

# The Book of Revelation

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## Study Guide

LESSON  
TWO

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT



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## STUDY GUIDE

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### How to use this lesson and study guide

- **Before you watch the lesson**
  - **Preparation** — Complete any recommended readings.
  - **Schedule breaks** — Review the outline and the time codes to determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions in the outline.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
  - **Notes** — Use the Notes section to follow the lesson and to take additional notes. Many of the main ideas are already summarized in the notes, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
  - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
  - **Review Questions** — Questions on the basic content of the lesson. Answer review questions in the space provided. Review questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
  - **Application Questions** — Questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

## Outline

- I. Introduction (0:20)
- II. Purpose (1:50)
  - A. Offers of Blessing (3:10)
  - B. Threats of Curses (6:32)
- III. Details (11:42)
  - A. Introduction (15:20)
  - B. Vision of Christ (19:40)
    - 1. Description of Christ (20:00)
    - 2. Letters to the Seven Churches (25:44)
      - a. Ephesus (30:00)
      - b. Smyrna (31:14)
      - c. Pergamum (33:45)
      - d. Thyatira (34:50)
      - e. Sardis (38:55)
      - f. Philadelphia (40:07)
      - g. Laodicea (41:19)
  - C. Coming Events (44:45)
    - 1. Seven Seals (49:00)
    - 2. Seven Trumpets (01:00:28)
    - 3. Seven Histories (01:05:22)
    - 4. Seven Bowls (01:16:52)
  - D. Great Prostitute (1:21:00)
    - 1. Judgment on Babylon (1:22:00)
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  - B. Integrated Strategy (1:58:25)
- V. Conclusion (2:05:20)

## Notes

### **I. Introduction**

### **II. Purpose**

John wrote the book of Revelation to encourage suffering Christians to remain faithful until Jesus returns.

#### **A. Offers of Blessing**

John delivered offers of blessings for everyone that was loyal to Jesus.

John's audience was to read the visions with an eye toward Jesus' blessings.

#### **B. Threats of Curses**

John expressed threats of curses against those who were disloyal to Christ.

John highlighted curses to exhort both false and true believers to repent.

### **III. Details**

- Introduction (1:1-8)
- Vision of Christ (1:9–3:22)
- Coming events (4:1–16:21)
- Great prostitute (17:1–21:8)
- Wife of the Lamb (21:9–22:5)
- Conclusion (22:6-21)

John used the statement “in the Spirit” to mark the beginning of new divisions.

#### **A. Introduction**

- Prologue: stresses the book’s divine authority
- Greeting: John identified himself and his audience
- Praise: revealed John’s central concerns for his audience

**B. Vision of Christ****1. Description of Christ**

Before describing Jesus:

- John expressed unity with his readers.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- John indicated he received his vision “in the Spirit.”

John’s description of Jesus:

- The “son of man” walking among the seven lampstands.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Jesus’ was majestic, glorious, and powerful.

## 2. Letters to the Seven Churches

Christ addressed letters to seven churches in Asia Minor:

- Ephesus
- Smyrna
- Pergamum
- Thyatira
- Sardis
- Philadelphia
- Laodicea

These letters all contain elements that resemble Old Testament prophecies:

- Address
- Description of Christ
- Claim of knowledge
- Evaluation
- Offers of blessing and threats of curse
- Promise
- Exhortation

**a. Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7)**

Jesus holds seven stars in his right hand and walks among seven golden lampstands.

Commended for sound doctrine and intolerance for wicked behavior.

Criticized for forsaking their first love.

**b. Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11)**

Jesus is “the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.”

One of only two letters that doesn't include a rebuke.

The church in Smyrna faced serious persecution, probably because of unbelieving Jews.



**c. Pergamum (Rev. 2:12-17)**

Christ “has the sharp, double-edged sword.”

Jesus’ evaluation of the church was both positive and negative.

**d. Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29)**

Jesus is a purifying fire with eyes like blazing fire and feet like burnished bronze.

Hadn’t lost their first love but tolerated the teaching of “Jezebel.”

**e. Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6)**

John alluded to the seven manifestations of the Spirit and seven stars in Jesus’ hand.

Evaluation of the church at Sardis was severe.

**f. Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13)**

Jesus holds the key of David.

Jesus' words were positive but included an implicit warning.

**g. Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22)**

Jesus is the ultimate trustworthy authority.

Evaluation was very negative.

This church needed to repent or Jesus would reject them.

### C. **Coming Events**

John's vision reveals events that were still in the future in John's day.

Consists of four series of smaller visions:

- The seven seals
- The seven trumpets
- The seven histories
- the seven bowls

Recapitulation: a later passage restates or repeats an earlier passage.

Recapitulation is very common in biblical prophecy.

Example: John's visions refer to the final judgment three different times.

- Rev. 6:12-17: Part of the vision of the seven seals
- Rev. 11:15: Part of the vision the seven trumpets
- Rev. 15:1: Part of the vision of the seven bowls

## 1. Seven Seals (Rev. 4:1–8:1)

Two main parts:

- God's heavenly throne room (Rev. 4 and 5).
  - God was being worshiped by four heavenly creatures.
  - Twenty-four elders surrounded God's throne.
  - Scene contains many images from the Old Testament.
  - God held a scroll in his right hand — his plan for the world.
  
- Opening of the seals (Rev. 6:1–8:1)

The first four seals released the four horsemen of the Apocalypse.

- First seal: rider on a white horse brought conquest to the nations
  
- Second seal: rider on a red horse represented slaughter
  
- Third seal: rider on a black horse represented famine
  
- Fourth seal: rider named Death on a pale horse represented death by sword, famine, plagues and wild beasts
  
- Fifth seal: Christian martyrs crying out for justice
  
- Sixth seal: the entire earth experienced God's judgment

Between the sixth and seventh seal there is an interlude.

- Seventh seal: silence

## 2. **Seven Trumpets (Rev. 8:2–11:19)**

The vision of seven trumpets is structured similarly to the vision of the seven seals.

The first four trumpets signaled judgments on the four major regions of creation.

- First trumpet: hail and fire mixed with blood was hurled on dry land
- Second trumpet: a huge mountain was thrown into the sea
- Third trumpet: a blazing star was thrown into fresh water sources
- Fourth trumpet: the sky was damaged

An eagle warned that even worse judgments were coming:

- Fifth trumpet: an army of unnatural locusts
- Sixth trumpet: four angels destroyed a third of humanity

The first six trumpets are followed by a two part interlude:

- John received a scroll and was told to eat it.
- John envisioned two witnesses who died for the sake of the gospel.

After the interlude, the seventh angel sounded the seventh trumpet.

- Seventh trumpet: proclaimed Christ's everlasting victory

### **3. Seven Histories (12:1-14:20)**

Portrayed the spiritual conflict between Satan and the people of God.

Key symbolic characters:

- The Woman (Rev. 12:1-7): represents faithful Israel
- The Dragon (Rev. 12:3-17): identified as Satan

- The Beast from the sea (Rev. 13:1-10): symbolizes all political powers that oppose Christ's kingdom
  
- The Beast from the earth (Rev. 13:11-18): served the Beast from the sea
  
- The 144,000 believers (Rev. 14:1-5): those who belong to God
  
- Angelic messengers (Rev. 14:6-11): communicated that Christ's gospel will triumph over every opposing kingdom
  
- After the angelic messengers, John exhorted God's people to persevere (Rev. 14:12-13).



- The Son of Man (Rev. 14:14-20): Christ

This vision declared the ultimate future victory of Jesus.

#### 4. **Seven Bowls (15:1—16:21)**

Seven angels pour out seven bowls of God's wrath against the wicked.

- First bowl: inflicted sores on those who had the mark of the beast
- Second bowl: turned the sea to blood
- Third bowl: turned rivers and springs to blood
- Fourth bowl: created scorching heat from the sun
- Fifth bowl: poured out on the throne of the Beast
- Sixth bowl: cleared a path for the kings from the East to invade God's Promised Land
- Seventh bowl: triggered the final destruction of the wicked

## **D. Great Prostitute**

John draws attention to:

- final blessings for those who were faithful to Christ
- ultimate curses for those who weren't

### **1. Judgment on Babylon (Rev. 17:1-19:21)**

The city of Babylon is presented as a prostitute (Rev. 17:1-6).

Six messages of judgment and lament:

- First message: God will destroy everything that opposes him (Rev. 17:7-18).
- Second message: declares the utter defeat of Babylon (Rev. 18:1-3).
- Third message: calls God's people to reject Babylon (Rev. 18:4-8).
- Fourth message: three laments of those who worshiped the beast and profited from the luxury of Babylon (Rev. 18:9-20).

Babylon represents every nation and organization that opposes Christ.

The messages warn the church not to commit these same sins.

- Fifth message: pronounces the permanent destruction of Babylon (Rev. 18:21-24).
- Sixth message: the praise of God's people in response to the judgment against Babylon (Rev. 19:1-8).

Interlude: a blessing for those who participate in the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9-10).

- The final battle: between God and his enemies (Rev. 19:11-21).

The beast and the false prophet are defeated forever.

## 2. **Reign of the Saints (Rev. 20:1-21:8)**

### a. Thousand Year Reign — “the Millennium” (Rev. 20:1-10):

- Satan is bound
- Faithful Christians reign with Christ for a thousand years
- Satan is released
- God destroys all of his enemies

Four major interpretations for this passage fall under two categories:

- Premillennial: Jesus will return before the millennium starts.
  - Historic premillennialism
  - Dispensational premillennialism
- Postmillennial: Jesus will return after the millennium ends.
  - Postmillennialism
  - Amillennialism

### Historic premillennialism

After Jesus returns, Satan will be bound and Jesus will usher in the millennium.

### Dispensational premillennialism

- When Jesus returns, he will restore Israel and reign over the nations from Jerusalem.
- Near the end of the millennium, God will defeat Satan.

### Postmillennialism

- Jesus will return after the millennium.
- During the millennium Jesus rules from heaven through his earthly church.

### Amillennialism

- The millennium is not a literal thousand years.
- Jesus reigns from heaven through his church and will return at the end of the millennium.

b. Last Judgment on God's Enemies (Rev. 20:11-15)

God rendered final judgment on all humanity.

c. Last Judgment for God's People (Rev. 21:1-8)

In the new heavens and new earth, God will dwell among his people.

**E. Wife of Lamb**

The bride, the wife of the Lamb, was the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:9).

John's audience was encouraged to pursue God's blessings and look forward to Christ's return.

The New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:9-27):

- Shaped as a cube like the Old Testament Most Holy Places.
- The dimensions and descriptions mention the number twelve.
- The river of life flowed from God's throne through the middle of the city.
- Shone with the glory of God.

**F. Conclusion**

John emphasized the messages that had been repeated throughout his visions.

Christians should faithfully persevere, and sinners should repent.

## **IV. Application**

### **A. Common Strategies**

Each strategy is useful, but none is sufficient on its own.

Four common strategies for applying Revelation:

#### **1. Preterism**

Most of the prophecies in the book of Revelation were fulfilled in the distant past.

Insights from preterism:

- Provides a helpful focus on John's original audience
  
- Understands that the final chapters of Revelation speak about Christ's future return.



Critique of preterism:

- Neglects future events
- Narrow view of temporal statements like “the time is near”
- Ignores historical contingencies

## 2. **Futurism**

The visions in Revelation won't begin to be fulfilled until the final crisis immediately preceding the second coming of Christ.

Insights from futurism:

Looks forward to Christ's return, judgment, and the restoration of creation

Critique of futurism:

Downplays application to past and present audiences

### 3. **Historicism**

The visions of Revelation offer a chronological outline of the course of church history from the first century until the Second Coming.

Insights from historicism:

- Revelation begins with the situation of the seven churches
- Revelation ends with the Second Coming
- Revelation moves toward a climax

Critique of historicism:

- Assumes all the prophecies in Revelation are chronological
- Dependent on the Protestant Reformation

#### **4. Idealism**

The scenes in Revelation depict general patterns of spiritual war, not specific events or chronologies.

Insights from idealism:

- Acknowledges thematic arrangement of prophecies
- Highlights Satan's consistency throughout history
- Recognizes inaugurated eschatology
- Emphasizes modern application

Critique of idealism:

Fails to identify any symbols with historical events

#### **B. Integrated Strategy**

Combines the valuable insights of each view while avoiding their shortcomings

Two steps of the integrated strategy to application:

- Use every available means to discern principles and truths in Revelation.
- Look for parallels between our circumstances and those of John's original audience.

To discern principles and truths in Revelation, it's helpful to look at some of the more important themes John emphasized.

To apply the lessons of Revelation to modern life we can look at similarities between John's day and today.

Three prominent similarities:

- Same God
- Same fallen world
- Same people

The book of Revelation gives hope to all Christians in every age.

## **V. Conclusion**



3. To whom did John address the book of Revelation, and what was his purpose in writing?

4. What are the four central visions found in Revelation?









## Application Questions

1. What comfort and hope does John's description of Christ give you in your present circumstances?
2. How can you apply the commendations and criticisms found in the letters to the seven churches to your life and ministry today?
3. What trials and temptations are Christians in your country currently facing?
4. How does it encourage us to know that Jesus is the only one who could open the seven seals containing judgments on the world?
5. How can you use the message of the seven trumpets to share Christ with non-believers?
6. How does the vision of the seven histories help you to persevere knowing that you will experience trials and struggles until Christ returns?
7. What encouragement should we draw from God's commitment to his people found in the vision of the seven bowls?
8. In what way do the prophecies of the Bible motivate us to remain faithful and obedient to God?
9. What ministries are you currently engaged in, and how are they helping you walk in faith and resist temptation?
10. How should the reality of a coming final judgment and return of Jesus influence the way we live today?
11. How do the similarities between Christians today and John's original audience give us confidence in God's victory and courage to continue in the faith?
12. What is the most significant thing you learned in this lesson?