

# THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

## Historical Background

1. **Time of Writing:** Probably near 96 A.D., under the reign of Domitian.
2. **Place of Writing:** The Isle of Patmos—a volcanic island 8 miles long and 4 miles wide off the coast of modern Turkey (Rev. 1:9).
3. **Human Author:** The Apostle John, also the human author of the Gospel of John and the three Epistles of John. John came to the Roman province of Asia (Turkey) around 70 A.D. Establishing a base of operations in Ephesus, he apparently had a circuit ministry to the seven churches listed in chapters two and three. He was approximately 70 years old at that time. Then, in 96 A.D., he was banished to Patmos by Domitian, who died within the year, and John was released. John was preserved by God because his work was not yet finished. After writing the Revelation, John continued to minister until, as tradition has it, he died of old age—the only one of the apostles to do so.
4. **Recipients of the Book:** John was commanded to send the original letter to the seven churches of Asia Minor (Rev. 1:11). These were literal, existing local churches in the time of John.
5. **Theme of Book or Purpose of Writing:** A two-fold purpose of Revelation (Rev. 1:1):
  - a. To reveal Jesus Christ as the one who is the Guide and focal point of human history, and
  - b. To reveal to His servants the course of history from 96 A.D. to the Millennial Reign of Christ and eternity future.

Many make an error in taking the words of verse 1 to indicate these events all occurred in the 1<sup>st</sup>-or 2<sup>nd</sup> Century. However, the words “*things which must shortly take place*” in Rev. 1:1 are the exact words used in Rev. 22:6, where not only the reign of Christ, but the eternal state is in view. Remember, a day with the Lord is a thousand years and a thousand years as a day, (2 Pet. 3:8).

## Suggestions for Study and Review

1. Knowledge of dispensations is absolutely imperative in order to understand the Book of Revelation. Review dispensations; follow the dispensational outline (below) of Rev. 1:19.
2. Memorize chapter titles to master the overall content of the book.
3. A warning about symbolic language: the Revelation is the “Apocalypse.” It is the “unveiling” and is meant to be understood. However, the apocalyptic style requires heavy use of symbols. These symbols save a thousand words by presenting a biblical concept in picture form. Many are interpreted in the book itself; others are found elsewhere in Scripture or in the historical background. Symbols must be seen from biblical context and their historical setting. For example:
  - a. The “*seven golden lampstands*” (Rev. 1:12) are the “*seven churches*” (Rev. 1:20).
  - b. The “*seven stars*” (Rev. 1:16) are seven angels (pastors of the seven churches).
  - c. The “*sharp two-edged sword*” (Rev. 1:16) is the “*Word of God*” (Heb 4:12).
  - d. The “*woman clothed with the sun, moon, and stars*” (Rev. 12:1) is the nation of Israel as seen in Genesis 37:9–11 (notice Joseph’s family knew what they meant).

- e. The “*great fiery red dragon*” (Rev. 12:3) is identified as “*Satan*” (Rev. 12:9). The “*seven heads and ten horns*” (Rev. 12:3), seen again in connection with the Anti-Christ (Rev. 13:1), are identified in Rev. 17:9–12 as the final Gentile empire or the Revived Roman Empire.
- f. The Great Whore (Harlot) of Rev. 17:3–4 is apostate religion (Rev. 17:5–6), centered in a city (Rev. 17:18).

The danger with symbols is the “interpreting” of them in light of what that symbol may represent in modern times, leading to some wild and far out “hidden meanings,” etc.

- 4. Memorize the Beatitudes of Revelation (Seven Blessings):
  - a. Blessing for teaching, studying, and obeying Revelation (Rev. 1:3)
  - b. Blessing to martyrs (Rev. 14:13)
  - c. Blessing to those who are awake, keeping their robes pure—maintaining edification of the soul (Rev. 16:15)
  - d. Blessing to those invited to the Marriage Feast (Rev. 19:9)
    - 1) Friends of Bridegroom—Old Testament Saints (John 3:29)
    - 2) Friends of Bride—Tribulation Saints (Matt. 25:1–10)
  - e. Blessing to those in the First Resurrection—believers of all dispensations (Rev. 20:6)
  - f. Blessing to those in the Tribulation who apply doctrines of the Revelation (Rev. 22:7)
  - g. Blessing to those who wash their robes by faith in Jesus Christ—regeneration (Rev. 22:14)

### **Three-Fold Outline of Revelation—Dispensational (Rev. 1:19):**

- I. “*Write the things which you have seen ...*” (chapter 1)  
Chapter 1 deals with the vision of John on Patmos of the glorified Jesus Christ.
- II. “*And the things which are ...*” (chapters 2 and 3)  
This deals with the seven churches of Asia then in existence. In these seven churches are seen characteristics that exist throughout the Church Age.
- III. “*Things which will take place after this ...*” (chapters 4 through 22)  
Having dealt with the Church Age in chapters 2 and 3, John is commanded to deal with human history following the Rapture of the Church:
  - A. Chapters 4 and 5 are the Church in Heaven. These chapters prepare for the Tribulation judgments.
  - B. Chapters 6 through 19 are the Tribulation Period.  
The most extended passage of Revelation deals with the seven years of the restoration of Israel and the judgments on the earth. This age is the “time of wrath” (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9), “the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel” (Dan. 9:24–27), the “*time of Jacob’s trouble*” (Jer. 30:1–8), and the “*hour of trial* [time of tribulation] *which shall come upon the whole world*” (Rev. 3:10).
    - 1) Chapter 6      The Seven Seals of History Opened
    - 2) Chapter 7      The Sealing of 144,000 Jewish Evangelists
    - 3) Chapter 8      The Seven Trumpet Judgments
    - 4) Chapter 9      The Seven Trumpets Blown
    - 5) Chapter 10     Angelic Herald of the Second Advent
    - 6) Chapter 11     The Herald of the Two Prophets
    - 7) Chapter 12     The Fall of the Dragon
    - 8) Chapter 13     The Anti-Christ and the False Prophet
    - 9) Chapter 14     The 144,000 Jews at the Second Advent and Bloodshed of Armageddon

- 10) Chapter 15      The Seven Vials
- 11) Chapter 16      The Vials Opened
- 12) Chapter 17–18    Babylon, the Whore. (Religious and Commercial)
- 13) Chapter 19      The Second Advent of Jesus Christ

C. Chapter 20 is the Millennial Reign of Christ and the Great White Throne

D. Chapter 21–22 is the Eternal State

## **REVELATION CHAPTER 1**

### **The Vision on Patmos**

There is much confusion today regarding the Revelation. It is a great loss to the Church that this book is bypassed as without significance or as a book that no one understands. Much of this error is due to a lack of understanding of the first chapter. Here, we find the answers to most, if not all, of the false views of this great book.

### **The Purposes of the Book**

Revelation 1:1–3

1. **To Reveal Jesus Christ.** The word “*revelation*” is from *apo* (“away from”) and *kalupto* (“a veil, cover”). Therefore, the object of the book is to unveil or reveal many things—the most important being Jesus Christ. In Luke 2:32, He is called “*a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.*” In this book, Jesus Christ is revealed as the focus, as well as the One who controls the course of history.
2. **To Reveal the Course of History.** God the Father, who is the Author of the plan of salvation, gave this revelation to our Lord to show those who believe in Him the course of history from the time of the Apostle John to the end of time. The phrase “*which must shortly take place*” (NASB) is misunderstood to mean things which happened in John’s time. The same words are found in Rev. 22:6, after John is shown things from the eternal state (Rev. 21:1–22:5). So, we know that God is simply reminding us that our life is “*a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away*” (James 4:14) and “*a thousand years [is] as one day*” with God (2 Pet. 3:8).
3. **To Finish the Testimony of John.** This message was sent by God to the Apostle John by a “teaching angel” (cf., Rev. 22:9). This is the same John who “bore witness to the Word of God” (cf., John 1:6–9, 1 John 1:1–4).

Two things are unique about the character of this book. The angel “communicated” or “signified” it to John. The word used here (*semeion*) means “to give a signal or sign.” The lessons of the book are taught in “symbols.” Second, John “saw” the book visually (Rev. 1:20) and recorded “all that he saw.” The Revelation is a “picture-book” based on the rest of the Word of God. The signs and symbols of the book are found elsewhere in Scripture. So, we see that Revelation is a book for people who love the Word of God and study it in depth from beginning to end. Superficial study is the greatest cause for misunderstanding of the book.

4. **To Bless Those Who Study.** Obviously, God does not offer a blessing to those who understand if no one is capable of understanding! The blessing is to the pastor, “*he who reads*” and the congregation, “*those who hear,*” who both understand and obey its teachings, “*keep those things which are written in it*” (Rev. 1:3). The book of Revelation involves seven blessings or beatitudes (Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). This book promises spiritual happiness and blessing to those who take the time and study to receive its truths.

### **The Author of the Book**

Revelation 1:4–8

Though John acts as the secretary, the Author is God Himself. After greeting the seven churches of Asia, where he had a circuit ministry, John sends greetings from the Godhead. Grace always precedes peace, because only when we receive the provisions of grace do we have “*peace with God*” (Rom. 5:1).

1. **From God the Father.** The preposition “*from*” (v. 4) speaks of ultimate source. The “*Him*” (v. 4) here is God, who is timeless and eternal. It is God’s desire that through the grace of the cross, mankind might experience true and eternal “*peace* (v. 4).”

2. From God the Holy Spirit. The “*seven spirits*” (v. 4) here speak of the completeness and fullness of the Holy Spirit. It is the task of the Holy Spirit to reveal the Son (John 16:13–14; Rev. 3:1). He is seen in Rev. 4:5 and Rev. 5:6 in connection with the Son. This figure is taken from the Old Testament in Isaiah 11:1–2 and Zechariah 4:10.
3. From God the Son. Here, Christ is revealed as Prophet (faithful witness), Priest (“*firstborn*,” v. 5, speaks of the Old Testament right of the firstborn, which was the right of priesthood, inheritance, and rule), and King (“*ruler over the kings of the earth*”).

He is the One “always loving us” (the present participle shows eternal love), who “released us once for all” (culminative aorist) from our sins. By faith in Him, we are made a “[royal] *priesthood*” (1 Pet. 2:5–9). This same Christ will return and reign forever (cf., Dan. 7:13; Zech. 12:10; 13:6).

Three of the favorite Old Testament titles of deity are ascribed to Him in v. 8. He is the “first and last” (“*Alpha and Omega*”), the “Lord God” (*Jehovah Elohim*) and the “Almighty” (“*El Shaddai*,” Gen. 17:1).

### **The Vision of John** Revelation 1:9–16

John describes for his congregations, and for us, the conditions of this vision. He was an exile on the volcanic Isle of Patmos—which was a gulag where slaves worked the mines. John was a prisoner in his 90s! Domitian exiled him because of his effective ministry of the Word. Note that “*tribulation and kingdom and patience*” (v. 9) are three of the realities for those “in Christ.” On this lonely island, the Spirit of God was John’s companion and comforter. The voice of the resurrected Christ, as a trumpet, commanded John to write to the seven churches whom we see in chapters 2 and 3.

When John turned (v. 12), he saw the Jesus he loved in resurrected glory (cf., Dan. 7:9–14). Again, symbolism is taken from Scripture. Christ wears the garment of the High Priest (v. 13). The white head and hair speak of holiness (v. 14; Dan. 7:9–10). His flaming eyes reveal the omniscience of God’s judgment (Dan. 10:6; Zech. 4:10). The feet of bronze picture judgment (v. 15). The “*two-edged sword*” of His mouth is the “*Word of God*” (v. 16; Heb. 4:12; Rev. 19:15). His shining face is the glory of the “*Sun of Righteousness*” (Mal. 4:2).

### **Interpretation and Outline** Revelation 1:17–20

Though John was “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*” (John 21:7), this was not the Jesus he had known “*according to the flesh*” (2 Cor. 5:16). John’s response showed something of the reverence we must have for Christ instead of superficial familiarity.

Because of the cross, Jesus holds the key to release the hold of death, or to lock the door of hell forever. This key is belief in Him or rejection of Him, resulting in judgment.

Once again, we see in v. 19 the book’s outline, which must be followed:

1. “[What] *you have seen* ...” deals with the vision on Patmos in chapter 1.
2. “*The things which are* ...” would include chapters 2 and 3 concerning the seven churches then in existence—the Church Age
3. “*The things which will take place after this* ...” begins in chapter 4 and runs through the end of book. It is worth noting that Rev. 4:1 begins with the words “*After these things.*”

**Verse 20** interprets the symbols of the previous vision, which often happens in Revelation. The seven stars are “*angels*” or, literally, “messengers” (pastors) of the seven churches, which are represented by the seven lampstands. Jesus walks “*in the midst of the churches*” (Rev. 1:13) and holds pastors of those churches “*in His*

*right hand*” (Rev. 1:16). He must be the central figure of all true churches—and the ultimate authority over every pastor.

## **REVELATION CHAPTERS 2 AND 3**

### **The Message to the Seven Churches**

#### **Introduction**

As we study the message of Christ to the seven churches, we will do well to keep in mind four interpretation aides given by Dr. C. I. Scofield:

1. Local meaning—these are seven actual churches existing in John’s time and to which he ministers.
2. General meaning—these conditions may be found in churches throughout the Church Age, and this gives us a key for evaluating a local church by the “*mind of Christ*,” (1 Cor. 2:16).
3. Personal meaning—each message includes the challenge “*to him who overcomes*” and “[him] *who has an ear*.” Thus, we can evaluate our own lives by this.
4. Prophetic meaning—these seven churches are chosen in this order to illustrate church history from the time of John to the Rapture.

Two major trends are seen running through this account. First, there is the purifying process going on for those who are true believers—the “overcomers” by faith (1 John 5:4–5). Second, there is an increasing apostasy of dead human religion. At the Rapture, the Body of Christ is removed, but apostate Christendom goes on to become the “great whore” of Revelation 17.

#### **Ephesus**

Revelation 2:1–7

The church of Ephesus was founded by the Apostle Paul (Acts 18:18–21; 19:1–20). John came there before the destruction of Jerusalem and made Ephesus the center of his circuit ministry. “*Ephesus*” means “beloved,” yet this church is rebuked for losing its love for Christ. They had many good “*works*” but had “*fallen*” from their occupation with the Person of Christ.

Historical Ephesus illustrates Church history from 35–100 A.D. Note Satan’s attempt to infiltrate the church through the Nicolaitans. The word comes from *niko* (“to conquer”) and *laos* (“the people”). This attempted establishment of a “church hierarchy,” which distinguished between “clergy” and “laity,” was repulsed in the first century.

The warning to the believer who “*has an ear*” and would be an “overcomer” is to constantly maintain personal fellowship and love for Christ as the greatest of spiritual priorities. Obviously, we can only love the Living Word by loving and living the written Word. Revelation 2:5 gives the road of recovery as remembrance, repentance, and return to “*first works*”/acts of love for Christ. Here, we see the beginning of the cooling process leading to the Laodicean church.

#### **Note:**

1. Ephesians are commended for endurance and their stand against false apostles and the Nicolaitan heresy.
2. They are condemned for “reversionism”—the “*first love*” from which they had “fallen” was the sound doctrine of the Book of Ephesians.

## **Smyrna** Revelation 2:8–11

“*Smyrna*” means “myrrh,” which was a gum or resin that was crushed to give off a fragrance. Myrrh was also used in embalming the dead. This church was persecuted and suffered greatly. Christ greets them as the One “*who was dead, and came to life.*” This poor church was rich in God’s sight, for they were faithful in spite of suffering, slander, and death. They are promised the “*crown of life*” (v. 10; James 1:12). Note here Satan’s two-fold attack of external persecution and internal infiltration by legalistic Jews who Christ calls the “*synagogue of Satan.*”

One of the great martyrs of Smyrna was the Pastor Polycarp, who was a student of John. He was burned at the stake and won the crown of life!

Historically, Smyrna represents Church history from 100–300 A.D., a period of great persecution by Rome. At this time, Christianity was despised by the world as a collection of ragged, poor, deluded people, yet they were rich before God. When we come to Laodicea, we find a large, rich, respected church that is naked in God’s sight. Is there any question where we are today?

### Note:

1. Smyrna is the edified church.
2. This suffering church endured the most and lasted the longest.
3. They were encouraged but not condemned.
4. Smyrna had many great teachers and a maximum number of believers in maturity.

## **Pergamos** Revelation 2:12–17

“*Pergamos*” is a compound word meaning “married, exalted.” Pergamos was a rich, influential city of Asia Minor. Yet the church was worldly. She is greeted by Him “*who has the sharp two-edged sword*”—the Word of God (Heb. 4:12). She has permitted the infiltration of three heresies. One, Satan had set up his throne here. We find that the teaching of the Babylonian mysteries was actually carried to Pergamos about 133 B.C. These teachings, begun in ancient Babylon, would in time become so assimilated by apostate Christianity as to become “Mystery Babylon.” Pergamos was the center of Caesar worship. Second, the doctrine of Balaam had gained a foothold (Numbers 22–25). This was basically a teaching of compromise with the world—Balaam taught Israel to intermarry with the heathen—thus a “marriage” of the Church and the world. Third, the Nicolaitans, who were repulsed by Ephesus, are accepted in Pergamos.

What begins in apostasy as “deeds,” develops into “doctrines,” which in time becomes “denominations.” The overcomers will receive the “*hidden manna,*” the deep things of Christ (v. 17; John 6:31–33; Col. 1:26), and the “*white stone,*” representing the vote of approval from God.

Historically, Pergamos represents Church history from 300–500 A.D. Constantine made Christianity a “state religion” so that it became joined to the heathenistic practices of Rome.

During the period of this apostate union, Damasus, the Bishop of Rome (an unbeliever) was given the title of Supreme Pontiff of the Babylonian Mysteries, which came to Rome from Pergamos. Thus, Satan’s program to “assimilate” the Church through infiltration took a great step forward. This was the age of “heresy,” yet even here there were “overcomers” who stood against the tide and died a martyr’s death!

### Note:

1. It is the “surrounded” church.
2. Pergamos was one of the most evil cities of the ancient world. It was here that Satan had his headquarters on Earth.
3. There were many strong believers in Pergamos, but they were surrounded by religious apostasy.

4. They are condemned for allowing apostasy into the church. Idolatry and rituals of ceremonial sex had also infiltrated this church.

### **Thyatira**

Revelation 2:18–29

The Son of God greets this church with flaming eyes and feet of judgment! Though there is some approval in Rev. 2:19, the church has become a haven for “*Jezebel*,” an actual woman who became prominent as a teacher and led people into idolatry and immorality. Even though God gave her “*time to repent*,” she would not. She is a preview of the “*great whore*” (Revelation 17) and so will be cast “*into great tribulation*” along with her “*children*,” i.e., apostate Christendom.

Even in Thyatira, some remained faithful (Rev. 2:24–29). They are to “*hold fast*” to truth and are promised great authority in Christ’s kingdom for standing against the usurped authority of this Jezebel. They will be decorated with the “*morning star*,” the reflected glory of Jesus Christ (v. 28; compare Dan. 12:3; 2 Pet. 1:19).

Historically, “*Thyatira*,” which means “*continual offering*,” speaks of the age of Romanism, 500–1500 A.D. In Romanism, the “*once-for-all*” sufficiency of the cross is denied for a continual offering of works, penance, and sacraments as a means of salvation. Just as Jezebel will not repent, neither will this system of idolatry as the “*Babylon*” of the future (cf., Jer. 51:8–9; Rev. 18:4). The “*deep things of Satan*” are the Babylonian teachings perpetuated by the Roman Church.

#### **Note:**

1. This church is commended for production and service under pressure.
2. However, they are condemned for allowing apostasy to enter, along with demonism and occult practices.
3. They are warned to “*hold fast*.”

### **Sardis**

Revelation 3:1–6

The word “*Sardis*” means “*remnant*” or “*those who escape*.” This church has a name that it is “*alive*,” but God says it is spiritually dead. The challenge is to “*wake up*” as in Ephesians 5:14. This waking pictures a remnant of true believers, even in Sardis. This “*awakening*” returns to the Word of God that had been “*received and heard*.” Those who overcome are “*clothed in [the] white garments*” of imputed righteousness (v. 5; Rom. 4:3–5; 2 Cor. 5:21). The “*Book of Life*” contains the names of those who trust in Christ alone (Rev. 20:12).

Historically, Sardis pictures the Reformation Church of 1500–1700 A.D. The awakening of men like John Huss, John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, and others brought a return to the Word of God as the only authority of faith and the truth of salvation by faith in Christ alone. Also, the individual priesthood of every believer (1 Pet. 2:5–9) delivered them from the tyranny of the Roman priesthood.

#### **Note:**

1. Sardis is an active church from the “*programs*” standpoint but are dead through lack of doctrinal instruction and spirituality.
2. They are warned to “*remember [what they] received and heard*” (i.e., John’s teaching).
3. There were, however, a “*few*” faithful people in Sardis.

### **Philadelphia**

Revelation 3:7–13

“*Philadelphia*” means “*brotherly love*.” This church reflected the biblical teaching of John 13:34–35. The Christ who holds the “*keys*” of history sets before this church an “*open door*” of service (cf., 1 Cor. 16:9;



Col. 4:3). This missionary-minded church would have victory over the “*synagogue of Satan*,” and because of faithful perseverance would be kept from the “*hour [time] of trial*.” The overcomer is promised a permanent place of service in God’s eternal temple—bearing the name of God.

Historically, Philadelphia represents Church history of 1700–1900 A.D. During this time, we have the great mission outreach of the Wesleys, Taylors, and Careys, among others. China, India, and Africa became centers of great evangelistic work. This missionary zeal will continue until the Rapture removes the true Church from Tribulation.

This is verified in 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10; 4:13–18; 5:9, as well as Rev. 1:19 and 4:1. In addition, the word “*church*” is mentioned all the way up to Rev. 4:1 (a picture of the Rapture), and from here, Israel becomes the focus. The reason for this is that the Tribulation is the “*time of Jacob’s trouble*” (Jer. 30:7) to refine and regenerate the nation of Israel.

**Note:**

1. Philadelphia is the missionary church—having the “*open door*” of evangelism.
2. The key regarding Philadelphia is the recurrence of the words “*kept My word*” in Rev. 3:8–11.
3. They were small, yet mighty through doctrine.

**Laodicea**

Revelation 3:14–22

Here, we have the last of the seven churches. The name comes from *laos* (“the people”) and *dike* (“rights”)—thus the “human-rights” church. The apostasy of this church is found in that it was “*lukewarm*.” The cooling of love for Christ, which had begun in Ephesus, has now become total apostasy and indifference. This church prided itself on its wealth, riches, programs, and buildings; but Christ was completely left out (v. 20). Jesus Christ “vomits this apostate organization from His mouth” (v. 16). Yet, still the offer of grace was extended to anyone who will receive it (vv. 18, 20). Interestingly, Laodicea was home of an eye salve of the ancient world. As the “*Amen, the faithful and true witness*” (v. 14), Christ is the source of light from the Word. He promises those who would come out of this apostasy, fellowship (breaking the bread of life together) and ultimate exaltation in His throne (Rev. 3:20–22).

Historically, Laodicea represents the “modernistic” church. Whatever the name or designation, it places a premium on riches, programs, buildings, and, above all, “human rights/social justice.” The social church has become man-centered and has pushed Christ out of His rightful place “in the midst of the churches.” In this age of complacency, Christ continues to call His people out from apostasy and into the true riches of His grace and fellowship.

**Note:**

1. The Laodicean church is lukewarm: apathetic to Christ, His Word, and the plan of God.
2. It is a very large, wealthy local church. They had buildings, finances, and crowds but divine viewpoint calls them “*wretched, miserable, poor blind, naked*” (v. 17).
3. They are believers (v. 19), but apathetic. The solution is positive volition to fellowship with Christ around His Word.

May we all, by His grace, return to the purity of faith in Smyrna, a fragrant aroma to God. May we regain that “lost love” for Him and reach out with the missionary zeal of Philadelphia. The door is still open!