

Episode: Revelation Series No. 01

Narrator: John the Apostle

Primary Scriptures: Revelation 1

Story Summary: Background of *Revelation*, Revelation 1

Location: Roman Empire, Island of Patmos

Time:

AD 30	Jesus crucified and resurrected; Pentecost; Holy Spirit arrives
AD 48	Paul's "famine visit" to Jerusalem; First Missionary Journey starts
AD 50	Council at Jerusalem; Start of Second Missionary Journey.
AD 53	Start of Third Missionary Journey
AD 67/68	Paul probably killed in Rome
AD 85-95	John writes <i>Revelation</i>

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Revelation 1:3, 1:8, 1:18-19

Due to lack of trustworthy records, it is often difficult to verify statements about history, especially when those statements are written by writers who may be biased. This is an ongoing challenge for those who study the history of the early churches.

One fact remains indisputable: the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and virtually wiped out that city in 70 AD. For a long time afterward, Jews were out of favor with the Roman government. It seems likely that, from 70 AD on, Christians sought to separate themselves from being associated with their Jewish counterparts and any favor or special privileges Jews once had from the Romans were no longer valuable.

It was about this time when the churches started growing because of dedicated evangelistic efforts, as well as the advent of the gospels and letters which would become the bulk of the New Testament. Even though the church was growing, it was still too small to receive much recognition or persecution from the Roman Government. However, there were localized pockets of persecution.

John wrote *Revelation* as the first century was coming to a close. Jesus had been dead for more than five decades, and the Christians were unsure about when He would return. False teachers tormented churches throughout the empire. Some churches were not doing so well. Jewish leaders were no longer persecuting Christians, but persecution by local officials and citizen groups was growing. Overall, *Revelation* was written in a time of great uncertainty and turmoil.

To modern readers, *Revelation* appears to be a confusing mix of prophecies and symbols that address mostly events future to modern times. It is often unclear what these events are or when they will occur. Although it is a difficult read, it is still a valuable part of the New Testament. As John wrote in the opening: "Blessed are those who read and hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things written in it; for the time is at hand." You don't have to understand *Revelation* to be blessed by reading it.

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the first three verses of *Revelation*. Where did John get his revelation? Where did Jesus get His revelation, and why did He receive it? How did John get his revelation?
 2. Discuss the possible tie of Revelation 1:1 and Revelation 22:3-5.
 3. Why is it valuable to read *Revelation* even if you don't understand it?
 4. According to Revelation 1:4-8, what is the relationship of Jesus and God and the Father?
 5. Do you think Revelation 1:7 ties to Mark 13:26? Does it tie to 1 Thessalonians 4:17?
 6. Where was John when he received the revelation? When did he receive it?
 7. When do the events of *Revelation* take place?
1. John got his revelation from Jesus Christ. Jesus got his revelation from God, so that Jesus could show his servants what must soon take place. The angel made the revelation known to John. 2. The letter is written so the servants of Jesus will know what is going to take place. In the end, the servants of Jesus will serve him forever. 3. Per Revelation 1:3, you get a blessing for reading it aloud, hear it and take it to heart. 6. On the island of Patmos. He received it on the Lord's Day, Sunday. 7. Per Revelation 1:19, they take place now and in the future.

Application Questions:

1. John wrote *Revelation* about six or seven decades after the death of Jesus, when it surely reassured the early Christians that Jesus was coming back. It has now been nearly 20 centuries since He died. Does *Revelation* encourage you that Jesus will return? Does it cause you to behave or believe any differently?
2. Much of *Revelation* is hard to understand. Does that cause you to want to study it more or to study it less? If you were to study it more, how would you choose your study material?
3. Does it make a difference whether you read Revelation silently or aloud? If aloud, should you read it to somebody? (Revelation 1:3)
4. Revelation 1 gives many descriptions of Jesus as he is in heaven. How do you visualize Jesus in heaven?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. Revelation 1:1 says the reason for the revelation to John is to show what must "soon" take place. Do you think that means all the events have already taken place, or that "soon" could mean a very long time?
2. Revelation is written for the benefit of God's servants according to Revelation 1:1. What does it take to be one of God's servants? Are you willing to be a servant of God?
3. Is there anybody you trust enough to teach you about *Revelation*, or do you think you need to figure it out on your own? If the former, who? If the latter, how would you go about figuring it out on your own?

Episode: Revelation Series No. 02

Narrator: An Elder of Laodicea

Primary Scriptures: Revelation 2,3

Story Summary: Background of the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3

Location: Roman Empire, Island of Patmos

Time:

AD 30	Jesus crucified and resurrected; Pentecost; Holy Spirit arrives
AD 48	Paul's "famine visit" to Jerusalem; First Missionary Journey starts
AD 50	Council at Jerusalem; Start of Second Missionary Journey.
AD 53	Start of Third Missionary Journey
AD 67/68	Paul probably killed in Rome
AD 85-95	John writes <i>Revelation</i>

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Revelation 2:2, 2:4, 2:10, 2:23; 3:3, 3:5, 3:11, 3:15-17, 3:19-20

John had possibly been living in Ephesus for many years prior to the writing of *Revelation*. If so, he would have been very familiar with the churches in Asia, including the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2 and 3.

Revelation 1:19-20 introduces Revelation 2 and 3, and these two verses are sourced from Revelation 1:12-16. All seven letters in Revelation 2 and 3 are addressed to the angel of that church, but it is not clear to modern readers what that means. It is possible that *angel* refers to the human leader of each church or to the envoys these churches had sent to John. It seems as if the letters are meant to be applied both by the angel and the church members.

The seven churches are located in a rough geometrical oval. The order of the church letters starts with Ephesus on the southwest side and progresses in a clockwise fashion to Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The church at Ephesus was the largest of these churches and, along with Laodicea, is the only church mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament (although Lydia of Thyatira is mentioned). Due to its location, it seems like the church at Colossae should have been included in this list; we don't know why it was not.

The letters of Revelation 2 and 3 are from Jesus. The general pattern of the letters is: the address to the angel of the church, a characteristic of Jesus, an acknowledgement of the condition of the church, something good about the church, a warning to the church, and a promise of a reward for changed behavior.

Although the letters are addressed to seven specific churches, you can easily see that the problems addressed in them are experienced by modern churches, making Revelation 2 and 3 very valuable and relevant to modern Christians and churches. To many people, some of the most sobering verses in the Bible are found in passages such as Revelation 2:4-5, 2:14, 3:3 and 3:15-17. However, some of the most encouraging verses of the Bible are also found in these two chapters.

Discussion Questions:

1. The section on the letters to the seven churches starts in Revelation 1:10. Who are the letters from? What do the seven stars and the seven lampstands signify? What or who are the angels of the seven churches?
 2. Where are the seven churches located?
 3. What is the typical structure of the letters?
 4. How many of the churches had letters to them written by Paul?
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1. The letters are from Jesus. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. It is not specified who the angels are, but they might be the head elder at the church. 2. At Ephesus and in cities to the east of Ephesus, all in the Roman Senatorial province of Asia. 3. An opening from Jesus, a description of the church, good things about the church, bad things about the church, and a warning and/or promised reward. 4. Ephesus had the letter in the New Testament known as *Ephesians*; Paul said he wrote a letter to Laodicea, but no copy of that letter exists.

Application Questions:

1. Jesus told the Ephesians that they had forsaken their first love. Can you remember the first person (outside of your family) that you loved? Why did you love them? Do you still love them? How do you think the Ephesians forsook Jesus?
2. Jesus told the Christians at Smyrna they would be persecuted as a test. How would you react if you were persecuted for being a Christian? Are you training yourself to withstand persecution?
3. Jesus told the church at Thyatira they should not tolerate the immoral Jezebel who pretends to be a prophet but instead leads the people into sin. Are you willing to tolerate defiantly sinful people in your church? After reading this letter to Thyatira, do you think you should continue to do so?
4. Jesus warned the church at Laodicea for being lukewarm and for relying on their material wealth. Have you ever been lukewarm in your love for Jesus? According to this letter, how is material wealth deceptive? Do you let your material wealth deceive you?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. Which of the evaluations of the seven churches hits closest to your own life? What is the penalty or reward for that church?
2. Following the style of the letters in Revelation 2 and 3, write a letter to yourself as if it were from Jesus.
3. Jesus warned the Laodiceans about feeling as if they need nothing. Do you ever dream of having great riches or piles of friends so you won't need anybody or anything? In spiritual terms, can you ever be self-sufficient?

Episode: Revelation Series No. 03

Narrator: A Mighty Angel

Primary Scriptures: Revelation 5-11

Story Summary: The beginning of the time of tribulation

Location: Roman Empire, Island of Patmos

Time:

AD 30	Jesus crucified and resurrected; Pentecost; Holy Spirit arrives
AD 48	Paul's "famine visit" to Jerusalem; First Missionary Journey starts
AD 50	Council at Jerusalem; Start of Second Missionary Journey.
AD 53	Start of Third Missionary Journey
AD 67/68	Paul probably killed in Rome
AD 85-95	John writes <i>Revelation</i>

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Revelation 5:5; 6:9-10, 6:15-17; 7:4, 7:14; 9:6, 9:20-21; 11:2-3, 11:10-11, 11:19

Revelation is often classified as apocalyptic literature, a style of writing that developed after the Jews returned from Babylon. This type of literature often describes the author's understanding of the end of the world as revealed by a heavenly messenger. The writing typically urges its readers to be patient and trusting for their coming deliverance and rewards. The language of apocalyptic literature is usually symbolic.

Revelation 5 begins the intense apocalyptic portion of the book. It starts by describing a scroll with seven seals and the Lamb who is qualified to break these seals and open the scroll. The terms describing the Lamb show it to be Jesus. The chapter does not reveal if the scroll contains good news or bad news, even though it is clear the contents are very important.

Revelation 6 begins with the Lamb opening the first seal. It immediately is known that the seals represent calamities on the earth. Revelation 6 describes the disasters of the first six seals.

Revelation 7 is a short break from the calamities, describing the sealing off of 144,000 people from the tribes of Israel and the great multitude who come faithfully from the great tribulation.

Revelation 8 describes the opening of the eighth seal, and the revealing of the seven angels with seven trumpets. This chapter describes the disasters of the first four trumpets. Revelation 9 describes the sounding of the next two trumpets.

Revelation 10 talks of the angel and the little scroll. The little scroll is used to get John engaged in the action. His involvement spills over into Revelation 11 where the two witnesses and the beast are introduced. The chapter ends with the disaster of the seventh trumpet.

These seven chapters contain some of the scariest words ever written. The symbolic nature of the language has encouraged countless interpretations. All in all, these chapters are drastic warnings which are used to encourage Christians to be faithful to Jesus.

Discussion Questions:

1. What style of writing is the book of Revelation? What are some components of that style of writing?
 2. What are some of the challenges of understanding Revelation 5-11?
 3. Which of the verses in Revelation 5-11 most capture your attention?
 4. How many angels are in heaven?
 5. Where can you learn about the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse?
 6. Some American Christians use Revelation 7:4 as one reason why everyone should support Israel. Whether you agree, do you see their reasoning?
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1. It is apocalyptic writing. These writings represent an author's understanding of the end times, often revealed by a heavenly messenger. It is written to warn its readers of coming challenges, while encouraging them to be faithful. 2. These are some of the challenges: hard to know which things are literal and which are symbolic; hard to follow the sequence of events, and at what time in the future they will occur; whether some things should be understood on multiple levels; and, how these things fit in with other books of the Bible. 4. Many hundreds of millions according to Revelation 5:11. 5. Revelation 6:1-8.

Application Questions:

1. Apocalyptic writing is meant to both warn readers of coming events and to encourage them to be faithful. Does Revelation 5-11 encourage you to be faithful, or do you consider it mostly a warning? In what ways does it encourage or warn you?
2. Revelation 5:8 says the prayers of God's people are incense that is offered to Him. Knowing that, what are some things you could say while you pray?
3. How might Revelation 6:9-11 encourage you? How might Revelation 7:11-17 encourage you?
4. After the calamities described in Revelation 8 and 9, ungodly people still did not repent, as described in Revelation 9:20-21. Why is it so hard for people to repent of their actions?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. It is common for people of all ages to be envious of those in power and those who have wealth. Using Revelation 4:12-17, explain how calamitous circumstances affect the balance of power among people? What qualities would you want to have in circumstances where food or water is in very short supply?
2. In Revelation 9:4, the people of God have seals on their foreheads. What might this mean? Based on other passages, could this have something to do with the Holy Spirit?
3. Of the actions described in Revelation 9:20-21, which are common in modern society?

Episode: Revelation Series No. 04

Narrator: Michael

Primary Scriptures: Revelation 12-20

Story Summary: The finish of the time of tribulation

Location: Roman Empire, Island of Patmos

Time:

AD 30	Jesus crucified and resurrected; Pentecost; Holy Spirit arrives
AD 48	Paul's "famine visit" to Jerusalem; First Missionary Journey starts
AD 50	Council at Jerusalem; Start of Second Missionary Journey.
AD 53	Start of Third Missionary Journey
AD 67/68	Paul probably killed in Rome
AD 85-95	John writes <i>Revelation</i>

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Revelation 12:7-9, 12:12; 13:7-8, 13:15-17; 14:7, 14:9-10, 14:12; 15:2; 16:11; 19:5, 19:9, 19:20-21; 20:3-5, 20:10, 20:11-15

Revelation 12 is a continuation of the events of Revelation 5-11. By the end of Revelation 11, the Lamb has opened the seven seals of the scroll, the seven angels have blown their trumpets, and the two witnesses have appeared. Revelation 11 ends with the opening of God's temple in heaven.

Revelation 12 tells of a great sign in heaven with the woman and the dragon. A war breaks out between the dragon and its angels versus Michael and his angels. Though Michael is the victor, the dragon continues to torment mankind.

Revelation 13 describes two beasts: one of the sea and one of the earth. This chapter contains the famous language about the mark of the beast and the number 666.

Revelation 14 and 15 tell of calamities associated with various angels, while Revelation 16 describes the seven bowls of God's wrath. Revelation 17 moves into the story of Babylon, the prostitute sitting on the scarlet beast. Like most other things in *Revelation*, the woman can be interpreted to mean many different things. The interpretation chosen has a big impact on the meaning of the fall of Babylon as described in Revelation 18-19.

Revelation 19 and 20 describe the defeat of Satan and his minions by Jesus and His servants. The thousand-year period and the final judgments are also described.

There are innumerable interpretations of *Revelation*. This message is probably indisputable: Jesus wants his followers to be faithful to Him no matter what and no matter how long it takes. No matter if there is persecution by the ancient Romans or Jews, or by some future governmental entity. No matter if there are natural disasters or if there is climate change. As Jesus told Peter, "Have faith in God."¹

¹ Mark 11:22

Discussion Questions:

1. Based on Revelation 12:1, are the events described in 12:1-6 an actual set of occurrences or simply a sign in heaven? Does Revelation 12:5 probably refer to Jesus?
 2. Revelation 12:7-9 refers to Satan and his angels. How might Satan's angels differ from God's angels?
 3. According to Revelation 12:17, who are the woman's children?
 4. According to Revelation 13:2, what is the relationship between the dragon and the beast? How powerful will the beast be?
 5. Relate the plagues of Revelation 16 to the plagues Moses sent to torment Pharaoh and Egypt.
 6. Discuss Revelation 17:9-10.
 7. Revelation 18 discusses the fall of Babylon. What things might Babylon represent?
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1. The dragon gave the beast its powers. It will wage war against God's people and conquer them. It will have authority over the whole world. Everyone will worship the beast except those whose names are in the book of life. 6. It says that the language of the "seven heads" is symbolic with at least two meanings. 7. Ancient Rome; a future worldwide empire; an economic system; a false religion.

Application Questions:

1. Revelation 13 describes a time of incredible economic persecution against Christians. What sorts of things can you do to prepare for such a time? Should those types of preparations be spiritual or material? In what ways should you also consider Jesus' words in Matthew 6:25-34? How do they relate to Revelation 13?
2. According to Revelation 16:11, people cursed God because of their pains and sores, but refused to repent. Does that make sense to you?
3. Are you preparing your family to deal with difficult economic times that might occur when Christians are persecuted? How can you prepare them?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. Is the economic control described in Revelation 13:16-17 already possible because of the Internet? What kinds of things might the marks be? According to Revelation 14:9-11, how much effort should you expend to avoid getting the mark?
2. Revelation 18:11 indicates that people are upset over the fall of Babylon because it causes them such economic distress. The goods described in Revelation 18:12-13 represent the economic goods at the time of the Bible. What sort of things could cause world-wide economic distress now? What kinds of goods would be affected now?
3. How much persecution could you withstand before giving up your Christian beliefs? Can you train yourself so that you will be able to withstand more?

Episode: Revelation Series No. 05

Narrator: Peter

Primary Scriptures: Revelation 4, 21, 22; 2 Peter 3:10-13

Story Summary: Two heavens described in Revelation

Location: Roman Empire, Island of Patmos

Time:

AD 30	Jesus crucified and resurrected; Pentecost; Holy Spirit arrives
AD 48	Paul's "famine visit" to Jerusalem; First Missionary Journey starts
AD 50	Council at Jerusalem; Start of Second Missionary Journey.
AD 53	Start of Third Missionary Journey
AD 67/68	Paul probably killed in Rome
AD 85-95	John writes <i>Revelation</i>

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Revelation 4:8-11; 21:1-2, 21:3-4, 21:7, 21:27; 22:3-5, 22:12, 22:18-19

A great challenge in interpreting *Revelation* is deciding what is meant to be literal, what is meant to be symbolic, and what is both. This episode is based on a literal interpretation of Revelation 21:1 to the extent that one heaven exists, and that it will pass away and be replaced with another heaven.

The heaven described in Revelation 4 is the first of those two heavens. God resides in this heaven, and it appears to be the same heaven described in the Old Testament by people such as Isaiah and Ezekiel. Everything in this heaven is centered around worshiping God.

The second heaven is described in Revelation 21 and 22. It seems as if this second heaven is the one people often imagine when they think about the afterlife.

With these assumptions in place, it is not always clear to which of the two (or both?) heavens Jesus refers in His messages, or to which the prophets refer.

There is no doubt that going to heaven is the primary goal of many Christians. So it comes as a startling reality that the Bible doesn't say all that much about heaven, and what it does say is often couched in terms that are challenging to comprehend.

No matter the difficulty in understanding, one thing is absolutely clear from the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament writers: you should be willing to do whatever it takes to go to heaven. The rewards of being with God for eternity are invaluable. Some of these rewards are shown in Revelation 21 and 22. Imagine: being with God every moment, forever!

Here is a little teaser to think about: who gets to be in heaven? According to one authority, this answer is revealed in the last chapter of *Revelation*. Three times it is shown who gets to be in the second heaven.¹

¹ God's servants. Revelation 22:1-10

Discussion Questions:

1. Read 2 Peter 10-13 and Revelation 21:1. What are the similarities and differences in those two accounts? Do you think they refer to the same event?
2. Do you think of the heaven you will inhabit as the one of Revelation 4 or the one of Revelation 21-22?
3. Read Revelation 4:8 and 4:11. Do you envision these lines of poetry being said or being sung? What does the Bible say?
4. Revelation 22:7, 12, 20 have Jesus saying He will come soon, yet it has been almost two thousand years since those words were recorded. Does this time lapse impact your thoughts about the return of Jesus? Why or why not?
5. Envision heaven using the measurements in Revelation 21:16. Is it big enough to have houses for everybody who will go to heaven? (note: that verse denotes a cube, not a rectangle) Should we take these measurements at face value or are they intended to be metaphorical?

Application Questions:

1. Does Revelation 21:3-4 embody your idea of heaven, or do you think of it in an entirely different way?
2. Does Revelation 21:8 encourage you to avoid certain sinful behaviors?
3. Does Revelation 22:18-19 give you pause about teaching *Revelation* or interpreting it for others?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. Do you have any reason to believe Revelation 21:8 and 22:15 are not literal?
2. Revelation 22:3 indicates that those in heaven will serve God forever. Does that sound like something you want to do forever? If not, what kind of incentive is that?
3. Which is more compelling to develop a video game about: Revelation 21-22 or Revelation 5-20?
4. Should going to heaven be the primary goal of a Christian? If so, why? If not, what should be?