

**The Book of Revelation Now and Then: Visions for a Just World and the People of  
God  
NT 6/741  
Spring 2016**

Harry O. Maier  
hmaier@vst.edu  
604-822-9461

This class is intended as an introduction to ancient apocalyptic literature in general and a thorough study of the Book of Revelation in particular. The course will focus on the historical backdrop and theories of origins of the Book of Revelation, Revelation as literature or a textual world, Revelation as a text that has had enormous influence in shaping the western imagination, and Revelation as a call to faithful discipleship. Particular attention will be given to considerations of sacred texts and violence, gender, imperial and post-colonial urban imagination, and the place of apocalyptic theology in contemporary society. The course invites students to compare and contrast the dystopic and utopian visions of Revelation with contemporary visions of society. It will explore the relation of apocalyptic and apocalypse to preaching and the task of the preacher in holding up for listeners visions of God's world and the call to discipleship.

**Objectives/Competences**

1. To identify literary, historical and social theories of the origins of apocalyptic theology.
2. To help students distinguish the meaning of the terms apocalypse, apocalyptic, apocalypticism, and apocalyptic eschatology.
3. To locate Revelation in its historical setting and to interpret the text in the light of its historical background.
4. To offer a close reading of the text as a literary product, with considerations of time, plot, character, and structure, relationship with Hebrew Bible tropes and literary devices
5. To relate a historical reading of Revelation to contemporary interpretations, including the history of interpretation of key texts.
6. To relate the eschatology of Revelation, especially as it relates to its treatment of Babylon and Jerusalem, to contemporary urban ideals and challenges
7. To introduce a wide variety of scholarly perspectives on the interpretation of Revelation and its relationships to contemporary identity.
8. To foster sophistication in the interpretation of apocalyptic texts and to encourage a growing awareness of the importance of apocalyptic theology in shaping the contemporary imagination, especially as it relates to urban identities.
9. To consider the place of apocalypse and apocalyptic in preaching and the act of preaching as revelation and unveiling.

## Format

Lecture (2 hours) with seminar on assigned readings (1 hour)

The final two weeks of class will be given over to student presentations focusing on the relation of Revelation to contemporary issues, especially as these intersect with issues relating to modern dystopic fears and faithful engagement with New Testament texts.

Each week will include:

1. Opening Reflection

Each class will open with a brief time of student-led singing and/or reflection/prayer. While the Book of Revelation appears only rarely in the Revised Common Lectionary, it enjoys pride of place in hymnody and liturgy. As a means of introducing the class to this rich heritage, each week a different student or group of students will open the class by introducing a hymn to be sung, followed by a brief (no more than 5-minute) reflection on a text from the Book of Revelation, and then conclude with a brief reflection.

2. Apocalypse Watch

Following worship each week, we will spend 5-10 minutes sharing the results of Apocalypse Watch. Following Catherine Keller's ([Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World](#) [Boston: Beacon, 1998]) observation that western culture is "in Apocalypse" one of the goals of the class is to raise awareness of the degree to which the Book of Revelation and invocations of apocalypse continues to shape the contemporary secular imagination. To help achieve that goal, students are assigned for the duration of the semester to keep their eyes and ears open for invocations of apocalypse in mass media and to come to class prepared to share their findings. You should be creative! Be prepared to share instances of music, art, websites, newspaper clippings, movies, etc. The Book of Revelation continues to create the most optimistic and pessimistic of citizens, but often in ways that are disguised. Your task is to make explicit the way John's Revelation continues to be the Word on the streets.

3. Seminar Discussion

Each week a different group of students will draft and distribute a two page single-spaced typed response to an essay question designed to aid engagement with the assigned readings for the week.

4. Revelation Book Fair

The final class students will spend time telling one another of a book, film, or other medium relating to the Book of Revelation or apocalyptic literature more generally that focuses in particular on a topic that relates Revelation to questions of contemporary concern, theology, and proclamation. Participants are invited to be creative in use of multimedia, choice of genre, etc. Those who elect a more traditional route can offer a 750 word book/medium review. The review will state the basic thesis of the author/medium,

the methods by which the “author” comes to his/her conclusions and a brief overview of each chapter/unit, with a final section dedicated to a brief discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the work as whole.

### *Distance Education*

In addition to watching the lectures, discussion of readings will be facilitated by on-line discussion of each others’ brief essay submissions. The Revelation Book Fair assignment will be facilitated through use of Adobe Connect for students how can participate in real time, or submitted as a written report for those who cannot.

## **Evaluation**

### Paper

The paper should be an exegetical treatment of a text taken up with a view to consideration of a contemporary issue relating to contemporary urban issues broadly interpreted and the use of the text in formation (teaching/ preaching/ discipleship). While the focus of the class is on the Book of Revelation students may elect to take up another instance of apocalyptic/apocalypse in the New Testament. Students may also elect to offer a paper that investigates a popular medium of apocalyptic (zombies, etc) and to compare and contrast it with the apocalyptic found in the Book of Revelation or another NT apocalyptic text.

### Major Exegetical Paper

A hand-out will be distributed in class that sets out the rubrics for the Major Exegetical Paper.

The bibliographical requirements are as follows: MDiv/ MA students – 10-15 bibliographical citations in addition to the course texts, assigned articles, and lecture presentations; ThM and Major Exegetical papers-- 15-20 citations. ThM students are also required to furnish a 10 item annotated bibliography with their paper. Please note that Bibles (including Study Bibles), concordances, grammars, and other exegetical helps do not count as bibliographical items. Avoid older commentaries. The ones in the reference section of the library are examples of what is appropriate.

Paper Length: MDiv/ MA – 3750-5000 words (15-20 pages) ; ThM/Major Exegetical Papers -- 6250-8000 words (25-30 pages)

**Due Dates: MDiv: Friday 8 April; ThM and non-graduating MDiv major ex: 24 May; graduating MDiv/ Major Ex: 12 April**  
**Not Approved Rewrites: non-graduating MDiv/ThM: 17 June; graduating MDiv/Major Ex/ThM: 29 April**

**Required Texts**

**Texts will be on sale at the UBC Bookstore; students may elect to purchase new or used copies (print or e-book) from an on-line bookseller.**

Steven J. Friesen, Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins (Oxford: OUP, 2001). ISBN 978-0195188219

Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now (New York: Orbis, 2000). ISBN 978-1570752872

Harry O. Maier, Apocalypse Recalled: The Book of Revelation after Christendom (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002). ISBN 978-0800634926

**Recommended Texts**

Catherine Keller, God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). ISBN 978-0800637279