



Although you may find it very hard to believe, REVELATION and ZOMBIES have a lot in common. Let's start with Revelation. The title of the very last book of the Bible—Revelation—comes from the very first word of the book. And that first word is *Apokalypsis*.

So the book of Revelation could just as easily be titled "Apocalypse." Imagine you learned the books of the New Testament like this: Mathew Mark Luke John Acts, Romans Corinthians, yadda yadda and then, the end: Apocalypse!

So, Revelation is an apocalypse. But what does this mean?

Let's start with the meaning of the word *Apokalypsis*. Not so long ago, here in North America, a common wedding ritual was for the bride to wear a veil covering her face, and at a certain point in the ceremony, the groom would raise the veil up, revealing her face to her very-soon-to-be-husband. Incredibly, that was also the practice 2000 years ago in Greek and Roman weddings. And the Greek word for that unveiling was . . . wait for it. *Apokalypsis*.

*Apokalypsis* simply means the unveiling or revealing of what had been hidden or obscured. Just as the bride's veil when removed revealed her fully to her husband, so too did apocalypses reveal a previously obscure reality to their audiences.

Apocalyptic writings are acts of unveiling, of truth-telling.<sup>1</sup>

They reveal the deeper reality of a present crisis and its near future. In that sense, they are prophetic. But they are not predictions about events thousands of years later. Rather, Revelation speaks to the immediate circumstances of its original audience living under Roman rule.

Judean apocalyptic theology emerged during centuries of foreign domination while they struggled to reconcile God's promises with the apparent triumph of oppressive empires. The apocalyptic answer was bold: empire would not have the final word. God would. So, through fantastical imagery and symbols, otherworldly creatures and heavenly visions, Revelation proclaims that evil will be exposed and justice will ultimately prevail through God's miraculous intervention.



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<sup>1</sup> John J. Collins, "What is Apocalyptic Literature," in John Joseph Collins, *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

“John” wrote Revelation<sup>2</sup> as a letter to the seven congregations of Asia Minor. Most of its content is a series of visions— Apocalyptic visions. Prophetic visions. Unveiling and truth-telling about the present and the looming future. Although there was no widespread Roman persecution of Christians at that time, social exclusion was quite prevalent. So, John was pointing out and warning about a crisis he saw on the horizon. A crisis of identity. A crisis of faith. And when John wrote about "Babylon," he was not talking about ancient Babylon. His audiences knew that. Babylon was the code word for Rome. The Roman Empire.

Maggie, Eli, Joanne and I are going to present Revelation chapter 18. While they come up, I want to name a jarring aspect of this chapter: John uses the image of a debased wicked woman, a prostitute, to symbolise the Babylonian and Roman empires’ violent system of domination. However, given male violence against women over many millennia, this metaphor is deeply unfortunate. We today can understand the historic metaphor for empire idolatry and seduction, but let’s also shout out loudly that this image should never be used or even tolerated in our 21<sup>st</sup> century context.

So, we invite you to listen carefully. The Book of Revelation was written to be heard by its audiences—heard, not read—so the text will not be projected. Listen. What do you hear? What is John, the author of Revelation, revealing and unveiling?

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### **Dramatic reading of Revelation chapter 18: The Fall of Babylon**

Angel 1: Eli ~ Angel 2: Maggie ~ Commentor: Joanne ~ Narrator: Tim

**Tim** (narrator):

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined by his splendor. He called out with a mighty voice,

**Eli** (angel 1):

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!

It has become a dwelling place of demons,  
a haunt of every foul spirit,  
a haunt of every foul bird,  
a haunt of every foul and hateful beast

For all the nations have drunk

from the wine of the wrath of her prostitution,  
and the kings of the earth have engaged in prostitution with her,  
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxury.”

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<sup>2</sup> David A. DeSilva, *Discovering Revelation: Content, Interpretation, Reception*, Discovering Biblical Texts (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021).

**Tim** (narrator):

Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

**Maggie** (angel 2):

“Come out of her, my people,  
so that you do not take part in her sins  
and so that you do not share in her plagues,  
for her sins are heaped high as heaven,  
and God has remembered her iniquities.  
Render to her as she herself has rendered,  
and repay her double for her deeds;  
mix a double dose for her in the cup she mixed.  
As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously,  
so give her a like measure of torment and grief.  
Since in her heart she says,  
‘I rule as a queen;  
I am no widow,  
and I will never see grief,’  
therefore her plagues will come in a single day—  
pestilence and mourning and famine—  
and she will be burned with fire,  
for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.”

**Tim** (narrator):

And the kings of the earth, who engaged in prostitution and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning; they will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

**Joanne** (commentor):

“Alas, alas, the great city,  
Babylon, the mighty city!  
For in one hour your judgment has come.”

**Tim** (narrator):

And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo any more, cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron, and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, choice flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, slaves— and human lives.

**Joanne** (commentor):

“The fruit for which your soul longed  
has gone from you,  
and all your delicacies and your splendor  
are lost to you,  
never to be found again!”

**Tim** (narrator):

The merchants of these wares, who grew wealthy from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

**Joanne** (commentor):

“Alas, alas, the great city,  
clothed in fine linen,  
in purple and scarlet,  
adorned with gold,  
with jewels, and with pearls!

For in one hour all this wealth has been laid waste!”

**Tim** (narrator):

And all shipmasters and seafarers, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,

**Joanne** (commentor):

“What city was like the great city?”

**Tim** (narrator):

And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out,

**Joanne** (commentor):

“Alas, alas, the great city,  
where all who had ships at sea  
grew rich by her wealth!  
For in one hour she has been laid waste.”

**Maggie** (angel 2):

Rejoice over her, O heaven, you saints and apostles and prophets! For God has condemned her condemnation of you.

**Tim** (narrator):

Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,

**Eli** (angel 1):

“With such violence Babylon the great city  
will be thrown down  
and will be found no more;  
and the sound of harpists and entertainers and of flutists and trumpeters  
will be heard in you no more,  
and an artisan of any trade  
will be found in you no more,  
and the sound of the millstone  
will be heard in you no more,  
and the light of a lamp  
will shine in you no more,  
and the voice of bridegroom and bride  
will be heard in you no more,

**Maggie (angel 2):**

for your merchants were the magnates of the earth,  
and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.  
And in you was found the blood of prophets and of saints  
and of all who have been slaughtered on earth.”

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Chapter 18 is a full-on celebration of the fall of the oppressive Roman Empire. What John sees when the veil is pulled back is gripping and disturbing. He sees an empire that appears glorious and prosperous on the surface, but whose opulent wealth depends on wide-spread extraction and exploitation and suffering. “Babylon” is dressed in luxurious purple and scarlet, glittering with gold and jewels. She looks magnificent. But John is announcing that Babylon has fallen. The empire has collapsed. He hears merchants and traders weeping because Babylon is no more. They are weeping because their abundant profits have disappeared. The ship captains and their crews are also wailing. They transported luxury goods and food across the Mediterranean Sea from the vassal states to Rome, but now they are wailing because their lucrative work is gone. These Empire collaborators had gotten wealthy. Now they’re unemployed.

John lists all the cargo on these merchant ships: the list includes many luxury items for jewelry, furniture and ornamentation. Then food staples such as wine, olive oil, grain, livestock. These food items strikingly illustrate the gaping inequality of the Roman extractive economy. The empire ensured the supply of staples for its core Roman population at the expense of the margins. For example, 200,000 families in Rome received a free daily supply of grains. However, the outlying provinces and vassal states—those who produced these staples—had to pay high

prices for them, and at times there were none available due to the demand at the Empire's centre. The faraway shelves were empty due to Rome's parasitic luxurious lifestyle.

The image is almost cinematic. Imagine John watching ships move across the sea, carrying the wealth of the Mediterranean entire world and beyond toward the imperial centre.<sup>3</sup> Resources flow from every corner of the empire toward a single destination. And then comes the most chilling item on the cargo list: "Slaves—and human lives." Women and men have become commodities. Slaves and human lives. Just cargo.

John is writing to the seven congregations because he wants them to recognise that the splendour of the Empire is built upon the suffering of others. Rome's abundance did not simply appear out of nowhere, nor did they produce it. No. It was extracted from the margins of the Empire, from the provinces and their people. That's the economic system. Wealth flows inward. Power flows outward. And military force and violence enforce the system, making possible a lavish life that most people at the centre regard as normal. And the uncomfortable reality for John's congregations is that they are entangled in this system. Some suffer under it. Others benefit greatly from it. Some do both. That is why Revelation is an apocalypse. It reveals unveils and invites hearers to see—no, it insists that we see.

Almost 1900 years later, another apocalypse appeared. Not a biblical apocalypse this time, but a zombie apocalypse. Some of you may remember George Romero's 1978 film *Dawn of the Dead*. His previous film *Night of the Walking Dead* pioneered the zombie apocalypse movie genre. (The zombie had its origins in Haiti but it was nothing like what came to be known in North America. In Haiti, the zombi expressed Haitians fear of being re-enslaved and losing their identity.)

The *Dawn of the Dead* zombie apocalypse begins with society in total collapse due to a zombie outbreak. The dead are all returning to "life" with a mindless and incessant drive to consume flesh, and civilization is falling apart. During mass hysteria, four survivors escape and find refuge in a shopping mall by barricading themselves inside. They then become seduced by the dazzling array of products everywhere. They wander through the stores, giddy with all the material abundance there. They continue to block all entrances so they can "keep all the mall's wonders for themselves."

Meanwhile the zombie hordes swarm-shuffle toward the mall "as if programmed to do so by their former selves."<sup>4</sup> Because the shopping mall was the pinnacle of their life when they were alive. Romero's satire is merciless. Even after death, the zombies are still consumers. They are

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<sup>3</sup> J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Brazos Press, 2010), 141–42.

<sup>4</sup> Greg Garrett, *Living with the Living Dead: The Wisdom of the Zombie Apocalypse* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 22–23. Kelly J. Murphy, "The End Is (Still) All Around: The Zombie and Contemporary Apocalyptic Thought," in Kelly J. Murphy and Justin Jeffcoat Schedtler, eds., *Apocalypses in Context: Apocalyptic Currents Through History*, Second edition (Fortress Press, 2025), 428.

drawn instinctively toward the temple of consumption. The living dead wander-shuffle throughout a shopping mall. One of the survivors is bitten by a zombie—and thus is becoming one—but nevertheless, with his shopping cart overflowing, he is elated with his sacrifice to the god of consumption: “We did it, didn’t we? . . . We got it all!” he exclaims.

Romero is asking a profoundly apocalyptic question. What if consumerism is not merely something we do? What if it becomes something that shapes us, becomes core to our identity? What if we become so formed by the habits of acquisition and consumption that we no longer notice them? What if we spend our lives pursuing abundance but never stop to ask who produces it—and at what cost—and whether that abundance of stuff makes us more fully human? Or less human?

Just as John did in Revelation, Romero is pulling back the veil. An *apokalypsis*. He is revealing what lies beneath the surface of a society organised around consumption.

This brings us to Jason Hickel. I mentioned him in a sermon a year ago. Hickel is a world-renowned economic anthropologist, professor, and a prolific writer. He was born and raised in Swaziland as a missionary kid. His parents were called by the Lord to serve in southern Africa as medical missionaries. While Jason does not publicly claim Christian faith, it seems to me that his upbringing echoes in his work. For example, his best-selling book in 2020 is entitled “Less is More.” Less is More. More with Less. I must hasten to say that his parents were not Mennonite, but rather faithful Catholics.

In any case, Hickel does not write apocalyptic literature in the ancient sense, yet his work achieves a similar function. It unveils. It reveals truths we would rather remain hidden. He asks uncomfortable questions. Like: How is wealth created? Why does poverty persist? Why do some countries seem permanently trapped in insurmountable debt while others accumulate lavish wealth? Why does the global economy continue lurching toward ecological destruction even when we know the consequences of catastrophic climate change?<sup>5</sup>

Hickel shows how contemporary global capitalism has many of the characteristics that John in Revelation identified in the Roman Empire. Wealth flows disproportionately from the Global South toward the powerful centres of the Global North. Labour and resources are extracted

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<sup>5</sup> Jason Hickel, *Less Is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World* (William Heinemann, 2020); Jason Hickel, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and Its Solutions* (Windmill Books, 2018). Jason Hickel and Gurpreet Singh, “Capitalogenic Disease: Social Determinants in Focus.” *BMJ Global Health* 8 (2023): e013661. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2023-013661>. : Jason Hickel and Dylan Sullivan, “Capitalism and Extreme Poverty: A Global Analysis of Real Wages, Human Height, and Mortality since the Long 16th Century,” *World Development* 161 (2023): 106026, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.106026>. Jason Hickel and Morena Hanbury Lemos, “Open Veins: Drain from Latin America through Ecologically Unequal Exchange,” *Ecological Economics* 248 (2026): 109055, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2026.109055>. Jason Hickel and Varsha Gandikota, “Is Capitalism Fuelling Today’s Wars?” *Reframe*, April 28, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-5FEW3Eni8>.

from the poor regions and sent to the wealthy centres. Political and military power work together to maintain the system.

Like John in Revelation, Hickel invites us to look beneath appearances. He challenges the narratives that tell us everything is fine when our country's economic indicators are solid. Like John, he shows how an oppressive and unjust system becomes so normalised that we stop noticing it altogether.

So, how then shall we live? Given the massive injustice of the global economic system that we benefit from and given the looming environmental apocalypse, what do we do? And where do we find our hope?

I suggest to you this morning that Romero's zombie apocalypse, while a poignant picture of truth clearly unveiled, offers us nothing. There is nothing we humans can do other than to protect ourselves, and even that is futile. All is lost. There is no hope.

John's answer in Revelation is quite different, and yet ultimately, I find his hope inadequate. His message has two prophetic parts. First, wake up and pay attention. Several of the congregations in Revelation have become quite comfortable. The wealthy of these churches, as we see in chapter 3, have flourished in the Roman empire economy and have become complacent. This has "left them unaware of their spiritual poverty," and they have lost their faith identity.<sup>6</sup> So, John's first step toward faithfulness is learning to see clearly.

His second step is action: John calls his communities of Jesus followers to disentangle themselves from imperial systems that diminish human life. He says that resisting empire oppression requires removing themselves from the empire's evil. Benefiting from and living off the suffering of others cannot continue.

That remains a challenge for us today. We are part of one of the wealthiest societies in human history. We are entangled in this system. Many of us benefit daily from an economic system we neither designed nor fully understand. John's question therefore becomes our question. What forms of suffering remain invisible because they are far away? What costs are hidden behind our comforts? Who grows our food? Who produces the dazzling array of products in our malls, or rather, on Amazon? Who sews our clothes? Who mines the minerals in our computers and cell phones? Who bears the consequences of environmental degradation?

John's third step is intrinsically related. Ultimately, followers of Jesus are to wait in anticipation for God's intervention and liberation. In 1<sup>st</sup> century Judean-Christian apocalyptic faith God will intervene miraculously in human history to overthrow oppressive empires, thus vindicating the faithful, and establishing a new creation marked by justice and peace. Wait for God.

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<sup>6</sup> deSilva, *Discovering Revelation*, 76.

Yet, once the veil has been lifted, we cannot remain innocent bystanders. We have choices to make. This is where Jason Hickel's work becomes crucial. Unlike John in Revelation, Jason does not have us wait for God's dramatic miraculous intervention. His hope lies in human communities choosing new paths based on fairness and sharing. One of Jason's foundations is the biblical practice of Jubilee, and he proposes many pathways toward a fairer world system. Some are grassroots oriented while others require government legislation.

Underlying Hickel's pathways is a phrase I find deeply compelling. He advocates a transformation in our attitudes toward what we as communities need. He calls it "radical abundance." Radical abundance rejects what our society tells us, that abundance comes through more production, more growth, and more consumption. Instead, he says, there is enough for all— enough for all when we organise society around sharing, when we ensure that everyone's basic needs are met, when we value care, community, health, time, and ecological well-being more than we value economic output statistics.

And that is where I find hope this morning. Not in superficial optimism. Not in the assumption that everything will somehow work out, and that ultimately God will rescue us.

Hope begins with seeing clearly. Hope grows when communities refuse to accept exploitation as normal. Hope emerges when people imagine alternatives. Hope takes shape whenever human beings choose generosity over accumulation, cooperation over competition, sufficiency over excess, and solidarity over indifference. There is enough for all.

John, Romero, and Hickel each offer an apocalypse, unveiling a world hidden beneath the surface. But once the veil is lifted, we are not to merely observe. We are invited to respond. To live differently. To imagine differently. To build differently. To participate in the creation of a world economy marked by justice, jubilee, and radical abundance. There's enough for all. Will we share it? How will we respond to the apocalypse?