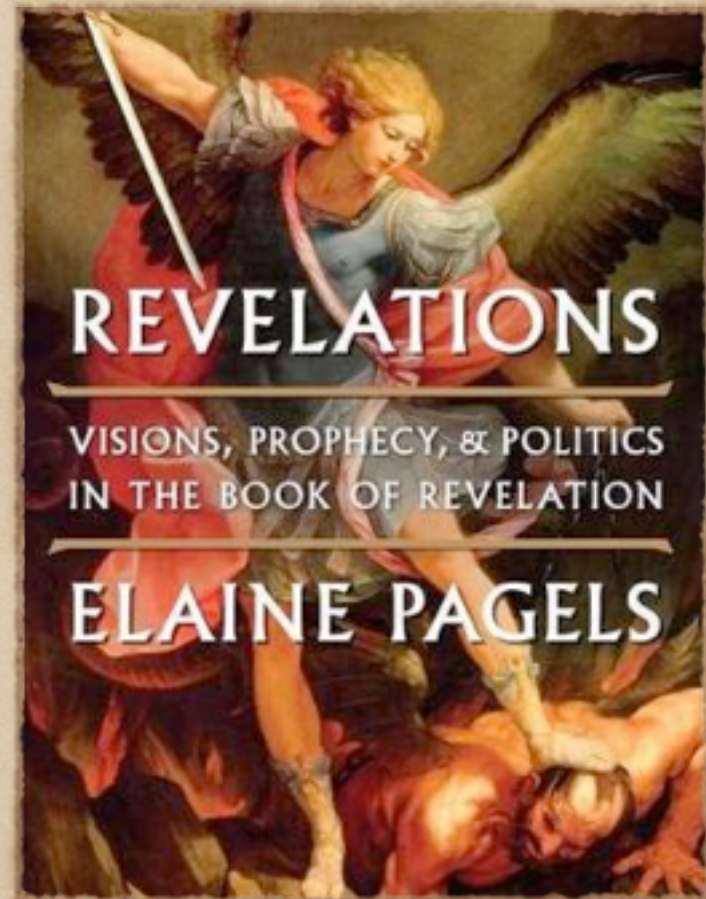


# Revelations

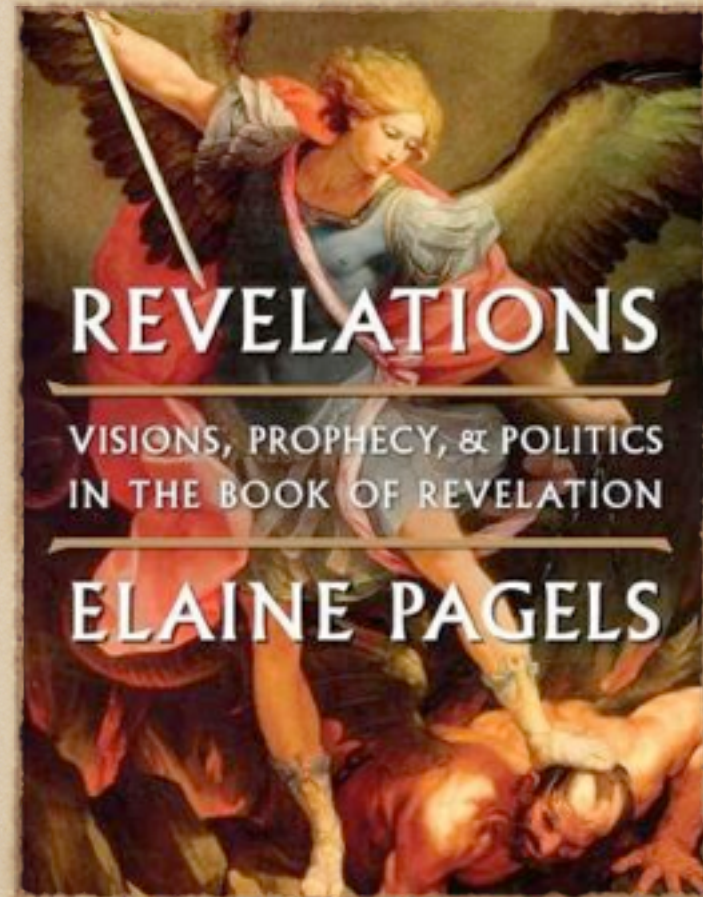
Visions, Prophecy, and Politics  
in the Book of Revelation  
by Elaine Pagels

Holy Manners 29  
Bookstudy - Fall 2012  
ACTS Committee  
St. David's United Church,  
Calgary, Canada  
[rev.stdavidscalgary.net](http://rev.stdavidscalgary.net)



# Session 3

## Ch 2 - Visions of Heaven and Hell



Additional resources are on site. <http://rev.stdavidscalgary.net>

- In Chapter 2, Pagels introduces her thesis that John is upset with other “prophets” with a different message than his own.
- He is first concerned with things as they “are right now”.
- By way of authority he follows the tradition of the old testament prophets and describes how and where God spoke to him and revealed these messages.
- Paul of Tarsus claimed his visions gave him the authority of an apostle.
- Pagels contends that John is attacking Paul when he congratulates the Church in Ephesus for their having “tested those who claim to be apostles but are not”

- Pagels sees John as “a Jew who had found the messiah” and alarmed “at seeing God’s “holy people” increasingly infiltrated by outsiders”
- John criticizes others of the 7 Churches with the common for eating meat sacrificed to idols, of practicing forbidden sexual behaviours, and of listening to women.
- John wanted the Churches to be holy and ready to fight for God in the approaching end-times.
- Pagels sees a parallel in the Essenes of Qumran. A new historical view of the Essenes is that they were not just holy and separate, but active in fighting the Romans.

- John does not urge actual combat, but sees “Jesus as a warrior king storming down from heaven, leading armies of angels...”
- “When John accuses “evildoers” of leading gullible people into sin, what troubles him is what troubled the Essenes: whether - or how much - to accommodate pagan culture.”
- “Those whom John says Jesus “hates” look very much like Gentile followers of Jesus converted through Paul’s teaching.”
- “... in those early years ... trouble broke out when the maverick called Paul of Tarsus came out of nowhere and began to preach a “gospel” quite different from what was taught in James’ and Peter’s circle.”

- Paul fought back when the Jerusalem Church tried to extend Jewish tradition to the Gentile Church. Now 40 years after Paul died, John was still fighting that battle.
- And of course, as often in dispute, both sides claimed God had vindicated their separate views.
- This difference was emphasized when after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, the Gentile Church assumed the end of Judaism.
- The Rabbinic movement arose to sustain Judaism as a dynamic and continuing faith throughout their world-wide dispersal (diaspora).

- Paul has been read to mean “that God disinherited the Jewish people in favour of Gentile believers, whom Paul calls the “spiritual Israel””.
- So also do many Christians today think of themselves as “progressed” from Judaism.
- John appears to have seen this as a terrible identity theft.
- It may have been Roman magistrates that first noticed these new Churches whose members refused to any longer honour the Roman Gods, and called them Christians. They were considered “obstinate” in this refusal and possibly seditious.

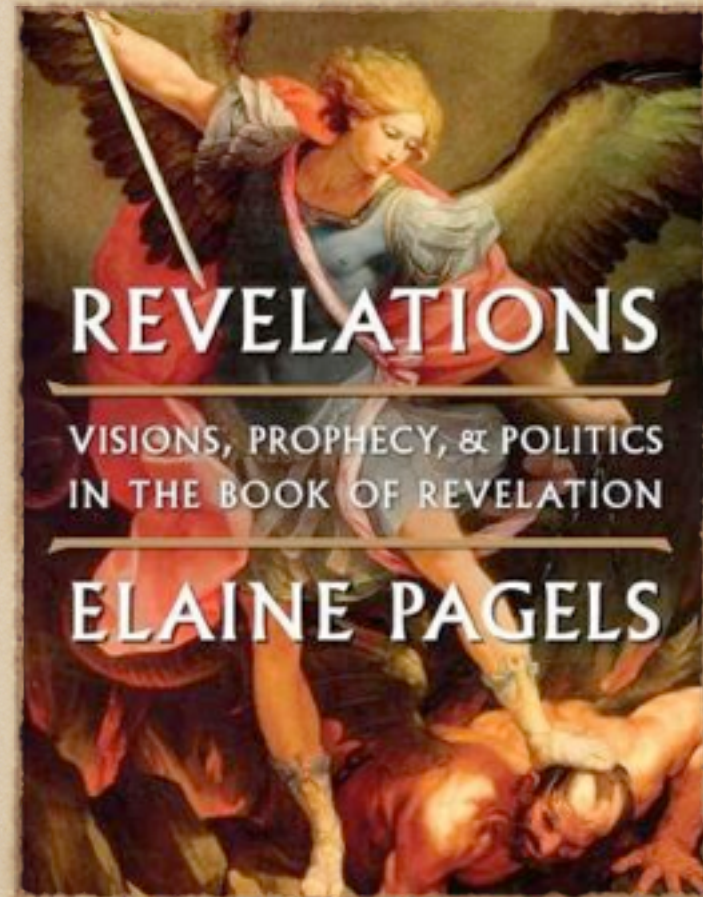
- John does not mention Bishops (or supervisors). He seems to see himself as a prophetic leader for Jesus appeared to him and commanded he speak to the churches.
- Ignatius seems the first among the Church to adopt the Roman term "Christian". He also claimed the title Bishop.
- Ignatius had a revelation in Philadelphia, "Pay attention to the bishops, priests and deacons!"
- Ignatius' "scriptures" were Paul's letters. He rejected the "ancient" texts of the old testament and the gospel writers connecting to them.



- “Thus, what began among devout Jews - Jesus, Paul, James, Peter, and John of Patmos - within forty to fifty years had ignited a new movement that would claim to supplant Jewish tradition”
- “Whose revelations then, are genuine - Paul’s or those of John of Pamos? The future of the movement would turn on this question - or more accurately on which would gain acceptance as “canonical”. As we shall see, two hundred years later, influential Christian leaders chose both and wrestled them into the same New Testament canon.”

There follows major portions of a  
presentation August 2012 at the  
**Long Now Foundation,**  
as aggregated by *fora.tv*  
“The Truth About the  
Book of Revelation”

Dr. Elaine Pagels



See [http://fora.tv/2012/08/20/Elaine\\_Pagels\\_The\\_Truth\\_About\\_the\\_Book\\_of\\_Revelations](http://fora.tv/2012/08/20/Elaine_Pagels_The_Truth_About_the_Book_of_Revelations)

# Break

Discussion Questions:

1. What makes the Heaven and Hell stories of the book of Revelation so popular for so long?
2. Pagels says that John was really angry at the Pauline Christians. Does this help our understanding today of differences between Christians and Jews?

