

# Syllabus for THE BOOK OF REVELATION NTL786

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## I. Course Description and Objectives

*Description:* This course is an exploration of the major passages and theology of the book of Revelation and the history of its use in the Church. More specifically, it will focus on ways of approaching this text, the historical, social and literary background against which it is to be understood, the theology it expresses, and the consequences for the Church's worship and ministry in light of this theology. Specific attention will also be given to the contemporary problems and possibilities it generates for the pastor in the North American Church (*Prerequisite: BIB550 or the equivalent*).

*Objectives:* Upon successful completion of the course you will have:

1. Demonstrated a basic grasp of the content and theology of the book of Revelation.
2. Demonstrated a rudimentary understanding of the social, political, rhetorical, and inter-textual/canonical backgrounds against which it might be best understood.
3. Demonstrated familiarity with the overall contour of Revelation's interpretation in the history of the Church, including some of its popular interpretations today.
4. Demonstrated an ability to articulate various consequences that taking Revelation seriously has for the identity, worship, and ministry of the Church.

## II. Required Textbooks/Reading

Bauckham, Richard. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Boring, Eugene. *Revelation in Interpretation*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989.

Forbes, Bruce David and Jeanne Halgren Kilde. *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004.

Koester, Craig. *Revelation and the End of All Things*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

LaHaye, Tim and Jerry B. Jenkins. *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*. Tyndale House, 1995. **(Not available in NTS bookstore. You should obtain the cheapest [or even a free] copy you can online or elsewhere.)**

Lindsey, Hal. *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970. **(Not available in NTS bookstore. You should obtain the cheapest [or even a free] copy you can online or elsewhere.)**

Longenecker, Bruce. *The Lost Letters of Pergamum*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.

Thomas, Christopher. Prepublication version of a portion of *Revelation* in the Two Horizons Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Forthcoming). Provided free of charge in Blackboard.

### III. Helpful Websites

<http://www.ntgateway.com/rev.htm>

This is the Revelation section of the NT Gateway site. It is one of the best sites on the Web for generally reliable information on Revelation and the rest of NT studies.

<http://www.luthersem.edu/ckoester/Revelation/Main.htm>

A website by Craig Koester. Clearly presented information and nicely illustrated pictures and images relevant to interpreting Revelation. A nice tour of the seven cities of Revelation 2-3.

[http://www.religioustolerance.org/end\\_wrlld.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/end_wrlld.htm)

A website that keeps track of recent wrong predictions related to popular predictions of the end of the world which are, at times, based on particular interpretations of the book of Revelation.

### IV. Course Requirements

**1. Reading Revelation.** You must read Revelation through (preferably in one sitting but **in no more than two** sittings) at least eight times prior to, or during, this course. **The first two readings are due by 11:00 PM on Friday, July 20 and the next one is due by 11:00 PM on Friday, July 27.** (Between your first and second readings, you should complete the Longenecker assignment below.) See the other scheduled readings on the Schedule of Topics and Assignments below. (As an aid to help focus your reading, I've included a diagram of the structure of Revelation that I'll use in class under Course Documents in Blackboard. Use it if it is helpful to you but don't bother with it if it isn't helpful. It will make more sense to you after the class than before.) Each time a reading is due, you must post a statement in the Reading Revelation Forum in Blackboard by the due date/time saying that you have completed that reading. Each reading counts 10 points toward your final grade, making all eight readings count 80 points toward your final grade. **You cannot "make up" any of this reading. You can only get credit for what you actually read by the due date listed on the Schedule of Topics and Assignments below. Since these are basically "give away" points, this is an all or nothing assignment. You do not get credit for partial reading.**

**\*\*Note Carefully\*\*** **To save time**, as you read Revelation, you should keep a running master list of *critical* questions and insights of comprehensive or theological significance that arise from a careful reading of the text. These questions and comments should not only note the scriptural context of the concern, but what matter of importance is at stake. These questions will later become a part of requirement 5 described below.

- 2. Longenecker Reflection Paper:** Read Revelation carefully (this will count as your **first** reading of Revelation). Next, read Bruce Longenecker’s novel, *The Lost Letters of Pergamum*. Then read Revelation carefully again (this will count as your **second** reading of Revelation). Assume for now that Longenecker’s historical novel captures the socio-historical, cultural, and especially the **political** feel of the first century setting in which Revelation would have been first heard. Write a 750-1,000 word (3-4 pages) paper, typed, and double-spaced, answering the following question: How does understanding Revelation in light of this background change the way I read it? Give **specific examples from the text of Revelation** which sound different to you after reading Longenecker and **explain why they now sound different**. You may earn up to 100 points for this essay. To submit your paper, go into the Assignments Tab in Blackboard to the Longenecker Paper assignment. Click on View/Complete Assignment at the bottom of the description. Then upload your assignment **as an MS Word** file by 11:00 PM, Friday, July 27.
- 3. Insights from Bauckham, Boring, and Koester.** Read the following pages in these three books carefully: Bauckham, 1-22; Boring, 1-62; Koester, 1-40. Briefly describe 25 insights you gained from these books that you consider to be significant. Make sure you draw at least 4 insights from Bauckham, 10 from Boring, and 6 from Koester (= 20) **noting the author and page number from which you are drawing the insight**. The remaining 5 insights may come from any of these books. You may earn up to 50 points for this assignment. To submit this assignment, go into the Assignments Tab in Blackboard to the Insights assignment. Click on View/Complete Assignment at the bottom of the description. Then upload your assignment as an MS Word file. Submit this assignment by 11:00 PM CST on Friday, August 17. My assistant, Laura Lyons, will be grading this assignment. An example of an “A” quality “Insights” assignment from another course will be available for you in Blackboard under the Course Documents tab in the Guidelines Folder. It will be called “Model Insights Assignment.” Please keep in mind that this example will be over the entirety of one book, not portions of three books.
- 4. Fishbowl Discussions.** You will actively participate in various “fishbowl” discussions. The “fishbowl” will consist of a class discussion/critical analysis of the book or essays assigned for that day. **I will not simply give these points away because you show up in class that day.** You must make regular contributions during this discussion period in a way that demonstrates an understanding of, **and a critical engagement with**, the assigned book or essays.

  - a.** It may help you to take a few notes on the *Late Great Planet Earth (LGPE)* and *Left Behind (LB)*, **particularly with regard to their driving theological agenda and assumptions**. You may earn up to 40 points in the *LGPE* fishbowl which will be held on Wednesday, August 29. You may earn up to 40 points in the *LB* fishbowl which will be held on Monday, September 3. These discussions will typically last 60-90 minutes.
  - b.** You may earn up to 90 points by actively participating in a “fishbowl” discussion of the essays in *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times*. The “fishbowl” will consist of a seminar type (half the class) group discussion/critical analysis of one essay per day on September 4-6. Two essays will be assigned for each of these three days and half the class will discuss one in a fishbowl and the other half will discuss the other essay. You will not

know which essay discussion you will be appointed to until you arrive in class that day. Hence, you should carefully read each essay and take notes on your reading or even bring a summary of the essays to refer to during the discussion. I will attempt to focus the discussion by asking at least two of the following three questions: (1) What is the main thesis/purpose of the essay? (2) What are its ramifications for interpreting particular sections/verses of Revelation? (3) How does the essay help you contextualize the *Left Behind* series and how does it help you better understand how to do Christian formation in such a context? These discussions will typically last 15-30 minutes.

- 5. Critical Reading Responses (CRR) to Revelation, Boring, Koester, Bauckham, and Thomas.** You will prepare two critical reading responses of **1,500-2,500 words** each in which you critically engage a portion of Revelation and the textbook reading associated with it. You will be penalized for having significantly more or less words than the lower and upper limits. For the specific content and due dates of these CRR's, see the Schedule of Topics and Assignments below.

These responses should have three sections: (1) *Critical* questions and insights of comprehensive or theological significance that arise from a careful reading of Revelation itself **prior to** reading the selections from the textbooks. These questions and comments should not only note the scriptural context of the concern, but what matter of importance is at stake. These questions should be an **edited version** of your running master list of *critical* questions and insights that you generated during your prior readings of Revelation. (2) *Critical* questions and observations that your reading of Boring, Koester, Bauckham, and Thomas raises in your mind about the biblical text and/or vice-versa, critical questions and observations that reading the biblical text raises in your mind about your reading of Boring, Koester, Bauckham, and Thomas. (3) A comparative section noting any significant disagreements or inconsistencies between Boring, Koester, Bauckham, and Thomas **as to how they address specific critical issues**. An example of an "A" quality CRR will be available in Blackboard under the Course Documents tab in the Guidelines Folder. It will be called "Model CRR."

To submit your assignments, go into the Assignments Tab in Blackboard to the CRR1 or CRR2 assignment. Click on View/Complete Assignment at the bottom of the description. Then upload your assignment as an MS Word file. Submit your first CRR by no later than 11:00 PM on Friday, September 21 and your second by 11:00 PM on Friday, October 5. You may earn up to 100 points for each CRR making them worth a total of 200 points. My assistant, Laura Lyons, will be grading your CRRs.

- 6. Take-home Essay/Research Paper.** You may choose to either write a take-home essay on a question that will be distributed the last day of class (3,000-5,000 words) or a research paper on some aspect of the interpretation of Revelation (4,500-6,000 words). You may earn up to 400 points for this essay/research paper. To submit your essay/paper, go into the Assignments Tab in Blackboard to the Essay/Paper assignment. Click on View/Complete Assignment at the bottom of the description. Then upload your assignment as an MS Word file. Submit your essay/paper by 11:00 PM on Friday, November 9.

The take-home essay will be a question (or questions) related to the interpretation of Revelation and the ministry implications of the material we've covered in class and in the reading. Hence, to answer it, you will creatively draw on your class notes, all your course reading, and on your own theological reflections in the context of a ministry situation.

Unless you will have access to the NTS library or another equivalent theological library, you should **not** choose to write the research paper. As a research paper, it clearly **requires additional research over and above your class resources**. If you do choose to write the research paper, **I must approve whatever topic you choose by Friday, October 12**. If I haven't approved a research topic for you by that time, I will assume you are writing the take home essay.

As general guidelines for the research paper, follow the instructions given by Joel Green in the document, "Some Comments on Research Papers." It is located in Blackboard under the Course Documents tab in the Guidelines Folder. **I will assume you have read and followed Green's directions when I grade your paper.** Note carefully: You should begin your research paper with a thesis statement that explicitly states the thesis you intend to argue and return to that thesis statement in your conclusion. While the paper should generally follow Turabian style, you may consult the *SBL Handbook of Style* for proper form for footnotes, abbreviations, etc. You may also use the document entitled "Ripples and Luke 24HBT.doc" located in Blackboard under the Course Documents tab in the Guidelines Folder as a general guide as to how this paper should look in terms of footnotes and style. Although you are not limited to them, I have included some possible topics below.

*Possible Topics:*

- 1) Explore in detail a theological theme on the basis of your reading of Revelation (e.g., creation, redemption, Christology, ecclesiology, holiness).
- 2) How do we square the violence of Revelation with the God of the Gospels?
- 3) Give a critical history of interpretation of one of the major symbols in Revelation (e.g., 666, the Beast, the False Prophet, Babylon, the New Jerusalem).
- 4) How does John make use of and reshape an OT theme/image (or themes/images) in Revelation (e.g., Exodus, creation, temple, redemption, messianic war, the eschatological earthquake)?
- 5) Give a summary and critique of the interpretation of key passages in Revelation put forward by one of its major or popular interpreters (e.g., Irenaeus, Augustine, Joseph Mede, John Nelson Darby, Tim LaHaye).
- 6) Does Revelation contain an implicit universalism (i.e., the view that all will ultimately be saved)?
- 7) Is there an implicit "secret rapture" in Revelation?
- 8) Construct a theology of worship based on the book of Revelation.

## V. Summary of Grading Policy

**A Word about Grading:** Evaluation in this kind of course, by its very nature, involves an element of subjectivity. It involves someone who is an expert in the field making a judgment on the kind of

work you produce. That is a part of what you are paying for in this class. The primary factors I take into account in assessing “good solid graduate work,” the sort of work to which I assign a “B” are (1) ability to demonstrate a breadth and depth of understanding of the material engaged; (2) ability to engage this material **in a critical way**; (3) ability to exhibit how the material is related to a larger theological and ecclesial context. If you demonstrate a **consistent** ability to do these things in all your coursework, you can expect to receive a B. If you demonstrate consistent ability to do them **incisively and with excellence**, you can expect to receive an A. If you demonstrate an ability to do these things **often, but not consistently**, you can expect to receive a C. (Hence, I assume that a C means “average,” or “satisfactory” work. It does **not** mean “bad” or “unsatisfactory.”) If you **seldom** demonstrate an ability to do these things, you can expect to receive a D.

The final grade will be computed using the following point scale. There are 1,000 possible points.

80 points	Reading Revelation
100 points	Longenecker Reflection Paper
50 points	Insights
200 points	Critical Reading Reviews
40 points	<i>Late Great Planet Earth</i> Fishbowl
40 points	<i>Left Behind</i> Fishbowl
90 points	<i>Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times</i> Fishbowls
400 points	Final Project

The following point scale will determine letter grades:

A	1,000-900
B	899-800
C	799-700
D	699-600
F	599-0

## Schedule of Topics and Assignments

(Bg = Boring, Bk = Bauckham, K = Koester, T = Thomas, *RRET* = *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times*)

<b>Date</b>	<b>Class Topic</b>	<b>Assignment Due</b>
07/20		Revelation Reading
07/27		1. Revelation Reading 2. Longenecker Paper
08/03		Revelation Reading
08/10		Revelation Reading
08/17		Insights Assignment
08/24		Revelation Reading
08/28	Getting acquainted/Intro to the course/Revelation in History	
08/29	Intro to Apocalyptic Literature/Intro to Revelation/Nature of Symbols/Political and Social Background	Fish Bowl: <i>Late Great Planet Earth</i>
08/30	Revelation 1 and the Messages to the Seven Churches (Rev. 1-3)	1 Revelation Reading
08/31	Key Passages in Revelation (Rev. 4-7)	
09/03	Key Passages in Revelation (Rev. 8-11)	Fish Bowl: <i>Left Behind #1</i>
09/04	Key Passages in Revelation (Rev. 12-14)	Fish Bowl: <i>RRET</i> , Essays 1 & 2
09/05	Key Passages in Revelation (Rev. 15-19:10)	Fish Bowl: <i>RRET</i> , Essays 2 & 3
09/06	Key Passages in Revelation (Rev. 19:11-20:15)	Fish Bowl: <i>RRET</i> , Essays 5 & 6
09/07	Key Passages in Revelation (Rev. 21-22)	
09/21		1. Revelation Reading 2. CRR1: Bg, 63-149; K, 41-113; Bk, 23-108; T, All material available through Revelation 11
10/05		1. Revelation Reading 2. CRR2: Bg, 149-231; K, 115-205; Bk, 109-64; Remaining available material from Thomas
10/12		Research Paper topic must be approved
11/09		Essay/Research Paper