

# Apocalypses

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Dr. Mark Given

Welcome to the online home of REL 323, Apocalypses. The Scroll (i.e., Requirements) and Timetable (i.e., Schedule) are accessed by clicking on the buttons above.

**Catalog Description or REL 323:** A historical and socio-rhetorical analysis of ancient Jewish and Christian apocalyptic movements and literature with some attention to modern examples. Canonical texts such as Daniel and Revelation will be examined in the context of numerous extra-canonical Jewish and Christian apocalypses.

**The purpose of REL 323** is to explore an ancient but still influential Jewish and Christian worldview called apocalypticism. Its primary example in the Hebrew Bible is Daniel, and in the New Testament, the Apocalypse or Revelation. These and other early Jewish and Christian apocalyptic texts will be studied in their historical and literary contexts--the "apocalypse then" aspect of the course. While the study of ancient texts and communities will provide the backbone of the course, we will also occasionally consider modern pop culture expressions of apocalypticism in film, music, and on the internet--the "apocalypse now" aspect of the course. The critical perspectives developed with reference to the ancient materials will be applied to contemporary manifestations.

The purpose of this course is not to convert you to any particular confessional or non-confessional position. In a 1963 decision, the supreme court encouraged the study of religion in an academic environment. This is consistent with a goal common to most universities of studying all significant aspects of human experience in a sympathetic and responsible, yet thoughtful and critical, manner. Religion is a very significant aspect of human experience and the continuing influence of apocalypticism at the present time is rather obvious. Therefore, apocalypticism is a highly appropriate subject for study in a state university.

## Methods and Style

The main methodologies in this course will be **literary-historical** and **socio-rhetorical**. 1) A **historically oriented** religion course is an excellent place to begin to develop the sort of critical thinking skills that will serve you well in your university career and beyond. It takes learned skills and diligent efforts to reconstruct the past and understand how and what people were thinking and feeling two millennia ago in a world more different than like our own. Much of our knowledge of the past comes by way of texts, and texts require interpretation. We will be faced with some very strange texts this semester and part of the challenge will be simply *to learn how to read*. I will encourage you to take stands on current issues of interpretation and to defend your ideas on the basis of carefully reasoned and evidence-based arguments. 2) A **socio-rhetorically oriented** religion course is an excellent place to contemplate an important issue addressed by the Public Affairs mission of Missouri State: how to maintain unity in diversity. Ancient Judaism and Christianity were religious movements of great diversity that had more than their share of inner turmoil. For example, the apocalyptic Dead Sea Community was probably

organized by priests who felt alienated from the prevailing political and religious power structure, and outbreaks of apocalypticism have continued to divide various Jewish and Christian groups down to the present day.

The teaching style, it will be apocalyptic, of course! Perhaps here is the place to warn you that you will encounter some R-rated material from time to time in the course. You may immediately think I'm just talking about film clips and the internet, but I'm talking about ancient apocalyptic literature, *including that found in the Jewish and Christian Bibles*. Not surprisingly, for example, certain passages from Revelation have been described as gratuitously violent. Other apocalyptic texts have quite seriously been labeled pornographic.

It is inevitable that apocalypticism brings us in contact with subject matter that makes us uncomfortable since it is a brutally honest--some would say pessimistic and paranoid--way of looking at the world, not as an Eden, but, for many apocalypticists, a living Hell. Ancient apocalypticists knew they lived East of Eden.

## The Fine Print

1) *Academic honesty* is expected of all Missouri State students (see [Academic Integrity Policies and Procedures](#)). In my course, cheating on any assignment besides the final exam will result in an F for that assignment and usually cannot be made up. Cheating on the final exam will result in an XF. 2) *Nondiscrimination* is practiced at Missouri State and Missouri State is an Equal Opportunity/ Affirmative Action employer (see [EOAA Summary Statement](#)). 3) *Disability Accommodation* is available at Missouri State ([DSS](#)). Inform me during the first week of class if you have a documented learning disability. 4) Some minor aspects of this syllabus are subject to change with notice. Academic honesty is expected of all Missouri State students. You are responsible for making yourself aware of policies on cheating and plagiarism in the Undergraduate Catalog.