

# TED BIBLE CONFERENCE WORKSOP

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**READING REVELATION RESPONSIBLY TODAY:  
DISCOVERING THE BIG PICTURE**

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# What is Revelation?



‘REVELATION, *n.* A famous book in which St. John the Divine concealed all that he knew. The revealing is done by the commentators, who know nothing.’

—**AMBROSE BIERCE**

*The Devil's Dictionary*, 347.

# I. Intro: Fear and Suspicion



❖ Perplexing, difficult and dangerous book

‘No other part of the Bible has provided such a happy hunting ground for all sorts of bizarre and dangerous interpretations.’

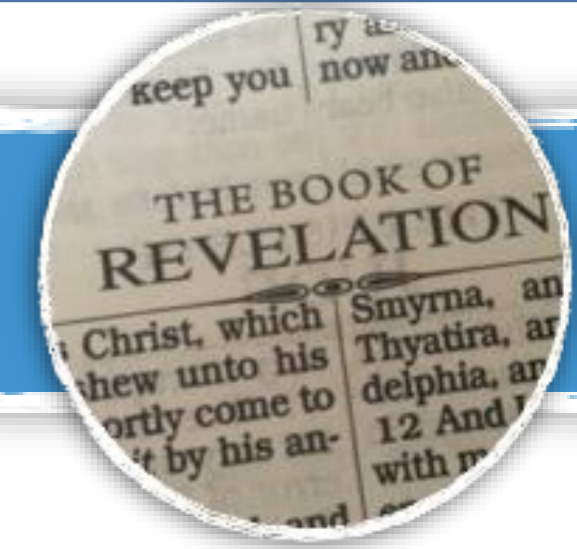
— **EUGENE BORING** (*Revelation*, 4)

‘Few writings in all of literature have been so obsessively read with such generally disastrous results as the Book of Revelation. Its history of interpretation is largely a story of tragic misinterpretation.’

— **LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON** (*The Writings of the NT*, 507)



# I. Intro: Fear and Suspicion



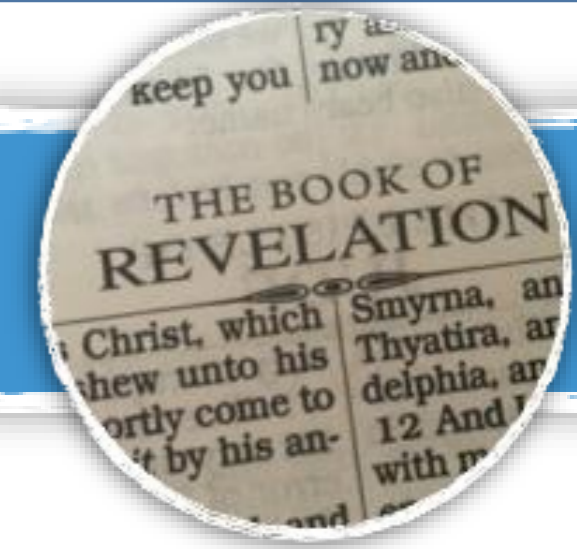
‘Though St. John the Evangelist saw many strange monsters in his vision, he saw no creature so wild as one of his own commentators.’

— G. K. CHESTERTON

*Orthodoxy*, 13



# I. Intro: Fear and Suspicion



Extreme tendencies:

- ❖ Hyper-canonization (escapist irresponsibility)
- ❖ De-canonization (ignoring irresponsibility)

→ A HEALTHY APPROACH is needed:  
maintaining balance between the apocalyptic and healing aspects of the Gospel



Haec est uisio prima apoc  
calypse libri iohannis apostoli.  
apocalypsis ihesu xpi  
in quam dedit illi as  
palam facere seruatur  
que aperiet fieri tunc  
significatur uita  
per angelum suum seruo suo io  
hanni qui testimonium perhibu  
it uerbo dei & testimonium ihu  
xpi qui quicumque uidit. beatus q  
legit & qui audit uerba prophete  
ie huius & seruat ea que in ea  
scripta sunt. tempus enim prope  
est.

# I. Intro: Fear and Suspicion



‘The Revelation was not written without tears; neither without tears will it be understood.’

*(Expl. Notes, on Rev 5:4)*

**JOHN WESLEY**

(1703–1791)





THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF GRASPING  
**THE BIG PICTURE**

# II. The Purpose of Revelation



**LIBRARY OF CELSUS**  
Ephesus

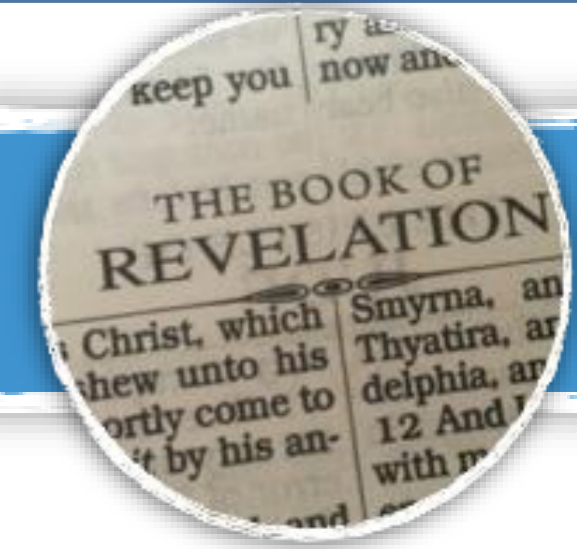
- ❖ The primary recipients
- ❖ The major background issue:  
How to behave wisely in the society?





# THE CHALLENGE OF IMPERIAL CULT

# II. The Purpose of Revelation



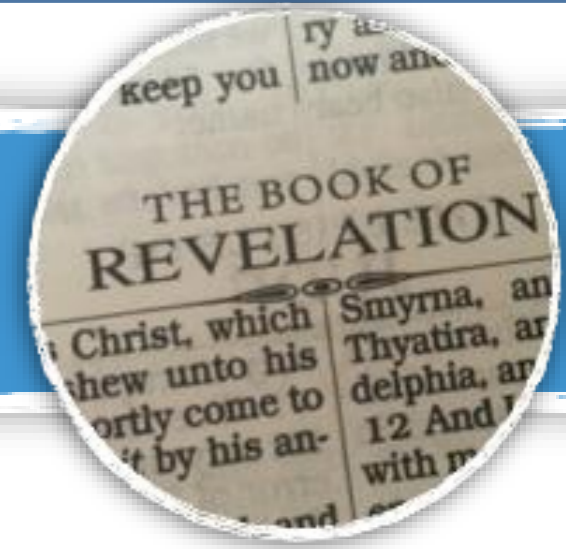
**TEMPLE OF DOMITIAN**  
**Ephesus**

- ❖ The effect of the crisis: divided church
- ❖ The church leader arrested
- ❖ Revelation as a response to the situation
- ❖ The strategy of Revelation: widening the horizon and showing things from heavenly perspective

# Major points

- ❖ There is only one real power centre – there is no place for compromise on this question.
- ❖ God has a clear plan for humanity, which advances towards its goal.
- ❖ Invitation to follow the Lamb.

# III. The Theology of Revelation



## Theological interpretation:

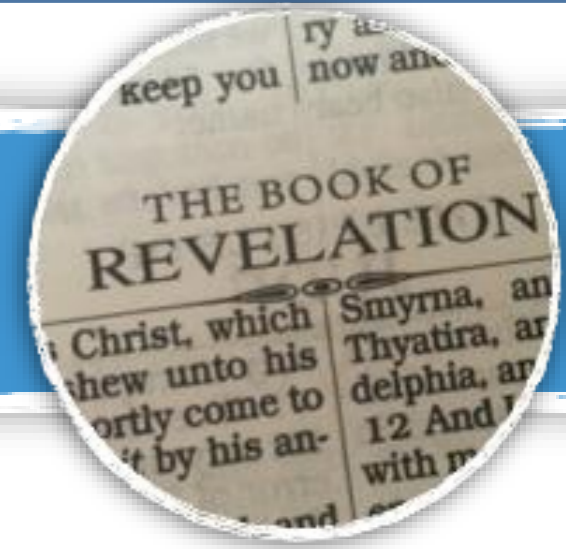
- ❖ Seeks to harvest the results of exegesis and it organizes them into a big picture
- ❖ Traces the development of the theological topics throughout the book and it shows how they are woven into its message

# III. The Theology of Revelation



1. **God and the Lamb on the throne: the only legitimate rulers of the universe**
  - ❖ The key question: 'Who is the legitimate ruler of this world?'
  - ❖ 'Throne' as a key word (mentioned 47x in 17 chapters)
  - ❖ The pivotal vision: chs. 4–5 (Throne-room vision)
  - ❖ Throne conflict

# III. The Theology of Revelation



## 2. The slain Lamb: God's response to the reality of evil

- ❖ Evil often appears in disguised form
- ❖ The Lamb is the central character of Revelation

**STEVENSON:** 'We encounter in this provocative image one who chose to join humanity in suffering, to identify with creation rather than stand above it.' (*The Slaughtered Lamb*, 29)

- ❖ The victory of the Lamb

# III. The Theology of Revelation



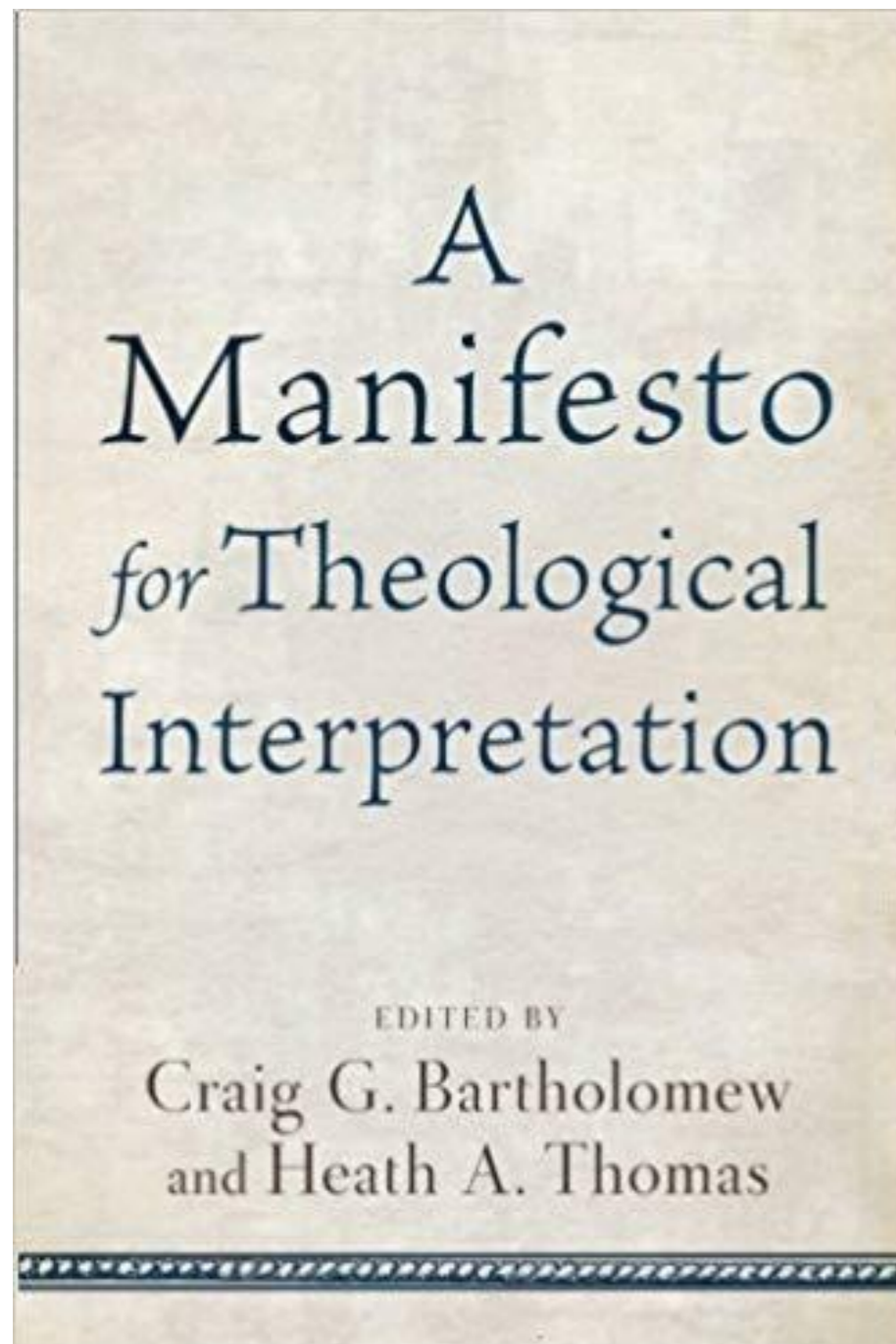
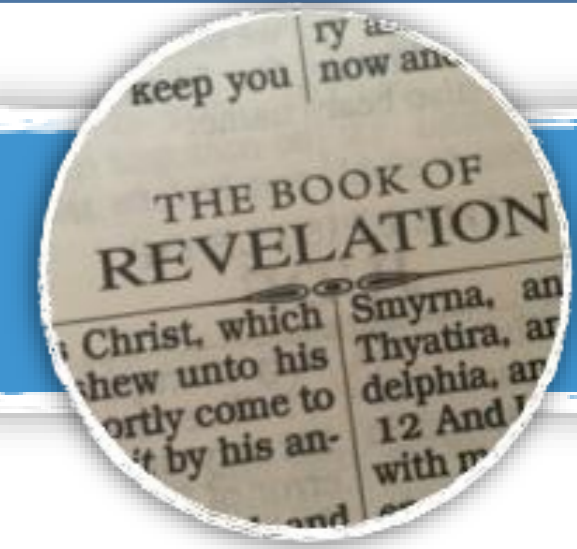
## 3. Moving towards the end: the triumph of God's plan

- ❖ Revelation as a prophecy

- ❖ Why is future revealed?

→ GOAL: to teach us about the Lord of history!

# III. The Theology of Revelation



“As the creation of God, the **world and its history** are invested with a **telos**: the world is created for a purpose. History, we might say, is God’s project. In the terrain of space and time, given as a dwelling place for God’s creatures, God seeks to bring about his purpose of drawing all things into reconciliation with himself (2Cor 5:19).”

— **CRAIG BARTHOLOMEW** (ed.)

*A Manifesto for Theological Interpretation*, 7-8.





**There is a purpose in history!**

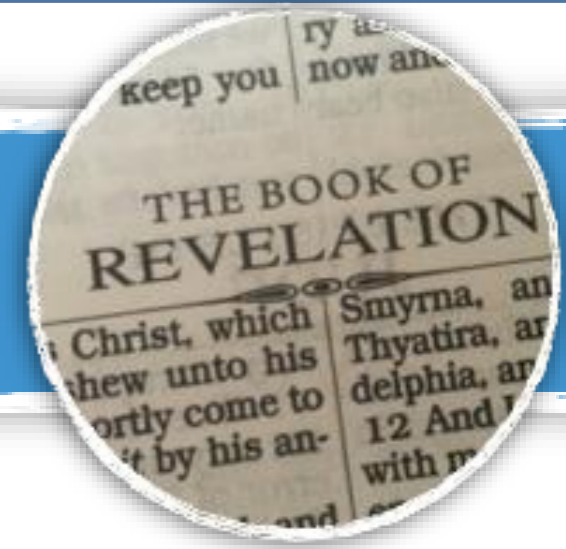
History reveals how God works and how is he engaged with his creation!

# III. The Theology of Revelation



4. **Between the Lamb and the beasts: the place of God's people in the world**
  - ❖ From God's people is required spiritual discernment
  - ❖ An alternative vision of reality
  - ❖ A choice between two cities
  - ❖ The wisdom aspect (14:6)

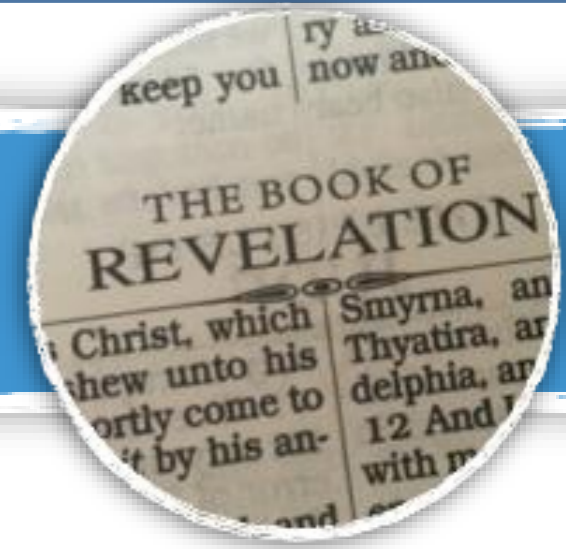
# III. The Theology of Revelation



## 5. **Worship or idolatry: a critical choice**

- ❖ The significance of the motif of worship
- ❖ προσκυνέω in chs. 12–14
- ❖ Worship and false worship (idolatry)
- ❖ Revelation issues a strong call to resist every form of idolatry

# III. The Theology of Revelation



6. **The witnessing community: the call of God's people in the world**
  - ❖ A vital question: 'Who is a faithful witness?'
  - ❖ The model to follow: the Lamb's conquering
  - ❖ The expected response: faithfulness, obedience and perseverance
  - ❖ The missional task of God's people

# III. The Theology of Revelation



7. **The new creation: reaching the goal of the history of redemption**
  - ❖ In Rev 21–22 the story of redemption reaches its goal
  - ❖ Major biblical concepts find fulfilment: new covenant, new temple, new Israel, new Jerusalem and new creation (DUMBRELL)
  - ❖ G. K. BEALE: new creation is the “centre” of NT theology.

# III. The Theology of Revelation



**CHRISTOPHER WRIGHT**  
(1947–)

The Bible is ‘not just a single narrative, like a river with only one channel. It is rather a complex mixture of all kinds of smaller narratives, many of them rather self-contained, with all kinds of other material embedded within them – more like a great delta. But there is clearly a direction, a flow.’

*(Mission of God, 64)*



# Great Controversy?

# IV. Conclusion

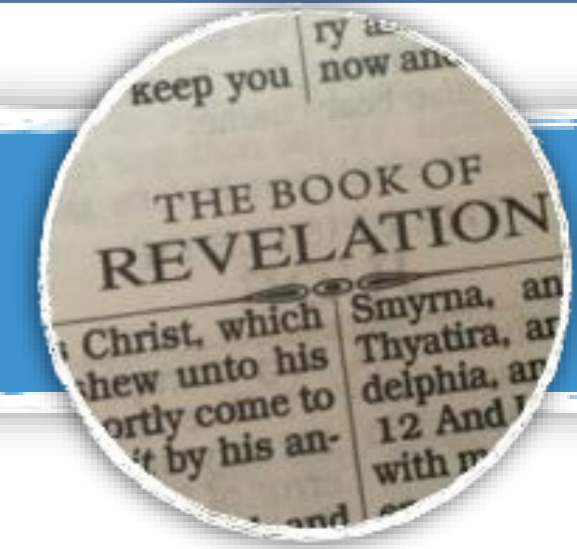


Keep on mind:

- ❖ Revelation is an open book
- ❖ Prophecy is always best understood after its fulfilment
- ❖ Beware of surface parallels
- ❖ Do not get lost in details, but keep on mind the big picture
- ❖ Revelation is not about antichrist, but the living Christ



# IV. Conclusion



The basic thrust:

‘The true and living God summons us from our preoccupation with the world to recognize, in light of his ultimate plan for history what really matters and what really does not.’

— **CRAIG KEENER**

*Revelation, 21.*

**Major  
emphasis**

Revelation teaches us  
how to live wisely in  
this world!