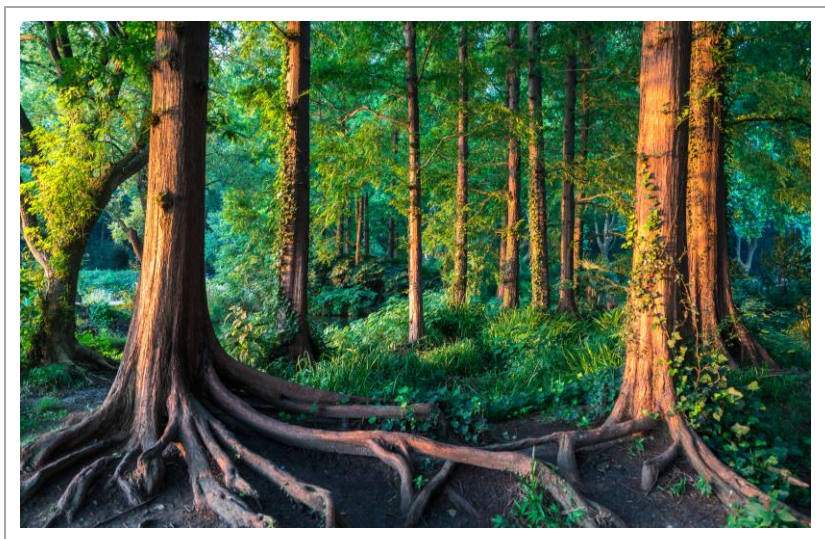


FOR THE HEALING OF THE NATIONS

Reading the Book of Revelation
with Normal People



SALISBURY UNITED CHURCH

Sundays, October 22-November 26, 2023

Rev. Britt L. Aerhart

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Introduction

The Book of Revelation Is a Book of Imagination

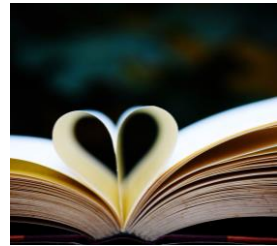


Revelation describes a dream-vision. Like most dream-visions it is filled with symbols and flourishes, mysterious beasts and ominous numbers. Reading it literally simply kills the meaning within the dream.

Interpreting imaginatively as one would a dream, opens the door to exploration and understanding.

The Book of Revelation Is a Book of Consolation

Revelation was first received by Christians living under oppression in the Roman Empire. It speaks a language of consolation shaped by a distinct time and situation. If we try to force it to speak to us as if it was written in our time, we will misunderstand the consolation it offers to encourage and strengthen God's people of faith.



The Book of Revelation Is a Book of Hope



Often the Book of Revelation is interpreted as if it is about the favored few who will survive the end of the earth. This is not very hopeful for the rest of us, and is about as far from the meaning of the Book of Revelation as one can get! Rather, Revelation speaks about a “great multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people and language,” ... and the “Lamb who

will lead the multitude to living springs of water.” (7:9-17)

BACKGROUND

When it comes to the Book of Revelation in the Bible, most of us shudder and think of ghastly predictions about the end of the world. This is largely because our imaginations have been conditioned to interpret Revelation that way. To take the Book of Revelation seriously apart from imposed interpretations requires some intentional courage on our part. We will have to stretch ourselves to be curious but not defensive, and critical but not dismissive.

Revelation Is Unique in the Bible

There are no other books quite like Revelation in the Bible. It was written by a man named John who was sentenced to serve time in a Roman penal-colony on an island called Patmos. He had a profound dream-vision while under detention and was compelled to write what he saw in a letter addressed to seven nearby Christian communities. Those seven communities no longer exist but the letter he wrote them continues to have meaning for the church as part of the Bible.



A Message in Disguise

The Book of Revelation falls into an “apocalyptic” category of writing. The word “apocalyptic” in Greek simply means “revelation”. It is an ancient style of writing designed to disclose something otherwise hidden. Some people think of Revelation as a kind of coded message, which to some extent is true. It contains symbols, images and allusions which hint at deeper meanings, many of which we don’t automatically understand today. However, Revelation was never intended to be so difficult to understand that only a few “code-breakers” could read it for everybody else.

IT'S ALL ABOUT EMPIRES

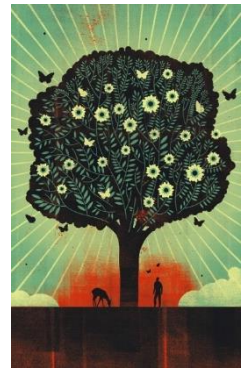
The Book of Revelation focusses on empires, in particular the Roman Empire. Throughout the Bible, empires create conflict and suffering within the history of God's people. The Assyrians. The Babylonians. The Egyptians. The Greeks. The Romans. They all rose to become world powers. They invaded, conquered, enslaved captives, erased cultures and religions, and built monuments to their eternal greatness in the way that empires usually do. The story of the Bible, with its long spiritual memory of the way empires tend to behave, represents an alternative vision for life compared to the life offered by empires.

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth ... I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God"

(Rev. 21: 1-2)

The City of God

The key symbol for a new way of life in the Book of Revelation is the City of God (21:9-22:5). Other dream-visions in the Bible use symbols with a similar meaning: the Peaceable Kingdom (Isaiah 11:1-9), the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31), the New Creation (2 Corinthians 5:16-18), or the Great Banquet (Acts 10:9-16). There is a liberating sacred theme running through the entire Bible that the healing of human culture and society and the redemption of the entire creation is God's ultimate goal. In the city of God, all the things that have spoiled life under the reign of Earth's empires will be excluded. What is beautiful about every people and nation will be drawn into the city. The water of life will run clear as crystal and the tree of life will produce leaves which shall heal all the nations of the earth.



More About Symbols & Numbers in Revelation

One of the first “rules” about most books of the Bible is that things are never strictly as they appear. This is especially true in the Book of Revelation, including numbers and symbols.

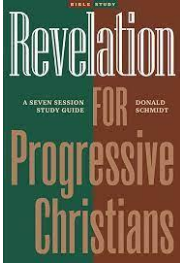
Numbers 7, 666, 12 & 144,000: Numbers in scripture do not represent pure mathematics. Numbers are symbolic. For example, God created over 7 days. 7 represents wholeness. Similarly, the number 12 represents completion – there are 12 tribes of Israel and 12 disciples of Jesus in the Bible. Multiples of 7 or 12, like the number 144,000, also suggest wholeness or completion, but at a vast level. The number 6, one less than 7, emphasizes a lack of wholeness. When six is repeated, as in 666, it represents an infinite falling short of completion and a profound lack of wholeness.

The Beast, The Dragon, The Woman Giving Birth, the Idolator (whore) of Babylon & The Lamb that Was Slain: Empires often adopt icons or figureheads as symbols. Lady Liberty stands at the entrance to New York Harbor. Victoria, the Goddess of Victory, sits atop the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. Britannia, Lady Britain, was important on WWII posters in England. The dream-vision of the Book of Revelation creates unique versions of national icons. For example, the inhuman Beast in Revelation is usually taken to symbolize the Roman Empire, as opposed to the Roman Empire’s own symbol of the noble eagle. Revelation also uses the icon of the innocent and humble Lamb to represent Christ and Christ’s people who seek to follow a new vision for life apart from the world’s empires.



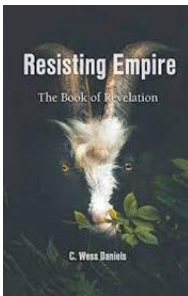
For Personal Study

Book: Revelation for Progressive Christians



More material has probably been written about the biblical book of Revelation than the rest of the Bible combined. What's more, people who write or talk about Revelation have a passion that defies all logic. They speak wildly and forcefully about plagues and judgements, and the end of the world – but are they the real concern or message of Revelation? Pick up this seven-session study by Donald Schmidt to find out.

Book: Resisting Empire, The Book of Revelation



Reading Revelation as a book predicting the end of the world leads us away from the book's original intention. C. Wess Daniels pulls back the covers of misinterpretation and tries to give the Book of Revelation back to the people to whom it belongs – the multitude. The book of Revelation, according to Daniels, is a book for “Angelic Troublemakers” for whom the light and love-filled realm of God is a complete contradiction to means and methods of empires.

Book: Resisting Empire, The Book of Revelation



The book of Revelation is just plain weird! Rev. Dr. Brian K. Blount, a Presbyterian minister, New Testament scholar and past President of Union Presbyterian Seminary, sensibly discusses the Book of Revelation in this audio broadcast.

[Click here](#) or copy the link below in your browser.

https://youtu.be/H2MPSK1EIk?list=PLXq_nGjou6quxmNXbHmk1QUUDg2b3tPcOR

Reading for Worship

Join us Sundays, October 22 through November 26, 2023, as we survey the Book of Revelation and try to find new meaning in this old and much-misused text from the Bible.

Here are the readings for Sundays Services in this Worship Series:

Sunday, October 22: The End Is Our Beginning

Read: Revelation 21-22:6

Sunday, October 29: Light Walking Around

Read: Revelation 1-3

Sunday, November 5: The Helpless Lamb

Read: Revelation 5

Sunday, November 12: The Terrible Beast

Read: Revelation 13, 18

Sunday, November 19: The Resistance of the People

Read: 12, 19

Sunday, November 26: The New Song of the Multitude

Read: Revelation 7, 22:7-21



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