

Revelation

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? Revelation is an amazing and colorful picture of Jesus' triumph over every power of the devil.

WHO WROTE IT? The apostle John.

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN? Around A.D. 95, while John was exiled to the lonely island of Patmos because of his faith.

WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT? This book is the grand finale of not only the Bible but God's view of history.

THE BREAKDOWN

- Chapter 1: John's vision of Jesus
- Chapters 2-3: Letters to seven churches
- Chapter 4: The throne in heaven
- Chapters 5-7: The seven seals
- Chapters 8-11: The seven trumpets
- Chapters 12-14: The dragon and the beasts
- Chapters 15-16: The seven bowls
- Chapters 17-18: The fall of Babylon
- Chapter 19: The return of Christ
- Chapter 20: The judgment
- Chapters 21-22: New heavens and new earth

KEY CONCEPTS

- Visions
- "Write"
- "I saw"
- Seven
- "Praise the Lord!"
- "Come!"



WHAT'S THE POINT OF

Revelation?

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In the end, the Great One wins.

WORTH MEMORIZING

- 1:9 "I am the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end," says the Lord God. "I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come—the Almighty One."
- 2:4 "But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first!"
- 3:20 "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends."
- 7:9-10 After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar, "Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!"

- 22:17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." Let anyone who hears this say, "Come." Let anyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who desires drink freely from the water of life.

THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE

- **DON'T MESS WITH GOD.** Talk about high action—this book is as vivid and violent as a science-fiction thriller. That's because it represents the battle of the ages: God vs. evil. His conquest is worth our greatest applause.

After this I saw a vast crowd, too

great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language,

standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb.

They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar,

"Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!"

REVELATION 7:9-10

PERSPECTIVES

If I had 300 men who feared nothing but God, hated nothing but sin, and were determined to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, I would set the world on fire.

JOHN WESLEY (1703-1791),
BRITISH EVANGELIST AND FOUNDER
OF THE METHODIST MOVEMENT



business and management writer Peter Drucker said, "Trying to predict the future is like trying to drive down a country road at night with no lights while looking out the back window." None of us knows what tomorrow holds, but the Lord Jesus Christ—Alpha and Omega—knows the end from the beginning, and in the book of Revelation He tells us how history will conclude. It's true that Revelation is full of apocalyptic visions, but the very title of the book implies God wants to *reveal* His plans to us. A special blessing is promised to those who study this book, and without it our lives—as well as the Bible itself—would be incomplete.

The apostle John received Revelation while exiled on the island of Patmos. The immediate recipients were seven churches in Asia Minor.

After an opening introduction in chapter 1, and exhortations to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3, the writer launched into chapter after chapter of vivid descriptions of the events of the Great Tribulation, leading to the dramatic moment of Christ's return in chapter 19 and a tour of our eternal home at the end of the book.

The book of Revelation tells us that regardless of what happens in life—no matter how depressing the news or difficult the times—life in Christ has a happy ending for those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, who pray: Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

KEY THOUGHT:

God has a plan for the future and for eternity. Regardless of what happens in life—no matter how depressing or difficult the news—life in Christ has a happy ending for those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

KEY VERSE:

"And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him."
Revelation 22:3

KEY ACTION:

"And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely."
Revelation 22:17

KEY PRAYER:

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

BASIC SURVEY

REVELATION

AUTHOR: John (1:1), probably the apostle John.

DATE: AD 96.

IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

God will judge evil and reward His saints.

DETAILS, PLEASE

Jesus Christ arranges for John to receive a "revelation" of "things which must shortly come to pass" (1:1 KJV). Jesus then breaks seven seals from a scroll, unleashing war, famine, and other disasters. A dragon and two beasts arise to demand worship, and seven "vials of the wrath of God" (16:1 KJV) bring plagues, darkness, and hailstones on earth. The upheaval destroys "Babylon the great," the world system, just before an angel seizes Satan and imprisons him for one thousand years. After a brief release to instigate a worldwide war, Satan is thrown into "the lake of fire and brimstone" (20:10 KJV). God then unveils "a new heaven and a new earth" (21:1 KJV).

QUOTABLE

> Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing (5:12 KJV).

UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

Revelation is an example of "apocalyptic literature." *Apocalyptic* implies "revealing secret information." The book of Revelation identifies Jesus Christ as the "Alpha and Omega" (1:8 KJV) and reveals the number 666 as a sign of "the beast" (13:18 KJV).

SO WHAT?

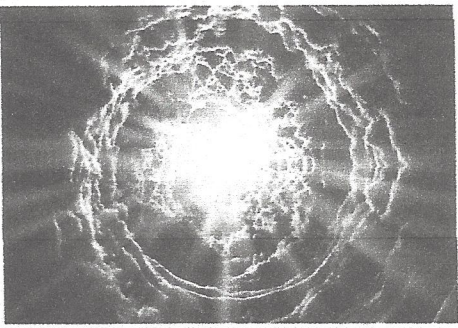
"Ye read the back of the book," an old southern gospel song says, "and we win!" The curse of sin will be gone, we'll live in perfect fellowship with the Lord Himself, and we will "reign for ever and ever" (22:5 KJV).

READ REVELATION 10-11.

- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 281. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 281. →

HEART OF THE BOOK

THE GLORIFIED CHRIST



In John's vision, he saw that Christ has been glorified, and he stated that we will be able to see all His power and glory radiating from Him.

Jesus appeared to John on the island of Patmos, and this is John's amazing description: "I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. . . . And His face was like the sun shining in its strength" (Revelation 1:13-16 NASB).

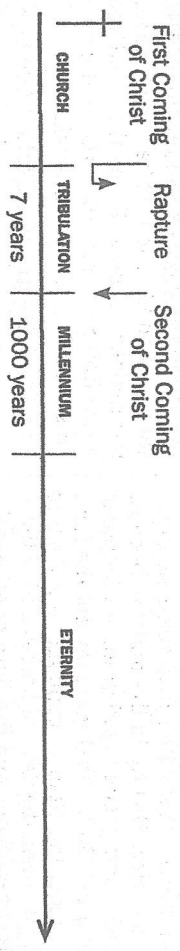
Jesus was still recognizably the carpenter from Nazareth, the son of Mary, but His physical body was now resurrected and glorified. It had to be to contain the fullness of deity. Jesus was still able to appear like a normal human. That's how He looked when He appeared to His disciples after His resurrection. But John's vision shows what Jesus *actually* looked like in His full glory.

And the good news for us is that we, too, shall one day have glorified bodies: "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2 NKJV). And in that day, like John, we shall see Jesus in His exalted state, with all the power and glory of God radiating from His presence.

READ REVELATION 1 AND 19.

- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 282. →

The Rapture and Second Coming



CLOSER LOOK

ADMONITIONS TO THE CHURCHES

Many people are tempted to skip over the letters to the seven churches to quickly get to the “good stuff”—details about the end time—but some of the most potent information in Revelation is found here. To “endure unto the end” (Matthew 24:13 KJV), we need to truly *know God*, because “the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits” (Daniel 11:32 KJV).

Jesus’ admonitions to the churches tell us how to “know God.” He told the Christians of Ephesus, “You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. . . . Repent and do the things you did at first” (Revelation 2:3–5 NIV). They had done so much good, been so faithful, yet were in danger of losing it all.

Jesus rebuked other churches for tolerating teachers who promoted sexual immorality (vv. 14, 20). This insidious teaching is infecting churches today as well, like yeast working its way through dough (1 Corinthians 5:1–9).

Jesus warned the Christians in Sardis, “I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die” (Revelation 3:1–2 NIV). Jesus called the believers in Laodicea lukewarm because material affluence had blinded them. They said, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But they failed to see that they were actually “wretched, pitiful, blind and naked” (Revelation 3:16–17 NIV).

READ REVELATION 2–3.

● Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 283.



CLOSER LOOK

END-TIME EVENTS

It has been said that there are as many interpretations of Revelation as there are Christians. This book, filled with vivid, highly symbolic imagery, has been used to “prove” that two of Oliver Cromwell’s guards were the end-time witnesses of Revelation 11, that Adolf Hitler was the Antichrist of Revelation 13, that Iraq was the final Babylon of Revelation 18, and that Russia is Gog and Magog. And quite a few people look onto their unique interpretations dogmatically and get quite hot under the collar with those who disagree.

So some people give up on reading Revelation entirely—but this is a mistake. There is much that Christians can agree on, and much that is clear in the big picture, if not in every detail. For example, whether the bizarre “locusts” of Revelation 9:1–11 are supernatural beings, genetically engineered monsters, or some kind of deadly drone technology, Christians can be glad that they will be spared their attacks.

And even the most skeptical among us can see that this world can’t last much longer, but is headed to a terrific climax and doom. Many secular scientists admit that, the way things are going, the Bible’s statement that “every living creature in the sea” will die is not so far-fetched (Revelation 16:3 NKJV). And apart from Preterists (who think that the end time was fulfilled in the judgment of Jerusalem in AD 70), most Christians agree that Christ will one day return—perhaps in our lifetime—set up His kingdom on earth, reward the righteous, and punish the wicked.

READ REVELATION 8–9.

● Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 284.



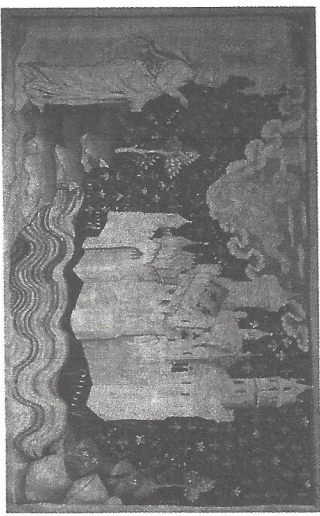
CLOSER LOOK

HEAVEN ON EARTH

John described how, at the end of the reign of Christ in the Millennium, the wicked nations, spurred on by the devil, surrounded Jerusalem to attack it, but “fire came down from heaven and devoured them” (Revelation 20:9 NASB).

This fire will be global in scope and its heat intense. It will dissolve the entire earth and vaporize its oceans and atmosphere: “But the day of the Lord will come . . . in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10 NKJV). As a result, “the old heaven and the old earth . . . disappeared,” John said. “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1 NLT).

This fourteenth-century tapestry *The New Jerusalem* (part of the *Apocalypse*) is an artist's interpretation of what heaven on earth may look like.



Right now the abode of God, heaven, the eternal city called New Jerusalem, is in the spiritual dimension somewhere above the earth. Paul called it “the Jerusalem above” (Galatians 4:26 NKJV). Presently, Christians who die live with God in an invisible spiritual dimension, but God’s ultimate plan is for us to rule and reign with Him on this earth forever and ever.

Our entire planet will be renewed and transformed into a global paradise, and God’s city will emerge from the heavenly dimension and descend. John wrote, “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven . . . God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them” (Revelation 21:2–3 NIV).

READ REVELATION 21-22.

HIDDEN TREASURE

INVITING JESUS INTO YOUR HEART

This verse is often used to explain how we can invite Christ to save us: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20 NKJV). While this was originally written to those who were already Christians, who needed to commune with Christ (v. 19), it actually does explain how we can invite Jesus into our hearts. After all, Galatians 4:6 (NLT) states, “And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.” And Ephesians 3:17 (NLT) states, “Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him.”

READ REVELATION 5 AND ISAIAH 11.

HIDDEN TREASURE

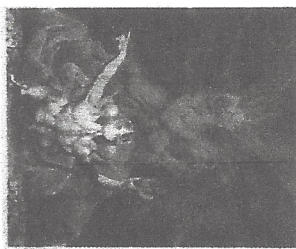
HEAVEN’S JOYS

The Bible describes heaven, saying, “Behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues. . . . They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore.” Jesus Himself “will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:9, 16–17 NASB). Jesus promises, “I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts” (Revelation 21:6 NKJV). What beautiful promises! We have a wonderful hope, which is why Paul states that we should give “joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light” (Colossians 1:12 NIV).

READ REVELATION 4 AND 7.

HIDDEN TREASURE

THE MARK OF THE BEAST



William Blake (1737–1827) painted *The Number of the Beast* in 1806. The Bible is unclear about whether the mark of the beast will be physical or spiritual.

3) is a spiritual mark, so the 666 mark is spiritual, not anything physical. Whatever the mark of the Beast is, Christians can agree that materialism and “covetousness . . . is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5 NKJV) and that we should trust in God, not worldly riches (1 Timothy 6:17).

READ REVELATION 13-14.

HIDDEN TREASURE

BABYLON THE GREAT

John describes Babylon as “that great city” that “made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (Revelation 14:8 KJV). An angel described this city as a “great prostitute” and added, “I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that had seven heads.” Then he explained, “The seven heads of the beast represent the seven hills where the woman rules” (Revelation 17:1, 3, 9 NLT). Some people think this woman is the Catholic Church based in Rome, since the ancient heart of Rome is the Seven Hills. But it’s more likely that this woman represents the global commercial system that ruled the seven great world empires of history, since all the earth’s merchants become rich through her (Revelation 18:15, 19).

READ REVELATION 17-18.

Personal Gold

from DAVID JEREMIAH

JUST A MINUTE . . .

How strict was Jesus on the issue of time-wasting? Consider this example:

He said to another person, “Come, follow me.” The man agreed, but he said, “Lord, first let me return home and bury my father.” But Jesus told him, “Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead! Your duty is to go and preach about the Kingdom of God.” Another said, “Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family.” But Jesus told him, “Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-62, NLT)

It seems like a stringent approach to young recruits, doesn’t it? Shouldn’t we take time out for funerals? Shouldn’t we show our families the courtesy of checking in to tell them we’re checking out?

Of course we should. Jesus’ point is that we must keep in check our own tendency to put the big things aside for the little ones. It’s what Charles Hummel called the “tyranny of the urgent”—putting the more important thing behind the more immediate thing. At any given moment we need to be aware of the wisest possible way to invest the moment we so briefly hold in our grasp. Too easily a lifetime has passed and we’ve done little or nothing of eternal value. Stop to attend that funeral and you’ll find five different reasons to change your mind about following Jesus; check in with your family and you’re liable to be talked out of your new resolution. Jesus is simply making the point that a commitment to him means a radical reprioritization of life’s values—effective immediately.

I believe that sometimes God gives us explicit instructions for the moment. I know he does for me. I don’t hear voices, but in the midst of all my busyness and distractions the still, small voice breaks through: *Why don’t you call this particular friend? Why don’t you go to that particular place? I think it’s common in the life of ministers. Sometimes I obey what I know to be the voice of God. Other times, to my shame, I let the moment get by. I tell God, in essence, “Let me go bury the dead first.” And I know deep down that I’ve missed a divine appointment. It’s an empty feeling to comprehend, much later, that you’ve missed something special God had for you to do.*

We need to learn to hear his voice, particularly as it pertains to the immediate use of our time. If we could do that, even moderately well, the fruit of our lives would be orchards ample enough to feed the world.

*Too easily a
lifetime has
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THE REVELATION

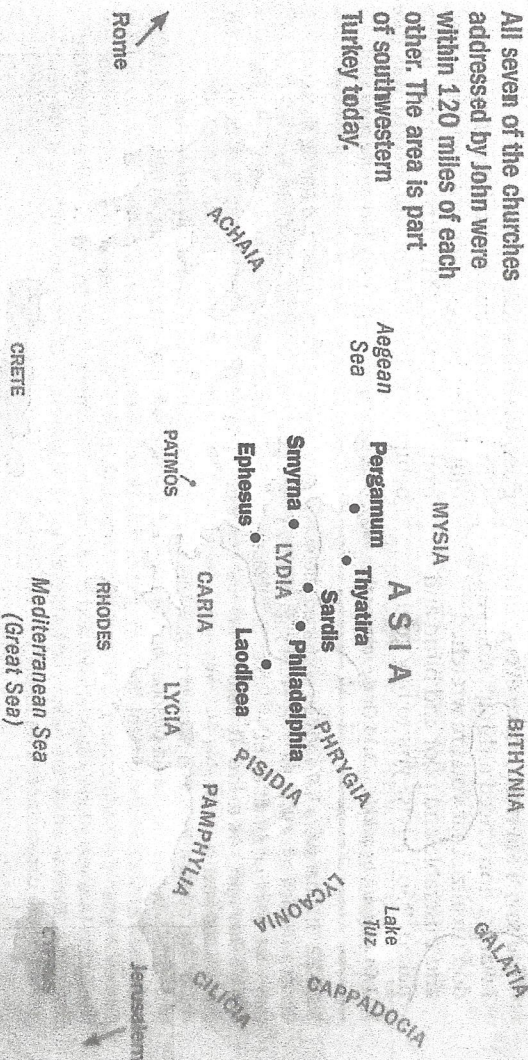
OF JESUS CHRIST

JUST AS GENESIS IS THE book of beginnings, Revelation is the book of conclusion. In it, the divine program of redemption is brought to fruition, and the holy name of God is vindicated before all creation. Although there are numerous prophecies in the Gospels and Epistles, Revelation is the only New Testament book that focuses primarily on prophetic events. Its title means "unveiling" or "disclosure." Thus, the book is an unveiling of the character and program of God. Penned by John during his exile on the island of Patmos, Revelation centers around visions and symbols of the resurrected Christ, who alone has authority to judge the earth, to remake it, and to rule it in righteousness. The title of this book in the Greek text is *Apokalypsis Ioannou*, "Revelation of John." It is also known as the Apocalypse, a transliteration of the word *apokalypsis*, meaning "unveiling," "disclosure," or "revelation." Thus, the book is an unveiling of that which otherwise could not be known. A better title comes from the first verse: *Apokalypsis Iesou Christou*, "Revelation of Jesus Christ." This could be taken as a revelation which came from Christ or as a revelation which is about Christ—both are appropriate. Because of the unified contents of this book, it should not be called Revelations.

WATCH WORDS

- revelation (a disclosure of what has been previously hidden)—1:1
- seven (a number representing completeness)—5:6 (also 1:20; 4:5; 5:5; 8:2; 10:3; 16:1)
- Lamb (Jesus Christ, the perfect sacrifice for sin)—6:1 (also 5:6, 12; 7:10)
- wrath (God's anger directed against sin)—14:10 (also 6:16)
- blessed (having received special favor from God)—22:7

All seven of the churches addressed by John were within 120 miles of each other. The area is part of southwestern Turkey today.



INTRODUCTION TO THE REVELATION

OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE

BACKGROUND

The book of Revelation is apocalyptic. The original Greek title of this book referred to the "Apocalypse," meaning "unveiling" of things known to God. The book's symbolic imagery is meant to comfort—not confuse—its readers. The apostle John is widely believed to be the author of the book, the title of which includes his name as the visionary. His name appears repeatedly in the first and concluding chapters. In 1:9 John reveals his whereabouts, noting that he received the visions on Patmos, a very small Greek island to which he was exiled in his old age. A voice "as of a trumpet" says, "I am Alpha and Omega," and, "What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia" (1:10-11).

MESSAGE

Christians in the Roman Empire are experiencing increased persecution under the rule of Domitian. The first chapters,

OUTLINE

- I. Greetings
- II. The Vision Begins
- III. Messages to the Seven Churches
 - A. God's glorious throne
 - B. The book with seven seals
 - C. Sealing of 144,000
 - D. Sounding the trumpets
- V. The Lamb's Battle
- VI. The Lamb's Triumph
 - A. The woman and the scarlet beast
 - B. Fall of Babylon
 - C. Rider on the white horse
 - D. The resurrection of the dead
- VII. The Lamb's Kingdom
- VIII. Conclusion

which detail strengths and weaknesses of the seven churches in Asia, refer to the impending crackdown on believers who will not worship Caesar and to the "hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world" (3:10). Beginning in chapter 4 John describes visions of heaven where the Lamb opens a series of seals, each revealing an aspect of peril and destruction. Persecution comes in the form of beasts, false prophets, and "the great dragon" (12:9). The final battle between the forces of heaven led by the risen Christ and the forces of evil ends in a victory for the forces of heaven. When Christ returns to reign on earth for one thousand years, Satan will be bound and cast into the lake of fire. The book ends with a vision of the new heaven and new earth and the hope of the return of the risen Christ.

TIME

Revelation was probably written toward the end of John's life, during his exile to the island of Patmos (A.D. 90-95).

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| I. Greetings | 1:1-8 |
| II. The Vision Begins | 1:9-20 |
| III. Messages to the Seven Churches | 2:1-3:22 |
| A. God's glorious throne | 4:1-11 |
| B. The book with seven seals | 5:1-6:17 |
| C. Sealing of 144,000 | 7:1-8:1 |
| D. Sounding the trumpets | 8:2-11:19 |
| V. The Lamb's Battle | 12:1-16:21 |
| VI. The Lamb's Triumph | 17:1-18 |
| A. The woman and the scarlet beast | 18:1-19:4 |
| B. Fall of Babylon | 19:5-21 |
| C. Rider on the white horse | 20:1-15 |
| D. The resurrection of the dead | 21:1-22:5 |
| VII. The Lamb's Kingdom | 22:6-21 |

Revelation

BOOK INTRODUCTION

Sometime during the apostle John's lonely exile on the tiny island of Patmos, the risen, glorified Jesus Christ appeared to His beloved disciple in all His glory: white head and hair, eyes of fire, feet of brass, a voice "as the sound of many waters . . . and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength" (1:14–16). John's reaction was understandable. He wrote: "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead" (1:17). The Lord's assignment for John sounded simple enough: "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this" (1:19). The apostle could not have imagined, however, the impact those "things" would have on every Christian's understanding of the future. These were "words of . . . prophecy" (1:3; 22:7), meaning they foretold the future and offered exhortations about those events—what Jesus described as "the things which will take place after this."

The apocalyptic imagery of Revelation must have utterly overwhelmed John at times, based as it was on fantastic symbols and images. John was compelled to use words to write down the revelation, but he received it primarily in pictures—we can only imagine a sky-size, three-dimensional, high-definition viewing.

WHAT IT SAYS | *To the Seven Churches . . . and Beyond*

John's immediate readers were the first to receive his revelation from Christ. Jesus told John to write it down "in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea" (1:11). We know that John left Patmos and went to (or returned to) Ephesus. Heading north from Ephesus in western Asia Minor, the remaining six cities could be visited on an elongated circuit in the very order Jesus mentioned them, arriving back at Ephesus, John's home base. Jesus had specific messages for each of the seven churches—and for all churches through all the ages (2–3). They were letters of commendation and tender encouragement, but mostly warning. Out of the seven churches, only two of them were faithful; the other five were in danger of losing their witness because of worldly compromise. The Lord uses the phrase "I know" eight times in these letters—assuring the persecuted churches that He understood their plight, as well as their opportunities and dangers, while warning the compromising churches that He saw their shortcomings.

The revelation John received reminds the church of every age that Jesus Christ is Lord of all; that He will be the ultimate victor over the devil and his representatives; and that Christ's triumph over death at the resurrection ensured that death will have no power over those who belong to Him. Regardless of what comes upon the earth in terms of tests and trials, the Christian knows the final outcome: all things lead to Christ's eternal kingdom. This should encourage God's people to follow Christ no matter the cost and to exchange the world's offerings for Christ's eternal kingdom.

WHAT IT MEANS | *Warfare, Judgment, and Ultimate Victory*

Not everything in the Bible is meant to be crystal clear. Many of the wise sayings of Proverbs, as well as the parables of Jesus, demand a search for their meaning. Apocalyptic visions are the same way. Reading the Book of Revelation requires having "ears to hear" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22)—new insights await in the details of every sign and symbol. Nevertheless, there are a number of unmistakable themes that arise from its pages.

- **Christ the Lamb and King:** Whenever the Lord is in a vision in the Book of Revelation, He is always central. He is the glorified Lamb, the worshiped Lamb, the magnifying Lamb, and the vindicated Lamb. And 26 times in this letter, John sees Christ as the Lamb who was slain for the sins of the world (John 1:29). This same Lamb returns to slay those who rebel against God and reign victorious as "King of kings and Lord of Lords" (1:5; 5:5–10; 12:1–11; 17:14; 19:16).
- **Spiritual Warfare:** The central plotline of Revelation is spiritual warfare—Satan and his demons and earthly representatives war against the authority of God and His Son. Satan attempts to deceive the entire world and lead them astray. The conclusion of the book—the return of the victorious King—is the ultimate message that God wins the spiritual war.
- **Correction:** The letters to the seven churches (2–3) become letters to churches through the ages—with warnings about complacency, syncretism, heresy, and apathy (2:1–3; 2:2; 13:1–18; 17:1–18; 24).
- **Deliverance:** The promise of Revelation 3:10 (see also 1 Thess. 5:9), and the absence of the church through the central chapters of Revelation, affirm that Christ is the ark that delivers believers through the storms of earth's final age. The Christian's destiny is to reign with Him, not be punished by Him (19:1–10; 20:1–6).
- **Destruction of Satan and Evil:** John the apostle presents in stark detail what Daniel the prophet saw centuries before—the passing away of the kingdoms of this world and the advent of the kingdom of Christ (Dan. 2:44; 4:3; 6:26; 7:13, 14). God's chief opponent throughout the biblical story of redemption will finally be punished forever for his rebellion (20:7–10).
- **Eternal Salvation:** The New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven to earth fulfills Christ's promise of going away to prepare a dwelling place for His followers (21:1–22:6; John 14:1–4).
- **Worship:** The Book of Revelation is about worship. It contains scene after scene of all of heaven worshipping God and the Lamb because they alone are worthy (4–5). The people of God are a worshipping people.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU | *The End of the Story*

The Book of Revelation promises a special blessing for those who take the time to peer into the future with the apostle John (1:3). If they do, they will see that God wins. Christ triumphs. Righteousness prevails. Satan loses. Sorrow, sickness, and death disappear. A new heaven and earth emerge from the ashes of the old. And God Himself wipes away the tears from every eye.

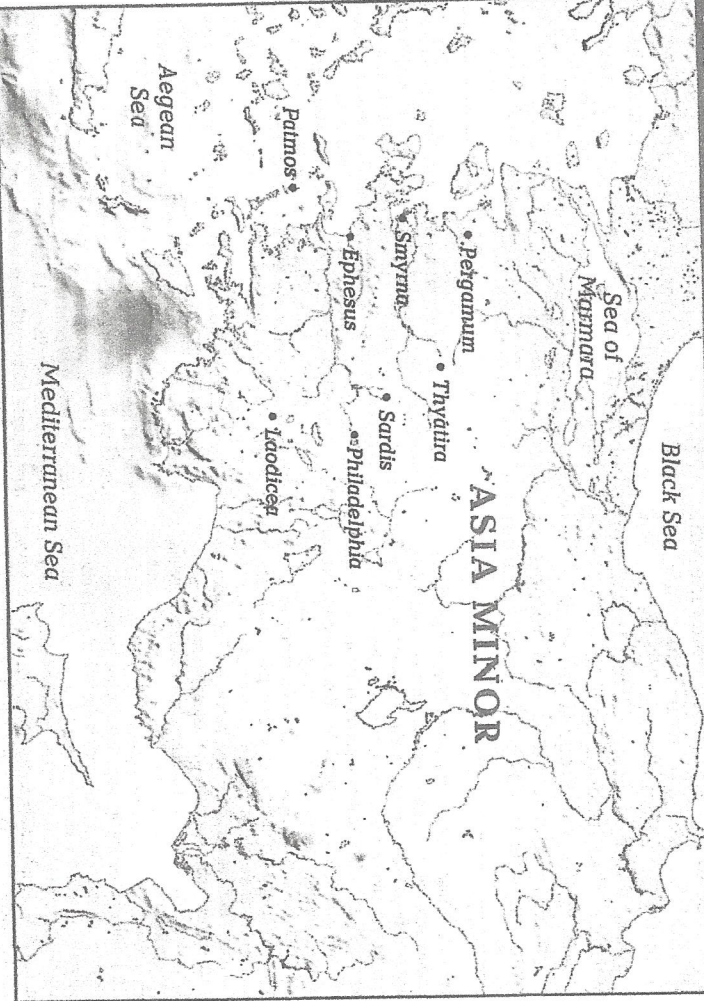
Regardless of what happens in this life—no matter how depressing the world news or how difficult or dark the season we might be enduring—life in Christ has

a happy ending . . . and nothing in earth, heaven, or hell can ever take that away. When the heartache of this present world weighs heavily on us, we have only to look up and look ahead at the radiant end of one story and the joyous beginning of a new story that will never end. An eternal story with one central theme: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!" (5:12).

Scan with your smartphone to explore more material on Revelation from Dr. Jeremiah's digital library, or go to www.jeremiahstudybible.com/Revelation/Library.



THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION



The island of Pafnos was close enough to Asia Minor that each of the seven churches mentioned by Jesus could be visited on an elongated circuit beginning in Ephesus.

THE BEATTITUDES IN MATTHEW AND REVELATION • 14

The "blessing" motif is carried from the words of Jesus in the Gospels all the way through the end of history in Revelation.

Matthew	Revelation
Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (5:3)	Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near. (1:3)
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (5:4)	Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" (14:13)
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. (5:5)	Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame. (16:15)
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. (5:6)	Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God." (19:9)
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. (5:7)	Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ; and shall reign with Him a thousand years. (20:6)
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (5:8)	Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. (22:7)
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (5:9)	Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. (22:14)
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (5:10)	Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (2:10)

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE RAPTURE AND THE SECOND COMING • 3:10

The Rapture	The Second Coming
A "stealth" event; Christ witnessed by believers only (1 Thess. 4:17).	A public event. Christ witnessed by everyone (1:7).
Christ comes for His bride to take her to heaven (John 14:1-3).	Christ returns with His bride to set up His 1,000-year Kingdom (19:11-16).
Occurs prior to the beginning of the Tribulation (3:10; 1 Thess. 5:9).	Occurs at the end of the Tribulation (Matt. 24:29-35).
Ushers in a time of great distress on earth (Matt. 24:15-28).	Ushers in a time of great peace on earth (Isa. 2:6; 19:21, 23-25).
Believers are rescued from wrath (3:10).	Believers rule with Christ (20:4).
Church age believers receive their glorified bodies (1 Cor. 15:50-54).	OT saints receive their glorified bodies (Isa. 26:19-21).
Christ comes in the air (1 Thess. 4:14-17).	Christ comes to the earth (19:11-16).
Imminent, could happen at any time (Titus 2:13).	At least seven years away (Dan. 9:26-29).
No signs precede it (Titus 2:13).	Many signs precede it, including the Tribulation (Matt. 24:3-35).
A time of great joy for believers (1 Thess. 2:19, 20).	A time of great mourning for unbelievers (1:7).

Revelation

Sometimes the book of Revelation can seem like a nightmare. Many-headed beasts. Frightening omens. Deception. Wars with rivers of blood spilt. Death, hell, and destruction.

Sometimes, though, the book can seem like a magical dream come true. Men and angels singing praise. A great hero riding a white horse. A city of gold and jewels, with a river like crystal. No more tears, no more pain, no more death. God dwelling in our midst.

You could hardly imagine a more dramatic wrap-up to the Bible.

But how are we to interpret it? And what does it mean to teens today?

Let's take those questions one at a time.

Among the different ways that Bible scholars have approached this book, three stand out.

First, it is important to remember that this book comes out of a real historical context during the time in which it was written. It is believed that the Apostle John wrote this book around A.D. 95. This would make it the last book of the Bible to be written. At that time, some of the Christian churches were beginning to face serious persecution, and some of them were getting sucked into the false teaching and immorality that were popular in their day. The book deals with these issues.

Second, the book presents teaching relevant to every generation. Here we learn about sneaky deceptions practiced by our spiritual enemy, Satan (chaps. 12–13). We learn about the dangers of following the wrong leaders. And we learn about Christ's ultimate power over all his foes (19:11–21). And that's just the beginning of the truths of Revelation.

Third, Revelation gives us images of what will happen at the end of time. History won't just go on forever as it

always has, nor will it dribble out into some kind of pointless ending. No, there is a time coming when good and evil will have their final showdown. Satan will use his human and demonic followers to try to take all power into his own hands. But then God will step in to rescue those who are faithful to the Son. In the end the world will be remade (chaps. 21–22).

But now for the second, more important question: what does all this mean to *us*?

It means that the history we are a part of is heading somewhere and is not just a random series of events.

It means that every individual life and the choices each person makes, really matter.

It means that the greatest happy ending ever still lies ahead; we can have hope as we trust in Jesus.

Don't let the nightmarish qualities of this book scare you off from reading it. And in the same way, don't let the scary parts of your own life make you doubt the good purposes of God for you. His power is unbeatable—and you are on the winning side!

Author: John

Date: Written in A.D. 95 while exiled on Patmos

What in the world is going on?

A.D. 26–30

Years of Jesus' ministry

A.D. 64

Fire breaks out in Rome and burns for nine days, destroying most of the city

ca. A.D. 64–67

Peter is martyred

A.D. 64–65

Christians experience great persecution in Rome

ca. A.D. 64–65

Paul the apostle is executed in Rome

A.D. 66–73

The Jews revolt against the Romans

A.D. 66

Gessius Florus, the governor of Judea from A.D. 64–66, allows a massacre of Jews in Caesarea

A.D. 70–72

The Colosseum is built in Rome, but dedicated a decade later

A.D. 70

Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple comes to pass when the Romans destroy Jerusalem and burn the temple

A.D. 73

The Jewish fortress at Masada is captured by the Romans

A.D. 75–78

Historian Josephus, who participated in the Jewish revolt, writes *The History of the Jewish War*

A.D. 79

Mount Vesuvius (Italy) erupts and destroys the cities of Pompeii and Stabiae

A.D. 81–96

Domitian is the emperor of Rome

REVELATION

- A. JOHN'S PAIN AND GOD'S GLORY (1:1—2:0)
- B. THE NEED FOR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL AMONG THE CHURCHES (2:1—3:22)
- C. GOD'S GLORIOUS POWER—HOPE FOR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL (4:1—5:4)
- D. GOD'S WRATH TOWARD UNBELIEF AND A REFUSAL TO SEE THE TRUTH (6:1—16:21)
- E. BABYLON'S GRAND APPEARANCE AND HERCE JUDGMENT (17:1—18:24)
- F. CHRIST'S VICTORY, RULE AND FINAL JUDGMENT (19:1—20:15)
- G. THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH (21:1—22:21)

THE BIG PICTURE

From beginning to end, the book of Revelation is about struggle. In its opening chapters, John dictated seven letters from the resurrected Christ to seven churches. Each church faced its own set of struggles, but some had deeper problems than others. In each letter, Jesus urged his people to cling to him and do what they knew to be right.

The rest of the book contains the story of another dramatic struggle: God's plan to rid the world of sin and its destructive consequences. We are told of a time when Jesus will return in glory to restore his broken world and conquer Satan, vindicating God's people and judging the wicked. On that day believers will receive eternal joy; unbelievers will receive unending separation from God. Ultimately, God will rebuild what has been broken by sin: He will create a new heaven and a new earth.

The book of Revelation ends with Christ as the victor. All that he said will come true; all that he taught will be proven right; all who followed him will be vindicated; all who rejected him will be judged. God will have his way. And he wants nothing more than to have us stand beside him as victors! Spiritual growth is often a struggle: God knows that. Throughout this book he urges us not to give up but to believe in him and to overcome. As God renews our broken world, he will make our broken lives new and perfect as well.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL THEMES

GOD RULES OVER ALL

God is sovereign. He is greater than any other power in the universe. Nothing and no one can compare to him. When we look at the turmoil in the world today, the problems we face, the pain we have suffered or the pain we have caused others, we may wonder whether God will really be able to right all the wrongs. But John wrote this book to assure us that though evil may seem to win today's battles, God is all-powerful and will assert himself for his people. In the end, all things will be made new in Christ.

GOD IS THE SOURCE OF HOPE

The book of Revelation reveals to us the ultimate source of hope—Jesus Christ. He is coming again and will deal with the problems of our sin-scarred world, restoring what is broken and dealing with the injustices around us. Life is never hopeless, regardless of what has happened to us or what we have done. We can focus on God's love, grace and forgiveness. He has made our restoration possible in Christ,

and Christ will return to complete his task of renewal throughout all creation. If we are looking to Christ, we can hang on to our hope despite the difficult circumstances that we may face.

THE PAIN OF CONSEQUENCES

Every one of us cries out for justice. When evil and injustice prosper, we begin to feel angry. It often appears that people get away with their selfish and wicked deeds. But in reality God will judge all wicked actions. Those who openly defy him will ultimately face the awful consequences of their sin. Those who turn to God in repentance for forgiveness need not fear the future day of judgment. Judgment is an awful thing, and the pain of sin's consequences should motivate us to turn our lives over to God and obediently follow his plan.

Essential Facts

PURPOSE:

To give hope to believers and warn them not to compromise their loyalty to God.

AUTHOR:

The apostle John.

AUDIENCE:

Seven churches in Asia Minor.

DATE WRITTEN:

Probably about AD 95, during the Roman emperor Domitian's persecution of Christians.

SETTING:

John, who was in exile on the island of Patmos, wrote to the seven churches to urge them to devote themselves to Christ.

KEY VERSE:

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (3:20).

KEY PEOPLE:

John, the risen Christ and members of the churches of Asia Minor.

KEY PLACES:

Patmos, seven cities in Asia Minor, Babylon and the new Jerusalem.

TVI The Mark of the Beast • 13:16-18

Ruling powers usually have an identifying insignia—Nazi Germany had its swastika; the Soviet Union its hammer and sickle. The idea itself goes back to early history. Babylon, the first Gentile power, was symbolized by a lion with eagle's wings (Dan. 7:4). The Empire of the Medes and Persians was represented by a bear rising up with three ribs between its teeth (Dan. 7:5).

Volumes have been filled with fanciful ideas that attempt to identify this mark. Some have identified it with credit cards, computer chips, barcodes, and even names of specific people (Adolf Hitler or Saddam Hussein). No one can say exactly what form the mark of the beast will take, but the number six seems to be important.

We cannot identify the exact significance of the mark of the Beast either. The number six is the number of man. Humanity was created on the sixth day and commanded to work six out of seven days. The number 666 is man's number—tripled. Six is also short of the perfect number, seven. Perhaps the number of the Beast represents the ultimate opposition to God.

Rapture is not a word that appears in our English Bibles. It comes from the Latin *rapio* ("to snatch or catch away"), the word the Latin Bible uses to translate Paul's phrase "caught up together" (1 Thess. 4:17).

An overview of the end-times scenario helps to put the Rapture in its proper place. What the Bible calls the "Day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31) began at Pentecost with the sending of the Spirit (Acts 2:16-21). Yet this preliminary event only anticipates a future, final Day of the Lord at the end of history. The Day of the Lord will be the culminating "day" in which God's judgment will fall upon those who have rebelled against Him and will be part of the preparation for the eternal state inherited by the saved from all ages. But there are several considerations.

First, the OT prophets foresaw a cleansing judgment on the nation of Israel, referred to as "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7). But the church is promised protection from this day: "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9). Finally, during a time of blessing and righteousness on earth, Israel will be ruled by the Messiah, and people from all the nations of the earth will bow their knees and confess Christ as Lord (Isa. 45:23; Phil. 2:10, 11).

The purpose of the Rapture is to remove the Church from the world before the judgments of the seven-year Great Tribulation. As Christ told the church at Philadelphia, "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (3:10). Consistent with that promise, John's vision of the Great Tribulation never mentions that the church is present on earth. God's promise that the dead in Christ, and the living at the time of the Rapture, will be "caught up together . . . to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17) was intended as a comfort for readers of that day—and it comforts us as well.

When he discusses the judgments of the Day of the Lord, Paul states that it would not happen until "He who now restrains . . . the lawless one" is taken out of the way (2 Thess. 2:7, 8). This passage is probably a reference to the Holy Spirit, who indwells the church on earth. The righteous presence of the Spirit on earth, working through the church, holds back the flood of evil that will be released during the Tribulation—an evil that will be judged when that period ends upon Christ's return to earth. When the Rapture occurs, the Holy Spirit and the church will be absent from the earth, opening the door for the reign of the Antichrist (whom John refers to as "the beast") during the Tribulation.

In his vision, John sees Christ coming to earth after the Tribulation. Christ is accompanied by "the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean" (19:14)—a reference to the church, the Bride of Christ, who will be "arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright" (19:7, 8). At the Rapture, Christ comes for His bride, celebrates the marriage feast with her in heaven during the Tribulation, and then returns with her to earth at His second coming.

The Rapture and the Second Coming are two separate events during God's end times, separated by the seven-year Tribulation. During that time, the bride of Christ is safely in heaven with her Groom, the King of Kings, waiting to accompany Him to receive the kingdom prepared for Him by His Father (Matt. 25:34). This will be a glorious occasion unlike anything in the history of the world. May the Lord find us ready and waiting.

For Further Reading: Jer. 30:7; Matt. 24:29, 30, 40, 41; John 14:3; 1 Cor. 15:50-54

Are the Teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses Compatible with the Bible?

Tim Johnson

People belonging to the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (headquartered in Brooklyn, New York) are commonly called Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs). Known for going door to door in order to share their faith, JWs teach that there is not much time before the end of the world takes place.

Started in Pennsylvania in 1881 by Charles Taze Russell, the Watchtower Society teaches that Jesus returned invisibly in 1914. There are two classes of Jehovah's Witnesses. First, there is the Anointed Class. This is made up of 144,000 people who belonged to the organization by 1935. Jehovah's Witnesses believe these are the only people who get to go to heaven (referring to the 144,000 mentioned in Rev 14). Second, there is the Great Crowd. This group is made up of everyone who has become a JW since 1935. By following Watchtower teachings, this group is awarded Paradise Earth for eternity, a sort of substitute for heaven where everyone has perfect health and never dies. To become a JW, believers must be baptized into the organization, regularly attend meetings at a Kingdom Hall, study material such as the *Watchtower* and *Awake* magazines, share their faith with others (most often door to door), etc. Jehovah's Witnesses are prohibited from participating in certain worldly activities, including voting in elections, saluting the flag, joining the military, celebrating birthdays or holidays, and getting blood transfusions. Since it is believed that the end of the world is very near, attending college or getting involved with non-JWs is also discouraged. In addition, JWs believe that all teachings of the Christian churches are wrong.

To justify their teachings as biblical, the New World Translation of the Bible was completed by JW leaders in 1961. It is heavily criticized by many prominent biblical scholars for being biased and flatly inaccurate. The teachings of the Watchtower Society disagree with the Bible (as accurately translated) in many vital ways. Here are some examples of unbiblical JW doctrines, with biblical references in parentheses that contradict them:

- Satan is the originator of the doctrine of the Trinity (but see Mt 28:19; Jn 14:10-11, 16, 23, 26).
- Jehovah's first creation was Jesus, so Jesus is a created being (but see Jn 1:3; 1Co 8:6).
- Jesus is not God, but rather Michael the archangel (but see Jn 1:1, 14; Php 2:6; Col 2:9).
- Jesus did not die on a cross, but rather on an upright stake (but see Gl 6:14; Php 2:8).
- The resurrection of Jesus was spiritual, not physical (but see Jn 20:27; 1Co 15:12).
- The Holy Spirit is "God's active force," not a personal being (but see Ac 5:3; 1Co 2:10-11).
- The souls of non-JWs will be annihilated. There is no hell (but see Mt 5:22; Lk 12:5).

Learn more about this religion so you can effectively share your faith when hard-working but tragically misled JWs try to share their faith with you. Show them the truth about Scripture and Jesus' promise of eternal life.

Imagine a place where the temperature is absolutely perfect . . . a place surrounded by beauty and splendor everywhere you look . . . a place where you continuously feel peace, joy, and safety. If you are a Christian, you will not imagine in vain, for the heaven that awaits all believers will be a perfect place. Though there are many beautiful places in our world, none compare to the new heaven and new earth that God will unveil in eternity.

Revelation chapters 21 and 22 present the most vivid picture of the eternal state. To begin, what is often described as the final "heaven" will include not only a new heaven, but also a new earth. In fact, it is this new earth that is most emphasized in Scripture. It will be covered mostly by land, as there will be no seas (21:1). Crystal clear water will flow from the river that proceeds from the throne of the Father and the Son (22:1). We will never experience nighttime or darkness again, and we will continuously bask in the light of the Lord's glory (21:23; 22:5). At the center of this new earth will be the heavenly city, New Jerusalem. It will include a surrounding wall inlaid with precious jewels, twelve gates (each made of a single giant pearl), and a "heavenly highway" of pure gold like transparent glass (21:12, 19, 21). Whatever the exact size and shape (perhaps a cube or pyramid) of the city, there will be plenty of room for all the saints from every age, nation, and ethnicity to live within it and around it (21:16).

But what will we do there? Will we be bored? Because we will be in a perfected state, we will not worry about boredom, suffering, death, or having bad thoughts (21:4). We will reign with God, worship Him, and serve Him (22:3-5; see also Rm 8:17; Heb 1:2). It will be a place of complete goodness and safety.

Perhaps one of the best aspects of heaven will be the fellowship! There will be fascinating distinctions between individuals, races, and even nations (Rv 5:9; 21:24), yet without the strife these distinctions can bring on earth. We will be able to recognize redeemed loved ones, as well as all the saints throughout history. Matthew 8:11 says, "many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." Imagine what it will be like to talk to some of the Bible characters you have admired all your life! Picture yourself hanging out with Jesus, Adam and Eve, Noah, Job, Esther, and the Apostle Paul.

Together, we will have the ultimate privilege of seeing God face to face, knowing Him more intimately, and experiencing His greatness and love for eternity. For now, we can rest in this eternal hope. And when Jesus comes for us, "we will always be with the Lord" (1Th 4:17).

I am a cold-case homicide detective. In my line of work, there are times when the evidence is inconclusive and seems to lead nowhere. At other times the evidence is easily accessible and leads to an obvious conclusion. The same is true in biblical matters. Sometimes the biblical data is abundant and clear, while in other cases it's not. In the case of belief in purgatory, the evidence is very clear. Purgatory is described by people who believe in it as an intermediate place or state of being in the afterlife where some of us (even though we are Christians) will spend time purging ourselves of past sin so that we will be fully fit for heaven.

What is the evidence for purgatory? Several Bible verses are usually quoted, but these verses do not teach purgatory. Matthew 16:27, for example, talks about reward and judgment in heaven, not purgatory. Revelation 21:27, another verse offered to support the idea of purgatory describes our entrance into the New Jerusalem and says nothing about purgatory. First Corinthians 3:12-15 is usually provided as a key piece of evidence, but Paul is describing our activities in this life; prior to this (1Co 3:11), he is clear about the fact that no one can lay any foundation other than Jesus Himself, which implies that no one can save himself by performing good deeds in purgatory. Over and over again, the verses cited in support of purgatory are unclear, unspecific, and unconvincing.

On the other hand, the biblical case against purgatory is very clear and convincing. According to the Bible, forgiveness is not based on the good works of the believer (Rm 3:21-24, 27-28; 8:1). That's why we know that deeds or works performed by those in purgatory are not required, and they simply don't work. The Bible also teaches that Jesus' death on the cross purifies us from all sin (2Tm 2:13-14; Heb 10:14; 1Jn 1:7-9; 2:2). So, we know that there is not a lingering sin problem that must be taken care of in a place like purgatory. The Bible says that Jesus has already purified and purged believers of sin based on our faith in Him alone (1Co 6:11; Heb 1:3). So there's no need for additional purging in purgatory. The Bible also teaches that believers will not be subjected to the continuing anger of God; they have been spared God's anger in spite of their sinfulness (Jn 5:24; Rm 5:9). So there's no need for God's wrath or condemnation to be applied to believers in a place like purgatory. Finally, believers are united with God in heaven the moment they die (Lk 23:39-43; 2Co 5:6-8; Php 1:20-23). This eliminates the possibility of a place like purgatory.

The biblical evidence cited in support of purgatory fails to make a convincing case; the verses don't specifically describe purgatory. At the same time, the case against the existence of purgatory is compelling. Based on the evidence from the Bible alone, purgatory does not exist.

The longing for a future glorious city of God can be traced back to the time of the OT patriarchs. Abraham "waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). The term *New Jerusalem* (3:12; 21:2) is just one of several names given to this future city of God. It is also called the holy city (21:2; 22:19), the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22), Mount Zion (Heb. 12:22), and the bride of the Lamb (21:9). Many theologians refer to the New Jerusalem as "the crown of the new creation."

Perhaps nothing in Christianity has been caricatured as much as heaven—or represented as inaccurately. The Bible presents heaven as a very tangible place—a city called the New Jerusalem, on a new earth (21:2). Revelation 21:1—22:5 describes the characteristics of this place.

Preparation in Heaven. The apostle John saw the New Jerusalem descending from heaven to earth, dispelling the notion that our eternal home is "up in heaven." Instead, heaven comes to earth (21:1-3).

Absence of Sin. Sin has been paid for and Satan will have been banished to the lake of fire for eternity. The tragic effects of sin on this present world will be absent from the New Jerusalem, "for the former things have passed away" (21:4). Those "former things" include those who, during their life on earth, preferred sin over righteousness (21:8).

Indescribable Beauty. John describes the beauty of the New Jerusalem using the language at his disposal, but one gets the impression that John is trying to describe the indescribable (21:9-21). Some of the traditional images of heaven—like pearly gates and streets of gold—have their origin in John's characterization (21:21). The number 12 occurs eight times in John's description of the city, referring to gates and foundations, and the angels, tribes, and apostles associated with them. (Twelve is the number of the people of God.) The city's 12 foundations are probably not separated from each other, but are 12 layers encircling the city. Its brilliant colors would then blend together and add to its beauty.

Gigantic Proportions. The New Jerusalem is a cube measuring 1,400 miles on each side (21:16). (It is notable that the Most Holy Place inside the tabernacle was cubical in shape as well.) At 1,960,000 square miles, the New Jerusalem that John describes is nearly four times the size of the largest American state, Alaska. It is an inclusive city with room for people redeemed from every tribe, tongue, and nation throughout all history.

A Godly City. In this Jerusalem, there is no house of worship, "for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." The "glory of God" illuminates it, and "the Lamb is its light" (21:22, 23). There will be nations on the new earth, but they will be free to come and go through the gates of the city—gates that are always open. Because there is no fear of attack, the gates are never closed. For the same reason, the walls measure only 250 feet high, short in comparison to the area they enclose because they are meant only to outline the city's limits. The chief characteristic of the city is its holiness. The 12 gates are really a part of the wall that surrounds the city. John sees the wall glittering like a diamond bracelet (21:18).

A City of Life. A river of life flows from God's throne, watering trees that bear food for the inhabitants as in the beginning (22:1, 2). For eternal occupations, God's servants will have fulfilling work to do that fits them (22:3). And they will rule with Jesus over the new creation forever (22:5).

Sometimes heaven is referred to as a country, and we think of its vastness. Sometimes heaven is referred to as a city, and we think of its inhabitants. Sometimes heaven is called a kingdom, and we think of its orderliness. Sometimes heaven is called Paradise, and we imagine its beauty. But when we call heaven the Father's house, we think of intimacy and permanence. The most important feature of this New Jerusalem is that God and the Lamb will be there, forever!

For Further Reading: Isa. 25:8-12; 54:11, 12; Ezek. 28:24-26, 40-48; Matt. 22:29-33; John 14:1-4; 1 Cor. 2:7-9; Phil. 3:20, 21

THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES : WORSHIP

A GLIMPSE OF GLORY

Revelation 4:1—7:17

In one way or another, we have all witnessed the effect of praise. Praise completes the joy of an experience. Have you ever been to a sporting event where the crowd was very quiet? The silence was almost unbearable. The best part of a sporting event is cheering for the home team's victorious accomplishments. The most enthusiastic fans repeat those great moments to one another over and over again. Likewise, we will find energy coursing through our spiritual lives when we repeat—over and over—the mighty acts of God in history and his acts in our own lives. It is good to celebrate the joy and wonder of our relationship with the Lord.

Praise not only completes our joy in fellowship with the Lord, but it also gives us a foretaste of heaven. Worship through praise is the chief activity of eternity. Paul admonishes us, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:1-2). We learn something of what Paul means by this from the book of Revelation. Though many people have pigeonholed Revelation as a book solely about prophecy, this book is one of the most profound worship manuals in the Bible. While the Psalms are our Biblical hymnbook, the book of Revelation reveals heavenly scenes of worship.

John's words in Revelation 4:1 shed new light on praise by giving us an amazing description of worship: "After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven." It is exciting to think that worship is an open door to God's presence. Notice that John was ushered right to the throne! There is no waiting room or foyer for preparation. Why? Because the way has been completely opened through Jesus Christ! The writer of Hebrews expressed it this way: "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

As we meditate on the realities of heaven that John colorfully describes, we find sights of glory that thrill the imagination, sounds of power, songs of praise and fragrances of incense in the prayers of the saints. As we ponder John's words, we understand that worship is much more than an exercise of the mind. It is an experience of the whole person caught up in glory.

Few activities strengthen our faith more than cultivating a richer, fuller understanding of God through worship. Praise calls us to consider the nature and character of God. In Revelation 7:12, the multitude worships and adores God by calling for seven blessings upon him: "Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" The worshipers affirm and celebrate the matchless glory of the Lord.

Reflection upon God's character is a powerful means for enriching our prayer lives. As we seek to grasp God's greatness and ascribe to him all the honor that is due him, our faith is strengthened, our hearts are encouraged and our vision of God grows. Many of us would do well to focus less on in-depth analyses of our problems and to meditate more time on the character of God, who is the answer to our problems.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

As we honor God, we also receive a deeper sense of God's presence. When have you sensed God's presence? What was it like? How did this change your thoughts or actions? When you worship this week, quiet your heart and remind yourself that God is always present with you.

For more on worship, turn to Exodus 20.

ESSENTIALS

The Resurrections and the Great White Throne Judgment • 20:14-15

"Let the heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is Judge" (Ps. 50:6). God is not a judge, but Judge. As Creator of the earth and its inhabitants, He alone has the prerogative to pass judgment on both. God has exercised that prerogative more than once in the past: the worldwide flood that destroyed all but Noah and his family, the judgment on the pride of the people building the tower of Babel, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and other judgments on nations and individuals. The Bible warns individuals that they have only one chance to be reconciled to God before they face judgment: "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

The NT describes at least three major future judgments: the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11-15), the judgment of nations described by Jesus (Matt. 25:31-46), and the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20.

The time of the judgment seat of Christ occurs following the Rapture while the church is with Christ in heaven during the seven-year Tribulation on earth. The judgment of the nations takes place at the end of the Tribulation, just before the millennial kingdom, when Christ has destroyed the armies of the world that had attempted to destroy Israel (19:11-21). The Great White Throne judgment happens at the end of the Millennium.

The Great White Throne Judgment will not resemble in any way our current courtroom trials. At this "final judgment," there will be a Judge but no jury, a prosecution but no defense, a sentence but no appeal. This is the judgment at which sinners stand in the presence of a holy and just God to give an account for their sins. It is one of the most awesome revelations given to us in the Word of God. We view God as the God of love, but He must deal with sin and sinners too. Do not confuse this judgment with the Judgment Seat of Christ, where believers will have their works judged and rewarded. At the Great White Throne Judgment, there will only be unbelievers. There will be no rewards.

Almost 2,000 years ago, Christ was raised from the dead. At the Rapture, the saved of this present age will also be raised from the dead. Seven years later, at the close of the Tribulation, the martyred saints of the Tribulation and the OT saints will be raised from the dead (Dan. 12:1, 2; Isa. 26:19). All of these constitute the first resurrection, also referred to as the "resurrection unto life." When Christ comes back to reign during the Millennium, not one believer's body, from Adam onward, will be left in the grave.

The second resurrection is highlighted in Revelation 20: "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books" (20: 12, 13). This resurrection, which takes place 1,000 years after the first resurrection is complete, is the resurrection of the unsaved dead. All unsaved dead from Adam to the end of the Millennium will be included in this resurrection. "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life [will be] cast into the lake of fire" (20:14, 15).

In this final judgment of the unsaved, the Christian finds a foundation for forgiveness and a hope for justice. When it seems that the wicked of the earth enjoy unfettered privilege and unrestrained license (Ps. 73:3-18), and when it seems that those who mistreat us escape punishment, it takes only a reminder of the coming judgment to make us give up thoughts of vengeance, hatred, or lack of forgiveness. Then, in front of His white throne, God the Judge will settle all accounts of those who would rebel against His righteous ways, bringing a holy justice that will make all things right.

For Further Reading: Ps. 28:4; Dan. 7:19-28; Matt. 28:19, 20; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:11-15.

Tough Questions

How will people be saved in the Tribulation? • 7:14-17

The Word of God contains absolutely no evidence that there will be any hope for those who reject Christ as their Savior after the day of grace is over. Paul clarifies this issue in a letter to the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2:10-12): if the Rapture should occur today, those who have heard but rejected the gospel will be ushered into the Tribulation and will fall under the delusion of the Antichrist, putting their faith in this false Savior rather than Christ.

If not one believer will be left on the earth when the seven years of Tribulation begin, how will people be saved? By trusting in Jesus for their salvation. Specifically, God will send two witnesses into the world to prophesy and do mighty miracles. There will also be 144,000 Israelites "sealed" for God's service during the period (7:4). Twelve Spirit-filled Jews turned the world upside down in ancient times. Imagine the harvest of souls when the two prophets, plus these 144,000 Spirit-filled Jews, testify of salvation in Christ during the Tribulation!

FWI Interludes of Grace • 10:1-11:14

The interlude in the tenth chapter, between the blowing of the sixth and seventh trumpet, is one of several in the book. There are also interludes between the sixth and seventh seal (7:1-17) and bowl judgments (16:13-16).

This interlude (10:1-11:14) is the longest, and it offers grace, mercy, love, and encouragement. Here we are given three special words of testimony and witness from God: the first from a mighty angel (10:1-11), the second from two special witnesses (11:1-14), and the third from the elders in heaven (11:15-19).

These scriptural parentheses are intended to encourage us. They remind us that however depressing the events might seem, God is not without His witness. Even in judgment, there is mercy.

Insiders and Outsiders

Revelation 21:5-8 and 22:14-15

THE BIBLE IS A BIG BOOK that covers everything from the beginning of the cosmos to the final scenes of heaven. It presents the drama of God's love for humanity and his efforts to redeem us.

But the men and women in the story don't always cooperate with God's grand plans. In an opening scene, Adam and Eve get dismissed from paradise in the Garden of Eden. Here in the closing scene, some men and women are found wanting when it comes time for God's final judgment.

An angel is taking John on a guided tour. The apostle sees the river of life that flows through the center of heaven, a place illuminated by the light of God and accompanied by the sounds of saints praising him.

Meanwhile, there's a group of people who don't get to enjoy heaven's glories. These are the "dogs," or opponents of God "who love to live a lie" (Revelation 22:15). Among these outcasts are sorcerers, murderers, idol worshippers—and the sexually immoral.

Can a little extracurricular sex keep you out of heaven? Surely not, the modern mind would say. People who've "only" slept around a little shouldn't be lumped in with murderers and idolaters. But God has placed a premium on sexual faithfulness from the beginning of human history.

To us, sexual immorality may seem like a lightweight sin. To God, on the other hand, any sin has the capacity to corrupt our souls and pollute God's creation.

If we are armed with the truth, we need not fear. The great enemy that lurks around the corner for all of us is not an enemy at all. Jesus took the sting out of death and gained victory over the grave. It is sad that so many people—even many of God's people—live in continual bondage to the fear of death (Heb. 2:14, 15).

When we understand what God has prepared for those who love Him, we need never fear again (1 Cor. 2:9, 10). If we have heaven clearly in our minds, then our only other concern is for those we love and those who have yet to hear of God's eternal plan. Two illustrations remind us of this truth.

A mother of a large family was dying in one of our Eastern cities a few years ago, and before her death, her children were brought to her one last time. One by one she put her hand on each child's head and gave that son or daughter her last message and dying blessing, until at last her infant was given to her. She took it in her bosom and pressed it to her heart, and her friends could see her time was drawing near. They came to take the child back from her, and as they did, she said, "My husband, I charge you to bring all these children home with you."

In his book on heaven, D. L. Moody told about a father that he met in New York. That father had a son who was periodically ill. No one really thought his illness was serious until the child took a turn for the worse, when the doctor informed the mother that the boy's disease was terminal and that he would not live for more than a few days.

When the father came home from work that night, he saw his wife weeping and he asked her why. "There has been a great change in our boy since morning," the mother said. "The doctor tells me that he is very ill and may not live out the night."

When the father went in to see his son, it was apparent that the boy knew what was going on. He looked up at his dad and said, "I will be with Jesus tonight, won't I?" The father answered, "Yes, son, it is very likely that you will be with Jesus tonight."

As the father spoke, tears streamed down his face and he tried to hide them from his boy. But the boy saw the tears and said, "Father don't you cry for me; when I get to heaven, I will go straight to Jesus and tell Him that ever since I can remember, you have tried to lead me to Him."

God's Love Expels Our Fear

Revelation 3:14-22

Relationships can be difficult to maintain. When we feel threatened, we tend to become defensive and guarded. But when we feel safe in a relationship, we will be open and vulnerable. These principles are true in our relationships with people and with God.

The apostle John wrote, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:18-19). If our sins were not paid for, we would have good reason to be afraid and remain defensive toward God. However, since God loves us and has paid for our sins through Jesus Christ, we can safely open ourselves to God and seek his truth.

Jesus is waiting for us to repent, receive his love and open our hearts to him. He said, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (Revelation 3:20). Love is waiting. When we open ourselves fully to God's love, we will be able to see the truth because we will no longer be afraid of God's punishment.

Move on to Key 3 and turn to Luke 11.

fwi How to Recover Your First Love • 2:5

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul concludes with a benediction: "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity" (Eph. 6:24). Around 30 years later, John was called to write to the same church again. They were active in toil, steadfast in truth, and patient in trial. But their love was declining. Into this situation Jesus speaks three exhortations for that church—and for all who have lost their first love.

Restoration begins with *remembering*. Meditating on what our relationship with Christ was like when we were first saved. Recalling how we used to witness for Him. Reflecting on what it was like to trust Him with both the simplest and the greatest of our needs.

Repentance means to change one's mind and reverse course. If we have left our first love, we must turn and head back toward Him. This is a choice and an act of the will!

Repeating means to practice again the faithful steps of discipleship that we took as new believers. Feelings follow actions, not vice versa. Where the will goes, the heart follows. We can trust that our obedience to do the "first works" will be followed by a return to our first love.

Did the Christians in Ephesus remember what they had lost and recover that first love? The history of Ephesus holds a solemn lesson for churches today. At its prime, the harbor at Ephesus could accommodate the finest seagoing vessels, and highways radiated from it to all the cities of Asia Minor and beyond. Now the city is in ruins, and it has no church. The great, golden lamppost has been removed.

TEACHINGPOINTS The Overcomers 12:10-12

The same heavenly voice that expresses praise for the four freedoms now reviews the martyrs' victory. The one who had accused them day and night before God has finally been taken away. The overcomers are given several promises. They will:

- Eat from the tree of life (2:7).
- Not experience the second death (2:11).
- Eat of the hidden manna (2:17).
- Have power over the nations (2:26).
- Be clothed in white garments (3:5).
- Be pillars in God's temple (3:12).
- Share the Lord's throne (3:21).
- Inherit all things (21:7).

In this passage, all the unexplainable persecutions and tortures of God's people are made right (12:11).

When facing a difficult work environment, we all revolt against two things: one is tedious work and the other is idleness. But the work and the "workplace" that await belie delight the soul.

1. *We will sing* (19:1-8). The Book of Revelation contains more songs than any other book except Psalms. It contains 14 songs in all, but perhaps the most representative is here. No doubt many well-known passages in the Psalms that relate to the worship fulfilled perfectly in those days of eternal bliss in heaven.
2. *We will serve* (22:3, 6). One prominent theme in the Book of Revelation is that of service (1:1; 7:3; 10:7; 11:18; 15:3; 19:5), although as David Gregg has observed, our service is of a different kind: "It is work . . . free from care and toil and fatigue. . . . Work up there is relief, as well as a matter of obedience to the ruling will of God. It is work according to ability and delight and ability." The Book of Revelation describes many unique entities in heaven: the elders, the beasts around the throne, the 144,000, the angels, the multitudes—and responsibility before God. Just like on earth, each of us has a ministry.
3. *We will share*. Heaven will be the ultimate experience of fellowship. All of our friends and millions we have never met will be there. Most importantly, the redeemed will enjoy joyful fellowship with the Father, Son, and Spirit forever, reigning with Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords (22:5)

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REVELATION 22:18

Many Christians point to this verse as a reason not to add or subtract verses from the Bible. Thus when Christians come across religious groups such as the Mormons (who believe in three other scriptures: the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price), many of them cite Revelation 22:18 as proof that nothing should be added to the "canon" of Scripture, which is limited to the 66 authoritative books in the Bible. While it is true that nothing should be added to or subtracted from God's Word, this verse is only referring to the book of Revelation and not the whole Bible. Thus it is unfounded to use this as a proof text to argue that no other books should be accepted as Scripture. Instead of referencing Revelation 22:18 and abusing its meaning, we need to explain that other so-called scriptures deny or twist the teachings of the Bible. Besides that, the era of Scripture writing ended when Jesus' chosen apostles died. Anything outside the Bible is not God's Word.

