

## **A CALL TO FAITHFULNESS** **(An Important Perspective on the Book of Revelation)**

The Book is was written both to *encourage* Christians living in the Roman province of Asia at the end of the first century (and all Christians since then) and also to *exhort* them and us to *remain faithful*, no matter what. This is clearly stated over and over again. Sometimes the word "faithful" is used (1:5; 2:10, 13, 17:14; 19:11) and at other times the thought is expressed in different words (e. g. in the messages to the seven churches).

Any interpretation that loses sight of the essential purpose of the book is bound to be defective. In addition, if we fail to take this practical purpose into account, we will miss some of the rich teaching contained in the Revelation. Notice, for example:

### **1. Intentionality**

A great deal of thought went into this book. John did not just scribble down his recollections. The book is carefully organized. Think of the descriptions and of how numbers are used and of the repetition in the book.

### **2. The songs of worship**

Notice the songs of worship (4, 5, 7, 11, 15, 16 and 19). This has to be one of the great features of the book. In fact Robert Coleman has written a book specifically about these songs of worship.<sup>1</sup>

### **3. Be on the lookout for clues and for gems.**

- See how important *the throne* is to the whole book. (1:4; 3:21; 4:2, 3 etc.)
- Notice the word "Look!" (1:7; 1:18; 4:1 etc.) It does not always come out in translation, but you are able to trace its usage in a Greek lexicon (the word is *idou*).

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<sup>1</sup> Robert E. Coleman, *Songs of Heaven* (Old Tappan NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1980).

- Observe the continuity in the different 'sections' of the book. Is there an intentional relationship between the mention of the throne and the doors in 3:20-21 and 4:1-2? The Lord stands at the door and knocks and he promises that the overcomer will be seated with him on his throne. We then see a door opened in heaven and a throne.
- Consider the significance of the "heard - saw" sequence. (1:10, 12; 5:5-6; 7:7, 9, cf. 21:13-14) This may influence our interpretation of several passages. John first hears an announcement, but when he looks, he sees a picture that defines and explains that reality.
- Notice the interesting progression in the descriptions of God:
  - 1:4 The One who is and who was and who is to come.
  - 1:8 The One who is and who was and who is to come.
  - 4:8 The One who is and who was and who is to come.
  - 11:17 The One who is and who was.
  - 16:5 The One who is and who was.

The "more natural" rendering of the description of God would be: "the One who is and who was and who is to be (or will be). But "is to come" is in keeping with the theme of the book (1:7; 22:7, 12, 20). It certainly appears that the omission of the "is to come" from the last two references (11:17 and 16:5) was intentional. What is John (and the Holy Spirit) telling us? And does this give us a hint on how we should interpret the book?

- Look at John's "high Christology."
  - 1:8 God - "I am the Alpha and the Omega."
  - 1:17 Christ - "I am the first and the last."
  - 21:6 God - "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."
  - 22:13 Christ - "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

- Notice deliberately repeated statements like “It was given ...” (6:2, 4 and 8; cf. 12:5, 7 and 15). What does this convey to us?

There is so much more to the book than meets the eye, especially if we approach the book as if it were written to give us a detailed blueprint of future events. The above are just a few examples of richness found in the Revelation. If one wishes to consider some of the theological riches found in the book, I would recommend Richard Bauckham's, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*.<sup>2</sup> It's not an easy read, but it is a rewarding one.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).