



## Introduction to Revelation (Study Guide Chapters 1 & 2)

### Author

John is identified by name four times in the book. How John relates himself to others and other references strongly identify this John as the beloved apostle, author of the Gospel and the three epistles. Identifying himself in this manuscript is a break from his Gospel and epistles. "This book is the work of a Jew saturated with Old Testament prophecy, under the guidance of a word of Jesus and the inspiration of God."

### Date and Destination

Probably written around AD 96, at the end of the reign of Roman emperor Domitian (AD 81-96). Domitian banished John to the isle of Patmos because of his Christian stand (Rev 1:9). John was young when he met Christ, perhaps a young teen, yet I'm guessing John was likely over 80 years old when he wrote this book. On Patmos John received visions from God, which he recorded on a scroll. God then directed John to send his manuscript to seven churches (Rev 1:11) in western Asia Minor (Turkey). The larger intended audience was "all people", everywhere, of all centuries (see 2:7, 11, 17, 19; 3:6, 13, 22). It's addressed to believers, but a clear warning to unbelievers. It's a book for a "troubled age in which the darkness deepens, fear spreads over all mankind, and monstrous powers, godless and evil, appear on the stage of history." The book encourages Christians to persevere under persecution, hold on to hope, and find confidence in Christ alone.

### Background

1. The area of John's ministry changed from leader of the Jerusalem church to Asia Minor (Ephesus).
2. The book was written during increasing intensity of imperial opposition to Christianity.
3. The age of local Asia Minor churches was relatively young. Roughly 40 years.
4. John's books were written 15 to 20 years after other N.T. books to "complete the body of divine scripture".

This book is the written record of dramatic God-sent visions given to one of his servants who was commanded to write it all down. John sometimes is an active participant in the narrative, but for the most part is only the recorder. The details of the visions concerning the future were likely beyond John's ability to understand. Jensen states "The reality of Biblical prophecy is not dependent on full comprehension by the prophet himself."

Our English word "Revelation" is from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, the first word in the book. Revelation is prophetic in character and apocalyptic in form; A) mainly eschatological (eschatos: last times), B) written during times of persecution, C) visions abound, D) generally figurative and symbolic.

**Revelation 1:1-19:** The basic twofold theme; 1) Revelation of the *Person, Jesus Christ*, and 2) Revelation of *instruction for Christians*. Instructions for Christians include:

- Prophecy – prediction of events future to John's day, end times. Mostly descriptions of divine judgments of sin and the glorious triumphs of Christ.
- Historical Perspective – shows world history of the end times from God's eternal point of view. His application of justice to both individuals and nations.
- Doctrinal instruction – excellent survey of vital areas of truth.
- Spiritual application – exhortation (1:3) and note the words; read, hear, keep (take to heart).



## **Interpreting Revelation**

Revelation's prophecies are as difficult to interpret as they are fascinating to read. Yet they need not be frustrating to the student if they take the right approach to study of the book.

### Order of Procedure

1. *Observation*; what does the text say?
2. *Interpretation*; what does it mean?
3. *Application*; how does this relate to man? (or me)

Order of Content: Provides geographical context and direction. Identifies important events on earth or in heaven. Let the clear shed light on the unclear.

1. Doctrine and Exhortations
2. Clear, broad *movements* prophesied. Where will world history culminate?
3. Clear *events* prophesied.
4. Less clear movements and event prophesied.

### Things to Recognize

- As prophecy, Revelation is didactic (teaching) as well as predictive. Similar to O.T. prophets: forth-telling and foretelling.
- The last book in the Bible; expected to teach about the consummation of world history.
- A book of visions, yet describe real events in actual history (even if future from our perspective).
- Profitable for readers of all centuries (Rev 22:7), relevant to Christian life (increasingly so).
- Like all other scripture, that which is clear is essential.
- The Holy Spirit may be looked to for help in understanding (John 16:13).

### Laws of Interpretation

- A. *Law of Plain Sense*; "When the plain sense of scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense. Take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literary meaning unless the facts of the context indicate otherwise."
- B. *Law of Balance*; appeals for the avoidance of two extremes 1) symbolic, viewing symbols only generally and 2) forcing detailed meanings to every part of a particular symbol.
- C. *Law of Setting*; let the language and historical setting of John's day shed light on his choice of words and visions expressed.
- D. *Law of Context*; immediate context is always an important determinant in interpretation of a verse. For Revelation, the parallels of O.T. passages should be taken into account.
- E. *Law of Structure*; do not force any system or outline upon the book. Look for prominent clues to structures and let the book stand as it was originally written. Sections may be chronological, topical, or a combination of both. Allow for "backtracking" in the prophetic sections as a means of amplifying what is recorded.
- F. *Law of Prophetic Perspective*; just as in O.T. prophecy John may not foretell every important event. John was given visions of certain epochs and events as directed by God.

Symbols in Revelation may include numbers, colors, animals, stones, persons, groups, places, and actions. Three categories of symbols include 1) those interpreted in the text, 2) those interpreted in light of O.T. usage, and 3) symbols of no apparent Biblical connection.

Differing schools of interpretation; 1) *symbolic view*, teaching only as a series of pictures of spiritual truths, 2) the *preterist view*, sees all of Revelation fulfilled in the first century with external destinies only in the last two chapters, 3) *continuous historical view*, applies Revelation prophetically to all centuries since the time of Christ and only 19-22 foretell events after Christ's coming, and 4) *futurist view*, sees most of Revelation as prophetic of the end times.



## Survey of Revelation (Study Guide Chapter 3)

### Survey Methods

Jensen recommends conducting a first and second reading of the entire book, first looking only for key topics or themes, not reading every word. Second, a quick read through. Often the opening phrase of each paragraph provides clues that yield insight to the overall movement of the book. On page 28 he provides a paragraph breakdown. Another suggestion is to assign titles to each chapter and see if there is any connection or relationship between them.

John at Patmos	First four letters	Last three letters	Throne & thron	Scroll, search, Savior	First Six Seals	Redeemed of Tribulation	First Four Trumpets	Fifth & Sixth Trumpet	The Little Scroll	The Two Witnesses	War	The Beast & his prophet	Proclamations	Prelude to Bowls	Seven Bowl Judgments	Religious Babylon	Commercial Babylon	Second Coming of Christ	The Millennium	New Jerusalem	Words: comfort, warning
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22

Chapters can sometimes be grouped. Here are some overviews.

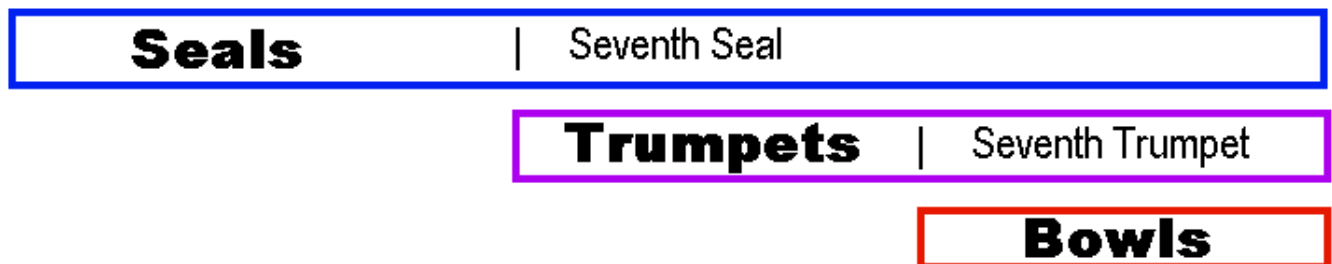
### Wilbur Smith's Symmetrical Pattern

- 3 Chapters – Letters to seven churches
- 3 Chapters – Seven-sealed book
- 3 Chapters – Seven trumpets
- 3 Chapters – Darkest hour of world history
- 3 Chapters – Seven vials (bowls)
- 3 Chapters – Babylon and Armageddon
- 3 Chapters – Millennium, last judgment, New Jerusalem, eternity

### Tenney's Outline of the Ministry of Christ

1:1 Christ Communicating	1:9 Christ in the Church – the Living One	4:1 Christ in the Cosmos – the Redeemer	17:1 Christ in Conquest – the Warrior	21:9 Christ in Consummation – the Lamb	22:6 Christ Challenging
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Observe how the series of judgments (seals, trumpets, and bowls) are related to each other. The seventh seal (8:1) constitutes the whole series of trumpets; and the seventh trumpet (11:15) constitutes the whole series of bowls. Is there a seventh bowl? See chapter 16:17 and Jensen's Survey **Chart F**.





**John’s Vision of Christ (Study Guide Chapter 4)**

**Jesus Christ the Son of Man (Rev 1:1-20)**

Paragraph points:

- vs. 1-3 He reveals Himself to us.
- vs. 4-7 He gives Himself to us.
- vs. 8 I AM...
- vs. 9-11 He commissions us.
- vs. 12-16 He stands with us.
- vs. 17-20 He consoles and inspires us.

Revelation 1:1-3, Luke 2:32, Heb 1:4-14, and 2 Pet 3:8

The first five words tell about the theme of the book - it’s all about Jesus. The word “Revelation” means to illuminate, or unveiling of Jesus Christ. People involved and their roles are God/Father, Christ, through an angel, to John, to his servants. References to time in this section – “what must soon take place.”

Revelation 1:4-7

This section contains four parts; salutation (v4a), benediction (v4b-5a), ascription of praise (v5b-6), and prophetic declaration (v7). See Isaiah 11:2 for the seven-fold works of the Spirit of God.

Analyzing the benediction;

The What	To Whom	From Whom
Grace and peace	To you (His Church)	The Father, the seven Spirits of God, and Jesus Christ
Glory and power forever	To Christ	Kingdom of priests, servants

Comparing the benediction (v4) with the ascription (v6) we see several ministries of Christ: Grace and Peace vs. Our freedom, His glory and power forever, and Ministry of Sacrifice. Note the references to time and how they relate to vs. 1. A thousand years is like a day; v7 first coming “despised and rejected by men” [Isaiah 53:3], second coming “with power and great glory” Luke 21:27].

Revelation 1:8 (and 22:13), 9-11

Note references to the Trinity, often translated “LORD”. In Revelation 1:9-11, note how John relates himself to his readers and Christ. Brother and companion in suffering and the kingdom, “in Christ”, he’s there because of the testimony of Christ. Meaning for “I was in the Spirit”, “on the Lord’s Day”: being still, listening, deep meditation, likely being lifted in prophetic vision into timeless eternity – includes many events all referred to as the Lord’s Day.

Revelation 1:12-16, Luke 7:34, John 5:27

Jesus prefers to refer to himself as “The Son of Man”. Several key symbols /characteristics in the vision teach us about Christ. *Seven Churches*; a) literal churches of John’s day, b) seven divisions of church history, c) seven types of churches that exist today, and d) seven characteristics that can exist in any church. *Seven Gold Lamp stands*; interpretation in vs. 20 “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lamp stands are the seven churches.”, also “ye are the light of the world” Matt 5:14. *Ten Characteristics of Christ*; See Tim Lahaye pp.18 (Revelation – Illustrated and Made Plain, Zondervan 1975, Jensen pp. 41-42]

Revelation 1:17-20, 2 Tim 1:7, Heb 2:14-15

Why did John react this way? Why should we never be afraid?



**The Seven Churches** (Study Guide Chapter 5)

**Letters to the Seven Churches** (Rev 2:1-3:22)

Paragraph points:

- vs. 2:1 To Ephesus, the orthodox but unloving church
- vs. 2:8 To Smyrna, materially poor but spiritually rich
- vs. 2:12 To Pergamum, tolerant of false doctrine
- vs. 2:18 To Thyatira, slipping into idolatry
- vs. 3:1 To Sardis, the lifeless church
- vs. 3:7 To Philadelphia, the faithful church
- vs. 3:14 To Laodicea, the lukewarm church

Jensen describes the letters in Revelation 2 & 3 as a mirror for the reader as he sees himself and his church described. Perhaps these chapters are included in Revelation to 1) address immediate spiritual needs of each existing church, 2) address the needs of Christians living after the first century, and 3) each generation should be impressed that the book was written to them.

As you read through the letters to the churches, fill in **Chart H** (pp. 45)

Description of Christ	Commendation	Condemnation	Warning or Counsel	Promise for Overcoming	Like Churches Today
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Notes about Ephesus (2:1-7): Holds 7 stars, walk among the churches, hard work/perseverance, not tolerate wicked men. Forsaken first love, repent and return, if not remove your church, eat from tree of life.

Notes about Smyrna (2:8-11): First & last / resurrected, rich in spirit / do not be afraid, *no warnings*, some in prison / persecution, crown of life / not hurt by 2<sup>nd</sup> death.

Notes about Pergamum (2:12-17): Sharp double-edge sword, remained true / did not renounce, a few of Balaam & Nicolaitans, repent, will come and fight against them, hidden manna / white stone w/new name.

Notes about Thyatira (2:18-29): Son of God (eyes of fire, feet of bronze), deeds / love / faith / service / perseverance & more, tolerate Jezebel, suffer intensely / dead children, authority over the nations / morning star.

Notes about Sardis (3:1-6): He holds 7 Spirits / 7 stars, reputation for being alive, dead / wake up / complete your deeds / remember / obey / repent, will come like a thief, dressed in white / in Book of Life /acknowledged.

Notes about Philadelphia (3:7-13): Holy & true / key of David, good deeds / open door / fall at your feet, *no condemnation*, hold on / no one takes your crown, pillar in the temple of God / name of God / city of God.

Notes about Laodicea (3:14-22): Amen / true witness / ruler of creation, *no commendation*, neither cold or hot / wretched / pitiful / blind / naked, spit out / rebuke / discipline, sit w/Christ on the throne.

**Tim LaHaye's Commentary**

Ephesus: The Apostolic Church, A.D. 30 – 100

(LaHaye p.22)

Gospel preached around the world, to all nations, with the church under Jewish leadership. Gentile leadership was known for apostasy and indifference. Nicolaitanism is synonymous with modern day ecclesiasticism. Separating spiritual and physical natures – license to sin. An unscriptural idea of bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and popes. Spiritual training directed by men, not the Holy Spirit.



Smyrna: The Persecuted Church, A.D. 100 – 312

(LaHaye p.29)

Under the greatest persecution in any time in history. Satan attempted to obliterate the church. "Tribulation ten days..." This church saw 8 of those 10 under Roman emperors, beginning with Nero (54-68) and Domitian through Diocletian (284-305) who attempted to destroy the Bible from the face of the earth. The only church without any condemnation. Standing against two basic heresies from the synagogue of Satan; 1) a false doctrine of Christ, 2) mixing law and grace. Still the same today.

Pergamum: The Indulged Church, A.D. 312 – 606

(LaHaye p.36)

Literally means marriage or elevation. [read middle paragraph to top of p. 37] Postmillennialism: As the church became rich and powerful it suggested the world was becoming better and better – i.e. the kingdom ushered in. Hence the thought that Christ's second coming would be at the END of the 1000 year reign.

Thyatira: The Pagan Church, A.D. 606 to the Tribulation

(LaHaye p.43)

Literally comes from two words meaning sacrifice and continual. A central heresy producing other false doctrines. The Church of the Dark Ages – merging paganism with Christianity. Commendations on p. 46. Condemnation – Jezebel of O.T. a false prophetess.

Sardis: The Dead Church, A.D. 1520 to the Tribulation

(LaHaye p.49)

Literally means "escaping ones". "Thou... art dead". Ritual and ceremony of the Reformation church crowded out the true life underneath leaving it impotent and ineffective. "I have not found thy works complete..." This church had every opportunity to continue reformation to Biblical standards, but did not.

Philadelphia: The Church Christ Loved, A.D. 1750 to the Rapture (LaHaye p. 54)

Literally mean "brotherly love". Just as Sardis came out of Thyatira, Philadelphia age came out of Sardis. Revivals in Europe and British Isles, spreading to America. This produced the modern missionary movement. Two major factors; 1) printed Bible, 2) increased study of the doctrine of the second coming. Around 1800 the doctrine of the premillennial return of Christ was revived.

Laodicea: The Apostate Church, A.D. 1900 to the Tribulation

(LaHaye p.49)

Christ is the "Amen" which is Hebrew for "true" (and final). The only church without ANY commendation from Christ.

### **Similarities to Churches Today**

Are the sins of the people, spiritual threats from within and without, source of power, and mission similar or different? We've inherited our legacy of church history. The Church suffers from the same basic heresies from the synagogue of Satan; 1) a false doctrine of Christ, 2) mixing law and grace. Churches exist that represent each age and state. Churches can be sound in doctrine but cold in practice if we've lost our first love, lost our understanding of the second coming, or our sense of urgency and mission. Have we intellectualized our "faith"? How should a church handle false teaching by members? Purge as in vomit. Should be handled by the elders, challenged 1-1, next as a group, and then expelled.

Read 1 John 5:1-5. In what sense should overcoming be a daily experience as well as an ultimate goal?

<sup>1</sup>JN 5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. <sup>2</sup> This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. <sup>3</sup> This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, <sup>4</sup> for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.