

**Apocalypse Now: Revelation's Meaning Today**  
Christian Assembly Foursquare Church — Wednesdays, 7 p.m., in 203  
**Class Schedule**

**10/14 Course Introduction**

**Flying Horses, or Helicopters? An Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature**  
*Ezekiel 1, Isaiah 6, Zechariah 1-8, Zechariah 9-14, Daniel*

**The Point of Revelation**

*Rev. 1*

**10/21 Seven Letters from Jesus Christ**

*Rev. 2-3*

**10/28 Heaven's Idea of a Church Service**

*Rev. 4*

**The Lamb: Revelation's Focal Point**

*Rev. 5*

**11/2! "Make It So": Unsealing the Father's Scroll**

*Rev. 6:1-8:5*

**Pharaoh Was Lucky: Angelic Plagues and Trumpet Calls**

*Rev. 8:6-9:21*

**11/11 John as an Old Testament Prophet, and the Two Mysterious Witnesses**

*Rev. 10:1-11:14*

**The Kingdom Comes: Revelation's Climax**

*Rev. 11:15-19*

**The Victorious Suffering of Israel and Her Son**

*Rev. 12*

**11/18 Who Are the Beasts?**

*Rev. 13*

**Sing the Song of the Saints: A Call for Endurance in Our Persecuted Church**

*Rev. 14*

**Harvest of Wrath: Seven Plagues from Seven Bowls**

*Rev. 15-16*

**11/25 NO MEETING (Happy Thanksgiving)**

**12/2 The American Way of Death**

*Rev. 17-18*

**12/9 God's Rehearsal Dinner (Don't Be Late)**

*Rev. 19*

**What and When Is the Millennium?**

*Rev. 20:1-6*

**12/16 The Eternal Death of Death**

*Rev. 20:7-15*

**The Eternal Life of Life**

*Rev. 21:1-22:5*

**Epilogue: What Is All This For?**

*Rev. 22:6-21*

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## **Assignment 1: For October 21**

Every series opens with a huge reading assignment. Don't worry; this only happens the first week. If you don't finish your "big picture" reading this week, try to complete it when you can.

I. **Read all of Revelation.** This will help you see where every week's reading assignment fits into the overall letter. Don't understand a whole lot? Don't worry.

II. Now **read closely Rev. 2-3.** These are the chapters we'll discuss next week. Don't know who the Nicolaitans are (2:6)? That's okay, Bible scholars don't either. Don't be intimidated by the stuff you don't know. You might find a study Bible or a commentary helpful, but don't let it distract you from reading the Bible itself.

### 1. **Compare:**

- (a) The way Jesus is described to each church;
- (b) Good things (if any) the speaker acknowledges about the church;
- (c) Bad things (if any) the speaker has against the church;
- (d) Warnings and encouragements for the church;
- (e) The promise Jesus has for "the one who conquers."

(You may want to make yourself a chart. Cheaters will find such a chart in Brown, Raymond E., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 783-784, which I'll bring next week.)

2. What patterns do you see here? How does the description of Jesus in each section ties into the needs of that church?

3. Where do these words encourage and/or discipline you?

4. "To the angel of Christian Assembly in Eagle Rock, write...." **Write** such a letter to Christian Assembly (or your own church), imitating Rev. 2-3.

5. What does "conquering" look like in Revelation? How does Revelation tell you what conquering looks like in our own life?

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**Assignment 2: For October 28**

I. If you haven't finished reading Revelation, keep it up!

II. For background on this week's reading, **read Isaiah 1:1-3 and Ezekiel 1.**

III. Now **read closely Rev. 4.** How does John's vision resemble or even draw upon these Old Testament visions of heaven?

This image of worship in heaven directly follows the letters to the seven churches. How would it encourage you if you were one of John's original readers? How does imagining heaven's worship service, and its open door, affect your life today?

The songs we sing on Saturdays and Sundays claim that our worship together is *a part of* that heavenly worship. How does knowing this affect your image of church?

IV. **Read Rev. 5.** For background on this scene, refer to the rest of Isaiah 1 and Ezekiel 2-3.

What a surprise: The conquering lion of Judah is the slain lamb of Nazareth! How has Jesus' ministry altered the scene presented in Isaiah 1 and Ezekiel 2-3? How does this scene change your perception of Judgment Day?

How does Jesus' conquering help you understand the kind of "conquering" being spoken of in chapters 2-3 — that is, *our* kind of conquering? (For more Old Testament background on the suffering lamb, see Isaiah 53.)

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**Assignment 4: For November 2**

**November 2 is a Monday! Don't come on Wednesday!**

This week's reading is long: Rev. 6:1-9:21. We'll take it in steps.

1. **Read Rev. 6** (but with the lights on). Remember, it's *Jesus* who makes these things happen!

A. How does *your* relationship with Jesus Christ change how you read this chapter? How do you think the suffering Christians in John's day would have read it?

B. How does this chapter change your relationship with Jesus Christ? How might it have changed John's contemporary readers?

2. **Read Rev. 7.** What is the message here for Christians who suffer for the sake of Christ? What is the message for Christians not called to suffer at this time (say, like you and me)?

3. **Read Rev. 8-9.** Remind you of anything? (Hint: Think Charleton Heston.) What do the plagues of Revelation have in common with the plagues of Exodus 7:14 and following? So are these disasters bad news, or good?

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## **Assignment 5: For November 11**

This week's reading comes in three parts: Rev. 10:1-11:14, Rev. 11:15-19, and Rev. 12. The most important reading is also the shortest.

1. **Read Rev. 10:1-11:14.** For background on edible scrolls, read Ezekiel 2-3. And good luck figuring out who the "two witnesses" are.

In chapter 10, John is being given Ezekiel's job description. (Not too shabby!) Assuming that our prophesying is supposed to look like John's, then should *we* see *ourselves* as prophets like Ezekiel and John? What would this look like in our lives at church and outside of church?

2. **Read Rev. 11:15-19.** Structurally, this is exactly in the middle of the book. In a way, it sums it all up: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." "You have taken your great power and reigned."

Looking in the text, what are the *signs* John has been seeing that God reigns? And what are the *effects* of God's reign? How does John's picture of the Kingdom of God differ from *your* previous picture of the Kingdom of God?

3. **Read Rev. 12.** Here are the first several signs that follow Revelation's midpoint. You know I'm going to ask this question in class, so you may as well be ready: Are they past, present, or future?

Where are we (modern-day Christians) in these scenes?

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**Assignment 6: For November 18**

Lots more reading this week: chapters 13-16. Let's concentrate on 13:1-14:13 (the beasts), since we've already "done" plagues.

1. **Read Rev. 13.** Past or future? Some think the first beast here is the Roman Emperor Nero; others think it's a future world leader of some kind. Other early contenders have included other Roman emperors, and later candidates Hitler, Stalin, Gorbachev, Reagan, Saddam Hussein.... Well, you get the picture. Whoever people love to hate.

But the question remains: Is Rev. 13 speaking about the past (like chapter 12 seems to be) or the future?

More importantly, how does either option affect your life? (Hint: see 13:9-10.) How will you live differently believing that the beast is a past world leader, now dead and gone? Or that the beast is a future leader yet to come?

2. **Read Rev. 14:1-13.** (What does "Babylon" represent?)

Where does John think this passage is supposed to change our lives? (Hint: 14:12-13.)

3. **Read John 14:14-16:21.** For a little background, look at Daniel 7.

Rather than asking detailed questions about these passages too, I'd like you to take a step back and reflect on the class so far. We only have a few weeks left. How have you started reading the Bible differently? Has it helped make your use of Scripture a more (or less) constructive part of your Christian life? Has it enriched (or hurt) the way you worship?

Importantly: Has it raised issues that need to be resolved (for instance, the Bible's authority or truthfulness, God's justice and love, your hope for the future)? Please bring them up in class or

after class! Reading Revelation is meant to be a blessing (Rev. 1:3) — let's make sure it really is!

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**Assignment 7: For December 2**

Assignment #1: Don't come the day before Thanksgiving! Gobble gobble!

Assignment #2: For the week after Thanksgiving, our assignment is to read about the least patriotic verses in all Holy Scripture: **Rev. 17-18**. (Fitting, isn't it?)

1. Who is the harlot? (Hint: Rev. 17:18, 18:2. But even here John is speaking figuratively.)

2. What does Babylon represent? Think about your ancient Jewish history (Hint: Check out Stephen's speech in Acts 7:43, which is quoting Amos 5:25-27, and Jeremiah 50-51.). What might "Babylon" have referred to in the first-century Mediterranean world?

3. Here it comes: Is Rev. 17-18 past, present, future, or some combination?

4. Regardless of your answer, how do Rev. 17-18 apply to our world today?

5. Among those who interpret Rev. 17-18 as referring to some political power already here or soon to exist, the popular contenders have been the Soviet Union, the European Community, Iraq (this is at least faithful to the literal meaning of "Babylon"!), and so on. In other words, America's enemies and rivals. I want you seriously to consider the possibility that in America, the best way to read Rev. 17-18 is to consider *America* the harlot.

A. How is this an appropriate way to read the chapters?

B. How is it inappropriate (that is, how does the USA not fit the description here)?

C. How does it change the way you read these two chapters?

D. How does it change the way we live as Christians in the richest, most powerful country in the

history of the world?

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## **Assignment 8: For December 9**

1. For background on Rev. 19-20, read Ezekiel 38-39.

1. Read Rev. 19. Sounds a little different on paper than it does when we sing it in the sanctuary, doesn't it? Note the differences between the wailing on earth and the rejoicing in heaven over Babylon's demise.

This is a very different view of salvation () and of our Savior () than the ones we usually see in Scripture. How is it compatible or incompatible with the usual biblical images of Jesus and of his work?

2. Read Rev. 20:1-6, on the Millennium. You should be aware that while most American evangelicals take the Millennium literally, most Christians and most Christian traditions do not. For the sake of consistency, you should probably take Rev. 20:1-6 as literally or as figuratively as you have taken the rest of Revelation's visions.

If the Millennium is to be taken literally, then how does it fit in with the rest of Revelation? If it is not, then what does it represent? We'll all value your opinions when we discuss this next week!

3. Read Rev. 20:7-15, on the final victory over evil and the last judgment. (I've moved this up to Dec. 9 from Dec. 16.)

For background on "Gog and Magog," see Ezekiel 38-39. Note Rev.'s reversal of Ezekiel's sequence! Also, Rev. 20:9 quotes 2 Kings 1:10-12. And the whole scene is like that in Daniel 7.

There are many different images of the last judgment in both the Old and New Testaments. How do these particular images change *your* images of the last judgment?

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**Assignment 9: For December 16**

1. Read Rev. 21:1-22:5. Finally, the happy ending! You've earned it!

A new heavens, a new earth, a new Jerusalem. "Behold, I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:5). Past or future? (Just kidding.)

Here's your final exam: Assuming you have a Bible that gives you Old Testament references to the images here (for instance, telling you that Rev. 21:4 quotes Isaiah 25:8), look up the references, read the contexts — not just the verse named, but several verses on both sides of it — and ask yourself how the Old Testament images are working in John's vision of the very end. In other words, practice looking up the references on your own.

Note the big images: The bride, the holy city, the garden, the temple. What is their point?

What place does *human* glory have in the presence of God's glory? (Hint: 21:24-26.)

2. Read Rev. 22:6-21. What are the indications here that John thinks or knows he is writing Holy Scripture?

How do these passages help you see the purpose of Revelation, both for the seven churches and for us? What role does this book play in God's plan?

Now reflect: How has this book been changing your faith and your Christian life?