



**GOD
WINS**

REVELATION

Bible Studies for Ashfield Presbyterian Church

Study 1 - Revelation 1

Getting Started ...

1. Why do you think this book generates passion and intense debate about its meaning for Christians today?

Revealing...

Read Revelation 1.1-3

Verse 1 says “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.” It’s from this that we get the book’s English title, **Revelation**. In Greek, the language in which it was written for the early church, the title of the book was “**apocalypsis**”.

Today we often use “apocalypse” to mean “disaster” or “catastrophe”. When we hear the word, we might immediately think of momentous and catastrophic events, or natural disasters like bushfires or floods or fierce storms. A popular online thesaurus gives a few synonyms: “annihilation,” “cataclysm,” “destruction,” “Armageddon,” and “the end of the world.” When we read **Revelation/Apocalypsis** we can see how that meaning has come about. The book is full of images like this.

But “Apocalypse” actually means “unveiling.” It means “laying bare the truth” and “revealing what was hidden.” The ‘revealing’ often comes through accounts of dreams or visions of strange and catastrophic events, as we saw when we studied the books of Daniel and Zechariah.

The truth that Revelation makes clear is that true reality is often different to how it appears to be. No matter how things look on the surface, or how great the opposition, **God and his people will win in the end**. And, because of that, the book calls believers to patient endurance and faithfulness, as God works out his plans for salvation of his people, and judgment of the world.

This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God’s people.
(Revelation 13:10)

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus. (Revelation 14:12)

Some helpful suggestions:

Understanding the book of Revelation will take some work on our part, and it will be well worth it. Here are some suggestions to help us as we begin:

1. Remember the original writer and his situation

John, the disciple, wrote to the church while it was experiencing persecution under Roman Emperors. He was imprisoned on the penal island of Patmos because of his faithful testimony about Jesus (1:9).

2. Remember the original readers and their situation - this is a real letter!

We might already know that the book of Revelation starts with “seven letters to seven churches.” As we read, we’ll see that the “seven letters” don’t stop at the end of chapter 3. The whole book was written as a letter to the Christian communities in the region we know today as Türkiye, as they lived under the threat of persecution and possible death for their faith.

3. Know your enemy

As the “unveiling” progresses in the book, we see that the people of God are facing much opposition. There are fearsome images of “beasts” with multiple heads and horns and crowns. And behind them, “pulling the strings,” is Satan himself. As we’ll see, the beasts, horns and crowns represent the Roman Empire, with its Caesars and regional governors. One specific threat for Christians at the time John was writing was the order made by the Emperor Nero that people must bow down and worship his statue in every town and city in the empire... or face death. The real enemy, though, is Satan himself, who has been defeated already by Christ. Watch the battles play out in John’s visions - and see how Christ’s people win by overcoming Satan because of the blood of the Lamb (Jesus Christ) and the words of their testimony.

4. Reading Symbols

Symbols are “word pictures that represent something else.” They show things for what they are, with a vividness that could not be matched by a conceptual description. A picture is worth a thousand words! The great city is a harlot luxuriously dressed (17:18). The new Jerusalem is a bride (21:2). The seven churches are seven lampstands (1:20). Satan is the dragon-serpent (20:2).

The problem with symbols is that they can be misunderstood. Rather than reading every detail literally, we need to be sensitive to the writer’s intention and try to work out the points of comparison between two things that may be dissimilar in other respects. For example, John *hears* the promise that the Lion of Judah is worthy (5:5) but he *sees* a Lamb that has been slain (5:6) ... Jesus is like a lion *and* like a slain lamb. John *hears* the roll call of God’s people – 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel (7:4) – but *sees* a great multitude from every nation (7:9) ... God’s people are both an army of perfect size and symmetry *and* a worldwide worshipping community.

It’s not always easy to read the symbols, but John gives us a few clues. The general rule is, if we really need to know the meaning of a symbol, it will be explained in the text. At other times, there are some simple “rules” ... see *Digging Deeper #1*.

5. Get the big picture, and don't sweat on the details...

The most helpful tip for reading Revelation may come as a great relief: we can make sense of the book without having to decode anything! Revelation is a “vision,” so it’s literally packed with word pictures... and the best thing to do with

Digging Deeper #1

Numbers in Revelation – a few examples



The number 7 occurs 52 times in the book. For example, there are seven churches (1:4,11) seven spirits (1:4) and later on seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven signs. The number seven was used to denote completeness and perfection.

Can you think of any modern symbolic numbers? (Why, for instance, is it so important to reach 100 in cricket? Why might someone be disappointed with 99?)

In Rev 1:4 John mentions “seven spirits” before God’s throne in heaven. What might he be saying about the Holy Spirit in this verse?

Rev 13:18 says the “number of the beast” is 666. If the number 7 is about perfection, what is John saying about the beast?

Other symbolic numbers in Revelation include 12 (and its multiples), 1000 (and its multiples) and 3½. We’ll think more about these numbers as we encounter them.

Symbols in Revelation – a few examples

Sometimes John tells us what the symbols mean. See, for example, Rev 1:12 and 1:20 – the lampstands are the seven churches.

At other times we can work out what the symbols mean by making connections within the book. For example, in Rev 11:3-4 we read about “two witnesses” who are described as “lampstands”. Who, then, might these “witnesses” be?

Sometimes we can work out the meaning from what we know of the world around us. An example of this is the white clothes and fine linen described in Rev 19:8. What does fine linen usually suggest, and what might that say about God’s people in heaven?

Colour coding

Like the example above, there are other references to colours in the book. “White”, for example, suggests purity, and “gold” is symbolic of royalty. Keep an eye out for them.

any picture is stand back and look at it. Look at the big picture rather than trying to decode every brush stroke. Time after time, the big picture is totally clear. God wins. And evil, whatever its form, is overthrown. As commentator Vern Poythress says:

“Revelation is a picture book, not a puzzle book. Don’t become preoccupied with isolate details. Rather, become engrossed in the overall story. Praise the Lord. Cheer for the saints. Detest the beast. Long for the final victory.”

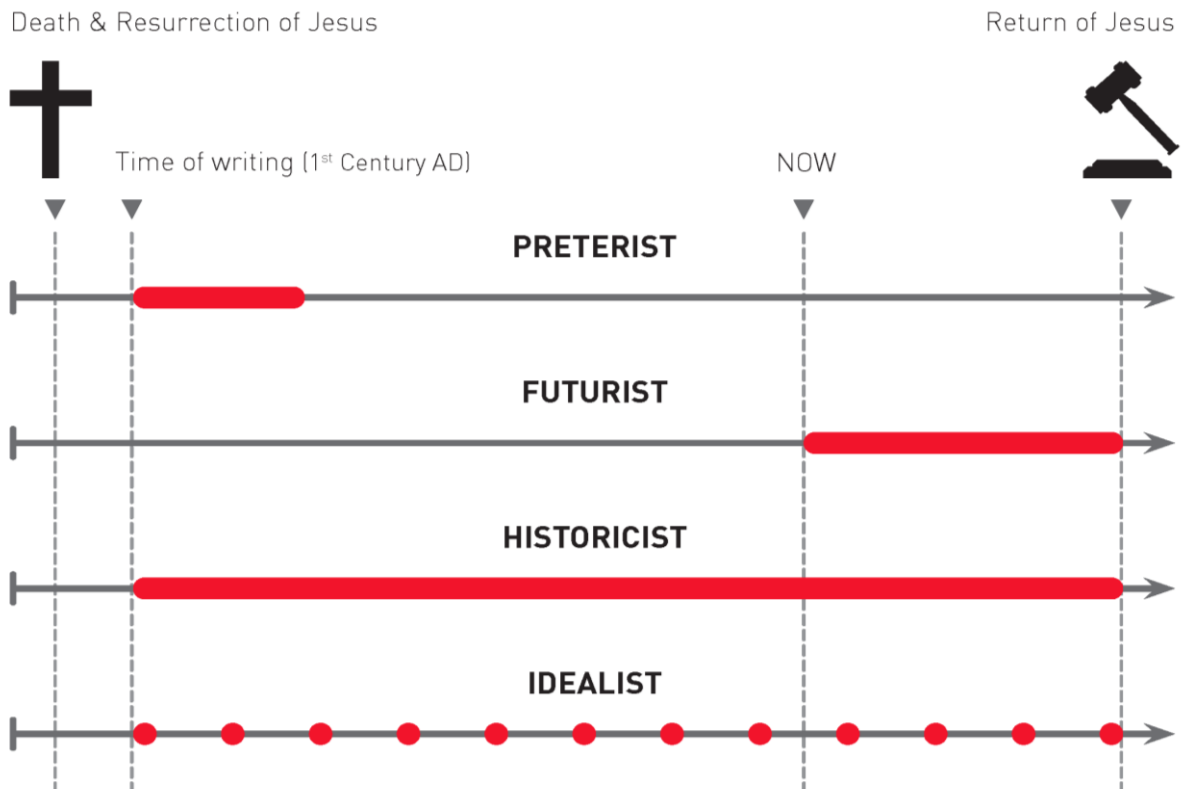
And let this encourage us as we wait with patient endurance for the return of Christ.

Ways of Interpreting Revelation

There are four main “schools of thought” in interpreting the book of Revelation.

- A. **It’s all in our past (preterist).** The idea is that the events in Revelation happened in the time frame of the Roman empire, and should be read with that historical context in mind. In other words, the letter was written to Christians in the 1st Century Roman empire, and we need first to understand how they would have understood it. John says several times that the things in his vision will SOON take place - in the lifespan of his readers. (But it also seems clear that the “Revelation” extends all the way to the final judgement. There is at least some future focus.)

- B. **It’s all in the future (futurist).** This view holds that the events in the book of Revelation would happen in a far distant future (at least, from the point of view of the original readers.) So, according to this view, Revelation is talking about events that are still to come, including times like “the tribulation” and “the millennium.” (However, this view fails to see that this letter had a real meaning and significance for the people it was originally addressed to.)



<https://visualunit.me/2013/10/08/four-ways-to-read-revelation/>

- C. **It's a roadmap of history (historicist).** This approach sees the book of Revelation as describing the key events of history from the death of Jesus to his return to judge the world, and that it is a "timetable" by which we can interpret "signs of the times." In other words, world events today are described in Revelation. (This view is very speculative, and again, fails to give the letter significance for the original readers.)
- D. **It's a matter of principle (idealist).** This view says Revelation isn't talking about time - rather, it is talking about a pattern of events or trends that will be repeated throughout history, as an encouragement to God's people of all times who face persecution. In that sense, it is a "timeless" message.

While most popular books on Revelation use approach 2 or 3, these studies take a combination of views 1 and 4. **John's vision was first and foremost a message for Christians facing persecution in the early Roman empire, but it's also relevant for Christians of all times.**

Digging deeper #2 - some points in favour of a "past" view of Revelation

Many Christians have been exposed to some very speculative views of Revelation, such as the idea that the book is a "roadmap", or timeline, for world events in the present day.

So what evidence is there that it's really a book addressed to Christians about to face Roman persecution, as the "preterist" or "past" view suggests? Here are some points to consider:



Clues from the text

- John is told to write the letter to seven real first century churches facing real problems
- Revelation 17 speaks of a "woman sitting on a scarlet beast" with seven heads, and then explains that "The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits... the woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth." Rome was famous as "the city of Seven Hills," and was the centre of a huge, global empire. The clues in the text back up the interpretation!

Clues from history

- There are strong parallels between "the Beast" in Revelation, who sets up an image and demands worship, and what we know of first century history: the Roman Emperor did the same.
- Other early Christian literature picks up and echoes the language of Revelation when talking about the persecution Christians suffer "for their testimony." There is a good match between what we know of the history of the time, and the images painted by Revelation.

Futurist claims are almost always wrong

Futurist (and historicist) interpretations of Revelation generate lots of books and movies. However, their claims and predictions have so far all been wrong. For instance, Saddam Hussein no longer appears to be "The Beast," or "The Antichrist" even though this claim was made boldly. (eg <http://seder.topcities.com/>). And ... there's no mention of "The Antichrist" in Revelation!

A generation earlier, "Russia" was cast in this role. (Interestingly, any "anti-American" world power quickly makes an appearance in Futurist interpretations of Revelation!)

This is how we read the rest of the Bible!

When we read other parts of the Bible, we first understand the historical situation of the first readers, then apply the principles to our own situation.

Having said all this, there are some pretty weird hyper-Preterist views around too!

Stay cool. Work hard at making sense of the book. Listen to one another. And avoid extremism!

2. Which interpretation category best describes your own approach to reading the book?
3. What does John say about the source of the words he is about to write? What is the “chain of communication”? (Compare 1:1 with Matt 11:25-27; Matt 16:16-17; Gal 1:11-12)

What is John’s part in the communication of the revelation (1:2)?

4. What claim is made about “the one who reads the words of this prophecy” and “those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it” (1:3)?

Read Revelation 1:4-9

5. John brings greetings to “the seven churches in the province of Asia” (1:4-8). What do we learn from this?

1:4,8

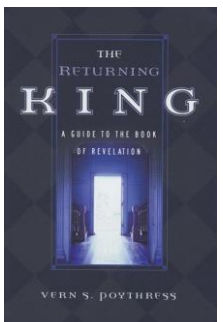
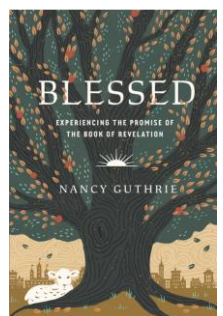
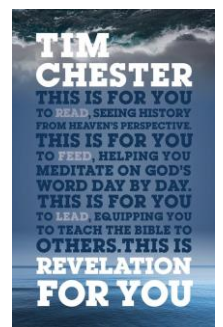
1:5

1:7 (compare with Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10 help us understand what this means)

6. What do we learn about the recipients of the greetings? (1:5-6)
7. Why is John exiled on Patmos (1:9)?
8. Has “exile” for bearing witness to Christ ever been your own experience?

Bearing witness to Jesus has risks attached. You might even end up exiled! This age is full of troubles, especially for Christians who testify boldly about Jesus and take on the full might of Satan's opposition to the kingdom of God. But John, out of his encounter with the risen, ruling Jesus... the glorious “Son of Man” ruling with God, encourages us to persevere. As we will see, John’s vision is awe-inspiring, fear-inspiring and hope-inspiring.

Chat and **pray about your fears and expectations** in tackling the book of Revelation.



Some recommended resources...

Revelation for You, Tim Chester

Blessed: Experiencing the promise of the book of Revelation, Nancy Guthrie

Nancy Guthrie’s podcast series of her book:

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/introducing-the-blessed-podcast-with-nancy-guthrie/>

The Returning King: A guide to the book of Revelation, Vern Poythress

Study 2 - Revelation 1: I Saw Heaven Opened

1. How is Jesus described by the world around us? Think about how he is portrayed at different times of the year. How does this influence our own understanding of what Jesus is *really* like?

Read Revelation 1

2. What was John doing when he received his revelation (v10)?

John hears a mighty voice, instructing him to write down what he sees, and to send it to the “seven churches in the province of Asia”. These were real churches in what, today, is Turkey. The whole of the book is the message for each of the churches.



3. When he turns to “see the voice”, what does he see? (1:12, 20)

4. And who does John see? Fill in the table below.

| Verse | Description | Allusions, leading to understanding |
|---------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1:13, 16a, 20 | | |
| 1:13-14a | | |
| 1:14b | | |
| 1:15a | | |
| 1:15b | | |
| 1:18 | | |
| 1:16a | | |

| | | |
|-------|--|--|
| 1:16b | | |
| 1:17b | | |
| 1:18a | | |
| 1:18b | | |

5. What is your overall impression of the person described in these verses?
6. From the connections you've made with other parts of the Bible, who is this person?
7. How closely (or not!) does the description of Jesus in these verses match the perception of him in the world? And in our own hearts?
8. John was terrified when saw Jesus, and "fell at his feet as though dead" (1:17). Isaiah had a similar reaction when he saw the Lord Almighty seated on his heavenly throne (Isaiah 6:1-5). Jesus said to John, "Do not be afraid (1:17). Why would his next words have been a comfort to John?

In her book, *Blessed* (p 60), Nancy Guthrie says this about Revelation chapter 1:

"We find that seeing the glorified and ascended Jesus in his eternal, authoritative, powerful, compassionate reality is what we need to patiently endure the tribulation inherent in being in Jesus until his kingdom comes ... Instead of reducing Jesus to simplified, understandable, manageable terms, the vision that John was given and wrote down for us expands our vision and engages our imagination. It causes us to open ourselves up to someone bigger and grander and more captivating and commanding than we've ever seen before. And we find ourselves blessed – blessed by seeing the glorified Jesus."

Spend some time praying about the impact of John's vision in our lives now and into eternity.

Study 3 - Revelation 2-3: Letters from Heaven

The seven letters in these two chapters of Revelation were written to real churches that existed in the 1st century AD. Jesus commends the faithful, critiques those who are falling from their faith, and gives instructions and promises. They are literary masterpieces, with connections to the description of the risen Jesus in chapter 1, and also to God's plans for the world described in chapters 21 and 22.

The churches addressed in the letters were situated in the province of Roman Asia, in cities where the cult of Emperor worship was practised enthusiastically and was central in the life of the community. It was one way the authorities 'kept the peace'.

Still, this part of Asia was one of the most 'Christianised' parts of the Roman Empire at the end of the 1st century AD. Christian rejection of these celebrations did not go

unnoticed, and it added to the suspicion already directed against the churches because of refusal to participate in other aspects of traditional Roman religious practice.



“By the time John was writing, there were forty major temples where Caesar was worshipped as god – including one in each of the seven churches addressed in Revelation chapters 2-3. The imperial cult was a big part of commercial life through the trade guilds. These guilds offered members a network of associates and contracts, so they were a key way to get on in commercial or political life. The problem for Christians was that participation in the trade guilds became synonymous with involvement in the imperial cult. Pressure to participate came from neighbours as much as from officials. People were urged not to make trouble and to be grateful for Roman rule. This inevitably put Christians on a collision course with the culture and, ultimately, the authorities. Faithful believers believed in Jesus as the one and only Son of God, the only Saviour of the world, and the one true lord. But to express this belief out loud was culturally awkward, commercially disastrous, and politically treasonous.”

Tim Chester, *Revelation for You*, p12-13

1. Each of the letters ends with a promise to “the one who overcomes.” What views of “overcoming” are common in the world? And amongst Christians today?

Read through Revelation 2-3, pausing after each of the seven letters to fill in the table below.

| The Church | The commendation | The criticism | The command | The encouragement |
|------------|------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|
| 2:1-7 | | | | |
| 2:8-11 | | | | |
| 2:12-17 | | | | |
| 2:18-29 | | | | |
| 3:1-6 | | | | |
| 3:7-13 | | | | |
| 3:14-22 | | | | |

2. Revelation is an historical document, written to real churches undergoing real persecution from the Roman Empire. It concerns real events which “must soon take place” for them (1:1). Likewise, it concerns events that must soon take place for us. In a few words, summarise the opposition that was being experienced by the churches in Asia. How does this compare with the experience of being a Christian in 21st century Australia?

3. What are the key criticisms Jesus makes of these churches? Would he make them of our church?
4. What are the main commendations Jesus makes? Would he make them of our church?
5. What commands does Jesus make? How will we follow these commands in our church? And in our individual lives?
6. What does Jesus say to the churches of Smyrna (2:9) and Laodicea (3:17-18) about material riches and spiritual riches?
7. What will it mean to “eat from the tree of life” (2:7)? See also Rev 22:2. How does this contrast with God’s response to the sin of Adam and Eve? See Genesis 3:21-24.
8. What does Jesus mean when he says the one who conquers “will not be hurt by the second death” (2:11)? See also Rev 20:6.
9. What is the benefit of receiving a new name from Jesus (1:17)? See Rev 14:1 and 22:4.
10. How do people deceive others about their devotion to Jesus (3:1)? Can they deceive Jesus?
11. Jesus makes promises to each church about what will happen to “the one who overcomes”. What do you think it means for these Christians to overcome? (Look at 12:10-11 to help)

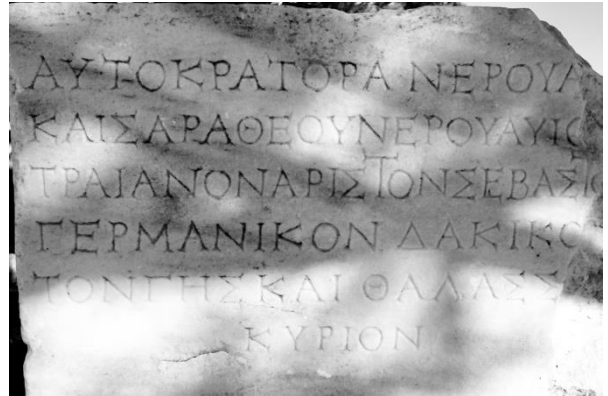
What encouragement would this give to the early church? What encouragement does it give us today?

Spend some time praying about the struggles of living as a Christian in this time in history, and seek God’s help to overcome through faith in Christ.

Study 4 - Revelation 4-5: Who's Really in Charge?

The cult of Emperor worship under Roman rule placed demands on everyone, including Christians. This photo shows an inscription found near the ruins of the temple of the Emperor Trajan (AD 98-117) at Pergamum in modern-day Türkiye. In part, it declares Trajan to be “Caesar god” and “lord of the earth and sea”. Literature from the time tells us that people who lived under this rule were expected to

- Participate in festivals honouring the Emperor
- Declare that Caesar was ‘lord’ by offering incense on altars carried by priests
- Make sacrifices to the Emperor, and then eat the sacrificed meat
- Bow to the ground before Caesar’s statue or ‘image’, and acknowledge him as ‘lord’ by stopping at his altars in public places
- Obey Caesar’s edicts without question
- Acknowledge the authority of the Emperor when conducting business or market transactions, and before drawing water from public fountains



Life was difficult for Christians living in this context – a declaration of faith in Jesus was a deeply political statement.

1. How do governments today expect citizens to do to show their allegiance to their country? Do citizens expect the same of each other? How do these expectations clash with what Christians do in their allegiance to Jesus?

Read Revelation 4.

When you visit an art gallery it’s important to stand back and take in the overall impression of an artwork, as well as paying attention at the details. In this chapter, John paints a picture for us with words – the details matter, but it’s important to look at the big picture.

2. What is this chapter describing? (4:1) Write down the images that jump out at you.

Where does the open door lead? There are comparisons to be drawn here between Isaiah 6:1-4, and Daniel 7, and Acts 7:54-56

Who is sitting on the throne (4:2, 8, 11)

The twenty-four elders represent the twelve patriarchs of the Old Testament and the twelve apostles of the New Testament (that is, the complete church), and the four “living creatures” (lion, ox, man and eagle) represent the strongest and most majestic of the earth’s creatures. What are they doing? (2:6-11)

3. What reason is given for this worship? How does this compare to the Emperor’s claim that he should be worshipped?

Read Revelation 5

Again, we need to stand back and look at the big picture that John presents to us. The question of “worthiness” continues in this chapter, but (especially after reading chapter 4) we may be surprised at what “worthiness” looks like.

The one on the throne, the Lord God Almighty, holds in his hand a scroll with writing front and back, and sealed. At this point, we don’t know what the scroll contains. John’s question is “who is worthy to open the scroll?”

4. What does John hear about the one who is worthy to open the scroll? (5:5)

5. But what does John see? (5:6) What is surprising about this image?

Pay attention for when this technique is used later. Hearing one thing but seeing another show two different perspectives on the same reality.

5. What makes the slain Lamb worthy to open the scroll? (5:5, 9-10) What three things has the Lamb achieved through being slain?

- With his blood he purchased ...
- He made them to be ...
- And they will ...

6. What confidence, hope and challenge does this give to Christians who experience pressure from the world around them because of their faith in Jesus and their allegiance to him?

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb

Be praise and honour and glory and power,

For ever and ever!”

The four living creatures said “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshipped.

Revelation 5:13-14

Who is worthy of our allegiance and worship? **Spend time now thanking God for Jesus** and what he has done for us, and seeking his help to keep worshipping him in our lives even when other people and other things try to demand our allegiance.

Study 5 - Revelation 6-11: Riding Through History

Readers who take the “all is history” or “all in the future” views of Revelation assume the events in these chapters unfold one after the other. The temptation with this approach to reading the book is then to try to identify particular events in world history with the events described in the book. World War II, the US attack on Iraq, events in the Soviet Union (and now the Russian Federation), and alleged parallels between the Roman Empire and the European Union, have all been claimed as fulfilments of the Revelation prophecies.

See “Ways of Interpreting Revelation” in the first study for the background to the approach we’ll take with these chapters. The sequences of “sevens” (seals and trumpets, and later in chapter 16 bowls of God’s wrath) are parallel descriptions of the same history of God’s people, and his enemies, living in a world under his judgment and moving toward the return of Jesus and final judgment.

Read Revelation 6:1-8:1

1. Summarise the descriptions of what happens in each of the prophecies about the opening of the seals.

| | Passage | The prophecies | | Summary |
|-------------------------|---------|----------------|--|---------|
| the progress of history | 6:1-2 | first seal | | |
| | 6:3-4 | second seal | | |
| | 6:5-6 | third seal | | |
| | 6:7-7:8 | fourth seal | | |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------------------------|--|--|
| | 6:9-11 | fifth seal | | |
| the end of history | 6:12-17 | sixth seal | | |
| an interlude in the prophecies | 7:1-17 | a pause between the seals | | |
| final judgment and beyond | 8:1 | seventh seal | | |

2. What is the general picture of the progress of history towards Jesus' final judgment of the world? What can Christians expect life to be like?

Between the sixth and seventh seals there is an interlude; a pause for us to take a breath, recover and be encouraged (7:1-8:1). This pattern is repeated between the sixth and seventh trumpets (10:1-11:14) and the sixth and seventh bowls (16:15)

3. Notice again how John hears one thing (7:4) and sees another (7:9), just like he did with the Lion of Judah (5:5) / Lamb who was slain (5:6). This suggests that the 144,000 (7:4-8) and the great multitude (7:9-17) are two ways of describing the same thing. What does each description teach us about God's people?

4. What can Christians expect in the final judgment? (7:1-8)

What will be our response? (7:9-12) Compare this with Matthew 20:8-9 – what similarities can you see in the words and actions of the crowd when Jesus entered Jerusalem.

For Christians, what will life look like after the final judgement? (7:13-8:1)

Read Revelation 8:2-11:14

- Summarise the descriptions of what happens in each of the prophecies about the blowing of the trumpets.

| | Passage | The prophecies | | Summary |
|-------------------------|---------|----------------|--|---------|
| the progress of history | 8:2-7 | first trumpet | | |
| | 8:8-9 | second trumpet | | |
| | 8:10-11 | third trumpet | | |
| | 8:12-13 | fourth trumpet | | |
| | 9:1-12 | fifth trumpet | | |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------|---------------------------|--|--|
| the end of history | 9:13-21 | sixth trumpet | | |
| an interlude in the prophecies | 10:1-11 | a pause between the seals | | |
| | 11:1-14 | | | |
| final judgment and beyond | 11:15-19 | seventh trumpet | | |

Digging Deeper #3 - eating the "little scroll"

God's word to Ezekiel (Ezek 2:1-3:4) helps us understand more about the "little scroll" in the Book of Revelation. God's words of judgment on the world are proclaimed by his faithful people.



^{2:1}He said to me, "Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you." ² As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.

³He said: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day. ⁴ The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.' ⁵ And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious people—they will know that a prophet has been among them. ⁶ And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briers and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or be terrified by them, though they are a rebellious people. ⁷ You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. ⁸ But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious people; open your mouth and eat what I give you."

⁹Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, ¹⁰ which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe.

^{3:1}And he said to me, "**Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the people of Israel.**" ² **So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat.**

³**Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.**

⁴**He then said to me: "Son of man, go now to the people of Israel and speak my words to them.**

6. What is the general picture of the progress of history towards Jesus' final judgment of the world? What can Christians expect life to be like?

7. What can Christians expect to see in the final judgment? (10:7) Look up Genesis 18:18, Galatians 3:8, and Ephesians 1:9-10 to see what is meant by the "mystery of God."

8. How will the church be victorious over the world? (10:1-11:14) Who are the "two witnesses", "two olive trees", "two lampstands? (11:3-4, see also 1:12-13,20)

9. For Christians, what will life look like after the final judgement? (11:15-19) What does 11:19 tell us about who will be in God's **presence when the judgment is complete?**

10. What reassurance and encouragement do these chapters give to Christians who are living under intense persecution? What message is there for Christians who are not persecuted in that way?

Pray for the persecuted church, that it will be victorious over the world through the Word of God and its testimony about Christ. Pray that the church around the world will have boldness to proclaim Christ, and faithfulness to withstand the pressures from the world around.

Study 6 - Revelation 12:1 – 14:13: Beware of Imitations

1. “John portrays the struggle of the church as a great cosmic battle, spanning Heaven and earth ... day-to-day struggle to live without compromise is part of a battle that touches heaven itself ... History is portrayed as a conflict between Satan and the people of God.” (Tim Chester, *Revelation for You*, p 99.) What evidence of this do you see in the world around us today? And in your own life?

Read Revelation 12.

2. There are four characters in the scenes described in this chapter: the woman, the dragon, Michael, and the child. Who do you think these characters represent?

The woman? (See Genesis 37:9-11 for Joseph’s dream about the sun, moon and stars, and his brother’s understanding of what these things together meant)

The dragon? (See 12:9, and compare with Genesis 3:1:7; Psalms 74:13-14; 89:10; Isaiah 27:1; 30:7; Ezekiel 29:3; 32:2-3; Habakkuk 3:18-19)

The child? (See 12:5, and compare with Psalm 2:9)

Michael? (see Daniel 10:13; 12:1; Jude 9 for other references to Michael)

Digging Deeper #4 A Cosmic Battle

In Revelation John tells us that Michael is the one who leads “his angels” into battle against Satan and his angels, and who achieves a decisive victory over Satan, after which Satan was “hurled to the earth” (NIV). The ESV says: “and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.” Are the events in John’s vision historical, or are they predictions of the future? We know that Satan still had a place in heaven in Job’s story (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-8). And Jesus says (in Luke 10:18) that he “saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” At the end of Revelation 12, we see the dragon cast out of heaven and going off to make war against the rest of the woman’s offspring – he is hurled to the earth, but not completely overthrown. So, Michael’s battle is not a future event – this is part of John’s history lesson for us about the cosmic battle between God and Satan in the past, a battle which continues in the present and in which God will have final victory in the future. The “overcoming” that John writes about in 12:11 is ongoing and will reach its climax when Jesus returns ... which we see at the end of the book.



3. How powerful is the dragon? (10:3-4, but contrast with 12:5, 7-9)
4. What is the dragon's motivation to work evil in the world? What examples of his work do we see in the Bible? (12:4, compare with Genesis 3:15; Exodus 1:16; Esther 3:6; Matthew 2:2; 1 Peter 5:8)
5. How does the dragon do his work? (See the descriptions of him in this passage)

"Ancient serpent" (12:9)

"Devil" and "Satan," which have overlapping meanings of "adversary" (in a courtroom setting) and "false accuser, slanderer." (12:9-10)

"... who leads the whole world astray." (12:9, see also 20:8)
6. How is the dragon defeated? (12:11,17)
7. What opposition should Christians expect today from Satan? What is our defence against this opposition? What will be the ultimate outcome of the battle?

Read Revelation 13

8. In a few words, describe the beast that rises from the sea. (13:1-3) Compare John's description of a beast looking like "a leopard ... a bear ... a lion" with the beast in Daniel's vision (Daniel 7, especially v17-18). What might John want us to understand about the beast in his own vision?
9. This beast is powerful (ten horns, seven heads, ten diadems, 13:1). Who is worshipped because of this beast and its power? (13:4)
10. Who is persecuted by this beast? And what are these people called to do? (13:8-10)

11. Tim Chester (*Revelation for You*, p 101) describes the second beast as a twisted parody of Jesus – it looks like a lamb, but it speaks like a dragon. A fake and deceptive “saviour”. In a few words, describe the second beast. (13:11-13).

12. The second beast has power to perform great signs, but are they signs that point to truth? (13:13)

13. The number of the beast is 666. From what we know about number symbols in the book of Revelation, what does this number tell us about the second beast?

Read Revelation 14:1-13

14. What is the contrast between the 144,000 standing with the Lamb (14:1) and the people described in 13:17? What is the future for each group of people? (Compare 14:2-5 with 14:9-11)

15. How do we show that we are marked by the Lamb? (14:6-7, 12)

Pray again for the persecuted church, and ask that God will give each of us his Holy Spirit and the faithfulness to stand against the lies and deceit of Satan. Thank God that Satan cannot accuse us anymore, because of the work of Jesus on the cross, and *his* advocacy for us in heaven.

Study 7 - Revelation 14:14 – 16:21: Justice at Last

Read Revelation 14:14-20

1. What are the images we usually have of “harvest”, “reaping” “treading the winepress”, “threshing” and “winnowing”?
2. In this passage there are two descriptions of a harvest from the earth. Who is doing the harvesting? (14:14, compare with Daniel 7:13-14)
3. What sort of a harvest is this? (14:19-20) How does this compare to the harvests described in Matthew 9:35-38 and John 4:34-38

Matthew 13:24-30

Read Revelation 15

4. Who is singing the “song of Moses”? Why might this song be appropriate for them to sing? See Exodus 15 for the context of Moses’ song.
5. What deeds are the singers describing as “great and amazing” and “just and true”? (15:3, and look back to the end of chapter 14) Why might it be difficult for us to see these deeds as “just and true”? How does Moses’ song help us understand God’s justice and wrath together?

Read Revelation 16

6. Here we read about another cycle of “sevens.” There are echoes of the Exodus in the “seven bowls of God’s wrath,” as well as comparisons to make with other parts of the Bible, and we’ll note of them as we read through the chapter and fill in the table below.

| Passage | The prophecies | | Comparisons and allusions |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|--|--|
| 16:2 | first bowl | | Exodus 9:9 |
| 16:3 | second bowl | | Exodus 7:19-21 |
| 16:4 | third bowl | | Exodus 7:19-21 |
| 16:8-9 | fourth bowl | | Exodus 8:19 |
| 16:10-11 | fifth bowl | | Exodus 10:21-23 |
| 16:12 | sixth bowl | | Exodus 14:1-31 |
| 16:13-14, 16 | a pause between the bowls | | Exodus 8:1-15 |
| 16:15 | | | Matt: 24:42; Luke 12:35-40; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10 |
| 16:17-21 | seventh bowl | | Exodus 9:22-26 |

7. Are the events described in this chapter ahead of us? Or behind us? What might the words of the voice from the temple (16:17) tell us about this? (Compare with John 19:30.)

8. God's wrath, poured out in each of the "bowls," gathers his enemies for their destruction. What are God's people commanded to do in anticipation of "the battle on the great day of God Almighty?" (16:15).

9. What is the outcome of this final battle? (16:18-21)

Pray that God will help us be ready, and that he will deliver us from his wrath in the final battle.

Study 8 - Revelation 17:1 – 19:10: A Tale of Two Women

In the next chapters we meet two women who symbolise two great cities: “Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes” (17:5) and “the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” (19:7-8; 21:2)

1. What is the difference between prostitutes and brides? How does the Bible use the imagery of prostitution and marriage to describe God’s relationship with his people? (Look at Ezekiel 16:1-22 or Hosea 1:2; 2:2,13)

Read Revelation 17

2. John tells us that the woman, the “great prostitute, is “the great city that rules over the kings of the earth” (17:18). Briefly describe her.

What does her clothing tell us about her? (17:1-5)

3. How does the “great prostitute” treat God’s people? (17:6)

4. It would be convenient here to conclude that the “great prostitute” represents the powers of the world that persecute the saints. But what is the sobering message from Jesus about who will be held responsible for the persecution of God’s people? (Luke 11: 47-51, compare with Psalm 106:34-40)

Digging Deeper #5 - Why does John contrast two cities and two women?



“Whether they were Jews or Gentiles, most of John’s readers were used to belonging to a city. Most citizens of the great cities of the province of Asia would have thought it possible to be fully human only in the public life of a city.”

They needed focus, a vision of an eschatological future toward which they could live, and John presents that future as an alternative to Babylon.

“... so the visions of the harlot city Babylon (17:1-19:10) and the Lamb’s bride the New Jerusalem (21:9-22:9) form a structural pair in the latter part of the book. They both play on the ancient mythic ideal of the city as the place where human community lives in security and prosperity with the divine in its midst. Babylon represents the perversion of this ideal, what it comes to when, instead of the true God, humanity’s self-deification is the heart of the city. All the proud, God-defying, tyrannical and oppressive cities and states of the Old Testament contribute to the picture: Babel, Sodom, Egypt, Tyre, Babylon, Edom. The Babylon of Revelation sums up and surpasses them all. But the echoes of the past are tailored to the reality of the present: John’s readers would recognise well enough contemporary Rome in her true colours. Conversely, the New Jerusalem represents the true fulfilment of the ideal of the city, a city truly worth belonging to. It takes up the ideal to which the earthly Jerusalem aspired but surpasses her in an eschatological excess already to be found in the visions of the Old Testament prophets. ... Babylon must fall so that the New Jerusalem may replace her. Her Satanic parody of the ideal of the city must give way to the divine reality.”

Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p 130.

5. The woman rides a beast with 10 horns on its head. What will the horns and the beast do? (17:14)

What will be the outcome? (17:14-18)

Read Revelation 18

6. When Babylon falls, what happens to those who profited from the persecution of the faithful saints, the weak and the powerless?

- The “great prostitute”? (18:2-9) Will she live up to her boasting (v7)?
- The kings of the kings of the world? (18:9-10)
- The merchants of the earth? (18:11-17)
- Those who earn their living from the sea? (18:17-19)
- The saints? (18:20)

It's not easy to draw a clear conclusion about the identity of Revelation's "Babylon". It's Rome. *And* it's all the godless cities of the Old Testament. *And* it's Jerusalem – how remarkable that the city that was meant to draw people to God is described in the same ways as the greatest enemies of God's people!

But this is not the end of the story!

Read Revelation 19:1-10

7. What does John want us to understand from the contrast between the great prostitute (19:2) and the bride of the Lamb (19:7-8)?

8. Look carefully at the description of the bride and her clothes. Look back at 17:3-5 – how are these clothes different from the clothing of the great prostitute?

9. Who dresses the bride? (Compare with Philippians 2:12-13, and Ephesians 2:10)

10. Where do you live? Which city shapes your vision of “the good life”? Is it Babylon, the great prostitute? Or is it the Bride, the New Jerusalem? If we are living in the wrong city, what needs to happen so that we can “move house”?

11. How will you be dressed when Jesus returns?

Pray that we will be ready when Jesus returns, dressed in the righteous deeds he has prepared for us to do.

Study 9 - Revelation 19:11 – 20:15: The End of the World as we Know it

And now we reach the final battle, and another cycle of “sevens,” each introduced by the words “I saw ...” We’ll look at the first six visions in this study, and the seventh in the next.

Read Revelation 19:11-20:15

1. Summarise each vision. There are many allusions here, some very direct, to other parts of the Bible. Make time, if you can, to look them up and note how they add to your understanding of the vision.
 - *I saw heaven standing open ... 19:11-16*

Psalm 2

Rev 1:14

John 1:14

Heb 4:12

2 Thess 2:8

- *And I saw an angel standing in the sun ... 19:17-18*

Contrast this feast with 19:9

- *Then I saw the beast ... 19:19-21*

Recall Rev 13 ... who is the beast?

- *And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven ... 20:1-3*

When is Satan bound? (compare Matthew 12:22-29 and the parallel in Mark 3:20-30; and see also Colossians 2:15 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12)

Is the thousand years a thousand years?

- *I saw thrones ... 20:4-10*

- *Then I saw a great white throne ... 20:11-15*

Who will be judged? Who will survive the judgment? (See also Psalm 62:11-12; Proverbs 24:12; Romans 2:5-11; 2 Corinthians 5:10)

2. Knowing that Satan is judged, but only restrained, how should we live? (See 1 Peter 5:8-11; Ephesians 6:10-20)

Pray through Ephesians 6:10-20.

Study 10 - Revelation 21-22: The End of the Beginning

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." Revelation 21:1-5

1. What are you hoping for in the new heaven and new earth? How is this different, or similar, to our neighbours' hopes for the future?

Read Revelation 21:1-22:5

2. What Biblical themes does John use to show what the new creation will look like? (Compare John's vision with God's word through Isaiah, 65:17-25, to see one example of how the hope of a restored world is woven through the Bible.)

21:2,9

21:3, 15-17

21:4

21:7-8

22:1-5

3. Why will there be no temple in the new Jerusalem? (21:22, compare with Genesis 3:8; 17:7-8; Leviticus 26:9-13)
4. Who is invited into the city? (21:3, 6-7, 24-27; 22:3 and see also 22:14)

5. Who is excluded? (21:8, 27 and see also 22:15)

6. How is the new Creation *even better* than the first Eden? (22:1-3, compare Genesis 2:8-17 and Genesis 3:14-24)

Read Revelation 22:6-21

7. What does Jesus tell us about the book of Revelation?

22:6

22:7

22:10

22:18-19

22:17

8. What does Jesus tell us about himself in these last chapter of our Bible? How does it compare to what he said about himself in Revelation 1-3?

For the 1st century Christians who received John's letter suffering was real. In the face of this, the letter provided the hope and instruction they needed to persevere, and not give up, no matter what the pressure from their neighbours and from the Roman Empire under which they lived.

The message for us in the 21st century is the same. This world is full of tears, but in the new creation Jesus, the Lamb of God, will wipe all of them away as we gather around his throne. The powers of the beast of this world will be overthrown – overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of the testimony of his saints (Revelation 12:11)

While we wait for this day, the book of Revelation is a call for "patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus." (Revelation 14:12)

9. What hope have you gained from reading Revelation? What encouragement? What challenges?

Pray through Revelation 21:1-5 and Revelation 20:20. Thank God for Jesus!