

Jon K. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation, Pentecostal Old Testament & New Testament Commentaries* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021). xvi + 409 pp. \$57.75 hardback; \$36.20 paperback.

Jon Newton's *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation* is the first member of the Pentecostal Old Testament & New Testament Commentaries series (edited by Chris Carter [NT] and David Hymes [OT]) to see the light of day. This is fortuitous, for with the publication of this fine volume, the series is off to a roaring start. Newton's passion for Revelation, reflected in his life-long study of the prophetic letter, shines through on every page. Newton is not only well-versed in contemporary scholarship, he is also a committed and practicing Pentecostal. His years of ministry in the Australian Assemblies of God (now called the Australian Christian Churches), along with his study, have prepared him well for this task.

Newton is, above all, to be commended for his courage. He challenges traditional Pentecostal perspectives when warranted, but also remains faithful to the central convictions that have animated this dynamic movement. His courage is perhaps most clearly evidenced in his insistence that the premillennial position is not intrinsic to Pentecostal theology (48). While Pentecostal scholars critical of our dispensational roots are ubiquitous, almost none have connected the dots and challenged the premillennial perspective (42-48). Many seem to think that a Pentecostal framework is inconceivable without it. So, it was refreshing to read Newton's call for consideration of other positions (48, 346). His own reading of Revelation might be described as an edifying blend of the preterist and idealist approaches (40, 140-41, 190, 388). Thus, Newton affirms Revelation is "a message for the first-century church, applicable to the church ever since" (41).

Although Newton challenges a purely futurist reading throughout the book, he clearly highlights the importance of Christ's glorious victory and the very real judgment associated with it (51, 264, 279-88). With reference to the Angel of Warning's message (Rev 14:9-11), Newton declares, "Here we find the most explicit statement of the traditional doctrine of hell in the New Testament: it is unending, uninterrupted, conscious torture. . . .The hearers must be warned and so must every hearer and reader since" (264).

Newton reflects the “sober optimism” often associated with amillennialism, but rejects a strong emphasis on recapitulation. He is thus probably best categorized in the postmillennial camp, but this needs to be qualified in an important way. Newton acknowledges that Pentecostals generally anticipate the decisive in-breaking of God’s kingdom in the future with the imminent, physical return of Christ (51, 336). This is how God’s glorious redemptive plan will be consummated. Newton himself is not always clear about how this climax will take place (he cautiously argues that the battle of Rev 19:11-21 refers to spiritual warfare, 336-37), but Christ’s intervention and ultimate victory are certain.

Newton also does a fine job of introducing the reader to a wide range of scholarly opinions. This is perhaps especially important with a book like Revelation, which is read in such different ways within the Christian family. Newton works through the text verse by verse—the verses often analyzed together in short units—and does a fine job of highlighting the most important interpretative options for each unit. The commentary thus serves as a tremendous resource for anyone struggling to understand a particular portion of Revelation, which undoubtedly includes us all! One weakness of Newton’s commentary is the flipside of this strength. Newton often summarizes three or four options without offering a clear indication of his own preference (e.g., 116, 122-23, 160-63, 169, 172, 201). I found myself longing to read “I believe” introducing a statement rather than “perhaps” linked to a string of possibilities. Nevertheless, Newton does a superb job of distilling the contributions of scholars, both ancient and modern, and providing a rich survey of the key options.

Another great strength is the way in which Newton highlights the Old Testament texts that serve as the brick and mortar for John’s remarkable visionary epistle (29, 142). As Newton skillfully demonstrates, Old Testament allusions permeate Revelation and the book is largely incomprehensible without an awareness of them. Newton, drawing upon the best of contemporary scholarship and an impressive knowledge of the Old Testament, deftly illuminates these important building blocks and leaves no stone unturned. I was particularly struck by his interpretation of the “silence” of Rev 8:1 and the seven trumpets that follow (Rev 8:6-9:21, 11:15-19) against the backdrop of the conquest of Jericho (Josh 6:3-5, 10), the climax of the Exodus story (173-74). Newton also helpfully highlights the connection

between Rev 20:5-6 and Ps 90, which refers to “a thousand years” (90:4) and the cry, “O Lord! How long will it be?” (90:13). He concludes, “The thousand years in the psalm functions as a metaphor for the present age or life spent waiting for God to intervene, a long time to us but very brief to God” (345).

Finally, I want to commend Newton for keeping the Pentecostal community in mind with his application. Of course, this is the purpose of this Pentecostal commentary series, but stating the goal is much easier than achieving it. While present-day application is not the focus of this commentary, the reader will find many examples of insights that will stir and inspire. And Newton knows how to turn a phrase. One of my favorite lines, drawn from the bold, counter-cultural witness that the church is called to give in Rev 7:10, reads, “Loud voices are not an uncommon feature in Revelation, which must rate as the loudest book in the Bible” (166). This observation leads Newton later to declare that Revelation “teaches its readers how to worship.” The worship we are called to give is “demonstrative, loud, and full of truth, and dangerous in a world opposed to God” (394). Pentecostals the world over will resonate with this conclusion.

As with any commentary, strength in one area (e.g., analysis of interpretative options) necessarily translates into weakness in another (e.g., application). I did feel that, at times, Newton’s emphasis on reading Revelation as a story (24, 129, 142, 192, 219) seemed to get lost in the maze of exegetical options that he presents. Additionally, this emphasis on Revelation as story appeared to limit Newton’s ability to see the significant repetition (or recapitulation) which is a literary feature found throughout the Apocalypse. Newton’s reading, in my view, sees much more chronological progression in the story than the text warrants (177, 219, 256, 340-41, 346). The cycles of judgments (seals, trumpets, bowls) each seem to take us to the very end, which is then described from different angles in Rev 19:11-21 and again in 20:7-15. Note that both descriptions of the end of history climax with Christ’s victory over a rebellious horde. When this repetition is not clearly affirmed, present-day application becomes difficult. This is why I would recommend that students of Revelation read a commentary focused on presenting a single, unified vision of John’s message (such as Michael Wilcock’s *The Message of Revelation: I Saw Heaven Opened* [1975] or David Mathewson’s *A Companion to the Book of Revelation* [2020]) in

conjunction with Newton's fine work, which enables the reader to see a breadth of interpretative possibilities.

Newton's insightful analysis of Revelation in light of a plethora of Old Testament texts is not matched by a similar zeal to read Revelation against the backdrop of other, related New Testament texts. This was intentional, as Newton makes clear: "trying to harmonize Revelation with the rest of the New Testament may destroy its unique message" (345). However, as Richard Bauckham observes, Revelation shows signs that its author consciously writes with a sense that he is summing up the entire prophetic tradition and bringing the central themes of the New Testament to its fitting climax (Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* [1993], 5). This suggests that we might profit from reading Revelation in conjunction with the rest of the New Testament. I should note that there is one notable exception to Newton's approach in this regard. He does stress the importance of Acts for a Pentecostal reading of Revelation: "Revelation and Acts are like two sides of a coin, both revealing the full picture of our era. Or to put it another way, Revelation shows the back-story of Acts, giving us a spiritual or prophetic-apocalyptic interpretation of the expansion of Christianity as a kind of spiritual warfare" (142).

Lastly, the physical design of the commentary was clear (with the biblical text nicely highlighted in a bold font), functional (convenient footnotes), and pleasing to the eye. I would have liked to see indices at the back and there were numerous typos, which in a work like this is virtually unavoidable (87, 185 n. 23, 226, 247, 340 n. 4, 346, 339-343). These minor physical flaws, like the other weaknesses noted above, do not significantly detract from this overall impressive and immensely valuable book.

Revelation is appropriately the last book in the New Testament. Nevertheless, it is fitting that Newton's commentary on Revelation is the first to appear in this Pentecostal series. For, it is both evidence of the strength of Pentecostal theology and a sign of its future promise.

Robert P. Menzies
Asian Center for Pentecostal Theology, Kunming, China