

# The Revelation of Jesus Christ: a study for fellowship groups

Further copies from: Adrian H Reed at the email address below:  
ahr@blueyonder.co.uk



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## **Part 0: Introduction to the book (Rev 1:1-3)** published 10/09/2003

*Read Revelation 1:1-3*

It is hoped in this series to unlock some of the truth of this fascinating book, especially to those who have found it a mysterious and perhaps even unintelligible book. It won't be an exhaustive study ... nor an exhausting one, being confined to a limited number of sessions. Instead it will pick out things which illustrate the message of the book and a way to begin to understand what it has to say to us today. We'll get the background to the study out of the way first! It's very important!

**Interpretation** There are four main ways in which Christians have interpreted the book:

- o The **then-present-day view** (what theologians call the *praetorist* view). The writings were by the Apostle John, perhaps through a secretary actually acting as scribe. John was exiled and imprisoned in a copper-mine on the island of Patmos. The church is going through awful persecution under Roman rule and John is writing to encourage those who were suffering by telling them that the ultimate victory will be God's and the Roman Empire will fall. That's what happened and Revelation is a message for that day and for Christians alive at that time: an epistle. It may also teach us some lessons for today but there is no bigger picture to look for.
- o The **historical view**. The book is a prophecy, written in dramatic picture language, to foreshadow all that will happen during the church age. Each section, beginning with the messages to the churches and working through to the end of chapter 17 has a fulfillment during the centuries which have elapsed since New Testament days. One problem with this view is that those who have promoted it down through the years have tended to see their own generation as the generation which will see the return of Christ and this has led them to fit history to the events of the book of Revelation accordingly. Over many centuries the historical view has much changed!
- o The **prophetic view**. This view sees the book of revelation as a detailed prophecy of what will happen during the times immediately leading up to the return of Christ. *Read Daniel 9:24-27*. Central to this view is an interpretation of events during a 70<sup>th</sup> week of years (i.e. a period of 7 years or perhaps at least 7 years, rather than 7 days) that was revealed to Daniel as an overview of God's plan to bring an end to sin and to usher in an era of righteousness. The first part of this is a period of 7 plus 62 weeks of years, 483 years altogether that brings the nation of Israel from the first year of the reign of Cyrus of Persia and the return of Jews after the captivity (Dan 9:25) to the birth of Christ, "the Anointed One". After this, according to Daniel's prophecy, the Anointed One will be cut off, a reference to the crucifixion. After this also, the whole church age which has sun for nearly 2000 years fits into the picture. The 70<sup>th</sup> and last week of seven years is to occur at a later date (Dan 9:27) and will finally see God triumphing in righteousness over the rule of sin. The events leading up to this 70th week of seven years (or more), events during it, and what follows, all of this tied in with the return of Christ, is what the prophetic view holds the book of Revelation to be all about. This view of the book suddenly became fashionable toward the end of the nineteenth century and was the most widely held interpretation until about 30 years ago, since which it has been given much less prominence.

- o The **eternal view**. In this interpretation of the book, the teaching is principally about Jesus Christ. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ (not the revelation of John!) not so much about what the future holds, even though there are definite statements about Jesus' return and about future events, as much as about Jesus himself in his eternal character and about eternal principles governing God's dealing with mankind. These are lessons for every generation of Christians, unchanging in a changing world.

These four views look at the book in very different ways. The book itself draws heavily on statements from the Old Testament, but is not at all an assortment of repeated scriptures but is the most carefully constructed and detailed account which stands the most thorough analysis. Some people hold that it is in the purposes of God for us to be able to understand the book in all of the above four ways, because it has been written under the direction of the Holy Spirit for that very purpose. Certainly there was a then-present-day relevance for the first readers of the book, addressing what they were actually going through at that time. Certainly there are prophetic statements to understand and apply. We will avoid a pick-and-mix approach to the book in this study series because that will probably add to any confusion in the limited time available. We shall mainly be taking the eternal view, looking at what the book teaches about Jesus himself on earth and in heaven, as well as what it teaches us about our own position in relation to God and the world in which we live.

**The structure of the book** There are four sections to the book, most of which falls into section 2, and each contains the words "in the Spirit" to describe John's condition when receiving the vision. Two of the scenes take place on earth and two in the heavenly realm (including the last – the New Jerusalem). The two scenes on earth have the sword as the centre-point of the story and the two heavenly scenes have the Lamb as central.

Title		"in the Spirit"	Sword / Lamb	The scene
Christ in the midst of the Church	Rev 1-3	Rev 1:10	Rev 1:16	Earth
Christ seated on the Throne	Rev 4-16	Rev 4:2	Rev 5:6	Heavenly
Christ returning in Judgment	Rev 17-20	Rev 17:3	Rev 19:15	Earth
Christ in the New Jerusalem	Rev 21-22	Rev 21:10	Rev 21:22	Heavenly

**Spiritual warfare.** A battle is being played out between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan: a battle which God is going to win (Rev 11:15). In this battle Christians, as subjects of the kingdom of God, have a part to play. However, the people of God are called to be priests rather than soldiers, and their weapons are not the usual weapons of war, but are prayer (Rev 5:8; 8:3,4), blood (Rev 12:11; 16:6; 19:2) and testimony, or word of mouth (Rev 6:9; 12:11; 19:10; 20:10).

John says that the revelation is something that the Father gave to the Son, and which the Son has passed on to the church through him. It has been passed on to us, not to give us endless predictions to grapple with and understand, but it has been given to us to bless us (Rev 1:3)!

Q If our quality of Christian life is to be improved what three things must we do? Discuss this.

Next study: Part 1 **Jesus is the eternal God** (Rev 1:4-20)