

Biblical scholar seeks to clarify obscured revelation

By Beverly Wolter
Duke News Service

Is the mark of the beast on you? Because if it is, repent, brother, repent, or you won't be numbered among the 144,000 who will be saved on the great day of judgment.

So says the book of Revelation. Or does it?

To Dr. James M. Efirm, a Duke Divinity School faculty member with a reclamation project, it doesn't.

Efirm's project is to reclaim the Biblical books of Daniel and Revelation.

Books don't predict end of world

Not that the books have been lost, buried, mutilated or destroyed, but they have been obscured for many people by well-meaning but misguided revivalists and by popular writers, Efirm feels.

"The books," he said, "are neither a timetable predicting the end of the world, nor an assurance of who and how many are going to be numbered among the saved when the end comes."

In a new paperback book by Judson Press titled "Daniel and Revelation, A Study of Two Extraordinary Visions," he seeks to clarify the books for readers.

Puzzling symbolism

The books are puzzling in their symbolism, and, as Efirm admits, many ministers and laymen ignore them rather than try to decipher them.

He has set himself the task of interpreting the symbols.

Efirm, associate professor of biblical languages and interpretation, starts with the premise that the Bible, among other things, is a collection of different types of

literature, and that these differences should be appreciated in the same way that readers distinguish between fiction, poetry, essays, drama or history.

"'Daniel' and 'Revelation' are 'apocalyptic' literature," Efirm said.

"Apocalyptic" comes from a Greek word meaning "revelation" or "uncovering."

"Apocalyptic literature was written for people undergoing repression," Efirm said.

Interest stimulated by stressful times

He noted that historically, interest in the books has increased in times of stress.

During the turbulent 1960s people began to see in "Daniel" and "Revelation" predictions of the coming of the end of the world. Hal Lindsey's book "The Late, Great Planet Earth," which appeared in 1970, capitalized on this concern.

"The apocalyptic books tell what God is going to do for his people in the light of persecution. They show that despite the presence of evil and wickedness, God is in control and will deliver his people," Efirm said.

"One must think symbolically, not literally. Daniel does not predict that the world is going to come to an end in the near future, and neither does Revelation."

Books start realistically

"Daniel" was written when the Jews were resisting the conqueror Antiochus who forbade the practice of their religion. "Revelation" was written when the first century Christians were being persecuted for refusing to worship the Roman emperor.

Both books start realistically, "Daniel" with what Efirm terms "delightful stories about Jewish youths in a foreign land fighting to fulfill their religious obligations," and "Revelation" with a series of letters to Christian churches in Asia Minor.

But then both books turn "apocalyptic" as their writers have visions and dreams.

Beasts and angels

Daniel's dreams frequently involved beasts—rams and goats—and these Efirm explains as representing the warring kingdoms of the day.

Angels sometimes had to appear to Daniel to explain his dreams to him.

The angel Michael is mentioned frequently because at this time, Efirm writes, nations were developing the notion of patron spirits. Michael was thought to be the patron angel of the Jews.

"Revelation" is more complicated to explain, partly because of its use of numbers.

"To the ancients, individual numbers had great symbolic significance," Efirm said. "Seven stood for perfection, 10 for completeness and 12 for the people of God."

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A FAVORITE TOUR SPOT—Three high school students from Northwood High School in Pittsboro had a chance to view a ventilator up close during a recent tour of the medical center. Various tour stops in departments around the medical center are designed to expose students to health careers. In respiratory therapy, educational coordinator Rick Leonard explains how portable ventilators such as the one in this photo are used to help people breathe. Leonard also explains to students the qualifications necessary for a respiratory therapist and the career possibilities. Other departments participate in the tours, but more tour stops are needed. If you would like to have students tour your department, contact the public relations department. (Photo by Parker Herring)

Picture Duke, win, publish, exhibit

Your photograph of some aspect of Duke might be worth \$50.

The admissions and publications offices are sponsoring a photography competition. Each entrant may submit up to six unmounted black and white photographs of scenes of the campus and activities here.

The first-place winner will be awarded \$50 and the runner-up will get \$25. There will be three third-place prizes of \$5 each.

All prize-winning work will become the property of the Office of University Publications and will be exhibited in the East Campus Library during January.

In addition, selected photographs will be printed in the Bulletin of Information for Prospective Students and in other

university publications.

All prints must be labeled on the back, in the upper left-hand corner, with entrant's name, class (if student) and address or phone number.

Photographs must be delivered to the Office of Admissions, 2138 Chapel Dr., by Dec. 1. Winners will be announced in The Chronicle by Dec. 15.

Entries which are not accepted must be collected by Jan. 15. Works not collected during this time will become the property of the publications office.

Contest judges will be John Menapace of Duke University Press, Chanticleer editor Blair Mathies and Elizabeth Matheson of the Office of University Publications.

For further information, call 684-6786.

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