

Background:

Title:

The **Revelation of John**. In the Greek text it is, *Apokalupsis Ioanou*. *Apokalupsis* means "an uncovering, a laying bare, making naked, an unveiling." Another title comes from 1:1, "Revelation of Jesus Christ." This could be taken as a revelation which came from Christ or which is about Christ - both are appropriate.

Author:

The human writer of the **Revelation** refers to himself as John in five passages (1:1, 4, 9; 21:2; 22:8). The question is whether the writer was an unknown prophet named John, a presbyter who lived at Ephesus, or the apostle John, who wrote as an apostle and prophet. He refers to himself as a prophet (1:3, 22:7, 10, 18-19) and was told to prophesy (10:11), but he never refers to himself as an apostle. External evidence supports the apostle John as the writer. So states Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, and Hippolytus.

Date:

The book has been dated as early as Claudius (A.D. 41-54) and as late as Trajan (A.D. 98-117). The majority of scholars place the composition of the Apocalypse during the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96). Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 120-202), a student of Polycarp, who was a student of John the apostle, wrote that the Apocalyptic vision "was seen not very long ago, almost in our own generation, at the close of the reign of Domitian."

Internal evidence for Domitian's reign is also strong. John wrote the book while in exile on the isle of Patmos (1:9). It is well known that Domitian often used this method of persecution while Nero preferred simply to kill his victims. The spiritual condition of the churches (chapters 2 & 3) and the doctrinal errors described seem to be more in harmony with a late date. The Nicolaitians (2:6, 15) were a strong influence at this time also. While Nero's persecution seems to have been confined to Rome and was not a persecution for religious reasons, the persecution John speaks of was suffered throughout Asia Minor and was on religious grounds (2:13; 6:9; Rev 2-3).

To Whom Written:

The immediate destination of **Revelation** is evident (2-3). A sound interpretation of **Revelation** must take as its starting point the position that the book was intended for the believers living in John's day and age, although it does have a message for all believers throughout history. All those who read and study this book in any age are called "blessed" (1:3). The writer thinks primarily of the immediate needs of his Asiatic churches. He foresees the message of Christian triumph over the adverse forces of evil would have a much wider relevance.

The policy of the government to exterminate Christianity brought despair to the hearts of the churches. However, there was another danger from within. The twin problems of Judaism and Gnosticism began to cause confusion, controversy, and dissension within the churches. Those internal problems destroyed fellowship, and broke down the spirit of optimism in the disciples of Christ. With problems on the outside and problems from within, the church must have been asking, "Is there any hope for the future?" The Book of Revelation is God's answer. John is writing to the persecuted Christians who need comfort and assurance.

REVELATION

When Worlds Collide

Key Text:

Rev 12: 11

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

Theme:

- I. Revelation shows the things which must shortly come to pass (1:1).
- II. Revelation comforts and encourages the church during times of persecution.
- III. This book shows the church that God is in control of the universe, not the forces of evil.
- IV. John writes to show the final destiny of the forces of evil.



Book
Look
at the

Reframing the Future

Introduction:

It is a Saturday afternoon, holiday time for all boys, except Tom Sawyer, who has been sentenced to whitewash thirty yards of board fence nine feet high. At this dark and hopeless moment, writes Mark Twain, an inspiration bursts on him! Soon enough a boy comes in sight, the very boy, of all boys, whose ridicule he had been dreading most:

"Hello, old chap, you got to work, hey?"

"Why, it's you, Ben! I warn't noticing."

"Say—I'm going a-swimming, I am. Don't you wish you could? But of course you'd druther work—wouldn't you? Course you would!"

Tom contemplated the boy a bit, and said:

"What do you call work?"

"Why, ain't that work?"

Tom resumed his whitewashing, and answered carelessly:

"Well, maybe it is, and maybe it ain't. All I know, is, it suits Tom Sawyer."

"Oh come, now, you don't mean to let on that you like it?"

The brush continued to move.

"Like it? Well, I don't see why I oughtn't to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?"

That put the thing in a new light. Ben stopped nibbling his apple. Tom swept his brush daintily back and forth—stepped back to note the effect—added a touch here and there—criticized the effect again—Ben watching every move and getting more and more interested, more and more absorbed.

Presently he said:

"Say, Tom, let me whitewash a little."

What Tom Sawyer has done, of course, is *reframe* his situation. Without changing anything about the situation itself, he has offered Ben a different view of reality. Whitewashing is not a chore—it's fun!

Now watch the apostle John as he takes the reality of the church near the end of the first century—persecuted, ridiculed, disenfranchised—and reframes the situation in a way that brings hope and encourages perseverance.

Outline:

I. Words to the Seven Churches

A. Time has passed.

1. This revelation was probably given to John about A.D. 95.
2. The church has been established throughout Asia. The faith of these Christians has begun to cool. False teachers have entered the church and gained a foothold.

B. The situation is changing—intense persecution is coming.

Transition: How does John encourage a flagging church to remain faithful in the dark days to come? He reframes their faith and suffering in a wider perspective.

II. The Great Perspective

A. The Tale of Two Beasts. Revelation 12:1-10, 12, 17.

1. A beast will arise from the sea.
2. Then another beast will arise from the earth.
*Do not be alarmed, church of Jesus.
God is in his heaven and all is right with the saints.*

B. The Tale of Judgment. Revelation 14:1-7, 9-11

1. There will come a terrible time of judgment.
2. And the angel of God will proclaim: **Revelation 16:5-6**
*Do not be alarmed, church of Jesus.
God is in his heaven and all is right with the saints.*

C. The Tale of a Second Fall. Rev 19:11-16, 19-21; 20:1-2a, 10b

- Do not be alarmed, church of Jesus.
God is in his heaven and all is right with the saints.*

D. The Tale of the New Church. Revelation 21:22; 22:3-5

III. The Role of the Saints in the Meantime

A. What is our responsibility during this period of conflict?

1. What it isn't: devising strategy, bulking up for the conflict, or raising an army to combat the Beast.
2. What it is: Persevere . . . hold on . . . be faithful.

B. The Perseverance theme in Revelation.

1. Perseverance commended in the Seven Churches.
2. "Overcoming" is not linked to power or knowledge but to perseverance.

Conclusion: When things look bleakest, it is time to reframe. When the situation seems hopeless, it is time to reframe. When we learn to see this life through the lens of the Spirit, suddenly it becomes possible to persevere. When we learn to view the world around through the eyes of faith, hanging on makes sense.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Christ in Revelation

Like so many of the books we have studied this year, Revelation is centered on Jesus Christ. Unlike other books, however, the picture of Jesus in Revelation is of the resurrected Lord and his continuing work in behalf of his church.

This revelation belongs to Jesus, not John (1:1). It was given to him by God and shared by him with the beloved apostle. The message John relates to the seven churches of Asia is Christ's message. The picture John recounts of heaven is predominantly a picture of the victorious Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

The term "lamb" is a favorite expression of John's in describing Jesus. He used it in his gospel (e.g. Jn 1:29, 36). In the Revelation, John uses the term over 25 times. In chapter five, the picture is particularly poignant - the lamb stands in the center of heaven with the "marks of slaughter" (NEB) still fresh upon him. Only this lamb can open the scroll because "with your blood you purchased men for God."

There are other terms used to describe Jesus in this great book: King (1:5; 3:21; 11:15; 15:5; 17:14; 19:16; 20:4-6), Lion of Judah (5:5), root of David (3:7; 5:5; 22:16), shepherd (7:17), Faithful and True (19:11; 21:5), Word of God (19:13), King of Kings and Lord of Lords (19:16), Alpha and Omega (1:8, 17; 21:6; 22:12;), and Morning Star (2:28; 22:16).

There are incredible pictures of Christ drawn in this book. Besides the Lamb imagery, there are the visions of Jesus as "Son of Man" (1:9-18), the child of the pregnant woman (12:1-13:1), the harvester (14:14-16), and the rider on the white horse (19:11-16).

Finally, there are great hymns of praise for Jesus recorded in this book (1:5b-7; 5:9-14; 7:14-17; 11:15). Jesus is worshiped as God and as one with the Father. The glory that belongs to the one belongs to the other.

*The kingdom of the world has become
the kingdom of our Lord and of his
Christ, and he will reign for ever and
ever.*

Revelation 11:15

Major Lessons

1. Jesus knows about everything, good or evil, that is done by the churches (2 - 3).
2. The church must have an attitude of repentance if it is to survive the day of judgment (2 - 3).
3. Even though the world is in chaos, we must have confidence that God is still on the throne and rules the world (4).
4. Christ Jesus is the one who holds the destiny of the church/kingdom in His hand (5; 1:18).
5. Christians reign on earth through the power of Christ (1:5-6; 5:10).
6. The answers to all the questions of life are found in Christ crucified (5:5-10).
7. Only those who have been made presentable by the blood of the lamb can stand justified in the day of judgment (1:5, 5:9; 7:9, 14; 12:11; 14:3-5; 19:8; 22:14).
8. Numbers have a significant meaning in Revelation. One must consider a number's meaning in the context in which it is used. Consider the following:
 - 1 = unity
 - 2 = strength of witness
 - 3 = the divine number
 - 4 = the world or things of nature
 - 6 = imperfection, falling short of perfection
 - 7 = perfection
 - 10 = power; strength
 - 12 = organized religion or foundational structure
 - 666 = the mark of the beast; anyone without Christ
 - 144,000 = redeemed
 - 1000 = long period
 - 3 1/2 years/1260 days/42 months = short period
9. The conflict between good and evil has existed since creation and has continued through the history of God's people. But God has protected and will continue to protect His children (12).
10. The ultimate and final glorious victory belongs to the saints of God, not Satan and his forces. (1:18; 2:7, 10-11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21; 5:13; 6:9; 7:3-4, 9, 13-17; 14:1-5, 12-13; 15:2-4; 18:20-19:10; 20:1-10, 27; 21:1-8; 22:1-5, 14).

Outline

Introduction (1:1-8)

- I. **The Vision of Christ (1:9-20).**
- II. **The Lamb and the Seven Churches (2:1-3:22).**
- III. **The Lamb and the Throne Scene (4:1-5:14).**
- IV. **The Lamb and the Sealed Book (6:1-8:5).**
 - A. The First Four Seals: The Four Horsemen (6:1-8).
 - B. The Fifth Seal: Cry of Martyred Souls (6:9-11).
 - C. The Sixth Seal: Judgment Announced (6:12-17).
 - D. Interlude: (7:1-17).
 - E. The Seventh Seal: Seven Trumpets (8:1-5).
- V. **The Seven Trumpets (8:6-11:19).**
 - A. First Four Trumpets: Disasters (8:6-13).
 - B. Fifth Trumpet: First Woe (9:1-12).
 - C. Sixth Trumpet: Second Woe (9:13-21).
 - D. Interlude: (10:1-11:13).
 - E. The Seventh Trumpet: Third Woe (11:14-19).
- VI. **The Conflict Between God and Satan (12:1-13:18).**
 - A. Battle One: The Woman and Her Child (12:1-6).
 - B. Battle Two: The War in Heaven (12:7-9).
 - C. Battle Song of Triumph (12:10-12).
 - D. Battle Three: Against the Woman (12:13-17).
- VII. **The Forces Against the Lamb (13:1-18).**
 - A. The Sea Beast (13:1-10).
 - B. The Earth Beast (13:11-18).
- VIII. **The Forces of the Lamb (14:1-20).**
 - A. The Lamb and the Saints (14:1-5).
 - B. The Four Headline Banners (14:6-13).
 - C. The Sickles of Judgment (14:14-20).
- IX. **The War With the Beast (15:1-16:21).**
 - A. Song of Moses and the Lamb (15:1-8).
 - B. Seven Angels and Seven Bowls (16:1-21).
- X. **The Great Harlot, Jerusalem (17:1-20:15).**
 - A. The Vision of the Great Harlot (17:1-5).
 - B. The Beast Interpreted (17:6-11).
 - C. The Horns and Woman Interpreted (17:12-18).
 - D. Babylon's Fall (18:1-24).
 - E. The Hallelujah Chorus After Her Fall (19:1-10).
 - F. Rider on the White Horse: Conqueror (19:11-21).
 - G. The Reign of One Thousand Years (20:1-6).
- XI. **The Vision of the New Jerusalem (21:1-22:5).**
 - A. The New Heaven and New Earth (21:1-8).
 - B. The View of the New Jerusalem (21:9-23).
 - C. The Inhabitants of the New Jerusalem (21:24-27).
 - D. The Provisions of the New Jerusalem (22:1-5).

The Epilogue: Closing Words (22:6-21).

Small Group Study

Warm-up:

What would be your first command or request if you were king over this country? Why would this be the first command?

Look at the Book

Revelation 20:1-6

1. Why do you think "an angel" was sent to chain the Devil?
2. How can a spiritual being like Satan be bound?
3. Why would the task of judgment be given to the souls who sit on the throne? What would qualify them to judge?
4. Who are the "rest of the dead?"
 - a. saints who had been martyred
 - b. souls who had died without Christ
 - c. saints who had died but were not given judgment
 - d. souls who are alive but are spiritually dead
5. What do you think is the "second death," and who will be a part of this death? Why?

Looking Closer:

1. What are the effects of Satan being chained or bound? What does that mean to the Christian?
2. How could you tell if someone had received the "marks of the beast"? How would you be viewed if you had the "marks of the beast" on your forehead? Is this "mark" a physical or spiritual "mark"?
3. Express what you would do to remove the "mark" from someone. How could "the mark" be removed?
4. What do you think it takes to be a part of the "first resurrection"?

Looking Around:

Express your thanksgiving for what Christ has done for your life.