

First Introductory Lesson: What is God' Revelation in general? What does the the book of Revelation talk about? What type of literature is seen in the book of Revelation? Who wrote the book of Revelation? What is the Socio Political Context of the book of Revelation? Why it is important to study the book of Revelation?

Revelation in General: Revelation can be defined as "God's supernatural disclosure to human beings of truth they would not otherwise know and are incapable of discovering on their own." This communication may be either oral or written. Revelation consists of both Words And Deeds: God's revelation of Himself has been given to humanity by both words and deeds. It consists of God progressively unfolding His character, mighty acts, and purposes in history. The revelation may occur in a single, instantaneous act, or it may extend over a long period of time.

The Definition Of Revelation: The term "Revelation" comes from the Greek word *apokalupsis*, which means "**a disclosure**" or "**an unveiling**." It has the idea of disclosing something that was previously unknown. Revelation is the opposite of scientific research or human reasoning. The knowledge that God has revealed about Himself to humankind could never be attained through any type of scientific experiment or logical reasoning. It is entirely a supernatural disclosure from God.

Revelation consists of truths revealed By God Alone: Only God reveals the truths of revelation. He alone is the source of knowledge about Himself and His plan. Revelation is, therefore, an act of God. Jesus said. "*All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him*" (Matthew 11:27). The Identity Of Jesus Christ Can only be known through Divine Revelation. After Simon Peter acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus said to him. "*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven*" (Matthew 16:12). The fact that Jesus Christ is God the Son can only be known through divine revelation - it could not be attained through any human means.

Divine Revelation is a work of the Holy Spirit. God reveals these truths through the Holy Spirit. Paul writes, "*These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God*" (1 Corinthians 2:10). Peter speaks of divine revelation in this manner. "*First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God*" (2 Peter 1:20,21). Therefore divine revelation is a work of God alone.

God reveals Himself through the Prophets: God chose a select group of people to be the human channel of Revelation. They are known as the Prophets. In the Book of Amos we read. "*Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets*"(Amos 3:7). The Bible often records God giving His revelation to

the prophets. For example, He revealed Himself to Samuel. *“The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord (1 Samuel 3:21).*

Paul Received Divine Revelation: The Apostle Paul wrote of God giving truth to him by divine revelation. *“That is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 3:3-5).*

Revelation Gives Humanity Sufficient Truth About God: The doctrine of revelation holds that God has revealed sufficient truths about Himself. The Bible is complete in the sense that it reveals everything necessary for humanity to know God. Scripture has been completely written. Nothing needs to be added. However in another sense, Revelation is only partial because it does not tell us everything about Him. In fact, Scripture itself speaks of things that God revealed but humans were prevented from recording.

There is more than one Method Of Revelation: God has chosen more than one method to reveal Himself to humankind. The writer to the Hebrews said. *“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe (Hebrews 1:1,2).*

The Bible Speaks Of Secrets Hidden that are now revealed: According to the New Testament, divine revelation also consists of revealing secrets that had been hidden for long ages that are now disclosed. Paul wrote. *“Now to the One who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith (Romans 16:25,26).*

Paul also wrote. *“The mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:26,27).* Divine revelation is the key that unlocks these hidden secrets.

When God reveals to humanity truth that we would not otherwise know it is called "Revelation." Human reason or intuition could never know these truths - they can only be revealed by God Himself. The purpose for our existence, and the plan of God for our salvation, can only be known through divine revelation. To bring this Word to humankind, the Lord chose a group of people to be the ones through whom He would speak. They were known as the prophets. The prophets revealed God's truth to humanity over a long period of time in a number of different ways. The revelation given in Scripture tells humanity everything that it needs to know about God and his plan. God's Word to humankind is therefore both sufficient and complete.

What is the Book of Revelation? Revelation is a book about the future and about the future. It offers future hope to all believers, especially those who have suffered for their faith by proclaiming Christ's final victory over evil and the reality of eternal life with him. It also gives present guidance as it teaches us about Jesus Christ and how we should live for him now. God gave the revelation of his plan to Jesus Christ who in turn revealed it to John.

The book of Revelation is hard to understand. It is a complex book and it has baffled interpreters for centuries. It is figurative, symbolic, metaphorical, and imaginative. The first century Jews and Christians were familiar with this type of literature, numbers and meanings and so on but we are not! Some groups interpret this book very literally and fundamentally and as a result, confusing the people. This book is primarily a book of hope to the suffering Christians that the Risen and Ascended Jesus will come again and reign victorious forever as the Lord of the Universe. It is a book of warning as things were not proper as Christ is calling the people of those seven churches to commit them to live in righteousness. This book is primarily a word of comfort and encouragement to faithfulness amidst the persecution of believers by unbelievers. It says that God is sovereign, He is in control of history, of life and death. His people are victorious in Him! These are truly the last words of Jesus to His church!

Apocalyptic literature: The book of Revelation is a Jewish literary genre known as ***apocalyptic*** (revelation) revealed through dreams and visions. ***Apocalyptic*** means uncovered, unveiled or revealed. It was written to express the conviction that God was in control of history and would bring deliverance to His people. This type of literature is characterized by a struggle between good and evil, use of symbols, colors and animals, numbers, visions and dreams through angels. While reading this symbolic language, we don't have to understand every detail. Instead we should realize that John's imagery shows us that Christ is indeed the glorious and victorious Lord of all. Jesus gave his

message to John in a vision allowing him to see and record certain future events so that they could be an encouragement to all believers.

Authorship: John is the author and he himself says in different places (Rev. 1:1,4,9; 22:8). Apart from the bible, we have some extra biblical affirmations about John's authorship: Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Origen. According to tradition, John was the only one of Jesus' original twelve disciples who was not killed for the faith. He also wrote the gospel of John and the letters of 1, 2 and 3 John. When he wrote Revelation, John was in exile on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. He was sent there as an exile by the Romans for his witness about Jesus Christ. Near the end of his life, John received a vision from Christ which he recorded for the benefit of the seven churches in Asia and for Christians throughout history.

Socio - Political Context of the Book of Revelation:

Christians and Jews: The Jews were excused by the Roman government officially from some of the responsibilities that violated their religious faith, such as serving in the army and participating in the worship of Roman gods. They were also exempted from emperor worship. All this was possible because the Jews had done an agreement with the Roman government that as an obligation they will pray for the emperor but not to him. This agreement convinced the Romans of their loyalty to the empire. Christians on the other hand lived under the cover of Jewish sect for some time. They were seen by the Romans as a part of Judaism because they were all Jews at the beginning. So, they have received the same benefits as the Jews received. There was a time at one point of time when Nero wanted to put the blame of the fire in AD 64 on the Jews but when it did not succeed he blamed it on the Christians. There was a Jewish War of A.D. 66-70, in which the Christians avoided to be identified with the Jews. So after the war the Christians were excluded from the synagogue. The Christians understood the destruction of the temple as God's judgement for the murder of Jesus. They regarded themselves as true Israel. All this led the Jewish leaders to clarify the identity and the situation with the Roman authorities. After all this the Christians were no longer considered Jews by their Jewish neighbors. They were rejected by Jews and they faced a serious crisis of community and personal identity.

The Persecution of Christians: Persecution against Christians on the part of the Roman government is referenced in the New Testament. Christians' abstinence from emperor worship may have led to the executions that affected the church at Pergamum in the book of Revelation. Persecution did exist under Domitian in the late first century.

Still, it only occurred when Christians refused to respect the simple rituals of the Roman religion, such as sacrificing to the gods. In fact, this persecution was not a new principle but was grounded in well established laws.

Worship of the Emperor: The worship of the emperor or the Imperial cult was widely practiced during the time of Domitian who ruled from 81-96 CE, particularly during the later part of his rule. Christians refused to participate in the worship of emperor which led to persecution. Out of the seven cities listed in Rev.2-3, all had imperial temples except for Thyatira. The churches in Revelation were located where the imperial cult was most securely in place. For the Christians this was one big problem they were facing. Christians were under serious threat because of this imperial cult or emperor worship.

The Political Context of the Book of Revelation: The political context of the book of Revelation was during the period when the Roman ruled the Empire. Revelation was written at the end of the 1st century CE during the reign of Domitian. Domitian followed the footsteps of Nero who was a notoriously cruel leader. Domitian was said to have been similarly harsh. We will look at the Roman emperors who were in rule during the time of the book of Revelation was written.

Julio-Claudian Emperors: The first five emperors of the Roman are known as Julio-Claudian emperors.

Augustus was the first Roman ruler, under whom the Roman imperium or the power of the imperial state was thoroughly established. He ruled wisely and well. During his reign a regular professional army was created and on retirement the veterans were given bonus and settled in colonies in the provinces. To consolidate the empire at large, Augustus took a census of the population and all property as a basis for recruiting the army and for taxation. **Tiberius** succeeded Augustus and during his reign the Roman armies suffered reverses with the result that he withdrew the frontier to Rhine. His later years were clouded with troubles and he died in 37 CE. He prohibited the building of temple and appointment of priests for his own worship. He discouraged the worship of Caesar. **Caligula** was made Tiberius successor by the senate. During his reign he pardoned political prisoners, reduced taxes, gave public entertainments. However, he began to show signs of mental weakness. He demanded to be worshipped as god. He planned to “place his own image in the Holy of Holies in the temple in Jerusalem.” After the death of Caligula, the senate selected Claudius as the ruler. **Claudius** was a good scholar and that proved to be an abler ruler. Under his rule Rome became a bureaucracy

governed by committees and secretaries. He died in 54 CE leaving to Nero the succession of the imperial throne. **Nero's** first five year reign was peaceful and successful but the ending part of his reign saw him indulge his lustful bent. He offended Rome by building his Golden House at the centre of the city after the great fire broke out in 64 CE. Nero was suspected of having deliberately set it in order to make room for his new Golden House. It is true that Nero persecuted Christians not because they did not worship him but in order to find "scapegoats" for the fire that broke out at Rome. Large number of Christians were detained, tortured and put to death. It was also during this time that the authorities learned to distinguish between Jews and Christians.

Flavian Dynasty: The ancient Roman imperial dynasty of Vespasian and his sons Titus and Domitian is known as Flavian Dynasty. **Vaspasian** was fragile in his habits and energetic in his administration. He strengthened the frontiers by reducing dependent principalities to the status of provinces. He built the famous Colosseum in Rome and died in 79 CE leaving his office to Titus. **Titus** was brave ruler which made him one of the most popular emperors that Rome ever had. The catastrophic overthrow of Pompeii and Herculaneum occurred during his reign. He appointed a commission and did his utmost to rescue as many of the victims as possible. He even sold his private furniture to contribute to the general need. He died in 81 CE and the senate conferred the imperial power to his brother Domitian.

Domitian was a thorough autocrat. He demanded worship for himself which the Jews and Christians refused to worship. During his reign there was complete change unlike his father and brother in matters of evil aspects of rule. He demanded Caesar worship. He launched hatred against the Jews and the Christians. He wanted himself to be addressed as 'Lord and God'. All were asked to call him 'lord' or face the consequence of death. In 93 CE he executed some Christians for refusing to offer sacrifice before his image. His reign is considered to be the time when the book of Revelation was written. His last year of reign was a nightmare and he died in 96 CE.

Roman Economic Power: The dominion of the Romans is not only over the kings of the earth politically but its power is extended to the economic aspects as well. The Romans had to meet and supply the needs of the provinces. In order to support the various projects such as the constructing buildings, roads, and fleets of sheep for trade and travel and also for its armies, taxes had to be collected. Rome also have imported basic necessities for their living and also large amount of luxury goods. The imported goods included gold, silver, bronze, precious stones, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, exotic wood, ivory, marble, spices, wine, cattle, sheep, horses and slaves (18:11-13). The

slaves who are 'human beings' are in the list of imports alongside with materials and goods. This shows that the Romans valued them as nothing and placed them on the same level as gold, silk and cattle.

The Christians in the beginning were together with Jews and were enjoying the equal benefits. But when the separation between them was made the Christians no more benefited and had to face various crises. John had encouraged the Christians to remain faithful. Imperial cult and persecution were important aspects during that time. The political context gives us a clear idea of how the Roman Empire was mighty and powerful in terms of military power and rule. Worship of the Emperor is also one of the important aspects which the book deals with. John writes Revelation to let the readers know and understand about the Roman Empire and its context. He calls people to be faithful till the end in spite of the trials and difficulties they are facing.

The complexity in the book of Revelation: Many Christians find that the Book of Revelation is the most difficult book in the New Testament to understand. The figurative language of the book has led to some very fanciful interpretations. For example, someone suggested that the number of the beast from the earth, 666 (Rev 13:18), identifies President Ronald (6) Wilson (6) Reagan (6) because he had six letters in each of his three names. Much of the difficulty in understanding the book of Revelation comes from disconnecting it from the rest of the Bible. This is understandable in one sense because we tend to think of and even identify the books of the Bible as separate works. After all, they were composed by different human authors spanning many centuries. However, the Bible is primarily a work of divine composition. Therefore the inspiration of the Holy Spirit provides a unifying context that organically connects each of the books of Sacred Scripture. From this perspective, the books that make up the Bible should be viewed as the chapters of an integrated work, must be interpreted in connection with one another. This is especially true of the book of Revelation, which constitutes the last chapter. Thus, if Revelation is read as a stand alone work it is incomprehensible. Unfortunately, many readers of Revelation are not that familiar with the earlier chapters. They may not even have read them. This is a serious obstacle to understanding Revelation because it draws on numerous earlier biblical passages. There are 348 clear Old Testament references in the Book of Revelation. The most obvious source of the ideas and images in the Book of Revelation is the Old Testament. The author draws much from the books of Ezekiel and Daniel, and in a lesser degree from Zechariah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers and Psalms. Some speak of as many as 24 canonical books of the Septuagint as the source of Revelation. It has been discovered that the influence of the Old Testament on Revelation

is so great that out of 404 verses in the entire book there are only 126 which contain no allusion to the Old Testament.

Why it is important to the study the book of Revelation? Revelation is one of the most avoided books in the Bible. Pastors seldom preach from it. Sunday schools and small groups seem to have many more pressing things to study. Revelation can be a challenging book to read and understand. For many people, it is a dark book, filled with images of wrath, destruction, and death. It can be downright scary. Then there are the strange images that come from John's vision, which are so unlike anything we've seen or known. It becomes difficult to make sense of them. However, there are few good reasons for us to engage with the Revelation?

1. **It is God's word** and, as such, we cannot just close the book on Revelation because we don't like it or find it difficult to understand. Both of these reasons indicate that many in the church today have lost sight of the value and purpose of prophecy. That is a normal outcome for those who avoid the study of prophecy. To say it is not worthy of study is to bring into question God's wisdom in revealing it to us. The Bible makes it crystal clear that true prophecy is not an invention of man but was given to man by the Holy Spirit as God inspired men (2 Peter 1:20–21).

2. **Revelation is Christ's message to the church.** If we fail to read and study Revelation, we are missing important instruction from our Savior on how to live in this sin-cursed world. Christ's letters to the seven churches were written for our benefit. The significance of the book is so great that Christ said, "*Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy aloud, and blessed are those who hear and obey the things written in it*" (Revelation 1:3). There is blessing one receives from reading, listening to, and obeying the words of Revelation. No other book in the Bible makes such a promise. Believers who fail to read, study, and heed Revelation will miss out on promised blessings and are prone to go astray.

3. **Prophecy is unique to the bible.** Prophecy is given to us by God for our benefit. In Old Testament times, God's prophecy served two purposes: 1) to warn people of God's impending judgment if they failed to repent, and 2) to give people hope for the future. The same is true of prophecy in the New Testament. Revelation warns people to repent and avoid the coming wrath of God, which is unavoidable. It also gives us hope that God will judge evil and right the wrong that Adam's sin brought upon His creation (Romans 8:19–22).

4. **The study of Revelation enlightens our path in a dark world.** In the context of Christ's power and return, the apostle Peter reminded us that "we possess the prophetic word as an altogether reliable thing. You do well if you pay attention to this as you would to a light shining in a murky place" (2 Peter 1:19). When we study prophecy, we come to understand God's grand plan for all of human history. It is a light that shows us His way out of this world of sin and darkness. It also reminds us that, hard as we try, we can't reform all of the evils in this world. Only God can fix the world through Christ.

5. **Revelation answers the question,** "how will God restore His kingdom that is in rebellion?" The first book in the Bible, Genesis, is the book of beginning and the last book, Revelation, is the book of ending. In fact, it is the ultimate ending! In Revelation 1–3, Christ councils the church how it should live in a rebellious kingdom. He warns the church of dangers to avoid and promises blessing for those who endure to the end. Chapters 4–19 lay out God's process to eliminate the rebellious ones from Earth in preparation to restore His Kingdom. Jesus Christ, the Kinsman Redeemer, the Lamb who bought back man's right to rule over the earth with His own shed blood, will remove the usurpers so He can restore God's Kingdom and rule over it. Revelation closes with God's restored Kingdom on this earth for 1,000 years (Revelation 20), followed by His eternal Kingdom in the new heavens and earth (Revelation 21–22).

6. **Revelation is a call to all who do not know Jesus christ as Lord and Savior, to come to faith.** It warns people of the eternal judgment that is coming upon all the enemies of God and the hope we can find only through faith in Christ. We should not fear the wrath of God in Revelation but rather, it should motivate us to share the gospel with everyone we know. For the church to avoid Revelation is to avoid one of the greatest evangelistic tools God has given us. We should not fear the wrath of God in Revelation but rather, it should motivate us to share the gospel with everyone we know.

There are many reasons to value the book of Revelation and study it, but none are more salient than the simple fact that it is God's inspired Word. We hold that all Scripture is relevant for faith and practice, which includes the prophecy of Revelation. Israel began straying from God when they started choosing only the parts of God's Word they liked and ignored the rest. In time, they made God into their own image rather than the God revealed in Scripture. We would do well to learn from Israel's failure and hold true to all of God's Word, even the parts that are difficult to study.