Revelation



Term 4 Community Group Studies and Bible Talk Overview

As You Begin

Revelation often terrifies us with its odd and strange images. Dragons, swords, blood, angels, plagues, and violence - is it literal or figurative? What do they mean? Then there's the question of timing. Is this like a clock, sequencing events of the end, giving us stages? Are we to see nations and kings like Napoleon, Nero, or nations underneath these events? Is it all future? All of this has led to countless books, articles, and podcasts. But while it is tricky, we shouldn't shy away from it. Nor should we dwell on it excessively.

What's clear is the book's core message: **Jesus wins**. The lamb who was slain will emerge victorious over all God's enemies and his people. And this is the big idea to keep in mind as we read and study it. It is first of all a book to comfort God's suffering, perplexed people who feel like the world is out of control. In chapter **4-5**, we have a vision of God's heavenly throne room, and the good, great, best news about this - the throne isn't empty! God has abdicated or left. Revelation offers a comforting word to anyone living in a world marred by evil and questioning its eventual end: **Jesus wins**.

In 2026, we will look at the first 5 chapters, finishing the book in late 2027.

Structure

Revelation is written by John[1] towards the end of the first century. The church is likely going through a time of heightened persecution under Emperor Domitian. Believers in the seven churches of Asia Minor experience this to varying degrees. John himself is writing as a believer who'd been exiled to the island of Patmos.

There is a threefold structure to Revelation. Jesus tells John to write:

[1] Who also wrote the Gospel of John and 1-3 John.

i. **What you have seen:** The situation of the seven churches, **Ch 2-3**
ii. **What is now:** The reality of God's rule and Jesus' victory, **Ch 4-5**
iii. **What is to come:** The future, from John's perspective, **Ch 6-22**

Note that the future is not the future for us, but from John's perspective. He writes of things that will happen soon in Asia Minor.

However, these are also the flavour all of life between Jesus' first and second comings. This larger chunk can be broken into two parts.

Chapters 6-16 Describe life between Jesus' first and second comings, comprising of four panels each with a set of seven things including an interlude between the sixth and seventh thing. They each highlight something of life now:

i. **Ch 6-7** - Tyranny of rulers
ii. **Ch 8-11** - Suffering and chaos in the created world
iii. **Ch 12-14** - Persecution of believers
iv. **Ch 15-16** - Destruction of earth

Chapters 17-22 Describe the end of things and the beginning of the new creation:

i. **17:1-19:10** - The destruction of human evil
ii. **19:11-20:15** - The destruction of spiritual evil
iii. **21:1-22:5** - New Creation
iv. **22:6-21 22** - Keeping the words of Jesus and Revelation today

We can also organise Revelation by seven sets of seven:

Prologue (**1:1–3**)

i. Seven churches (**1:4–3:22**)
ii. Seven seals (**4:1–8:5**)
iii. Seven trumpets (**8:6–11:19**)
iv. Seven great signs (**12:1–15:4**)
v. Seven bowls of wrath (**15:1–16:21**)
vi. Seven messages of final judgment (**17:1–18:24**)
vii. Seven last things (**19:1–22:5**)

Epilogue (**22:6–20**)

Genre

In the Greek Bible, Revelation is called, *The Apocalypse of John*. Whoa! What does this mean? Definitely not fire or end of the world stuff. While the dictionary defines apocalypse as, 'The complete final destruction of the world, as described in the biblical book of Revelation; an event involving destruction or damage on a catastrophic scale.' This isn't what the word means in the Bible. It's a compound word meaning 'To remove a cover from' (from + to cover).

So, this is a scroll about revealing and uncovering to make fully known. It's a revelation. It's seeing something clearly you couldn't before. This is God pulling back the curtain to show us what's really going on.

More over, the word apocalypse is all over the New Testament. Paul wrote about how he learnt the gospel of Jesus by saying, "I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a an *apocalypse* of Jesus Christ" and that God "was pleased to *apocalypse* his Son to me" (**Galatians 1:12**, **16**). In **Ephesians 1:17** Paul prays, 'asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and *apocalypse*, so that you may know him better.' He wants them to understand Jesus better and better.

So, an apocalypse in the bible is about seeing Jesus, the world, our place and God's plans properly.

Symbols & Numbers

Apocalyptic imagery is based on biblical design patterns that begin in the book of Genesis and then develop throughout the Bible. We need the rest of the bible to understand them. Which means we must interpret the symbols by connecting them to their roots in the Hebrew Bible[2] and in 1st century Roman culture, not our own culture.

---

[2] Especially helpful for Revelation is Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zephaniah.

When it comes to numbers, we aren't to try and measure or take them literally - we read them literarily, like all parts of the bible. That means, we are to think about the meaning of the number in the content we are reading it, not the mathematical impaction or length of time.

For example, there are more than 7 churches in Asia Minor (like Colossae). Why these seven? It's about completeness. Whenever we encounter seven of anything in the book, a message is conveyed. Seven is a number associated with completeness. John wants us to know that these seven churches are for all the churches, in every generation, reflecting struggles and victories we all have. As we read in **1:7**, '**Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches**.' This is a message for all Christians, written to 7 real churches. And, the lamp stands and candles, this represent those churches from both an heavenly and earthly view.

Below is a summary of some common themes and numbers to help:

Symbol	Meaning
Lion	Nobility
Ox	Strength
Eagle	Speed
Horn	Power
Eye	Knowledge
Right hand	Authority
Lampstand	Church
Star	Angel / messenger
Dragon	Satan

Number	Meaning
4	Create world: earthly or consummated
6	Humanity
7	Perfection, completeness, salvation
10	Opposition to God and / or his people
12	God's people, redemption
1,000	Great multitude, very long period undefined

Further Reading

Nancy Guthrie, *Blessed: Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Revelation*, Crossway, 2022.

An excellent female voice on Revelation both in a scholarly and pastoral way.

Geoff Bingham, *The Revelation of St.John the Divine: Commentary and Essays on the Book of The Revelation*, New Creation Publications, 1993.

Geoff Bingham was the principal of BCSA from 1967-73. Very academic, but short.

Paul Barnett, *Revelation: Apocalypse Now and Then*, Aquila Press, 2019.

Paul Barnett was the rector at Trinity Church Adelaide from 1973-80. An easy to read commentary, but slightly academic in places.

Gordon Fee, *Revelation*, Cascade Books, 2011.

One of the foremost scholars on Revelation today. His commentary in the NCC series is short and accessible.

Tom Wright, *Revelation for Everyone,* Westminster John Knox, 2011.

Written as a daily devotion.

Toolkit

Five Tips When Reading Revelation

i. The Old Testament is the background for Revelation. So when you come across a strange image in Revelation, ask yourself, "Is this from the Old Testament?" And, "Where is it?" John's visions echo Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah because they are seeing the same heavenly realities. Let the clearer parts of the Bible help you understand the trickier parts of the Bible.

ii. The gospel is the key to understanding the whole Bible, including Revelation. **1:1-3** reminds us it's a book all about Jesus.

iii. The main body of the Revelation (chapters **6-22**) often goes through cycles of 7. These cycles view the same events (all the time between Jesus' first and second comings) from different angles - just like an instant replay in a sports game.

iv. Many images in Revelation are repeated and are symbolic of something concrete. See the tables above for a quick summary.

v. Interpret Revelation according to its apocalyptic literary genre, recognising its use of symbols and imagery. Nanci Guthrie says, "apocalyptic literature describes earthly events from a heavenly perspective."[3] See the Bible Project video in Session One for more details.

[3] Nancy Guthrie, *Blessed: Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Revelation*, Page 30.

Seven Blessing of Revelation

i. **Revelation 1:3**, Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

ii. **Revelation 14:13**, Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.”

iii. **Revelation 16:15**, “Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed.”

iv. **Revelation 19:9**, Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”

v. **Revelation 20:6**, Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

vi. **Revelation 22:7**, “Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.”

vii. **Revelation 22:14**, “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.”

Summary of the Seven Churches



i. **Ephesus** - A church that stops loving Jesus (**2:1-7**)
ii. **Smyrna** - A church that is afraid to stand out for Jesus (**2:8-11**)
iii. **Pergamum** - A church that drifts from the teaching of Jesus (**2:12-17**)
iv. **Thyatira** - A church that tolerates wrong teaching about Jesus (**2:18-29**)
v. **Sardis** - A church that thinks too highly of itself (**3:1-6**)
vi. **Philadelphia** - A church that thinks too little of itself (**3:7-13**)
vii. **Laodicea** - A church that is too content in itself (**3:14-22**)

Session One

Read **Revelation 1**

This week is all about the genre of Revelation and celebrating the magnificence of Jesus to help us understand the rest of the book. Remember, the purpose of Revelation is to give us a heavenly perspective on our earthly circumstances, so we'd know that Jesus wins and can be given hope for the future.

It's important to read any apocalyptic work as a whole book. This is so we can see how the themes and ideas develop while looking for the most repeated or "anchor" images and words, like the heavenly throne, the lamb, the dragon, the beast, etc. This means we need to take time to identify symbols and look for where they appear in the OT, then in the 1st century Greco-Roman cultural context John wrote in and to, and then look for how the symbols are interpreted within the book itself. For example, in **1:8** we read, "the Alpha and Omega, the one who was, who is, and who is coming." As we keep reading, Revelation tells us that this is the risen Jesus. Or, in **1:12** we hear about seven stars and lamps and then, in **1:20** we learn they are the Angels and churches.

Watch the video below and then chat through the questions.

www.bibleproject.com/videos/apocalyptic-literature

i. What does **1:1** tell us about what the rest of the book will be about?
ii. What do **1:1-3** tell us about Revelation?
iii. What do **1:1-8** tell us about Jesus?
iv. What do they tell us about what Jesus has done for us?
v. If we feel guilt from sin, how can these verses help?
vi. How do these verses help us when we are worried and afraid about how life is going?

Session Two

Read **Revelation 2:1-11**

Although each church gets its own section, **Revelation 2-3** is not seven letters, but one letter in seven sections. In **1:11**, John is to write what he sees on one scroll and send it to all the churches. They are to read each other's sections and listen, **2:7**. This is important because it means each section can and should be read more broadly. If a church in Ephesus can benefit from reading about a church in Sardis, so can a church in Adelaide. The specifics for each church will differ, but there will be something here from which every church can learn. Wy only seven churches? They represent all the people of God - seven being a complete number of perfection.

A general pattern to the letters is this:

i. Greeting: **To the angel of the church in...**

ii. A title of the risen Christ, usually taken from the description in chapter 1: **These are the words of...**

iii. Something specific Jesus knows about the churches: **I know...** This is either positive or negative or both. It shows his complete knowledge of his churches and all their diversity.

iv. Something they should do in response to what Jesus knows or an encouragement to keep going: **Whoever is victorious**, **2:7**,**11**,**17**,**26**, **3:5**,**12**,**21** or **do not be afraid**, **2:10** or **You have this in your favour**, **2:6**.

v. Call to everyone: **Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches**.

vi. A result of listening to Jesus, application or blessing.

Read **Revelation 2:1-11** and take note of who's speaking to each church, what the praise, criticism, and promise to each one is.

i. What do you think are the most serious warnings?
ii. What promises of Jesus stand out most?
iii. How can we turn these verses into a prayer for us and our church?
iv. Each of us has sin and bulk that we will struggle with and could easily have a letter like this written about us! How does the gospel motivate us to follow Jesus, correcting and urging us to live a resurrected life?

Session Three

Read **Revelation 2:12-29**

We will do the same as Session Two this week. Read **Revelation 2:12-29** and take note of who's speaking to each church, what the praise, criticism, and promise to each one is. Use the questions above again.

Session Four

Read **Revelation 3**

We will do the same as Session Two and Three this week. Read **Revelation 3** and take note of who's speaking to each church, what the praise, criticism, and promise to each one is. Use the questions above again.

Session Five

Read **Revelation 4**

John's next vision is of God's heavenly throne room, described with images from many Old Testament prophetic books. Around God are creatures and elders, representing all creation and human nations, who are giving honour and allegiance to the one true God.

This is an encouraging moment after the seven letters. At the time, Emperor Domitian was actively persecuting Christians all over Rome. This would have been felt all over the world. It begs the question: Is Jesus still on the throne, if such a horrible way of life is in store for his people? Maybe it's empty or Jesus as decided not to rule any more?

Read on to find the encouragement John and Jesus give to the Christians.

i. Where is John taken in his vision?
ii. Is the throne empty? Who is on it?
iii. Who does John see gathered around the throne and what are they doing?
iv. Where else do we see the Holy triad in the Bible? Hint: It's only in 2 places, here and… How is this section like that?
v. How should a vision of God's holiness change us? Does both dread and joy fill you? Why is that a fitting response?
vi. How might you live in the reality of this holy God each day? Are there habits to cultivate or put off?

Session Six

Read **Revelation 5**

Recap **Revelation 4** as you begin and then read Revelation 5. Same scene, but we're changing angles. **Revelation 4** says Holy, Holy, Holy is God and now we say worthy is the lamb (**5:9**, **12**). The atonement is now at the centre of John's vision and what God's doing in the world. And those around the throne sing a new song, a song about the lamb as all nations, peoples and creature are united around the atoning blood of the lamb. It turns out that **Revelation 4** isn't enough. **Revelation 5** completes the picture and is the goal of our existence; under the holy God, looking at the lamb on the throne.

i. What is in the hand of the one on the throne?
ii. What is going to happen to it (**5:2-4)** and what does John do?
iii. Who does the angle say will do this?
iv. How is this figure described (**5:5-6**)?
v. How do all those around the throne see this person?
vi. How would you summarise this chapter?
vii. In a world of suffering and evil, how does Jesus' triumph (**5:5**) and ransom (**5:9**) encourage us?
viii. Eternity is more than time around and with God - but it's no less. How does this image fill you with joy for the future and how can you live more like this today?
ix. How do **Revelation 4-5** encourage us in our witness to other about Jesus? What does this tell us about our priorities in life?

Notes

TRINITY
CHURCH

Revelation 1-5

Term 4 2026 Community Group Studies and Bible Talk Overview

Trinity Church Golden Grove