



REVELATION

THE RETURN OF THE KING



Introduction and Background

from John D. Barry et al., Faithlife Study Bible, 2016:

“Revelation draws back the curtain on the unseen realities of life for God’s people. There is a spiritual battle going on, and the risen Jesus reveals these visions to John so that God’s Church will be aware of what is happening now and in the future. While the strange imagery might seem frightening, the ultimate message of Revelation is a hopeful one: Although evil appears to triumph, God remains on the throne.

The title of Revelation comes from the opening verse, which identifies this book as the revelation of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:1). The recipient is identified as “John” (1:4). In the early church period, this was often understood to be the Apostle John, who spent the latter part of his life in Ephesus, a major city in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). John writes to them from Patmos, a small island in the Aegean Sea, where he had been exiled (1:9). He wants to strengthen them in the face of cultural pressure and outright persecution.

There are two major options for dating Revelation: during the reign of the Roman emperor Nero (ad 54–68) and during the reign of Domitian (ad 81–96), when there was intense localized persecution by the Roman Empire. Irenaeus, a church father during the second century, connects Revelation with Domitian (Against Heresies 5.30.3), and many modern interpreters hold this view.

Revelation is written in an apocalyptic, prophetic style. This kind of writing often featured an angel or otherworldly being who revealed heavenly mysteries to a human recipient.

These mysteries are delivered in the form of visions that use graphic imagery to symbolize cosmic realities. The cryptic language may have helped Revelation be easily circulated around the Roman Empire during a time of Christian persecution... At the same time, Revelation echoes the concern of Old Testament prophecy for the status of God's people in the present day. The book uses apocalyptic imagery to anticipate the final realization of God's reign but ultimately functions as a prophetic message for the people of God in their current situation and trials.

Revelation opens with an introduction (1:1–20) that includes a vision of the Son of Man, a figure that also appears in the Old Testament prophecy of Daniel (Dan 7:13). This figure, Jesus, then dictates to John seven letters—one for each of the seven churches (Rev 2:1–3:22; compare Mark 2:10; 8:31). The majority of Revelation (Rev 4:1–22:5) consists of a series of visions disclosing unseen realities concerning the future yet with implications for the present time. These visions unfold as three sets of seven—seals, trumpets, and bowls. Each time a seal is broken, a trumpet is sounded, or a bowl is poured out, John witnesses a new scene of apocalyptic imagery.

After the seventh bowl unleashes cataclysmic destruction, John has visions depicting the fall of "Babylon," the defeat of Satan, and the renewal of heaven and earth (17:1–22:5). In the closing scene, Jesus assures John that He is coming soon, a promise that confirms the urgency of John's message (22:6–21)."

We will be moving through Revelation fairly quickly, and there will be much that won't be covered. If you have time to read and discuss more then please do, and Tom can recommend resources to aid discussion of some of the trickier sections.

Please use your time in groups however is best for encouraging one another. To read God's Word, pray, share, have fun and be built up in faith together!



1. REVELATION 1:1-8 **THE RETURN OF THE KING**

- How does John's sense of urgency come across in the opening verses?
- Why might this have felt particularly strong given the situation these Christians were in?
- What is John keen to stress about God in verses 4-6?
- Is there anything there that surprises you? Or anything else you would have expected to read in his description of God?
- How does John use the Old Testament to restate that Jesus is going to return? (verse 7)
- Do you take comfort from the description of the Lord God in verse 8?
- How do you feel as we start to read Revelation? Do you feel 'blessed' to read these words?
- What difference(s) does it make to our lives to believe that Jesus will return?

2. REVELATION 3:1-6 **LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES**

- How does the reputation of the church in Sardis differ from the reality?
- Are we ever in danger of relying on our reputation or past, and missing the present reality?
- How does Jesus encourage/warn these Christians to wake up in verse 3?
- Could we apply the same word to ourselves sometimes if we're in danger of 'snoozing' in our faith?
- What might it take to be one of those 'dressed in white' who will be with Jesus forever?
- And how does the wider context of the New Testament help ensure we give a gospel-based answer?
- How would you say verse 6 in your own words?
- Is there anything in particular that you need to listen to, hold fast to, or return to with Jesus?

3. REVELATION 5 **THE LION AND THE LAMB**

- Again we hear the number seven, this time for the seals, what is the significance of this number?
- Why does it make John so sad that no-one is worthy to open the scroll?
- What does this say about how history and all our lives would be different if Jesus had not come?
- Does John see a Lion (v5) or a Lamb (v6)?
- What does it mean that a lamb looks like it's been killed, and yet stands?
- How does the glory ascribed to this lamb ratchet up throughout verses 8-14?
- How often do we think of Jesus in this way?
- Does it help or hinder your faith to try and imagine Jesus in glory as the Lion and the Lamb?
- Could this picture of Jesus in glory be of any help in following him now, before we join him?

4. REVELATION 11:15-19 **THE KING WILL REIGN**

- What is being described in verse 15? And how does it picture what will happen in the end?
- What stands out to you from the song of praise in verse 17?
- Do we really believe that one day Jesus will return to reign?
- How else does John describe this so as to emphasise the power and glory of Jesus' eternal reign?
- Does it impact our faith in the present, to believe that this is the future?
- How does this inform the way we see the world around us?
- Are you looking forward to having Jesus as your King?



EXTRA CONTEXT: **BABYLON IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The New Testament refers to Babylon 12 times. Friesen comments on these occurrences: “Matthew and Acts refer to Babylonian exile as a way of understanding Jesus in relation to Israel’s history, while 1 Peter and Revelation use Babylon as a symbol for Rome” (Friesen, “Babylon, NT,” 379)...Some New Testament references to Babylon may be cryptic allusions to Rome (1 Pet 5:13; Rev 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2). Like Babylon, Rome was an oppressive, imperial power that had besieged Jerusalem and desecrated the temple (Friesen, “Babylon, NT,” 379). The book of Revelation portrays “Babylon the great city” as “the mother of prostitutes and the abominations of the earth” (Rev 17:5), which will be cast down in end-time judgment. Revelation is replete with Old Testament imagery: “The historic city and empire of Babylon were always depicted by the prophets as the ungodly power par excellence”... It would have been natural for Christians to see Rome as a contemporary version of the Old Testament Babylon from which God delivered his people (Wiseman, “Babylon,” 479).

William R. Osborne, “Babylon,” ed. John D. Barry et al., The Lexham Bible Dictionary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

5. REVELATION 18:1-8 **WARNINGS OVER THE FALL OF EVIL**

- What is wrong with Babylon as described in verses 2 and 3?
- But what has happened? (v2)
- What is the warning to God’s people in verses 4 to 5?
- What might this look like in practice, how do we faithfully live ‘in the world but not of the world?’
- What do we have, or have been given, that can help us to do that?
- Is it tempting to try and downplay or even omit the references in the New Testament to God’s Judgment on evil?
- But what world (or eternity) would we be left with, if God did not draw a line and say ‘enough is enough?’
- Can these warnings actually encourage us in our faith, and in our sharing of the Good News of Jesus?

6. REVELATION 21:1-8

A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

- What are some of the more common ideas or images of heaven in popular culture?
- How do verses 1 and 2 give us a very concrete image of where God's people will live for eternity?
- What or who is the main cause of hope and joy when picturing eternal life in verse 3?
- How does life in eternity differ from our experience now according to verse 4?
- Does the idea of God's justice and mercy together help understand both the incredible promise of these verses and the significant warning?
- A final question - do we really believe this is true?

A FINAL PRAYER

We pray for those who are lonely. We hope in the promise that the home of God will be among people: that God will dwell with us, that we will be his people and that God himself will be with us.

We pray for those who are crying; the sad, the depressed and the anxious. We hope in the promise that God will wipe every tear from our eyes.

We pray for those who are experiencing the consequences of death, the bereaved and those who are mourning. We hope in the promise that death and mourning will be no more.

We pray for those who are in pain, suffering from illness either physical or mental. We hope in the promise that crying and pain will be no more.

We pray for those who are thirsty for truth, love and grace; those who seek God and his life with earnest hearts. We hope in the promise that God will give water to the thirsty without cost from the spring of the water of life.

Lord you said, 'See, I am making all things new.'
'Amen, make all things new!'



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SPACE FOR NOTES & PRAYERS