

# SESSION 1

## Greetings and Doxology

SCRIPTURE REVELATION 1:1–8

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### Welcome

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Welcome to this study of the book of Revelation, a unique book in the Bible. Revelation is the only apocalyptic book in the New Testament. Its Greek title *Apokalypsis* is a word meaning an “unveiling” or “uncovering” of future events or hidden realms, such as getting a glimpse into heaven.

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**U**nderlying both Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature is the view that history is divided into two ages. The present age is evil and corrupt and it will be destroyed. The age to come is characterized by goodness and by God’s presence and power. The central turning point in history, on which apocalyptic writers often focus, is the Day of the Lord, when the present age will give way to the new age. Christian writers understood this to be the day of Christ’s return—the Second Coming.

Although the author only refers to himself as “John” (1:4), it has traditionally been accepted that he was none other than John the apostle. He wrote from the island of Patmos, a rocky island in the

Aegean Sea, some ten miles long and five miles wide. He had been exiled to this tiny barren spot because of his Christian witness. Most scholars feel that the book of Revelation was written toward the end of the reign of Domitian; that is, around A.D. 90–95.

Not only is the book of Revelation unusual, it is also difficult. The world of John’s Revelation is so remote from the modern world that one hardly knows where to begin in trying to understand it. Yet it is an integral part of God’s Word, and therefore an important book for Christians to understand. With prayer and patience, the Holy Spirit will bring wisdom and understanding to the reader, even if specific details do not become crystal clear.



## Ice-Breaker

15 Min.

### CONNECT WITH YOUR GROUP

## LEADER

Be sure to read the introductory material in the front of this book prior to this first session. To help your group members get acquainted, have each person introduce him or herself and then take turns answering one or two of the Ice-Breaker questions. If time allows, you may want to discuss all three questions.

We all enjoy stories, especially ones that engage our imagination. We are about to begin a book that will do just that. First, take some time to get to know one another better by sharing your responses to the following questions.

1. What type of book or movie do you like best?

- Adventure.
- Science fiction.
- Fantasy.
- Mystery.
- Historical documentary.
- Other \_\_\_\_\_.

2. What vivid dream or nightmare from childhood can you still recall?

3. When have you waited and waited for someone who never showed up? What had happened that prevented him or her from meeting with you?



## Bible Study

30 Min.

### READ SCRIPTURE AND DISCUSS

## LEADER

Select one group member ahead of time to read aloud the Scripture passage. Then discuss the Questions for Interaction, dividing into subgroups of three to six. Be sure to allow at least 15 minutes for the Caring Time at the end.

John introduces himself to his audience, but even more importantly he introduces the true author of the book, Jesus Christ. He opens with a song of praise to the God who has redeemed us by his own blood, the God who is, and was, and is forever—the Beginning and the End. Read Revelation 1:1–8, and note God’s promise to those “who hear the words of this prophecy and keep what is written in it” (v. 3).

### Greetings and Doxology

**1** The revelation of Jesus Christ that God gave Him to show His slaves what must quickly take place. He sent it and signified it through His angel to His slave John, <sup>2</sup>who testified to God’s word and to the testimony about Jesus

Christ, in all he saw. <sup>3</sup>Blessed is the one who reads and blessed are those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep what is written in it, because the time is near!

<sup>4</sup>John:

To the seven churches in the province of Asia.

Grace and peace to you from the One who is, who was, and who is coming; from the seven spir-

its before His throne; <sup>5</sup>and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To Him who loves us and has set us free from our sins by His blood, <sup>6</sup>and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>7</sup>Look! He is coming with the clouds,  
and every eye will see Him,  
including those who pierced Him.  
And all the families of the earth  
will mourn over Him.  
This is certain. Amen.

<sup>8</sup>“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “the One who is, who was, and who is coming, the Almighty.”

Revelation 1:1–8



## QUESTIONS FOR INTERACTION

### LEADER

Refer to the Summary and Study Notes at the end of this session as needed. If 30 minutes is not enough time to answer all the questions in this section, conclude the Bible Study by answering question 7.

1. How do you feel when you think about the Second Coming and the end of the world?
  - Excited.
  - Nervous.
  - Scared.
  - Not ready.
  - Hopeful.
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_.
2. John refers to his audience as “priests” in verse 6. How does this compare with being “slaves” (v. 1)? How can we be both?
3. In what ways might we be “blessed” (v. 3) as we read “the words of this prophecy”? What conditions must we meet in order to attain such blessings?
4. To what is Jesus the “faithful witness” (v. 5)? What does it mean that he is the “firstborn from the dead”?
5. What does God reveal about his character with the titles he takes in verse 8?
6. How might the expectation of Jesus’ return to earth have encouraged Christians suffering persecution? How about those experiencing peace and plenty?
7. To some, Jesus is a baby or an innocent victim of crucifixion. To John, Jesus is the reigning King of Kings. How might this view of Jesus affect your day-to-day dealings with sin? With discouragement? With opposition?



### GOING DEEPER:

*If your group has time and/or wants a challenge, go on to this question.*

8. John wrote, nearly 2,000 years ago, that the return of Christ was to “quickly take place” (v. 1). Since it has yet to occur, how do we reconcile John’s statement? Does his statement that “this is certain” (v. 7) offer us hope?



## Caring Time

15 Min.

### APPLY THE LESSON AND PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

This very important time is for developing and expressing your concern for each other as group members by praying for one another.

1. Agree on the group covenant and ground rules that are described in the introduction to this book.
2. How might the anticipation of Jesus’ imminent return to earth affect how you live your life in the coming week?
3. Share any other prayer requests and praises, and then close in prayer. Pray specifically for God to bring someone into your life next week to fill the empty chair.

# LEADER

Take some extra time in this first session to go over the introductory material at the front of this book. At the close, pass around your books and have everyone sign the Group Directory, also found in the front of this book.



## Next Week

Today we gained a small glimpse into the character of God—the Alpha and Omega, beginning and end. We were reminded that Jesus is going to return to the earth one day, perhaps this very day. In the week to come, spend time in prayer before the God who is, and was, and is to come, and consider how his imminent return might affect you if it were to happen tonight. Next week we will encounter the Son of Man, face-to-face.



## Notes on Revelation 1:1–8

**SUMMARY:** John identifies the five stages of transmission of this book: from Father to Son to an angel to John to the reader. The prologue to the book consists of an introduction (1:1–3) stating the origin of the work, and a salutation (1:4–8) with greetings (vv. 4–5a), a doxology (vv. 5b–6), and two prophetic sayings (vv. 7–8). Even though the book has been defined as “revelation” and “prophecy,” it is set in the form of a letter. In a fashion typical of Greek letters, the sender and recipients are named (v. 4) and a greeting is offered (vv. 4–5).

**1:1 *The revelation.*** Literally, *apokalypsis*—an unveiling or uncovering of something that was hidden; supernatural truths that could not be known had God not spoken them. This is the name that has been given to a type of literature that flourished in John’s time, dealing with the details of the unseen spiritual realm and their implications for history (e.g., the book of Enoch). *of Jesus Christ.* This is not “the revelation of John” as the book is sometimes called; it is the testimony borne by Jesus Christ. He is the witness (v. 4). It was given to John. *quickly take place.* This revelation has to do with events at the end of time (as becomes clear as the book unfolds), it also deals with interpreting the meaning of events that were happening at the time of its writing in light of the expectation of the imminent return of Christ to establish his kingdom.

**1:3** Since this is a book that came straight from God (as the words “revelation” and “prophecy” imply), those who read it are especially blessed. *Blessed.* This is the first of seven beatitudes in Revelation (14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14). To be blessed is to be in the favor of God. *reads/hear.* This probably refers to the first-century practice of reading aloud in church. *prophecy.* This is the second word that defines what kind of book this is (the first being “revelation”). Prophecy is a vision given by God of what lies ahead in both the immediate and long-term future.

**1:4 *seven churches.*** These seven churches are named in 1:11. There were other churches in this region, however (Acts 20:5–6; Col. 1:2; 4:13). Why only these seven are addressed is not clear. They may have been the key churches in each of seven postal regions in Asia. Certainly the number

seven was important (it represented perfection) and is used often in Revelation. The seven churches were located about 30 to 50 miles from each other on a circular road that connected them. *province of Asia.* The western half of Asia Minor (the western part of modern Turkey). *the One who is, who was, and who is coming.* A paraphrase of the name of God in Exodus 3:14–15. *the seven spirits.* This may be an unusual way of speaking about the Holy Spirit (the number seven referring to a complete manifestation of the Holy Spirit). Or it could refer to the seven archangels in Jewish tradition; or it could refer to seven angels who minister to the Lamb (4:5; 5:6).

**1:5** Three titles are given to Jesus. *faithful witness.* Jesus is the one whose life made God known to the world. The Greek word for witness (*martyrs*) becomes “martyr” in English, and certainly in Revelation death is often the result of faithful allegiance to God (as it was for Jesus). *firstborn from the dead.* But Jesus did not remain dead; he rose again to become the sovereign Lord over the church. The title “firstborn” not only denotes priority in time, but especially stresses his right of authority over all others who are raised to life after him. *ruler of the kings.* He is also the supreme ruler of the whole earth (Phil. 2:10–11). This assertion contradicted, of course, the first-century fact that Rome ruled without rival. Domitian (who was probably emperor when John wrote) asked to be addressed as “Lord and God.” But, in fact, it is Jesus who is the ruler behind rulers and will be revealed to be so at his second coming. *To Him who.* The first of several doxologies honoring Jesus (4:11; 5:9,12–13; 7:10). *by His blood.* This emphasizes the sacrificial nature of Jesus’ death in terms of the Old Testament sacrificial system.

**1:6 *kingdom, priests.*** The early church felt itself to be the true Israel, with all the promised blessings applying to it (Gal. 3:28; Phil. 3:3; 1 Peter 2:5,9).

**1:7** This combination of quotations from Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10 accents the divine identity of Jesus as God's appointed ruler of God's kingdom. The mourning is caused by the realization that judgment is coming upon those who

rejected God's ruler. When Jesus returns all will see him (not just Israel); all will mourn him (as they realize that judgment is coming).

**1:8 *the Alpha and the Omega.*** The first and last letter in the Greek alphabet. God controls the whole sweep of history. *says the Lord God.* This is one of the two places where God speaks directly (21:5–8).