FRESH

OUTLOOK
BIBLE STUDIES

REVELATION:
PROFESSING CHRIST TODAY

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THE PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK

Session 1
Renouncing Evil: The Dragon, Babylon and Monsters

Leader prep:
Watch "Why Did You Write a Book About the Book of Revelation? Dr. Elaine Pagels"; "How to Read the Bible: Apocalyptic Literature"; "The Significance of the City in the Bible (and God's Plan for It)"; "Rob Bell: Jesus, Domitian and The Book of Revelation;" "We Studied the "Day of the Lord" in the Bible (Here's What We Found)"

Listen "The Bible for Normal People – Episode 180: Brian K. Blount – Revelation for Today"

Read "Ancient Rome - Cult of the Emperors"; "7 Tips for Understanding Revelation"

Supplies:
Slideshow with the following images: "Rosie the Riveter," "Democratic Donkey And Republican Elephant," "How to Remember What 'Bear' and 'Bull' Market Mean" "The Bald Eagle," and "Vespasian Seven Hills Coin"
Nametags, pens
Media clips, equipment to play them
Bibles or Bible app
Paper, art supplies

1. Welcome and prayer

slideshow, equipment nametags, pens

Before the gathering, set up the equipment to display the slideshow and media clips.

Welcome everyone to this study of the Book of Revelation. Encourage people to create nametags. Invite participants to name their feelings about the book.

Offer a prayer:
>**Living God, give us the eyes to see your purposes in a world longing for justice and peace. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.**

Present the slideshow (except the image of the Vespasian coin, saving it for step 5 of this session). Invite comments and observations of the images. Discuss:
- What messages do beastly images convey when representing patriotism, politics and economics?
- What do eagles, donkeys, elephants, bulls and bears represent for politically oppressed and poor people? When do these mythical images become monsters in the public imagination?

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2. Revelation as political/wartime propaganda

Talking point: Just as modern governments and political parties use beastly images as propaganda to identify perceived enemies, Revelation uses mythic images to describe the forces threatening the Christian witness.

Show the YouTube video ["Why Did You Write a Book About the Book of Revelation? Dr. Elaine Pagels"](#) (from 2:58 to 9:07). Invite comments and observations about the video. Discuss Pagels's insight that Revelation functions as "wartime literature."

Talking point: Ancient Rome was rife with propaganda using images of victorious emperors and gods to symbolize the Pax Romana, a political-economic system of control and dominance. Revelation portrays Rome as a false empire using monstrous images from the Old Testament. For first-century Christians, rejecting Satan and the power of evil meant renouncing Rome and its emperor.

3. Image of Satan: The great red dragon

Show the YouTube video ["We Studied Dragons in the Bible (Here's What We Found)"](#) (4:17). Invite participants to name observations, questions and takeaways from the video.

Read aloud [Revelation 12:1-6, 9](#). Discuss:
- Who does the dragon in the passage represent?
- Who might the woman/mother image represent? (The crown of 12 stars and the wilderness journey suggest Israel; maybe the image also evokes Eve, Mary and the church.)
- What do you make of the red dragon's threat to the woman and her child?

4. Images of Rome's leaders: Monsters of Babylon

Ask participants to form two teams. Ask one team to read aloud [Revelation 13:1-10](#) and ask the other to read aloud [Revelation 13:11-18](#) with enthusiasm. Distribute the art supplies and paper, and ask the teams to work together to draw the monster in their respective passage. After sufficient time, invite the teams to share their drawings.

5. Image of Rome: Babylon the prostitute

Talking point: For John, Rome and its emperors are the problem — but he never mentions Rome in his letter. Instead, he speaks of Babylon, the ancient city that destroyed Jerusalem and conquered Israel in 584 BCE and became a symbol of political corruption. Like Babylon, Rome destroyed

Jerusalem and the Holy Temple (70 CE).

Display the "Vespasian Seven Hills Coin" image in the slideshow, and read Revelation 17:1-6, 9 aloud.

Talking point: The first-century CE coin depicts the Roman goddess Roma seated on seven hills. Revelation portrays Roma as a prostitute sitting on a beast with seven heads, symbolizing the seven hills of Rome. Babylon represents a corrupt civil religion (the Bible uses prostitution to signify idolatry).

Discuss:
- What is the significance of the images of two women: the mother of Christ and the Christian community vs. Babylon, the prostitute, riding the scarlet beast)?
- How do these images help you understand the contrast between the value systems?

6. Discerning the signs of Babylon today

media clips, equipment

Show the YouTube video "Rob Bell: Jesus, Domitian and The Book of Revelation" (from 1:25 to 6:12). Invite participants to name observations, questions and takeaways from the video.

Discuss:
- How would you describe the predicament of Christians living in Asia Minor in the late first century CE?
- How can people living under oppressive regimes find hope?

Talking point: Babylon stands for any monstrous and violent earthly force that opposes God's justice in every age. All empires will eventually become Babylon.

Show the YouTube video "The Significance of the City in the Bible (and God's Plan for It)" (7:01).

Discuss:
- How can we recognize the influence of Babylonian values: self-preservation and peace, to be enforced by the threat of violence and death?
- What steps can we take to renounce Satan and the power of evil in the world?
- Where do you see signs of God's value system of peace through generosity breaking into the world?
- What's the danger in characterizing enemies as monsters?

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7. Looking ahead and prayer

Ask participants to prepare for the next session by watching [“We Studied the ‘Day of the Lord’ in the Bible (Here’s What We Found)”](#) (end at 5:45). Send the video link via email or text message.

Prepare for prayer with three deep breaths and a moment’s silence. Say, “Come, Lord Jesus!” Sit quietly for a moment, and then pray aloud:

Dear God, we feel lost in a world where right is called wrong, and bad things are called good. Guide us on the path that leads to our true home in you. We pray in Jesus’ name, who has shown us how to live in an upside-down world. Amen.

Conclude with a gentle prayer:

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

SAMPLE

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