

Preaching the Book of Revelation
Luther Seminary
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June 2006

Course Description:

This course explores the promise and challenges involved in preaching on the book of Revelation. Attention will be given to issues arising from the use of Revelation in our contemporary context, to the major literary and theological dimensions of the book, and to strategies for preaching on major passages.

Goals:

1. To have a clear sense of the literary and theological dimensions of Revelation
2. To develop constructive ways of engaging the sensationalistic approaches to the book
3. To develop practical strategies for preaching on the various types of passages within the book, including those dealing with God and evil, hope and judgment
4. To develop creative approaches to proclaiming Revelation in the context of worship.

Schedule:

June 19	1:00 - 5:00 p.m.	Revelation and our Contemporary Context
June 20	8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Revelation 1-7
June 21	8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Revelation 8-15
June 22	8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Revelation 16-20
June 23	8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.	Revelation 21-22

Course Requirements:

1. Before the class begins, participants are to have read
 - C. R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Eerdmans, 2001)
 - R. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge, 1993).
 - Also recommended is M. E. Boring, *Revelation* (Interpretation series; Westminster John Knox, 1989).
2. Before the first class, participants are to write a 3-4 page paper on your understanding of the challenges in preaching Revelation in your own context of ministry. This material will be used during our first session. As background, consider the following:
 - Popular treatments of end-times themes. If you have not done so, read a volume of *Left Behind* or similar work, consult related web sites and television programs.
 - Scholarly treatments of Revelation. How are these helpful or problematic for preaching? (Some of these are listed in the bibliography.)
3. During the week, each participant will make one 30-minute presentation on a specific passage from Revelation. The presentation should discuss key exegetical features of the

text and strategies for preaching on it. A specific passage will be assigned to each participant by email.

4 Participants will prepare and preach one sermon that reflects their learning in the course. The sermon should be based on a passage from Revelation other than the one that the student presented on in class. All sermons will be preached and videotaped during a weekly worship service sometime before November 6.

5. A 2-4 page reflection paper that accompanies the final sermon. The paper should describe the preacher's hermeneutical approach to the text, and the strategies used to preach the text. The video tape of this sermon and accompanying materials must be sent to the instructor by November 6, 2006. Earlier submissions (summer and early fall) are highly encouraged!

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON REVELATION

Commentaries on Revelation

Aune, David. *Revelation*. 3 vols. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, 1997-98. Aune provides historical information, word studies, and summaries of other scholars, but gives little attention to theology. The text is difficult to read, but is useful for certain kinds of scholarly information.

Beale, G. K. *The Book of Revelation*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. An extremely long commentary that reads Revelation primarily in light of the Old Testament. Generally conservative, evangelical perspective.

Boring, M. Eugene. *Revelation*. Interpretation. Louisville: John Knox, 1989. A useful commentary for teaching and preaching. The book works through Revelation section by section giving attention to key issues and reflections on the meaning for people today.

Caird, G. B. *A Commentary on the Revelation of St John the Divine*. Black's New Testament Commentary. London: A. & C. Black, 1984 (originally 1966). A non-technical commentary that is interesting to read. Gives attention both to the historical and theological dimensions of the text.

Koester, Craig R. *Revelation and the End of All Things*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. This study is designed for general use. The introduction deals with perspectives on the book, and the remaining chapters work through Revelation in sequence so that it can serve as a commentary on the text. It is also divided into chapters that can be used week by week in parish Bible studies.

Mounce, Robert H. *The Book of Revelation*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977. A helpful and balanced commentary from an evangelical perspective. Explores Revelation's meaning for its original readers and includes reflections that are helpful for contemporary teaching and preaching.

- Murphy, Frederick J. *Fallen Is Babylon: The Revelation to John*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998. This historically oriented commentary deals with the context in which Revelation was written and considers how its message would have addressed its earliest readers.
- Reddish, Mitchell G. *Revelation*. Smyth & Helwys, 2001. A historically informative commentary that includes photographs of biblical sites related to the book of Revelation.
- Rowland, Christopher. "The Book of Revelation" in *The New Interpreter's Bible* vol. 12. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998. Rowland takes a largely literary approach to Revelation, rather than focusing as much on historical questions. The commentary includes reflections on the text for today.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elizabeth. *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*. Proclamation Commentaries. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991. This study considers Revelation in light of liberation theology. It deals with the book's message in light of the powers that oppressed people in the first century and today. The book is short and readable.
- Smalley, Stephen S. *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005. A detailed commentary on the Greek text with some attention to theological issues.

General Studies of Revelation

- Bauckham, Richard. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993. This is a very readable and engaging study of Revelation's theology. Topics include its understanding of God, Christ, the Spirit, and the nature of prophecy. Especially interesting is his treatment of Revelation's hope for the nations of the world.
- Collins, John J. *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. This is a very helpful introduction to the world of Jewish apocalyptic writing. It does not deal with Revelation, but discusses works similar to it.
- Thompson, Leonard L. *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. Thompson argues that the Christians addressed by Revelation were fairly well adjusted to life in Asia Minor, and that the imperial cult was not much of a threat. His view differs sharply from that of Yarbro Collins and Schüssler Fiorenza.
- Yarbro Collins, Adela. *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984. Yarbro Collins works with the idea that Revelation moves in cycles of visions. She makes the case that Revelation did not so much address a time of persecution as it tried to awaken people to a crisis that they could not see.

Examples of Approaches for Lay People

- Dawn, Marva. *Joy in Our Weakness*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. Written in popular style with many anecdotes woven into reflections on Revelation.

Peterson, Eugene. *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*. A popular preacher and teacher, Peterson produced the paraphrase of the Bible entitled *The Message*.

Rossing, Barbara. *Rapture Exposed. The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*. Boulder: Westview, 2004. Rossing tries to show some of the political dimensions of rapture theology. She develops arguments against it while formulating a more hopeful approach to Revelation.

Examples of Futuristic / Dispensationalist Interpretation

LaHaye, Tim. *Revelation Unveiled*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999. LaHaye is one of the authors of *Left Behind*. Here he gives a dispensationalist reading of Revelation. E.g., the comments on Rev 4 begin with an extensive discussion of the rapture theory based on texts outside of Revelation.

_____ and Jerry Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*. Wheaton: Tyndale, 1995. This is the first volume in a tremendously popular fiction series. It presents dispensationalist theology in the form of Christian fiction. You can also check their website leftbehind.com.

Osborne, Grant R. *Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002. This commentary follows a futuristic interpretation but gives attention to the historical implications of the text. There is detailed commentary on each passage of the book.

Thomas, Robert L. *Revelation*. 2 vols. Chicago: Moody Press, 1995. This commentary follows the dispensationalist system of Darby, LaHaye, and others, giving a more scholarly rationale for a futuristic reading.