

# The Book of Revelation

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*The Book of Revelation is one of the most mysterious books of the Bible. It is filled with heavenly perspectives, tales of two cities, beasts and dragons, other worldly and heavenly visions of the past present and the future. But what on earth is it all about?*

## Course Outline:

1. The Prophet's Call (*Read Chapter 1*)
2. Letters to the Churches—Part One (*Chapter 2*)
3. Letters to the Churches—Part Two (*Chapter 2*)
4. The Heavenly Council (*Chapters 4 & 5*)
5. Seven Seals & Seven Trumpets (*Chapters 6-11*)
6. The Great Ordeal (*Chapters 12-14*)
7. The Seven Bowls (*Chapters 15-16*)
8. The Last Days of Babylon (*Chapters 17-18*)
9. The Reign of God (*Chapters 19-20*)
10. The New Jerusalem (*Chapters 21-22*)

Meets Eleven Wednesdays September 8<sup>th</sup>—November 17<sup>th</sup>

## **General Outline of Revelation<sup>1</sup>**

- |   |              |
|---|--------------|
| I. God Speaks to the Church in the City | Chaps. 1–3   |
| II. God Judges the “Great City”         | Chaps. 4–18  |
| III. God Redeems the “Holy City”        | Chaps. 19–22 |

## **Expanded Outline**

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|--|-------------------------|
| I. <i>God Speaks to the Church in the City</i> | <i>Revelation 1–3</i>   |
| A. Letter Opening                              | 1:1–8                   |
| B. The Presence of the Risen Christ            | 1:9–20                  |
| C. Messages to the Seven Churches              | 2:1–3:22                |
| II. <i>God Judges the “Great City”</i>         | <i>Revelation 4–18</i>  |
| A. The Heavenly Throneroom                     | 4:1–5:14                |
| B. Opening the Sealed Scroll                   | 6:1–8:1                 |
| C. Sounding the Seven Trumpets                 | 8:2–11:19               |
| D. Exposé of the Powers of Evil                | 12:1–14:20              |
| E. The Seven Last Plagues                      | 15:1–16:21              |
| F. The Fall of Babylon                         | 17:1–18:24              |
| III. <i>God Redeems the “Holy City”</i>        | <i>Revelation 19–22</i> |
| A. Praise of God’s Victory                     | 19:1–10                 |
| B. Seven Visions of the End                    | 19:11–22:5              |
| C. The Vision Ends                             | 22:6–20a                |
| D. The Letter Ends                             | 22:20b–21               |

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<sup>1</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989.

# The Prophet's Call

## (Revelation Chapter 1)

### Revelation 1

#### Prologue

<sup>1</sup>The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.<sup>2</sup> He made it known<sup>3</sup> by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup>who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup>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, because the time is near.<sup>4</sup>

#### The Title v. 1-3

- a. The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ
  - i. “Revelation” or “Unveiling”
  - ii. Chain: God→Jesus Christ→ Angel→ John→One who Reads→ Those who Hear
  - iii. First Blessing: read and heard in worship.
- b. Prophecy

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel 2:28 “there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come.

<sup>3</sup> Amos 3:7 “Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.”

<sup>4</sup> The first of 7 Beatitudes (cf. 1:3, 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14)

- c. Crisis: “what must soon take place” and the “time is near”
  - i. What is so urgent?  
The end of the world?  
Persecution?
  - ii. Reject, Reinterpret, Reaffirm<sup>5</sup>
- d. The Word of God and The Testimony (Greek *martyr*) of Jesus Christ
  - i. Over 500 allusions to the OT
  - ii. This is what is required of us.



Figure 1 St. John at Patmos - Pine Panel Alte Pinakothek at Munich, 1518

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<sup>5</sup> See 2 Peter 3:3-16

## Greetings and doxology

<sup>4</sup>John,

To the seven churches in the province of Asia:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits<sup>6</sup> before his throne, <sup>5</sup>and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, <sup>6</sup>and has made us to be a kingdom and priests<sup>7</sup> to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

<sup>7</sup>Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. <sup>8</sup> So shall it be! Amen.

<sup>8</sup>"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

### 2. The Address v.4-8

#### a. Seven

- i. Churches
- ii. Spirits

#### b. Province of Asia

- i. Under the control of Domitian (81-96)
- ii. "All hail to our Lord (Kurios) and to his Lady"
- iii. Everyone who addressed him in speech or writing had to begin "Lord and God..."

### c. Royal Titles

- i. Faithful Witness  
(Greek *martyr*)
- ii. Firstborn of the Dead
- iii. Ruler of Earthly Kings
- iv. A Royal House of Priests
- v. "I am" the Alpha and Omega
- vi. Who was, and is and is coming
- vii. The Omnipotent  
(Greek *pantokrator*)

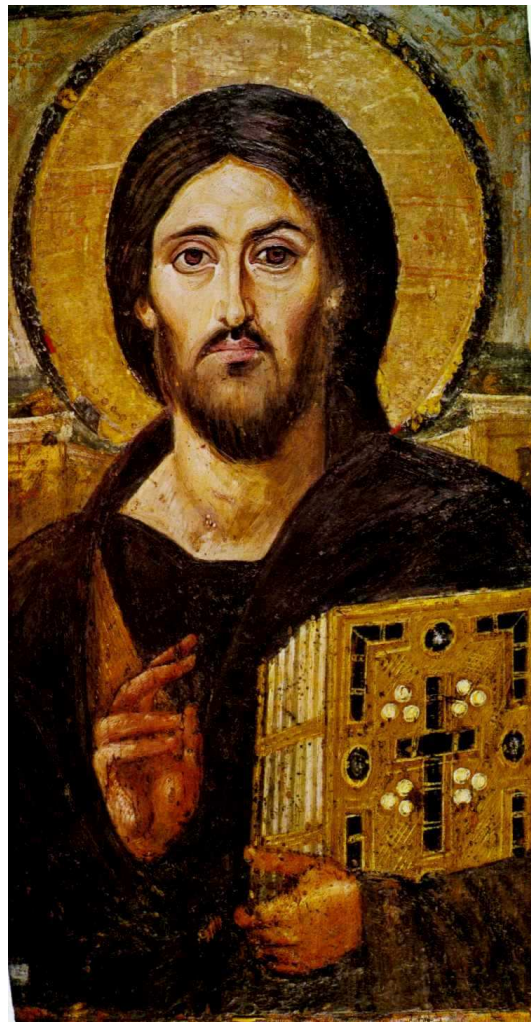


Figure 2 Christ Pantocrator St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> Century

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<sup>6</sup> Revelation 1:5 Or the sevenfold Spirit

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 19:6 (cf. John 12:32-33)

<sup>8</sup> See Daniel 7:13; Zech 12:10-13ff

## One like a Son of Man

<sup>9</sup>I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup>On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, <sup>11</sup>which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

<sup>12</sup>I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup>and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man,"<sup>9</sup> dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. <sup>14</sup>His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. <sup>15</sup>His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. <sup>16</sup>In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. <sup>10</sup> His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

<sup>17</sup>When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. <sup>18</sup>I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

<sup>19</sup>"Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. <sup>20</sup>The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels<sup>11</sup> of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

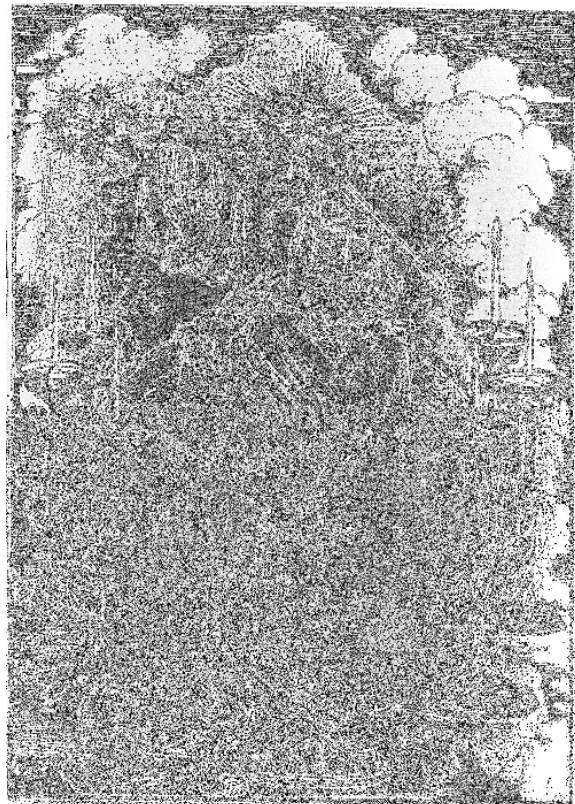
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<sup>9</sup> Daniel 7:13

<sup>10</sup> Isa. 11:4, 49:2 cf. Heb. 4:12

<sup>11</sup> Or messengers

3. The Exile
  - a. The ordeal and sovereignty which are ours in Jesus Christ
  - b. Patient Endurance – key Christian Characteristic for John. (Read Pliny)
  - c. Patmos—place of Exile
4. The 'Son of Man'
  - a. The Seven
    - i. Gold Lamps
    - ii. Stars
    - iii. Angels
    - iv. Churches
  - b. Like a Dead man
  - c. The living one
  - d. The Keys of Death and the Grave (Hades Gk. Sheol Hb.)
  - e. What you see, what now is and what is to happen hereafter



**Figure 3 Christ among the seven lampstands  
Albrecht Durer, 1528.**

## **Gaius Plinius to the Emperor Trajan:**

(Letters X.96 translated from Latin by William Harris, Prof. Em. Middlebury College)

It is for me an important point of responsibility to refer to you as Head of State [*latin domine, equivalent of Greek, kurios, used by Christians only of God and Jesus as Lord but claimed as a title by the emperors and especially important to Domitian in John's time*], things about which I have questions, since you are the person best able to set straight my hesitations and correct my lack of information.

Actually I have never been present at a Examination of Christians, so I do not know what punishment is required or how far it is to be carried out. Nor do I understand the legal grounds for a prosecution, or how stringently it is to be prosecuted. I am not clear about prosecutions in respect to the age of the persons, whether no distinction should be made between the young and the old, and furthermore whether a pardon should be granted in cases of recanting [*Latin paenitentiae*], or if there is no advantage for a person completely ceasing to be a Christian. Or is the name "Christian" which is prosecutable, even if not involved in criminal actions, or is that "criminality" is automatically attached to the name?

In the meantime, I now handle it this way with those who are turned over to me as Christians. I ask them directly, in person, if they are Christian, I ask a second and third time to be sure, and indicate to

them the danger of their situation. If they persist [*Latin perseverantes, related to "endurance", Greek hypomone, the central virtue of Christians in Revelation*], I order them led dispatched (= executed). I have had no trouble with this, since whatever it was they admitted or professed, I decided that their obstinacy and unyielding inflexibility should be sufficient reason for punishment. Some others who were virtually insane with this cult, but Roman citizens, I sent back to Rome for trial.

As I continue with this handling of the situation, as often happens, the numbers and kinds of incriminations are becoming more widespread. An anonymous List has been brought out which contains the names of a great many persons. I decided to dismiss charges again any on this list who stated that they were now not, nor had ever been Christians, if they repeated after me a prayer of invocation to the Gods, and made an offering of wine and incense to your statue, [*According to tradition they were required to make the two word acknowledgement of Roman sovereignty "Kurios Kaisaros" ("Caesar is Lord"), and exact counterpart to the Christian confession "Jesus is Lord" (cf. Romans 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3)*] which I had brought in to the court along with the statues of the Gods, for this purpose. And in addition they were to formally curse Christ, which I understand true Christians will never do.

Other named by the anonymous List said they were Christians, and later changed their statement. Some said that they had been and then stopped, some three years before, some longer, some even twenty

years before. *[Note this would be in the time of Domitian]* All these revered your statue and those of the Gods, and cursed Christ. They stated that the sum total of their error or misjudgment, had been coming to a meeting on a given day before dawn, and singing responsively a hymn to Christ as to God, swearing with a holy oath not to commit any crime, never to steal or commit robbery, commit adultery, fail a sworn agreement or refuse to return a sum left in trust. When all this was finished, it was their custom to go their separate ways, and later re-assemble to take food of an ordinary and simple kind. But after my edict which forbids all political Societies, they did in fact give this up. I thought at this point that it was necessary to get information from two slave women, whom they call Deaconesses (*ministrae*) about the actual truth, by means of torture. I found nothing worthy of blame other than the blind and over-wrought nature of their cult-superstition.

I have therefore postponed further Examinations (*cognitiones*) and made haste to come to you immediately for consultation. This situation seem to demand serious consultation, especially in view of the large number of people falling into this danger. A great many persons of every age, of every social class, men and women alike, are being brought in to trial, and this seems likely to continue. It is not only the cities, but also the towns and even the country villages which are being infected with this cult-contagion.

It seems possible to check and reverse this direction at this point, for it is quite

clear that the Temples of the Gods which have been empty for so long, now begin to be filled again, the sacred rites which had lapsed are now being performed and flesh for sacrificial rites is now sold again at the shops, although for a while nobody would buy it. So it seems reasonable to think that a great many people could be persuaded to reform, IF there were a legal procedure for Repentance.

### **Emperor Trajan to Pliny:**

You have done the right thing, my dear Pliny, in handling the cases of those who were brought to you under the charge of being Christians. But it is not possible to make hard and fast rule with one specific formula. These people must not be searched out, if they are brought before your court and the case against them is proved, they must be punished, but in the case of anyone who states that he is not a Christian and makes it perfectly clear that he is not, by offering prayers to out Gods, such a one is to be pardoned on the grounds of his present repentance *[Latin paenitentiae]*, however suspect he may have been in the past.

But anonymous lists must not have any place in the court proceedings. They are a terrible example and not at all in keeping with our times.

## Options for a Christian in A.D. 96

Being a Christian in a hostile culture where one is expected to “pledge allegiance” to Caesar and false gods was tough: politically, socially, economically, emotionally.

1. **Quit.** Curse Christ and bow before Rome.
2. **Lie.** “Situation Ethics” It was the lesser of two evils. Christians would lie about their allegiance to Rome, but with mental reservations, keeping their true faith and beliefs *private*.
3. **Fight.** Many Jewish Zealot Sects chose this—and were resoundingly squashed.
4. **Change the “Law”.** Work within the system to change the political situation and laws. Not a real good short term solution.
5. **Adjust.** This was the syncretism of Christianity to incorporate beliefs and practices of the other Roman cults in order to “fit in.” “Intolerance and exclusiveness must be avoided, so that Christians should do nothing that would indicate disrespect for the religion of other people” (ie. Adjust Christian beliefs and practices to the cultural “civil religion”.) Many did this.
6. **Die.** Die at the hands of the Romans. John indicates that this

is the only appropriate Christian response.

**Key Question of Revelation:** Will the Christians who must decide how to live their lives in the Mundane Cities of Asia (Part I) orient themselves to the ‘Great City’ that will inevitably receive God’s Judgment (Part II) or to the ‘Holy City’ that will be redeemed by God (Part III)?

**The Key Spiritual Dilemma of Revelation:** It is easy to understand when unfaithful people experience the consequences of sin and rebellion to God. But, how are we to understand the faithfulness and reality of God in light of *faithful* Christians experiencing disaster and persecution? Is God being faithful to his promises? What is God going to do about all of this mess!?!

“**Response** to the message of Revelation is an expression of faith in the Faithfulness of God in a situation which gives no indication of it in this world; it is faith’s “nevertheless” when “therefore” makes no sense.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid Boring, p.42.



### **Christ Pantocrator: St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, Egypt**

This is an early type of the Christ Pantocrator. Wearing a tunic (chiton) and a draped outer garment (himation), Christ makes the sign of blessing with the right hand and holds in the left a very thick Gospel-book with a cover adorned with jewels and precious stones. The eyes are not alike in size and shape, the mouth is asymmetrical with a melancholy expression, the rather short beard has an inward curve and the hair falls back over the left shoulder.

The exceptionally high quality of the painted icon suggests that it must have been the product of a Constantinopolitan atelier in Justinian's age. This may be further confirmed by the fact that the iconographical type it represents was created at the time when Justinian was emperor, although we cannot be absolutely certain about that. It should be remembered at this point that the Monastery of St. Catherine had been founded by Justinian and that the emperor had presumably sent various gifts to the Monastery, including perhaps this very icon.

At one time the icon was dated to the 13th century. However, its cleaning and conservation in 1962 revealed the original encaustic layer, thus pointing to a much earlier date in the 6th or 7th century.



The most common translation of Pantocrator is "Almighty" or "All-powerful". In this understanding, Pantokrator is a compound word formed from the Greek words for "all" and the noun "strength" (κρατος). This is often understood in terms of potential power; i.e., ability to do anything, omnipotence.

Another, more literal translation is "Ruler of All" or, less literally, "Sustainer of the World". In this understanding, Pantokrator is a compound word formed from the Greek for "all" and the verb meaning "To accomplish something" or "to sustain something" (κρατεω). This translation speaks more to God's actual power; i.e., God does everything (as opposed to God can do everything).

The Pantokrator, largely an Eastern Orthodox or Eastern Catholic theological conception is less common by that name in Western (Roman) Catholicism and largely unknown to most Protestants. In the West the equivalent image in art is known as Christ in Majesty, which developed a rather different iconography.

### **Uses in the New Testament**

In the New Testament, Pantokrator is used once by Saint Paul (2 Cor 6:18). Aside from that one occurrence, the author of the Book of Revelation is the only New Testament author to use the word Pantokrator. The author of Revelation uses the word nine times, and while the references to God and Christ in Revelation are at times interchangeable, Pantokrator appears to be reserved for God alone.