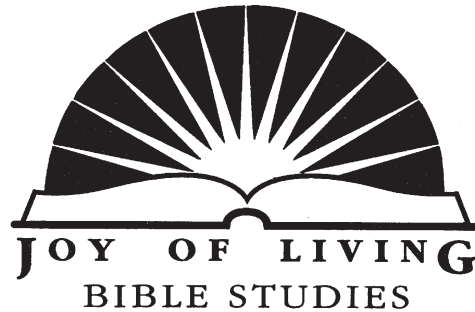


Revelation

Lesson 1



Behind the Scenes of History

The book of Revelation is the scariest book in the Bible. Yet it is also one of the most comforting, reassuring, and exhilarating books in the Bible.

Why is it scary? Well, just imagine having your home shaken and broken to splinters by a devastating 8.0 earthquake. Then imagine huddling in a shelter as bombs rain down upon your city with deafening explosions, lung-searing smoke, and blistering fire. Imagine the horror of being surrounded by plague, of watching friends and family falling sick, moaning, dying. Imagine the eerie sight of strange creatures descending from the sky, settling over the whole earth, killing people by the hundreds and thousands.

Now imagine experiencing not just one but *all* of these horrors at the same time. That is just part of the terrifying, electrifying, awe-inspiring swirl of events that make up the book of Revelation.

And yet, as I said, the book of Revelation is also one of the most comforting and exhilarating books in the Bible. It pictures a time when there will be a glorious new heaven and a new earth, a time when God will dwell with human beings, when there will be universal peace and an end to all sorrow. Jesus will wipe every tear from our eyes, and there will be no more death, nor mourning, nor crying, nor pain.

As we attempt to place ourselves amid this dizzying vortex of terrors, miracles, and wonders that are prophesied for the end of this age in the book of Revelation, we have to agree with Dr. Earl Palmer, who observed, “This remarkable book is both hard to understand fully and impossible to forget.”¹

Perhaps the most striking and profound aspect of this book is its relevance and importance to our lives today. The book of Revelation is not just a musty piece of parchment from a bygone age, nor is it merely a collection of mysterious, symbolic images for some future age. The book of Revelation is vibrant, alive, and profoundly applicable to the times in which you and I live.

The “Bookends” of the Bible

It is no accident that the book of Revelation appears as the last book of the Bible. Revelation gathers all the threads of theme and his-

toric events contained in the rest of the Bible, weaving them into a seamless whole. The entire scope of human history—and of eternity itself—comes into brilliant focus in the book of Revelation.

Someone has rightly observed that the book of Genesis and the book of Revelation are like two bookends that hold the entire Bible together. In Genesis we have the story of the origin of human sin; in Revelation we have the complete and final victory over sin. Genesis presents the beginning of human history and civilization; Revelation presents the end of both. In Genesis we learn the beginnings of God’s judgment and His grace toward mankind; in Revelation we see the awesome result of His judgment and the triumph of His grace. The great themes of these two books are intricately intertwined.

Have you ever been to a major airport and watched the people get off the planes? You may see a crowd of people wearing shorts and flowered shirts, with leis around their necks. Aha, you think, these people just arrived from Hawaii. You may see another crowd of people lugging raincoats and umbrellas, with faces wreathed in gloom like an overcast day. They are just off the plane from Seattle.

In much the same way, as you work your way through the book of Revelation, you recognize the identifying features of the great themes of the Bible, and it is easy to tell in which Old Testament books those themes originated. Here we catch an echo of Daniel, there an aroma of Joel, and elsewhere we find nuggets from Isaiah and Ezekiel. In Revelation, we see very clearly the organic unity of the Word of God.

A Book from the Mind of God

Who is the author of the book of Revelation?

At first glance, the answer might seem to be John. But look again. John writes that this book is “the revelation of Jesus Christ, *which God gave him*” (Revelation 1:1, italics added), and which Jesus in turn made known to John. The author of Revelation is *God Himself!* John was certainly involved in the process of producing this book, but it truly had its origin not in the mind of John, but within the Godhead, in the mind of God the Father. The Father revealed it to the Son, who in turn made it known to a human being named John.

Why did God the Father have to give this revelation to Jesus the Son? Remember that in Matthew 24:36 Jesus said that though He understood many of the events of the last days of the age, He did not know the time when these events would happen. This knowledge, He

1. Earl Palmer, author, Lloyd J. Ogilvie, general editor, *The Communicator’s Commentary: 1,2,3 John, Revelation* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), p. 97.

said, belonged only to the Father. Now, of course, since Jesus is risen and glorified, He knows all that the Father knows, but while on earth the timing of these events was unknown even to Jesus Himself.

So God the Father gave this revelation to Jesus, who in turn entrusted it to John by means of an angel. Thus, while all Scripture is inspired by God, the book of Revelation occupies a unique place in the Bible, because no other book of the Bible has been given to us in this way. John's role in the writing of this book is virtually that of a secretary taking dictation. John is the writer, but God is the Author of the book of Revelation.

But who is this man John, whose pen has preserved for us this awesome and powerful vision of the future? In verse 4 he simply identifies himself as "John." By comparing Revelation with other Scriptures and by examining the traditions of the early church, we can be reasonably sure that the author is John the apostle, the brother of James, the son of Zebedee, the beloved friend of Jesus, author of the gospel and three letters that bear his name. Certainly, there are Bible scholars who disagree, but when we compare the style, content, and structure of Revelation with that of the other writings of the apostle John, it is difficult to come to any other conclusion.

John probably wrote this book near the end of his life, at around A.D. 94 to 96. He was an old man, likely in his eighties, when this vision was given to him. The book is addressed to seven selected churches located in the Roman province of Asia, which today is part of the nation of Turkey.

As we begin our journey through the vision God gave to John, notice the inspiring promise we find at the outset: "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it" (Revelation 1:3). God has promised all the readers of this book—including you and me—a special blessing if we read, hear, and take to heart the words of this prophecy.

What kind of blessing? I believe the Lord is promising that we will find comfort, guidance, and assurance, even through such times of upheaval and fear as described in Revelation. We live in troubled, confused times, filled with temptations, pressures, and anti-Christian philosophies—and the days will grow darker as we near the conclusion of history. But the person who understands the book of Revelation will have a faithful guide through the tumult and confusion of this dying age.

Ray C. Stedman

Why Study Revelation?

Too often, as people turn to the book of Revelation, they are looking for a detailed blueprint of what will happen in the future, a chronological outline that will tell them exactly who, what, when, where, how and why things will happen. Then as they open this book they are confronted with strange images and symbols that often make no sense. Many people are left confused, bewildered and possibly even frightened.

So, why study Revelation? The opening words tell us. It is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. In Revelation we truly see Him revealed, uncovered not only as the "Lamb that was slain" (Revelation 13:8) but as the Lord of Glory.

Many of the prophecies of God's Word have already come to pass. We look back on the fulfillment and they make complete sense, but it is often because we are looking back on the fulfillment. As they say, "Hindsight is 20-20." As we look at those prophecies yet unfulfilled they are not always quite so clear. Many of the symbols in Revelation are interpreted for us elsewhere in Scripture. However, many of the events of Revelation, although detailed in other parts of God's Word, are often seen from the perspective of eternity and not laid out in neat chronological order. We can make educated suppositions on what

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things mean and how they play out in time, but remember they are only educated suppositions and only time will reveal the exact fulfillment. We are finite, limited beings looking at the infinite. We who live in time are given a glimpse into eternity.

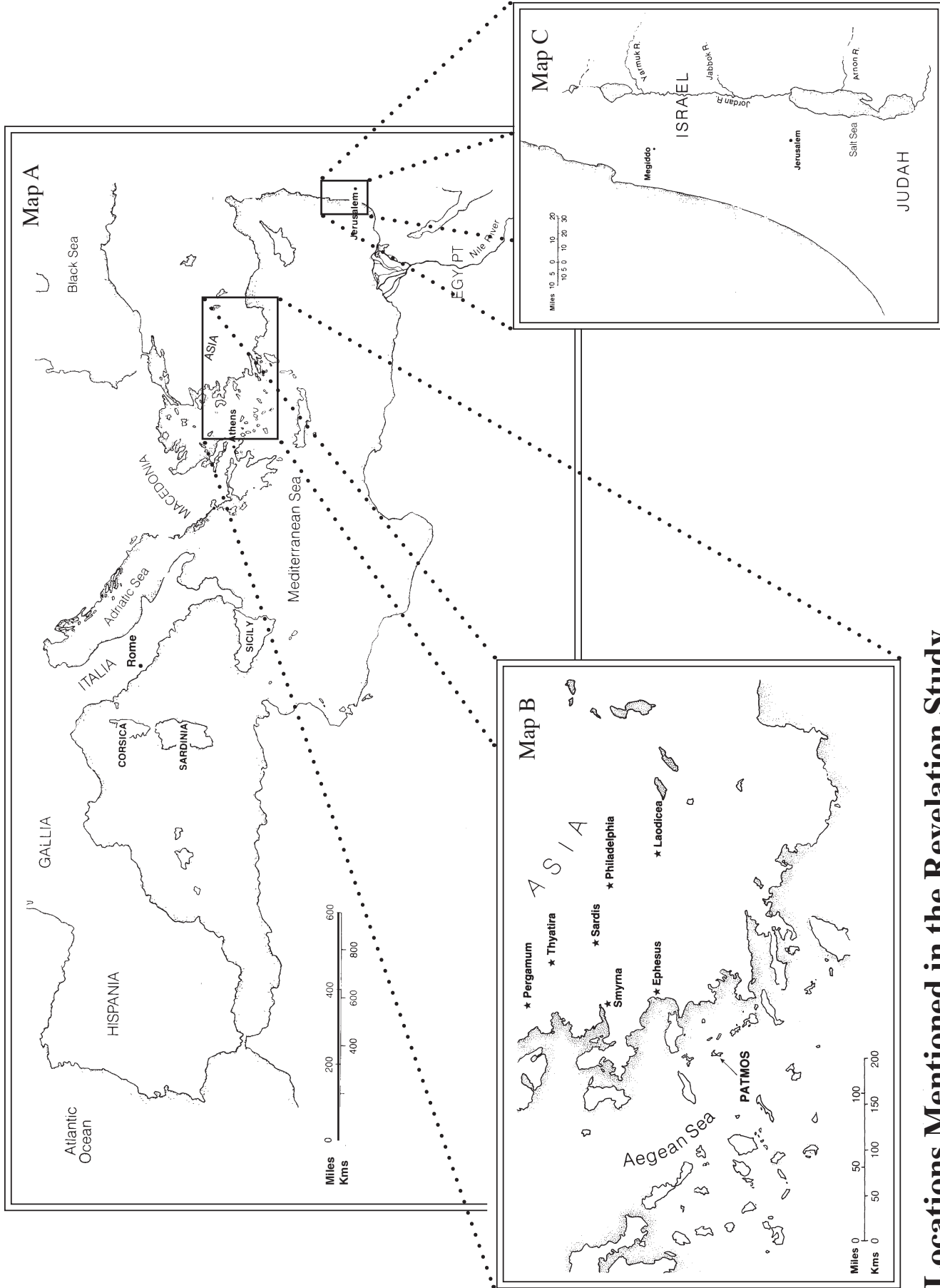
So, then, what is the purpose of these yet unfulfilled prophecies? Revelation 19:10 tells us, "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." These prophecies are to testify to us, to reveal to us Jesus Christ, just as the first sentence of Revelation states.

The Commentary portion of this study was taken from the book *God's Final Word*, by Ray C. Stedman (Discovery House Publishers, 1991). In the book, Pastor Stedman quoted sections of Revelation prior to explaining them. Due to space constraints, we were unable to print these long Scripture passages in the Commentary section of each lesson. As you read the Commentary, you should already be familiar with the Revelation passages discussed, because they were covered in the previous lesson's Study Questions. However, you may wish to keep your open Bible beside you, so that you can re-read these portions of Revelation as you study Pastor Stedman's Commentary.

As you work through the Study Questions, remember that your study of each section on Revelation will be followed in the next lesson by Pastor Stedman's Commentary. It is important to read the Commentary as well as complete the Study Questions! Many ideas are addressed in the Commentary that could not be brought out in the Questions. The Commentary gives us the benefit of Pastor Stedman's years of study and his outstanding teaching.

A special blessing awaits you as you study Revelation. Revelation 1:3 says, "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it." We pray that as you study these Scriptures, God will make them real to you, help you apply them to your life, and truly take them to heart.

Nancy Collins



Locations Mentioned in the Revelation Study

Adapted from Reproducible Maps, Charts, Timelines and Illustrations (Ventura: Gospel Light, 1989). Used by permission.

Study Questions

Before you begin each day:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Remember that the challenge questions are for those who have the time or inclination to do them.
- ☞ Personal questions are to be shared with the class only if you wish to share.
- ☞ If you desire, insert your name in the assigned verses to make them more personal.

First Day: Read the Introduction to Revelation.

1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the Introduction to Revelation, or from your teacher's lecture? What personal application did you choose to apply to your life?

2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down, carry it with you, tack it to your bulletin board, on the dashboard of your car, etc. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its "address" (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

Second Day: Read Revelation 1:1-18, concentrating on verses 1-3.

1. a. From Revelation 1:1, what is this book about?

 b. The word *revelation* is taken from the Latin word *revelatio* which means (as does the Greek word *apokalupsis* from which we get the English word *apocalypse*) "an unveiling," or a disclosure of that which was previously hidden or unknown. Apocalypses have to do with mysteries and their meaning. In the Gospels we see Jesus Christ as our suffering Savior. In Revelation we will see Jesus Christ revealed in His glory. From Daniel 2:28, who reveals mysteries?

2. From Revelation 1:1, who gave this revelation (this unveiling of what was not previously known) to Jesus Christ? To whom was Jesus Christ to show this revelation?

3. a. What was He to show His servants?

 b. Read 2 Peter 3:8. How does God's view of time compare to our view of time?

4. How did Jesus Christ make the Revelation known? What does John then do? (Revelation 1:1b-2)

5. Who does God say is blessed in Revelation 1:3?

6. a. Challenge: What promises and warnings does God give us in the following verses that compare to what He tells us in Revelation 1:3?

Mark 4:23-25

James 1:22-25

- b. Personal: From these passages we see that God wants us to act upon the truths that He gives us. As you begin this study, will you make a commitment to carefully listen to what God is saying, and with His help, be obedient to what He teaches you? If so, write a prayer of commitment.

Third Day: Read Revelation 1:1-18 again, concentrating on verses 4-5.

1. Who was John writing to and what does he desire for them? Who does he say this blessing is from? (Revelation 1:4-5a)
2. Challenge: Compare the description of the Lord in Revelation 1:4 to who He says He is in Exodus 3:14 and John 8:58.
3. Revelation 1:4 speaks of the “seven spirits before his throne.” Seven is a symbol of completeness— of perfection. From Isaiah 11:2 describe the Holy Spirit in all His fullness.
4. Describe Jesus Christ from Revelation 1:5a.
5. To be a faithful witness you must tell the truth about what you have personally seen. In John 3:11 Jesus is speaking. What does He bear witness and testify to? What is the people’s response?
6. a. Jesus is speaking in John 7:17. From this verse, if a person truly wants to *do* God’s will what will he/she find out?
 - b. Personal: All too often people want to know what God’s will is so that they may decide whether they want to obey it or not. God wants us to love Him so much that we want *to know* His will so that we *can do* His will. What about you, which category do you fall into? If you want to *do* His will, no matter what, write a prayer expressing this to Him. If you are still not certain that you want His will for your life, write a prayer asking him to make you willing to do His will.

Fourth Day: Read Revelation 1:1-18 again, concentrating on verses 5-6.

1. a. In Revelation 1:5 we learned that Jesus Christ is “the faithful witness.” What is the second name He is called in verse 5a?
 - b. Jesus Christ is the first to rise in glory from having once been dead. All others who were raised from the dead in the Bible returned to the same earthly life they had before. What does Colossians 1:18 say about Him being the firstborn from the dead?
2. a. What titles are given to Jesus in Revelation 17:14 and 19:16 that compare to the third thing that is said of Him in Revelation 1:5?

- b. How does Philippians 2:9-11 express this same truth about Jesus Christ?
3. a. From Revelation 1:5b, what is Jesus Christ's *present* feeling toward us?
 - b. Read Hebrews 13:8. Will His love for you ever change?
 4. What has Jesus Christ done for us? (Revelation 1:5b)
 5. Personal: Jesus Christ paid for our sins by dying on the cross (see 1 Peter 2:24). Have you been set free from the penalty for your sin? Read Romans 6:23. Why not accept the gift of eternal life that God is offering to you now through faith in what Jesus Christ has done? Write a prayer thanking Him for loving you and setting you free from your sins.
 6. a. Jesus Christ has not only freed us from the penalty of our sins but also from the bondage to our sins. What does Romans 6:18 and John 8:36 say regarding bondage to sin?
 - b. Personal: Is there some habitual sin that you struggle with? Confess it to the Lord now, and ask Him to forgive you and to help you walk in freedom from that sin.

Fifth Day: Read Revelation 1:1-18 again, concentrating on verses 7-11.

1. a. Describe the Lord's return from Revelation 1:7.
 - b. Compare the description of the Lord's return in Revelation 1:7 to the following verses:
Zechariah 12:10

Matthew 24:30

Acts 1:10-11
 - c. Challenge: From the above verses is there any possibility that the Lord will come again as He did the first time, born as a human baby?
2. Revelation 1:8 restates who is the Author of the Book of Revelation. How is He described in verse 8?
3. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. How do Isaiah 43:10 and 44:6 help you understand what John is saying in Revelation 1:8?

4. How does John describe himself in Revelation 1:9a?
5. Where was John when God revealed these truths to him? (Revelation 1:9b) Locate this on Map B on page 8. Why was he there?
6.
 - a. What was John instructed to do? (Revelation 1:11) Locate these places on Map B on page 8.
 - b. Personal: John was imprisoned on the island of Patmos “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus,” in other words, for sharing God’s truth with others. The message of the book of Revelation was not for John alone but for him to share with other believers (see Revelation 1:1,11). Will you commit yourself to sharing with others the truths you learn as you study God’s Word? Write a prayer of commitment right now and then look for opportunities to share what you have learned already.

Sixth Day: Read Revelation 1:1-18 again, concentrating on verses 12-18.

1. What did John see when he turned to see who was speaking to him? (Revelation 1:12-13)
2. Challenge: From Revelation 1:13-16 describe the person who was “like a son of man.”
3.
 - a. From Revelation 1:17b-18, who does the one ‘like a son of man’ say He is?
 - b. Read Romans 6:9 and 14:9. Who is the One described in Revelation 1:17-18?
4. In Revelation 1:17, what did John do when he saw the Lord? What was the Lord’s response to John’s reaction?
5. What promises does the Lord Jesus give us in the following verses?
John 14:27

Hebrews 13:5b-6
6. Personal: Are you fearful about something, perhaps even of God Himself? He loves you so much that He sent His Son to pay the price for your sins, so that you might enter into a relationship with Him and have eternal life (see John 3:16; 17:3). If you’ve never accepted this love why not do it now? Write a prayer thanking Him for His love.