

Welcome to Growth Groups at Christ Church! The aim of these groups is that we grow in our knowledge and love of Christ as we share life and seek to serve him together. We are committed therefore to prayer, to time reflecting on God's Word, to caring for each other's needs and to reaching out with Jesus' love. Our prayer through these studies is that he would, "fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives" (Col. 1:9).



You will get the most out of this study by reflecting on it personally, participating in group discussion and by living it out in God's strength in whatever life situations he places you.

Revelation

Triumph of the Lamb

Study 1 – **Behold the King** (Ch. 1)

Study 2 – **Letters to the Church** (Ch. 2-3)

Study 3 – **The Throne Room** (Ch. 4-5)

Study 4 – **The Seven Seals** (Ch. 6-7)

Study 5 – **The Seven Trumpets** (Ch. 8-11)

Study 6 – **Deeper Conflict** (Ch. 12-14)

Study 7 – **The Seven Bowls** (Ch. 15-16)

Study 8 – **The Fall of Babylon** (Ch. 17-19:10)

Study 9 – **The Final Battle** (Ch. 19:11-20)

Study 10 – **The New Creation** (Ch. 21-22)

Introduction

The book of Revelation continues to cause both fear and fascination for many believers today. Fear, because of the many different and sometimes disturbing interpretations out there. Fascination, because of its intriguing content which often so accurately captures the chaotic state of our world today. As we approach this final book in the biblical canon, let's come in a spirit of faith, noting God's promise of blessing for those who hear and heed its message (Rev. 1:3).

The book itself is a record of a vision given to John while he was exiled on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9). The author has traditionally been affirmed as John the apostle and son of Zebedee, who at this stage was clearly well known to the churches in Asia Minor to whom he writes. It will become clear in our study that the church was being threatened by both persecution from the outside as well as false teaching on the inside, all of which was tempting them to compromise with the world. The vision John receives is fundamentally an encouragement for these believers to persevere in faith and faithfulness to Jesus in light of his past victory over sin, Satan and death and in light of his return in final judgement and salvation.

The book is described as a "revelation" (1:1) and as a "prophecy" (1:3) and also shares many characteristics of a first century letter (1:4). It's a book that quotes or alludes to the Old Testament more than any other book in the New Testament, thus highlighting our need to understand the Old Testament story in order to truly grasp its message. In particular it shares much in common with the Old Testament prophetic books of Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah and Zechariah, thus highlighting our need to understand their symbolic style of communication.

The central figure of the book, whom we encounter at the beginning and the end and who mediates the whole revelation, is Jesus Christ himself. Understanding Jesus and the gospel story (his death, resurrection, ascension and return) as the fulfilment of the Old Testament story is thus the central key to understanding the book as a whole.

At the outset we note four broad approaches that impact the way Revelation has been read. The **preterist** view sees the majority of the prophecies of Revelation having been fulfilled in the past (praeter=past), either in the destruction of Jerusalem (symbolically named 'Babylon') in 70AD or in the fall of the Roman Empire. The **futurist** view sees everything after the letters (Ch. 2-3) as relating to the future, including events like "the millennium" and "the tribulation". The **historicist** view sees Revelation as a roadmap of all history which gives us something of a timetable leading up to Jesus' return and by which we might learn to discern the "signs of the times" in contemporary events. The **idealist** view sees the entire book as a symbolic presentation of the battle between good and evil. In

Resources for further study

Beale, G.K. 2015. *Revelation: a shorter commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Goldsworthy, G. 1994. *The Gospel in Revelation*. Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster.

Wilcock, M. 1975. *The Message of Revelation: I Saw Heaven Opened*. The Bible Speaks Today Series. Leicester, UK: IVP.

Online

The Bible Project overview - thebibleproject.com/explore/revelation/

Third Millennium ministries - thirdmill.org/seminary/course.asp/vs/rev

St Helen's study notes - www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/bible-study-resources

Sermons by Martin Morrison - christchurchmidrand.co.za/resources2016.html

These studies are designed to be an interactive guide to help us explore, understand and apply the book together. As always, you will get the most from God's Word by humbly and prayerfully crying out to him for understanding (Prov. 2:3) and being willing to listen and learn from others (Prov. 1:5).

As you work through each study, we encourage you to be thinking through application in terms of the "Head, Heart, Hands" model outlined below. Along with the regular meaning and observation questions, we will sometimes specifically flag a question as focussing on one of these key application areas.



Head – how does this passage challenge us to think differently about God, the world and ourselves?



Heart – how does this passage challenge our deepest affections (hopes, fears, dreams etc.)?



Hands – in what concrete ways does this passage challenge us to live differently as individuals and as a community?

3. What echoes does this chapter have with the Old Testament passages below?
What point is being made?
- Daniel 2:27-28, 44-45

 - Exodus 19:5-6

 - Daniel 7:9-14; 10:4-9
4. How is Jesus described in this passage (titles, symbols, achievements etc.)
and what is the significance of each of these?



5. Is Revelation about the past, the present or the future? Discuss.



6. How is this vision of Jesus an encouragement or challenge to you/us in the struggles you/we face?

Study 2

Letters to the Church

2:1-3:22

These seven letters represent the heart of the 'application' of Revelation for which the vision that follows supplies the necessary motivation. While Jesus addresses each of the seven churches in a way that is unique to their context, the fact that exactly seven are singled out suggests that these letters have significance for the whole church in every age. In these letters the whole church is called to believe and obey the gospel at an ever deeper level, looking to Christ's completed victory and to God's ultimate reward.



Read Revelation 2:1-3:22

1. Use the table below to help identify the pattern of the letters

Church...	The words of...	I know...	Challenge or warning...	The one who is victorious
Ephesus				
Smyrna				
Pergamum				
Thyatira				
Sardis				
Philadelphia				
Laodicea				



5. What particular challenge here resonates most closely with you/us?



6. In light of these letters, what can you/we practically do to ensure that we continue to grow in our love and obedience to Jesus?



5. How are God and the Lamb related in this vision?



6. What is the natural response to seeing this ultimate reality with the eyes of faith?

3. In what ways is 7:1-17 the answer to the question of 6:17 and a fulfilment of the whole bible story?



4. How does this passage comfort you in the midst of a broken and violent world? How often do you pray 'How long O Lord?'



5. How should this final vision of people from every nation, tribe, people and language, shape the way we look and live as the church now?



Read Revelation 10:1-11:19²

4. What do we learn about God's word and how people will respond to it?



5. How should this present and this future continue to shape the lives of God's people?

² The "two witnesses" probably represent all of God's people in their prophetic role. Note how they share characteristics of God's OT witnesses (11:6), especially Moses (Law) and Elijah (Prophets).



Read Revelation 13

3. What is the relationship between the dragon and the beasts? What does each beast remind you of?

4. What is the ultimate goal of the dragon and the two beasts?



5. Where might we see the activity of the dragon and the beasts in history and in the world today?



Read Revelation 14

6. What identifies those who worship the Lamb vs those who worship the beast? What are their respective futures?



7. Are you aware of this cosmic conflict in your own experience? Where does your ultimate assurance lie?

4. How do the OT texts below help us understand the significance of the sixth bowl?

1. Isaiah 11:12-16

2. Zechariah 12



5. In 15:4, the people of God sing about all nations worshipping God. However, in 16:19 the nations come under judgement. How can these two teachings fit together?



6. Do you feel God's judgement is justified? How should God's people feel about God's judgement?

Study 8

The Fall of Babylon

17:1-19:10

This study fills in the picture of God's final judgement on Babylon that was announced and prefigured in the pouring out of the seventh bowl (16:19). In this study we will reflect on the significance of "Babylon" within the whole Bible story and on what God's final judgement on it means for us today.



Read Revelation 17

1. Describe the wrongs the woman in scarlet has committed.

2. What do the following Old Testament passages about other cities add to the picture?

Isaiah 23:15-18

Jeremiah 51:9-14

3. What will finally happen to the woman? The beast?



Read Revelation 18

4. What is wrong with Babylon that God should judge it?



5. What are we called to do in relation to Babylon? What will this look like practically?



Read Revelation 19:1-10

6. How might this section help us heed the call 'Come out of her, my people'?

Study 9

The Final Battle

19:11-20:15

In this study we at last witness the end of the ultimate source of all evil that has corrupted God's world. This is pictured as both a final battle and a final judgement in which a great reversal takes place. Here we also encounter the 'Millenium', an age in which Satan is bound but not yet finally defeated.



Read Revelation 19:11-21

1. Where do the descriptions of the rider on the horse come from and what do they mean?



Read Revelation 20

2. What will happen during the time that Satan is bound? When will this be?

3. What descriptive details are we given of the New Jerusalem and what is the significance of each?



4. In Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* the main character, Christian, who had endured great hardships on his journey, becomes "sick with desire" when he sees the "Celestial City". What aspect of the new creation do you long for most?



Read Revelation 22:6-21

5. What's the significance of John being told not to seal up the prophecy (compare Daniel 12:4)?

6. How are these final words of Jesus both a warning and encouragement?



7. How might your/our life change if you consistently live with this hope before you?