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revelation  
**YOUR FUTURE**

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**PART ONE**

## INTRODUCTION



Revelation is written in 'apocalyptic' form – a type of Jewish literature that uses symbolic imagery to communicate hope (in the ultimate triumph of God) to those in the midst of persecution\*.

It was written at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD by the aged apostle John, the only one of the twelve still alive. He had been banished to the small prison island of Patmos for his faith, probably for refusing to offer incense to Caesar as God.

The Christian church was facing severe persecution. Almost all believers were socially, politically or economically suffering because of this empire-wide persecution and some were being killed for their faith.

The seven churches (Revelation 1:11) were real churches, each with specific characteristics and needs and an appropriate message but also representing the church as a whole.

So God's word through John at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century is also His Word for today. We can take heart as we understand John's vision of hope – Christ will return to rescue his people and settle accounts with those who defy him.

## THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION

All seven letters to the churches (Revelation 2-3) follow the same general format:

- To the angel of the church of ...
- The words of ... (title of Christ, usually taken from the vision in Chapter 1)
- I know...leading to commendation and/or rebuke.
- Call to respond
- He who has an ear...
- To him who overcomes...



\* Life Application Bible (1991)

# STUDY 1 Prologue: Revelation 1:1-3



## Connect

1. What do we associate with the word 'unveiling' in today's society?
2. How do you feel about studying the book of Revelation?

## Discover

### Read Revelation 1:1-3

*Verse 1a 'The revelation of Jesus Christ...'*

3. Who and what will be revealed by the revelation given to John?
4. Elsewhere in the New Testament Jesus reveals God (John 14:9) How have these roles now been reversed in this passage?

*Verse 1b '...which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.'*

5. What is the significance of using the word 'show' as opposed to 'tell'?

*Verse 2 'He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw - that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.'*

6. Read verses 1-2 again. How was this revelation communicated to John?

### Definition

Reveal (v) to bring to light what was formally hidden, veiled, secret.

7. There are two references to time in this passage: verse 1 talks about '**what must soon take place**' and verse 3 says '**the time is near**'. How should we understand the word 'soon' and 'near'?

*Verse 3a 'Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy...'*

Revelation is a book of prophecy that is both **prediction** (foretelling future events) and **proclamation** (preaching about who God is and what he will do). Life Application Bible (1991).

8. How can we as a church, community and individual be blessed by reading this prophecy? (Luke 11:28)

*Verse 3b. '...blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written.'*

9. In what ways does he expect us to take this message to heart?
10. Why must we be prepared / ready for the Last Judgement and establishment of God's Kingdom?

## Apply

As a community, pray right at the start of these studies for an enlarged vision of Jesus.

**For next week: Read Revelation 1:4-8**

## STUDY 2 Address and Doxology: Revelation 1:4-8



### Connect

1. Share an experience you may have had receiving a letter/visit from a friend in a time of crisis. In what ways were you challenged as well as comforted by their words?

### Discover

#### Read Revelation 1:4-6

Verse 4 uses the standard form for beginning a letter, stating the sender's name and the addressees. The whole book forms this letter, and John will sign off in 22:21.

2. What specific references are there here to the Father, Son (John 14:6/17; 1 John 2:27; Revelation 19:11) and Holy Spirit? What authority does this give the book?
3. In verse 5, what three impressive titles are given to Christ?
4. Re-read verses 5-6. How do these two verses remind us of what Christ has done for us? What is our freedom intended to lead to?

#### Seven

The number seven is used throughout Revelation to symbolise completeness and perfection. "Seven spirits" - seems to be a way of referring to the Holy Spirit.

5. What does it mean to be a priest? What role do we have? How would this help to encourage other believers?

#### Read Revelation 1:7-8

6. Looking to the future (verse 7) how will Jesus' second coming differ from his first? (See also Mark 13:26; 1 Thessalonians 4:16)

v8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega." Says the Lord God. "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

7. What is the significance of Christ being introduced to John as 'the Alpha and the Omega' (1:8). See also Rev 4:8; Isaiah 44:6; 48:12-13.
8. Amid persecution, conflict and suffering, what help does v8 give us?

### Apply

9. How does the knowledge of Christ's second coming affect the way we live out our 'FREE' values as a community?

Pray individually that Christ will continue to be the 'alpha and omega' of your life.

Following Jesus  
Reaching Out  
Extended Family  
Everything in Love

For next week: Read Revelation 1:9-20

## STUDY 3 One Like a Son of Man: Revelation 1:9-20



### Connect

1. Can you think of a time when you have been 'lost in wonder, love and praise'? Describe the situation.

### Discover

#### Read Revelation 1:9-11

**Note:** It may be helpful to read through the 'Introduction' to these studies again to remind yourselves of the context.

2. Why are the circumstances in which John receives this revelation especially encouraging?
3. What is the significance of the words 'suffering', 'kingdom' and 'patient endurance'?

#### Read Revelation 1:12-16

4. What truths about the Lord is John conveying by these images?
5. What images impress you most with the magnificence of Jesus, and why?

#### John's response - Read Revelation 1:17-18

Compare John 1:14; Matthew 17:1-5; John 13:23-35; 1 John 1:1 with John's reaction here.

6. What differences are there?
7. How did Jesus encourage John? How does he encourage us?
8. What vision of himself do you think Jesus wants us to have?

#### Read Revelation 1:19-20

9. The two images of verses 12 and 16 are explained in verse 20. What does John's vision have to teach us, therefore, about the Lord and His Church?

### Apply

10. How should we as a church/community respond to this vision of Jesus? How should we respond as individuals?

It is important that we spend some time worshipping Jesus before we listen to the message for each church. Spend some time thanking Jesus for who he is and what he has done for us. You may find the following songs helpful:

- Jesus, we enthrone you
- You are Holy
- My Jesus, my Saviour
- All I once held dear

**For next week: Read Revelation 2:1-7**

## STUDY 4 Ephesus: Revelation 2:1-7



### Connect

1. Talk about expressions of love - what have people done for you that has really made you feel loved?

### Discover

#### Read Revelation 2:1-7

##### Fact File:

Ephesus was the largest and most important of the seven cities of the province of Asia mentioned here. It was the centre of commerce and of worship of the goddess Artemis (Diana). The church had been specially privileged:

- ⇒ Paul visited Ephesus briefly (c.52AD), leaving Priscilla and Aquila there (Acts 18:18-21).
- ⇒ Later he spent over two years there building up the church (Acts 19:1-10).
- ⇒ Paul wrote to the church (Ephesians 1:1).
- ⇒ He sent Timothy to help them (1 Timothy 1:3-7).
- ⇒ He called the elders to meet him at Miletus, while journeying to Jerusalem (Acts 20:17-38).
- ⇒ According to tradition, John also had close links with the Ephesian church and spent the last years of his life there.

2. What opposition may we expect when we oppose the gods of the day? (See also Acts 19:23-34).
3. What privileges do we have as a church in this country?

4. What special privileges do we have in our community? Individually?

The Ephesian church can be described in three phases:

##### **Active, but...** (Revelation 2:2-3)

5. List the words that describe the Ephesian church. What should motivate an active church?
6. What other factors may motivate activity?
7. The Ephesian church was about 40 years old (second generation). What other motivations could arise from this?

##### **Discerning, but...**(Revelation 2:2b, 6)

8. What should be the basis for rejecting false teaching?
9. What had the Ephesian church been taught about the rejection of false teaching? (See also Acts 20:29-31; Ephesians 4: 14-15)

The Nicolaitans were believers who compromised their faith in order to enjoy some of the sinful practices of Ephesian society.

10. How can rejection of false teaching lead to lack of love?

**'You have forsaken your first love...'** (Revelation 2:4-5)

11. Does this refer to our love for God, or for others, or both? How do the two relate?

12. Describe what this means for a believer? For a church?

13. How serious a sin is this?

14. What steps should we take to put it right (v5)?

15. What would be the result of failing to repent? (Compare Revelation 1:20 and 2:1)

### Apply

16. How can we recover our first love? (Romans 5:5; Galatians 5:22) Has anyone a testimony about this?

Often we forget to tell or show people that we love and appreciate them. Make space this week to demonstrate love for one person in your community.

### Going Deeper

If the church does not repent Jesus will come and remove their lampstand. The church will no longer be a witness to the world. Read Mark 4:21-25; Luke 8:16-18 to see what Jesus said about lampstands in his teaching.

**For next week: Read Revelation 2:8-11**

## STUDY 5 Smyrna: Revelation 2:8-11



### Connect

1. Can you share an experience when God's Word (read or heard) has seemed to be specifically meant for you?

### Discover

#### Read Revelation 2:8-11

#### Fact File:

Smyrna was a city that knew about death and life. It had been destroyed (c. 580 BC) but then rebuilt (c. 290 BC) to a comprehensive plan; a beautiful city, crowning the hill on which it was situated. It had been compared to phoenix rising from the ashes. It was also a city that knew about faithfulness, proverbially a loyal supporter of Rome.

In pairs, write down all the points that make this letter so appropriate to the church in Smyrna.

2. How would these references affect their listening to the reading of this letter?

**Poverty** (Revelation 2:9) The word means extreme, not relative, poverty.

3. Why do you think these Christians would have been so poor?

#### "I know..."

(Revelation 2:9)  
The words "I know your deeds...", used in five of the letters, are here replaced with 'I know your affliction, poverty and the slander you suffer'.

4. How would we cope with real poverty?
5. Can you imagine circumstances in which we might have to face such poverty, now or in the future?
6. What about churches elsewhere?

**Slander** (Revelation 2:9)

7. In today's society, where would Christians most expect to be slandered?
8. How should we react to slander? (See also Matthew 5:11-12; 1 Peter 3:15-16)

**Persecution and Death** (Revelation 2:10-11) Ten days indicates a long but limited time.

9. Where in today's world might faithfulness to Christ be punished by death?
10. Can you think of people who throughout the story of the Church, have been killed for their faith?
11. How do we handle the fear of death? (See also Philippians 1:20-24). How can we draw strength from this letter to Smyrna?

**In conclusion**

12. How might Jesus' statements about himself, as well as his promises solidify their faithfulness and ours?

Only the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia mention no problem and give no warning. What role does affirmation play in helping Christians who are under spiritual pressure?

**Apply**

13. In what circumstances do you find it most difficult to be faithful?
14. How would you reply to a new believer who says, 'It's so hard to be a Christian'? (Matthew 10:37-39; John 15:18-19).

In your community, take time to pray for the persecuted church (<http://www.opendoorsuk.org/>), remembering to use Jesus' promises and instructions in your prayers.

**For next week: Read Revelation 2:12-29**

# STUDY 6 Pergamum and Thyatira (Part 1): Revelation 2:12-29



## Connect

Start with a game of Jenga.

## Discover

### Read Revelation 2:12-29

#### Fact File:

Pergamum - an important city, loyal to Rome, the centre of Emperor-worship, so pressure would have been strong on Christians to take the oath to Caesar.

Thyatira - the smallest and least important of the seven towns and the only one not to be built on high ground. Its main strength was in commerce and there were numerous trade guilds. It was from these that pressure would have been put on Christians. It was virtually impossible to work without being a member of a guild, and membership of a guild involved idolatry.

At Pergamum some Christian lives were threatened by the Emperor cult; at Thyatira, their livelihood was threatened by the trade guilds.

**We will study these two churches together because, although there are clear differences between them and the letters addressed to them, the rebuke from the Lord is basically the same in both cases.**

1. Read Revelation 2:12 and 2:18. Which of the following words could be used to describe the titles of Christ in both letters?

strength   love   authority   judgement  
gentleness   humility   lordship

2. What does this tell us about Christ's relationship with the churches?

3. What specific things does the Lord say he knows about Pergamum? Thyatira?
4. In which of the two cities would it have been easier to be a Christian? Why?
5. In which of the two churches does there seem to have been more growth?
6. How far does growth in activity and numbers indicate spiritual growth?
7. Jesus wanted these two churches to be loyal to the truth. But what is the truth - what are the non-negotiables of the Christian faith?

#### **“To him who overcomes...”**

8. How could Antipas (verse 13) be said to be one who overcomes?
9. What blessings are promised to overcomers (verse 17)?
10. Why do you think these blessings are “hidden”? (Compare John 4:31-34.)

**Manna** (contrasted with “food offered to idols”) was God’s miraculously provided bread throughout Israel’s 40 years in the desert; a white stone might have been a token of admittance, or a voting counter, or even a juror’s means of indicating acquittal.

11. What hidden resources are we able to draw on, that are not known to outsiders or compromisers? Consider, for example. John 6:50-51; Luke 22:19-20; 2 Corinthians 4:18; Philippians 4:7; Matthew 5:11-12.

### Apply

12. When has some self-denial led to a precious and satisfying recompense, perhaps an unexpected one, either in your own experience or in someone else who has inspired you?

## STUDY 7 Pergamum and Thyatira (Part 2): Revelation 2:12-29



### Connect

1. Have you ever worked for a long time to achieve something? Were you ever tempted to give up? What kept you going? Was it worth it?

### Discover

#### Re-read Revelation 2: 12-29

2. Remind yourselves of the situation in Pergamum and Thyatira (see page 14 for the fact file). What did Jesus commend them for? What were they doing wrong?

#### Rebuke: “Nevertheless...” Revelation 2:14-15; 2:20, 24

The two churches are both rebuked for tolerating false teachers.

- The teaching of Balaam. (See also Numbers 25:1-3; 31:15-16)
- The Nicolaitians – rejected by the Ephesian church
- “that woman Jezebel”

3. Pergamum was the centre of emperor worship and temple prostitution was also prevalent. How had the church responded to the lure of these temptations?

4. How was the so-called prophetess Jezebel (verse 20) like her namesake? (See 1 Kings 16:30-33)

**For next week: Read Revelation 2:12-29 again**

**We will also be sharing communion together as a community.**

5. False teaching leads to wrong doing. What did the toleration of these teachers lead to in the two churches? (Revelation 2:14; 2:20)

6. What must be the basis for discerning false teaching and wrong behaviour?

### Warning

7. Jesus has called Pergamum and Thyatira to repent. What does it mean to repent?

8. Compare the Lord's titles with what He will do if there is no repentance (Revelation 2:16; 20-23)

9. Why will he act so dramatically?

10. What will he do for those who obey Him? (Compare Psalm 2:8-9)  
Why are purity and obedience essential to receiving authority?  
Compare John 6:38-39.

11. What might the Lord do in our lives if we continue to reject His warning?

### Apply

Spend some time individually asking the Holy Spirit to show you where you need to repent.

Share communion together as a community. This is a reminder of Christ's victory over sin.

## STUDY 8 Sardis: Revelation 3:1-6



### Connect

1. How do you know if something is alive? Now think about a person – what signs of life and health do you expect to see? What are the parallel signs for a healthy growing church?

### Fact File:

Sardis was proverbial for its slackness. It was set in a seemingly impregnable situation on a steep hill with only an easily defended narrow strip of land providing access. But the city had been captured, first by Cyrus, king of Persia and then again three centuries later. On both occasions the enemy armies had entered at the weak point where the over-confident Sardis had set no guard. And the church reflected something of the attitude of the city. We know more about the church in Sardis from what is not said than from what is said.

### Discover

#### Read Revelation 3:1-6

#### Unaware Revelation 3:1-3

2. In what ways was Sardis **unaware** of its state (Revelation 3:1-3)?
3. What are the characteristics of a church that is visibly dying or dead?

4. What characteristics can remain to give a church a good reputation even though it is dying?
5. What can give a good reputation to an individual Christian when God sees him as dying or asleep?

#### Comfortable Revelation 3:2

Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira all had problems with false teachers. This problem is not mentioned in Sardis.

‘Neither the Jews nor the Gentiles seem greatly to have troubled the people of Sardis. Sardis was a very ‘peaceful’ church. It enjoyed peace, but it was the peace of the cemetery!’  
(Hendriksen)

6. What else besides false teaching might damage the health of a church? (See also for example Acts 20:29-31).
7. Smyrna experienced slander and was warned about coming persecutions. Pergamum had already witnessed martyrdom and lived in the shadow of “Satan’s throne”. It seemed that Satan didn’t bother with Sardis. Why?
8. What comments would you expect to hear about a sermon in a ‘Sardis-like’ church? What would you **not** expect to hear?

#### The Few Revelation 3:4-5

9. What is God’s promise to the faithful?

10. How would you explain the words 'dressed in white' (See also Revelation 7:14; 19:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:21-24).

11. Compare verse 5(b) with verse 1(b): with whom does your reputation most matter? What might be the costs of standing out as different from the "comfortable"?

## Apply

Share with the group some of what you can remember of your early days as a Christian and/or what you have seen in a new Christian.

12. How should those early experiences develop?

13. What have you lost that you need to regain?

14. What have you learnt that you need to retain?

**For next week: Read Revelation 3:7-13**

## STUDY 9 Philadelphia: Revelation 3:7-13



### Connect

1. Can you share a testimony of God giving strength in a situation where you felt most weak?

### Discover

#### Read Revelation 3: 7-13

##### Fact File:

Philadelphia has been badly damaged by a severe earthquake in 17AD, and smaller aftershocks continued to produce cracks in walls and pillars. Feeling unsafe in the city, many people had moved out into the countryside where they cultivated vines with good success. But about the time of writing Revelation, the Emperor Domitian had decreed the cutting down of half the vineyards (perhaps to encourage the production of corn), leaving the Philadelphians to feel weaker, more insecure and let down by their ruler.

#### Little strength Revelation 3:8

2. In what sense do you think they were a church of 'little strength'?
3. What factors do we have in mind when we refer to a church that is strong or weak?
4. From what you know of churches in the developing world, how would you rate their strengths and weaknesses compared to ours?

**Little strength...but faithfulness** Revelation 3:8b-10

5. How had the church shown its faithfulness?
6. What sort of opposition do you think they had faced?
7. How did the Lord encourage them to go on being faithful?

**Little strength...but an open door** Revelation 3:7

8. Look at the title of Christ (verse 7). What do you think the key and open door refer to?

See Isaiah 22:14-24, where a doorkeeper who can be trusted with real authority replaces one who misused his office. Here in verse 7 the idea seems (from the context) to be the door of entry to God's kingdom, as in Acts 14:27 (and not necessarily the door to effective mission, as is meant elsewhere in the New Testament).

9. What is the right way to deal with a sense of weakness, for a church or for individuals?

**Little strength...but future blessing** Revelation 3:9-12

10. How would the promise of verse 9 strengthen believers who feel weak?

11. What encouragement is given in verse 10?

12. What special meaning would the promises of verse 12 have for someone living in Philadelphia? (The various names imply security of belonging, and possibly rights of citizenship.) What meaning do they have for us?

**Apply**

13. How can recognition of weakness in fact strengthen us?

14. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. How would you apply these verses to the Philadelphian Christians? How would you apply these verses to yourself? See also Hebrews 11:32-34.

## STUDY 10 Laodicea: Revelation 3:14-22



### Connect

1. What do you associate with the word 'lukewarm'?

### Discover

#### Read Revelation 3:14-22

#### Fact File:

Laodicea was a wealthy city, a centre of banking, with a flourishing trade in fine black wool cloth, and a famous medical school known particularly for an eye ointment. Like its poorer neighbour, Philadelphia, Laodicea had suffered earthquake damage, but considered itself so self-sufficient that it refused to receive help for the rebuilding. Their weak point was their water supply, which was brought by aqueduct from distant hot springs. On arrival, the water was lukewarm and sickly. If John's messenger travelled to the seven churches in the order mentioned, Laodicea was the final stop. He would soon be back in Ephesus, his mission accomplished.

#### The final letter expressed:

#### The most severe rebuke Revelation 3:15-19

2. What did the Laodicean Christians think of themselves?
3. What sort of riches would they have had in mind?

4. How are the titles of Christ (verse 14) in this letter so appropriate? How would the Laodicean church change if it took them seriously?
5. How does He describe the church? How does his assessment of them compare with what they think about themselves?
6. How does His assessment relate to the life of the city? How could the situation be remedied? (verses 17-18) What do you think the 3 images (gold, white clothes, and eye salve) refer to in spiritual terms?
7. The offers of verse 18 are for purchase, not free gifts. What might the cost be (verse 19)? Do you think these offers are worth the price?

#### The most drastic rejection Revelation 3:16

8. What is expressed in the words 'I will spit you out of my mouth'?
9. Why is this rebuke so drastic?
10. If Christ assesses us as 'lukewarm', how will He rebuke us?

## **The most tender call** Revelation 3:20

11. In Philadelphia, Jesus spoke as the one who has the right to open and shut doors. Here is the same Christ (3:20), standing outside a closed door. Why doesn't he open it?
  
12. What do the words 'I will come in and eat with him and he with Me' signify? Compare with Revelation 3:21.
  
13. What difference can you sense between 'I will eat with him' and 'he will eat with Me'? What does this teach us?

## **Apply**

14. Why do we find it so hard to see ourselves as we really are? What can we do about it?
  
15. Are you keeping Jesus out of any part of your life? What would happen if you let him in?
  
16. As you look back on the last ten weeks, and in particular the seven letters to the churches (Revelation 2-3), what has the Spirit taught you as an individual? A community?

Holland Road Baptist Church  
Studies  
Printed September 2014