



Getting the Big Picture of the Bible: Revelation

Pastor Michael Wallace
May 5, 2019

Image from Juliet Venter
(<http://www.juliet-icons.co.uk/>)
Revelation 18 & 19

Outline of today's class

- Reminder of the genre
- Passages
- Revisiting *Left Behind*
- Major Theological Themes
- Passages



Defining Apocalypse

Collins and Hellholm define apocalypse as

- “A genre of revelatory literature
- with a narrative framework,
- in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being
- to a human recipient,
- disclosing a transcendent reality
 - which is both temporal,
 - insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation,
 - and spatial
 - insofar as it involves another, supernatural world ...
- intended for a group in crisis
- with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation
- by means of divine authority.”



John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 5 and 41.

Middle Passages

Rev 13:1-10, primordial monsters

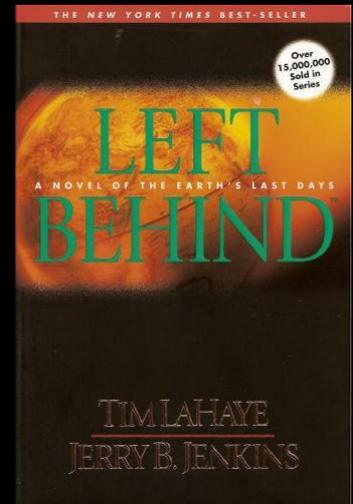
Rev 14:1-8

Rev 15:1-4 & 16:1-12, connections to Exodus



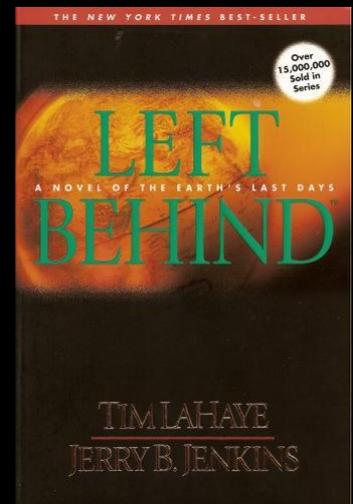
Revisiting *Left Behind*: Problems (Gorman)

- The series is not really fiction but a combination of theology and proleptic documentary, like an advance DVD, because it views biblical prophecy as “history written in advance” (Left Behind, 214).
- It finds aspects of the second coming that are not in the Bible, such as two comings of Jesus, and a rapture in Revelation. Rather, “Jesus will return once.”
- It imposes a foreign, 19th-century theological, interpretive construct onto the ancient biblical texts: dispensationalism.
- It assumes that we are on the brink of the rapture and tribulation, and that is really all that matters.
- It misses the most important movement in the book, which is not temporal but theological; the focus on God as Alpha and Omega (1:8; 21:6; 22:13) means that Revelation “does not move from rapture to millennium but from God to God.”



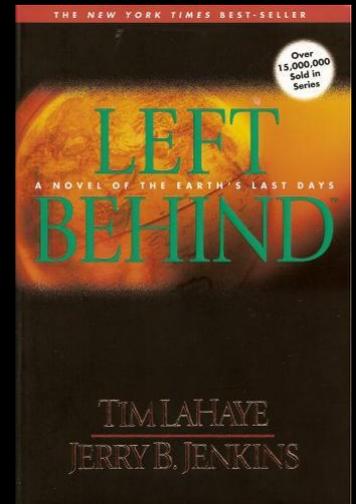
Revisiting *Left Behind*: Problems (Gorman)

- The series misunderstands the NT references to the “end times.” For the NT, the “end times” is the period between the first and second coming of Jesus.
- It is escapist and therefore has no ongoing ethic of life between the times, between the first and second comings. There is no compulsion to love one’s neighbor, practice deeds of mercy, work for peace and justice, etc. Contrast the hope of imminent return and the ethic in 1 Thessalonians, which actually has an ethic for life in the hope of the second coming.
- It is inherently militaristic. Anything resembling pacifism, international cooperation, or disarmament is satanic, and believers are called to participate in a literal war that is guaranteed victory by the return of a conquering Jesus. Christian heroes join this Jesus, carrying and using Uzis and the like.



Revisiting *Left Behind*: Problems (Gorman)

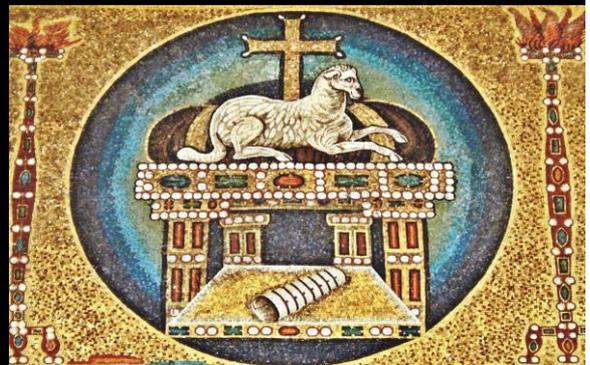
- It is inherently anti-Catholic. The only good, saved Catholics are those who are basically Protestant.
- It fails to see the church as a peaceful alternative to empire rather than its chaplain or its war-making opponent.
- It is uncritically pro-American.
- It privileges the modern state of Israel in an uncritical way.
- It is suspicious of anything to do with the work of the United Nations or international organizations.
- It sees wars in the Middle East as part of God's plan, in effect, therefore, as *desiderata*, or a good.
- It inculcates a survivalist and crusader mentality into the minds of its readers.
- This makes the overall series dangerous spiritually, theologically, and politically. Craig Hill notes that "proponents of the Rapture have mangled the biblical witness almost beyond recognition."



Major Theological Themes (Gorman)

The Throne: The Reign of God and the Lamb.

- God the creator reigns! Jesus the redeemer, the slaughtered Lamb, is Lord!
- The reign of the eternal God, the beginning and the end, is not merely future or past but present, and it is manifested in—of all things—the slaughtered Lamb.
- God is inseparable from the Lamb, and vice versa. Each can be called the Alpha and Omega, and they rule together on one throne.
- This is a cruciform (cross-centered and cross-shaped) understanding of divine power.



Major Theological Themes (Gorman)

The Reality of Evil and of Empire.

- Evil is real.
- Empire is now—not merely future or past but present.
- Empire, by nature, makes seductive blasphemous and immoral claims and engages in corollary practices that bring disorder to both vertical (people-God) and horizontal (people-people) human relations, promising life but delivering death—both physical and spiritual.



Major Theological Themes (Gorman)

The Temptation to Idolatry and Immorality.

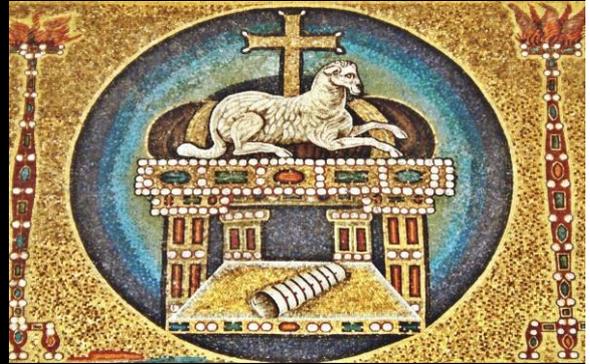
- The Christian church is easily seduced by empire's idolatry and immorality because these claims and practices are often invested with religious meaning and authority; they become a civil religion.
- For that reason, immorality is ultimately idolatry: the idolatry of violence, oppression, greed, lust, and the like.
- Humanity's ultimate inhumanity—treating fellow humans as disposable commodities—is therefore at root an attack on God as creator and redeemer.



Major Theological Themes (Gorman)

The Call to Covenant Faithfulness and Resistance.

- In the midst of empire and civil religion, whatever its forms, the church is called to resistance as the inevitable corollary of covenant faithfulness to God, a call that requires prophetic spiritual discernment and may result in various kinds of suffering.



Major Theological Themes (Gorman)

Worship and an Alternative Vision.

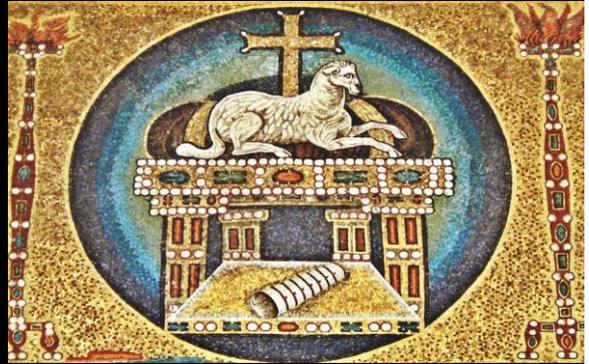
- The spiritual discernment required of the church, in turn, requires an alternative vision of God and of reality that unveils and challenges empire, a vision in need of the Spirit's wisdom to see and apply.
- Revelation provides this vision of "uncivil" worship and vision, centered on the throne of the eternal holy God and the faithful slaughtered Lamb, and on the coming new creation.



Major Theological Themes (Gorman)

Faithful Witness: The Pattern of Christ.

- Christian resistance to empire and idolatry conforms to the pattern of Jesus Christ and of his apostles, saints, prophets (like John), and martyrs: faithful, true, courageous, just, and nonviolent.
- It is not passive but active, consisting of the formation of communities and individuals who pledge allegiance to God alone, who live in nonviolent love toward friends and enemies alike, who leave vengeance to God, and who, by God's Spirit, create mini-cultures of life as alternatives to empire's culture of death. This is a Lamb-shaped or cross-shaped (cruciform) under standing of discipleship and mission.



Major Theological Themes (Gorman)

The Imminent Judgment and Salvation/ New Creation of God.

- God the creator and Christ the redeemer take evil and injustice seriously and are about to come both to judge humanity and to save the faithful and renew the cosmos.
- The will of God is for all to follow the Lamb and participate in the saving life of God-with-us forever.



Ending Passages

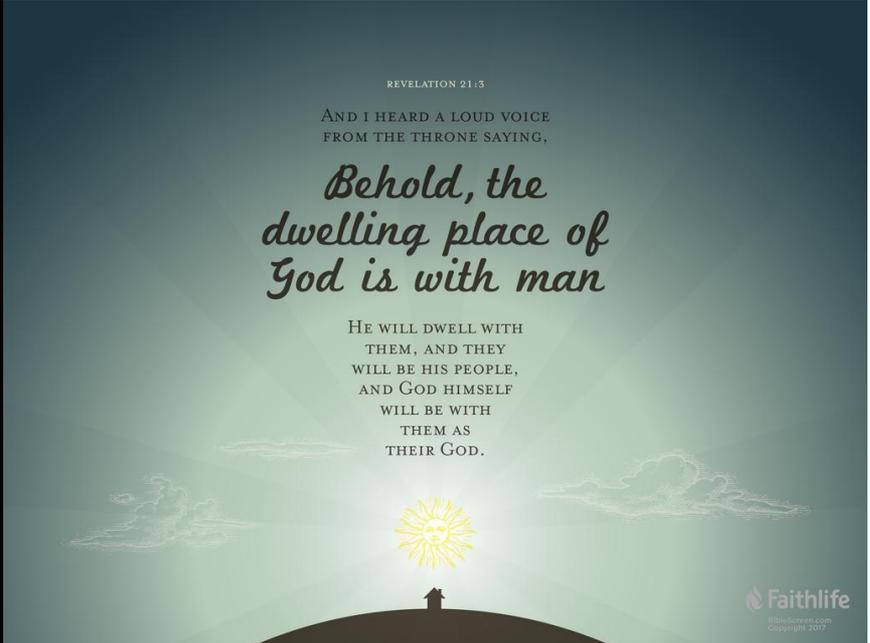
Rev 21—22:1-7

REVELATION 21:3

AND I HEARD A LOUD VOICE
FROM THE THRONE SAYING,

*Behold, the
dwelling place of
God is with man*

HE WILL DWELL WITH
THEM, AND THEY
WILL BE HIS PEOPLE,
AND GOD HIMSELF
WILL BE WITH
THEM AS
THEIR GOD.



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