

## Preface

Stepping into the Revelation from the rest of the New Testament is to enter into a strange, bizarre new world; and this is true even in the days of Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter. Instead of narratives, arguments, or plain statements of fact, the Revelation is full of angels, trumpets, and earthquakes; of strange beasts, dragons, and bottomless pits. Most believers, therefore, take one of two extremes: some simply avoid it in despair; others take an exaggerated interest in it, thinking to find here all the keys to the end of the world.

Both of these positions, I would argue, are simply wrong. On the one hand, in the providence of God it is Holy Scripture, a part of the twenty-seven-document canon of the New Testament. Indeed, it serves as the ultimate—and marvelous—conclusion to the whole of Scripture. On the other hand, a great deal of what has been written about it, especially at the popular level, tends to obscure its meaning rather than to help the reader understand it. In fact many years ago, when I was teaching a course on the Revelation at Wheaton College, one of the options for a term paper was to analyze the exegesis of Hal Lindsay's *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Two students took me up on this alternative, both of whom independently came to the conclusion that the task was altogether impossible, since there is not a single exegetical moment in Lindsay's entire book. John himself would surely have found Lindsay's book as "apocalyptic" as most modern readers do John's.

The purpose of the present book is therefore singular: to offer one New Testament scholar's exegetical reading of the text, with very little concern for anything except to help people hear it for the word of God that it is. And therefore none of the so-called alternative ways of understanding the book will hereafter be mentioned in this book. At the same time, I would be deceiving the reader if I did not admit that I am equally concerned that the exegesis leads to theological understanding. That is, what does it mean for God and his Christ to be the one and only sovereign(s) in a universe in which others compete for sovereignty and

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worship; and what does it mean for contemporary people of God to be a countercultural alternative in such a world, just as John himself was, and was encouraging his readers to be? Furthermore, with theology there must be worship, because whatever else is true about this marvelous Revelation, John recognizes that truly Christian theology should lead to doxology. That is, descriptions of God that do not lead to the worship of God might be intellectually useful, but they are unrelated to biblical reality; and biblical reality is what John wants his readers to see and hear. In a form of divine sovereignty that often accompanies biblical prophecy, John wrote what turned out to be the final book in the Christian canon; and thus it serves fittingly as the climax to both the New Testament and to the entire biblical story—which begins in Eden and concludes with a restored Eden.

Finally, I should note that the biblical text used throughout is the (yet to be published) 2011 edition of the NIV, which has been used by permission of the Committee on Bible Translation who are responsible for the translation (to which I have access before publication as a member of the translation committee) and of the Zondervan Corporation who will publish it.

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