

Despite the fascination with Revelation in large sectors of the Christian community, the devisors of the Revised Common Lectionary featured only six readings from the book in their whole three-year cycle. That is, at least in part, a contributing factor in its abandonment from many pulpits. Here at Good Shepherd, I've preached from Revelation a total of only nine times in fifteen years, although we did spend a few months in 2013 studying the book in "Soup, Salad, and Soul." Although that resulted from a request from participants, I was glad to comply. I've been fascinated by the book since 1970, when I first heard sermons from it and when I first read the Bible through. That was also, of course, the era of Hal Lindsey and his sensational (and very dubious) interpretations of Revelation in The Late, Great Planet Earth and its sequel, Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth. I read both of those and, like most Christians of the time, assumed they were valid. Fortunately, I heard some better preaching on Revelation in later years and took two courses on Revelation in seminary. Jim Blevins, who taught both those courses, may have had a bee or two in his bonnet, but he was no Hal Lindsey.

The history of this book in the Church is also instructive. It may have been written in the first century AD, but it took quite a while to become commonly accepted by churches. As late as 348, the great theologian Cyril of Jerusalem did not list Revelation among the books of the New Testament. Just a few years later, however, the equally-respected Athanasius did list Revelation as part of the New Testament in 367 and, perhaps crucially, so did Augustine of Hippo in 397. But the ancient churches of Near East did not accept Revelation into their canon until the fifteenth century and Martin Luther nearly left it out as well, which may have made the Protestant tradition look very different indeed.