

***Revelation's Rhapsody: Listening to the Lyrics of the Lamb***

**Prepared by**

**Robert Lowery**

**Professor of New Testament and Dean**

**Lincoln Christian Seminary**

**Lincoln, Illinois**

**([rlowery@lincolnchristian.edu](mailto:rlowery@lincolnchristian.edu); [www.rlowery.com](http://www.rlowery.com))**

**Fall 2009**

*“Even on earth, who that sings or plays well on an instrument knows not the joy of waking music? Merely to listen often-times moves to tears, to light-heartedness, to longings, to feelings one would not or could not utter. What will it be in heaven to be singer, musician, listener, to be one voice in a harmony, yet as individually listened to, approved, commended. . . . Heaven is revealed to earth as the homeland of music.”*

*--Christina Rossetti*

The opening words in Revelation, “The revelation of Jesus Christ . . . “ invites us to listen to the lyrics given to John. The word “listen” means more than hearing; the verb beckons us to hear and obey the lyrics given *by* Jesus and *about* Jesus. If we are to understand the lyrics found in Revelation, we can only appreciate their content if we follow six principles.

I. Listening to the Lyrics: The Scriptural Stage

- A. The Revelation does not sound a discordant note when compared with other books of Scripture.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- B. The Story that John sings fits in with the other sixty-five compositions; indeed, it relies upon most of those compositions and their stories to communicate its message.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- C. The Revelation provides a grand, symphonic finale to the Bible.

## II. Listening to the Lyrics: The Storied Setting

- A. The Revelation was written against the backdrop of persecution and cultural seduction.
  
- B. The Story that John sings fits with the other sixty-five compositions; indeed it mirrors the trials God's people have always faced.
  
- C. The Revelation is a timeless word for the period of "the great tribulation," the time between Christ's first coming and His final coming.

## III. Listening to the Lyrics: The Style

- A. The Revelation was written in a style—uniquely combining prophecy, apocalypse, and letter—that would have sounded familiar to its first recipients.
  
- B. The Story that John sings complements the other sixty-five compositions written in genres familiar to the recipients.

- C. The Revelation uses genres that wed privileges and responsibilities of God's people from the first coming to the final coming of Jesus.

#### IV. Listening to the Lyrics: The Sources

- A. The Revelation uses most of the Old Testament writings to tell its own Story in light of those previous Stories.
  
- B. The Story that John sings recycles and reapplies well-known Stories drawn from other books of the Bible.
  
- C. The Revelation shows both the timeliness and the timelessness of God's Word that has always comforted and challenged his people.

#### V. Listening to the Lyrics: The Symbolism

- A. The Revelation uses symbols to tell its Story.
  
- B. The Story that John sings uses symbols familiar to the recipients.

- C. The Revelation uses images that are not the reality, but rather they point to a deeper reality.

## VI. Listening to the Lyrics: The Structure

- A. The Revelation uses an intricate structure that enhances its message.
  
- B. The Story that John sings makes repeated use of repetition and recapitulation, strategies well-known to the ancients.
  
- C. The Revelation uses a non-linear approach to reinforce its message so that God's people dare not forget what God has revealed.

*"We have heard enough when God ceases to speak, and have learned enough when we have learned His will."  
--Christina Rossetti*