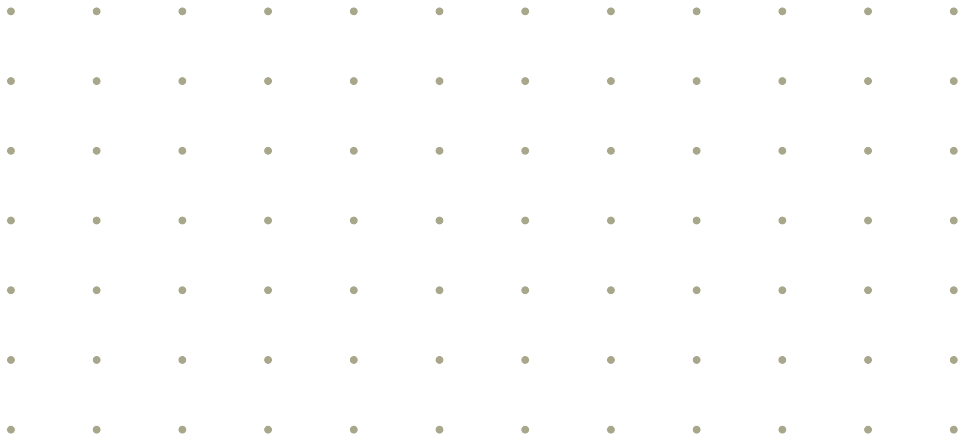




REVELATION

A 12-WEEK STUDY

Stephen Witmer



J. I. Packer

THEOLOGICAL EDITOR

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KNOWING THE BIBLE

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Genesis	Matthew	Galatians
Exodus	Mark	Philippians
Ruth/Esther	Luke	Colossians/Philemon
Psalms	John	Hebrews
Proverbs	Acts	James
Isaiah	Romans	Revelation
Daniel	1 Corinthians	

• • • • • •

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REVELATION

A 12-WEEK STUDY



Stephen Witmer

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S E R I E S P R E F A C E

KNOWING THE BIBLE, as the series title indicates, was created to help readers know and understand the meaning, the message, and the God of the Bible. Each volume in the series consists of 12 units that progressively take the reader through a clear, concise study of that book of the Bible. In this way, any given volume can fruitfully be used in a 12-week format either in group study, such as in a church-based context, or in individual study. Of course, these 12 studies could be completed in fewer or more than 12 weeks, as convenient, depending on the context in which they are used.

Each study unit gives an overview of the text at hand before digging into it with a series of questions for reflection or discussion. The unit then concludes by highlighting the gospel of grace in each passage (“Gospel Glimpses”), identifying whole-Bible themes that occur in the passage (“Whole-Bible Connections”), and pinpointing Christian doctrines that are affirmed in the passage (“Theological Soundings”).

The final component to each unit is a section for reflecting on personal and practical implications from the passage at hand. The layout provides space for recording responses to the questions proposed, and we think readers need to do this to get the full benefit of the exercise. The series also includes definitions of key words. These definitions are indicated by a note number in the text and are found at the end of each chapter.

Lastly, for help in understanding the Bible in this deeper way, we would urge the reader to use the ESV Bible and the *ESV Study Bible*, which are available online at www.esvbible.org. The *Knowing the Bible* series is also available online. Additional 12-week studies covering each book of the Bible will be added as they become available.

May the Lord greatly bless your study as you seek to know him through knowing his Word.

J. I. Packer
Lane T. Dennis

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW



Getting Acquainted

The book of Revelation is extraordinary in every way—not least in its hard-to-classify genre.¹ It is prophecy (1:3; 22:19) while also belonging to the genre of apocalyptic² writing (1:1), and it begins and ends with features that characterize the epistles of the New Testament (1:4–5; 22:21). Like other Jewish apocalypses, Revelation is filled with symbolic images from beginning to end. This allows for numerous possible interpretations of the book, and much diversity of opinion on matters such as the tribulation, the rapture, and the millennium.

Revelation begins with a vision of the resurrected and ascended Christ and his words to seven first-century churches in Asia Minor that were facing a range of challenges: persecution from without, false teaching from within, temptation to compromise with the surrounding pagan culture, and spiritual lethargy. The book then covers a vast sweep of time, from the first century all the way to the return of Christ.

Central to Revelation is its assertion that Christ has already won the victory over Satan through his death, and has therefore freed Christians from their sins by his blood (1:5). Christ's past, inaugurated (i.e., already begun) victory guarantees his future, consummated (i.e., fully completed) victory (2:26–27). Because Christ has already conquered Satan through his uniquely redemptive suffering, Christians can also “conquer” in the present by holding fast their witness in the face of enticing temptation or violent persecution, even if their faithful witness results in death.

Placing It in the Larger Story

Through its pervasive allusions to the Old Testament, Revelation demonstrates that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment and climax of history. Believers live after Jesus' first coming, suffering as he suffered, but full of hope because of his atoning death and their assurance of his future, victorious return. The entire book strains forward to the new heaven and new earth described in chapters 21–22.

Key Verse

“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (Rev. 1:5b–6)

Date and Historical Background

Revelation was written by a man named John (1:1), most likely John the son of Zebedee, as suggested by early church tradition and indicated by links between Revelation and the Gospel of John (e.g., Jesus is the “Lamb” of God and the “Word” in both books). This is the John who was one of Jesus' original 12 disciples, and probably the one identified in John's Gospel as the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 21:20). John likely wrote Revelation in the mid-90s AD, near the end of the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian, while in exile on the island of Patmos.

Outline

- I. Prologue (1:1–8)
- II. Substance (1:9–22:5)
 - A. God's people imperfect in the world (1:9–3:22)
 1. The son of man among the lampstands (1:9–20)
 2. Seven letters to seven churches (2:1–3:22)
 - B. The Lamb and the seven seals (4:1–8:1)
 1. The Lamb receives the scroll (4:1–5:14)
 2. The Lamb opens the seven seals (6:1–8:1)
 - C. The seven angels and seven trumpets (8:2–11:19)

- 1. Prayers go up; fire comes down (8:2–5)
- 2. The seven trumpets are blown (8:6–11:19)
- D. The cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan (12:1–14:20)
- E. The seven angels and seven bowls (15:1–16:21)
 - 1. Heaven’s sanctuary is filled with glory (15:1–8)
 - 2. The seven bowls are poured out (16:1–21)
- F. The judgment of God’s enemies (17:1–20:15)
 - 1. Babylon, the beast, the false prophet (17:1–19:21)
 - 2. Satan (20:1–10)
 - 3. Unbelievers (20:11–15)
- G. God’s people perfect in glory (21:1–22:5)
- III. Epilogue (22:6–21)

As You Get Started . . .

When you think of the book of Revelation, what comes to mind? Do you think it refers mainly to events in the first century, events in our day, or events in the distant future?

Are you more intimidated or more intrigued by the colorful and often bizarre images throughout Revelation? Are there areas of confusion you hope will be cleared up through this study of Revelation?

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

Do you think of Revelation as a book mainly to be understood or to be obeyed, or both? Is it intended mainly to give us information, or to change our behavior, or both?

As You Finish This Unit . . .

As we'll see, God gives a blessing to every person who reads, hears, and obeys the words of Revelation (1:3). Take a moment to ask God for this special blessing, and for help in understanding this dazzling and mysterious book.

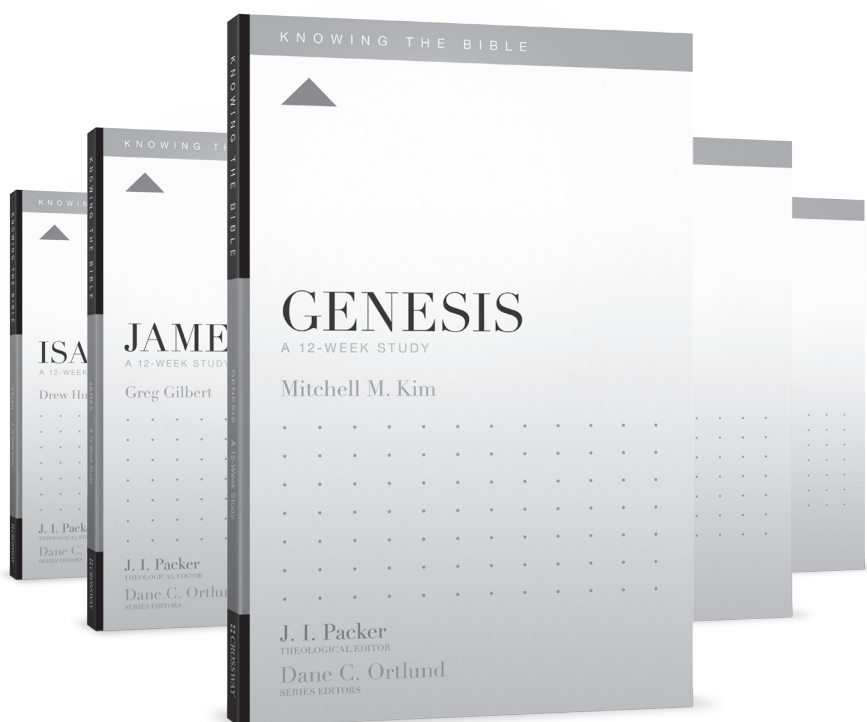
Definitions

¹ **Genre** – A type of literary work, characterized by a particular style, form, and content.

² **Apocalyptic** – The distinctive literary form of the book of Revelation and of chapters 7–12 of Daniel. These parts of Scripture include revelation about the future, highly symbolic imagery, and the underlying belief that God himself will one day end the world in its present form and establish his kingdom on a re-created earth.

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THE BOOK OF REVELATION has been a source of both great encouragement and great confusion to Christians throughout the centuries.

In this accessible study, Stephen Witmer helps readers understand and appreciate Revelation's core message: Jesus Christ has already defeated Satan, sin, and death on our behalf—a truth that gives us great hope for the future.

ABOUT THE *KNOWING THE BIBLE* SERIES

Over the course of 12 weeks, these studies explore books of the Bible and:

- Ask thoughtful questions to spur discussion
- Show how each passage unveils the gospel
- Tie the text in with the whole story of Scripture
- Illuminate the doctrines taught in each passage
- Invite you to discover practical implications
- Help you better understand and apply God's Word

“Knowing the Bible brings together a gifted team of Bible teachers to produce a high-quality series of study guides.”

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“Here are carefully wrought studies that will ignite the mind and the heart.”

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GRAEME L. GOLDSWORTHY,
author, *According to Plan*

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BIBLE STUDY

