

**PROVIDENCE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**  
**NT5311N Revelation: New Testament Apocalyptic**  
**3 credit hours**  
**Instructor: Ed Neufeld, PhD**

## **SYLLABUS**

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### **A. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

John the Seer directed this Revelation to First-century Christians who found themselves on the margins of society, often despised, and either attacked or about to be attacked. The church now politely ignores Revelation, or ridicules and rejects it, or fixates on its predictions. It rarely figures in the day-to-day experience of most Christians, yet that was precisely its original intention. This course will explore the original setting and audience of this writing, and how it was written to guide their faith and obedience. We will also explore how it might guide contemporary faith and experience.

This course is designed as an independent study, based on audio lectures with power point outlines, with additional reading and assignments.

Prerequisite: BI5102 Reading the Church's Bible

### **B. COURSE OBJECTIVES**

The following course objectives flow out of various learning opportunities available to students, including assigned readings, audio lectures, and individual student research. As with all courses, students play an integral role in learning outcomes, which are commensurate with student initiative and effort. As a collective effort, this course aims:

- To clarify the genre of Revelation: what is the nature of apocalyptic literature generally; and how did it function among ancient readers of approximately 200 B.C.E. – 200 C.E?
- To reconstruct the historical setting in which John wrote his letters to the seven churches: why this style of writing? Why was this appropriate for the communities addressed?
- To introduce Revelation studies, in order to argue that Revelation is a spiritually rich text that should not be feared. It is a guiding and encouraging text for all Christians at all times, and an inviting text for others.

### C. COURSE TEXTS

Kraybill, Nelson. *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010.

Kraybill writes from an Anabaptist pacifist tradition. There are a few conclusions presented in this book that I think go beyond what John the writer had in mind. But overall this book admirably demonstrates how to read Revelation so that it shapes the worship and allegiance of Christ followers in the third millennium. It is his posture toward Revelation that we need to grasp.

Wilcock, Michael. *The Message of Revelation: I Saw Heaven Opened*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1975.

Wilcock's book is somewhat dated by now, but it is a classic of simplicity and method. One, it is readable; and two, it presents a perceptive approach to understanding and interpreting Revelation. His approach is not novel in itself, for the most part. But he lays it out with unusual clarity. Wilcock's value is his approach to Revelation, which I find unsurpassed, and his accessible style of writing.

### D. RECOMMENDED TEXT

Beale, G. K. *The Book of Revelation*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Eerdmans, 1999.

This fine is commentary is long and detailed. Beale himself says that his approach is particularly similar to that of Wilcox. Its strengths include Beale's attention to the OT origin of John's imagery and themes, his perception of the purpose of Revelation, and his attention to how Revelation might shape the lives of contemporary readers. Non-Greek readers should not be put off by this being a commentary on the Greek text, because the Greek is always translated.

### E. COURSE AUDIO LECTURE OUTLINE

- Unit 1            Revelation 1 -- Prologue and Opening Vision
- Unit 2            Rev 2-3 -- Messages to the Seven Churches
- Unit 3            Rev 4-5 -- Throne Room Vision
- Unit 4            Rev 6-7 -- Seven Seals
- Unit 5            Rev 8:1 - 11:18 -- Seven Trumpets
- Unit 6            Rev 11:19 - 14:5 -- The Deeper Conflict

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| Unit 7  | Rev 14:6 - 16:21 -- Deeper Conflict Ends; Bowl Judgments |
| Unit 8  | Rev 17 -- 'Symbols', the Harlot, and the Beast           |
| Unit 9  | Rev 18:1 - 20:6 -- The Harlot and the Beast (Conclusion) |
| Unit 10 | Rev 20:7 - 22 -- New Heaven and Earth; Epilogue          |

## F. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### General Guidelines

Students should submit documents either on the itslearning web site, or electronically as an email attachment. Paper is also accepted. Electronic submissions should be formatted as hard copy would be, that is, with proper title page, #12 Times New Roman font, double-spaced unless otherwise noted, page numbers, works cited, and so on.

Ed Neufeld can be reached by email via his faculty page on the Providence web site. Assignments as electronic files can be attached to emails sent this way.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty – the following paragraph is from the PTS Academic Catalogue, section 2.4.14: “The Seminary operates on an honor system. The faculty assumes that all course work, both oral and written, is the product of the student’s own work. Cheating and plagiarism in any form are prohibited. Students must not use other people’s ideas or words with out acknowledgment, copy other people’s work as their own, or falsify the results of study. Academic dishonesty and plagiarism are viewed as grave offenses. They may result in the student failing the course, and can be grounds for dismissal from the Seminary at the sole discretion of the Seminary. Dishonest use of ideas or sources is an ethical issue that reflects on readiness for ministry. Work submitted to one class should not be used in a second class without consultation with the faculty. For a fuller discussion, see “Academic Dishonesty” in the Student Handbook.”

### Assignments

1. Reading Revelation. Read Revelation completely through six times in the translation of your choice. As much as possible read it through in one sitting, or at least all in one day. Do not read it through more than once in a single day, and not more than twice a week. I *suggest* that you spread these readings out through the course, doing the first one quite early, and the last after all the other assignments are done. After each reading, type a one-two page response to your reading. Write out a reflective impression you gained from that reading. Your responses should consider repeated themes, or overall impressions. Pay attention to the atmosphere of the whole book. What effect does Revelation have on you? Why do you think that is so? For a first century persecuted believer, what is the big picture? Date each response. Submit all six responses as one document. 20%

2. Lecture Responses. Type a one to two page response to each audio lecture. Do not summarize the lecture. Pick a few points made in the audio lecture that caught your attention. Describe them and explain why this attracted your interest. These responses may express approval, disapproval, disbelief, or surprise. Submit all ten in one document. 20%
3. Apocalyptic Reading. Read Leon Morris's *Apocalyptic* (Eerdmans, 1972; 2nd ed IVP, 1973). This small book has about 125 pages of text, and is a fine introduction to apocalyptic. The entire book is available online as a pdf file, and can be downloaded free of charge. E. Neufeld can send it as an attachment if it is no longer available. *Apocalyptic* is divided into 25-30 short sections, beginning with the introduction. Write an eight to ten page summary of Morris's *Apocalyptic*, organized and labelled as one or two paragraphs summarizing each of Morris's sections. In your conclusion evaluate the usefulness of the book, and note what parts of the reading were least and most helpful to you. 10% of course grade.
4. Wilcock Summaries. Read the following ten sections of Wilcock, and write a one-page summary on each of the ten sections, describing the main points and including a bit of evaluation: Introduction (pp19-25), the relevance of the book (27-31), the repeat of patterns (37-39), the meaning of numbers (59-64), the sequence of events (85-89), the analysis of the drama (110-15), the unity of the drama (139-41), the identifying of symbols (151-57), the millennium (175-82), and the book we could do without (220-22). Submit as one paper, which should have an introductory and concluding paragraph. 15%
5. Kraybill Review. Read Kraybill's *Apocalypse and Allegiance*, and write a six-page review. The first four pages or so should carefully summarize the book. Then cover two more matters: in one page indicate the main purpose or point of the book: what gap does he intend to fill, or what view "out there" does he hope to correct? Read the whole book with this question at the back of your mind. Lastly, evaluate the book. What do you think are its strengths and weaknesses? 15%
6. Research Paper / Preparation Studies. Choose one of the two following options, *not both, only one* of them. Either write a *research paper*, or write eight one-page *preparation studies*. 20%

*Research Paper Option*. Select a text from Revelation, read the text carefully, research enough to find out what commentators agree on in your text and what the problems are. It is a good idea to check your text selection with the instructor. This is a good paper in which to explore some debated aspect or theme of Revelation, or a section you have grappled with for some reason. Explain your text as you understand it. It is appropriate to suggest an application of your text to contemporary life, but not before the last paragraph or two. Write eight to ten pages of text. You may use either the footnotes / endnotes bibliographic style of citation, or the parenthetical-reference list style of citation. Do not take more than one page to get to your text or issue. Imagine that you are writing to a fellow student, one who is taking the course with you, but knows little about the matter you are researching.

*Preparation Studies Option*. Imagine that you will lead a group of people in a study of the book of Revelation. They are reading the whole book of Revelation, but do not understand it at all.

For eight evenings you will explain to them a different section of Revelation each evening. This assignment is designed to prepare you to lead this.

Select eight texts from Revelation between three and fifteen verses long. Write one page, definitely not more than one page, on each of your eight texts. Each page will have the following four elements: (1) A title for that study at the top of the page, including the text references, i.e. Rev. 1:1-7. (2) A paragraph describing the text you have chosen. Observe the obvious - is your text a conversation? A picture? A conflict? An invitation? What happens? Who are the key characters? What is the tone? And so on. Pay close attention to what your text actually says. Don't interpret, just observe. (3) A second paragraph describing how your text would have served the original first century readers. How would your text have helped John's persecuted churches, to guide or warn or encourage them? (4) A third paragraph in which you show how your text might guide Christian life and loyalty and worship in the present time. That is, how would you apply the text?

These preparation studies can be either single-spaced or double-spaced. You do not need to research this, although you may. A sample preparation study is included at the end of this syllabus.

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### Sample Preparation/Background Study

#### Text – Mark 12:28-34: Jesus gives the Two Great Commands

One sentence summary: Jesus taught that not one command but two commands are over all the others: love God without reservation, and love people as ourselves.

Observations: This paragraph records a conversation between Jesus and a law teacher. Before this paragraph, different Jewish leaders in the Jerusalem temple (11:27) asked Jesus questions to trick him, or get him in trouble. At first it seems this will be the same, but it is not. The law teacher asked a short question: which is the most important commandment? Jesus answered the man's question, saying that the most important command is to love God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength.

But the question with its answer apparently seemed incomplete to Jesus. He added another command "like it," to love one's neighbour as one's self. Jesus did not let the great command stand alone. The law teacher agreed completely with the two command summary, and then he restated what Jesus had said, adding to what Jesus had said, but he does not seem to change anything important. Mark records the whole answer, so it must be important that the two commands each get stated twice. The section ends with Jesus saying that the man was not far from the kingdom, and Mark's comment that no one dared ask Jesus questions after this.

Audience: The audience in the Temple were all Jews. I assume that "which command is the most important" was something Jews debated. The disciples and the Jews would have heard which part of Moses' Law was most important. I think they would have been surprised that the greatest command was really two commands, not just one. I expect they would also have been surprised that two "love" commands were the center of Moses' law.

Mark's Gospel was probably written to Gentiles, and Gentile believers would get something different from this. They were not asking which of Moses' commands were most important. They wanted to know what Jesus thought was most important. From this section, Gentile readers would learn what Jesus thought was most important, and they would also learn that by loving God and loving people they were obeying the most important parts of Moses' law.

My Church: Preachers call believers to do many different things. There are many voices out there, too many. It is good to hear what is the most important. These two commands of Jesus tell all believers what is most important. We all know that loving God is important, but we hear all kinds of ways to do that. The most important way to love God is to love one's neighbour. How we treat the person next to us is the center of loving God with all we have. But don't get rid of the first command, which is to love God with all we have. These two summarize what Moses' Law commanded, and they also summarize what Jesus commanded. These two are the center. It is always safe to come back to these two, and hold them up. These two are the ruling pair.