



Revelation 21:6

# REVELATION

## Background File

“John” is named as the author of Revelation. Legend claims that he was the beloved apostle of Jesus. The author of Revelation, however, identifies himself only as John. It was a common name, and he makes no claim to be an apostle or to have ever seen Jesus during his time on earth. This John likely was a leader of several Christian communities in what is now known as western Turkey.

Most scholars think Revelation was written late in the first century C.E. During this time Roman authorities demanded that emperors be worshiped as gods. Revelation 1:9 describes how John’s activities on behalf of the gospel upset local authorities, who banished him to the small island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. John wrote this letter to seven churches that were facing various challenges.

## What’s the Story?

John presents his message in an ancient style of writing known as *apocalypse*. The word is often used today to mean an end-of-the-world catastrophe. The Greek word *apokalypsis* (uh-POCK-uh-LIP-sis), however, simply means “revelation.” It refers to an unveiling or revealing of something that was previously hidden.

In Scripture, an apocalypse tells of an experience with the supernatural world, in which the author is usually guided by a mystical being. It is filled with striking, fantastic images of conflict between good and evil, and ends in a glorious triumph of God’s forces of good. See Daniel 7–12 for another example of apocalyptic writing.

Revelation does not have a story line that moves in a logical sequence from one scene to the next. Instead, it offers a series of visions. Some of these visions are repeated with slight alterations in other chapters. Some build upon previous visions. Revelation presents two kinds of visions: terrifying episodes of violence and glorious visions of victory and celebration. As in the writings of the Old Testament prophets, the terror always gives way to the promise of God’s triumph. Revelation can be outlined in this way:

Opening words (1:1-8)

The seven churches (1:9–3:22)

Praise to God and the Lamb (4:1–5:14)  
Seven seals and seven trumpets (6:1–11:19)  
Opposition to God’s kingdom (12:1–13:18)  
God’s judgment and victory (14:1–20:15)  
New heaven and new earth (21:1–22:5)  
Final words (22:6-21)

## What’s the Message?

Much of the controversy about Revelation revolves around the question: Who were the original readers for this revelation? A popular view of Revelation in our society assumes that this book is “history told in advance,” written to warn readers about events that will happen during their lifetimes. According to this view, the book is a series of hidden clues that reveal exactly what will take place at the end of the world.

John, however, seems to have something more immediate in mind. He had worked with seven churches and now writes to them as they struggle to survive in a world dominated by the Roman Empire. Some faced persecution; some were being corrupted by society; some had stopped taking faith seriously.

The visions in Revelation address this question: Who or what is at the center of Christian life? John uses bold and dramatic images to drive home the point that Christian life centers on Jesus Christ alone. This message takes two forms. First, the terrifying visions are warnings to those who are falling away from the faith. Second, the glorious visions of triumph offer encouragement to those who are oppressed, persecuted, or feeling powerless in a hostile world.

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### Introduction and Salutation

**1** The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants<sup>a</sup> what must soon take place; he made<sup>b</sup> it known by sending his angel to his servant<sup>c</sup> John, <sup>2</sup>who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

**3** Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

**4** John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

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



**1:1 The revelation:** The book’s name comes from its first word. In Greek it is *apokalypsis*, which means a revealing or unveiling.



**1:4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:** John uses the standard letter form of his time, addressing his readers and including words of welcome and blessing.

<sup>a</sup> Gk slaves    <sup>b</sup> Gk and he made    <sup>c</sup> Gk slave