

**The Samaritan Institute
at
The Sunshine Cathedral**

***Revelation
in Context**

A Six Week Course

***Course curriculum designed and prepared by
The Reverend Dr. Durrell Watkins.**

*"Here at the Sunshine Cathedral, we are
seekers and students of Truth, empowered
by Spirit, sharing the Light with the World"*

**Sunshine Cathedral
is
A Metropolitan Community Church
Affiliated with The Center for Progressive Christianity**

TSI is the educational arm of the Sunshine Cathedral

Rev. Durrell Watkins

Required Reading:

The Book of Revelation (any translation)

***Recommended Reading:**

Deryn Guest, et al., eds. *The Queer Bible Commentary*.
London: SCM Press, 2006

Carol A. Newsom & Sharon H. Ringe, eds. *The Women's Bible Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992

Barbara R. Rossing. *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*. NYC: Basic Books, 2004

Revelation in Context – The most fascinating and misunderstood book in the New Testament is the Book of Revelation. Too often presented as a prediction of doom and violence, Revelation may be something much more liberating and optimistic. This course will explore the artistic, counter-cultural, historical, and political aspects of this lively and dramatic biblical fantasy. Once the source of fear and dread for many Christians, Revelation may now become for students in this course a treasured tool of hope and empowerment.

Lesson 1

The Scholars Weigh In

To begin our study, let's see what the scholars say about the Book of Revelation:

“The Book of Revelation – also called the Apocalypse – is the only complete *literary apocalypse* in the New Testament. It has been interpreted many ways throughout Christian history. Christians who have been relatively well integrated into the larger society have usually found its otherworldly Messiah and array of beasts, numbers, colors, and the like difficult to understand, even disturbing. In contrast, politically persecuted Christians have often identified with its message about salvation and encouragement for martyrs. Fundamentalist Christians have seen in it literal prophecies of modern events. Political and religious revolutionaries have drawn on its political, antiestablishment rhetoric. Literary figures and artists have found in its bizarre images a source of great inspiration. Some students during the turbulent 1960s wondered whether its author knew about psychedelic drugs. Other students, educated in myth and symbolism, have found much intellectual stimulation in Revelation. Some social-scientific interpreters have stressed the ancient sky voyager's astronomical-astrological attempt to read the meanings of the stars. There have been a variety of interpretations, but it would be generally agreed among scholars that historical, literary/symbolic, and social-scientific approaches provide the best avenues to unlock its secrets.”¹

“Once upon a time there was a world full of imperialism and war. And in this world the majority of people experienced economic deprivation, gender and sexual inequality and violence, and the invention of an all-powerful hetero-masculine religion. This is the world of the Revelation Apocalypse of John, revealing the underside of the first-century CE *Pax Romana*. This world is not unlike our own twenty-first century world. With these common links, what is a responsible and ethical way to read the Apocalypse of John and face A/apocalypse in our time?...Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries scholars attempted to make sense of this last book of the bible. The most common interpretative strategies focused on the historical. The dominant readings in commentaries...continue to center on the

¹ Dennis C. Duling, *The New Testament: History, Literature, and Social Context*. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2003 (443)

answers to questions of date, authorship, recipients and the overarching historical, social and political context for the book. The majority opinion is that an itinerate preacher-prophet named John wrote to seven churches in Western Anatolia at or near the end of the reign of the Emperor Domitian (81-95 CE).²

About the violent imagery in Revelation:

“...God’s people were experiencing a new Exodus, ‘not in Egypt but in the heart of the Roman Empire,’... Christians are called to ‘come out’ of empire and injustice, just as the Israelites were called to come out of slavery in Egypt...This idea, that the Exodus story is reenacted in Revelation, is a valuable tool for comprehending the terrible plagues of death and disaster. The plagues serve for the conversion of the oppressors and for the liberation of God’s people. Like the plagues brought against Pharaoh in Exodus, the violence of the plagues threatened against Rome in Revelation is the violence of release and liberation, not vengeance or cruelty...the aim of this ‘Exodus in the bosom of the Roman Empire is the conversion of the oppressors...and the liberation of the holy ones. Repeating the Exodus, God attempts to rein in the Roman empire’s rush to destroy the world...The purpose of Revelation’s terrifying description of suffering is to wake up the world to God’s vision for life...to wake us up so the threatened events will *not* come to pass. God is not a cosmic destroyer.”³

Keys to Understanding Revelation:

“The first key: The Revelation is an Eastern book...The second key: It contains over one thousand symbols, two-thirds of which come directly from the Old Testament. The remaining one third come from the everyday life experience of the Near Eastern people...the visions are not to be taken literally. The symbols point to a much larger reality. The third key:...The final apocalypse is not doom and destruction, but the ultimate victory of...Christ for every individual, IN every individual, and AS every individual.”⁴

² Tina Pippin and J. Michael Clark. “Revelation/Apocalypse” in *The Queer Bible Commentary*. Deryn Guest, et al., eds. London: SCM Press, 2006 (753)

³ Barbara R. Rossing. *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*. NYC: Basic Books, 2004 (124-125)

⁴ Rocco A. Errico. *Treasures from the Language of Jesus*. Marina del Rey, CA: DeVorss & Co., 1987 (63-64)

The Performing Arts in the Bible

The bible contains a good bit of performance literature. For instance, Bible scholar Lawrence Wills says, “there are numerous ancient versions of Esther, which were likely performed, and even before we have evidence for Purim there is evidence of ‘Mordecai’s Day,’ where early versions of the story were probably performed. (You might be interested to know that European Purim plays gave rise to Yiddish theatre which gave rise to Vaudeville, TV variety shows like Sid Caesar, and ultimately the apex of western art, the sitcom).”⁵

In addition to some ancient versions of Esther being performance literature, I believe the story of Jonah was meant to be orally recited, that the Song of Songs was in fact a medley of wedding songs, and that the book of Psalms is basically a hymnal filled with songs and poems. Additionally, I argue in my MDiv and DMin theses that Mark’s gospel was meant to be performed in the style of ancient Greek tragedy. Both John’s Gospel and the Letter to the Philippians contain hymns (or fragments of hymns). Similarly, I believe Revelation was a performance text...a sort of dinner theatre piece to be performed at dinner parties. The drama, comedy, gore, and other fictive, creative, imaginative elements found in Revelation (and the other performance literature of the bible) are appropriate to songs, poems, and plays that are meant to be orally performed for audiences. When things get a little scary in Revelation, compare the scene to a riveting scene on television or in a movie, and you will notice that the effect (and probably the intent) of both the scene in Revelation and the scene from modern, electronic media are very similar!

The Politics of Revelation

Remember, Revelation is written at the end of the 1st century of the common era (during the reign of Domitian). Domitian followed Nero, who was a notoriously cruel leader. Domitian may have been similarly harsh. Add to this the knowledge of the “divine son” (reference to Julius Caesar and his adopted son Octavian), the “Lordship” of Caesar, and the “good news” of the Roman Peace, and you have a context for much of Revelation. Also, notice how much of Revelation is borrowed from the Hebrew Scriptures, especially the apocalyptic book of Daniel. Consider what Apocalyptic Literature is (Resistance Literature) and recall that Revelation is written some 67 years after

⁵ In a personal communication between Lawrence Wills and Durrell Watkins

the crucifixion of Jesus and 26 or so years after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. Revelation is written during a turbulent time that has been escalating for decades. This is important information when reading the text.

Read Aloud Revelation 1-3.

Consider the following notes about certain symbols. Discuss any other questions/observations you might have.

Rev. 1.1: “*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, to show his servants what must happen **soon**...*”

If Revelation is written between 90 and 100 CE (probably around 96 at the end of Domitian’s reign), then what are we in the 21st century to make of the word “soon” that was written two millennia ago?!

Rev. 1.3: “...*the appointed time is **near**.*” Clearly, the writer was mistaken, or he was expressing hope rather than prediction, or it is a cathartic fantasy. Notice also that this verse promises a blessing to readers of this text. In fact, this is the only biblical book that promises a blessing to its readers.

Rev. 1.4: **7 churches of Asia**. In biblical numerology, “7” is the number of completeness, fullness, perfection, or wholeness. So the imagery suggests that the text is being written for the “entire” Asian church. “Asia” refers to the Roman province of Asia Minor, modern day Turkey.

Rev. 1.5: “**washed** us...with his blood” is used in many older translations, but the best manuscripts actually read, “**freed** us...by his blood” which is consistent with biblical imagery and makes more sense for a work of resistance literature.

Rev. 1.10: “caught up in spirit” – clearly a vision or day dream, not something to be taken literally, but like any dream, to be interpreted.

“The Lord’s day” – “Worship was held on the ‘Lord’s Day,’ but since Sunday was also a work day in the Roman Empire, Christians gathered very early in the morning for worship. They dispersed and

then came together again in the evening to share a 'common meal,' probably the Lord's Supper or Eucharistic meal."⁶

Rev. 1.13: Ankle length **robe** – the garb of a priest.

Son of man (image borrowed Daniel 7, a figure representing the faithful. In extra-canonical literature the Son of man becomes a unique individual endowed with supernatural power. The writer of Mark's gospel borrows the image and applies it to Jesus, as does Revelation's author).

Rev. 1.14: Hair like wool or snow...characteristics of the "Ancient of Days" (Daniel 7).

Fiery eyes = all knowing.

Rev. 1.15: Brass-like feet = solid, immovable, sturdy, strong.

Water-like voice = power/authority (Ez. 1.24)

Rev. 1.16: *"In his right hand he held seven stars. A sharp two-edged sword came out of his mouth..."* Imagery that would be gruesome and ridiculous if taken literally. Mithras and the Caesars were represented with stars in their hands.

Rev. 1.18: *"I was dead but now I am alive forever."*

Rev. 3.8: *"...I have left an open door before you which no one can close..."*

⁶ Rossing (144)

Lesson 2

The Scholars Weigh In (again)...

“[The Book of Revelation] is a series of dreams and visions. The Aramaic word for ‘revelation,’ GILIANA, also means ‘vision’ and implies ‘dream.’ Its root is GLA which means ‘to uncover,’ ‘to lay open,’ ‘to declare,’ ‘to show,’ and ‘to make known.’ The visions in this magnificent and alluring book should not be taken literally. The Eastern imagery used by the author is a symbolic representation of spiritual and historical events. This imagery points to a much larger reality. As an example, Jesus is seen...as riding a white horse in the sky (Rev. 19.11-16)...Truth always rides a [powerful] horse; that is, truth will always conquer. There will be no literal white horse in the sky. All these things are Eastern symbols and figures of speech.”⁷

“The Revelation was written to inspire and encourage believers...The writer...comforted those who were being persecuted and assured them of...ultimate victory...The apocalyptic discourses were not intended to frighten...”⁸

“...Revelation has...been influenced by Greek tragic drama. The genre of Revelation...seems to be a syncretistic one – setting forth a prophetic message in the form of Greek tragic drama.

There are many similarities between Revelation and the extant Greek tragedies. A Greek theatre was considered sacred ground for all who participated; actors, chorus, and patrons were considered ministers of religion. The technical Greek word for producing a play was ‘to teach’ and the director was called ‘the teacher’ while the plays were termed ‘the teaching.’ Actors were called priests and the throne of God stood on the lower stage. Thus, the readers of Revelation would have found much about Greek drama already a part of their religious heritage and a good background for understanding their new one.

The role of the chorus in Greek tragic drama is very close to the role of the 24 elders in Revelation. At the beginning of the Greek drama, a chorus of 12 or 24 entered the stage and stood around the throne of Dionysius...The chorus could don masks and represent animals, birds, or beasts...(After 400 BCE) the dramas added one actor. The chorus

⁷ Rocco A. Errico. *Let There Be Light: The Seven Keys*. Marina Del Rey, CA: DeVorss & Co., 1985 (56)

⁸ Rocco A. Errico. *Treasures from the Language of Jesus*. Marina del Rey, CA: DeVorss & Co., 1987 (67)

however continued to be the medium for interpreting the drama. In Revelation the 24 elders sing and interpret the drama...

At Ephesus, a great amphitheater stood holding 24,000 seats. It had been built in the 3rd century BCE and was the largest of the Greek theatres. The stage building...contained 7 windows...Thus, for nearly 300 years before the writing of Revelation, the number 7 had acquired great significance for the inhabitants of Ephesus....Revelation can easily be divided into seven acts with seven scenes...

If the symbolic language in Revelation is taken literally, much of the message is lost. The book then becomes one of fear, gloom, and doom. In reality, the symbols are used by the writer to give a hidden message of hope to Christians being persecuted.⁹

OUTLINE OF REVELATION (Blevins)

Prologue (1.1-8)

Act I – Seven Golden Lamp Stands (1.9 – 3.22)

Scene 1 (2.1-7) 1st Lamp stand

Scene 2 (2.8-11) 2nd Lamp stand

Scene 3 (2.12 – 17) 3rd Lamp stand

Scene 4 (2.18 – 29) 4th

Scene 5 (3.1 – 6) 5th

Scene 6 (3.7 – 13) 6th

Scene 7 (3.14 – 22) 7th

Act II – Seven Seals (4.1 – 8.4)

Scene 1 – First Seal – White Horse (6.1-2)

Scene 2 – Second Seal – Red Horse (6.3-4)

Scene 3 – Third Seal – Black Horse (6.5-6)

Scene 4 – Fourth Seal – Green Horse (6.7-8)

Scene 5 – Fifth Seal – Martyrs

Scene 6 – Sixth Seal - Judgment of the world

Interlude – Sealing of the 144k (7.1-17)

Scene 7 – Seventh Seal – Gold Incense Container

And so on...Act III – Seven Trumpets; Act IV – Seven Tableaux (including the story of the woman and the dragon, the beast from the sea, the beast of the land, etc.); Act V – Seven Bowls (curses); Act VI – Seven Judgments; Act VII – Seven Great Promises

Finally, the Epilogue (22.6-21)

⁹ James L. Blevins. "Book of Revelation" in *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*. Watson E. Mills, ed. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1991 (759-760)

“The book of Revelation is the latest of the Bible’s major apocalyptic writings and the most intricate and sophisticated. Its sophistication, indeed, makes it one of the greatest literary and theological writings among the Scriptures. Most scholars date the book to about 95 CE, during the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian (d. 96 CE). This places Revelation’s initial composition about a decade after Matt 24’s version of Jesus’s apocalyptic discourse...[Revelation’s] author, John of Patmos, is probably not to be identified with John the apostle. Rather, he was an itinerate Christian prophet, who cultivated an apocalyptic imagination among his colleagues and followers. Revelation arose as a letter to early house-churches in Asia Minor, that is, the Roman province of Asia located in modern Turkey.”¹⁰

A LOOK AT SOME OF THE SYMBOLISM

3.1 – Sardis had been captured by Cyrus and later by Antiochus. They are warned, therefore, to be on guard.

3.8 – An open door. Two things should be noted here. (1) “An open door is an Aramaic idiom meaning “an opportunity”... “No one can shut the door,” is a way of saying that no one can take away your opportunity. In the East, when [someone] faces a difficulty or dilemma, he [or she] says, “Every door is shut to me.”¹¹ (2) This is written to the church at Philadelphia...founded by Attalus II Philadelphus of Pergamum to be an “open door” for Greek culture; it was destroyed by an earthquake in 17 CE and rebuilt by the Emperor Tiberius; it was renamed Neo-Caesarea. Having been renamed for Ceasar may explain why in v. 12, the writer makes a reference to Jesus’ name. In any case, the “open door” suggests opportunities for advancement of the cause, perhaps over-against the “open door” the city was meant to be for imperialism.

3.10 – “whole world”/“inhabitants of the earth” = pagan world/Roman world

3.14 – Lukewarm = a lack of passionate commitment is intolerable to the writer

3.16 – spit (literally, “vomit”) – the writer finds lack of commitment to be nauseating

¹⁰ Stephen L. Cook, *The Apocalyptic Literature*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003 (192)

¹¹ George Lamsa. *New Testament Commentary*. Nashville: Holman, 1945 (557-558)

3.18 – symbols of wealth...writer contrasts their material prosperity with what he perceives to be their spiritual lack. “Ointment” – the city was supposedly an exporter of eye ointment!

3.20 – The invitation of Christ is all inclusive...If ANYONE...the heavenly banquet excludes no one.

4.1 – Open Door (see 3.20). Also, the ancients viewed the heavens as a kind of vault that could literally be entered by way of actual doors.

4.2-8 – Imagery borrowed from Ezekiel

Notice the 7 (see note on drama)

Also recall that 7 has a numerological significance (wholeness/completion/perfection)

Additionally, there are the 7 hills of Rome...7 as a heavenly number over/against the splendor of Rome.

4.4 – 24 elders (12 apostles + 12 tribes)...Imagery of inclusion, and suggestion that the NEW is the TRUE and that the NEW represents the ancient better than how the ancient has evolved. This “back to the way it was/was meant to be” is a common myth even today.

4.5 – Seven spirits (Tobit 12.15). Lightning, etc. = Theophany

4.6 – Sea of glass (Ez. 1.22-26). Four living creatures (cherubim), see Ez. 1.5-21 and Ez. 10.20. Covered with eyes...God sees everything.

4.7 – Lion, calf, human, eagle: symbolizing what is (arguably) noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in creation.

4.8 – six wings (like the seraphim, see. Isaiah 6.2)

5.1-14...Remember that Revelation is meant to both praise and encourage martyrs (how extensive martyrdom was under Domitian is a matter of debate; the writer may be exaggerating the threat; however, at other times, the threat was very real). Jesus’ martyrdom makes him an example for martyrs. He is worthy; he is the example to follow.

5.6 – Jesus as Paschal Lamb (decades after his death; this interpretation was meant to make meaning of a tragedy; compare to Abraham/Isaac story and modern sensibilities re: cruelty to animals) – Discuss atonement theologies (At-One-Ment):

Question: I don’t see why Jesus had to die such a horrible death? Did God require it? If so, why couldn’t God come up with a less violent way to redeem us? I just don’t understand how brutality can be redemptive.

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Answer: The earliest Christians seemed to have some idea that Jesus' death had meaning and purpose. They celebrated that belief more than they explained it. A couple of centuries after Jesus' death, a man named **Origen** thought he had figured it all out. He hypothesized that the world was in the grip of Evil, and God wanted to win the world back. This "Ransom Theory" suggests that God made a bargain with the forces of evil (personified as "Satan") whereby God would give up an ideal person as a ransom to win back the world; but God cheats Satan out of his winnings by raising Jesus back to life in the Resurrection.

About nine centuries after Origen, a theologian named **Anselm** came up with what he believed was a better understanding of Jesus' death. Anselm hypothesized that God was a cosmic monarch, and in Anselm's world, a monarch's authority was absolute. Anselm figured that God wanted to redeem humanity, but the integrity of God's monarchical office wouldn't allow God just to forgive and forget. Someone had to be punished for the sins of the world. So, Anselm imagined that God sacrificed Jesus to satisfy God's own wrath. Anselm's proposal is called the "Satisfaction Theory".

A few years after Anselm, someone named Peter **Abelard** came along with a much less violent understanding of things. Abelard believed that God's love would outweigh God's wrath. He understood Jesus' life and death to be an example for us to follow. Jesus lived a life of courageous love and he wouldn't back down from what he believed was his life's mission, even if others wanted to kill him for it. His was a moral example, and our admiration of him causes us to follow his example. We serve God by serving others, and if we don't back down even when the cost is high, we are following Jesus and are thereby assured of right relationship with God. The Abelardian view doesn't blame God for Jesus' violent end, nor does it let us off the hook for taking responsibility for our own lives. Abelard's view is called the "Moral Theory of Atonement".

About three centuries after Abelard, the Reformation theologians such as **Calvin** and **Luther** weighed in. The Reformers modified the Satisfaction model and came up with the vicarious sacrifice model, also called the "Penal Theory". The Reformers decided that there was a real cost for sin, and so the sins of humanity resulted in a debt owed to God. In their view, Jesus died to pay the debt.

Still others would come to see Jesus' execution as a confrontation with death over which Jesus was the victor, and 20th century Liberation theologians saw Jesus' suffering as divine solidarity with the poor and marginalized of the world.

Of course, each of these views has a biblical proof-text or two to support it and most depend on the assumption that God and humanity were somehow separated and needed to be reconciled. However, perhaps it is possible that God has never been apart from the creation

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that is called in scripture, “very good”. Maybe God loves us and always has, unconditionally and forever.

My personal belief is that Jesus was killed as so many others were, to terrorize the community into being compliant with imperial rule. I don't believe God required, desired, or sanctioned his brutal execution, or anyone else's. The miracle for me isn't how he died but that his followers dared to claim they experienced him beyond his execution. I don't need to find meaning in his death, because I find meaning in his life. The witness of his earliest followers is that the significance of his life could not be killed! I don't need to glorify Jesus' execution in order to celebrate the Resurrection.¹²

Also from 5.6 – 7 horns and 7 eyes = Christ has FULL (7) POWER (horns) and KNOWLEDGE (eyes) is the case the writer is making.
5.11 – Countless (Literally, “100,000 plus 1,000,000)...symbolizes infinity

5.14 – Fell down and worshiped (not Caesar, but the one Caesar killed...he didn't stay dead and he's ruling a heavenly kingdom that will outlast the empire...this is clearly meant to be seditious)

¹² Q&A with Durrell Watkins from *The Sun Burst*, March 2008. Answer provided by Rev. Durrell Watkins

Lesson 3

5.6 – Jesus as Paschal Lamb (decades after his death; this interpretation was meant to make meaning of a tragedy; compare to Abraham/Isaac story and modern sensibilities re: cruelty to animals) – Discuss atonement theologies (At-One-Ment)... Compare views that say we are somehow estranged from God and those who say we could never be estranged from God:

More About the Lamb:

“To tell the story of Revelation is to tell the story of Jesus, the Lamb, and ultimately to tell the story of God – since the Lamb is beside God throughout the entire book. The slain Lamb’s victory through suffering love is the heart of the Revelation story...[T]his theology, this counter-understanding of victory in the Lamb, is more relevant today than ever. In the face of terrorism and the glorification of war, we need the vision of ‘Lamb power’ to remind us that true victory comes in our world not through military might but through self-giving love.

Revelation’s conquering Messiah is the slain but standing Lamb, the very opposite of Rome’s victory image. In Revelation, Jesus conquers not by inflicting violence but by accepting the violence inflicted upon him in crucifixion.

Needless to say, dispensationalist Christians tell the story of the Lamb very differently – as a vengeful war story, not a story of suffering love. We should be outraged that their war story is the version that Americans are exporting to the world in the name of Christianity.”¹³

“The phrase ‘the wrath of the Lamb,’ occurs only once in Revelation, in chapter 6 (v.16) – and then only on the lips of people who are trying to flee. In 28 other references to the Lamb throughout the book of Revelation, John never again refers to the Lamb as wrathful. Yet ‘wrathful’ is the favorite dispensationalist description for the Lamb...By making wrath their dominant imagery for Christ, dispensationalists have betrayed the mission of the Lamb in Revelation...We must make a choice as we read the story of the Lamb. To whom will we turn? To the violent, crusading Messiah, the wrath-filled ‘Terminator’ Lamb of Tim LaHaye and John Hagee? That Lamb is like a muscled action figure whose Tribulation Force followers conduct paramilitary operations out of an underground bunker. To be sure, that version of the Lamb’s story offers a certain

¹³ Barbara R. Rossing. *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*. NYC: Basic Books, 2004 (135-136)

way of ‘making Scripture come to life,’ and that has strong appeal for people. But what kind of life? Ultimately, that story is just another version of imperial Roman victory through military power. The Tribulation Force of *Left Behind*, and the rampaging armies of Hal Lindsey, win victory for the good guys with superior military power and God on their side. But their God does not look much different from the Roman generals who brought about victory through violent conquest.”¹⁴

“Dispensationalists do not seem to believe the Lamb has truly ‘conquered’ or won the victory when he was slaughtered. They preach the saving power of the blood of the Lamb in Jesus’ crucifixion, but it is not quite enough saving power for them. They need Christ to come back again with some real power, not as a Lamb but as a roaring lion.”¹⁵

“But there is no indication that the author of Revelation ever wants to call upon Jesus to return as a lion. John very deliberately replaces the lion with the Lamb in chapter 5 and never again refers to Jesus as a lion. Only evil figures are identified as lion-like in subsequent chapters of Revelation – the locusts have teeth like lions in chapter 9, and the horses of death have heads like lions. So where do dispensationalists get the idea for Jesus to return as a lion? I say they fabricate this lion-like Jesus because they have a problem with the Lamb’s weakness and vulnerability. They crave the avenging Jesus who will return as a lion and show his true power and fury...”¹⁶

“Armageddon is the event that dispensationalists crave above all else – the ‘main event’...The word Armageddon appears only once in the entire book of Revelation (16.16), but dispensationalists make it the book’s centerpiece.”¹⁷

“Why are exaggerated blood and death so prominent in every dispensationalist storyline? The answer is the escapist Rapture of saints from the earth up to heaven. From high above the earth dispensationalists plan to watch the whole grand spectacle of earth’s final war and destruction. The Rapture means that they will escape

¹⁴ Rossing (137)

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid. (138)

having to suffer any violence, yet will be able to view it all as it unfolds. Like a front-row seat at a shoot-em-up movie, heaven affords spectators the perfect place from which to watch the death of earth... This voyeuristic desire for an aerial view of the end of the world while escaping its torments is what dispensationalism is all about."¹⁸

Seems not unlike the Roman arenas where crowds would gather to watch displays of violence, and yet (remember), Revelation is meant to be counter-cultural, that is, something different from the dominating, violent, imperial culture.

What About the Horse Riders?

"The Four [Horse-Riders] of the Apocalypse... form a typical example of the way in which the bible makes use of the general principle of symbolism... The bible is not written in the style of a modern book. It has a method all its own of conveying knowledge through picturesque symbols... A direct statement in the modern manner would appeal to a particular kind of audience, but a symbol appeals to any audience, each individual getting just what he [or she] is ready for."¹⁹

"The Bible is not full of predictions. The bible does not undertake to say just what is going to happen in the future, because if this could be done it could only mean that we have no free will. If the future is all arranged now – like a movie film packaged in its box – what would be the use of praying?... But of course you can change the future and the present by prayer..."²⁰

"The Four [Horse-Riders] of the Apocalypse stand for the four parts or elements of our human nature as we find it today... There is, first of all, the physical body... Then there is your feeling nature or emotions... Third, there is your intellect... Finally, there is your spiritual nature, or your real eternal self; the true you, the I AM, the Indwelling Christ, the Divine Spark... the time will come when the first three will be merged in the fourth, and then we shall all *know* instead of only *believing* that the spiritual nature is all. Meanwhile, however, this is

¹⁸ Rossing (138-139)

¹⁹ Emmet Fox. *Alter Your Life*. San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1994 edition (7-8)

²⁰ *Ibid.* (8)

not the case, and so we find ourselves living with these four elements of our nature – and the bible calls them the Four Horses.”²¹

A Look At More Symbols

6.2: Bowman on a white horse...possibly the Parthians. An irritant to the Romans the Parthians actually won a major battle against Rome in 62. They were known for their archery skills.

6.4: Red Horse/Huge Sword – image of war (see Ez. 21.14-17)

6.5: Black Horse/Scale – Famine (which often accompanies war)...scale represents shortage of food and the subsequent rising of food prices

6.8: Pale Green – death

6.10: cries for vengeance (primitive justice)

7.1: Four corners – earth is thought to be flat! (We now know better)

7.4-9: 144,000 = the square of 12 (representing the tribes of Israel) multiplied by 1000, symbolic of the “new Israel” that will include all kinds of people beyond the ethnic or geographic tribes (universal/pluralistic). verse 9 says, “...great multitude which no one could count from every nation, race, people, and tongue...”

Palm Branches – Remember Jesus’ “triumphant” entry into Jerusalem...a symbol of celebration and victory

7.14: Survivors of great distress = those who had survived Roman persecution

7.17: Life-giving water = remember that metaphor from John 4?

²¹ Fox (8-9)

Lesson 4

8.3-6 “The heavenly temple is modeled after the temple in Jerusalem: the angel first stands at the altar of burnt offerings in the courtyard of the temple and then enters the inner sanctuary, where he offers incense at the ‘golden altar,’ which stands before the invisible God enthroned upon the cherubim and the ark of the covenant (see Ex. 27.1-8, 30.1, 40.5, Num. 3.31, 1 Kgs 6.22, etc.). The angel mirrors the movements of the priest on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur, Lev. 16.12-13), though the high priest mixed incense and blood, not prayers, as he sacrificed on the golden altar (Isa. 6.6). Incense purifies the prayers, as they are offered...”²²

This seems to be a re-enactment of a ritual that would have been familiar to writer and his community, but not necessarily to us.

Also, just as Jesus is somehow raised to life beyond his execution, the Temple in Revelation is somehow raised to new life beyond its destruction. It continues to thrive in heavenly places.

8.7 More plague phenomena, mirroring the 7th plague on Egypt (see also Ps 105.32).

8.8-9 More plagues mirroring the plagues found in the Hebrew scriptures.

8.10-11 “The [falling] star has name, ‘Wormwood...,’ a poisonous, bitter shrub (Prov. 5.4). The physician, Galen, refers frequently to apsinthon [“wormwood”], which can heal if mixed properly with honey and wine; otherwise, it is deadly. According to Jeremiah, God judges...false prophets by giving them wormwood (Jer. 9.15, 23.15).²³

8.12 Re: Darkness “In Matthew, the darkening of the sun is a sign of the end (24.29); in Exodus, the 9th plague brought darkness on

²² Leonard L. Thompson. *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: Revelation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998 (114 – 115). Thompson notes that angels relaying prayers to God is recurring theme in sacred literature, such as when Raphael brings the prayers of Sarah and Tobit to God (Tobit 12.12) and when an angel takes fire from the altar outside the Holy of Holies and offers it to the earth (Ez. 10.2).

²³ *Ibid.* (116)

Egypt...(10.21)...According to Amos, there will be darkness at noon on the day of the Lord (8.9)...Darkness is associated with death, the underworld, and movement down, in contrast to 'light,' which is associated with life, heaven, and movement up. God unleashes those 'dark' powers, when [God] judges."²⁴

9.1 "I saw a star that had fallen from the sky..." In antiquity, fallen powers were sometimes depicted as fallen stars (**Is. 14.12-15**, Luke 10.18, Jude 13). "Morning Star" or "Lucifer" in Is. 14 refers to the King of Babylon. The early church "fathers" attributed "Lucifer" to "Satan."

Compare the falling imagery in other texts:

"He replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.'" Luke 10.18

"...God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to [Tartarus], putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment." 2 Peter 2.4

"And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these have been kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day." Jude 6

"And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him." Revelation 12.7-9

NOTE: "Pagans believed that stars were divine beings; Jews identified them with angels."²⁵

Compare, also, the "falling" image with the "rising" image that is sometimes associated with Revelation. Note the following explanation of "the Rapture":

²⁴ Thompson (116)

²⁵ Adella Yarbro Collins. "The Apocalypse (Revelation)" in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Raymond Brown, et al., eds. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990

“...Modern focus on the rapture has come largely from 19th century Protestant millennialism and dispensationalism. Just as other important Christian terms, such as ‘trinity’ and ‘catholic,’ are not in the bible but are used to describe conclusions gleaned from the systematic and comprehensive study of biblical materials, so ‘rapture’ does not occur in the bible either. It comes from the Latin Vulgate of 1 Thessalonians 4.17 where the verb, ‘shall be caught up together’ is translated *rapturo*.²⁶”

If one already believed in a rapture, one could read rapture into Revelation 11.12, but such a short fragment doesn’t offer a clear picture of “the rapture.”

9.3 Scorpions (known for painful stings)

9.5 Five months (the life-span, more or less, of a scorpion)

9.11 Abaddon (actually, an Aramaic word)

9.14-15 Symbolism for destructive activity

9.20 Idolatry (the gods their hands had made)

10.1 to 11.14 – an interlude in two scenes

10.1-4 – 7 thunders (voice of God) – see Psalm 29 where thunder (as God’s voiced) is praised 7 times

10.6 – three “parts” of the universe as understood in antiquity

10.7 – mystery of God (or plan of God) is to defeat evil and establish the reign of God on earth.

10.9-10 – Sweet and Sour, sweet b/c of ultimate victory; sour because of suffering in the meantime.

11.2 – 42 months...period of time the Jews were persecuted by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (Dan. 7.25; 12.7). This three and half year period of turmoil became the “prototype” of periods of suffering.

11.3 – 2 witnesses in mourning attire...are they Peter and Paul? The Law and the prophets? Elijah and Moses? Do they symbolize all Christian martyrs?

11.4 – olive trees and lampstands...imagery taken from Zechariah

²⁶ John S. Reist, Jr. “Rapture” in *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, Watson Mills, ed. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1990

11.5-6 – Imagery taken from Moses, who turned water into blood²⁷ (Ex. 7.17-20) and Elijah who called fire down from the sky (1 Kings 18) and closed up the sky for three years (1 Kings 17.1).

11.7 – the Beast is Nero

11.8 – The Great City is “Babylon” which represents Rome. “Sodom” and Egypt” symbolize inhospitality and oppression (Sodom was unkind to strangers who lodged with Lot; Egypt became unwelcoming to the Hebrews). “Where...crucified” not literally Jerusalem, but symbolically the presence of God as a witness.

11.9-12 – Three and half days (symbolic time, see note on v. 2)...Raised up to heaven (like Elijah, 2 Kings 2.11).

11.13 – 7,000 – a symbolic number representing all social classes (7) and large numbers (thousand)

11.19 – traditional theophany images.

REMEMBER:

Ancient views of justice equated it with vengeance.

Imaginary violence can be cathartic.

The point is that “we” win (according to the author).

Almost every line of the text borrows imagery from other sources...biblical, apocryphal, cultural...There are probably more borrowed images than we can identify.

The text is intentionally symbolic and difficult to understand.

The text is late compared to other biblical writings.

It is meant to be a blessing (a word of encouragement) to the community for which it was written.

It is resistance literature (over against Rome).

It borrows from Jewish and Pagan legends and myths.

It pieces together unrelated images to form this story.

What is described is a “vision” – like a dream (and those can get pretty crazy!)...this is a reaction to what is going on in the life of the writer (and reader/hearer), not a prediction of the distant future.

It is creative, probably drama (making the vision one of artistic imagination).

It understands the world, the universe (and even God) very differently than 21st century people do.

Image IS NOT essence; and Explanation IS NOT experience.

²⁷ Is the writer of the Gospel of John making a connection between Jesus and the liberator Moses when he imagines Jesus turning water into wine (John 2)?

Lesson 5

Revelation in One Easy Lesson

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Prophecy is not prognostication. Prophecy is the word of the prophet to a particular people in the people's own time. It may indicate what is likely to happen in the immediate future, but it isn't telling the future that the stars have preordained (not in a Christian context, anyway).

Revelation was written centuries before anyone in Europe knew there was a North America. It was written by people who didn't speak English and had never heard English. In fact, modern English had not yet evolved. The writer of *Revelation* clearly did not intend for his audience to be 21st century (or 20th cent. or 19th cent. or 18th century) America.

A prophet wouldn't know that people in later cultures, languages, and times would read his or her work! A prophecy must ring true for those who first hear it, or it isn't a relevant prophecy.

Apocalyptic literature is resistance literature. Apocalyptic literature enjoyed literary success for about 4 centuries. Soon after the first century of the common era, its popularity waned and since then it has not been written as often or read as widely.

Apocalyptic literature uses imagery and symbols. One must be in the loop to know what it is really talking about. If the imagery is taken literally, it will seem very strange (compare to modern idioms: *Raining cats and dogs*; *being in a pickle*; *being caught between the devil and the deep blue sea*, etc.).

As we have discussed, *Revelation* might have been meant to be performed. It is certainly written like a drama. It may have been an artistic form of protest.

John is "caught up in the spirit." This is a mystical image. He is having a vision of faith (not a literal looking ahead), an imaginative, creative way of expressing a viewpoint.

If taken the literally, *Revelation* gives mixed messages:
7.1 – 4 corners. A flat world? Not for us, anyway!

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144,000 – 12x12x1000 = everyone...BUT, 14.4 = 144,000 *virgin men!*
So which is it? Everyone, or almost no-one!

Chapter 12 - rhetorical device used by the narrator is the appropriation of a common myth. The goddess figure in celestial garb whose child later avenges a foe who had been fighting her is a story that is known in various ancient societies.

The woman's celestial garb...associates her with a high goddess figure, or 'queen of heaven.' Several pagan goddesses, including the Ephesian Artemis and the Egyptian Isis shared this title and were linked with cosmic imagery in ancient art.

The story of the pregnant sky goddess in conflict with a dragon is very similar to the Greek myth of the goddess Leto, pregnant with Apollo (the sun-god) by Zeus (the supreme deity), being pursued by Python (a dragon) who knew that Apollo would one day displace him as ruler over the oracle at Delphi. And so Python wants to kill Apollo. The north wind and the sea-god (Poseidon), on Zeus' order, come to Leto's aid. Leto gives birth to Apollo and Artemis and Apollo slays Python.

Goddess imagery doesn't end with the woman in conflict with a dragon. That may be the only intentional use of goddess imagery, but other images find their way into the text all the same. For instance, when the woman sprouts eagle's wings, we are reminded of the winged symbol for the Egyptian goddess Isis, and when the earth actively swallows the floods of water to protect the woman, we might imagine the earth as Gaia, herself a deity, deigning to come to the aid of a friend or lesser deity.

Mark of the beast:

13.3 = Mortally wounded head = popular legend that Nero would come back to life and rule again after his death from a self-inflicted stab wound in the throat.

2nd beast = false prophets

Mark – 6 is imperfection, in contrast to the divine "7"...triple 6 is a way of saying he is very much opposite of what is good and holy. The person is Nero, whose name in Greek (letters having numerical value) is 666. In Latin, its 616 (which some manuscripts read).

Armageddon – scene of many ancient battles. Eventually, a legend developed that said the biggest battle of all would be fought there. Of

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course, bigger battles than this writer could ever imagine have already been fought, using the entire world as the battle ground (WW 1 & 2). WW1 was sometimes called Armageddon.

20.2 – first time in scripture that “the serpent” means devil.

Epilogue – don’t add or take away. Sort of a superstitious curse, protecting the work (before the days of copy right laws). Which book is the writer trying to protect? His own! *Revelation*. Remember, the bible of bible days was the OT. The NT wasn’t canonized by the church for a few hundred years. The NT never talks about itself, because the NT didn’t exist in NT days! Writer of Revelation is talking about *Revelation*.

Maran Tha – Our Lord Come.

Apostles would ask, “when are you coming into your own?” They wanted to know when Jesus would overthrow the government and set up a traditional kingdom. His power wasn’t military or political, though. His power was charismatic. His was the power of hope, courage, love. His dominion didn’t have geographical boundaries. The question, “when will you come (into power)” evolved after his death into, “when will he come back?” An ancient prayer of the church was “Marana Tha!” Our Lord, come! People thought he would return miraculously, literally, and quickly. But it didn’t happen quite that way (unless, as some have speculated, “Pentecost” in Acts 2 was the so-called “second coming”).

Rhetoric

You have already noticed the rich use of imagery borrowed from the Judaic scriptures in Revelation. For example, the one “like a son of man” (1.13) seems very similar to a vision of “one like a son of man coming on the clouds of heaven...” (Daniel 7.13). The robe and sash sound very much like the priestly vestments described in Exodus 28.4. The robed figure has white, wool-like hair just like the Ancient One of Daniel 7.9. In verse 16 a sharp sword is coming out of the robed one’s mouth, echoing Wisdom 18.15-16, “Your all-powerful word from heaven’s royal throne bounded, a fierce warrior, into the doomed land, bearing the sharp sword of your inexorable decree.” The sword in the mouth image also resembles a statement in Ephesians 6.7 declaring the divine word to be a spiritual sword. In verse 17, the narrator is struck down in a sort of faux death, demonstrating knowledge of the ancient belief that looking on the

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divine could be fatal (Exodus 19.21). So, part of the rhetorical scheme is to use familiar images and phrases from sacred texts.

Beyond simply borrowing phrases and images from the Hebrew bible, the author chooses images that are symbolically rich and perhaps common in that time and location. Lampstands could symbolize domestic life and comfort as in the guest room where Elisha stayed (2 Kings 4.10) or as with the ideal homemaker who keeps her lamp burning at night (Proverbs 31.18). Lampstands could be used in religious settings (1 Chronicles 28.15). Lampstands could represent a sort of tree, as in the tree of life (a description of such a lampstand can be found in Exodus 25.31-40). Lamps could represent divine light, as in the “lamp of God” (1 Samuel 3.3), divine guidance (Proverbs 6.23), or a divine presence as with the seven churches in the first three chapters of Revelation. Lamps could also represent the light of an individual as opposed to the greater cosmic light. Multiple lamps could indicate spiritual gifts (e.g., wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, and reverence found in Isaiah 11.2, or power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing found in Revelation 5.12).

If lamp imagery is meant to include the flames that illumine the lamps, then the picture of flames adds to the richness of the word tapestry. Flames could stand for transcendence, the holy Spirit, wisdom, divinity, zeal, or martyrdom. There is no myth about the origin of fire in the bible, but even the lack of a story about the creation of fire might lead one to assume that fire is part of the miracle of the THE creation.

Other cultural images that might have been familiar to the original audience of Revelation include gold (valuable, relatively indestructible), the color white (supernatural brilliance), snow (fairly rare, extraordinary, seen from a distance could appear numinous), bronze (a sturdy but easily worked metal), furnace (part of the language of refining – an interpretation of living through hard times), seven (completeness), stars (heavenly, used in contrast to the pagan practice of star worship, Christ is called the “morning star”), right hand (the hand used for swearing oaths), sword (the most important weapon of battle), and the sun (source of light/life, from the heavens can see all).

Other interpretations of some of those same images include the sword as a symbol of authority, liberty, strife, justice, or war, the sun as a symbol of the renewal of life, and the 7 stars as a counter image to Mithras and the Roman emperors who were sometimes portrayed as holding stars to show their dominion over the world.

Central Issues

Knowing that many of the images and phrases of the passage are borrowed from earlier sacred texts, and knowing that many of the images would have been familiar in the ancient world and would have been understood in particular ways, let's apply those quotations and those cultural images to the late first century circumstances which the writer of Revelation attempts to address. Let's just take the imagery from chapter 1:

Turning toward the mysterious voice, the narrator (an orator or actor of sorts, performing the text "in the spirit on the Lord's day") spies seven golden lampstands, and standing in the middle of the lamps is one like the son of man with hair like the ancient of days. In the drama or poetry or choreography of the piece, the narrator is seeing seven regional churches that have access to divine light and who have at their core an otherworldly but still somehow immanent Christ, a human-one in whom people saw something divine, something linking him (in their experience and estimation) to Ultimate Reality (the Ancient of Days). This Christ, though executed, is in some sense alive and capable of functioning in a priestly way to bless, console, challenge, and mediate for the churches.

The churches are precious to Christ (golden) who is watching over them all (with fiery eyes); and who has experienced hardships and who must therefore have empathy for suffering people (refined in a furnace). His voice is powerful and authoritative (like rushing waters). Caesar may hold the known world in his political hands, but Christ is holding these seven churches in "his" right hand (the hand of relationship, blessing, and promise). He speaks powerfully against wickedness and oppression (using his voice like a sword against an enemy) but divine power is with him (seen by his shining sun-like face) and, by extension, with those who are hoping in him. He challenges the churches and raises the issues they may not want to hear, but also comforts them by reminding them that he has somehow survived his execution, he will live forever, and he holds the keys to the netherworld. If he lives and has the keys to the realm of

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death, then anyone on his side need not worry about being killed, because ultimately, death is not real – not for him and his, anyway.

Function

Is this pericope (and the larger text to which it belongs) a sort of script for a performative ritual for associational gatherings? Was it like the “dancing cowherds” – a performance troupe who said prayers, sang songs, and danced in honor of a deity at meetings of burial societies?²⁸ Or is it a sort of Greek style play (with the narrator being a one-person chorus) that was to be presented in market places, at festivals, or in worship? And if it was a play, what was it trying to accomplish? Was the play meant to dramatize Rome, generate animosity toward Rome, and then through the illusion of performance work out a relatively non-threatening solution to the perceived conflict? Maybe the “playwright” is thinking: *I’ll use biblical imagery from Daniel and Ezekiel and imperial images of a sovereign holding stars to generate dissention, and then I’ll work out the conflict cosmologically with our side winning.*

Such a plan would be both politically seditious and emotionally cathartic.

Augusto Boal, a thespian and social activist, taught,

“In a Theatre of the Oppressed show, spectators do not exist in the simple ‘spectare = to see’ sense; here to be a spectator means to be a participant, intervening; here to be a spectator means to prepare oneself for action, and preparing oneself is already in itself an action.”²⁹

Conclusion

My argument is that it is possible that the writer of Revelation is doing what Boal is talking about: Using dramatic art to help people acknowledge their oppression and react to it in creative ways where the violent impulses are worked out on stage as a way of empowering and emboldening individuals in the safe, laboratory-type environment of a performance space. In the Greek theatre style, narration and

²⁸ See the work of Philip A. Harland. *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003

²⁹ Augusto Boal. *Theatre of the Oppressed*, NYC: Theatre Communications Group, 1979

masks might be more important than improvisation and movement, but the idea that art can be subversive, educational, empowering, and therapeutic is the same. Both Boal and the writer of Revelation seem to believe that performance is of itself a political and potentially therapeutic event that may be contributing to the process of personal and social (and maybe even global) change. Presenting chaos in a way that suggests that we can gain some control over the chaos may be intended to help us face the real chaos of life with less anxiety or at least with more hope.

The Roman government executed “our” messianic hero. But we now have this performance piece that posthumously gives voice to that hero. In our art, he lives! He not only lives, but he also has the power of God at his disposal. And he lives to encourage us and to give us hope. Death didn’t rob him of his power, in fact, death didn’t even work! And so our “living one” tells our communities, our seven regional, “golden” and light-filled gatherings, that he is holding us in his right hand, and we need not be afraid because he is alive forever. The worse “they” can do is kill us, and even then we might not stay dead. He after all, has the keys to the realm of the dead. This would seem to be the message of the opening scene of what might be a form of resistance performance art.

Revelation in One Easy Lesson created and first taught by Durrell Watkins at MCC-Christ the Liberator, North Brunswick, NJ, 2004.

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Now, let’s apply what we’ve learned about the imagery in Revelation to the next section of our study – chapter 12.

- 1 – Adorned with celestial garb (see Gen. 37.9-10)
- 2 – Sexist interpretations (vs. the reality that child-bearing is painful!)
- 3 – Dragon = represents demonic power, a symbol of evil or oppression. Seven heads/crowns (seven hills of Rome? Roman authority???) 10 horns (Power).
- 5 – “rule” (over against Caesar; a messianic image). “Caught up to God” (resurrection and/or ascension).

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6 – Fled to the desert (like the children of Israel did for safety from Egypt). 1260 days (42 months, 3.5 years...remember??? We saw this in chapter 11...42 months is the period of time the Jews were persecuted by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (Dan. 7.25; 12.7). This three and half period of turmoil became the “prototype” of periods of suffering).

7-12 – the only time “Michael” is mentioned in Revelation. He is, of course, victorious over the dragon (Good wins!). Michael means “who can compare with God” and might simply symbolize God’s goodness and ultimate victory over evil. “Michael” (who can compare with God?) is used as an image over against the beast (“who can compare with the beast or who can fight against it?” – Rev. 13.4). Michael seems to be the answer to the question asked in 13.4 – Who can take on the evil of oppression? Ultimate Good (God)! In angel mythology, Michael is an archangel and the guardian and champion of Israel (see the book of Daniel).

14 – Eagle – symbol of divine power (and swiftness)...compare to the divine Mother Eagle image in Deuteronomy 32.11 (and the eagle image in Isaiah 40).

17 – Being good doesn’t mean one won’t suffer.

13.1 – blasphemous names (divine titles for emperors). Beast is “prince of this world” (devil), emperor.

13.3 – Nero killed himself in 68 CE (stab wound to throat); legend said he would return to rule again. Writer may be suggesting that Domitian is the return of Nero (that is, exhibits the same cruel intentions).

13.4 – Worshiped the beast (emperor worship)

13.5 – 42 months (again)

13.11 – second Beast (military?)

13.18 – see earlier note on 666 (It’s Nero)

Lesson 6

Read "Revelation" by Susan R. Garret in *The Women's Bible Commentary*.

Re-Read Revelation 2.19-29...Discuss "Jezebel" (and offer a rebuttal from HER perspective)

Read Chapters 14, 15, 16, and 17 in the Book of Revelation. Refer to various symbols, images, scriptural references in the text (some of these themes, images, symbols, etc. have already been discussed in previous readings).

Read pp. 767-768 of "Revelation/Apocalypse" by Pippin & Clark in *The Queer Bible Commentary*.

{Suggested additional reading: Read 191-196 of "Revelations: Women, Gnostics, and the Early Church" in Buehrens' *Understanding the Bible: An Introduction for Skeptics, Seekers, and Religious Liberals* (Beacon Press, 2003)}

Read Chapters 18-22 in the Book of Revelation. Refer to various symbols, images, scriptural references in the text (some of these themes, images, symbols, etc. have already been discussed in previous readings).

Ask yourself:

How is Revelation a text of hope?

How is Revelation a text of empowerment?

How is Revelation an imaginative work of fiction?

How is Revelation a subversive text?

How is Revelation a cathartic text?

How is Revelation a violent, disturbing text?

Whose voices have been left out?

How can we faithfully read "against" the text?

Do you feel empowered now to appropriate it, re-interpret it, or even refuse to embrace it?

Regardless of what you believe about Revelation, how has confronting the text been a blessing for you?

A note about the scholars we have consulted for the last six lessons:

1. James Blevins – Professor of NT, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (**Louisville, KY**)
2. John A. Buehrens – Former President of the Unitarian Universalist Association (**Needham, MA**)
3. J. Michael Clark – Theologian at Warren Wilson College
4. Adella Yarbro Collins – Professor of New Testament at McCormick Theological Seminary (**Chicago**)
5. Stephen Cook – Asso. Professor of OT, **Virginia** Theological Seminary
6. Dennis Duling – Bible Scholar, Canisius College
7. Rocco Errico – Founder, Noohra Foundation
8. Susan R. Garrett – Asst. Professor of New Testament, Yale Divinity School (**New Haven, CT**)
9. Philip A. Harland – Assistant Professor of Christian Origins, Concordia University (**Montreal, Canada**)
10. George Lamsa – a speaker of Aramaic and a member of the Assyrian Church of the East
11. Tina Pippin – Asso Professor of Religious Studies, Agnes Scott College (**Decatur, GA**)
12. John S. Reist – Professor of Christianity and Literature at Hillsdale College (**Hillsdale, MI**)
13. Barbara Rossing – Bible Scholar, Lutheran School of Theology at **Chicago**
14. Leonard L. Thompson – Professor Emeritus (Religious Studies), Lawrence University (**Appleton, WI**)
15. Lawrence Wills – Professor of New Testament, Episcopal Divinity School (**Cambridge, MA**)

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