



# Revelation

(Introduction & background information provided is from the ESV study Bible)

## **Author and Title**

Revelation 1:1 announces both the book's title (it is a "revelation") and its divine author ("Jesus Christ"). The book is an "unveiling" of unseen spiritual forces operating behind the scenes in history and controlling its events and outcome. This disclosure is conveyed in a series of symbolic visions that exhibit the influence of OT prophecies, especially those received by Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. The book is also "prophecy" (Rev. 1:3; 22:7), not only as divine prediction of future events but also as divine diagnosis of the present state of affairs.

The divine author identified in the opening verse, Jesus the Messiah, has authority from God to describe coming events to his servant John (see also 1:4, 9; 22:8) for communication to the church.

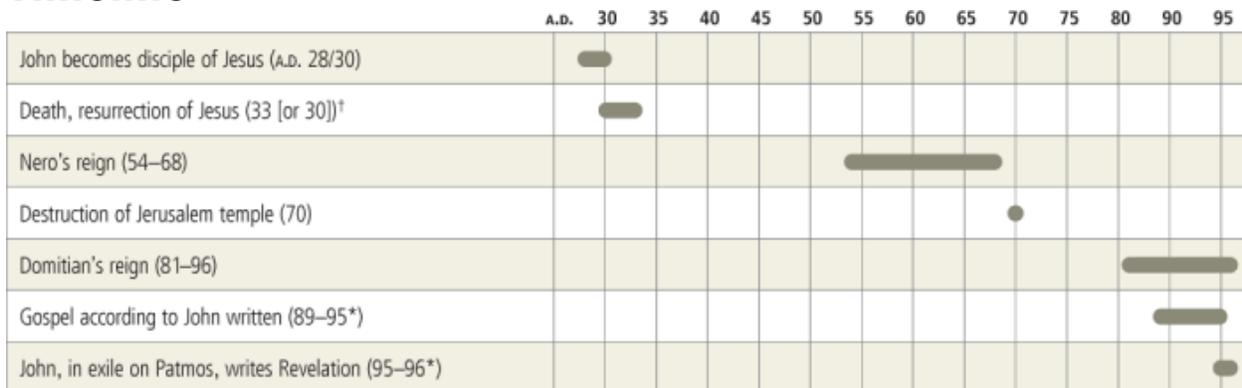
Without denying his own role in the composition of the book, John presents himself more as a recipient and recorder of visions than as the author of Revelation's message. Although John does not call himself an apostle and he numbers himself among the prophets (22:9), early church fathers—notably Justin Martyr (writing c. A.D. 135–150), Melito of Sardis (mid-2nd century), and Irenaeus of Lyons (writing c. 185)—consistently identified him as John the son of Zebedee, the beloved disciple who authored the Fourth Gospel and three NT epistles.

Because Revelation’s Greek style differs markedly from other Johannine literature and its theological emphases are distinctive, a number of contemporary scholars think it was written by another John, called “John the elder,” someone otherwise unknown (who also wrote 2 and 3 John). These scholars give weight to another early tradition (beginning with Dionysius of Alexandria in the 3rd century) that attributes Revelation to “John the elder.” Nevertheless, both thematic links (e.g., Jesus as Lamb and Word of God [John 1:1, 14, 29; Rev. 5:6; 19:13]) and the earliest church tradition favor the traditional attribution of Revelation to John, the “beloved disciple,” who with Peter and James belonged to Jesus’ inner circle (John 21:20, 24).

## Theme

Revelation unveils the unseen spiritual war in which the church is engaged: the cosmic conflict between God and his Christ on the one hand, and Satan and his evil allies (both demonic and human) on the other. In this conflict, Jesus the Lamb has already won the decisive victory through his sacrificial death, but his church continues to be assaulted by the dragon, in its death-throes, through persecution, false teaching, and the allure of material affluence and cultural approval. By revealing the spiritual realities lying behind the church’s trials and temptations during the time between Christ’s first and second comings, and by dramatically affirming the certainty of Christ’s triumph in the new heaven and earth, the visions granted to John both warn the church and fortify it to endure suffering and to stay pure from the defiling enticements of the present world order.

## Timeline



\* denotes approximate date; / signifies either/or; † see *The Date of Jesus' Crucifixion*, pp. 1809–1810

## Purpose, Occasion, and Background

The Revelation is addressed to first-century churches in seven cities of the Roman province of Asia (now western Turkey, see map) (1:4, 11) as representative of all Christ’s churches (cf. “all the churches,” 2:23; and “to the churches,” 2:7, etc.).

These churches were threatened by false teaching (such as that of the Nicolaitans, 2:6, 15), by persecution (2:10, 13), by compromise with surrounding paganism through idolatry and immorality (2:14, 20-21), and by spiritual complacency (3:1-3, 15-17). Jesus sent his revelation to John to fortify his churches to resist the wiles of the devil, whether in the form of intimidating violence (the beast), deceptive heresy (the false prophet), or beguiling affluence (the prostitute).

## History of Salvation Summary

Christians are called to be faithful to Christ amid spiritual war against Satan and sin (see note on Matt. 12:28) as they await Christ's second coming.

## Key Themes

1. Through his sacrificial death, Jesus Christ has conquered Satan, the accuser, and has ransomed people from every nation to become a kingdom of priests, gladly serving in God's presence.	1:5, 18; 5:5-10; 12:1-11
2. Jesus Christ is present among his churches on earth through his Holy Spirit, and he knows their trials, triumphs, and failures.	1:12-3:22
3. World history, including its woes and disasters, is firmly in the control of Jesus, the victorious Lamb.	5:1-8:1
4. God is presently restraining his own wrath and his enemies' efforts to destroy the church as he patiently gathers his redeemed people through the testimony that his suffering people proclaim about Jesus.	6:5-11; 7:1-3; 8:6-12; 9:4-6, 18; 11:3-7; 12:6, 13-17
5. Present disasters (war, drought, famine, epidemic disease), though limited in scope by God's restraint, are foreshadows and warnings of escalating judgments to come.	6:3-17; 8:6-13; 11:13; 16:1-21; 20:11-15
6. By maintaining their faithful testimony to the death, believers in Jesus will conquer both the dragon and the beast. The martyrs' victory, now hidden, will be manifest in their vindication at Christ's return.	2:10-11, 26-29; 3:11-13; 6:9-11; 7:9-17; 11:7-12, 17-18; 12:10-11; 14:1-5; 15:2-4; 20:4-6
7. Satan attacks the church's perseverance and purity through violent persecution, through deceptive teaching, and through affluence and sensual pleasure.	2:1-3:22; 13:1-18; 17:1-18:24
8. At the end of the age, the church's opponents will intensify persecution, but Jesus, the triumphant Word of God, will defeat and destroy all his enemies; the old heaven and earth, stained by sin and suffering, will be replaced by	16:12-16; 19:11-21; 20:7-22:5

the new heaven and earth; and the church will be presented as a bride in luminous purity to her husband, the Lamb.

## The Setting of Revelation

(c. A.D. 95)

John addressed the book of Revelation “to the seven churches that are in Asia,” namely Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, although there were undoubtedly other churches elsewhere in the province of Asia (e.g., Miletus and Colossae, see Acts 20:17; Col. 1:2). John had apparently been exiled from Ephesus to the island of Patmos, southwest of Ephesus, and it was there that he recorded his visions.



## Structure & Outline

Revelation is composed of a prologue ([1:1-8](#)), a body ([1:9-22:5](#)), and an epilogue ([22:6-21](#)). The prologue and epilogue are linked by repeated themes: an angel sent to show God's servants what must soon take place ([1:1](#); [22:6, 16](#)), blessings on those who keep the prophecy ([1:3](#); [22:7, 9](#)), John's self-identification ([1:1, 4](#); [22:8](#)), and the designation of God as Alpha and Omega ([1:8](#); [22:13](#)). The body contains four enumerated series of seven messages or visions: letters to churches ([chs. 2-3](#)), seals on a scroll ([4:1-8:1](#)), trumpets ([8:2-11:19](#)), and bowls of wrath ([chs. 15-16](#)). See [chart](#).

The general movement of the book is from "the things that are"—the first-century churches' present situation ([chs. 2-3](#))—to "the things that are to take place after this," climaxing with the destruction of the enemies of God and his church and the presentation of the church as the Lamb's bride in a new heaven and earth ([1:19](#); [4:1](#)). Within this general temporal movement, however, visions "double back" to present distinct, complementary perspectives on the same event or phase of the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan. For instance, [12:1-6](#) portrays the defeat of the dragon in its desire to destroy the child of the heavenly woman ([vv. 1-5](#)), followed by her flight for safety into the wilderness ([v. 6](#)); then [12:7-17](#) again portrays the defeat of the dragon, now in its desire to accuse believers ([vv. 7-12](#)), followed by the heavenly woman's flight for safety into the wilderness ([vv. 13-17](#)). Earlier visions sometimes portray later events, and later visions portray earlier conditions. For example, [6:12-17](#) shows the shaking of earth and sky, so that the stars are cast to earth as by a great wind; then [7:1-8](#) shows angels restraining the winds of woe until God's people are sealed; and still later, John sees sun, moon, and stars still in the sky and only partially darkened ([8:12](#)). This principle of repetition or *recapitulation* to elaborate God's purposes and confirm their certainty is seen in earlier Scripture (see [Gen. 1:1-2:25](#); [37:5-11](#); [41:1-32](#); [Dan. 2:1-45](#) [with [Dan. 7:1-28](#)]; [Acts 10:10-16](#)). In Revelation, recapitulation means that the order in which John received visions does not necessarily indicate the order of the events they symbolize. These observations regarding the structure intrinsic to Revelation are reflected in this outline:

- I. Prologue ([1:1-8](#))
  - A. Title, transmission, promise of blessing ([1:1-3](#))
  - B. Epistolary opening ([1:4-6](#))
  - C. Announcement of the coming King ([1:7-8](#))
- II. Body ([1:9-22:5](#))
  - A. "Things that are": Christ's presence with and knowledge of his churches ([1:9-3:22](#))
    1. The Son of Man among his churches ([1:9-20](#))
    2. Christ's edict-letters to his seven churches ([2:1-3:22](#))
      1. To Ephesus ([2:1-7](#))

2. To Smyrna ([2:8-11](#))
  3. To Pergamum ([2:12-17](#))
  4. To Thyatira ([2:18-29](#))
  5. To Sardis ([3:1-6](#))
  6. To Philadelphia ([3:7-13](#))
  7. To Laodicea ([3:14-22](#))
- B. "Things that shall take place after this": Christ's defense of his church and destruction of its enemies ([4:1-22:5](#))
1. The Lamb and the scroll: current and coming woes, precursors of the end ([4:1-8:1](#))
    1. Heaven opened: the Lamb receives the scroll ([4:1-5:14](#))
    2. The Lamb opens the scroll's seven seals ([6:1-8:1](#))  
(*Interlude*: the sealing of God's international Israel, [7:1-17](#))
  2. The angels and the trumpets: warnings of coming wrath ([8:2-11:18](#))
    1. Heaven's incense altar: the saints' prayers, and fire flung to earth ([8:2-5](#))
    2. Angels sound seven trumpets ([8:6-11:18](#))  
(*Interlude*: the safety and suffering of God's city-sanctuary, his witnessing church, [10:1-11:14](#))
  3. The woman, her son, the dragon, and the beasts: the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan ([11:19-14:20](#))
    1. Heaven's temple opened ([11:19](#))
    2. The woman's son defeats the dragon ([12:1-6](#))
    3. Michael and heaven's armies defeat the dragon ([12:7-17](#))
    4. The beast from the sea ([13:1-10](#))
    5. The false prophet from the land ([13:11-18](#))
    6. The Lamb and his sealed victors ([14:1-5](#))
    7. Angelic announcements of judgment ([14:6-13](#))
    8. Harvests of earth and vine ([14:14-20](#))
  4. The bowls of God's final wrath ([15:1-16:21](#))
    1. Heaven's sanctuary filled with glory ([15:1-8](#))
    2. Angels pour out seven bowls ([16:1-21](#))
  5. Babylon the prostitute ([17:1-19:10](#))
    1. Babylon's power and luxury ([17:1-15](#))
    2. Babylon's fall lamented and celebrated ([17:16-19:10](#))
  6. The defeat and destruction of the beasts, the dragon, and death ([19:11-20:15](#))
    1. Christ defeats and destroys the beast, the false prophet, and their gathered armies ([19:11-21](#))  
(*Interlude*: the thousand years of the dragon's binding and the martyrs' reign, [20:1-6](#))

2. God defeats and destroys the dragon and its gathered armies ([20:7-10](#))
  3. The last judgment and the destruction of death, the last enemy ([20:11-15](#))
  7. "All things new" ([21:1-22:5](#))
    1. The new heaven and earth, home of the Lamb's bride ([21:1-8](#))
    2. The new Jerusalem, the Lamb's pure bride ([21:9-22:5](#))
- III. Epilogue ([22:6-21](#))
- A. Transmission and trustworthiness of the Revelation, promise that Jesus is coming soon, promise of blessing ([22:6-9](#))
  - B. Prohibition of sealing the book, promise that Jesus is coming soon, promise of blessing ([22:10-15](#))
  - C. Transmission of the Revelation ([22:16-17](#))
  - D. Prohibition of altering the book, promise that Jesus is coming soon, and final pronouncement of blessing ([22:18-21](#))

## **FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION**

**BIBLE STUDY FOCUS** - "7 Lessons from 7 Churches"

**MAIN TEXT:** Revelation 2:1-20, 3:1-20

### **Instructions for Small Group Time:**

Option 1: Send the main text to small group members so they can read it ahead of time.

Option 2: Read the text together when you meet

Basic Bible Study Practices:

1. As people read the text, ask them to pay attention to key words
2. As people read the text have them highlight key words, people, and places
3. As people read the text have them pay attention to repetition of key terms, ideas, and people
4. If people are given the opportunity to read the text ahead of small group time, have them read it at least twice so they become familiar with its contents.

## **SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Read through Revelation 2 and 3 (also feel free to read more verses to gain a deeper understanding of context).
2. What are some specific questions or themes that stick out to you about these passages? Take a few minutes and discuss them as a group.
3. Do any of the letters to the churches in these passages make you cringe? If so, which ones and why?
4. What personal lessons did you learn from these verses? How can you apply these lessons to your daily walk with Christ?
5. Do any of the churches in these passages remind you of a church that you have been to or are a part of? If so, what part can you play as a member of the Body of Christ to help edify the Global Church?
6. What personal commitment will you make to growing your relationship with Jesus?

## **Extra Resources**

The Bible Project - Overview of Revelation Part 1: <https://youtu.be/5nvVVcYD-0w>

The Bible Project - Overview of Revelation Part 2: <https://youtu.be/QpnlrBq2bKo>

Voddie Baucham Sermon - Tolerating the Intolerable: <https://youtu.be/n4iAPRNUCjw>

Crawford Loritts Sermon - Recapturing Our First Love: <https://youtu.be/PeBka44DDes>

John MacArthur Sermon - The Lord's Word to His Church in Philadelphia:  
<https://youtu.be/Ryjh1ijxnW4>