

# APOCALYPSE

This 8-week study will attempt to demystify the Revelation to St. John, which is now the final book of our Bible. No knowledge of Revelation will be assumed.

## JOHN'S VISION

The book describes itself as a revelation of Jesus Christ, which was given to John as he was in exile on the island of Patmos. With kaleidoscopic effect, the work layers images atop one another to form a bewildering mental picture, even more so when one considers that the work was meant to be read aloud (1:3) rather than studied slowly and pondered. The words are meant to be heard allowing each image to build on those that came before.

Yet the book, as we now call it, was not written to be the final book of the Bible. It was originally a letter which John sent to seven churches in an area which is modern day Turkey. It is best understood within the context of its times and intended audience, while remaining open to the fact that the text is scripture and continues to speak to us in our present day.

## NUMBERS AND IMAGERY

A headline on the sports page declaring "Falcons maul Lions 34-0" is immediately understood by most newspaper readers as a football reference. Due to the context of the words, we are not tempted to think that birds of prey attacked large felines. Similarly, a 24 or an 8 on the back of car, signifies a NASCAR fan. Every culture in every age has had its own symbols which convey a given set of meanings. Set of meanings as no symbol is neutral and every symbol can mean a variety of things to those who hear of it. While the chalice and paten of communion may be a comforting image for you, the same image could be a painful one for someone abused by a priest. Demystifying Revelation means coming to understand some of what the symbols might have conveyed, while realizing that precise understanding is neither possible, nor required.

## REVELATION AND THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

Largely due to an early heresy known as Montanism, in which a preacher expounded his own views of Revelation based on new visions, the last book of the Bible nearly didn't make it into scripture. As late as 340 A.D., the book was described as "disputed." The official list of books of the New Testament was set a few decades latter, with Revelation narrowly included. Reformers including Luther, Zwingli and Calvin kept the book in their Bible but never preached or commented on it. Lectionaries today do not read all of the book, but only a few select passages.

## THINGS NOT FOUND IN REVELATION

The book will never use the term "The Rapture" nor "The Anti-Christ." The Book also never gives a clear timetable for end times events, nor did it intend to.

**The Rapture**—This is not a scriptural term, having been coined 170 years ago. In 1830, in Port Glasgow, Scotland, fifteen year old Margaret MacDonald had a vision concerning the return of Christ. Her vision was adopted by John Nelson Darby a British minister and founder of a denomination called the "Plymouth Brethren." Prior to Darby, the church used the Greek word "Parousia" and its equivalents "Coming" or "Second Coming" to describe Christ's return.

**The Anti-Christ**—Not a synonym for The Beast of Revelation as it is typically used, this term from John's Letters of the New Testament is used to describe those working against the teaching of Jesus Christ (I John 2:18, 22; 4:3; II John 1:7).

## WHAT THEN IS REVELATION

Revelation was a pastoral letter written to second generation Christians in the midst of a crisis giving a heavenly vision that both challenges believers to greater faithfulness, and promises that earthly events, no matter how catastrophic are not beyond God's redemptive love. Now as in the end of time, God is present to believers and looks forward to a day of wiping every tear from every eye.



## AN OVERVIEW

Here is an overview of the sections to be covered each of the eight weeks. Reading the text ahead of the class is helpful, not essential.

<b>Week</b>	<b>Passage</b>	<b>General Topic</b>
1	Revelation 1	Apocalyptic writings
2	Revelation 2-3	The seven churches
3	Revelation 4-5	Power in symbolism
4	Revelation 6-8:4	The four horsemen
5	Revelation 8:5-11	Seven angels and seven trumpets
6	Revelation 12-14	Gematria—number codes
7	Revelation 15-18	The fall of Babylon
8	Revelation 19-22	Judgment and the end of time

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AN EIGHT WEEK STUDY  
ON THE REVELATION TO SAINT JOHN