



The Revelation on Patmos

A Self-Guided Study

Introduction

Revelation encouraged suffering Christians living in Ephesus and six other smaller towns of Turkey during one of the worst persecutions by the Roman emperor during the 1st century. Some were losing everything they owned and others were going to die for their faith in Christ. The Greek word for witness describes them perfectly ... *martyr*.

John, himself an exile on an island off the coast of Ephesus, writes to both reveal and to conceal the truth. He wants Christians and Jews reading this to understand its message. He wants his Roman captors to be puzzled by what he is talking about. With a growing knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures and of Christian theology, the insights revealed can sustain us as it did those believers long ago.

Our Questions

Questions in this study guide are adapted from a very fine work by Keith Krell, a graduate of Multnomah Bible College and Seminary (B.A., M.Div.), Talbot School of Theology (D.Min.) and the University of Bristol (Ph.D.). He is the pastor of Crossroads Bible Church in Bellevue, Washington. His questions formed the basis of the study and are used by permission.

Our Bible Version

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the **New English Translation** commonly known as the NET Bible which is also available for download free from www.bible.org. By using one standard version as the basis for study, everyone can collate the study with their preferred translation.

We also encourage you to get the **New Living Translation** as a different version which seeks to convey all the information that is found in the original Greek.

If you have a mobile phone, there is a free app from logos.com which can be downloaded from your app store. It will have the **English Standard Version** already on it.

How to Use This Study Guide

This book will guide your personal reading and research on a weekly basis. Questions are divided into Monday through Friday. If you try to maintain daily study, catching up on a day you miss on the weekend, you will grow in your knowledge. The baffling will become clear and the meaning will be made known to you. You gain exactly what you put in.

To multiply your growth, discuss your weekly study with a group. This could be your own family, neighbors, or a group from church or work. Parents are encouraged to teach Revelation to their children.

Your Group

Who are the people in your discussion group? Write their names down as a prayer list as you study.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.

Week One

Are You Ready?

Revelation 1:1-8

Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy aloud, and blessed are those who hear and obey the things written in it, because the time is near!

Why study something as difficult to understand as Revelation? For some people this is like studying calculus, haiku (Japanese poetry), or reading a novel by Kafka. Sure, you could do it, why put yourself to all that trouble?

One author points out that the book of The Revelation:

... speaks to the needs of the faithful believers and the unfaithful who are succumbing to the pressures of sin and persecution. Jesus had been away for what seemed like a very long time. The pain of persecution tempted some to wonder how God could be with them and how long it would be before he came back to set things right. The pleasures of wealth tempted some to abandon their zeal for Christ. They wondered why they should witness for Christ and risk losing everything they had worked so hard for and enjoyed so much. Faithful Christians wondered how much pain they would have to endure and needed to understand how their pain could be reconciled with God's love and justice.¹

Why study Revelation? Because there is a tremendous blessing awaiting those who study this book and live the way God directs us during these difficult days.

Don't forget to take time as you begin each study to pray asking God to make the *revelation* clear.

¹ Robert B. Hughes and J. Carl Laney, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*, 732

Lord,

As I began the study of The Revelation, I ask you to bless me. Give me your wisdom to understand what I study. Show me what you want me to do as I seek to live my life in a way that's pleasing to you. Give me a perspective on this world, on your plans, and my place in them.

Amen

Monday

Starting our study fresh on Monday, we need to reflect on how we feel about studying this book. Perhaps this is not the first time that you tried to study *The Revelation*.

In the past, how have you felt about the book of Revelation?

Presently, what disturbs you the most? What excites you the most?

What specific goals do you have for this study?

The word "Revelation" in (1:1) is the translation of the Greek word *apocalypse*, meaning "to uncover, to take out of hiding" (for a sampling see *Matthew 10:26; Luke 17:30; Romans 1:18; 8:19; 1 Corinthians 1:7*). Thus, the English title of the book seems appropriate.

What or who is the book revealing?

The phrase "of Jesus Christ" could mean that what is revealed is something about Jesus Christ or he is the one doing the revealing. We are not able at this point in our study to determine which it is.

By calling this *Apocalypse* John was giving his reader and the 1st century hearers a heads up that they were about to embark on a fantastic voyage full of the imagery and sensory experiences. The more vivid our imagination the more thrilling this will be. It can make apocalyptic action movies seem dull.

Jesus will reveal a behind the scenes look at forces assembling to change our world into the Kingdom of Heaven.

We should read with a sense of urgency because once the command is given, these things will happen very *quickly* and billions of people will be caught up in world events and be powerless to resist.

Why is this message not for those who don't trust Jesus (1:1)?

The unsaved may read and profit by what they learn but if reading does not lead to a relationship with Jesus, it will be futile. If believers reading does not lead to perseverance, we have missed the point!

Do you consider yourself a "servant" of God?" Why or why not?

The word translated "soon" is sometimes used to refer to things that will happen in a short period time. The angel who rescued Peter from prison told him to rise *quickly* (Acts 12:7). In Acts 25:4, the Roman governor, Festus, indicated he was going from Jerusalem to Caesarea "*shortly*." It turned out to be eight to ten days later.

In Luke 18:8, Jesus refers to God's justice being given to those who cry out to him "*speedily*." At this point John had been waiting over sixty years for the Lord to establish justice in the Roman empire.

The Apostle Paul used it in a way like John's use here when he promised the Romans that "... The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet *shortly*."

With this in mind, how do you understand what John means when he says, "*what must happen very soon?*" (Romans 1:1)?

Ever get impatient for God to act? We want what we want justice now! Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" We ask God to act quickly to make right things that we cannot make right.

Tuesday

Although this book is an *Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*, it was revealed to John through an intermediary, an angel (1:1, see 17:17). The word *angel* means *messenger* and can refer to either humans or angels. Angels are mentioned in this book eighty-three times.

For extra credit, put the symbol (✓) by every line where the word *angel* occurs in your copy of *The Revelation*.

To what two things did John testify? (1:2)

Thinking like a person living in the first century, how would you have understood the phrase “*the word of God*”? (1:2)

What is the phrase “*the testimony about Jesus Christ*” supposed to add to your understanding of “*the word of God*”? (1:2)

We think “*Bible*” when we hear “*the word of God*.” What we forget is that neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament had been collected into one book. Each individual work was valued highly by people but at the end of the 1st century were likely written on scrolls made of parchment (leather) or on paper (papyri). John likely wrote on paper.

When *The Revelation* was read aloud in the seven churches, they would have understood “*the word of God*” to mean the message of God which is the testimony about Jesus Christ contained in this book.

Why does John separate “*the one who reads*” and “*those who hear and obey*”? (1:3)

Can you imagine someone memorizing and delivering *The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* as a dramatic reading before a church? What an impact that would have had on a people who were used to hearing and imagining what they heard! Perhaps you’ve had the experience of listening to a drama on the radio picturing the action taking place.

How would this be a blessing to actor, the one who reads?

How would this be a blessing for the person who hears?

How is the blessing dependent upon obeying?

Read over and meditate on the seven beatitudes (blessings) found in The Revelation:

1. Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy aloud, and blessed are those who hear and obey the things written in it, because the time is near! (1:3)
2. Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write this: 'Blessed are the dead, those who die in the Lord from this moment on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so they can rest from their hard work, because their deeds will follow them." (14:13)
3. (Look! I will come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays alert and does not lose his clothes so that he will not have to walk around naked and his shameful condition be seen.) (16:15)
4. Then the angel said to me, "Write the following: Blessed are those who are invited to the banquet at the wedding celebration of the Lamb!" He also said to me, "These are the true words of God." (19:9)
5. Blessed and holy is the one who takes part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. (20:6)
6. (Look! I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy expressed in this book.) (22:7)
7. Blessed are those who wash their robes so they can have access to the tree of life and can enter into the city by the gates. (22:14)

Wednesday

In a sense, reading Revelation is like reading someone else's mail. It was not written specifically to us, but instead to seven churches which existed in 95 AD.

Why do you think John wrote to “the seven churches that are in Asia” (1:4)?

This would be a good time to look at a map and identify where the seven churches were (1:10) and where John was at this time (1:9).

John had been exiled from Ephesus to the isle of Patmos. Apparently The seven churches are a circuit. One would start at *Ephesus*, go north to *Smyrna*, then *Pergamum*. From there the mail route goes in a southeasterly direction to *Thyatira*, *Sardis*, *Philadelphia*, and then to *Laodicea* and then back to Ephesus.

What would be characteristic of a person “who is and who was and who is to come?” (1:4)

This series of distinctive statements describe someone eternal. God introduced Himself in Exodus 3:14 where he reveals his name as “I AM” which here is rendered as “who is.” The next expression “who was” refers to the fact that God not only has always existed, but it is the same God who revealed himself to Moses. The final part “who is still to come” expresses His firm intention to work his plan for his people.

Who are “the seven Spirits who are before His throne?” (see also 3:1; 4:5; and 5:6)

Its inclusion with a description of God, then the seven spirits, followed by a reference to Jesus Christ seems to indicate the trinity. The seven spirits would then be a reference to the Holy Spirit, but certainly an unusual one.

The use of the numeral seven which is the completion of a series (in the Revelation there are seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, seven thunders). A possible precedent for understanding the spirit in a seven-fold manner is found in Isaiah 11:2:

And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. (ESV)

Thursday

Yesterday we looked at the first and third members of the Trinity, the Father and the Holy Spirit. Now we look at the second person: Jesus Christ.

What three titles are attributed to Jesus Christ and what do these tell us (1:5a)?

1. -
2. -
3. -

What three things has Jesus done for us (1:5b-6)?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

All the credit for our freedom and position in the kingdom as priests is due to Christ. As you will discover, this book is full of phrases for the second person of the Trinity. One way of viewing the book of The Revelation is as a tremendous worship scene.

The greeting, “*grace and peace to you,*” is sent by John to the seven churches but it comes from the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Take a few moments and re-read verses 4 through 6 and praise the Lord for all the things he did to bestow grace and peace upon us.

Friday

As you conclude the first week of your study in Revelation, it is appropriate that we come to the theme of the book in verse seven:

(Look! *He is returning with the clouds*, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes on the earth will mourn because of him. This will certainly come to pass! Amen.)

John is not directly quoting but is making an *allusion* to a prophetic idea. He grabs imagery from previously inspired writers to recall to the mind now familiar visions.

In verse 7, the phrase “*he is returning with the clouds*” reminds of the description in Daniel 7:13.

¹³I was watching in the night visions, “And with the clouds of the sky one like a son of man was approaching. He went up to the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him.

How is the use in Daniel 7:13 similar or different from this use?

There is also to Acts 1:11 where the angels refer this to Jesus’ return. The phrase “*every eye will see him, even those who pierced him*” refers to Zechariah 12:10:

“I will pour out on the kingship of David and the population of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication so that they will look to me, the one they have pierced. They will lament for him as one laments for an only son, and there will be a bitter cry for him like the bitter cry for a firstborn.” (Zechariah 12:10)

Do you think Zechariah 12:10 is a reference to the Rapture (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)? Why or why not?

The title, “*Alpha and the Omega*” (1:8) refers to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. We might say in English that this covers the subject from A to Z. This seems to be an allusion to Isaiah 41:4, “*I, the Lord, am the first; and with the last I AM He*” (NKJ).

This is the point of calling him by the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, Alpha and Omega. (Some Jewish teachers similarly came to call him the *Aleph* and the *Tav*, the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. They further called God “truth,” Hebrew *emet*, spelled *aleph-mem-tav*, which they said were the first, middle and last letters

of the alphabet, showing that God was eternal and ruled over all time.)²

The title, “The Almighty,” which was already used in 1:4 would have been very familiar to those who read the Old Testament in Greek. It was used there 181 times refer to God’s power as The Lord of Hosts (2 Kings 5:10).

Suggestions for Group Discussion

- Which of the seven blessings listed in The Revelation would you most like to have?
- What does it mean to you to have grace and peace with God?
- Does knowing God is the *Almighty* comfort or trouble you?
- Does knowing what Jesus did for you make you willing to do what he commands in this book?

²Craig S. Keener *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament*, Re 1:8

Week Two

The Comfort of Seeing Christ

Revelation 1:9-20

“Do not be afraid! I am the first and the last, and the one who lives! I was dead, but look, now I am alive – forever and ever – and I hold the keys of death and of Hades!”

To have what it takes to be steadfast and endure difficult days ahead, we must look to “Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” Seeing Jesus Christ as he really is, will give us the perspective, the strength, and the hope that will enable us to conquer and enter into the kingdom.

Lord,

As we study this week, help us put our eyes on Jesus. Give us understanding of the way He is presented here so our faith may be strengthened. Conquer our fear by reminding us of the First and the Last, the One who has already conquered death is on our side.

Amen

Monday

Locate the island of Patmos on a map (look under Patmos, Greece). Why was John there at this time?

As John writes this letter, prophecy in apocalyptic form, he writes from a very difficult personal situation. He is confined to this island out in the Aegean Sea. He writes to people who are undergoing similar persecution, but who are part of the same kingdom and also called to endure “*in Jesus.*”

The expression “*the Lord’s day*” (1:10) may refer to Sunday. It was used this way in a writing called the *Didache* (written near the same time). However, it is possibly a reference to the coming time of judgment, the Day of the Lord (see *Ezekiel 30:3; Joel 2:1; Amos 5:18; Malachi 4:5*).

How would you interpret this verse if it were referring to Sunday?

Would it be different if John refers to the final day of judgment?

What is John commanded to write?

What is significant about the command to “send” this book to the “seven churches?”

When we think “book,” we get the mental picture of several hundred pages bound together with either a paperback or hard cover. Those who first heard this would have formed a different mental picture. They would expect to see a scroll perhaps written on paper or parchment.

Another different image is “*lampstand*.” Clay was molded to allow a homeowner to place a wick through a spout into a small reservoir of olive oil. Several of these clay lamps placed on a stand would give sufficient light for a room. Another variation is a menorah with branching arms filled with oil and a wick. Light that and your world is illuminated.

What do the “seven golden lampstands” symbolize (1:12; see 1:20)?

This is an example of Scripture literally interpreting the Scripture. One interpretive principle is “*let the author identify and explain his own figures*.”

What do the lampstands represent (1:11)?

From their description as lampstands, what can you conclude is one of the primary purposes of the church?

Also consider the contribution of the following verses to this idea:

“Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God without blemish though you live in a crooked and perverse society, in which you shine as lights in the world” (*Philippians 2:14–15*)

⁸for you were at one time darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light – ⁹for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth – ¹⁰trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹²For the things they do in secret are shameful even to mention. ¹³But all things being exposed by the light are made evident. (*Ephesians 5:8-13*)

Tuesday

Today we began looking in detail at the person John saw in his vision, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not the way He appeared at his First Coming. Then His Glory was veiled in flesh, but this is God the Son as He really is.

To start, list the 10 things that characterize John’s description of the person he saw (*1:12-16*):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Now we want to know what John and the Christians of the seven churches would have understood each aspect of this description. This will give us a better picture of how to understand Christ.

John sees a figure who is “like a son of man” (1:13). This very descriptive term from the Old Testament describes a human being or at least some one “like a human being” (see *Job 25:6; Ezekiel 2; Daniel 7:13; 8:17; [10:5-6]*). It is one of the favorite terms that Jesus used of himself (*Matthew 10:23; 16:28; 24:30; 25:64*).

The description continues by describing the clothing of this person as being “clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash” (1:13). This sash was horizontal not diagonal.

What would this portrayal have communicated to John’s hearers (cf. *15:5-8; Exodus 28:2-4; Daniel 10:5-6*)?

The next aspect describes his head and hair as being “white” (1:14a; cf. *Daniel 7:9*). This is combined with the description of his eyes “like a flame of fire” (1:14b; cf. *2:18*).

What do these two features symbolize?

What is symbolized by feet “like burnished bronze” (1:15a; compare *2:18; 3:18*; see also *Ezekiel 1:7; Daniel 10:6; Micah 4:13*)?

What does a voice “like the sound of many waters” convey to you (1:15c; *Ezekiel 1:24; 43:2*)?

Consider the overall impression you would have encountering someone with this kind of appearance.

What conclusion would a hearer in the 1st century have drawn about this man’s identity?

A reader familiar with worship in the Jewish temple and the depiction of God in Daniel and Ezekiel likely perceived the image as God serving as a priest. This is further strengthened by his presence in the midst of the lampstands (*compare Leviticus 24:1-4*). They probably also would have connected Him with the idea of the King doing this (*see Isaiah 22:21-22*).

Wednesday

The next feature in John's vision are the stars held in Christ "right hand" (1:16a).

How does John identify the "seven stars" (see 1:20)?

The word translated "angels" (1:20) could also be "messengers" (*as in Luke 7:27; 9:52*). It has been suggested that the stars could stand for either the *guardian angel* or the *pastor* of each church.

What difference would each of these translations make?

Another unusual image is a *sharp, double-edged sword* out of his mouth. refers to the blade coming out of his mouth. It is a military broad sword used to kill.

Look up the subsequent references to this sword and consider what you learn about this sword:

2:12, 16 -

6:8 -

19:15, 21 -

When we compare these uses with *Psalm 2:9* and *Isaiah 11:4; 49:2* we realize that Jesus is coming to judge and slay those who will not repent. Some of these people are *in the church* while others are *in the world*.

What emotion does this military picture stir up within you?

The final characteristic is that Jesus' face looked *"like the sun shining in its strength"* (1:16c). Walking in the light and shining like the light is characteristic of those who overcome (*Daniel 12:3; Judges 5:31*). As the warrior who brings God's judgment upon this world, Jesus Christ will be victorious when he is revealed.

Thursday

Today we want to consider how we ought to respond to this vision. First, consider John's response (1:17a).

Do you think this was an unusual or an appropriate response? Why or why not?

What further revelation of himself does Jesus give John (1:17-18)?

Skim through chapters two and three and jot down the type of things they were experiencing:

Why might people in those circumstances need to know Jesus has *"the keys of death and of Hades"* (1:18b)?

Looking over this vision of Christ (1:12-18), what do you find that comforts you?

Does any aspect of this trouble you?

Friday

The Revelation was meant to reveal, not conceal. While this message is for believers, it is also a blessing for all who “hear and obey.”

What are the three aspects does Jesus’ command John to write (1:19)?

1. *Write*
2. *Write*
3. *Write*

If you were to take these three aspects and apply them to The Revelation, how might it help you understand the book?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

By identifying the symbols of the seven stars (1:12) and the seven golden lampstands (2:16) as a “mystery” (1:20), what does Jesus add to our understanding of how to interpret these?

In the New Testament, the word *mystery* is used of truth hidden previously but now revealed by God to man (*Daniel 2:28-30; with Ephesians 3:3-13*). The secret revealed (1:20) is that Jesus holds the messengers of the seven churches in his right hand and walks among the churches amid their persecution (1:9).

Suggestions for Group Discussion

- How does this vision of Christ differ from that presented in the Gospel accounts?
- Does the vision of Christ the Warrior-Priest-King walking among the churches bring comfort or fear? Why?
- If you knew you that you were in the right hand of Jesus Christ, would it make a difference in your boldness and in your faith?
- What can we do to encourage Christians who are being persecuted?

An Overview of the Literary Parts

The outline below helps us identify the way John put this work together. It is adapted from Dr. Walvoord's outline in the Bible Knowledge Commentary.

- I. Introduction: "What You Have Seen" (1)
 - A. Prologue (1:1–3)
 - B. Salutation (1:4–8)
 - C. The Patmos vision of Christ glorified (1:9–18)
 - D. The command to write (1:19–20)

- II. Letters to the Seven Churches: "What Is Now" (2–3)
 - A. Ephesus (2:1–7)
 - B. Smyrna (2:8–11)
 - C. Pergamum (2:12–17)
 - D. Thyatira (2:18–29)
 - E. Sardis (3:1–6)
 - F. Philadelphia (3:7–13)
 - G. Laodicea (3:14–22)

"Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches."

- III. The Revelation of the Future: “What Will Take Place Later” (4–22)
- A. The Events (4-9)
 - 1. Vision of the heavenly throne (4)
 - 2. Seven-sealed scroll (5)
 - 3. Opening six of the seals: the time of divine wrath (6)
 - 4. Saved in the Great Tribulation (7)
 - 5. Seventh seal opened introducing 7 trumpet judgments (8–9)

 - B. The Personages (10-15)
 - 1. The mighty angel and the little scroll (10)
 - 2. The two witnesses (11:1–14)
 - 3. The sounding of the seventh trumpet (11:15–19)
 - 4. Seven great personages of the end times (12–15)

 - C. The End of the Age (16-19)
 - 1. Seven bowls of divine wrath (16)
 - 2. The fall of Babylon (17–18)
 - 3. The song of hallelujah in heaven (19:1–10)
 - 4. The second coming of Christ (19:11–21)

 - D. The Future of the Kingdom (20-22)
 - 1. Millennial reign of Christ (20:1–10)
 - 2. Great white throne judgment (20:11–15)
 - 3. New heaven and the new earth (21:1–22:5)

 - E. The final word from God (22:6–21)³

³ Adapted from the outline by John F. Walvoord, “[Revelation](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 927–928.