



TEACH THE TEXT  
COMMENTARY SERIES

# Revelation

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To a small community of treasured friends and fellow  
believers, who met for a season to pray, give and receive  
encouragement, and plan worship for our local church:

Michael and Terese Cox  
Becca (Woodall) Owens  
Allison Cornell  
Stewart Kelly

Through our time together, we experienced the body of Christ  
and caught a glimpse of the new creation to come.  
I will always be deeply grateful.

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# Welcome to the Teach the Text Commentary Series

Why another commentary series? That was the question the general editors posed when Baker Books asked us to produce this series. Is there something that we can offer to pastors and teachers that is not currently being offered by other commentary series, or that can be offered in a more helpful way? After carefully researching the needs of pastors who teach the text on a weekly basis, we concluded that yes, more can be done; this commentary is carefully designed to fill an important gap.

The technicality of modern commentaries often overwhelms readers with details that are tangential to the main purpose of the text. Discussions of source and redaction criticism, as well as detailed surveys of secondary literature, seem far removed from preaching and teaching the Word. Rather than wade through technical discussions, pastors often turn to devotional commentaries, which may contain exegetical weaknesses, misuse the Greek and Hebrew languages, and lack hermeneutical sophistication. There is a need for a commentary that utilizes the best of biblical scholarship but also presents the material in a clear, concise, attractive, and user-friendly format.

This commentary is designed for that purpose—to provide a ready reference for the exposition of the biblical text, giving easy access to information that a pastor needs to communicate the text effectively. To that end, the commentary

is divided into carefully selected preaching units, each covered in six pages (with carefully regulated word counts both in the passage as a whole and in each subsection). Pastors and teachers engaged in weekly preparation thus know that they will be reading approximately the same amount of material on a week-by-week basis.

Each passage begins with a concise summary of the central message, or “Big Idea,” of the passage and a list of its main themes. This is followed by a more detailed interpretation of the text, including the literary context of the passage, historical background material, and interpretive insights. While drawing on the best of biblical scholarship, this material is clear, concise, and to the point. Technical material is kept to a minimum, with endnotes pointing the reader to more detailed discussion and additional resources.

A second major focus of this commentary is on the preaching and teaching process itself. Few commentaries today help the pastor/teacher move from the meaning of the text to its effective communication. Our goal is to bridge this gap. In addition to interpreting the text in the “Understanding the Text” section, each six-page unit contains a “Teaching the Text” section and an “Illustrating the Text” section. The teaching section points to the key theological themes of the passage and ways to communicate these themes to today’s audiences. The illustration section provides ideas and examples for retaining the interest of hearers and connecting the message to daily life.

The creative format of this commentary arises from our belief that the Bible is not just a record of God’s dealings in the past but is the living Word of God, “alive and active” and “sharper than any double-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12). Our prayer is that this commentary will help to unleash that transforming power for the glory of God.

The General Editors



# Introduction to the Teach the Text Commentary Series

This series is designed to provide a ready reference for teaching the biblical text, giving easy access to information that is needed to communicate a passage effectively. To that end, the commentary is carefully divided into units that are faithful to the biblical authors' ideas and of an appropriate length for teaching or preaching.

The following standard sections are offered in each unit.

1. *Big Idea*. For each unit the commentary identifies the primary theme, or “Big Idea,” that drives both the passage and the commentary.
2. *Key Themes*. Together with the Big Idea, the commentary addresses in bullet-point fashion the key ideas presented in the passage.
3. *Understanding the Text*. This section focuses on the exegesis of the text and includes several sections.
  - a. *The Text in Context*. Here the author gives a brief explanation of how the unit fits into the flow of the text around it, including reference to the rhetorical strategy of the book and the unit's contribution to the purpose of the book.

- b. *Outline/Structure*. For some literary genres (e.g., epistles), a brief exegetical outline may be provided to guide the reader through the structure and flow of the passage.
  - c. *Historical and Cultural Background*. This section addresses historical and cultural background information that may illuminate a verse or passage.
  - d. *Interpretive Insights*. This section provides information needed for a clear understanding of the passage. The intention of the author is to be highly selective and concise rather than exhaustive and expansive.
  - e. *Theological Insights*. In this very brief section the commentary identifies a few carefully selected theological insights about the passage.
4. *Teaching the Text*. Under this second main heading the commentary offers guidance for teaching the text. In this section the author lays out the main themes and applications of the passage. These are linked carefully to the Big Idea and are represented in the Key Themes.
  5. *Illustrating the Text*. At this point in the commentary the writers partner with a team of pastor/teachers to provide suggestions for relevant and contemporary illustrations from current culture, entertainment, history, the Bible, news, literature, ethics, biography, daily life, medicine, and over forty other categories. They are designed to spark creative thinking for preachers and teachers and to help them design illustrations that bring alive the passage's key themes and message.

# Preface

What an awesome responsibility to write a commentary on Revelation, a book that even comes with a warning not to add to or subtract from its message (22:18–19). It’s also the only New Testament book on which John Calvin did not write a commentary, an intimidating historical observation. But the people of God desperately need to hear the message of this powerful and provocative book, and for that reason we need reliable resources.

Most believers today fall into one of two categories. On the one hand, many are intimidated by Revelation and even fearful of it. They avoid it like the plague. For this group, Revelation might as well not even be in the Bible since it remains a closed book. At the other extreme, many believers are enamored of the riddles and time lines of the book. They become obsessed with predicting what God is doing in these last days (for more on the “last days,” see the sidebar in the unit on Rev. 12:1–6). Both extremes often fail to grasp the book as it was intended. Revelation is about much more than Armageddon, 666, the rapture, and the antichrist. It’s mainly about God Almighty, worship, the people of God, the Holy Spirit, Satan, sin, spiritual warfare, God’s mission, Jesus Christ, suffering, hope, judgment, perseverance, and the new creation. Such topics are central to Christian faith. May God give us ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches through this deeply important book.

I am thankful to Baker Books for the opportunity to contribute to the Teach the Text Commentary Series, which aims to serve pastors and teachers in a local church setting. I am especially grateful to Dr. Mark Strauss, the New Testament editor of the series, for the invitation to comment on Revelation. Mark is one of the brightest scholars and finest Christians I have had the

privilege of knowing, and it has been a pleasure to partner with him in this project. His insightful editorial comments have made the book much better.

Also, I would like to thank two people at Baker Publishing. Brian Vos, you are one of the few in academic publishing who actually listens to scholars who are called to write for the church. Thank you for supporting that extremely important vision and for offering authentic encouragement on so many occasions. And James Korsmo, thank you for being a superb editor who consistently gives careful attention to detail and for doing so with humility and patience.

I also would like to thank several people in my local community for helping with the project. Tracey Knight and Michael and Terese Cox read the manuscript and responded with encouraging and constructive feedback. Thanks also to the graduate class offered through B. H. Carroll Theological Institute for interacting with the material in a very helpful way: Bryan Davis, Jared Farley, Johnny and Elizabeth Ferrell, Dave and Brandi Johnston, Eric Mahfouz, and (last but not least) Jay Newman. My thanks and appreciation also go to the students of the Revelation classes offered at Ouachita Baptist University through the years: you have inspired me.

My hope and prayer is that this resource will give believers a deeper understanding of Revelation, an incredibly important gift from God to help us live faithfully until Jesus returns to make all things new.

All glory and honor be to God,

J. Scott Duvall

Fuller Professor of New Testament and Chair of Biblical Studies  
Pruet School of Christian Studies, Ouachita Baptist University

March 2013

# Abbreviations

## Old Testament

Gen.	Genesis	2 Chron.	2 Chronicles	Dan.	Daniel
Exod.	Exodus	Ezra	Ezra	Hosea	Hosea
Lev.	Leviticus	Neh.	Nehemiah	Joel	Joel
Num.	Numbers	Esther	Esther	Amos	Amos
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Job	Job	Obad.	Obadiah
Josh.	Joshua	P <sup>s</sup> (s).	Psalm(s)	Jon.	Jonah
Judg.	Judges	Prov.	Proverbs	Mic.	Micah
Ruth	Ruth	Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Nah.	Nahum
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Song	Song of Songs	Hab.	Habakkuk
2 Sam.	2 Samuel	Isa.	Isaiah	Zeph.	Zephaniah
1 Kings	1 Kings	Jer.	Jeremiah	Hag.	Haggai
2 Kings	2 Kings	Lam.	Lamentations	Zech.	Zechariah
1 Chron.	1 Chronicles	Ezek.	Ezekiel	Mal.	Malachi

## New Testament

Matt.	Matthew	Eph.	Ephesians	Heb.	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil.	Philippians	James	James
Luke	Luke	Col.	Colossians	1 Pet.	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet.	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom.	Romans	1 Tim.	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians	2 Tim.	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal.	Galatians	Philem.	Philemon	Rev.	Revelation

## General

ca.	circa
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare
chap(s).	chapter(s)
esp.	especially
par.	parallel
v(v).	verse(s)

## Ancient Versions

LXX	Septuagint
-----	------------

## Modern Versions

ESV	English Standard Version
GW	<i>GOD'S WORD</i> Translation
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
KJV	King James Version
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

## Apocrypha and Septuagint

Bar.	Baruch
------	--------

## Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

2 Bar.	2 Baruch ( <i>Syriac Apocalypse</i> )
3 Bar.	3 Baruch ( <i>Greek Apocalypse</i> )
1 En.	1 Enoch ( <i>Ethiopic Apocalypse</i> )

2 En.	2 Enoch ( <i>Slavonic Apocalypse</i> )
4 Ez.	4 Ezra
Jub.	Jubilees
Sib. Or.	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
T. Dan	<i>Testament of Dan</i>

## Talmud

Qidd.	<i>Qiddushin</i>
-------	------------------

## Apostolic Fathers

Did.	<i>Didache</i>
Magn.	Ignatius, <i>Letter to the Magnesians</i>
Mart. Pol.	<i>Martyrdom of Polycarp</i>
Rom.	Ignatius, <i>To the Romans</i>

## Early Christian Writings

Haer.	Irenaeus, <i>Adversus haereses (Against Heresies)</i>
Hist. eccl.	Eusebius, <i>Historia ecclesiastica (Ecclesiastical History)</i>

## Secondary Sources

BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
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# Introduction to Revelation

The final chapter of the Bible is known as the “revelation [*apokalypsis*] of Jesus Christ” (1:1). Revelation presents the ending to God’s great story in colorful language and powerful imagery. While the details of this awesome and mysterious book are often debated, the main idea stands clear: God wins! Revelation tells how the sovereign ruler of the universe destroys evil, rescues believers, transforms creation, and lives among his people forever.

To understand and apply the message of Revelation, we need to know more about its historical and literary contexts. The following overview provides crucial background information related to authorship, date, situation, purpose, literary genre, interpretation, and structure. Revelation offers the hope and heavenly perspective necessary for believers to live faithfully in this fallen world until Jesus returns. Christians today desperately need to hear what the Spirit says to the churches through this amazing book.

## Authorship

The author of Revelation simply identifies himself as “John” (1:1, 4, 9–10; 22:8–9), a servant of God who received and recorded the heavenly visions for the churches of Asia while suffering exile on the island of Patmos for fulfilling his prophetic witness. In the early second century, Justin Martyr identified the author of Revelation as the apostle John. Most early church leaders drew the same conclusion (e.g., Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen; also the second-century gnostic *Apocryphon of John*). John the apostle, the son of Zebedee, brother of James, and author of the Fourth Gospel, was the most prominent “John” mentioned in the New Testament, and the simple

identification as “John” suggests the author was an authoritative Christian leader in Asia (Mark 1:19–20; 3:17; Acts 4:1–23; 8:14–25). John regarded himself as a prophet in line with Old Testament prophets like Ezekiel and Daniel (e.g., Rev. 1:3; 10:8–11; 22:7, 11, 18–19). Church tradition says a group of Christians moved from Judea to Asia around AD 66 when the Jews began to revolt against Rome. Supposedly John the apostle was among that group and settled in Ephesus for an extensive ministry in that region.

In the third century, however, Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, raised doubts that John the apostle wrote Revelation because (1) the author does not claim to be an apostle, (2) the Greek is difficult, and (3) there are many differences between Revelation and the other Johannine writings. In addition, some interpret comments made by Papias, bishop of Hieropolis (AD 60–135), as evidence for John the elder rather than John the apostle as the author.<sup>1</sup> These objections are not convincing. The unusual Greek in Revelation and the differences in style and theology between it and other Johannine writings are best explained by differences in literary genre and situation rather than authorship. Alongside the differences are also many similarities between Revelation and John’s Gospel.

The external evidence strongly supports apostolic authorship, and the internal evidence can be interpreted either way, depending on the weight given to the role of literary genre and historical situation. In the end, the case for apostolic authorship remains the most viable option, but the identity of the author (whether John the apostle, John the elder, or a different John) does not affect the overall message of the book in a major way.

## Date

A majority of the scholars today date Revelation to the end of the first century during the reign of Emperor Domitian (AD 95–96), while a minority prefer an earlier date of AD 69, shortly after Emperor Nero’s death in 68 and prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 70.

Those who prefer the earlier date suggest that the intense persecution under Nero better fits the situation described in Revelation.<sup>2</sup> In addition, they argue that the early date provides a better reading of particular passages, such as the trampling of the temple courts by the Gentiles in 11:1–2 (more likely before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70), the number of the beast in 13:18 (666 may be a cryptic reference to Nero), and the seven heads of the beast in 17:10–11 (Emperor Galba [ruled 68–69] as the “one [who] is”). While these are viable arguments, the later date remains the most probable date of composition for the following reasons.

The external evidence favors the late date. Irenaeus (late second century), the disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of John, writes of Revelation:



“For it was seen, not long ago, but almost in our generation, near the end of Domitian’s reign.”<sup>3</sup> Most early church fathers follow this same tradition. Particular texts such as 11:1–2; 13:18; and 17:10–11 can be interpreted in equally responsible ways under a setting in Domitian’s reign (see the relevant sections of the commentary). In addition, the condition of the seven churches calls for a period of growth, for false teachers such as the Nicolaitans to become established, and for some congregations to decline spiritually (e.g., Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea). Also, certain historical references within the seven letters make better sense with a late date. For example, the wealth associated with Laodicea in 3:17 would have been unlikely following a devastating earthquake in AD 60.<sup>4</sup> After the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70, many Palestinian Jews settled in Asia, and a later date also best explains the strong opposition to Christianity originating from the Jewish synagogue (e.g., 2:9; 3:9).

Finally, Revelation reflects the dual threat of persecution and compromise, a threat best understood in light of the strong influence of the imperial cult. Worship of the Roman emperor was especially strong during the reign of Domitian, the ruler who claimed the title *dominus et deus noster* (“Our Lord and God”). The persecution under Nero was intense, but was centered in Rome. While Domitian did not authorize a systematic, empire-wide persecution as some have supposed, Christians did suffer under his reign.<sup>5</sup> Revelation records various levels of persecution (1:9; 2:2–3, 9, 13; 6:9–10; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2; 20:4) and anticipates an intensification of trouble in the near future (2:10; 3:10; 6:11; 12:11; 13:7, 10, 15), a scenario that matches the circumstances under Domitian. It is also noteworthy that Domitian came to be viewed as Nero’s successor.<sup>6</sup> Also, Revelation reflects the *Nero redivivus* legend (i.e., the idea that Nero had been resurrected and would one day return to rule Rome; cf. 13:1–7), which became increasingly popular toward the end of the first century, and therefore the later date seems more probable.

## Historical Situation

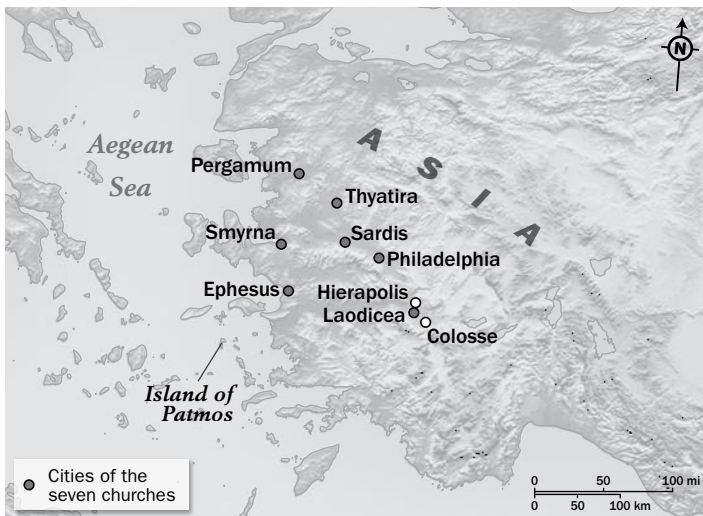
Revelation speaks to Christians facing pressure and persecution as well as those tempted to compromise. Opposition arose first from the Jewish synagogue (2:9; 3:9). Judaism was respected within the Roman Empire as an ancient religion, and Jews were exempted from worshiping Roman gods and participating in the imperial cult. Some Jews were hostile toward the church and accused believers before the Roman authorities of being anti-Roman troublemakers (see 2:9).

The Romans also opposed the church, especially through the imperial cult, which gathered political, social, and economic influences into a single dominating religious force, complete with temples, priests, festivals, and the

like. Christians who refused to participate in the idolatrous and immoral cult activities of emperor worship, often connected with local trade guilds, faced economic and social rejection. The imperial cult was especially strong during the reign of Domitian (AD 81–96), whose “lordship” directly contradicted the most basic Christian confession: “Jesus is Lord.” Although not systematic and widespread, persecution under Domitian was real (1:9; 2:13; 6:9–10) and threatened to get much worse in the near future (2:10; 3:10).<sup>7</sup>

The church also faced the threat of false teachers who urged accommodation to the surrounding society, teachers such as Jezebel and her followers (2:20–24) and the Nicolaitans (2:6, 14–15). The temptation to forsake Christ in order to fit into the surrounding culture and avoid persecution surfaces in the seven letters: Ephesus has forsaken its first love (2:4), some at Pergamum and Thyatira are following false teachers (2:14–15, 20), Sardis has a reputation for being alive but is really dead (3:1), and Laodicea remains lukewarm (3:16–17).

Revelation comforts and assures the faithful who are suffering but sternly warns those who are compromising with the world system. This double message of comfort and warning also relates to the overall purpose of the book.



The location of Patmos and the seven churches addressed in Revelation

## Overall Purpose

Revelation answers the most basic of all questions: Who is Lord of the universe? The Roman emperor claimed lordship by extending his power through local rulers, taxation, the military, trade guilds, temples, and various symbols like statues and coins. But Revelation was written to reassure Jesus’s disciples that

God is on his throne and that Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord of all. In spite of how things appear now, the decisive spiritual battle has been won at the cross and resurrection, and Jesus will one day return to establish his eternal kingdom. Believers should continue their faithful witness to the one true Lord no matter the cost. Those who are compromising with the idolatrous and immoral ways of the world are warned to repent or face judgment.

Revelation provides a transforming vision of spiritual reality that encourages believers to follow Jesus faithfully. The book uses powerful visions and symbols to overpower the ever-present symbols of Rome (and any other worldly empire). Bauckham refers to these transforming symbols as “Christian prophetic counter-images,” designed to impress upon the reader a different view of the world, a heavenly perspective.<sup>8</sup> Hearing (or reading) Revelation is like putting on a virtual-reality helmet in order to see true spiritual reality—God defeats the powers of darkness, judges evil, rescues his people, and transforms creation. The book unveils reality from God’s perspective. The prevailing images of this world fade and are replaced with heavenly images of God’s sovereign rule over the universe. In this way, Revelation empowers readers to reenter their present world and persevere faithfully.

In sum, Revelation proclaims hope—hope made possible by Christ’s victory, hope that brings comfort to the faithful who are now suffering, hope that calls for repentance from those who are compromising, and hope that one day God will judge evil and live among his people in a new heaven and new earth.

## Literary Genre

Revelation is a strange book filled with bizarre images like locusts with human faces and tails that sting like scorpions (9:7–10), a woman clothed with the sun (12:1), a beast with seven heads and ten horns (13:1), and so on. Revelation’s uniqueness results from its literary genre as a prophetic-apocalyptic letter.

As a letter, Revelation includes a greeting (1:4–5) and a closing (22:21) and targets a specific audience: the seven churches in the province of Asia (1:11). These seven locations are named in the order a letter carrier might visit them, starting from Patmos (the place of John’s exile) and moving in a clockwise direction (see map of the seven churches). New Testament letters were meant to be read aloud to believers gathered for worship (1:3; 22:18–19) and were written to address a particular situation or problem (see “Historical Situation” above). While the message of Revelation certainly extends beyond those seven churches, any approach to interpreting the book that ignores its message to the seven churches will distort its meaning significantly.

Revelation also claims to be a prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18–19; cf. 19:10; 22:9), including both *prediction* about the future (foretelling) and *proclamation* about the present (forthtelling). In the places where Revelation is described as

a prophecy, readers are commanded to *obey* the prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 18–19), indicating a focus on proclamation rather than prediction. Revelation speaks about the future to be sure, but it speaks most forcefully about how God wants his people to live in the present.

Finally, Revelation is an apocalypse (1:1—*apokalypsis*), a term meaning “unveiling” or “revelation.” Apocalyptic literature focuses on God’s communication to a well-known person (like John or Daniel) through visual images with the message that he will intervene in the course of history to overthrow evil empires and establish his kingdom.<sup>9</sup> Apocalyptic assumes a crisis situation where hope lies in the future. Through fantastic visions and strange images, God promises salvation for the faithful and judgment for the wicked. Revelation unveils transcendent reality that emphasizes God’s sovereignty and overpowers the present situation of suffering in this temporal world. Apocalyptic appears in Old Testament books like Daniel and Zechariah, and certain sections of the Prophets (e.g., Isa. 24–27; Ezek. 37–39). This type of literature flourished in Jewish works from 200 BC to AD 100 (e.g., *1 and 2 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, *2 and 3 Baruch*, *4 Ezra*, and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*). Jesus’s Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24–25; Mark 13) even displays an apocalyptic tone.

## Interpretation

There are five major approaches to interpreting Revelation:

- *Preterist*—Revelation is directed to first-century Christians, encouraging them with a message of hope of how God plans to deliver them from the evils of the Roman Empire.
- *Historicist*—Revelation offers a prophetic outline of church history from the first century until the future coming of Christ.
- *Futurist*—Revelation is concerned with what will happen at the end of history, just before the second coming of Christ.
- *Idealist*—Revelation is a symbolic description of the ongoing battle between God and evil. The book offers timeless spiritual truths to equip Christians for persevering in a world filled with suffering and injustice.
- *Eclectic*—This approach combines the strengths of several approaches, taking seriously the message to the original readers, acknowledging portions of the book that await future fulfillment, and finding relevant spiritual messages for Christians of every age. This commentary will take an eclectic approach.

There are also several important interpretive principles for reading Revelation responsibly. First, we must take seriously the message to the original

readers, which makes knowing the original context of the seven churches extremely important. We must resist the temptation to ignore the original audience and jump directly to God’s message for us. This “current events” approach to reading Revelation is extremely dangerous because it usually leads to reading meaning back into the book that is not really there in the first place (cf. the warning in 22:18–19).

Second, we must take Revelation’s picture language seriously but not always literally (e.g., the woman who sits on seven hills in 17:9). Our interpretive approach should match the literary type used by the author. Revelation communicates at several different levels: (1) vision level: what John saw; (2) text level: the words written on the page; (3) referent level: what the vision refers to in real life; and (4) rhetorical level: what impact the vision makes on the hearer.<sup>10</sup> With Revelation, we usually know what it is saying (text and vision) as well as the effect it has on the reader (rhetorical), but we’re sometimes not sure what it is talking about (referent). When trying to understand the meaning of the book’s symbols and images, we must pay close attention to the Old Testament background, the Greco-Roman world of John’s day, and Jewish intertestamental literature.

Finally, we should focus on the main theological message of each vision and resist the temptation to know all the details with absolute certainty. Reading Revelation calls for humility. It’s best to start with the big picture and move toward an understanding of the specifics, rather than the reverse. Revelation is much more than an eschatological puzzle to be solved; rather, it is God’s communication to the seven churches (and by extension to the universal church in every age) about how to live faithfully in light of the future he has in store. The “Big Idea” section for each passage can help us keep the main thing the main thing when reading Revelation.

## Outline

There are about as many outlines of Revelation as there are commentators.<sup>11</sup> Along with selecting a basic approach (see the five options outlined above), the other major choice regarding interpretation is whether to see the book as a chronological prediction of future events or as repeating and overlapping with a message about the past, present, and future. This commentary prefers the second option since it makes better sense of the interrelationship between Christ’s first coming, the situation of the seven churches, and events related to the end of the age. We do see a progressive intensification through the three series of judgments (seals, trumpets, and bowls), with all three culminating in the end of the age (6:12–17; 11:15–19; 16:17–21). The final chapters of the book relate primarily to the end of the age, and the three interludes (7:1–17; 10:1–11:13; 12:1–14:20) shed light on the current situation of God’s people

and offer insight into their present responsibilities and future hope. It's almost as if Revelation spirals forward, incorporating the past, present, and future in a dramatic unveiling of God's great plan. I propose the following outline:

- 1:1–8 Introduction
- 1:9–20 John's introductory vision: The risen and glorified Christ
- 2:1–3:21 Messages to the seven churches
- 4:1–5:14 A vision of the heavenly throne room
- 6:1–8:1 The seal judgments
- 7:1–17 First interlude: God's people protected on earth and celebrating in heaven
- 8:2–11:19 The trumpet judgments
- 10:1–11:13 Second interlude: John's role as prophet and the church's role as witness
- 12:1–14:20 Third interlude: The cosmic war between God and the forces of evil
- 15:1–16:21 The bowl judgments
- 17:1–19:5 The destruction of Babylon the Great
- 19:6–20:15 The final victory
- 21:1–22:5 The new creation: God's presence among his people
- 22:6–21 The conclusion

# Full Outline of Revelation

1. Introduction (1:1–8)
  - a. Opening (1:1–3)
    - i. Title: “The revelation from Jesus Christ” (1:1a)
    - ii. Chain of revelation (1:1b)
    - iii. Results of revelation (1:2)
    - iv. First beatitude (1:3)
  - b. Greeting and doxology (1:4–6)
    - i. Greeting (1:4–5a)
    - ii. Doxology (1:5b–6)
  - c. Prophetic confession (1:7–8)
    - i. Exclamation of Jesus’s return (1:7)
    - ii. Assurance of God’s sovereignty (1:8)
2. John’s introductory vision: The risen and glorified Christ (1:9–20)
  - a. The setting of the vision and John’s commission (1:9–11)
  - b. John’s vision of Jesus (1:12–16)
  - c. Jesus confronts John (1:17–20)
    - i. John’s reaction and Jesus’s reassurance (1:17–18)
    - ii. John’s commission renewed (1:19)
    - iii. Interpretation of key images (1:20)
3. Messages to the seven churches (2:1–3:22)
  - a. Message to Ephesus (2:1–7)
    - i. Command to the angel to write (2:1a)
    - ii. Description of Jesus (2:1b)
    - iii. Commendation (2:2–3, 6)
    - iv. Accusation related to sin (2:4)

- v. Exhortation and warning (2:5)
- vi. Admonition to listen (2:7a)
- vii. Promise to the overcomers (2:7b)
- b. Message to Smyrna (2:8–11)
  - i. Command to the angel to write (2:8a)
  - ii. Description of Jesus (2:8b)
  - iii. Commendation (2:9)
  - iv. Exhortation and encouragement (2:10)
    - v. Admonition to listen (2:11a)
    - vi. Promise to the overcomers (2:11b)
- c. Message to Pergamum (2:12–17)
  - i. Command to the angel to write (2:12a)
  - ii. Description of Jesus (2:12b)
  - iii. Commendation of good works (2:13)
  - iv. Accusation related to sin (2:14–15)
  - v. Exhortation and warning (2:16)
  - vi. Admonition to listen (2:17a)
  - vii. Promise to the overcomers (2:17b)
- d. Message to Thyatira (2:18–29)
  - i. Command to the angel to write (2:18a)
  - ii. Description of Jesus (2:18b)
  - iii. Commendation of good works (2:19)
  - iv. Accusation related to sin (2:20–23)
    - v. Exhortation, warning, and encouragement (2:24–25)
  - vi. Promise to the overcomers (2:26–28)
  - vii. Admonition to listen (2:29)
- e. Message to Sardis (3:1–6)
  - i. Command to the angel to write (3:1a)
  - ii. Description of Jesus (3:1b)
  - iii. Accusation related to sin (3:1c)
  - iv. Exhortation and warning (3:2–3)
    - v. Commendation of good works (3:4)
  - vi. Promise to the overcomers (3:5)
  - vii. Admonition to listen (3:6)
- f. Message to Philadelphia (3:7–13)
  - i. Command to the angel to write (3:7a)
  - ii. Description of Jesus (3:7b)
  - iii. Commendation of good works and encouragement (3:8–10)
  - iv. Exhortation (3:11)
    - v. Promise to the overcomers (3:12)
  - vi. Admonition to listen (3:13)



- g. Message to Laodicea (3:14–22)
  - i. Command to the angel to write (3:14a)
  - ii. Description of Jesus (3:14b)
  - iii. Accusation related to sin (3:15–17)
  - iv. Exhortation, warning, and encouragement (3:16, 18–20)
  - v. Promise to the overcomers (3:21)
  - vi. Admonition to listen (3:22)
- 4. A vision of the heavenly throne room (4:1–5:14)
  - a. God on his throne as the sovereign Creator (4:1–11)
    - i. John’s invitation to ascend to heaven (4:1)
    - ii. John’s heavenly vision: God on his throne (4:2–3)
    - iii. Twenty-four elders (4:4)
    - iv. Manifestations of God’s holy presence (4:5–6a)
    - v. Four living creatures worship God (4:6b–9)
    - vi. The elders respond in worship (4:10–11)
  - b. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain (5:1–7)
    - i. John sees the sealed scroll in God’s right hand (5:1)
    - ii. The search for someone worthy to open the scroll (5:2–4)
    - iii. Only the Lion-Lamb is worthy to open the scroll (5:5–6)
    - iv. The Lamb takes the scroll (5:7)
  - c. God and the Lamb are worthy of worship (5:8–14)
    - i. The living creatures and the elders worship the Lamb with a new song (5:8–10)
    - ii. All the angelic creatures worship the Lamb (5:11–12)
    - iii. All of creation worships God and the Lamb (5:13–14)
- 5. The seal judgments (6:1–8:1)
  - a. The first six seals (6:1–17)
    - i. The four horsemen (6:1–8)
      - (1) The rider on a white horse (6:1–2)
      - (2) The rider on a red horse (6:3–4)
      - (3) The rider on a black horse (6:5–6)
      - (4) The rider on a pale horse (6:7–8)
    - ii. The fifth seal (6:9–11)
      - (1) The souls of the martyrs under the altar (6:9)
      - (2) Their plea for divine judgment and vindication (6:10)
      - (3) God’s response (6:11)
    - iii. The sixth seal (6:12–17)
      - (1) Cosmic disturbances (6:12–14)
      - (2) The reaction of unbelievers (6:15–16)
      - (3) Who can withstand the wrath of God and the Lamb? (6:17)  
[The first interlude of 7:1–17 occurs here; see below]
  - b. The seventh seal: Silence in heaven (8:1)

6. First interlude: God's people protected on earth and celebrating in heaven (7:1–17)
  - a. The protective sealing of God's people on earth (7:1–8)
    - i. Four angels holding back the four winds (7:1)
    - ii. Another angel carrying the seal of God (7:2–3)
    - iii. The sealing of the 144,000 (7:4–8)
  - b. Celebrating the salvation of God's people (7:9–17)
    - i. The great multitude worships God and the Lamb (7:9–10)
    - ii. The company of angels worships God and the Lamb (7:11–12)
    - iii. The identification of the great multitude (7:13–14)
    - iv. The multitude comforted and protected in God's presence (7:15–17)
7. The trumpet judgments (8:2–11:19)
  - a. Preparation for the seven trumpets (8:2–6)
    - i. Seven angels are given seven trumpets (8:2)
    - ii. The angel with the golden censer and the prayers of God's people (8:3–4)
    - iii. The prayers are answered with plagues (8:5)
    - iv. The seven angels prepare to sound the trumpets (8:6)
  - b. The seven trumpet judgments (8:7–9:21)
    - i. First four trumpets (8:7–12)
      - (1) The first trumpet (8:7)
      - (2) The second trumpet (8:8–9)
      - (3) The third trumpet (8:10–11)
      - (4) The fourth trumpet (8:12)
    - ii. Fifth trumpet (first woe): Demonic locusts (8:13–9:11)
      - (1) An eagle warns of the three woes to come (8:13)
      - (2) A star/angel opens the Abyss (9:1–2)
      - (3) Demonic locusts torture people without the seal of God (9:3–6)
      - (4) The appearance of the scorpion-locusts (9:7–10)
      - (5) Apollyon, the angel of the Abyss (9:11)
    - iii. Sixth trumpet (second woe) (9:12–21)
      - (1) Introduction to the second woe (9:12)
      - (2) Release of the four angels (9:13–15)
      - (3) Description of the demonic army (9:16–19)
      - (4) Refusal to repent (9:20–21)

[The second interlude of 10:1–11:13 occurs here; see below]
    - iv. The seventh trumpet (third woe) (11:14–19)
      - (1) Announcement about the second and third woes (11:14)
      - (2) Heavenly announcement about the eternal kingdom (11:15)

- (3) The elders praise God for consummating the kingdom (11:16–18)
- (4) God unveils his heavenly temple (11:19)
- 8. Second interlude: John’s role as prophet and the church’s role as witness (10:1–11:13)
  - a. John is recommissioned to prophesy (10:1–11)
    - i. Another mighty angel appears (10:1–3a)
    - ii. The seven thunders (10:3b–4)
    - iii. The mighty angel swears an oath (10:5–7)
    - iv. John is commanded to eat the little scroll (10:8–11)
  - b. The two witnesses (11:1–13)
    - i. The command to measure the temple (11:1–2)
    - ii. The ministry and authority of the two witnesses (11:3–6)
    - iii. The beast kills the two witnesses (11:7)
    - iv. The world celebrates their death (11:8–10)
    - v. The resurrection and ascension of the two witnesses (11:11–12)
    - vi. Scene of judgment and confession (11:13)
- 9. Third interlude: The cosmic war between God and the forces of evil (12:1–14:20)
  - a. The false trinity versus God and his people (12:1–13:18)
    - i. The woman, the son, and the dragon (12:1–6)
      - (1) The great sign: A pregnant woman (12:1–2)
      - (2) Another sign: A red dragon (12:3)
      - (3) The dragon prepares to devour the child (12:4)
      - (4) God protects the woman and her son (12:5–6)
    - ii. The war in heaven (12:7–12)
      - (1) The heavenly war between Michael and the dragon (12:7–9)
        - (a) The war described (12:7–8)
        - (b) Satan and his angels defeated and cast down to earth (12:9)
      - (2) Proclamation song celebrating God’s victory (12:10–12)
        - (a) The proclamation of God’s victory (12:10a)
        - (b) The reason for the celebration (12:10b)
        - (c) The way believers triumph over Satan (12:11)
        - (d) Rejoicing in heaven but woe to the earth (12:12)
    - iii. The earthly war between the dragon and the woman and her children (12:13–17)
      - (1) The dragon pursues the woman (12:13)
      - (2) God provides protection for the woman (12:14)

- (3) The earth rescues the woman from the dragon's ongoing attacks (12:15–16)
- (4) The dragon attacks the woman's other children (12:17)
- iv. The beast from the sea (13:1–10)
  - (1) The beast emerges from the sea (13:1a)
  - (2) A description of the beast (13:1b–2)
  - (3) The dragon empowers the beast (13:2b)
  - (4) The fatal wound is healed (13:3a)
  - (5) The people of the world worship the dragon and the beast (13:3b–4)
  - (6) God permits the beast to fulfill its role (13:5–7)
    - (a) God allows the beast to blaspheme and slander God and his people (13:5–6)
    - (b) God allows the beast to battle and conquer the saints (13:7a)
    - (c) God allows the beast to have worldwide authority (13:7b)
  - (7) The inhabitants of the earth worship the beast (13:8)
  - (8) Believers called to faithful endurance (13:9–10)
- v. The beast from the earth (13:11–18)
  - (1) The nature of the second beast (the false prophet) (13:11)
  - (2) Its relationship to the first beast (13:12)
  - (3) Its ministry of religious deception (13:13–15)
  - (4) The mark of the beast and number of its name (13:16–18)
- b. The Lamb and the 144,000 (14:1–5)
  - i. The Lamb and the 144,000 on Mount Zion (14:1)
  - ii. The 144,000 sing a new song (14:2–3)
  - iii. The godly character of the 144,000 (14:4–5)
- c. Proclamations of judgment and reward (14:6–13)
  - i. First angel: Proclaiming the eternal gospel (14:6–7)
  - ii. Second angel: The fall of Babylon (14:8)
  - iii. Third angel: Judgment of the beast's followers (14:9–11)
  - iv. God's people called to endurance (14:12)
  - v. Second beatitude: Blessing on those who die in the Lord (14:13)
- d. The harvest of the earth (14:14–20)
  - i. The grain harvest (14:14–16)
  - ii. The grape harvest (14:17–20)
- 10. The bowl judgments (15:1–16:21)
  - a. Seven angels with the seven plagues (15:1–8)
    - i. Another great and marvelous sign (15:1)
    - ii. God's victorious people celebrate (15:2–4)
    - iii. Seven angels are given the bowls (15:5–8)

- b. The bowl judgments (16:1–21)
  - i. Seven angels commanded to pour out seven bowls (16:1)
  - ii. First bowl: Sores on people who worship the beast (16:2)
  - iii. Second bowl: Sea turns to blood (16:3)
  - iv. Third bowl: Rivers and springs turn to blood (16:4)
  - v. Hymn of praise for God’s justice (16:5–7)
  - vi. Fourth bowl: Sun scorches people (16:8–9)
  - vii. Fifth bowl: Darkness covers throne and kingdom of beast (16:10–11)
  - viii. Sixth bowl: Preparation for epic battle (16:12–16)
  - ix. Seventh bowl: The final judgment (16:17–21)
- 11. The destruction of Babylon the Great (17:1–19:5)
  - a. The vision of the great prostitute and the scarlet beast (17:1–6)
    - i. John invited to witness the judgment of the prostitute (17:1–2)
    - ii. John’s vision of the great prostitute (17:3–6)
  - b. The interpretation of the vision (17:7–18)
    - i. The beast and his influence (17:7–8)
    - ii. The seven heads and the beast (17:9–11)
    - iii. The ten horns and their war with the Lamb (17:12–14)
    - iv. The beast and ten horns destroy the prostitute (17:15–18)
  - c. The coming judgment calls for the saints to leave Babylon (18:1–8)
    - i. The angel announces the fall of Babylon (18:1–2a)
    - ii. Babylon’s demonic character and adulterous influence (18:2b–3)
    - iii. God’s people commanded to leave Babylon (18:4)
    - iv. Divine judgment urged/demanded and explained (18:5–8)
  - d. Three funeral laments over Babylon the Great (18:9–19)
    - i. Lament of kings (18:9–10)
    - ii. Lament of merchants (18:11–17a)
    - iii. Lament of mariners (18:17b–19)
  - e. God’s judgment of Babylon calls for rejoicing and praise (18:20–19:5)
    - i. Call for the heavens and saints to rejoice (18:20)
    - ii. The destruction of Babylon (18:21–24)
    - iii. The great multitude in heaven praises God (19:1–3)
    - iv. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures praise God (19:4)
    - v. The voice from the throne calls for praise (19:5)

12. The final victory (19:6–20:15)
  - a. The announcement of the wedding of the Lamb (19:6–10)
    - i. The great multitude sings the hallelujah chorus (19:6–8)
    - ii. The angel commands John to write a beatitude (19:9)
    - iii. John reminded to worship God alone (19:10)
  - b. The Warrior Messiah conquers the two beasts and their followers (19:11–21)
    - i. Attributes of the Warrior Messiah (19:11–13, 16)
    - ii. The armies of heaven (19:14)
    - iii. Actions of the Warrior Messiah (19:11, 15)
    - iv. Invitation to the great supper of God (19:17–18)
    - v. The Warrior Messiah conquers his enemies (19:19–21)
  - c. The temporary imprisonment of Satan (20:1–3)
    - i. An angel seizes and imprisons the dragon (20:1–3a)
    - ii. The purpose and length of his imprisonment (20:3b)
  - d. The millennial reign (20:4–6)
    - i. The faithful given authority to judge (20:4a–4c)
    - ii. The first resurrection and reigning with Christ (20:4d, 5b–6)
    - iii. The rest of the dead (20:5a)
  - e. Satan’s release, defeat, and punishment (20:7–10)
    - i. Satan released from his prison (20:7)
    - ii. Satan deceives the wicked and gathers them for battle (20:8–9a)
    - iii. God wins the final battle (20:9b)
    - iv. Satan thrown into fiery lake (20:10)
  - f. The final judgment (20:11–15)
    - i. God on his throne (20:11)
    - ii. The dead are judged (20:12–13)
    - iii. Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire (20:14)
    - iv. The wicked are thrown into the lake of fire (20:15)
13. The new creation: God’s presence among his people (21:1–22:5)
  - a. The new heaven and new earth (21:1–8)
    - i. The vision of the new creation (21:1–2)
    - ii. The fulfillment of God’s promised presence (21:3–4)
    - iii. God’s sevenfold speech (21:5–8)
  - b. A vision of the new Jerusalem (21:9–22:5)
    - i. An angel gives John a tour of the heavenly city (21:9–10)
    - ii. A description of the heavenly city (21:11–21)
      - (1) The glorious grandeur of the city (21:11)
      - (2) The city wall, gates, and foundation stones (21:12–14)

- (3) Measurements of the city (21:15–17)
- (4) Materials used to build the city (21:18–21)
- iii. The internal features of the temple city (21:22–27)
  - (1) The temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb (21:22)
  - (2) God and the Lamb illuminate the city (21:23)
  - (3) The gates will never close because night is no more (21:25)
  - (4) The nations will bring their glory into the glorious city (21:24, 26)
  - (5) Only those whose names are in the book of life will enter (21:27)
- iv. The garden city as paradise transformed (22:1–5)
  - (1) The river of life (22:1–2a)
  - (2) The tree of life (22:2b)
  - (3) No curse (22:3a)
  - (4) The throne of God and the Lamb (22:3b)
  - (5) The servants of God (22:3c–5)
- 14. The conclusion (22:6–21)
  - a. Blessing for those who obey the authentic revelation from God (22:6–7)
    - i. The true and trustworthy revelation from God (22:6)
    - ii. Jesus’s promise to return soon (22:7a)
    - iii. Blessing for those who obey the prophecy (22:7b)
  - b. The angel’s commands (22:8–11)
    - i. John’s response to the prophecy (22:8)
    - ii. Worship only God (22:9)
    - iii. Do not seal the book (22:10)
    - iv. To the unrighteous and the righteous (22:11)
  - c. Christ speaks (22:12–16)
    - i. Christ is coming soon with his reward (22:12)
    - ii. Christ’s divine identity (22:13)
    - iii. Blessing and warning (22:14–15)
    - iv. Jesus has given the revelation to the churches (22:16a)
      - v. Jesus verifies his identity (22:16b)
  - d. Exhortation to come to Christ (22:17)
  - e. Warning against adding to or taking away from the book (22:18–19)
  - f. Final promise of and prayer for Christ’s return (22:20)
  - g. Concluding benediction (22:21)

# The Revelation of Jesus Christ

## Big Idea

*Jesus Christ has revealed to his servant John a prophetic vision about God's plans for consummating human history, a vision that will bring blessing for those who hear and obey its message.*

## Key Themes

- God is revealing his plans for consummating human history.
- The prophetic vision centers on the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.
- God's revelation comes through Jesus Christ to the apostle John, who testifies to everything he saw.
- The fulfillment of the prophetic vision has begun but awaits future final fulfillment.
- Believers who hear and obey the prophecy will be blessed by God.

## Understanding the Text

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### The Text in Context

The introduction to the book of Revelation, which runs through verse 20, begins with a statement of the book's title: "the revelation from Jesus Christ" (1:1a). Next, we are told how the heavenly vision was communicated to John (1:1b) and how this resulted in John's testimony (1:2). The first paragraph closes with the first of seven beatitudes, or blessings, that appear throughout the book (1:3; cf. 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; see sidebar). The opening lines of Revelation also introduce many of the main themes of the book: the centrality of God and Christ, the imminent fulfillment of God's plans, angelic mediation, John's role as witness, the nature of the prophecy as proclamation of God's truth and the appropriate response of obedience, and the blessing on those who respond faithfully.



## Outline

1. Introduction (1:1–8)
  - a. Opening (1:1–3)
    - i. Title: “The revelation from Jesus Christ” (1:1a)
    - ii. Chain of revelation (1:1b)
    - iii. Results of revelation (1:2)
    - iv. First beatitude (1:3)

## Interpretive Insights

**1:1–2** *The revelation from Jesus Christ.* Ancient authors often provided the title of the book and a summary of its contents in the opening line.<sup>1</sup> The Greek term *apokalypsis* (“revelation”) means something unveiled, revealed, or made known. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the same noun is used for the revelation of truth in a general sense (e.g., Luke 2:32; Eph. 1:17), for more specific revelation as in a prophetic vision (1 Cor. 14:6, 26; 2 Cor. 12:1, 7; Gal. 1:12; 2:2), for making known the gospel (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:3), and for end-time disclosures of God’s righteous judgment, God’s people, and God’s Son (Rom. 2:5; 8:19; 1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7, 13; 4:13). As a result, we can see that the term used for the title of the book already carried connotations associated with prophetic visions and the last days.

The expression “of/from Jesus Christ” could be understood in several ways: (1) objective genitive, revelation about Jesus, the central figure in the book; (2) subjective genitive, revelation coming from Jesus; or (3) plenary (full) genitive, revelation both from and about Jesus. Most scholars favor the subjective genitive because of the immediate context where God gives the revelation to Jesus, who then sends his angel to proclaim the message to John and others (also Rev. 22:16). Yet the plenary genitive takes into consideration both the immediate context and the larger context of the entire book, of which this term serves as the title, where Jesus is indeed the primary figure.<sup>2</sup>

*to show his servants what must soon take place.* The revelation deals with what must “soon” (*en tachei*) take place. Drawing on Daniel 2:28–29, where Daniel sees events happening “in the last days,” John substitutes “soon” for “the last days” to emphasize that he is living in the last days when Old Testament prophecy is beginning to be fulfilled (see also Rev. 22:6).<sup>3</sup> By “soon” John does not mean “quickly once it begins.” Rather, his prophetic outlook stresses that the fulfillment of prophecy has already begun and that “the end is always imminent.”<sup>4</sup> As Osborne points out, the “language of imminence intends to draw the reader into a sense of expectation and responsibility, a sense meant to characterize every age of the church.”<sup>5</sup> God is revealing his plan

to overthrow evil once and for all and deliver his people into the new heaven and new earth where they can enjoy life in his presence forever.

*He made it known.* We also see here the chain of revelation: God → Jesus → his angel → his servant John → other servants (cf. Rev. 22:6, 8, 16). God and Christ together communicate the visionary message through an angel to John and finally to other believers. In apocalyptic literature, God often communicates his message through angels who often assist the person receiving the visions (e.g., Rev. 17:1, 7; 21:9; Dan. 7–12; Ezek. 40–48; Zech. 1–6; 1 En. 1:2; 72:1; Jub. 32:21; 3 Bar. 1:8; 6:1). Although the apostle John was well respected as an early Christian leader, he is characterized here only as a “servant” (*doulos*) among servants. Interestingly, “servants” is one of the most prominent terms for Christians throughout the book (Rev. 1:1; 2:20; 7:3; 10:7; 11:18; 15:3; 19:2, 5; 22:3, 6). John receives honor not by clinging to titles of authority but by identifying with fellow believers in their suffering (Rev. 1:9; cf. Rom. 1:1; Titus 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1).

This verse also speaks volumes about how the revelation is communicated, again relying on Daniel 2, where Greek terms found in Revelation 1 are used repeatedly (e.g., *apokalyptō*, *sēmainō*, *dei*).<sup>6</sup> In the context of Daniel 2, God communicated through symbols:

Dan. 2:23: “I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors . . . you *have made known* [*sēmainō*] to us the dream of the king.”

Dan. 2:45: “The great God *has shown* [*sēmainō*] the king what will take place in the future.”

Just as God communicated to Daniel through symbols, so he communicates to John in the same manner. The term “made it known” (*sēmainō*) suggests revelation through symbolic communication or picture language.<sup>7</sup> In addition, we are told that Christ “shows” (*deiknymi*) the vision to his servants through an angel (see the term elsewhere in Rev. 1:1; 4:1; 17:1; 21:9, 10; 22:1, 6, 8). This cluster of terms—revelation, show, made known—indicates that the visions of Revelation were communicated by means of symbols, and that is how the book should be interpreted as a general rule.

*John, who testifies.* We have the book of Revelation because of John’s visionary experience and his written testimony about it—he “testifies to everything he saw.” God works through both heavenly visions and Spirit-inspired human minds. The content of John’s visions consists of “the word of God” (Rev. 1:2, 9; 6:9; [14:12]; 17:17; 19:9, 13; 20:4) and the “testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 1:2, 9; 12:17; [14:12]; 19:10 [2x]; 20:4)—two somewhat synonymous phrases that describe the message of God’s great story communicated through his prophets and apostles, especially centering on the gospel.

**1:3** *Blessed is the one . . . , and blessed are those.* This is the first of seven beatitudes in the book of Revelation (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). In this case, we have a double blessing: (1) on the one who has the ability and courage to read aloud the book of Revelation to the gathered church, and (2) on those who gather to listen to its message and obey what they hear. In the first century, most people (as high as 85 percent of the general populace) were illiterate. Also, we tend to forget that the early Christians did not own a private copy of the Scriptures. As a result, the public reading of Scripture during worship gatherings became a priority (e.g., Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; 1 Tim. 4:13). Interestingly, John expects this prophecy to be obeyed, emphasizing the nature of the book as proclamation of God’s truth with ethical implications, and not simply a prediction of future events. The phrase “the time is near,” like “soon” in 1:1, is yet another expression of imminence (cf. Mark 1:15, where Jesus says the kingdom of God “has come near”).

### Theological Insights

The opening paragraph of the book of Revelation is similar to some prophetic introductions in the Old Testament (e.g., Jer. 1:1–2; Ezek. 1:1–3; Hos. 1:1; Amos 1:1). Like Old Testament prophecies, the emphasis falls on proclamation of God’s plan for the present and not merely on predicting what God will do in the future, on forthtelling as well as foretelling. Just as Jesus announced the arrival of the kingdom of God with his coming, so John announces the beginning of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in his vision (specifically called a “prophecy” in 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18–19). This “already/not fully” understanding of Christian eschatology serves as the foundation to the entire New Testament, the book of Revelation included. In Revelation, however, the final fulfillment receives additional attention for at least two reasons: (1) the book serves as the concluding chapter to the great story, where the final fulfillment is in view; and (2) the churches first receiving this transforming vision were in crisis and desperately needed the sustaining hope that a picture of God’s final future could provide. As a result, the language of imminent fulfillment runs through the book of Revelation beginning with the opening paragraph.

### Teaching the Text

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1. *We have hope because God has spoken and continues to speak about his plans for human history, plans that center on Jesus Christ.* It’s important to connect the opening chapter of Revelation with what we see in Revelation 2–3. Much of what the seven churches of Asia Minor once faced, we too now

## Beatitudes in Revelation

The book of Revelation includes seven beatitudes, or “blessings” (cf. Matt. 5:3–12; Luke 6:20–23). The beatitudes in 1:3 and 22:7 promise a blessing for faithfully appropriating the book (i.e., reading the prophecy aloud or obeying its message). Every other beatitude promises an eschatological blessing at the final consummation: experiencing the presence of God (implied in 14:13), being prepared for Christ’s re-

turn (16:15), receiving an invitation to the wedding supper of the Lamb (19:9), sharing in the first resurrection and remaining untouched by the second death (20:6), and enjoying the privilege of eating from the tree of life and entering the eternal city (22:14). The beatitudes, much like the promises to the victors in Revelation 2–3, summarize the challenges and rewards of overcoming.

1:3	<b>Blessed</b> is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and <b>blessed</b> are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.
14:13	Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this: <b>Blessed</b> are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.”
16:15	“Look, I come like a thief! <b>Blessed</b> is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed.”
19:9	Then the angel said to me, “Write this: <b>Blessed</b> are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”
20:6	<b>Blessed</b> and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.
22:7	“Look, I am coming soon! <b>Blessed</b> is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.”
22:14	<b>Blessed</b> are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.”

face, whether it be the seductive pull of a secular culture or strong opposition from that same culture. The foundation of our hope lies not in our own circumstances but in God’s faithfulness to speak and act in Christ, including the promise to one day make all things new. It’s important to remind believers that the vision was given not just to John but to all God’s people (i.e., “his servants”). God is not silent. He cares about what is happening to his people and is doing something about it.

2. *The prophetic vision has begun to be fulfilled but awaits final fulfillment. Therefore, we live in the last days with a sense of eschatological expectation.* The perspective of this commentary is that the last days foreseen by Daniel began to be fulfilled with the coming of Jesus Christ. Like John and the Christians in Asia Minor, we too live in the last days (cf. Rev. 12:6, 10–17). We are

fighting the same battles and receiving the same comfort as the first-century believers in Asia Minor. Paul sums up the mind-set well in Romans 13:11: “And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.” The imminence of the final fulfillment of God’s plan calls us to live each day with a sense of urgency and abandonment to the purposes of God (i.e., as though it were our last day). From another vantage point, the “end” is always imminent in the sense that we could die at any time.

One caution is in order here. The “nearness” of the final consummation should not be misinterpreted as permission to engage in speculation or date setting about end-time events. Jesus explicitly said that it was our job not to know times and dates set by the Father but to do what we’ve been told to do as his church (Acts 1:7; Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32–37; 1 Thess. 5:1–11). It is no coincidence that in the same context where John affirms the nearness of the time, he also stresses the priority of testifying to Jesus (v. 2).

3. *The promised blessing is for those who listen to and obey God’s Word.* Here we have another opportunity to emphasize the importance of knowing and living out God’s Word. Biblical illiteracy is a growing problem in the contemporary church. The ancient practice of listening to the Scriptures, rather than reading them silently to ourselves, may offer a helpful spiritual discipline for the church today. In addition, Revelation supports an added emphasis on the public reading of large sections of text. But listening by itself is not enough. The message must be taken to heart and lived out. Perhaps surprisingly, Revelation has much to say about discipleship. The blessing is not for those who engage in eschatological speculation but for those who “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (Rev. 14:4).

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## Illustrating the Text

*Jesus lies at the center of God’s plan for human history.*

**Contrasting Concept:** If we don’t recognize the main character, a story will not make sense. Pick a popular movie or book and consider what might happen if the reader believed a secondary character was the hero. For example, if someone believed the main character of *Star Wars* was C-3PO, she would constantly wonder, “Why don’t they give this droid more lines?”

*We must live each day as though it were our last.*

**Pop Culture:** Remember when *Tetris* was one of the coolest video games in existence? The premise was simple: A series of differently shaped blocks descended from the top of the screen. The goal was to line up the blocks like a puzzle, clearing each row of blocks and buying yourself more time. No

matter how skilled, every player eventually experienced the “game changing moment,” when the blocks started coming more quickly and the margin for error shrank to a hairbreadth.

The message of Revelation is that we are all living in the game-changing moment of history. Each day is significant, taking us closer to the imminent end. We have limited time and fleeting opportunities to live a life of faithfulness. (If your setting allows for it, you could display a *Tetris* screenshot or even a game in progress on a smartphone or tablet.)

***It is important to keep our focus on the main message of Revelation.***

**Human Experience:** Years ago, the most serious distractions for drivers might have been finding a decent radio station or dealing with fighting kids in the backseat. In our age of smartphones, we have texting, status updates, phone calls, and ten thousand songs at the tips of our fingers—and fighting kids in the backseat.

**A lot of us have had the same experience:** Driving along, we receive a text. Acting against our better judgment, we take our eyes off the road and shoot back a reply. Some of us may have actually looked up and realized we crossed the center line or nearly ran a stop light. The reality sinks in: “My focus was totally misplaced. I’m driving a car, not sitting on a couch!”

When we lose focus on the central message of Scripture about the end times (to endure in faithfulness to Jesus), we drift off course. Soon, things that are really not priorities can dominate our field of vision. At best, the truth intended to bring us hope and comfort becomes obscured and lost. At worst, we drift into vain speculations and take our eyes off our true mission.

***God promises blessing for those who know and live out his Word.***

**Bible:** Psalm 1 can provide illustrations of the difference between a fruitful and a barren life.