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Iconic Last Days: False Images and Picture-Perfect Prophecy – Part I

By Wilfred Hahn



A unique development of our time is the image—the icon, the picture, and the moving video. These images are an inextricable part of our culture. What household today does not have a camera, television or a DVD player?

Writes one observer, “Images. They are so compelling that we cannot not watch them. They are so seductive that they have revolutionized human social communication. Oral and written communication are in decline because a new form of communication, communication by image, has emerged.”¹

Actually, this age of “image communication” was really born with the invention of photography a little more than 150 years ago ... a very recent development, viewed in terms of the human timeline on earth.

As with all such sudden and recent trends that have impacted the world, one must ask: Why now ... why during these last days? Is the “image” just another

friendly technological development? Or, are there also some side effects to consider, along with novelty and convenience? Could the video phenomenon perhaps be playing handmaiden to key last-day trends?

Worldwide, though the eyes of mankind are engaged as never before with icons and moving pictures, “Though seeing, they do not see” (Matthew 13:13). Being so taken up with communicating through seeing, they are largely blinded to the rapidly approaching judgment. Yet, as we will see, this very same society is better equipped than ever before to comprehend the prophetic imagery of the Bible. Not only that, the Bible seems to have anticipated our last-day era, communicating in graphic form much of the





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last-day prophecy that is yet to be fulfilled.

In this 2-part series, we will first delve into the vulnerabilities of this “image society.” In Part 2, we will further explore the significance of why God so purposed it that He would communicate primarily through visions to the prophets about the last-day pre-millennial period. As well, we will review a companion trend—an explosion of false visions.

A Picture-Imperfect World

The emergence of the image has had a great effect upon the world. Following the invention of photography, it then only took 50 years or so for this new method of illustration to become a major influence in the communication of social values. A little later, moving pictures were invented ... otherwise known as movies. As old as the moving picture or photography may be, the impact of the image upon society is still unfolding today.

Images are now shot or viewed virtually everywhere, from cell phones, to

computers, surveillance cameras and a whole host of other media devices. According to 2005 census data, adolescents and adults now spend, on average, more than 64 days a year watching television and a little over a week using the Internet.² Of course, images are found almost everywhere, from newspapers and billboards, to elevator video screens and the exteriors of city buses.

Yet, the invasion of the image continues. According to Gartner, a technology consultancy, over 1 billion phones with cameras (representing as much as 80% of total sales) will be sold in 2010. That would mean that as many as one-half of the world's population will soon have camera phones. There will hardly be an event or occasion in the world that will not find its way into recorded media.

Not that there haven't been plenty of things to watch already. Since Louis Lumiere invented the first movie camera in the 1890s, approximately 370,000 motion pictures have been made around the world (to the end of 2002). If the entire universe of original film and video titles produced over that period were played continuously, the show would continue for 2,108 years.³

With all the new digital technology these days, increasingly the whole world is on stage. Consider that you are already likely to be caught on closed circuit TV (CCTV) at least several times a day if you are out shopping. In Britain, people are captured on video media an average of at least eight times a day. Almost every retail store today has surveillance equipment, as do key traffic intersections and highways. A British report in 2004 estimated that there were up to 4.2 million CCTV cameras in that country (about one for every 14 people).⁴ With websites such as YouTube proliferating, where people can post short videos of themselves or on vir-



tually any topic or interest, everyone can be on display.

We use and process images practically everywhere and any time. Is it not unreasonable to conclude that visual images clog the mind today? From every direction, the human eye is being lured by images and their potentially influential messages. We are attuned to the icon, this communication medium barraging us with worldly values imbedded in both real and un-real images.

The Impact of a Visual Society: Seeing is Believing

There is little doubt that our image culture today opens up mankind to a greater vulnerability to perceptual deception. Images can powerfully manipulate our emotions and perceptions, hampering our ability to interpret facts and truths today.

Of course, modern-day marketers of products well understand the persuasive powers of icons. Not surprisingly, according to estimates, 95% of consumers are more likely to buy a product because of a visual image or a photograph.

However, taking in information through graphic images involves a very different mental process than through the written word. Studies have shown that “brain images” can even subconsciously affect our perceptions and interpretations even of written text.

It is indeed a documented fact that graphic images, whether moving or stationary, have very powerful and unique impacts upon perception. Images can have emotional or cognitive effects that the viewer may not ever realize. As such, they can be an effective medium for manipulation and deception.

Is it then any wonder that the False Prophet mentioned in Revelation uses an image to deceive the world? Says the Bible, “And he had power to give life unto

the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed” (Revelation 13:15, KJV).

How God Communicates

There is little doubt that our generation is being prepared to be deceived by images—ultimately by the images of the beast. However, at the same time, God allowed it to be so that our intensely “image conscious” generation would also be ideally equipped to understand endtime prophecy. To discover why this is the case, we must first briefly review the main form of God's communication to mankind—the written Word.

God chose to mainly communicate His truth and revelation to most of mankind through written communication. If pictures and moving images had been the more reliable means for mankind to study, interpret and contemplate Scriptures, would not God have used this technique instead? At creation, would He not have designed it so that images would be the main form of communication rather than speech and writing? Though a picture may claim to represent a thousand words, the fact is that images alone are inadequate for all communication and are far too unreliable for literal and precise interpretation of truths and facts. Therefore, instead we were given the written Scriptures.

But just how did the Scriptures come to be recorded? How were prophecies revealed? No Angel Moroni appeared with neatly typeset golden plates, as the Mormons claim occurred to Joseph Smith. Indeed, God did write the 10 Commandments on two tablets and gave them to Moses ... twice. Yet, with a few exceptions, all of the original impartations of revelation were not in written

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Could it be true that God knew that our “last day” generation would be an “image conscious” society, one highly attuned to communication through images? As such, it is our generation that has the suitable aptitude to understand and interpret the visions and dreams described in the Bible better than any other.



form, but rather visual or aural or both (though not necessarily in the physical sense of being actually seen or heard). They received visions and dreams. On this point, God said, “When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams” (Numbers 12:6).

Though we may think that the moving picture (the movie) was an invention of the late 1890s, in reality a form of video communication had already been invented by God a long, long time ago. God used visions to communicate with his prophets. We see that the Holy Spirit frequently used “neural movies” to impart the content and meaning of much prophecy.

The Prophet—An Ancient Media Device

Many (if not all) of the major prophets mentioned in the Bible—both Old and New Testament—experienced either visions or dreams. Consider that virtually the entire book of Revelation is the product of a vision. The Apostle John wrote down what he saw and heard. Another example is the book of Zechariah, five chapters of which consist of eight separate visions. Other prophets expressly received prophecy in visual form. Examples abound. Said Ezekiel, “the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God (Ezekiel 1:1). “The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision” (Genesis 15:1). Jere-

miah was asked, “What do you see?” (Jeremiah 1:11), and, “God spoke to Israel in a vision at night” (Genesis 46:2). These serve as only some of the examples.

But why did God give visions and dreams to the prophets when the written Word (Scripture) was the intended form of communication to following generations? We see here that a two-stage process was involved. The prophets saw visions and then accurately wrote down what they heard and saw. In a sense, they served as ancient “high fidelity” media players. Crucially, the writing down of these visions was guided by the Holy Spirit. For the Bible says, “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). What we see then is that God many times chose to impart revelations in the form of images, then to be written down in words, and not pictures. Why?

There are likely a number of reasons we theorize. For one, God was able to show the prophets things of the future for which adequate words to describe them did not yet exist. Moreover, visions and symbols could contain much more information than could be understood through hearing.

No doubt there are other reasons. However, we observe a significant fact: A high proportion of prophecies and the greater volume of information that applies to the latter days—the very last of the last days and the events of the Great Tribulation—were given in the form of image-rich visions. Why should God have chosen to communicate more of His prophecies to later generations such as ours, in visions that are full of symbols and imagery?

Could it be true that God knew that our “last day” generation would be an “image conscious” society, one highly attuned to communication through images?



As such, it is our generation that has the suitable aptitude to understand and interpret the visions and dreams described in the Bible better than any other. While, on the one hand, our age of visual communications opens up our world to greater manipulation and deception, it also gives this generation the means to better understand prophecy, as we will further show.

Thoughts to Ponder

Our generation, namely the last generation—as the Bible defines this term with respect to the re-establishing of Israel in its own historical land and its reunion with the Messiah—is also the very last to experience actual visions and prophecy. We are not referring here to “personal prophecies” as some like to interpret today, but rather the type of prophecy that is inspired by “the spirit of prophecy,” that bearing the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 19:10).

Scripture clearly says that there will be no more prophecy after the Tribulation period. "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy" (Daniel 9:24). Here it is confirmed that visions and prophecies will be sealed up after the 70th week (the 7-year tribulation period). That is because no new visions will be necessary after this time. Jesus Christ himself will reign during the millennial period. No longer will it be necessary for Him to enable visions to be uttered and written down by men. His own words are the Word ... no visions required.

For today, the Bible expressly promises that the person who studies the book of Revelation will be blessed. “Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in

this book” (Revelation 22:7). Of course, one is only able to keep the words of prophecy if one studies them. Moreover, we are also told in the Book of Daniel—the Old Testament book which most closely parallels Revelation—that the day would come near the end that “Many will go here and there” (Daniel 12:4) to gain the knowledge with respect to its prophecies and the divine plan of God. Both these books of the Bible (as well as Zechariah), which emphasize endtime prophecy, rely heavily upon imagery, symbolism, visions and dreams.

It is true that many of the things prophesied in these books are more understandable today, given the technological advances, scientific knowledge and globalization of our generation. Our video-exposed society is ideally suited to this task.

We will further explore these observations in Part 2. Even more interestingly, we will outline other perspectives on endtime prophecy, which our generation is the first to uniquely appreciate. However, at the same time, much danger prevails. Like no age ever before, the world is besieged by a last-day flurry of false visions. (MC)

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ENDNOTES

- 1 J. Francis Davis, *Power of Images: Creating the Myths of Our Time*. *Media and Values*, Issue #57 / Winter 1992. <http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article80.html>
- 2 Sam Roberts, *Who Americans Are and What They Do*. In *Census Data*, *New York Times*, Dec. 15, 2006.
- 3 *How Much Information?* UC Berkeley's School of Information Management and Systems, 2003. <<http://www.sims.berkeley.edu>>
- 4 *A Report on the Surveillance Society*. Surveillance Study Network, September 2006. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/02_11_06_surveillance.pdf> Accessed May 10, 2008.