

connect 360

BIBLE TEACHING GUIDE

Terror & Triumph

A Study of Revelation

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Terror & Triumph (A Study of Revelation)—Connect 360 Bible Teaching Guide

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ALL THE BIBLE FOR ALL OF LIFE

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How to Make the Best Use of This *Teaching Guide*

Leading a class in studying the Bible is a sacred trust. This *Teaching Guide* has been prepared to help you as you give your best to this important task.

In each lesson, you will find first “Bible Comments” for teachers, to aid you in your study and preparation. The three sections of “Bible Comments” are “Understanding the Context,” “Interpreting the Scriptures,” and “Focusing on the Meaning.” “Understanding the Context” provides a summary overview of the entire background passage that also sets the passage in the context of the Bible book being studied. “Interpreting the Scriptures” provides verse-by-verse comments on the focal passage. “Focusing on the Meaning” offers help with the meaning and application of the focal text.

The second main part of each lesson is “Teaching Plans.” You’ll find two complete teaching plans in this section. The first is called the “Discovery Plan,” which emphasizes discovery learning techniques; and the second is called the “Discussion Plan,” which provides questions and suggestions for dialogue about the Scriptures. Choose the plan that best fits your class and your style of teaching. You may also use and adapt ideas from both. Each plan is intended to be practical, helpful, and immediately useful as you prepare to teach.

The major headings in each teaching plan are intended to help you sequence how you teach so as to follow the flow of how people tend to learn. The first major heading, “Connect with Life,” provides ideas that will help you begin the class session where your class is and draw your class into the study. The second major heading, “Guide Bible Study,” offers suggestions for helping your class engage the Scriptures actively and develop a greater understanding of this portion of the Bible’s message. The third major heading, “Encourage Application,” is meant to help participants focus on how to respond with their lives to this message.

As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. You might use one or more of the following methods:

- In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents in their *Study Guides* and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date on which each lesson will be studied.
- If all of your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
- Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.baptistwaypress.org under the “Teacher Helps” tab.
- Develop a sticker with the lesson dates, and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.

Here are some steps you can take to help you prepare well to teach each lesson and save time in doing so:

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. If your church’s adult Bible study teachers meet for lesson overview and preparation, plan to participate. If your church’s adult Bible study teachers don’t have this planning time now, look for ways to begin. You, your fellow teachers, and your church will benefit from this mutual encouragement and preparation.
3. Overview the study in the *Study Guide*. Look at the table of contents, and see where this lesson fits in the overall study. Then read or review the study introduction to the book that is being studied.
4. Consider carefully the suggested Main Idea, Question to Explore, and Teaching Aim. These can help you discover the main thrust of this particular lesson.

5. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. Using your Bible in your study and in the class session can provide a positive model to class members to use their own Bibles and give more attention to Bible study themselves. (Each writer of the Bible comments in both the *Teaching Guide* and the *Study Guide* has chosen a favorite translation. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translations chosen, of course.)
6. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the Bible comments in the *Study Guide*. The Bible comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible. Read also the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and you can also use them in the class session itself. Continue your Bible study with the aid of the Bible comments included in this *Teaching Guide*.
7. Review the "Teaching Plans" in this *Teaching Guide*. Consider how these suggestions would help you teach this Bible passage in your class to accomplish the teaching aim.
8. Consider prayerfully the needs of your class, and think about how to teach so you can help your class learn best.
9. Develop and follow a lesson plan based on the suggestions in this *Teaching Guide*, with alterations as needed for your class.
10. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.

Premium Commentary. Plan to get the additional Bible study comments available online. Visit our website, call 1-866-249-1799, or e-mail baptistway@texasbaptists.org to order the *Premium Commentary*. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website. The price of these comments is \$5 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Commentary* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see www.baptistwaypress.org for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

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FREE! Downloadable teaching resource items for use in your class are available at www.baptistwaypress.org. Watch for them in the “Teaching Plans” for each lesson. Then go online to www.baptistwaypress.org and click on “Teaching Resource Items” under the “Teacher Helps” tab for this study. These items are selected from the “Teaching Plans.” They are provided online to make lesson preparation easier for handouts and similar items. Permission is granted to download these teaching resource items, print them out, copy them as needed, and use them in your class.

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Terror & Triumph

A Study of Revelation

<i>How to Make the Best Use of This Teaching Guide</i>	4
<i>Writers for This Teaching Guide</i>	9

DATE OF STUDY

LESSON 1	The Revelation of Jesus Christ	
	REVELATION 1	13
LESSON 2	Jesus' Letters to the Churches	
	REVELATION 2:1-11; 3:1-6, 14-21	24
LESSON 3	The Lamb is Worthy	
	REVELATION 4:1-6; 5:1-14	34
LESSON 4	Six Seals Opened	
	REVELATION 6	45
LESSON 5	Intermission One: God's People Preserved	
	REVELATION 7	56
LESSON 6	Trumpets of Judgment	
	REVELATION 8; 9:1-6, 13-15, 20-21	66
LESSON 7	Intermission Two: Faithful Witnesses	
	REVELATION 10:1-9; 11:1-15	76
LESSON 8	Saints vs. the Serpent	
	REVELATION 12:1-6, 13-17; 13:1-4, 11-18	87
LESSON 9	The Forces of Evil Receive Judgment	
	REVELATION 14:1-13	100
LESSON 10	Songs of Victory and Scenes of Destruction	
	REVELATION 15:1-8; 16:12-21	110

LESSON 11	Babylon Falls	
	REVELATION 17:1–6A; 18:1–8	122
LESSON 12	The Return of the King	
	REVELATION 19:11–21; 20:1–10	133
LESSON 13	A New Heaven and a New Earth	
	REVELATION 21:1–8; 22:1–7, 16–17	144
	<i>How to Order More Bible Study Materials</i>	155

lesson 1

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

MAIN IDEA

No matter what comes, Jesus is in control.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What fears do you have for the future?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to summarize the meaning of John's vision and to affirm Christ's control of the future



Bible Comments

Understanding the Context

The Book of Revelation recounts the Apostle John's vision of a heavenly Jesus proclaiming the following encouraging message for the church of his day: despite the circumstances, God remains on his heavenly throne. God is in control.

John wrote the Book of Revelation during the late first century, in the context of persecution likely dictated by the Roman Emperor Domitian. The situation for Christians living in Asia Minor had become increasingly hostile. Because of his Christian testimony for Jesus Christ, John was exiled to the small island of Patmos, situated off the coast of Ephesus (Revelation 1:9). Patmos was Rome's extremely harsh destination for criminals.

John's exile to this rocky, nearly treeless, thirteen-square-mile island was only the first chapter in a long saga of Christian martyrdom in the coming centuries. However, John's placement there with some of Rome's worst criminals must have sent shockwaves throughout the early churches and would have intensified the growing pressure to compromise. John wrote Revelation to encourage the church to stay true to its witness in the face of persecution, a strong message indeed given his personal circumstances.

The opening line "The revelation of Jesus Christ" gives the book its title. The word used here for *revelation* is the Greek word *apocalypse*, which means *unveiling*. It is also where we get the word *apocalyptic*. Filled with confusing symbols and frightening images, the Book of Revelation may read like a foreign language to many modern-day believers; however, in the first century, this type of writing was not uncommon. Apocalyptic literature typically includes heavenly visions, symbolic language, angelic visitation, and cosmic dualism—often depicting the battle between good and evil.

Although Revelation holds much in common with other apocalyptic literature, it stands out in several ways. Most apocalyptic writings used pseudonymous authorship. Books were ascribed to authors who had lived centuries before (for example, the ancient Jewish *Book of Enoch*). However,

John—a living person, not a heroic figure from the past—is the author of Revelation.

Revelation also stands out from other apocalyptic genre because it addresses letters to seven actual churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). These seven letters share much in common with ancient forms of letter writing and give Revelation a historic feel (chapters 2–3).

Finally, at least six times, the Book of Revelation specifically refers to itself as *prophecy* (1:3; 19:10; 22:7, 10, 18, 19). Since prophetic writing shapes much of the Old Testament, this style is not as foreign to us. In fact, even in the New Testament, Paul recounts the receiving of revelations by contemporary prophets (1 Corinthians 14:30–31; Galatians 1:12, 16).¹

Interpreting the Scriptures

Prologue (1:1–3)

1:1. Revelation’s opening line “The revelation of Jesus Christ” (NIV) means the book is about Jesus. The content of the revelation addresses “what must soon take place” (1:1), a phrase that commonly refers to the second coming of Jesus (1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:7, 13). An angel makes known this revelation. Throughout the Bible, angels unveil prophecy (Ezekiel 40–48; Daniel 7–12; Zechariah 1–6).

The term *servant*, used eleven times in the Book of Revelation to refer to Christians, is also used throughout the New Testament to describe the apostles (Romans 1:1; Gal. 1:10; 2 Peter 1:1; James 1:1).

The name John is mentioned several times in Revelation (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). Early historical evidence from Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and others points to the author of Revelation as John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee and the brother of James (Mark 1:19–20). He was a fisherman who became one of twelve apostles (Mark 3:17), as well as a companion of the Apostle Peter (Acts 4:1–23). Stylistic and thematic differences with the Gospel of John and John’s New Testament letters have led some to attribute the Book of Revelation to John the Elder; however, the evidence for this attribution is dubious.

1:2. The words *testimony* and *testifies* originate from the Greek word *martyr*, which originally described a legal witness. The word *martyr* is used here to refer to both John and Jesus (1:5), who, despite the pressure to commit perjury, remain faithful to their testimonies. The examples of John and Jesus are used to inspire the church to stay true to its witness, even though it will require patient endurance (1:9).

1:3. Seven times in the Book of Revelation, a blessing is pronounced on the reader and the hearer (14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). In ancient days, the role of a reader was vital because most people were illiterate. Describing the message of Revelation as a prophecy would have reminded readers and hearers of the Old Testament prophets. However, prophecies were to be heard and obeyed (Matthew 11:15; James 1:22).

Greetings and Doxology (1:4–8)

1:4. The designation of seven churches in the province of Asia refers to the seven most prominent cities located in the western part of what is now modern-day Turkey. These seven were not the only churches in the area; Paul wrote an entire letter to the Colossians, who lived in the vicinity of Laodicea. However, on a map, these seven cities form a loose circle, connected by roads and listed in geographic order, which leads some to speculate they were part of an ancient mailing route.

The familiar greeting “grace and peace” comes from “him who is, and who was, and who is to come” (the eternal God). It is a literal translation of Exodus 3:14–15, where God reveals his covenant name *Yahweh* (literally the four consonants YHWH). If the designation “the seven spirits” in verse 4 refers to the Holy Spirit, this passage may be one of the earliest expressions of the Trinity (2 Corinthians 13:14).

1:5. John and Jesus are both regarded as faithful witnesses (Greek *martyr*) of Jesus who is called the firstborn. The term *firstborn* (Greek *protokos*) is an honorific title that in no way denies the eternal nature of Jesus (as advanced by the ancient heresy of Arianism) but, in fact, does the opposite. Drawing on

the Old Testament (Psalm 89:27), the New Testament consistently describes Jesus as the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18; Romans 8:29).

1:6. The designation *a kingdom and priests* fulfills God's promise to consecrate Israel as a holy nation (Exod. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9) and reminds the churches that the Roman Empire is a false kingdom that will be replaced. It also makes clear that Christians are called to serve. Note the relationship between God as Father and Jesus as his Son (Rev. 2:27; 3:5, 21; 14:1).

1:7. Jesus is coming with the clouds, as predicted in Matthew 24:30. Unbelievers will mourn over the one they pierced (John 19:34; Zechariah 12:10). Drawing on Daniel 7:13, the reader learns that Jesus is both a heavenly and human figure; he is both divine and human.

1:8. The letters *Alpha* (Α) and *Omega* (Ω) are the first and last in the Greek alphabet and are similar to the titles *First* and *Last* (Rev. 1:17) and *Beginning* and *End* (21:6). They portray God as the eternal, uncreated being. Used also to identify Jesus (21:6; 22:13), these titles more than suggest the divinity of Christ. Added to these attributes is *Almighty* (Greek *pantokrator*).

John's Vision of Christ (1:9–20)

1:9. John described himself as a “companion in the suffering” of Jesus (Mark 8:34). John's suffering was exile on the volcanic island of Patmos. He reminded the church that his crime was his faithfulness to the “word and witness” of Jesus (Rev. 1:2).

1:10–11. John received his revelation while he was “in the Spirit.” This description is the first of several references to the Spirit (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). John's experience was akin to those of Old Testament prophets (Ezek. 11:24; 37:1). The reference to “the Lord's Day” is found nowhere else in the New Testament but was later used to designate Sunday, the first day of the week, (*Didache* 14:1; Ignatius's *Letter to the Magnesians* 9:1). Christians gathering on the first day of the week is mentioned in Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2.

The voice John heard was loud—a mega-voice like a trumpet. John was told to write on a scroll what he saw. The Greek word *biblion*, from which we get our word Bible, comes from the Egyptian word for *papyrus* and could refer to either a scroll or a book.

1:12–18. John vividly described his encounter with Jesus. Drawing on the language of the Book of Daniel, he described “one like the son of man” standing among seven golden lampstands with white hair, a detail that reminds readers of the “Ancient of Days” in the Book of Daniel. However, in Revelation 1:17, Jesus is described as “the First and the Last” (Dan. 7:9–14; 10:5–19), meaning Jesus himself is the exalted and eternal God.

His heavenly description continues. The feet of Jesus are like bronze in a furnace; his voice is loud, and a sword comes from his mouth (2:16; 19:15; 21); his overall appearance is like the sun in its brilliance. The presence of such a figure sent John falling down like a dead man. But he was encouraged not to be afraid because the one who stood before him was the one who was dead and is alive forever.

Jesus holds the keys that give him power over death and Hades (1:18; 9:1; 20:1), just as he prophesied in Matthew 16:18–19. The term *Hades* refers to the place of the dead, which no longer holds Jesus, as Peter preached at Pentecost (Acts 2:27). The key symbolically indicates that Jesus, who unlocked death for himself, unlocks death for his followers. He is the “resurrection and the life” (John 11:25).

1:19–20. John was told to write down what he had seen, “what is now and what will take place later.” Some see this phrasing as the structural key to the Book of Revelation, a threefold division of past (chapter 1), present (chapters 2–3) and future (chapters 4–22). The difficulty lies in interpreting the phrase “what will take place later.” Some see this as referring to events that have already occurred in the first century (a view known as the *preterist* interpretation of Revelation); others see this referring to the still distant future.

1:20. The mystery is revealed. The seven stars refer to seven angels, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches (Rev. 10:7; 17:5, 7). The Scriptures maintain that God’s ultimate purpose and plan is a mystery revealed

in Jesus (Ephesians 1:4; 3:9; 5:32; Col. 1:26; 2:2). In the following chapters of Revelation, each of the seven churches will be addressed, warning them that if they are not faithful in their witness of Jesus, he will remove their lampstand.

Focusing on the Meaning

Fear gripped the seven churches addressed in Revelation 1. John, their spiritual leader, was exiled to Patmos. The people were left wondering, worrying, and dreading. The pressure on believers to conform to the Roman system grew stronger by the day. Then one Sunday morning, they received a message from John. Can you imagine how it must have felt to hear for the first time of John's vision of the glorified Jesus and to know that Jesus was concerned about them specifically?

They must have listened intently as readers communicated John's vision of the exalted Jesus. And surely they eagerly awaited the specific message Jesus had for *their* church. Did they bristle with confidence at the description of the might of their glorified Lord—even as they lived in the shadow of Roman might and its pagan temple? Did those hearers receive much-needed comfort? Were they inspired to endure the dark hours of dread? It appears so because the early church not only survived, it thrived. The message that said God was in control must have eased their fears. Perhaps this message needs to be heard in our churches. What would happen if our church heard this message today?

Fear encircles today's churches too. Bombarded with twenty-four-hour news about terrorism, epidemic disease, war, famine, and political gridlock, we are tempted to give in to fear and give up on faith. Yet, John's worst fears melted in the presence of the glorified Jesus—the Alpha and Omega who was dead but is alive forever. The presence of Jesus put everything into perspective for John. Worship has that effect on us.

Teaching Plans

DISCOVERY PLAN

Connect with Life

1. Read aloud the “Quick Read” sentence from this lesson in the *Study Guide*. Ask, *What are some chaotic and uncertain aspects of the world today?* Write responses on the markerboard.

Next, instruct the class to name a time in history when the world appeared chaotic and uncertain. Ask, *What caused the chaos and uncertainty?*

Encourage class members to share their fears about the future.

2. Say, *Throughout history, the Book of Revelation has provided comfort and encouragement to Christians who have faced chaos and uncertainty. The purpose of this study is to understand how this book of the Bible provides comfort and encouragement to us today.*

Guide Bible Study

3. Read aloud Revelation 1:1–3. On the markerboard, draw a horizontal line. Label one end of the line *Ignore* and the other end *Solve the Cosmic Puzzle*. Explain that many people take these two extremes when approaching the Book of Revelation. Ask the class to think of those who might land at each end of the spectrum. Then ask, *Where would you position yourself on this continuum?* You can allow class members to ponder this privately or encourage them to share their answers.
4. Read aloud Revelation 1:4–8. Give a brief biography of the Apostle John (1:4).
5. Before class, obtain a map of the territory referenced in Revelation. Present a quick overview of the geographical locations of the seven churches listed in Revelation 1:11 and the corresponding present-day cities.

6. Read aloud Revelation 1:9–20. Bring to class representations of some familiar symbols or metaphors. Examples might be a United States flag, a bald eagle, a picture of Father Time or the Grim Reaper, a corporate logo, a sports team mascot, and so forth. Ask, *How do you respond to these symbols?* (positive, negative, or neutral). Ask, *What do each of these items symbolize?*
7. Divide class members into small groups, providing the following for each: paper and pens, a study Bible or a chain reference Bible or similar resource. Instruct the groups to find passages in Revelation 1 that paraphrase or quote from the Old Testament.
8. For this exercise, allow each person to work independently. Provide paper and pens or colored markers. Ask class members to read Revelation 1:12–16 and then draw a picture of the image described. Allow a few minutes for drawing. Encourage members to share their pictures. Then ask, *How does the image described in this passage make you feel? What qualities do you think it conveys regarding Jesus Christ?*

Encourage Application

9. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the “Implications and Actions” paragraph found in the *Study Guide*. Encourage individuals to paraphrase the reasons for why understanding the Book of Revelation can be a blessing.

DISCUSSION PLAN

Connect with Life

1. Lead the class in an introductory discussion of these questions:
 - Has anyone here previously studied the Book of Revelation?
 - Does anyone remember our church or pastor preaching or teaching a lesson on it?
 - Do you think the book is a favorite topic for Christian Bible study? Why or why not?
 - How do you think people feel about the Book of Revelation?

Say, *This lesson introduces a study on the Book of Revelation that will remind us that no matter what comes, Jesus is in control.*

Guide Bible Study

2. Read aloud Revelation 1:1–3. Ask, *What verse/phrase states the purpose of the Book of Revelation?* (1:1)
3. Explain to the class that the first readers of the Book of Revelation were first-century believers who lived under the rule of Rome in the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. Ask class members what they know about the early followers of Christ and the period in which they lived. Note that many, if not most, of those believers would have been subject to religious persecution. Most likely, they were from various ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds. Many were illiterate, and those who could read probably did not have a compiled New Testament as we think of it, but only the Jewish Bible or the Old Testament. Also, explain that the Roman Empire was extremely heavy-handed—if not brutal—in ruling territories it had subjugated.
4. Divide the class into two groups. Ask one group to define or describe the term *apocalyptic literature*. Ask the other group to define or describe the term *prophecy*. Provide dictionaries, Bible dictionaries, or other resources. Also, provide paper and pens. Allow about five minutes, and then ask each group to present its definition. After each presentation, allow questions or discussion. (You may want to keep these definitions for reference in future lessons.)
5. Read aloud Revelation 1:4–8. Present a mini-lecture about the identity of John, the author of Revelation.
6. Ask the class to name the seven churches in Asia which John addressed (1:4). Provide the hint that they are named in verse 11. Locate the cities on a map and note which ones still exist.
7. Ask, *Who is the “star” of Revelation 1?* (Jesus Christ). Instruct the class to pick out five or more passages in Revelation 1 that underscore the supreme majesty of Jesus.

8. Read aloud Revelation 1:9–20. Encourage class members to use the biblical text of Revelation 1 and information from the *Study Guide* to identify symbols that indicate the majesty of Christ.
9. Enlist a volunteer to read aloud the *Study Guide* sidebar, “Apocalypse.” Lead a discussion with these questions:
- What are some of the effects of this extensive use of symbolism?
 - Are readers supposed to understand the passage thoroughly and without question?
 - Is it possible to interpret these symbols differently?
10. Match the following verses in Revelation 1 with the corresponding passages in the Old Testament. (A copy of this matching exercise can be found in Teaching Resource Items for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

Revelation Verse	Old Testament Verse	Answers	
Rev. 1:5	A. Exodus 20:18	Rev. 1:5	C
Rev. 1:7	B. Exodus 25:31–40	Rev. 1:7	F
Rev. 1:10	C. Psalm 89:27	Rev. 1:10	A
Rev. 1:12	D. Isaiah 48:12	Rev. 1:12	B
Rev. 1:13–15	E. Isaiah 49:2	Rev. 1:13–15	G
Rev. 1:16	F. Daniel 7:13	Rev. 1:16	E
Rev. 1:17	G. Daniel 10:5–6	Rev. 1:17	D
Rev. 1:19	H. Habakkuk 2:2	Rev. 1:19	H

Encourage Application

11. Ask, *In what way is living as a Christian easier than living as a non-believer? In what ways is it harder?* Emphasize that the answers may vary depending on geographical location and particular time periods.
12. Note that there are books in the New Testament shorter than the first chapter of Revelation, namely, 2 and 3 John, Philemon, and Jude. Ask, *If you only read the first chapter of the Book of Revelation, what would you conclude?* Emphasize that this chapter makes clear that Christ is eternal, all-powerful, and in control of the future.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–3 are from the New International Version (1984 edition).