



McKnight, Scott. *Revelation for the Rest of Us: A Prophetic Call to Follow Jesus as a Dissident Disciple*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2023. 312 p.

With this study Scot McKnight has set down a sharp gauntlet between followers of Jesus who for millennia have read the last book in the Bible as predicting God’s plan for the future and those who like John intended, read Revelation as a spiritual road-map for believers in all times. This brief overview does not come close to expressing the richness of *Revelation for the Rest of Us*.

The book is tidily organized into 5 Parts, probing who the book of Revelation was written for, the playbill of the personas, comprehending numerology and other mysteries, particularly, the perils (in any age) of living in “Babylon” (or Abbotsford), and hugely significantly, a primer for dissidents living amidst the perils of empire politics. Twelve appendices together with recommended commentaries complement the book.

McKnight wastes little time in getting to his thesis. “The book is for all times because it is about all time.” (p. 11) The implications are that Revelation “is timeless theology not specific prediction” with the author warning that “the moment it turns to specific predictions is loses its timeless message.” Here is a warning. Reading John’s book as prediction, disingenuously purports “to know things no human being can possibly know.” (p. 8); and in the process, too often demonizing those who read Revelation in other ways.

McKnight’s book is centrally about the insidious power of empire. In this telling, believers are set apart as “dissidents who discern corruptions in the world and in the church.” (p. 13) For some provocatively, this way of reading Revelation is not about “a rapture out of the world, but about faithful discipleship in the world.”

Throughout, John posits two fundamentally opposing sides. **Team Lamb** includes God, and the Lamb, and among others, the Allegiant Witnesses, with **Team Dragon** including the dragon, the beasts (the Wild Things in this study), all who inhabit Babylon, a meme for all the power brokers (emperors, merchants, really all those whose orientation is anti-Christ) in all ages.

Aware of ferocious antithetical forces, John comforts his readers with the assurance that “that God is on the throne and Caesar (or Babylon) is not.” (p. 40)

For Babylon, like for all hegemonic empires in history, presence is all about domination, with distinct characteristics.

- ◆ **Anti-God:** The paganism of Rome in John's time "had a rich supply of idolatries and Babylon encompasses them all." (p. 53)
- ◆ **Opulent:** In Rome the rich got richer whereas the poor remained in their ignored conditions.
- ◆ **Murderous:** The vaunted *Pax Romana* was really a euphemism for brutal subjection of vassal peoples. John verified Roman brutality (7:14) by writing of all those "who washed their washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (p. 55)
- ◆ **Image:** Rome's ingenuity attracted a watching world, with its "architecturally brilliant temples ... theaters and sporting spectacles." Roman roads criss-crossed the empire. "Roman egos demanded astonishment."
- ◆ **Militaristic:** The ruler of Rome was the most powerful man in that world. Rome enjoyed the blessing of the gods and the praise of the people.
- ◆ **Economically Exploitive:** Common wisdom in the Roman world was that "profit is happiness." Simply put, "Rome's party spirit was unstoppable, unsatisfying treadmill of desire and indulgence." (p. 58)
- ◆ **Arrogant:** Rome turned arrogance into a virtue. "It was the naked ego of one man, the Emperor, who was expressive of Roman ego-culture."

A key point in this study is that Lamb-shaped discipleship enables believers to remain faithful to the Lamb amid a timeless Babylon. And then as John's focus shifts, he sees the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, opening the seals, because He alone is worthy to do so. Poignantly, the Lion becomes the Lamb who wins not in a blood-soaked battle, "but with a non-violence weapon, namely, the Word of God." (p. 77)

In John's apocalypse the cosmic conflict portrayed is also a battle for allegiant truth, not about future predictions. "Everything about Revelation speaks directly to John's own day and how John's churches can live faithfully in Babylon. (Rome)" (p. 87) And by extension, believers must be wary over any predictive scheme which fails to acknowledge in our time "the red-hot power of God at work in churches in Africa, Asia and South America." (p. 87)

With amazing confidence, this author affirms that Revelation and the cannon it is part of, offers a "robust, confident story about everything [including] God's providential guiding of history to God's wrapping up all of history and all of creation." (p. 97)

The final thrust of this book helps believers (in every age) to live without compromise in Babylon. "The lens of Babylon's timeless presence in the world is to understand how Christians are to be allegiant witnesses to Jesus amid Babylon." (p. 220)

With sharp rebuke, McKnight critiques American evangelicals who “have been seduced into partisan politics in such a way that they have effectively abandoned the way of the Lamb.” (p. 221) These believers are now identified not by their theology but by their politics. Echoing the tragic deception of Christians in Hitler’s Germany, McKnight charges American evangelicals with “colonizing the Word of God to their ideology.” P. 237)

However, this study does not end in despair, noting that “Christian eschatology is the opposite of Babylon’s eschatology” (p. 231) Dissident disciples do not surrender the Lordship of Christ. Their mission remains inexorably, “to declare the glories of Christ, to preach the gospel, to teach the Word, to administer the sacraments, and to live in fellowship ... as a signpost of the new Jerusalem.” (p. 245)

Scot McKnight’s book is liberating. Removed are the frustrations of parsing obtuse imagery and undefined numerology such as who is represented by 666 or the 144,000. Attractive and accessible is the encouragement this book offers to disciples anchored in the ancient yet very present Lamb as “the way, the truth and the life.”

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