

## Book review

Jacob W. Elias

*Revelation*, by John R. Yeatts. Believers Church Bible Commentary. Scottdale, Pa., and Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 2003.

**J**ohn R. Yeatts's commentary on the Revelation to John follows the format now familiar to pastors and other church leaders who rely on the Believers Church Bible Commentary series: an introductory section, the commentary itself, and essays (twenty-six, in this case). Yeatts adds a glossary of recurring symbols and motifs in Revelation.

The amount of detail included in this commentary goes beyond the BCBC norm. Anyone picking up this book for even a cursory examination will notice how extensive are the bibliography and the index of ancient sources. Lists of biblical passages cited in support of interpretive claims sometimes take up four lines of the commentary's text. Frequently Yeatts also refers to other ancient sources, including pseudepigrapha, early church writings, Jewish writings, and various types of classical literature. At times I felt that Yeatts was too exhaustive in his effort to document his conclusions. Scholars may want to explore how Josephus or Eusebius shed light on a text in Revelation, but will the "Sunday School teachers, members of Bible study groups, students, pastors, and others" identified in the series foreword as intended readers also be interested?

Clearly Yeatts is committed to casting new light on Revelation. Some Christian readers, including some within the believers church community, ignore this apocalyptic treatise. Others give Revelation inordinate attention in an eager effort to decipher its code and predict the future. My impression is that potential readers whose instinct is to ignore biblical apocalyptic literature will need to be highly motivated to engage in the level of exegetical digging required for profitable reading of this commentary.

Similarly, readers intrigued by popular “eschatological fiction” (Yeatts’s term, 179–80) such as the *Left Behind* series, or those moved by the vivid prophetic scenarios of some radio and TV preachers, may find it easier to continue along their accustomed interpretive track. Yeatts tends to give even-handed coverage to different types of interpretation. While affirming the need for balance, I wished that Yeatts would argue more persuasively for his preferred interpretation.

I found myself looking for more dialogue with liberationist perspectives, such as those of Pablo Richard (Latin America), Allan Boesak (apartheid era South Africa), and Elizabeth

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Schüssler Fiorenza (feminist). More interaction with these interpreters of Revelation would stimulate awareness of how the message of the apocalypse intersects with its social and political context. Detailed reflections about the history of interpretation and the possible meanings of Revelation’s many symbols may appeal to some futurists but are

unlikely to win over those who declare that prophecy is not their thing.

When Yeatts talks about the writer of Revelation as “an artist at work” (211), and when he reflects on how the symbols appeal to the feelings (153), he may encourage more readers to give Revelation a hearing. When he discusses the imperial cult of the emperor (246–47), he may catch the ear of readers who long to know how the gospel informs the church as an alternative community relating to its social and political milieu.

After reading this major interpretive work I wonder whether in the end Revelation needs to be experienced through the right brain, rather than analyzed with the left. Yeatts has done an admirable job of the latter. I hope the result will be that more of us will join him in also doing the former.

### **About the reviewer**

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