

# REVELATION

## Who wrote this book?

The writer identifies himself as John. (Revelation 1:1, 4, 9 and 22:8). He gives one personal detail: he is “on the island called Palmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” (1:9) Palmos was a rocky island in the Mediterranean Sea. John was in exile. Is this John the beloved disciple, author of the Gospels or 1, 2, and 3 John? Maybe, but there is no way to be sure. This writer does want you to be sure that Jesus is the source of this message: *The revelation of Jesus which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.* (1:1)

## When was Revelation written?

This book was written during a time of persecution, probably during the reign of Caesar Domitian (A.D. 81-96). Near the end of his reign, he demanded that he be addressed as “Lord and God” and worship his image. Many Christians were put to death or exiled.

## Why was Revelation written?

To bring hope to those facing evil, to proclaim the present reign of Jesus and to show his coming victory. The final chapters picture the fulfillment of God’s plan for all of creation, the end toward which the whole Biblical message of redemption is focused.

## How should Revelation be read?

Look for the Big Picture!

1. Revelation is very visual: use your mind’s eye or draw a picture of what you read.
2. This book begins and ends with a promise of blessing for those who read and are faithful. If you find yourself troubled as you read, refocus by turning to chapters 1, 4, 5 or 20-22.
3. Revelation is a book with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Most Biblical books are collections of stories, prophecies or events which make sense as smaller sections. Revelation is easily misread if you pick out smaller sections or individual symbols, especially before you grasp the beginning and the end. Many religious programs on TV and radio preach fear instead of hope because they are overly focused on decoding or finding the modern equivalents to ancient symbols. Books and movies which use scenes and

symbols from Revelation often take them totally out of context.

Most of the symbolic language comes directly from the Old Testament. Of the 404 verses in Revelation, 275 contain direct quotes or allusions from the Old Testament. The number 12, for example, refers to the 12 tribes of Israel or all the chosen people. It has additional significance because of the 12 apostles. The number 1,000 also represents a large number in the Greco-Roman context, i.e., 10 units of 100 soldiers in the Roman army. In Revelation 7:4, the number 144,000 (12 x 12 x 1,000) – which Jehovah’s Witnesses and some other interpret as a small, select number – is actually symbolic of completeness: not one of the redeemed will be lost.

Here are a few basic symbols:

- Lamb – Jesus
- Seven – completeness, good (Genesis 1)
- Six – incomplete, evil (following the Hebrew way, 666 means evil, eviler, vilest)
- Babylon – evil empire (historical Babylon conquered Jerusalem and took people captive), Rome

Writing in code also protected Christians because Roman authorities did not understand the meaning.

Revelation is a type of literature called apocalyptic. It was a well-known genre beginning around 250 A.D. It is marked by conflict between good and evil, symbolic language, hidden meanings and the end of the world. Biblical apocalypse asserts the sovereignty of God, the ultimate victory of God over evil and the establishment of God’s kingdom. Revelation is the only apocalyptic book in the New Testament. Apocalyptic literature in the Bible includes Ezekiel 1-3 (38-39), Isaiah 24-27, 65, 66; Zechariah 6-8; and Daniel 7-12.

The New Student Bible recommends reading one complete vision at a time:

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 1. The church on earth                                    | 1-3       |
| 2. The Lamb and the seven seals                           | 4-7       |
| 3. Seven angels with trumpets                             | 8-11      |
| 4. Church persecuted by Satan and the Beast               | 12-14     |
| 5. The seven bowls of God’s wrath                         | 15-16     |
| 6. Judgment of Babylon                                    | 17-19:10  |
| 7. Final judgment and final victory;<br>the new Jerusalem | 19:11-end |