

UNVEILING HOPE

Lesson 1

Revelation 1



WELCOME

What are some of your past experiences with the book of Revelation, whether read, preached, interpreted, etc.? After reading the preface and introductory information of this study guide, what are your thoughts and feelings as you begin this study?

INTRODUCTION

The first chapter of *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* reads mostly like the introductory greeting of a letter. It is in this chapter that John introduces himself and begins to tell of his vision—the glorious vision that reveals Jesus as the ultimate Overcomer.

“As you read and study Revelation, don’t focus so much on the timetable of the events or the details of John’s imagery that you miss the main message—the *infinite love, power and justice of the Lord Jesus Christ.*”¹

Tips for meaningful engagement with the Word:

- The Scripture in this lesson is broken into two sections with the questions listed after each section. The verse numbers have been removed from the Scripture passages and footnotes have been inserted. These footnotes are intended to help clarify the passage and provide better understanding.

¹ *Life Application Study Bible*, 2167 (emphasis added)



WORD

As you come to the Word, pause and ask God to make it come alive for you. Ask Him to make it understandable and transformational.

Revelation 1:1–8

This is a revelation² from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants the events that must soon take place. He sent an angel to present this revelation to his servant John, who faithfully reported everything he saw. This is his report of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. God blesses the one who reads the words of this prophecy³ to the church, and he blesses all who listen to its message and obey what it says,⁴ for the time is near.⁵

This letter⁶ is from John to the seven churches in the province of Asia.⁷ Grace and peace to you from the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come; from the sevenfold Spirit⁸ before his throne; and from Jesus Christ. He is the faithful witness to these things, the first to rise from the dead, and the ruler of all the kings of the world.

² “The book of Revelation is an apocalypse, or in Greek *apokalypsis*. This is the word we translate as ‘revelation’... [It] means ‘unveiling’ or ‘disclosure.’ The last book of the Bible is the unveiling of Jesus Christ.” (Johnson, 25-26)

³ “In the biblical world, the word prophecy does not so much connote ‘prediction’ as it does ‘declaration.’ The heart of biblical prophecy is not ‘look what is coming,’ but, ‘thus says the Lord.’ This is not to say that God does not enable some of his people to predict the future ... It is simply to say that in ‘prophecy’ God is enabling some of his people, ‘prophets,’ to see what others could not see, especially concerning God’s will.” (Johnson, 25)

⁴ This is the first of seven beatitudes in Revelation. (Barton, 4) These beatitudes announce the blessings awaiting the faithful. This first beatitude promises a blessing for reading, listening and obeying the book. “John expects this prophecy to be obeyed, emphasizing the nature of the book as a proclamation of God’s truth with ethical implications, and not simply a prediction of future events.” (Duvall, 22) The other beatitudes in Revelation are found in **14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14.**

⁵ This references Christ’s second coming. “Believers must be ready for Christ’s second coming. The Last Judgment and the establishment of God’s kingdom are certainly near. No one knows when these events will occur, so all believers must be prepared. They will happen quickly, with no second chance to change minds or sides.” (Barton, 4)

⁶ The book of Revelation is the longest letter in the New Testament. It is written in the style of other first-century letters with a greeting and an ending. (Johnson, 25)

⁷ These were not the only churches in Asia at this time. While the seven churches were actual churches, they also represent all churches throughout the ages. (Barton, 5)

⁸ “The ‘sevenfold Spirit’ has been identified by some to mean the seven angelic beings or messengers for the churches ... Others have interpreted this to refer to those angels that accompany Christ at his return (**Luke 9:26; 1 Timothy 5:21**). But the reference to the Trinity here gives more weight to the interpretation that the sevenfold Spirit is the Holy Spirit. The number seven is used throughout Revelation to symbolize completeness and perfection.” (Barton, 6)

All glory to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by shedding his blood for us. He has made us a Kingdom of priests⁹ for God his Father. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen. Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven.

*And everyone will see him—
even those who pierced him.*

*And all the nations of the world
will mourn for him.¹⁰*

Yes! Amen!

“I am the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end,” says the Lord God. “I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come—the Almighty One.”

1. The New International Version translation of **Revelation 1:3** reads:
Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.
How does **verse three** help you feel more comfortable reading this book?

2. According to **Revelation 1:5–7**, Jesus was the first to rise from the dead and is the ruler of all the kings of the world. He loves us and has freed us from our sins by shedding His blood for us. The verses also state that Jesus will return and everyone will see Him.

a. John was writing to a people who were experiencing persecution.
How might these truths about Jesus have helped them?

⁹ “This saying describes the Christians as the continuation of the Old Testament people of God—his kingdom and his priests (see also **1 Peter 2:5, 9**). Together believers make up a kingdom of which Christ is their King.” (Barton, 7)

¹⁰ When Jesus returns, it will be visible and victorious, all will see Him and they will know it is Jesus. Even those who have pierced Him and rejected Him throughout the ages will see him. And “they will mourn because they know they will be facing God and his judgment.” (Barton, 8-9)

- b. Individually, Christians have all been made priests¹¹ and have direct and instant access to God through Christ's sacrifice on the cross.¹² However, there is tension in living on earth with its difficulties and struggles, while trying to hold on to the hope of God's promises. Note and share with your group how the knowledge of your direct access to God helps you while you live in that tension.

Revelation 1:9–20

I, John, am your brother and your partner in suffering and in God's Kingdom and in the patient endurance to which Jesus calls us. I was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the word of God and for my testimony about Jesus. It was the Lord's Day, and I was worshiping in the Spirit.¹³ Suddenly, I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet blast. It said, "Write in a book everything you see, and send it to the seven churches in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."

When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lampstands. And standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man.¹⁴ He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were like flames of fire. His feet were like polished bronze

¹¹ This means we no longer need to approach God through an intercessor; we have direct access to Him. See **Revelation 1:6; 1 Peter 2:9–10**.

¹² Barton, 7

¹³ "Four times in the book of Revelation John says he was 'in the Spirit' (**1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10**). This expression means that the Holy Spirit was giving him a vision—showing him situations and events he could not have seen with mere human eyesight. All true prophecy comes from God through the Holy Spirit (**2 Peter 1:20–21**)." *(Life Application Study Bible, 2177)*

¹⁴ "The title 'Son of Man' occurs many times in the New Testament in reference to Jesus as the Messiah." (Barton, 11) It is used first by Daniel in his apocalyptic writings (**Daniel 7:13–14**). This title "refers to the central figure in history, to the one to whom all the kingdoms of this world are given, to the one to whom all peoples of every age owe allegiance. [It] refers to the pre-existent, heavenly being who comes to establish the kingdom that cannot be destroyed." (Johnson, 42)

refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves.¹⁵ He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth.¹⁶ And his face was like the sun in all its brilliance.¹⁷

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if I were dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said, “Don’t be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living one. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave.

“Write down what you have seen—both the things that are now happening and the things that will happen. This is the meaning of the mystery of the seven stars you saw in my right hand and the seven gold lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches,¹⁸ and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.¹⁹

3. While exiled on the island of Patmos, John was worshiping in the Spirit when he had the vision that became the book of Revelation. “We are in the best position to hear from God when we are regularly experiencing Spirit-led worship,”²⁰ whether in a church service, with a small group, or on your own.
How have you seen this to be true in your life?

¹⁵ Jesus stands in control and in power. “The long robe pictures Jesus as a leader. The gold sash across his chest reveals him as the high priest who goes into God’s presence to obtain forgiveness of sins for those who have believed in him ... His glowing white hair indicates his wisdom and divine nature ... His blazing eyes symbolize judgment of all evil ... and deep insight, not only over the churches, and the believers but over the entire course of history ... The feet like bronze picture an exalted person with great power ... The voice like rushing waters evokes the image of a huge waterfall roaring over a high cliff. Thus, the voice is powerful and awesome.” (Barton, 11)

¹⁶ “This imagery ... indicates that Christ will speak words of both salvation and judgment.” (Fee, 15)

¹⁷ The image of His face shining in brilliance likely anticipates the conclusion of the book where Christ reigns, in heaven and on earth, and the sun is no longer needed for light because of the presence of God and Christ. (Fee, 18)

¹⁸ Christ reveals to John the mystery of the seven stars; they are the angels of the seven churches. Some believe they are the elders or pastors, some believe they are heavenly beings. Whether they are earthly leaders or heavenly messengers, they are accountable to God for the churches they represent. (Barton, 14)

¹⁹ Christ is standing among the seven lampstands that represent the seven churches who were facing difficulties and persecutions; “they must never forget that Christ was standing among them, totally in control.” (Barton, 15)

²⁰ Duvall, 37

4. How might you have reacted if you had been the one to see this extraordinary vision of the Son of Man? (**Revelation 1:13–16**)
- a. In what way is this image of Jesus standing with all power and authority different or the same as the way you typically think of Jesus?
- b. How did Jesus comfort John?
- c. How does this picture of Jesus bring you comfort?
5. Jesus states, “I am the First and the Last. I am the living one. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave.” What comes to mind as you read each of Jesus’ statements?
- I am the First and the Last.
 - I am the living one.
 - I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever!
 - I hold the keys of death and the grave.

6. The first chapter of Revelation unveils hope for those who hear or read this book. As you look forward to studying more of Revelation, what are you hopeful for, personally and for the church?



WORSHIP

Take a moment to enter into a time of worship—both on your own and with your community—to show praise, adoration and love for God.

Revelation 1:5–6 reveals Christ and what He has done:

- Christ is the first to rise from the dead
- Christ is the Ruler of all the kings of the world
- Christ loves us
- Christ has freed us from our sins
- Christ has shed His blood for us
- Christ has made us a Kingdom of priests for God His Father

Praise Jesus for these things He has done.

Close your worship with this prayer:

Jesus, You are mighty, powerful and hold all authority. Yet, You love us enough to shed Your blood to free us from our sins. You have made a way for us to have direct access to You and our hearts are filled with joy. Even though we live in a broken world, we know the end of this story and that gives us hope. All glory and power to You forever and ever!²¹ Amen.

²¹ Revelation 1:6



WITNESS

Believers are called to reflect Christ in the world. This section will help you engage with how to be a witness—reflecting Christ—this week.

“Many hesitate to witness about their faith in Christ because they don’t feel the change in their lives has been spectacular enough. But you qualify as a witness of Jesus because of what he has done for you, not because of what you have done for him. Christ demonstrated his great love by setting us free from our sins through his death on the cross, guaranteeing us a place in his Kingdom, and making us priests to administer God’s love to others.”²²

Take time to brainstorm ways you can extend hope and God’s love to others this week, whether in action, word or through a generous gift of money or time. Write your ideas here, prayerfully committing to act on one of them this week.

Readers' Note: As you prepare for next week, you may notice that lesson two is longer than a typical lesson. However, there are the same amount of questions as usual. The length is due to the background information that is provided for each of the seven churches. You may want to allow some extra time to engage with this lesson.

²² *Life Application Study Bible*, 2168

