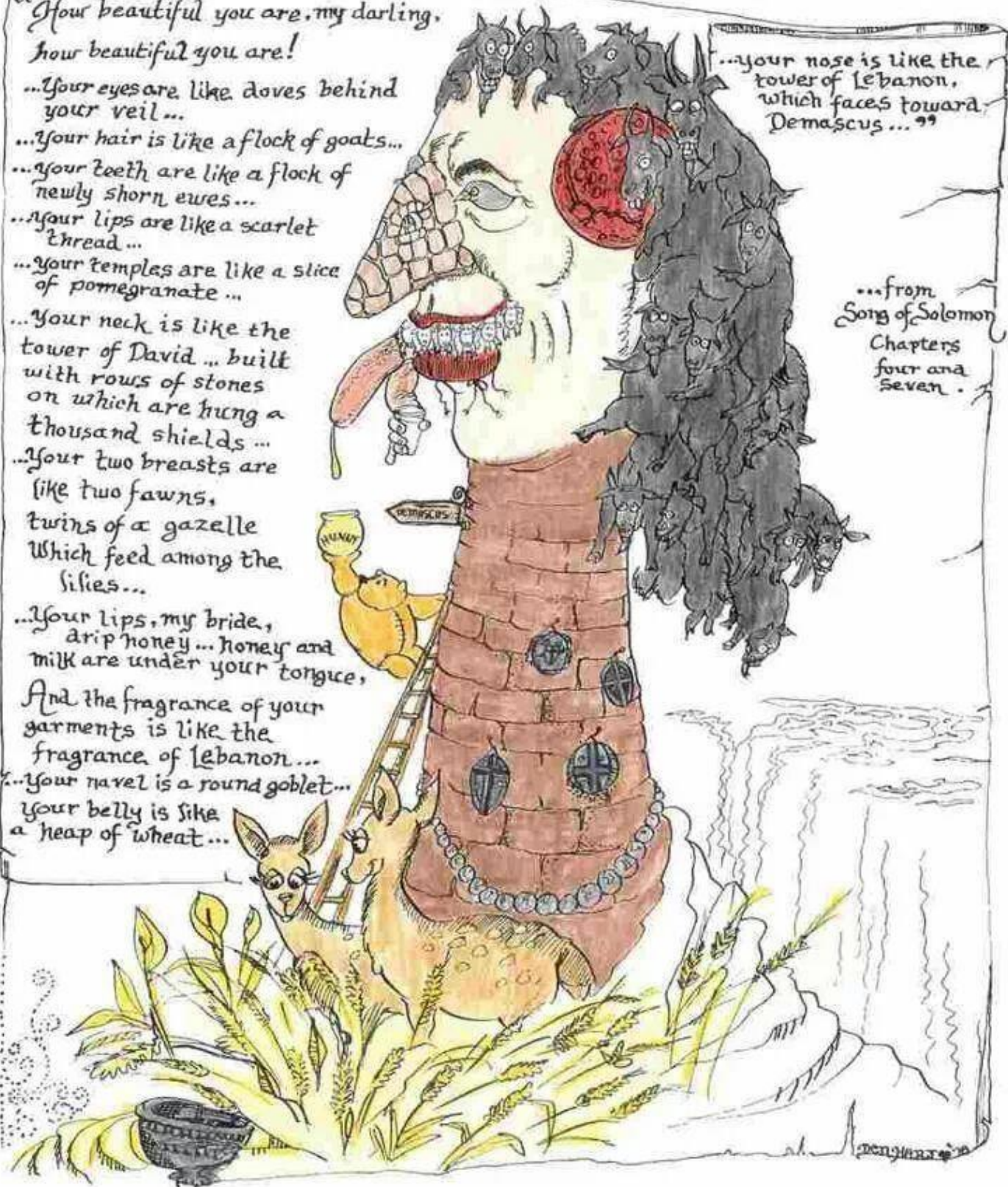
And the fragrance of your  
garments is like the  
fragrance of Lebanon...

...Your navel is a round goblet...

Your belly is like  
a heap of wheat...

...your nose is like the  
tower of Lebanon,  
which faces toward  
Damascus...”

...from  
Song of Solomon  
Chapters  
four and  
seven.



## The Book of Revelation – Another Word on Biblical Prophecy

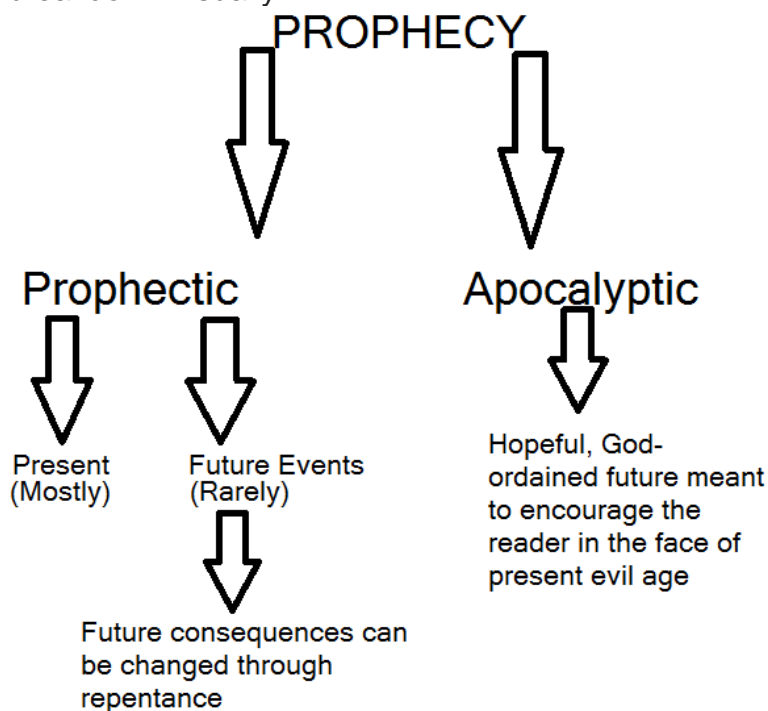
The world thinks of prophecy very differently than the Bible does. The world defines prophecy as, “making predictions” or “telling the future”. Therefore, the *Left Behind* series, *The Bible Code* and others follow suit in attempts to combine sensationalism with the biblical illiteracy of Christians (while making a profit).

What is not widely known to the world is that Biblical Prophecy as a whole rarely speaks of future events.

Roughly 80% of all prophecies in the Old Testament are related to commentary on present situations (ex: the captivity of God’s people, the evil around them, the injustice and suffering of the present age, the apathy of God’s people to change their idolatry, encouragement for those among God’s people who are living a righteous life; Micah 3:1-12). The prophecies that dealt with the future were warnings to call people to repentance or face a bleak future if they did not turn from their evil ways (ex: death, exile, destruction of their nation). Very often, a ‘sign’ accompanied the prophet’s future prediction to affirm the validity of the prediction.

When a prophet gave a prediction of the future, the ancient Hebrews ensured the survival of the fittest prophets of God by killing those who didn’t have perfect prediction records! (Deuteronomy 18:19-21) Getting ‘close’ only counts with horseshoes and hand grenades, and has no place in biblical prophecy.

Prophecy that deals with *future* events breaks down in to two categories: Prophetic and Apocalyptic. These categories were briefly discussed in the last lesson. **Prophetic prophecy** primarily focuses on repentance and people’s ability to change a possible dark future through their repentance. **Apocalyptic prophecy** primarily focuses on a hopeful future that cannot be changed and has been God-ordained, intending to encourage the reader in the face of their living in a present evil age. To give you a breakdown visually:



Therefore, when St. John uses the word 'prophecy' in Revelation he is referring to the genre of apocalyptic prophecy. This is radically different from prophetic future prophecy. Apocalyptic prophecy should not be confused with the function of prophetic future prophecy, its overall purpose, or usage.

### The Book of Revelation – Millennialism

**MILLENNIUM** and *LEFT BEHIND* millennial theories fall into three main categories:

#### **Premillennialism**

- interprets the Bible, even symbolic writing, literally.
- expects God's Kingdom to be restored in Israel.
- has Jesus reigning from Jerusalem for 1000 years.
- Then will come the judgment.

There are problems with Premillennialism:

- Apocryphal language can't be consistently literal.
- For example, does heaven really have gold streets? Is the devil really a dragon?
- With Jesus reigning in Jerusalem, wouldn't everyone convert?
- Scripture consistently reports Jesus will return for the purpose of judgment.

*Read Matthew 24*

#### **Postmillennialism**

- The world will be converted to Christ.
- The Jews will be restored to Israel.
- A millennial period of peace will be enjoyed for 1000 years.
- At the end of this period of peace, Christ will return.

There are problems with Postmillennialism.

- Apocryphal language can't be consistently literal.
- The Bible is clear it does not know when the end is coming. Similarly, we know in the end times the world will be on a downhill skid, and not enjoying a thousand-year period of peace.

## Amillennialism

This approach interprets literal passages literally and apocalyptic passages symbolically.

It maintains the thousand years can be interpreted properly using appropriate definitions of symbols.

- Most conservative theologians view the "thousand years" of Revelation as a symbolic number. Here is an example:
  - John's numbers usually have a symbolic meaning.
  - "Ten" was the number that meant a *round* number or a *complete* number.
  - "One thousand" is the cube of 10. This intensifies the meaning of the original number. Therefore, "a thousand" is the roundest number or understood as *the rest of time*.
- The "thousand years" is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible.

“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.” Revelation 2:10

The “crown of life” is the laurel wreath awarded to the victorious athletes of the Olympic games (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:24-25; Galatians 2:2; Philippians 3:14; 2 Timothy 2:5; 1 Peter 5:4). Those who die in the faith and for the faith have not truly died at all but have passed from life in time to life in a glorious eternity. THIS IS NOT FUTURE INDICATIVE – FUTURE INTENSIVE – MEANING THE RESURRECTION – DON’T CONFUSE THIS VERSE WITH HEAVEN. THE CROWN OF LIFE COMES AT THE RESURRECTION. AT FUNERALS WE DON’T TALK OF HEAVEN AS THE PLACE OF ‘CROWNING’ (OR EVEN CELEBRATION) BUT OF MOURNING THAT WILL PASS AWAY (1 THESS 4 – GRIEVING AS PEOPLE OF HOPE)

““Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with Me.” Revelation 3:20

Who is Jesus talking to – the unconverted or the converted?

The verb tenses indicate continuous, ongoing action, thus highlighting the patience of the Lord. He not only knocks upon the door but also calls out to

identify Himself, as was the custom in the ancient Near East - "if anyone hears My voice and opens the door."

This is the call of the Gospel. This often-overlooked detail reveals the error of those who would misuse this text in support of "synergism," the view that man must participate in his own conversion. Faith is always a free gift of God. It is never a work of man, the result of human decision or will. If any man opens the door to his heart, it is only because through the means of grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, God has moved and enabled him to do so.

*"The truth is that the King comes to the door, stands there, knocks, calls with His voice. In this lies the power that moves the will to open the door. The Lord's power of love and grace in and by His Word, which is the power of God to save (Romans 1:16), reaches into the heart and moves it to open and to receive. This is the picture here presented."* (Lenski, p. 163)

A note on The Rapture before we briefly look at its background:

- 1) Every time God 'gives' something, that is Gospel
- 2) Every time He 'takes' something, that is Law.
- 3) God gives animal skins to Adam and Eve; gives the mark to protect Cain; gives language to Babel instead of destroying them; takes life in the Flood (but gives a way out through the ark)
- 4) Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
  - a. What is the Context? What is St. Paul's intent?
  - b. Is it to explain the end times or to give hope?
- 5) The Rapture is a Dispensational Premillennialism view from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The Church didn't think this way for **1800 years**.
- 6) Read Matthew 24:36-44
  - a. The 'taken' one has been judged.
  - b. It's a good thing to be 'left behind' in this parable.

7) Back up a bit to verses 38-39 – what can we extrapolate from ‘the days of Noah’? What was going on in those days?

a. A lot of what we see going on today.

8) So – the point of the parable is not ‘The Rapture’ – the point is BE READY.

BOTTOM LINE: There is only ONE ‘Rapture’ – at the end on the Day of Judgment, when all the living and the dead are raised together. For Christians, it is not something to fear – this is St. Paul’s focus from 1 Thess. 4 – Christians have HOPE!