

that in some way this affects the way the tail colour gene operates.

These epigenetic effects are undermining the 'selfish gene' concept propounded by Richard Dawkins, which has dominated thinking about inheritance for the past thirty years. That concept asserts that the fundamental unit of heredity is the gene alone, and that reproduction has the sole purpose of perpetuating the genes.

Yet studies have shown, for instance, that an initial exposure to two pesticides reduced sperm counts in *four* subsequent

generations of male rats, and that smoking in early life can affect the health, not only of the smoker, but of sons and grandsons as well. Some researchers are even using the terminology of the long-dismissed ideas of the eighteenth-century naturalist, Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck, that parents can pass on "acquired characteristics" to their offspring.<sup>11</sup>

The truth is that, as each generation becomes convinced it has revealed the definitive description of how living things work, new facts emerge which demonstrate an even deeper

level of complexity. The works of the Creator are endlessly marvellous, and repeatedly illustrate the truth of the inspired words of Solomon, that "He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also He hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end" (Eccl. 3:11).

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11. Rowan Hooper, "Inheriting a heresy", reporting on a discussion meeting, "Beyond the Selfish Gene: Evolution for the 21st Century", London, 15 Feb. 2006; *New Scientist*, 4 Mar. 2006, p. 37.

## Belief matters

Ryan Mutter

*Convincing people of the importance of right beliefs is a difficult thing in this age. One approach is to go to the book of Revelation and show that God will judge individuals and systems that depart from the Truth He has revealed.*

**H**AVE YOU EVER experienced this? You are having a terrific conversation about the Truth with an interested friend. You show him a really great verse. He seems totally convinced of what you are saying. You start getting excited; you have visions of him being baptized. But then your hopes are dashed when he smiles and says, "But God doesn't really care about what you believe".

Convincing people that many of the beliefs they have been taught are not supported by the Bible has become easier because so few Christians actually know how to explain their faith from the pages of Scripture. Many churches simply do not emphasise that sort of thing. They are turning away from specific teachings and are instead saying that God does not care what we believe. So you can, for example, show someone that the reward of the righteous is on earth and not in heaven, and they thank you very nicely for sharing this, but they do not really care. They are

quick to turn to passages such as John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life". They claim that all that people need to do is to confess that Jesus died for them and they will be saved. Everything else is essentially irrelevant.

That teaching is, of course, a complete falsehood. It is also one of the most difficult errors of modern Christendom to overcome. Unfortunately it has kept a lot of people from learning the Truth. Is there anywhere we can go to show people that God actually cares about what we believe? The book of Revelation makes the point powerfully that what we believe matters. In fact the theme of 'belief matters' appears over and over again in the book. The point is made in a variety of ways to drive the lesson home.

### Judgement on false teachers

When we think of the book of Revelation, what do we think of? A lot of people think of judgements. People in the world certainly pick up on that aspect of the Apocalypse, as indicated by the number of movies about the world coming to an end and so forth that have the word 'Apoca-

lypse' in the title. But who are those judgements against?

Revelation 2:14 condemns "them that hold the doctrine of Balaam". Who were they? The verse gives us a pretty succinct description: "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication". What can we tell about them? They were false teachers. They taught the early Christians wrong things about worshipping God, and they encouraged the followers of Christ to engage in immoral conduct.

The same was true of "that woman Jezebel", a reference to another group upon whom judgement is pronounced. We read about the individuals termed collectively "Jezebel" in verse 20: "Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols". In the eyes of God, what really mattered about this group was that they taught others false things about worshipping Him, and encouraged people to do wickedly.

### **The beasts and the false prophet**

In Revelation we also read of beasts that do terrible things and then get destroyed. What are those beasts? What do we know about them? The example of the sea beast of Revelation 13 shows that they too are associated with false worship: "And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven" (vv. 5,6).

It is important to note that these beasts, just like the groups mentioned in Revelation 2, are associated with perversions of Christianity. The false things they proclaim are not atheism or Islam. Consider the beast of the earth, for example: "And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon" (v. 11). This beast wants the world to think it is like Christ; that is why it portrays itself as a lamb. But its words are not those of a lamb, they are the words of a dragon. That is what makes this beast so odious to God. It misrepresents Him and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The "false prophet" appears in Revelation. It is pretty obvious that "the false prophet" describes something associated with beliefs that are not acceptable to God. But what about Babylon? The end of Revelation is full of judgements on Babylon, and the reason is because Babylon is associated with false teaching and immorality:

"And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities" (18:2-5).

### **The importance of right beliefs**

So, at least as far as judgement is concerned, the book of Revelation distinguishes between those who have correct beliefs and those who hold false doctrines. That shows that the distinction is important to God. And the way in which Revelation talks about false doctrine shows *why* it is important to Him. Think back, for example, to what was written about "them that hold the doctrine of Balaam". The Bible says that they encouraged the early Christians "to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication" (2:14). Eating things sacrificed to idols is language for false worship. Committing fornication is immoral conduct. They are always linked. That is why what we believe matters to God. *Our beliefs affect our actions.*

Think about the reward of the righteous for a minute. The churches say that it is in heaven. We say that it is on earth. Why does it matter? We can quickly think of two reasons. One has to do with the promises to Abraham:

"And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee" (Gen. 13:14-17).

God has not fulfilled this promise. We know that because He says that He has not fulfilled it: "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:39,40). So, if Christ returns one day and raptures us all away to heaven, this promise will remain unfulfilled. God would then be a liar, and we would have no reason to strive to make our characters more like His. We could, for example, make and break promises whenever we felt like it.

But there is more to it than that. If the reward of the righteous is in heaven, then what is this life all about? We are just waiting here to die or until Christ comes to take us away. And we only need to be 'good enough' for him to accept us. In our minds, we will constantly be asking ourselves, "What can I get away with and still be OK?"

But if the reward of the righteous is on earth, things are different. Revelation says that we will be kings and priests on the earth: "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue,

and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (5:9,10).

How do we learn to be good kings and priests? Does the Bible say that we are going to be taught all that when Christ returns? Does it say that he is going to come back and fill us with wisdom and understanding? Let us have a look: "... whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet. 1:4). This verse says that our *nature* is going to be changed. It does not say that Jesus is going to change our character. So when is our character changed? When do we get those traits that will make us good kings and priests?

We are supposed to be developing them right now. That is what this life is about, preparing ourselves to be the future rulers of the world under the direction of Christ. The natural consequence of that is that, instead of asking ourselves, "What can I get away with and still be OK?", we must be asking ourselves, "How can I use this time better to prepare myself for my future role?"

Thus, understanding the reward of the righteous gives us a far greater reason to strive to be Christlike. Belief matters. And the Apocalypse is a good place to go to make that point to interested friends.

The Testimony Promoting Committee sends greetings to all readers, thanking them for their continued support and looking forward to this continuing for another year if the Lord remains away. We hope to be able to offer improvements this year in the form of more use of colour, and hope this will be appreciated by readers.

During the course of the year Brother David Willey has retired from the committee after serving for many years, much of it as chairman. We thank him for his help. He is replaced as chairman by Brother Trevor Hughes, who has himself been on the committee for some years. We welcomed Brother Stephen Whitehouse onto the committee during the course of last year. Readers will remember him for his series of articles on the prophet Elijah, and we look forward to further articles from him in due course. The committee now consists of the following brethren and sisters:

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