



Guided by His Word,
Serving in His Love

News of His

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The Homecoming

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." - **Revelation 21:1-4**

I suspect that one reason so many differing explanations of passages throughout *Revelation* abound is because the moderns that engage in such discussions are wholly unaccustomed to reading anything quite like it. We cannot run down to the public library and check out anything similar to the book of *Revelation*.

The Bible is a library of sixty-six books, most of which represent literary *genres* with which we are familiar. When we read narratives, such as one of the four gospels, we know that we can follow the story with little or no interpretation. We can appreciate how an epistle (a letter) communicates one author's specific concerns, interests or joys to a specific audience. We know that when we read poetry, we will be confronted with images and metaphors that we dare not take literally. But, when we come to *Revelation*, it is difficult for people of this age to know precisely what to do with it.

Revelation is an example of Jewish apocalyptic literature, a literary *genre* with which we have no experience. However, the genre was not novel to the Jewish people in the era of the Apostle John. When we read *Revelation*, the cultural distance we encounter is immediately perplexing. What are we to do with the wild images, the bizarre creatures and the symbolic use of numbers? While one student of the book may boast that his point of view treats the scripture the most literally, another will argue that to look for literalism in apocalyptic literature is to misinterpret the *genre*. How literally *Revelation's* images are to be taken is debatable. In any event, the

realities to which these images point, be they literal or symbolic, are the most comforting lessons of the book.

For example, when I read that there will be "no longer any sea," in the refashioned heavens and earth, I feel a little bad for guys I know who live to fish or just sail. Of course, it was good news to the ancient Jew who viewed "the deep" as the abode of demons and a realm of chaos. Whether or not there will literally be no vast bodies of water in the world where God's redeemed will abide, who can say? But, without a doubt, there will be no chaos, no evil and nothing else that could invoke the wrath of a holy God. There will be no potential abode for any godlessness.

In the recreated heaven and earth, there will be a new holy city, a new Jerusalem. John depicts it as a thing of resplendent beauty, descending from the skies. But, he also describes it as a perfect cube. Are we to literally inhabit a city that is shaped like a cube, or would something more significant leap from the page for the Jewish reader? He would understand that he is reading a piece of apocalyptic literature and would immediately identify the city with the Holy of Holies in the temple, which was also a perfect cube. Of course, that Holy of Holies was hidden from the people of God by a huge, thick veil. Access to God was limited to one man representing the nation on one day out of the year. This new Holy of Holies descending to earth would declare unfettered access to God in the life that is to come.

Revelation was not written to uncloud every mystery of the future or to satisfy the mind as to every detail of the ultimate victory of God. It was written to steel the hearts of believers in a hostile world as to the nature of that final victory. The reader who bears that in mind will reap the greatest rewards.



Karl's Korner