



CONCORDIA COMMENTARY
BIBLE STUDY SERIES

Pete Jurchen





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Written by Pete Jurchen

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PARTICIPANT GUIDE

WHAT IS THE CONCORDIA COMMENTARY BIBLE STUDY SERIES?

For decades, the Concordia Commentary series has been a blessing to pastors, church workers, and readers around the world. Drawing from great theologians and experts in biblical languages and Lutheran tradition, the many volumes of this series have helped illuminate God's Word to countless Christians. The Concordia Commentaries are extensive in length and offer great depth of study.

This Bible study series pulls excerpts and ideas from the Concordia Commentaries to bring these treasures to you individually or in your group Bible study. Consider these Bible studies to be guided tours of the books of the Bible by experts. Though not exhaustive, this study will help you better understand key themes and insights that only commentary authors can give.

We hope this Bible study deepens your understanding of God's Word, builds within you a desire to dig deeper into God's Word, and helps you more clearly see your Savior, Jesus Christ.



PARTICIPANT GUIDE FOR SESSION 1

PREPARATION FOR THE SECOND COMING

Primary Text: Revelation 1

Key Takeaways

The primary theme of this session is that of preparedness. How does Christ prepare our hearts and our minds for the end times? Jesus makes it clear that ever since His ascension into heaven, the church lives in the end times. Christians today do not have to wait for specific prophetic happenings or spectacular world events to understand the end times. Beyond this theme of preparedness for the End, this session will help orient you to the main themes of the book of Revelation.

Opening Prayer/Hymn

Heavenly Father, You sent Your Son to save us from our sins and will send Him again to restore Your creation and to bring us to everlasting life with You. Work through Your Word in Revelation to give us a lively hope and to strengthen our faith in Christ despite the persecution and suffering we endure for Your sake, until we stand in Your glorious presence for His sake. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn Suggestion: “Of the Father’s Love Begotten” (*LSB* 384)

Introducing the Lesson

The book of Revelation is one of the most controversial books of the Bible. It is the source of speculation about current events, life’s challenges, predictions of the future, and the end times.

Opening Question: What comes to mind when you think of the book of Revelation?

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Historical Considerations

Before reading the text of Revelation, it is important to first consider what the book is about, what its place is in history, what you can expect from reading it, and how you should read it. The Concordia Commentary on Revelation gives this summary regarding who wrote the book:

The author calls himself “John” (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8), but he nowhere indicates *which* John he might be. . . . The author just calls himself “John,” without any identifying description such as “apostle,” “disciple,” “son of Zebedee,” or “brother of James.” He assumed that his hearers would know who he was. . . .

. . . All the evidence, when weighed, points to John the apostle and son of Zebedee as the author of Revelation—as well as of the Gospel [of John]. Since there is no compelling evidence to the contrary, and there is persuasive supporting evidence, this commentary is written on the premise that the John mentioned in Revelation 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8 is the John who was one of the twelve apostles and who was the brother of James. (Brighton, 12, 18; brackets added)

Brighton discusses the date of writing in these words:

[Irenaeus] testifies that it was near the end of the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian that Revelation was written. He also says that John was in Ephesus until the time of Trajan. Irenaeus most likely received this information from Polycarp, at whose feet he sat as a young man. Polycarp (ca. 60–ca. 155) was bishop of Smyrna and had sat at the feet of John in Ephesus. (Brighton, 13; brackets added)

Domitian reigned from AD 81–96.

Revelation reveals and confirms that Christ was prophetically promised and that His incarnation, death, and resurrection happened so that God's creation could be restored to its original glory and righteousness. Revelation pictures the exaltation of Christ and what it means for the church. Where the Gospels end at the resurrection and ascension of Christ, Revelation picks up and continues the story from the ascension to the second coming of the Lord—and into eternity.

The hearer and reader are *to be ready* for what is to come to pass. It is a readiness that comes about through hearing the message. Such preparation consists of baptismal sealing (7:2–3), of being washed in the blood of the Lamb (1:5; 7:9, 13–14; 19:13; 22:14) and through such cleansing to stand ready for the coming of Christ (22:12). *As the Christian stands prepared for the coming Lord, he is encouraged in the hope of his faith (2:10) and is inspired for the mission that Christ has given to His church on earth (10:11).* (Brighton, 6)

The message of Revelation reveals two ongoing phenomena: the terrifying sufferings on earth and the reign of Jesus Christ as Lord in His heavenly, exalted glory. As these two phenomena are described, God's people on earth are encouraged to cling in hopeful faith to the eternal heavenly glory that beckons them in Christ's promise, "Surely I am coming soon," and in the church's response, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

In short, *the more the Christian is confident by faith—strengthened through Word and Sacrament—of going to heaven because of the merits of Christ, the more the Spirit moves the believer to desire to enter heaven. And the more the Christian desires the glory of God in heaven, the more the Spirit moves him to witness through this longing hope of faith.* This too is part of the purpose of Revelation: to comfort and encourage the worshiping Christian to pray this prayer of longing and to witness to the world through this worship and prayer. (Brighton, 7)

Theological Considerations

READING 1: REVELATION 1:1–3

PROLOGUE

KEY INSIGHTS FOR READING 1

Revelation was not the original name of the book. Like most ancient manuscripts, it had no title. Usually, the opening lines of such a book were considered a sufficient title.

In antiquity a title would be a strip or tag attached on the back of a roll; the title was also written inside the roll at the end of the text. . . . The earliest manuscripts of Revelation have the title “apocalypse/revelation of John,” taken from 1:1. (Brighton, 37)

This is the only New Testament book that is referred to as a revelation or a prophecy. As such, it should be viewed in the tradition of the Old Testament prophecies. Note how this prophecy was revealed to John through spoken words and through visions. John’s book describes visions that aid in the revelation. His symbolic descriptions of these visions will be critical to understanding Revelation.

The fact that John understood his Revelation to be a prophecy suggests that he believed this writing would be the last message of God to His people before the End (cf. “prophecy” in 22:18) and that he was the last prophet of the salvation story which had begun with the promise of old and now was concluded in the revelatory-unveiling of Jesus Christ. (Brighton, 38)

In Revelation, as elsewhere in Scripture, God uses mediating angels to communicate His Word. Here, at the beginning, the powerful and exalted Jesus communicates to John through an angelic messenger. Elsewhere in the book, the angels will communicate to John in different ways.

The source of the revelation is God. The mediator of the revelation is Jesus Christ, who uses an angel to give it to John and the churches. Angels play an important role throughout the book of Revelation. They help in the mediation by leading or attending John through the visions. They help in the interpretation of the visions. They also help John to focus on what is important in a particular vision. And they answer John’s questions concerning something within a vision. (Brighton, 38)

This passage closes with a special blessing from Jesus Christ.

Finally, these verses speak a blessing upon “the one who reads [aloud] and those who hear . . . and who keep” this prophetic message (1:3). The blessing is not here defined, but when the six other instances in Revelation of a pronounced blessing . . . are examined, it becomes clear that the blessing bestowed is the *participation in the heavenly banquet of the Bride and the Lamb (19:9)*. (Brighton, 38–39)

REFLECTION QUESTION FOR READING 1

From what you know about this book and other prophecies in the Bible, what is included in the blessing for those who hear and keep the Word of God?

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After this opening, John goes on to greet his readers.

READING 2: REVELATION 1:4–8
GREETING TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

KEY INSIGHTS FOR READING 2

John addresses the seven churches in Asia, which we will discuss in greater detail in later sessions. The description of God in verses 4–5 identifies the Trinity. “Him who is and who was and who is to come” describes God the Father. “Seven spirits” distinguishes the Holy Spirit. Finally, Jesus, the Son, is explicitly mentioned by name. Thus, this message John conveys is from the triune God Himself.

[First,] John, in his own way, uses “the One Who Is and Who Was and Who Is Coming” for the holy name in Exodus 3. He takes “the One Who Is” from the “I AM WHO I AM” of Exodus 3:14 and then expands it by adding “and Who Was and Who Is Coming.” By so doing he states that the ever present One is continually present now, as He was in the past and as He always will be in the future. . . .



LEADER NOTES

WHAT IS THE CONCORDIA COMMENTARY BIBLE STUDY SERIES?

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This Bible study series pulls excerpts and ideas from the Concordia Commentaries to bring these treasures to readers in an individual or group Bible study setting. Consider these Bible studies to be guided tours of the books of the Bible by experts. Though not exhaustive, this study will help learners better understand key themes and insights that only commentary authors can give. In creating this series, some editorial decisions are factored in.

Within the different sessions, key passages from the Concordia Commentaries have been curated to help the learner gain insight into the biblical text. Thus, not every chapter nor verse covered in the commentary is covered in this series, simply for the sake of length and pacing for each session. By collecting and modifying key reflections from the commentary text, this study gives a straightforward taste of the rich treasure of the commentaries. That said, this Bible study series is not comprehensive, and learners may raise questions not covered in these study materials.

Additionally, each session has been arranged in a threefold manner to engage learners. After an introductory question, the study delves into a section on historical considerations. This provides a critical, general background on the text studied in each session. You can read this section with your participants to help set up the text. In the second section, the study digs into theological considerations. This includes two to five main pericopes to be studied in the session, with key insights and discussion questions at the end of each reading to facilitate deeper reflection within your group. The third section focuses on practical considerations, which show us how the text applies to our

daily lives. The discussion questions are designed to break up the reading of the text and bring out key points in the study materials.

The Answer Key provides prompts for you as a facilitator when guiding discussions. The questions in this study are designed to be broad and open-ended, meaning that there is generally not one prescribed answer for each question. The prompts provided are there to give you information and context for discussion, not to be the only “right” answers. Use these materials as you see best for your context. Here is a suggested pattern for conducting a session with your group:

1. Welcome learners. Ask learners if any of them had questions from the previous week.
2. Open with prayer, and the suggested hymn can be read or sung. Then, read through Introducing the Lesson together, including the Opening Question(s). Give your learners time to consider the question(s) on their own or in groups to get them primed for the text to come.
3. Read through Historical Considerations together, perhaps asking volunteers to read paragraphs one at a time as others follow along.
4. For the Theological Considerations section, read each Bible reading together. How you decide to utilize the Key Insights is up to you. You may want to pause at appropriate times to read through the insights, you may want to read them as a group after the reading, or you may want to give learners time to digest the Key Insights silently on their own after you read the biblical text. The Reflection Question(s) for each reading section are designed to draw the learners back into the text, and the prompts in the Answer Key may be beneficial for you as a leader in drawing out new or different understandings as you facilitate discussion.
5. The Practical Considerations section returns to the key questions of the study at the end of each session, with some commentary and reflection questions.
6. The Final Thoughts section wraps up the theme of the main text.
7. A Deeper Look provides suggestions for further reading from the commentary.
8. If you have additional time, the Bonus Activities at the end of this guide can be used to generate discussions and apply the material from each section to our lives.
9. Finally, you can lead your group in a Closing Prayer.



ANSWER KEY FOR SESSION 1

PREPARATION FOR THE SECOND COMING

Introducing the Lesson

Opening Question: What comes to mind when you think of the book of Revelation?

Let participants share their thoughts. There is no right or wrong answer here. Just encourage participants to share any preconceived notions they may bring into this study.

Theological Considerations

READING 1: REVELATION 1:1–3

PROLOGUE

REFLECTION QUESTION FOR READING 1

From what you know about this book and other prophecies in the Bible, what is included in the blessing for those who hear and keep the Word of God?

Though not defined, this and other references to the blessing in Revelation clearly indicate participation in the heavenly banquet and the new creation. A foretaste of this blessing is also present for the church now as we receive the gifts of Christ's crucifixion in Word and Sacrament in the corporate worship of God's people.

READING 2: REVELATION 1:4–8

GREETING TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

REFLECTION QUESTION FOR READING 2

How might specific words or phrases from this section help Christians prepare for the daily life of faith?

Answers may include God's grace and peace, which remind us of the free forgiveness He has given us in Jesus Christ (v. 4); God's trinitarian

presence among His people in Baptism, where He made us His own sons and daughters and filled us with His Holy Spirit (vv. 4–5); the reminder of Jesus’ resurrection and reign, which takes away our fear of death (v. 5); the prompting of Jesus’ return, when He will set the world right (v. 7); and God’s eternal rule and care for His people, which will preserve us now and through all eternity (v. 8).

READING 3: REVELATION 1:9–20 VISION OF THE SON OF MAN

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR READING 3

John is given a special glimpse of Jesus, now glorified. The different details of Jesus’ appearance symbolically show His person and work. What are these different details? What do you think they may represent about Him?

The long flowing robe may evoke the garment of a high priest. The white hair might evoke respect and wisdom. Eyes like a flame of fire could symbolize the purifying presence of God, as Jesus is the one whom God has authorized to destroy evil and purify His people. The feet like fiery burnished bronze may represent strength that can conquer enemies (Daniel 2:32–34). The voice like the roar of many waters could show Christ’s glory. When John hears this voice, he knows he is standing before the very majesty and glory of God. The seven stars in Jesus’ right hand represent the angels to the seven churches. The right hand (the hand used to bless) indicates God’s mercy, and the right hand holding the stars would have reminded the people in those churches that God was with them. The two-edged sword shows how Jesus will execute the judgment of God according to God’s Word. Finally, the whole appearance of the Son of Man being like the sun reveals His glory. The sun in the Old Testament can be a metaphor for God (see Malachi 4:2), as through it, God produces light, which gives life and banishes darkness.

Practical Considerations

KEY QUESTION 1

In light of what you’ve learned in this session, what does Jesus’ reign have to do with the end times?

The book of Revelation shows us that Jesus is indeed reigning over creation. He who died and rose again is sitting at the right hand of the



BONUS ACTIVITIES

Session 1

Revelation 1 brings Jesus forward in all His divine glory as the Son of God. Some objects of creation give us a glimpse of that glory, as do some events in our lives.

Start a discussion on glorious things in creation. If possible, pull up pictures of a glorious sunrise or sunset, a mountaintop view, or a full eclipse. Next, show natural things that are both awe-inspiring and terrifying, such as a tornado, a hurricane, an avalanche, a forest fire, or a volcano. Ask members of the group to share personal experiences they have had with God's awe-inspiring creation.

Consider how John was overwhelmed by Jesus' glory, might, and majesty in this moment. Now think of the casual familiarity John must have felt as he followed Jesus without fear during His public ministry. How can this revelation of Jesus in His glory transform our worship as we bow before the altar in church?

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Session 2

Jesus' revelation to His church begins with letters to seven churches in Asia Minor.

Share a document like a diploma, a letter, a card, an email, a text, or another communication that had a deep impact on your life. Discuss what made that communication so impactful. Ask participants to share communications that have transformed their lives.

In Jesus' letters to the seven churches, our Lord reminds us He is carefully watching each of our congregations, guarding us in the truth, and calling us to repent of our divisions and turn from false teachings. Discuss the praiseworthy things Christ is accomplishing through your congregation. What are some areas in which your church needs to heed Christ's corrective words?

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Session 3

The tabernacle, and later the temple, in the Old Testament was an important place of worship for God's people. Its design taught Israel many factors about their relationship with God. Church architects use building techniques to pull us out of our everyday lives and lift us into God's presence.

If possible, take your group into the sanctuary and discuss features that remind you that we have come into God's presence. These could include the shape of the sacred space, the height of the ceilings, the beams that support the roof, the altar, the pulpit, the stained glass windows, the organ, and so on.

How can a renewed focus on the design of this sacred place remind us that we enter God's heavenly throne room and His glorious reign every time we worship?

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