

**Heeding Revelation's Warning:
A Re-orientation to a Much-Misunderstood Book**

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**Presentation One
Re-thinking Revelation: Literary and Lived Contexts**

1. Debunking Popular Myths about Revelation

Myth #1: Revelation is all about *us*.

Remedy: Reading Revelation as a *letter*

As a pastoral letter, Revelation addresses that which is of concern to seven specific congregations that have grown up within the Roman province of Asia Minor in the second half of the first century

Myth #2: Revelation is all about *our future*.

Remedy: Reading Revelation as *prophetic word* (as distinct from *prediction*)

As a prophetic word, Revelation announces God's perspective on the character and challenges of those congregations, confirming loyalty to Christ and his covenant where such loyalty appears, rebuking unfaithfulness to the covenant where it appears, and calling for repentance.

Myth #3: Revelation is written in a mysterious code.

Remedy: Reading Revelation as *apocalypse* – an *unveiling* of the readers' situation.

As an apocalypse, Revelation sets before the audience the "bigger picture," both in terms of space and time, that illumines and interprets what the Christians see happening around them, helping them identify the "real" challenges facing them in their situation, orienting them to respond to those challenges in a manner consonant with that "bigger picture."

2. Roman Asia Minor at a Glance

a. A polytheistic, highly religious population

b. A flourishing economy with many points of entry

- c. Christians as the “atheists” and “subversive element”
- d. The drive towards security and success
- e. Tensions between “assembly” and “synagogue”
- f. Pressure from neighbors
- g. The lure of wealth

Optional exercise: Read through the book of Revelation with these realities in your mind. Put yourself in the place of a Christian in Ephesus or Pergamum, to the extent possible. (My recent book, A Week in the Life of Ephesus [IVP Academic, 2020] may help significantly with this imaginative exercise.) Surround yourself in your mind with the temples to the traditional gods and to the various emperors, with the neighbors who are happy to include the acknowledgement of these gods at their private and public meals, in their business meetings, and in civic festivals. Surround yourself with the bustling activity of tradesmen and merchants and merchant marines loading their cargoes and growing wealthy from trade. Remember Antipas, whose life was forfeited because of his witness against these things. How does John make you look at your world differently? What questions and issues does John raise in regard to what is going on all around you? What does it mean for eternity to get in bed with Rome and its imperialism now?

Presentation Two

The Gospel of Rome and the Gospel of Jesus Christ: John’s Ideological Context and Contention

A. Divine Emperor, Eternal Rome: The Public Story About Roman Imperialism

- 1. Ancient testimonies
- 2. The rise of Augustus and the Good News of his Rule
 - a. The Augustan Peace
 - b. The New “New Year’s Day” in Roman Asia

- c. The Rise of Imperial Cult
- d. The coveted title of “temple warden” (*neōkoros*)
- e. The emperor as mediator of divine favor
- f. The mortal wound and the beast’s recovery
- g. Imperial cult as a *living* phenomenon

B. The True Center and the Unholy Scam: John’s Biblical Critique of the Public “Gospel”

- 1. Why Roman Imperialism is *Not* “Good News”
- 2. The Larger Story of the One God
- 3. The Emperors, Seen from God’s Perspective
- 4. Roma “Aeterna,” Seen from God’s Perspective

How do our country’s economic practices, political entanglements, and ideologies look when measured up against the Israelite prophets, Jesus’ teachings and example, and John’s critique of his own imperial context?

What values have we – as individual disciples and as collectives of disciples (e.g., “churches”) – internalized, and in what directions are we pulled, that run counter to the call of God to holiness and justice, to allegiance to the global family of faith, to setting the kingdom of God first?

Presentation Three:

Revelation's Strategies for Effecting an "Apocalyptic Adjustment"

1. A Revelation of Jesus Christ: Encountering the Glorified Lord as Principal Crisis

2. Hearing What the Spirit Says to the Churches

3. Finding Our Orbit Around the True Center

4. Deconstructing Global Webs of Deception and Domination

5. Constructing Spoken and Lived Witness to the Reign of God

(1) What response in the midst of the immediate situation and in the face of the immediate needs and challenges will best position us to survive the ultimate challenge of God's just judgment of all who live and have lived?

(2) What is the Glorified Christ's diagnosis of the pressing challenges to, and potential opportunities for, faithful response in the midst of our setting?

(3) What practices would reflect our proper acknowledgement of the centrality of God and God's Christ in the cosmos and of their just claims upon our lives?

(4) How is the voice of God – in Scripture, in prayer, in prophetic discernment and holy conversation – calling us to "come out" of unholy entanglements and to spin new patterns of living together and on behalf of the world that will constitute the "fine linen" in which Christ's Bride will adorn herself?

Presentation Four:

The God Whom John Proclaims: Revelation as Theology

1. The God who is alone worthy of worship
2. The God who indicts domination systems
3. The God of the Exodus
4. The God who vindicates God's faithful ones
5. The God who exercises sovereign rule over the cosmos
6. The God who promises shalom in God's presence
7. The God whose patience has an end

For Further Reading

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