



FOREWORD

'I think I'm quite ready for another adventure!' So says Bilbo Baggins as he boards the ship at the Grey Havens, on his way to the Undying Lands. Many Christians feel a little nervous about the adventure of reading this book. So here are my suggestions for getting the most out of these studies.

1. Be curious

Whenever we open the Bible, we are (in Augustine's words) reading a love letter from home. But this home of ours is another country, so we are also at the same time going on a cross-cultural adventure. The Bible was written in another language by people from another time and place, with different habits, cultures, and expectations from us.

This is especially so with the Book of Revelation, which is 'strange' to us in all sorts of ways. So we need to be curious as we embark on this adventure, ready to learn of its strange ways, and open to hearing what God might say to us on the journey.

2. Be careful

When you travel to another country, you need to learn its customs, ways of doing things, and ways of speaking, if you want to avoid misunderstanding or causing offence. There is a widespread vacuum of understanding about some important aspects of this book (such as the way it uses numbers), and vacuums always collect rubbish! We therefore need to exercise a historically disciplined imagination as we read. Many popular interpretations of Revelation are simply not possible, as they could not have been what John intended to communicate to his first audience, and we need to attend to such questions.

3. Be confident

And yet, as Rev 1:3 makes clear, we are not on our own as we read. Scripture is not so much a gift to each of us as individuals (though it is that)—it is primarily a gift from God to His people. So we are reading in good company, of those around us, of those who have had time to explore the difficult issues, and those who have gone before us.

Paul tells us that all Scripture is profitable to help us grow in faith—and Revelation is part of those Scriptures! So be assured that God will speak to us through this part of His word to us as we read faithfully—as we set out on this adventure together.

**The Revd Dr Ian Paul, Adjunct Professor of New Testament,
Fuller Theological Seminary.**