



## The revelation of Jesus Christ...

Revelation 1:1 ESV

### Introduction

Martin Luther considered the book of Revelation to be less helpful than most biblical books. Along with James, Jude, 2 Peter, and Hebrews, he placed it in a separate list at the end of his New Testament. He saw it as a great irony that the one New Testament book that promised blessings for those who either read and embraced its teaching should also be the book most difficult to understand. Many modern Christians likewise don't find much benefit from the book of Revelation. This series is written to unveil its inestimable value for our day. The word "revelation," used in the opening words of John's epistle, means *uncovering* or *unveiling*. There are seven primary aspects of this unveiling that can help us to see the great worth of the book for our lives.

### Unveiled Insight

With the opening words, "The revelation of Jesus Christ..." we glean the immediate sense that there were things revealed from God the Father to God the Son that are meant to be revealed to us. The book of Revelation was written not only for believers two thousand years ago; it is packed with crucial insight for our lives today. It contains fresh and vital perspectives on the sovereignty of our God and insights to help us remain faithful to God, even in difficult times.

An alternate rendering of Revelation 1:1 reads, "The revelation *from* Jesus Christ..." It is not only a revelation given *from* him, but more importantly, it is also a revelation *of* him. Indeed, we will see in this book imagery and verbiage unpacking a profound understanding of who Christ is and what he does. This last book of the Bible carries as its first concern that we come to know our Savior better.

### Unveiled: For Us

The first few words of Revelation inform us also that this unveiling was given by God "to show to his servants" significant truths. Before leaving His disciples, Christ made clear that He would continue to reveal his plans to them (John 16:12-15). In partial fulfillment of our Lord's promise, this capstone book of the Bible uncovers vital insights to help us better live the Christian life. It is for us!

### Unveiled: Into the Future

Revelation was given by God to show us, "the things that must soon take place." The word *must* is used to emphasize that what God plans, God accomplishes. When we combine the must of Revelation with the word, soon, we may easily become confused. We may ask, "Is the book of Revelation as relevant for our day as it was in John's day?" It may be helpful to recall that when the prophets of the Old Testament described the coming of Christ, they had a difficult time separating the first coming of Christ from His second coming. The cross and the crown seemed inseparable to them as they recorded God's promises for the future. Much as a person seeing a mountain range may perceive the mountains to be one jumbled conglomeration until they drive through them, so were mountains of prophetic insight, when viewed from a distance, difficult to perceive as separated events. Future generations, however, were able to watch prophecies find their fulfillment. Like a tourist driving through the mountains, individual prophecies

... which God gave him to show to his servant the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw..

Revelation 1:1b-2 ESV

could then be perceived and understood separately. Much like a mountain range, the book of Revelation contains pinnacles of insight from God that have been and will be fulfilled for each generation until the end has come.

### Unveiled: By an Angel

We read about this revelation that, “He made it known by sending his angel...” The word angel means *messenger*. Angels are messengers from God sent to serve us (Hebrews 1:14). It should be no surprise that God sometimes uses His unseen messengers to reveal His mysteries to us. Daniel was often given revelations by angels. In the book of Revelation, angels abound. The first prominent description of an angelic intermediary for the transference of God's message is seen in Revelation 17.

### Unveiled: to John

This revelation, we are told, was made known by sending an angel “to his servant John.” Who was this John? It was commonly understood by early Christians and the Church Fathers that this was John the Apostle, often called the *beloved* disciple. More recently, a growing number of scholars have suggested that the style of writing and the manner in which the author describes himself suggest a different John. The writing in Revelation is more vivid and terse, and the Greek grammar more stilted than that found in John's Gospel. Furthermore, the author of Revelation does not refer to himself as an Apostle.

Despite these factors, there is no significant reason to doubt that John the Apostle was the author. It is quite reasonable, in fact, to suggest that an earth-shattering apocalyptic vision from God could impact one's style and approach to recording what was seen. Furthermore, it was common practice for writers in those days, even Biblical writers, to dictate words that were put down by an amanuensis, or secretary. Hence, the flavor and emphasis of the particular secretary may have impacted the writing.

### Unveiled: Writing with Intent

The Greek word for Revelation, *apocalypsis*, is the basis for the English word “apocalyptic.” Literature that is apocalyptic is crafted in a unique style for a distinct purpose. When John opens this closing book of Scripture as “The revelation from Jesus Christ,” he is labeling it as an apocalyptic letter. Through symbol and image, apocalyptic writings created a bridge between this world and the next. In the Old Testament, the book of Daniel is the most prominent example of apocalyptic literature.

The apocalyptic symbolism that often confuses us permeates Revelation for three primary reasons. First, John was given insights into things futuristic that he could not fully convey with his understanding and vocabulary. For example, some theologians believe the locusts with “tails and stings, like scorpions” that had “power to hurt people for five months” symbolized nuclear warfare (Revelation 9:10). If so, God used symbols to convey a meaning that first century Christians could not have comprehended nor communicated with the cultural understanding and vocabulary of their day.

Second, Biblical imagery may convey a code-like function. Had the Romans intercepted the

**Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.**

Revelation 1:3 ESV

scroll containing this revelation in ordinary language, its clear condemnations of Roman rule would have caused further persecution. The symbolic imagery in Revelation, however, would have been confusing to the Romans while yet translatable by those who love God and His Word.

Finally, an image may capture and convey meaning more fully than many words. When John describes a “sharp, two-edged sword” coming out of the mouth of Christ (Revelation 1:16), one who doesn’t know Biblical themes and teachings may be repulsed by such imagery. Related Biblical insights about the Word of God, however, yield rich teachings from this single picture. Scripture is likened to a two-edged sword that can pierce our hearts, revealing truth and transforming our lives (Hebrews 4:12-13). This is true because Christ is the Word (John 1:1-4), through which the world was made (Genesis 1 and Colossians 1:15-17). When He spoke, people hung on His words (Luke 19:48b), words that will either free us or condemn us for eternity, depending on how we respond to them (John 12:47-50). This and much more is conveyed by the image of the sword.

### Unveiled: Blessings for You and Me

Finally, John describes the blessings that will unfold for those who read and hear what is written: “Blessed is the one who reads *aloud* the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.” Notice the stipulation, “reads aloud.” Early Christians, following the standard of the Jewish synagogue, gave emphasis to the public reading of Scripture. It was not only the reader who was blessed but also the listener. It was the one who took to heart what was read. The word blessed, also repeated in the Beatitudes, suggests a deep joy, fulfillment, and happiness. It is used in this culminating volume of Scripture seven times to describe seven blessings (Revelation 1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, and 22:14.). We can be grateful that each of these blessings is available still today.

### Final Thought

Perhaps many of us, like Martin Luther, have initially relegated the book of Revelation to the second tier when compared to the other books of the Bible. Further study, however, may cause us to highlight it as a favorite a book latent with blessings from God!

### Spending Time With God

This 12-week study series, *Revelation Made Relevant*, is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The Devotion questions are written for your personal study. The Discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The Digging Deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



SERIES

REVELATION MADE RELEVANT

LESSON 1

The Unveiling | Revelation 1:1-3

### Devotion: Personal Study

1. What thought or insight from the commentary would you like to carry with you into the week?

2. In a sentence, summarize your perspective about the book of Revelation before having engaged in this first lesson on *Revelation Made Relevant*.

3. Read John 21:22 in its context. Do you think this could be an illusion to Christ's coming to visit John on Patmos to provide the vision we now call the book of Revelation? Explain.

4. John's Gospel is primarily filled with content not found in the other three Gospels and much of it reveals God to us in a deep and profound manner. As an example, read John 17:20-26 and from it list a few key insights.

5. Read aloud Revelation 1:1-3. What is the most important truth you hope to take home with you from this text? Take a few minutes to ask the Lord to reveal more about His purpose in your life and in the world through our upcoming study of Revelation.

### Discussion: Small Group Study

6. What thought or insight from the Personal Study section would you like to explore more fully with the group?



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7. The commentary lists seven types of unveiling that are suggested in the opening sentences of Revelation. Which means most to you? Why?

10. Based on what you have learned about Revelation thus far, what do you hope to get out of this study? Be specific. Pray for the Lord to make it so.

8. Revelation promises blessings to those who read it and take it to heart. Have you read this book often? Rarely? Not at all?

### Deeper: Further Study

11. There are seven promised blessings contained in the book of Revelation. Read each and record who is offered a blessing and how that blessing encourages you personally, if at all:

a. Revelation 1:3

9. People are often turned off by the book of Revelation because of confusion that results from futuristic predictions. Through the years, what factors have influenced you to understand this book in a certain light? Is your present view of the book more positive or negative? Explain.

b. Revelation 14:13



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c. Revelation 16:15

12. Apocalyptic literature is meant to stir our imaginations. Much as in a movie or dream, such imagery conveys meaning beyond that which can be expressed by a few words. Can you think of a time when a dream or movie spoke to you profoundly in a manner that a mere description with words could not? If so, describe it.

d. Revelation 19:9

e. Revelation 20:6

13. Are there ways in which the book of Daniel and Revelation seem similar to you? Explain.

f. Revelation 22:7

g. Revelation 22:14

#### Scripture for Meditation

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