

Study 1: Revelation 1:1-8

- As a group, share what you know about the book of Revelation?
- What excites you about reading the book of Revelation? What worries you?
- Do you have strongly held views on the book? Why?

Revelation seems unfamiliar to 21st-century readers. It contains highly symbolic language, strange fantasy-like imagery and cosmic spiritual events. It seems disconnected from history in a way that the rest of New Testament is not. However, if you know the gospel of Jesus Christ, and if you have read at least some of the Old Testament, Revelation need not seem so strange at all.

In fact, the book of Revelation contains more references to the Old Testament than any other New Testament book. It presents for us— often in dramatic, pictorial style—the same truths that the Gospels teach about Jesus and his relation to the world.

As we work through the book, we will be relying on the Bible itself to interpret Revelation's message. Many discussions of Revelation get caught up in particular details of history: in dates and Roman emperors and who the Antichrist might be. But these are often distractions from the actual teaching of the book, which places Jesus Christ firmly at the centre. It is fascinating, and occasionally instructive, to look at these background details, but the power of God's word is not found there. It is found in the extraordinary revelation that,

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever"

(Revelation 11:15)

Above all, Revelation is a call to worship the King of kings.

Read Revelation 1:1-8

1. From v1, who or what is Revelation about?
2. Also from v1, what type of book is this?
3. From v4, who is this book written to? (see also v11, as well as chapters 2 & 3)
4. What promise is made to them (and to us) in v3?

"The author of revelation is stating that this is 'an apocalypse of Jesus Christ' and is therefore telling us what style of book it's going to be. We are going to be reading an apocalyptic book. Again this is very instructive because, just like we read a poem, a comic book and a recipe book each in very different ways, we need to read an apocalyptic book a very particular way too.

And it's no secret how we are to read apocalyptic books. There were lots of other apocalyptic books outside the Bible at the time of the New Testament. From that, we know 'apocalyptic' was a style of literature that was full of symbolic numbers, colours and animals. This is exactly what makes Revelation so strange. It's full of all kinds of bizarre images all the way through! The important thing to remember when reading an apocalyptic book is that these images are meant to be visualised. That's exactly why apocalyptic books are visions. Visions are meant to be looked at.

*The best way to read Revelation therefore is to visualise it in your imagination. See what the apostle John saw and take in the big picture. Lots of people are tempted to make everything mean something... but we're not meant to fixate over every little detail in each vision. We're meant to stand back and look at the overall picture." **

* "Hope: The best is yet to come", Bryson Smith (p 134)

Think about it

- Now that we've read the introduction to the book of Revelation what do you think of this as a description of the book:
Revelation is an apocalyptic book about Jesus written to first century churches to bless anyone who reads it.
- How might this description help guide us as we read Revelation?
- Given that the purpose of Revelation is to reveal certain things about Jesus whenever we read a part of it, it seems sensible to ask, "*What is being revealed about Jesus here?*" So list everything we learn about Jesus from these verses...

To finish

- Finish by chatting about your fears, hopes and expectations in tackling the book of Revelation. **It's a big challenge!**

Study 2: Revelation 1:9-20

Read Revelation 1:9-20

1. Where is John and why is he there (v9)? Have you ever had a similar experience when you've tried talking about Jesus?
2. What does John hear? What is he told to do by the trumpet-like voice? (v10-11)
3. What does John see (v12-16)?
4. John's vision in v12-16 echoes several Old Testament passages. Quickly read these sections to get a feel for the connections.
 - Ezekiel 8:1-2
 - Daniel 7:13-14
 - Daniel 8:15-17
 - Daniel 10:4-6
 - Zechariah 4:1-4
5. Who do you think John hears and sees in this vision? What makes you think that?

OPTIONAL

If you look ahead to chapters 2-3 you'll notice an interesting pattern between this vision in chapter 1 and the letters to the 7 churches. Each letter starts with a reminder of this vision of Jesus. Complete this list...

2:1 ... *holding seven stars (1:16)*

2:8 ...

2:12 ...

2:18 ...

3:1 ...

3:7 ...

3:14 ...

6. What does John do when he hears and see this vision (v17)? What's comforting/reassuring about the way Jesus responds to this (v17-18)?

7. Look again at v19-20. John sees Jesus standing among 7 lamp stands. What are we told they represent? What does it mean that Jesus is standing among them? Is it a good thing or a bad thing?

Think about it

- What does this vision show us about Jesus?

- How do you think this picture of Jesus might have been a blessing and encouragement to first century churches?

- How is it a blessing and encouragement to us today?

Revelation 2-3

Intro

Do you expect God to speak to you today? If so, what do you expect him to be concerned about?

Read Revelation 2-3

1. In the table below, fill in the details of what is said to the churches. (Do this in groups of 2-3. Then come back together as a big group and compare notes.)

To the angel of the church in...	These are the words of...	I know your...	I have this against you...	Whoever has an ear, let them hear...	To the one who overcomes...
Ephesus					
Smyrna					
Pergamum					
Thyatira					
Sardis					
Philadelphia					
Laodicea					

2. Are there any repeated words and ideas throughout the letters?
3. Which of the words of encouragement and warning given to the seven churches do you think might apply to our church?
4. Most of the promises to the church that overcomes or "conquers" refers to an event in a later part of Revelation (chs. 19-22) For example, compare the following verses:
 - 2:7 with 22:2
 - 2:26-27 with 19:15
 - 3:12 with 22:4

What does this tell us about the future of those who "conquer"?

Revelation is a book about Jesus written to first century churches to bless anyone who reads it.

5. What do these seven letters show us about Jesus?
6. How do you think that might have been a blessing and encouragement to first century churches?
7. How is it a blessing and encouragement to us today?

Revelation 4-5

Intro

What images and ideas spring to mind when you think of heaven?

Read Revelation 4

1. In the space below, draw what John sees in chapter 4. (Do this in groups of 2-3. Then come back together as a big group, share your pictures and explain what you've drawn)

Read Revelation 5

2. In the space below, draw what John sees in chapter 5. (Do this in groups of 2-3. Then come back together as a big group, share your pictures and explain what you've drawn)

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3. What do these visions show us about Jesus?
4. Whereabouts in this picture are the original readers of John's letter? (Look back at Revelation 1:6.) Whereabouts in the picture do you place yourself?
5. How do you think this picture of Jesus might have been a blessing and encouragement to first century churches?
6. How is it a blessing and encouragement to us today?