

NT 4350d / 5350d
Revelation
Fall 2020

Professor: Allan J. McNicol
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I. Course Description

This course will be primarily a textual analysis of the Apocalypse of John or, as it is generally known, the Book of Revelation. We will commence with a brief overview of the phenomenon of the esoteric literature of Judaism (including Apocalypses) and a survey of questions about the authorship, date, and setting of the book.

The bulk of the course then will be given over to close textual analysis of Revelation. We will attempt to understand the Apocalypse as much as possible from the perspective of its original readers; and on this basis we will come to an appreciation of the contribution of Revelation to the Christian understanding of history and eschatology. However, there will also be a major focus on understanding how one reads the Apocalypse in a contemporary church setting. We believe that the book was intelligible to its first century readers but it is another question how its message is abiding to twenty-first century believers.

From time to time throughout the course we will take up special issues that may be of some interest to a student who should choose to take a course on this subject: viz., the origin and influence of dispensational premillennialism with its persistent preoccupation on current events in the Middle East. Several special readings will be given on these topics and students will be asked to join in discussion of them. In this connection, undergraduate students will be required to read one popular modern fictional work (usually premillennial) such as one of the *Left Behind* series in order to gain appreciation for the impact Revelation has on contemporary popular culture. However, overall, the central focus of the course will be to study Revelation in its historical setting noting that the book brings the biblical story to its climactic conclusion.

Procedurally, the first part of each class will involve a lecture from the instructor. After break we will enter into seminar discussion of the lecture and secondary readings. These sessions may vary in style; but we may feature class reports on the contemporary work on Revelation students are reading for the class.

II. Goals

- A. To acquaint the student with the basic tools and methodologies of studying and interpreting a biblical text: in this case, Revelation.

- B. To encourage the growth of student theological skills through study and analysis of the text. Revelation is full of intertextual echoes. Study of them is an excellent way of entering into a fuller understanding of the message of the entire Bible.
- C. To enable the student to understand the impact of Revelation in popular culture; and through informed study, equip the student to have an impact on that culture through teaching, preaching and being able to discuss intelligibly the message of the book with others.

III. Objectives

- A. The student will be able to understand what the Book of Revelation was saying in its original historical setting.
- B. The student will gain facility in understanding the main contours of interpretation of Revelation in Western culture and will be led to develop an appreciation as to why this book has had such a tremendous impact on the West.
- C. The student will gain facility in understanding the rise of dispensational premillennialism in nineteenth and twentieth century evangelical culture and its significance in contemporary cultural life. The student will be expected to assess intelligently its impact in constructing his or her own view of Biblical eschatology.
- D. Finally, we will seek to discuss the issue of the viability of an eschatological vision for the contemporary believer. The numbers of those who profess Christianity are in serious decline in the West. Yet eschatological beliefs of various kinds proliferate. Why?

IV. Library Resources

Austin Graduate Library: 8:30 AM - 10:00 PM, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday
8:30 AM - 4:30 PM, Wednesday, Friday

Check the Austin Grad Library page of our website for a list of helpful website links for theology study.

The Instructor will facilitate student orientation to software and electronic data based resources in the Austin Grad library.

V. Textbooks

- A. Ben Witherington III, *Revelation: The New Cambridge Bible Commentary*, Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- B. New Testament (RSV is what the instructor will use in class).
- C. Several articles will be photocopied and made available in the library.

VI. Required Work

Undergraduate Students:

- A. Weekly attendance at class for lectures and class discussion.
- B. Timely completion of regular reading of assignments as noted in the course syllabus.
- C. Five to seven page review of a contemporary novel on apocalyptic themes.

Graduate Students:

- A. Weekly attendance at class for lectures and class discussion.
- B. Timely completion of regular reading of assignments as noted in the course syllabus.
- C. Sermon (5 pages)
- D. Exegesis chosen with the instructor

VII. Evaluation

Undergraduate Students:

- A. Two major exams (comprehensive from class lectures and readings): 30% each
- B. 5-7 page review of the contemporary novel: 30%
- C. Class participation: 10%

Grad Students:

- A. 25% for each test
- B. 25% for a sermon
- C. 25% for an exegesis - not to exceed 10 pages.

VIII. Outline and Reading

- Aug 26 Opening orientation, Introduction to the study of apocalyptic literature in the biblical tradition, Outline of Revelation.
- Sept 2 Matters of Background, Date of Composition, Interpretation
Reading: Witherington, 1-50
- Sept 9 Introduction and Letters to the 7 Churches in 1:1 - 3:22
Reading: Witherington, 65-111
- Sept 16 Opening Vision of the Holy One and the Lamb who rules History in 4:1 - 5:14
Reading: Witherington, 111-125
- Sept 23 Anticipation of the Coming Crisis in 6:1 - 8:5 (Seven Seals)
Reading: Witherington, 126-143
- Sept 30 Revelation and End of the World. The Rise of Dispensational Premillennialism and its contemporary significance.
Reading: B. Witherington, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology*, 93-131 (library reserve)
- Oct 7 The Seven Trumpets; The Crisis Deepens in 8:6 - 11:18
Reading: Witherington, 143-163
- Oct 14 Test I (Mid-Term)**
- Oct 21 The Development of the Crisis in 11:19 - 14:5
Reading: Witherington, 163-188

- Oct 28 The Defeat of Babylon in 14:6 - 19:10
Reading: Witherington, 188-239
- Nov 4 The Defeat of the Dragon and Final Judgment in 19:11 - 21:8
Reading: Witherington, 239-264
- Nov 11 The Interpretation of Revelation in Christian History
Reading: Arthur Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse*, 21-87 (library reserve)
- Nov 18 God's New World in 21:9 - 22:5
Reading: Witherington, 264-278
- Nov 25 No Class – Thanksgiving Holiday**
- Dec 2 Epilogue of 22:6-21 and Course Wrap-up
Reading: Witherington, 278-291
Allan McNicol, *Revelation: An Overview* (library reserve)
- Dec 9 Test II**

Bibliography

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