

REVELATION 1-11

Study Guide

AUTHOR

The author names himself as John (Rev. 1:1), and most scholars and early church fathers consider the Apostle John, who wrote the Gospel of John and 1-3 John, to have authored Revelation. Numerous similarities exist in language and themes between the apostle's other writings and this book, though some believe the author may have been a different John, possibly a traveling prophet. What we know from the text is that John identifies his message as prophecy (Rev. 1:1-3, 10-19; 4:1-2; 17:1-3; 21:9-10; 22:6-7), hearing/seeing and recording the message of the Lord. He also considers himself, as an exile on the island of Patmos, a partner in the suffering and persecution of those to whom he writes (Rev. 1:9).

DATE

The text implies it was written during a time of increased persecution against Christians. We are aware of such persecution existing by Nero following a great fire in Rome in A.D. 64 until the time of his death by suicide in A.D. 68. Should the book have been written based on Nero's persecutions, then it would have occurred before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and therefore was warning of further persecutions to come in the near future. However, another period of persecution came under the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96), and early church fathers record the Apostle John's exile to Patmos during Domitian's reign. So, while the earliest Revelation could have been written is A.D. 68, most scholars put the writing between A.D. 95-96.

KEY LOCATIONS FOR REVELATION



Map from Bethany Green, *Revelation: The Seven Churches*

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BACKGROUND AND CONSIDERATIONS

The book begins with messages to specific churches in Asia, modern day western Turkey. Clearly, these 1st-century Christians were facing persecution and trials, and the message John received was that they were going to face even greater levels in the future. However, what was the nature of persecution happening at the time?

▪ NATURE OF PERSECUTION

- Most trades had gods associated with them (art, blacksmith, fishing, etc.) and homage to these gods was expected, including annual festivals where sacrifices were made to these gods. Economic stability and increase were understood to have come from appeasing these trade gods, so failure to pay homage to them was considered disloyal and detrimental to the welfare of others.
- The Roman Emperor was also considered divine and required homage. In some situations, not attributing proper worship was deemed a sign of rebellion against the government.
- Per Roman law, Judaism could be practiced throughout the empire, while all other religions were only allowed in the country of origin. Since Christianity was considered a sect of Judaism, believers were free to worship. However, following the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, Jews officially removed their association with the Christian sect (partly because Christians said that the destruction of the Temple was because of the Jews crucifying Jesus) and Roman authorities began viewing Christians as an illegitimate religion outside of Palestine (where Christianity originated).
- This all meant there was great pressure for believers to live in such a way that didn't bring into question their Christian faith, dedication to local gods, or loyalty to the emperor ("Caesar is Lord."). Additionally, false teachers were instructing believers they could both identify with pagan cults and still maintain faithfulness to Christ (Rev. 2:17-15, 20-24).

Revelation was written to certain people in a certain point in time, but it also applies to us today. Just as the revelation to John spoke of impending persecution then, it also reveals to us the intensifying warfare confronting the church (Rev. 1:3) performed by an anti-Christian government and numerous anti-Christian religions. This book provides to Christians who are enduring great hardships great encouragement, firm challenges to stand firm in the faith, and assurance they are part of the sovereign God's way of completely overcoming evil forces of all kinds. But, this book is also an evangelistic appeal to those living in the kingdom of darkness or are waffling in their loyalties to enter fully into the kingdom of light, or face the consequences (Rev. 22:12, 17).

▪ OLD TESTAMENT IMAGERY

- This book is FILLED with symbolic imagery, numbers, and poetry – much of which harkens back to the Old Testament. Be on alert for these Old Testament word pictures and consider what they described and foreshadowed.
- Here are just a few of the Old Testament items to be looking for:
 - Lamb
 - Lampstands
 - Babylon
 - Olive trees
 - Actions or visions similar to Moses, Elijah, Ezekiel, Zechariah

▪ SYMBOLIC NUMBERS

- In Hebrew, numbers have symbolic meaning. Since so much of Revelation is based on Hebrew and Old Testament imagery, numbers carry meaning in this book as well.
- Frequently used to signify completeness and perfection:
 - 4 – living creatures, horsemen, angels
 - 7 – churches, spirits of God, thunders, seals, trumpets, bowls
 - 12 – elders, gates, foundations, fruit
 - Multiples of 12 – such as 24 or 144,000 (is a multiple of 12 & therefore symbolizes the totality, not a literal amount)
- Satan and evil also are represented by numbers.
 - 3 ½ -- often associated with Satan and evil, a picture of a fracturing of God's completeness and unity.
 - 42 months (3 ½ years or 1,260 days) – represents the timeframe of intensified evil (Rev. 11:2; 13:5)
 - 666 – number of the beast (Rev. 13:18). This is most likely tied to the Hebrew and Greek numbering system which would then spell out "Nero Caesar." The concept is that evil personified would return to lead the armies of Satan against God.

LITERARY STRUCTURE & CHIASM

The book of Revelation demonstrates a particular type of structuring, called chiasm, used throughout the Bible. A chiasm structuring sets portions of the book in such a way that they mirror or contrast each other, with the main point of the book in the center (or most indented) part of the structure.

The Chiastic Structure of Revelation

Adapted from James M. Hamilton Jr., *Preaching the Word: Revelation—The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*

1:1–8 Letter Opening: Revelation of Jesus and the Things That Must Soon Take Place


1:9–3:22 The Church in the World: Letters to the Seven Churches

4:1–6:17 Throne Room Vision, Christ Conquers and Opens the Scroll

7:1–9:21 The Sealing of the Saints and the Trumpets Announcing Plagues

10:1–11 True Prophet: The Angel and John

11:1–14 The Church: Two Witnesses Prophecy for 1,260 Days, Opposition from the Beast

 **11:15–19, Seventh Trumpet:** “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.” Worship!

12:1–13:10 The Church: The Woman Nourished for 1,260 Days, Opposition from the Dragon and the Second Beast

13:11–18 False Prophet: The Deceiving Beast

14:1–19:10 The Redemption of the Saints and the Bowls of Wrath

19:11–20:15 Return of Christ, He Conquers, Sets up His 1,000-Year Kingdom, and Opens the Scrolls

21:1–22:7 The Church in Glory: New Heavens and New Earth

22:8–21 Letter Closing: Jesus Is Coming Soon

TIPS FOR READING REVELATION:

- Some of the visions address the same event, but from different perspectives.
- Themes are introduced, repeated, combined with other themes, and further developed.
- Visions are recorded in the chronological order in which John received them, but that does not mean the events within the visions are chronological. For example:
 - Ch. 1 – Jesus walking in the midst of His churches
 - Ch. 5 – Jesus is exalted
 - Ch. 12 – Jesus is born
 - Ch. 11 – Beast attacks the 2 witnesses
 - Ch. 13 – 2 Witnesses brought into existence
- **Keep your focus on the plot line and major points of what visions are communicating.** In the way you don't get wrapped up in the strange imagery within a sci-fi movie, do that with Revelation as well. Here are some questions which will help you keep the main things up front:
 - What is the main point of the vision?
 - What warnings or encouragements are being given?
 - How is the vision further revealing Christ and His character, or Satan and his character?
 - What Old Testament imagery might be being used in the vision, and what did that imagery mean (or point toward) when used in the Old Testament?

THE SEVEN SEALS & TRUMPETS (REV. 6-11)

	Seal	Effect
Horses	1. White Horse	Conqueror with bow & crown – some interpret as Christ; others as the anti-Christ who promises peace
	2. Red Horse	Peace removed; warfare
	3. Black Horse	Scales for rationing; scarcity; famine
	4. Pale Horse	Death affecting 25% of earth
Other Images	5. Martyred Souls	Ask God how long until judgment; given robes & instructed to wait a bit longer
	6. Cosmic Catastrophe	Earthquake, sun darkened, blood moon, falling stars; sky, mountains, & islands removed
	7. Silence in Heaven	Silence & pause before further judgments – some interpret this as a Sabbath rest, awe at end of history, calm before the storm, or that the 7 trumpets & bowls make up the content of the 7 th seal

	Trumpet	Effect
Affect earth	1. Hail & fire mixed with blood	1/3 earth burned; 1/3 trees burned; all grass burned
	2. Mountain of fire into sea	1/3 sea to blood; 1/3 sea creatures die; 1/3 ships destroyed
	3. Burning star to fresh water	1/3 rivers and springs; 1/3 water turned bitter
	4. Sun, moon, & stars struck	1/3 of sun, moon, & stars; no light for 1/3 of day & night
Affect Humanity	5. Falling star opens abyss	Poisonous locusts (demons) for 5 months; people wish to die but can't die
	6. 200 million + horses/riders	1/3 humanity killed
	7. Jesus enthroned eternally	Rebellion comes to an end; Jesus enthroned; followers rewarded

SIMILARITIES OF EZEKIEL AND REVELATION (CH. 10)

Ezekiel	Revelation
Vision of God's glory; commissioning to prophesy (Ezek. 1-3)	Vision of glory of God & Christ (Rev. 1-5)
	Unsealed scrolls & Sounding Trumpets (Rev. 6-9)
	Commissioned to prophecy (Rev. 10)
Prophecies of God's judgment (Ezek. 4-32)	Prophecies of God's judgment (Rev. 11-18)
Prophecies of future salvation (Ezek. 33-48)	Prophecies salvation through Christ (Rev. 19-22)

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EZEKIEL & JOHN EATING THE SCROLL

Ezekiel 2:9–3:4	Revelation 10:2; 5:1;10:9, 10
2:9: "And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it."	10:2: "He had a little scroll open in his hand."
2:10: "And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe."	5:1: "Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals."
3:1: "And he said to me, 'Son of man, eat whatever you find here. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.'"	10:9: "So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, 'Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.'"
3:2: "So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat."	10:10a: "And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it."
3:3: "And he said to me, 'Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.' Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey."	10:10b: "It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter."
3:4: "And he said to me, 'Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with my words to them.'"	10:11: "And I was told, 'You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.'"

James M. Hamilton Jr., *Preaching the Word: Revelation—The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*

OLD TESTAMENT IMAGERY IN REVELATION 11:4-6

OT Image	OT Reference	OT Personage	Revelation
Two olive trees	Zechariah 4	Joshua the high priest Zerubbabel the governor	11:4
Fire consumes enemies	2 Kings 1:9–12	Elijah, wicked king Ahaziah and his men	11:5
No rain	1 Kings 17:1	Elijah, Ahab	11:6a
Waters to blood, plagues	Exodus 7–12	Moses, Pharaoh	11:6b

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OBSERVATION WORDS

- Jesus – *take note of different names, representations, actions, etc.*
- Holy Spirit
- God
- Lamb
- Old Testament allusions/images (names, objects,
- Trumpet – *distinguish between the following:*
 - *Trumpets announcing things in heaven*
 - *Trumpets announcing judgment*
- Seal, Bowls
- Throne
- Holy, Worthy
- Evil Actions (plagues, actions of seals, trumpets, bowls, etc.)
- Satan/beast (any synonyms)

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- What lesson did the Spirit highlight to you out of this book? How will you go about applying what you've learned? In what way(s) will your life look different as a result?

- What did you learn about Jesus through this book? How is He described? What does He do?

- What did you learn about the Holy Spirit through this book?

- What did you learn about God through this book?

- What are the Old Testament images, references, and allusions you saw? What did they mean in the Old Testament and what do they mean in Revelation?

- Describe some of the worship you see taking place in heaven. How does this change your perspective of worship here on earth and what heaven will be like?

- What warnings & encouragements are given to the church & believers? What warning or encouragement do you need to hold onto in your life right now?

- How does this book also address unbelievers? How does this impact your own passions for evangelism?

KEY WORD:

KEY VERSE:

KEY CHAPTER:

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