

the
SEVEN
churches

WEEKLY RESOURCE

7 weeks. 7 letters. 7 voices. 1 purpose.

The final book in the canon of scripture is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament reveals the God of creation, our desperate need for redemption, how He patiently and justly engages with His children and turns the focus on the imminent arrival of the Messiah. In the gospels, we see the person of Jesus Christ, our Savior, as He arrives in the flesh, lives an earthly life, and finishes the work of redemption through His death, burial, and resurrection. The following books and letters help us as believers as we navigate this new Christ-following reality. And then we come to Revelation. The revelation of Jesus Christ as He always has been and always will be. This January, we turn to the first few chapters of Revelation to read what Jesus has to say to seven unique churches. In these letters, we'll see these churches commended, challenged, and corrected. But most importantly, we'll see once again and even more clearly who Jesus Christ is.

As we open these chapters, we want you to study them for yourselves. These letters are written to churches – to an assembly of believers. That's what we are. A church. An assembly of believers. For us to become the church that Jesus Christ is calling us to be, we each need to take these commendations, challenges, and corrections personally. So let us study them together.

Every week, we'll provide a resource for your personal study written by a gifted and mature member of our church that accompanies the specific letter to each church. Each week will be a little bit different as it follows and flows with the personality of the writer, the content of the letter, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Some weeks will be a more structured study with notes and charts. Some weeks will be more reflective and personal. Each will impact you as you study the scriptures and let the Lord reveal Himself to you.

Ephesus Smyrna Pergamum Thyatira Sardis Philadelphia Laodicea

INTRODUCTION - REVELATION 1



Written by Brian Holt

Week One - January 9, 2022

My kids and I have this ongoing joke that I don't know the words to any Disney songs. And it's basically true. Not knowing the words, however, does not keep me from belting them out at the top of my lungs:

"Let me go! Let me go! Don't hold me back anymore!"

My kids are quick to remind me these aren't the right words and I'm quick to remind them that it doesn't much matter to me. I like my words better. But, it's true, my words aren't the right words. They don't convey the intended meaning. Often, they don't convey any meaning at all. If you heard my version of the song in the actual movie, you'd be so confused. The songwriter chose the right words to get you to think, feel, and understand what he or she wanted the listener to grasp. The words matter.

God's Word is the same way. The writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote what God intended them to write. They wrote inspired words so that their readers would think, feel, and understand what God intended. The words of the Word are right in front of us. They are ubiquitous through printed copies, smartphones, and web browsers - available to us anytime we want them. And yet, far too often, we read these words as if they carry the same weight as the lyrics of our favorite Disney songs. Casual. Inspirational. Motivational. We forget that these are the very words of God Himself - written for us.

And so, for the next few weeks, we're going to study them. And not just a simple passing-over-read-once-generically-apply, type of study. We want to drink deeply from the well of God's Word.

BEFORE YOU PROCEED

We're going to start with Revelation 1 before we move into the seven letters to the seven churches. This introductory week should give us context, give us practice, and prepare our hearts to listen carefully to what Jesus has to say to these churches. Each week is going to look a little different as our writers have been given freedom to provide a study that fits their personality and study habits.

You're stuck with me first. (You're welcome? Sorry?) My habit is to read a section broadly and then go through it more specifically. That's the pattern we're going to walk through this week. The questions provided are just designed to prompt your observation. Answer them or go where the Spirit leads. I pray that it's as fruitful for you as it was for me.

PREPARE

Get a copy of God's Word that you can write in and mark-up. You can use your print Bible or use your computer to print off a copy of the chapter with some extra line spacing and wider margins. Find what works for you (but find a copy you can spend some time with and write all over.) Grab a fine tip pen and some colored pencils.

DAY 1

FAMILIARITY

PRAY. We need the Holy Spirit of God to help us understand the Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). Get your head and heart aligned before you start studying.

Read Revelation 1 slowly and completely multiple times. Read it for comprehension, not for completion. You're reading this to familiarize yourself with it...not just to finish your reading for today. I recommend reading it three times before you move on to answering any questions.

After your initial readings, what captivated your attention? What stood out to you as interesting? What was confusing?

What would you like to study more before you're done with this chapter?

Spend time in prayer and reflection. Take 10-15 minutes and use the space below to journal your prayers over this passage. Pick a section to focus on. Read it repeatedly if it's helpful. Repeat those truths back to God in prayer.

DAY 2

Yesterday our target was familiarity. Today we're going for understanding. Spend some time in prayer before you begin.

Read Revelation 1:1-3 slowly with a pen and colored pencil in hand. Mark it up! Look for anything repeated, emphasized, commanded or of primary importance. Highlight, star, underline, outline, or box anything that stands out.

Suggestions: Highlight in YELLOW anytime God or Jesus is referenced. Highlight in GREEN any blessing or benefit to the reader. Highlight in RED any warnings or concerns. Underline repeated words or ideas. Draw areas to connecting words and thoughts. Put boxes around sections or whole thoughts. Come up with your own habits or patterns

Look back over your highlights and markups. What do you notice? What seems to be most important?

Revelation is unique in that it gives the reader an explicit origin story for the book. It's the revelation of Jesus Christ. Given by God. From an angel to John. Who wrote it down. That you now read. And even though John is the author (the one who wrote it down), this is not John's message. Whose message is it? What is the message about?

What does understanding the origin do to the importance of reading and understanding the message?

What are these verses calling the reader to do? Make it personal.

Spend time in prayer and reflection. If you're used to reading a few verses and moving on to a new section the next day, this much time in a single chapter may feel like you're not making progress... but you are! Look at your page. What is reflected on the page is YOUR hard work in studying your own Bible. It's not someone else's thoughts about your Bible. This is what God is revealing directly to you from His Word. Isn't it exciting?!

DAY 3

KEEP GOING

We're back for some more observation and understanding. As always, pray before you start!

Read and mark up Revelation 1:4-8 in your Bible. Continue the habit from yesterday. Keep the same patterns for your highlights and notations. Write in the margins anything that draws your attention.

John is writing this to seven specific churches in Asia. You saw the names of these churches on Day 1. Write them down here.

This book was written to churches, not individuals. Do you think that's significant? Why or why not?

Look back over the highlights in this section. If you didn't already, highlight any aspect, description, or quality given to Jesus Christ in these verses. List them in the space below.

Reflect on these. Which characteristic is new to you? Refreshing to you? Most inspiring of worship?

Read Revelation 1:8 again. This is a remarkable statement. Alpha is the first letter in the Greek alphabet. Omega is the last. "The Alpha and Omega" is like saying He's the A to Z. It's an attribution of His ultimate supremacy using language to make the point. "Who is and who was and who is to come" is making the same attribution using time to make the point. Present. Past. Future. Jesus Christ, the Almighty.

All these verses serve to set Jesus Christ as the ultimate authority. Do you see Jesus Christ as your authority? How does this get lived out on a regular basis?

What aspect or portion of your life is MOST under His authority? What is the LEAST under His authority?

PRAY. Submit yourself in prayer to Jesus Christ. To Him be glory and dominion forever.

DAY 4

DIVE IN DEEPLY

Today is a transition day. John is no longer greeting the churches. The salutations are over. Now he's going to recount what happened. He's going to tell you the story.

Read and mark up Revelation 1:9-16 in your Bible. What do you notice? What themes are you starting to see in this chapter? Spend a significant amount of time with John's description of Jesus Christ.

It's important to understand the context of each passage. If you were asked to describe Peyton Manning, your description might change if you called to mind a TV Commercial or a Super Bowl winning drive. What is the context and circumstances around John's description of Jesus in these verses? (*Hint: He tells you in verses 7-11*)

List the characteristics of Jesus Christ from these verses in the space below. What is significant about each?

As you envision what John is describing, compare and contrast with the image of Jesus you have in your mind. What resonates? What is different than you imagined? When there is a gap between our understanding and the word of God, we close the gap by changing what's in our minds. Where does your understanding need to be refined?

Pick one attribute of Jesus from these verses to focus on in your prayer time. The splendor of the golden sash. The purity of the white hair. The passion of the fire in his eyes. The power of his voice. Call to mind your own. Spend time worshipping over Jesus Christ today.

DAY 5

FINISH STRONG

The story continues as we see John's initial response to his vision of Jesus Christ.

Read and mark up Revelation 1:17-20. Stay diligent with your notations and highlights. Use these as tools to help you see and understand the verses better.

What does John do as he sees this vision of Jesus Christ?

Falling on your face is not an uncommon response to those who encounter God. Read these few examples:

- Abraham (Genesis 17:1-8)
- The people of Jerusalem (Ezra 8:1-8)
- An unnamed leper (Luke 5:12-13)

When God reveals Himself to His people, they always get low. They get really low. Seeing Christ for who He truly is does something in our hearts. We can no longer be masters of our own domains. We recognize just how high and exalted He is above us. And yet, Jesus is so gracious here to John. What does He do and say (v17b-18)?

Now for the most important question of them all: Who is Jesus in Revelation 1? Summarize what you've read.

Reread Revelation 1:19-20. It is here in the story that John is given the command to write. It's also here that the vision is explained. Jesus was standing amid these churches. Now He's going to speak to these churches. Prepare your heart in prayer. Ask God to help Redeemer Bible Church hear from Him in these next 7 weeks.
