



## Square Halo Books

# Selections from The End: A Reader's Guide to Revelation

### EXTREME LANGUAGE

Extreme language is a term applied throughout this book to those passages found both in the Old and New Testaments that describe a devastating series of signs in the heavens and on earth. These events can include earthquakes, thunder and lightning, hailstorms, and dramatic changes in the sun, moon, and stars.

Do the many passages using extreme language intend for the description of events to be taken literally or is the language symbolic? The interpretation of extreme language in the New Testament should be consistent with its use throughout the Old Testament where it refers to historical events. For example, in Revelation 6:12-14 the sun is darkened, the moon is turned blood red, and the stars fall to the earth. Similar language appears in Matthew 24:29, and Mark 13:24f, and there is a reference to it in Luke 21:25. The language in the New Testament passages is similar to that used to describe the destruction prophesied in Isaiah 13:9-13, concerning the Lord's overthrow of Babylon.

*Isaiah 13:10 The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.*

There is no indication in historical records that the signs in the heavens described in Isaiah 13 literally occurred immediately prior to Babylon's destruction. Likewise, in Isaiah 34:4 extreme language is used of God's destruction of all the nations, but especially of Edom.

*Isaiah 34:9-10 Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulphur; her land will become burning pitch! It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever. From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass through it again.*

Edom was judged and destroyed, but the land has not been turned into burning pitch. Ezekiel 32:7f uses similar language of God's judgment on Egypt.

*Ezekiel 32:7-8 When I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light. All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you; I will bring darkness over your land, declares the Sovereign Lord.*

Egypt has been judged and destroyed, but the events in the heavens that were described did not literally occur. The judgments pronounced in all these passages occurred without the literal darkening of the heavens or the literal burning of the land. From this it can be concluded that the language was not intended to be taken literally. Its purpose is to describe the extreme chaos that results from the destruction of a nation or world power.

Some interpreters believe these passages have not been fulfilled because the signs were not literally fulfilled. They theorize that the nations will be reestablished and literally destroyed as described in the prophecies. It is difficult to believe that these nations will be reestablished. It is also difficult to believe that the prophets were not talking about the nations that existed during their own time. The context supports the idea that the text is speaking of the destruction that has already occurred. Regarding the Babylonians God says:

*Isaiah 13:17 See I will stir up against them the Medes, who do not care for silver and have no delight in gold.*

History tells us that the Medes and Persians conquered the Babylonians.

The context of Ezekiel's prophecy also supports its fulfillment at the time it was made. Ezekiel prophesied after Babylon captured Jerusalem. Speaking to Egypt which failed to help Israel against Babylon he says:

*Ezekiel 32:11 " 'For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "The sword of the king of Babylon will come against you.*



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History tells us that Babylon conquered Egypt after capturing Jerusalem. The judgment of these nations has already come just as the prophesy stated. Therefore, it is reasonable to assert that the literal fulfillment of the extreme language in the prophesy was not intended.

The purpose of extreme language is to communicate the devastating nature of God's judgment. God's judgment on nations has been so severe that it would seem to those judged as though the sun was darkened and the stars were falling from the sky. This does not mean that the Old Testament images cannot literally come true at the end of human history. It is prophesied in several places in the

Old Testament, and in Revelation, that there will be a great earthquake at the very end (Ezekiel 38:19, Zech. 14:3-5, Rev. 6:12, 11:13,19, 16:18.) There is every reason to believe that there will be an earthquake at the end of history. The possible literal fulfillment of some extreme language at the end of human history does not diminish its significance as language that throughout Scripture symbolizes judgment by the Lord.

Extreme language in the Old Testament regularly appears in the same context with passages that mention the Day of the Lord. A further discussion of extreme language and its connection with the Day of the Lord appears in the Apocalyptic Terminology section.