THE FUTURE FORETOLD

Biblical Prophecy Without the Panic

WHY WAS REVELATION WRITTEN?

Study Companion

READ • REFLECT • STUDY • APPLY

TEXT FIRST. THEORY SECOND.
KNOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE. KNOW WHY YOU BELIEVE IT.

PART ONE

FOLLOW THE MESSAGE

Start Here

Beasts. A dragon. 666. Armageddon.

Those are often the things people associate with Revelation.

Maybe you've tried reading Revelation before and stopped because the symbols and strange imagery were confusing.

That's okay.

You don't have to understand everything in Revelation before you can understand **why it was written.**

In Part One, we'll follow the main Scriptures from the message and answer one question:

Why did God give us Revelation?

You can complete this section on its own.

If you want to explore more when you're finished, **Part Two: Go Deeper** will take you further into the text.

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1. START WITH THE FIRST THREE VERSES

READ: REVELATION 1:1–3

Don't worry about understanding every phrase yet.

Look for the basics.

Who is this revelation from?

Who receives it?

Who is supposed to hear it?

Verse 3 says:

> **“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it...”**
> — Revelation 1:3, NIV

Notice that Revelation wasn't simply meant to be **studied.**

It was meant to be **heard and taken to heart.**

THINK ABOUT IT

What does “take to heart” suggest about how Revelation should affect the way we live?

KEY IDEA

The word translated **revelation** comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis*.

It means an **unveiling** or **revealing**.

Revelation isn't primarily something God is trying to hide from us.

Something is being revealed.

And the book begins by pointing us toward **Jesus Christ.**

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2. LOOK AT JESUS

READ: REVELATION 1:12–18

John had known Jesus personally.

But when he sees the risen and glorified Christ, Revelation 1:17 tells us:

> **"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead."**
> — Revelation 1:17, NIV

Then Jesus tells him:

> **"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!"**
> — Revelation 1:17–18, NIV

WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

Write down two or three things this passage reveals about Jesus.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Before Revelation introduces the beasts, 666, Armageddon, or many of the other things people associate with prophecy, it introduces us to **Jesus.**

KEY IDEA

Before Revelation shows us **what is coming**, it shows us **Who is coming.**

REFLECT

When you think about Revelation, what usually receives more of your attention—the frightening events or Jesus?

Why?

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3. REAL CHURCHES. REAL PEOPLE.

READ: REVELATION 1:4, 10–11

Revelation was originally sent to seven churches:

Ephesus • Smyrna • Pergamum • Thyatira • Sardis • Philadelphia • Laodicea

These were real congregations facing real problems.

Some were suffering.

Some were compromising.

Some had become spiritually comfortable.

Some were afraid.

Some were faithfully holding on.

Read these two examples.

REVELATION 2:10

Jesus tells the believers in Smyrna:

> **“Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer... Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.”**
> — NIV

REVELATION 3:11

Jesus tells the believers in Philadelphia:

> **“I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.”**
> — NIV

Underline the commands in those verses.

What do you find?

KEY IDEA

Revelation isn't merely asking:

“Can you figure out what's going to happen?”

It's also asking:

“Will you remain faithful to Jesus no matter what happens?”

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4. READ THE END OF THE STORY

Revelation contains frightening events.

But don't stop reading before you reach the ending.

READ: REVELATION 21:1–5

According to verses 3–4, what will eventually disappear?

What does God say in verse 5?

KEY IDEA

Revelation does not end with evil winning.

It ends with God dwelling with His people and making everything new.

Satan doesn't win.

Death doesn't win.

Evil doesn't win.

Jesus wins.

That's why biblical prophecy should ultimately produce **hope**, not panic.

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5. TEXT FIRST. THEORY SECOND.

This distinction will matter throughout *The Future Foretold*.

THE TEXT CLEARLY SAYS:

Jesus is alive.

Jesus will return.

God will judge evil.

Satan will ultimately be defeated.

Death will ultimately be defeated.

God will dwell with His people.

God will make everything new.

THEN THERE ARE QUESTIONS THAT REQUIRE INTERPRETATION:

When does the Rapture happen?

How long is the Tribulation?

Who is the Antichrist?

What does 666 mean?

What is the Millennium?

How do Daniel, Matthew, Paul's letters, and Revelation fit together?

Christians who believe the Bible is God's Word sometimes reach different conclusions about these questions.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't study them.

We absolutely should.

But we want to recognize the difference between:

“The Bible says...”

and

“We believe this means...”

That's why our approach is:

TEXT FIRST. THEORY SECOND.

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6. YOUR PIVOT POINT

Revelation isn't only about understanding the future.

It challenges us to examine the present.

Read Revelation 14:12:

> **“This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.”**
> — NIV

Now bring that home.

Which statement comes closest to where you are today?

☐ I need to trust Jesus instead of being afraid of what's happening in the world.

☐ I've become more interested in prophecy than in following Jesus.

☐ There's an area where I've been compromising.

☐ I'm spiritually tired and need encouragement to keep going.

☐ I need to become more intentional about studying Scripture for myself.

☐ I am faithfully following Jesus, but I need encouragement to keep holding on.

What is one step you can take this week to remain faithful to Jesus?

PART ONE — FINAL THOUGHT

You don't have to understand every symbol in Revelation today.

You don't have to have your end-times timeline figured out.

Start here:

Jesus is alive.

Jesus is coming.

Jesus calls His people to remain faithful.

Jesus wins.

And if that's enough study for today, **you can stop right here.**

You've followed the main biblical journey of the message.

But if you're thinking—

“I want to know more...”

keep going.

Because now we're going deeper.

PART TWO

WANT TO GO DEEPER?

Optional Extended Study

Part One answered the basic question:

Why was Revelation written?

Now we're going to slow down.

We'll examine the original audience, look more closely at the seven churches, explore how Revelation describes itself, practice separating biblical statements from interpretation, and trace the book all the way to its conclusion.

There are more questions here.

More Scripture.

And more room to think.

Take your time.

You don't have to complete it in one sitting.

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7. WHAT DOES “REVELATION” ACTUALLY MEAN?

Return to Revelation 1:1.

The Greek word translated **revelation** is:

apokalypsis

It carries the idea of an **unveiling, disclosure, or revealing.**

Our modern word *apocalypse* often makes us think of worldwide catastrophe.

But imagine a curtain being pulled aside.

Something that was hidden can now be seen.

READ: REVELATION 1:1–3 AGAIN

This time look for action words.

What is being **shown**?

What is being **testified to**?

What are people supposed to **hear**?

What are they supposed to **do** with what they hear?

THINK DEEPER

If Revelation was intended to be read aloud to ordinary first-century Christians, how should that affect our assumption that the book is impossible for ordinary Christians to understand?

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8. THE SEVEN CHURCHES

Now let's spend more time with Revelation's original audience.

Read Revelation 2–3 over several days if necessary.

You don't need to rush.

For each church, ask:

What does Jesus praise?

What does Jesus confront?

What does Jesus command?

What promise does Jesus give?

EPHESUS — REVELATION 2:1–7

What were they doing well?

What had they lost?

What did Jesus tell them to do?

SMYRNA — REVELATION 2:8–11

What were they experiencing?

What did Jesus tell them not to fear?

What did He ask them to remain?

PERGAMUM — REVELATION 2:12–17

Where had they remained faithful?

Where had compromise entered?

THYATIRA — REVELATION 2:18–29

What good things does Jesus recognize?

What problem had they tolerated?

SARDIS — REVELATION 3:1–6

What reputation did this church have?

How did Jesus describe its actual condition?

Why is that contrast important?

PHILADELPHIA — REVELATION 3:7–13

What had this church done despite having “little strength”?

What does Jesus tell them to do?

LAODICEA — REVELATION 3:14–22

How did they see themselves?

How did Jesus see them?

What did He invite them to do?

9. STEP BACK AND LOOK FOR THE PATTERN

After reading the seven messages, what themes do you notice?

☐ Faithfulness

☐ Repentance

☐ Endurance

☐ Compromise

☐ Suffering

☐ Spiritual complacency

☐ Listening

☐ Overcoming

☐ Holding on

☐ Returning to Jesus

NOW ASK:

What seems to concern Jesus most about His churches?

How does that compare with the things that usually receive the most attention when people discuss Revelation today?

10. JESUS AT THE BEGINNING AND THE END

Revelation begins with Jesus.

It also ends with Jesus.

READ: REVELATION 22:7–21

Look for every reference to Jesus coming.

Write down what you find.

Now read Revelation 22:20:

> **“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”**
> — NIV

Think about that.

The Bible's final prayer isn't:

“Lord, help us figure out every prophetic detail.”

It's:

“Come, Lord Jesus.”

What does that tell you about the proper focus of biblical prophecy?

11. PRACTICE: TEXT OR INTERPRETATION?

Now let's practice one of the most important skills we'll use throughout this series.

For each statement, ask:

Does Scripture explicitly say this, or is this a conclusion reached by interpreting and connecting passages?

STATEMENT 1

Jesus Christ will return.

☐ Explicit biblical teaching

☐ Interpretive conclusion

What passage supports your answer?

STATEMENT 2

Satan will ultimately be defeated.

☐ Explicit biblical teaching

☐ Interpretive conclusion

Read Revelation 20:10.

What do you find?

STATEMENT 3

God will make everything new.

☐ Explicit biblical teaching

☐ Interpretive conclusion

Read Revelation 21:5.

What do you find?

STATEMENT 4

Every event described in Revelation occurs in the exact chronological order in which John records it.

☐ Explicit biblical teaching

☐ Interpretive conclusion

Can you find a verse that explicitly states this?

STATEMENT 5

The Tribulation lasts seven years.

☐ Explicitly stated in Revelation

☐ A conclusion reached by connecting biblical passages

☐ I don't know yet

Don't worry if you don't know.

That's our next study.

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12. WHY THIS DISTINCTION MATTERS

Saying something is an **interpretation** doesn't mean it's wrong.

Every serious Bible student interprets Scripture.

We compare passages.

We examine context.

We look at language.

We consider historical setting.

We ask how one biblical writer connects with another.

And sometimes a strong biblical case emerges from putting several passages together.

But intellectual honesty requires us to recognize the difference between:

A verse directly saying something

and

a conclusion we've reached from several verses.

REFLECT

Why might confusing those two categories create problems when studying prophecy?

How could this distinction help you evaluate something you hear from a pastor, prophecy teacher, video, podcast, or social-media post?

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13. TRACE THE STORY TO ITS END

Read Revelation 20:10–22:5.

Don't focus on constructing a timeline yet.

Instead, look for what ultimately happens to:

SATAN

DEATH

EVIL

GOD'S PEOPLE

CREATION

GOD'S PRESENCE

Now summarize the ending of Revelation in **one sentence**:

14. A DEEPER PERSONAL QUESTION

It's possible to know a tremendous amount about prophecy and still miss what Jesus is asking of us.

So return to the seven churches.

Which one feels most uncomfortable to read?

Why?

Is there something Jesus says to that church that you need to hear?

What would obedience look like this week?

15. FIVE DAYS IN REVELATION

If you'd like to continue beyond this Study Companion, use this simple reading plan.

DAY 1 — REVELATION 1

Look for: Everything the chapter reveals about Jesus.

Ask:

Who is Jesus according to this chapter?

DAY 2 — REVELATION 2

Look for: What Jesus praises and confronts.

Ask:

What matters to Jesus in His church?

DAY 3 — REVELATION 3

Look for: Warnings about compromise and complacency.

Ask:

Is there anything here I need to take seriously in my own life?

DAY 4 — REVELATION 21

Look for: God's promised future.

Ask:

What does this chapter tell me about where history is ultimately going?

DAY 5 — REVELATION 22

Look for: The final promises and invitations of Scripture.

Ask:

How should knowing Jesus is coming affect the way I live now?

NEXT TIME

WHAT IS THE TRIBULATION?

We've established something important.

Revelation reveals Jesus, calls God's people to faithfulness, warns of judgment, and assures us that evil will not have the final word.

But that raises another question.

What happens before Revelation reaches that glorious ending?

You've probably heard Christians talk about something called **the Tribulation.**

You may have heard that it lasts seven years.

You may have heard about the Antichrist, terrible judgments, and unprecedented suffering.

And you may have heard Christians debate whether the church will be here when it happens.

Before we ask **when** the Rapture occurs in relation to the Tribulation, we're going to ask the more basic question:

What does the Bible actually say the Tribulation is?

Where does the idea come from?

Does Revelation explicitly say there will be a seven-year Tribulation?

What did Jesus mean when He spoke about **“great distress”**?

And how do Daniel, Jesus, Paul, and Revelation fit together?

That's where we're going next.

BEFORE YOU CLOSE THIS STUDY

Whether you completed only Part One or went all the way through Part Two, remember why we're doing this.

The goal isn't to make you an expert at winning arguments about prophecy.

It's to help you become a careful student of Scripture and a faithful follower of Jesus.

So when the Bible speaks clearly—

believe it.

When interpretation is required—

study carefully.

When faithful Christians disagree—

go back to the text.

And through all of it:

Know what you believe.

Know why you believe it.

And above all—

Keep your eyes on Jesus.