

The REVELATION *of* JESUS CHRIST

THE FAITHFUL WITNESS

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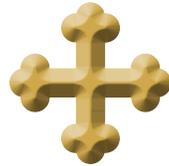
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GREAT AND WONDERFUL are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the ages!
Who shall not fear and glorify your name, O Lord?
For you alone are holy.
All nations shall come and worship you,
for your judgments have been revealed.
—the book of *Revelation* 15:3–4



The REVELATION of JESUS CHRIST

THE FAITHFUL WITNESS

REVELATION 1:1–8

1¹The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place; and he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,² who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.³ Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the time is near.

⁴John 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,⁵ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.⁷ Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

⁸“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.



Revised Standard Version of the Bible—Second Catholic Edition (Ignatius Edition)
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THE FAITHFUL WITNESS In the opening verse of the book of *Revelation*, the author discloses that this apocalyptic vision of heaven has been shown to him by an angel sent by Jesus. With its emphasis on Final Judgment, the theme of a trial permeates the book. From the outset, Jesus' unquestionable authority, inheritance, and power are established when he is described in the book of *Revelation* 1:5 as “the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.”

THE RULER OF KINGS ON EARTH

Link to a free lesson video and other study materials at www.turningtogodsword.com.

The title of the last book of the New Testament, *The Revelation to John (the Apocalypse)*, provides a clue about something important to keep in mind when studying the Scriptures—Christianity is a revealed religion. God’s story comes to us by way of divine revelation. We know what we do about our faith because God has revealed it to us. Divine revelation rests on Sacred Scripture, on Sacred Tradition guarded by the Church, and on the action of the Holy Spirit.

Because the book of *Revelation* is part of the canon of Sacred Scripture determined by the Church, we know that its divine author is the Holy Spirit speaking through a human author. Paragraph 81 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes God’s authority over the inspired books of the Bible: “*Sacred Scripture* is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.”

There is considerable debate among scholars over the identity of the human author of the book of *Revelation*, however. Many early Church fathers held that this work was written by John the Apostle (also identified as John the Evangelist)—based on statements in the biblical text that the author’s name is John and that he was exiled to the island of Patmos as punishment for his Christian witness.

Because of the complexity of the images found in the book of *Revelation*, consideration of the human author’s background and situation can shed light on the context in which these images are used, deepening our understanding of the text. Scholars agree that the book was written late in the 1st century AD. Enough similarities exist in structure and in the way that images are used between *Revelation* and the *Gospel According to John* to encourage the traditional view that both books were written by the same person—either John the Apostle or perhaps one of his followers who was familiar with his theology and able to match his distinctive approach.

The book opens with a prologue in which Jesus Christ is described in the book of *Revelation* 1:5 as “the ruler of kings on earth.” This triumphant view of Jesus is not seen in the Gospels, and it offers comfort and hope to those who read it during times of struggle between the Church and secular governments. The solemnity of Christ the King, celebrated on the final Sunday of the liturgical year, was established by Pope Pius XI in 1925 to combat secularism, a way of life that ignores God.

Think about the person who has provided the most effective Christian witness to you. How do you observe that person paying homage to Christ the King? In what ways do you consciously acknowledge the reign of Jesus Christ over your own life?

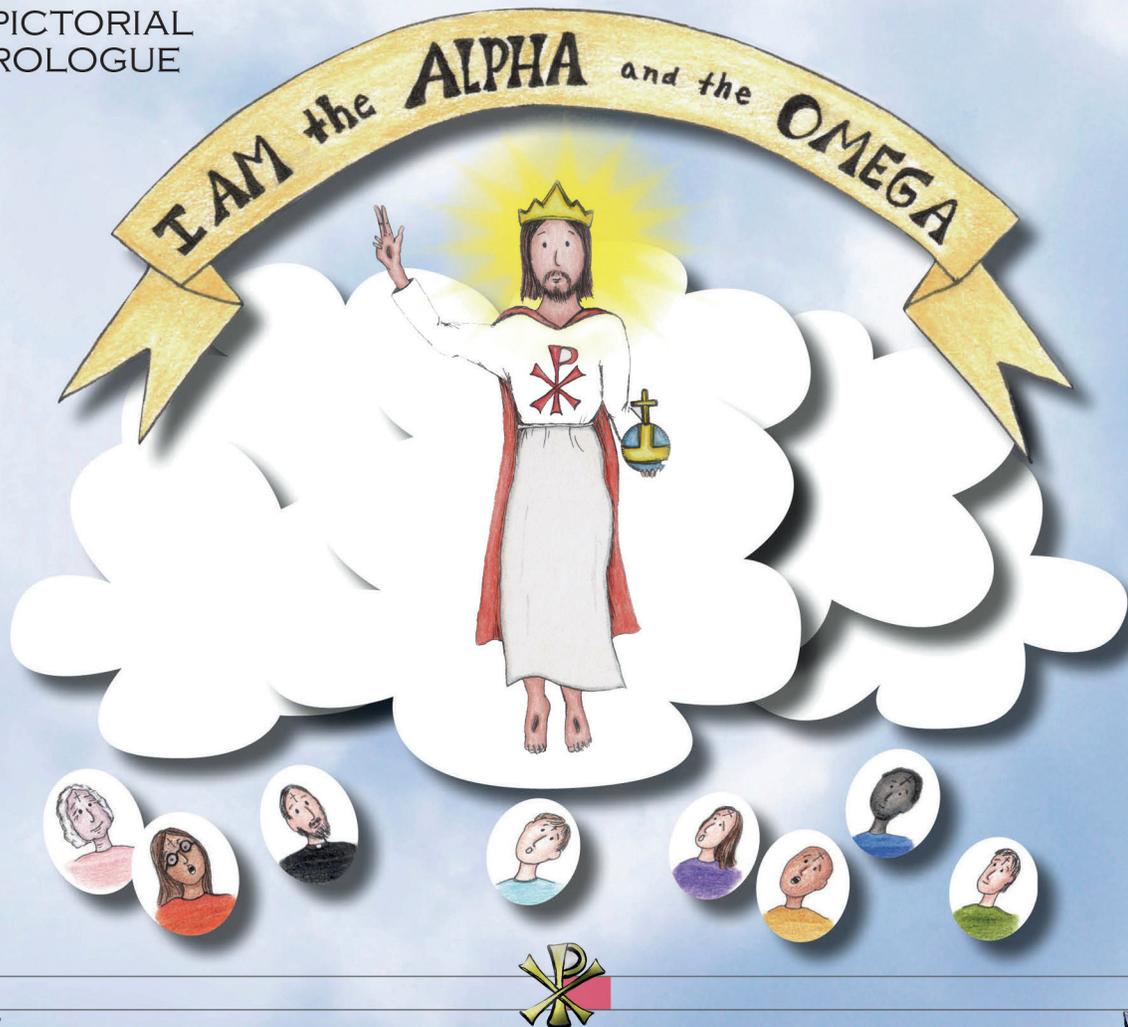
1 Read the book of *Revelation* 1:1–2. What claim does the author make about the source of his information? How did he come by this knowledge? How does the author describe his relationship to God? Consider whether this author might have any doubts about whether the events that he is describing are going to occur.

2 What is the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ that the author claims to be witnessing? Compare the author’s statement with the statement in the *Gospel According to John* 1:6–7. Based on the prologue in the *Gospel According to John*, for what purpose did the Baptist bear witness? What happened to John the Baptist? If necessary, refer to the *Gospel According to Matthew* 14:1–11. What does the author of the book of *Revelation* claim gives him authority to bear witness to the Word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ? What do the words “witness” and “testimony” imply is going to be one of the themes in the book of *Revelation*?

THE FIRST SEVENS

The number seven is repeated throughout the book of *Revelation*, echoing the seven days of Creation. Seven represents completeness but not finality or perfection. The number of seven churches in the book of *Revelation* 1:4 highlights the entire Church anticipating something more to be added to bring about ultimate fulfillment promised by the Old and New Covenants.

A PICTORIAL
PROLOGUE



3 Read the book of *Revelation* 1:3. What points to the idea that John is referring to the works of all of the prophets? How does the author suggest that readers approach this work? What does he promise those who do as he asks? What might be meant by the reference to the time being near? What is implied about the author’s role?

4 Read the book of *Revelation* 1:4. What is the author’s name? To whom is he writing? Consider why he is extending a greeting of grace and peace. How do paragraphs 1996 and 1997 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* define grace? What does the text suggest about the person whose throne is mentioned? What does it imply regarding the location of the throne and the seven spirits?

5 Read the book of *Revelation* 1:5. John uses three terms to identify Jesus Christ. Consider which of these terms seems most significant. What might explain why the word “faithful” is used to describe the type of witness that Jesus is? Consider why the author describes Jesus as “the first-born of the dead.”

ABOUT THE
ILLUSTRATIONS

Action in the book of *Revelation* constantly shifts from the beginning, middle, and end of time—and between the three realms of heaven, earth, and under the earth. Contributing to the confusion, as time changes these realms shift positions in relation to one another, creating an unstable cosmos. Each lesson in this Bible study includes an illustration that visualizes what is happening in this complex universe.

READING ALOUD

In the book of *Revelation* 1:3, the author strongly encourages reading the Scripture aloud: “Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy . . .” This blessing is extended to those who hear the words. It is likely that the author intended this as a serious instruction. Prophetic images are designed to evoke an emotional response. Vivid descriptions are less easily dismissed if readers speak the words aloud.

6 What is implied by pairing Jesus’ name with Christ, a word meaning “Anointed”? Over whom is Jesus Christ ruling? How does this description differ from the way in which Jesus is presented in the Gospels? Why might John’s audience find his description of Jesus especially comforting? What about this description might present-day Christians find comforting? According to the book of *Revelation*, how has Jesus demonstrated his love for humanity?

7 Read the book of *Revelation* 1:6, which discloses that Jesus has formed the Christian community into a kingdom. For what purpose has this kingdom been created? Compare Jesus’ kingdom to the one described in the book of *Exodus* 19:3–6. Under what circumstances is God speaking in the *Exodus* passage? What condition does God place on the establishment of that kingdom?

A CONTROVERSIAL BIBLICAL WORK

Martin Luther, who started the Protestant Reformation in 1517, was no fan of the book of *Revelation*. He pithily stated: “The book of *Revelation* does not reveal.” Luther was not the only person to have difficulty with this book, but the work remains in both Catholic and Protestant biblical canons.



EYEWITNESS NEWS

The final book of the New Testament differs from other books of Scripture because in it God reveals changes that have occurred in the world since Jesus’ Ascension. The Bible is a public record of what we know about God; the book of *Revelation* contains the most current biblical statements about who God is. *Revelation* is the only book of the Bible that names Jesus as God “who is to come.”

Most people rely on the media for information about the secular world. Christians rely on the Bible to learn what is going on in the spiritual world. Reading the book of *Revelation* is like having one’s spiritual life suddenly interrupted by breaking news. The author is a special correspondent who is reporting live from heaven. His interview subject is Christ the King, one of the three most prominent figures there.

The author is himself an important Christian figure. If he also is John the Apostle, then he is the disciple Jesus loved; he stood at the foot of the cross; and he is the one to whom Jesus entrusted

care of his own Mother. In the book of *Revelation*, John will be interviewing the second person of the Most Holy Trinity. When reading John’s report from heaven, it can be helpful to ask why Jesus agreed to talk with John. What point does Jesus want to make? What does the book of *Revelation* reveal?

The first words spoken by the Lord God in the book of *Revelation* 1:8 identify who God is: “I am the Alpha and the Omega.” The risen Christ repeats God’s name as told to Moses in the book of *Exodus* 3:14—then adds Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters, respectively, of the Greek alphabet. In this statement, the Lord God is spelling out that he is the first and the last, acknowledging that he is both the beginning and the end of all things—as well as everything in the middle.

The Word of God encompasses all of the letters of the alphabet—and every word that ever could be formed. Significantly, the Lord God identifies himself using Greek letters, moving beyond the Hebrew language and ideas of the Old Testament.



COMFORTING MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY

In German-speaking countries, it is common to see reference to a fifth set of Mysteries of the Rosary, usually referred to as the Comforting Mysteries. Catholics in those countries are encouraged to pray the Comforting Mysteries in private.

The Comforting Mysteries are closely tied to key themes in the book of *Revelation* as well as to basic statements of faith found in the Nicene Creed.

The five Comforting Mysteries of the Rosary are:

- Jesus who reigns as king.
- Jesus who lives and acts in his Church.
- Jesus who will return in glory.
- Jesus who will judge the living and the dead.
- Jesus who will complete everything.

As we study the book of *Revelation*, consider how the author attempts to emphasize each of these mysteries. With which of the Comforting Mysteries do you find it easiest to relate?

THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION



Link to a glossary, videos, and other study materials: turningtogodsword.com

8 Read the book of *Revelation* 1:7, a description of Jesus' Second Coming. Why might the detail about the clouds be included? If necessary, refer to *Acts of the Apostles* 1:6–11. What does a cloud usually represent in the Bible? If necessary, refer to the book of *Exodus* 40:34–38. How will the Second Coming differ from the way in which Jesus previously came to earth? What emotions are unleashed by thinking about Jesus' Second Coming?

STRONG TIES TO OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

While the last book of the New Testament is famous for abstract imagery, it remains indebted to writings in the Old Testament—especially the apocalyptic sections of the *Books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah*. Without familiarity with these Old Testament works, the images in the book of *Revelation* appear bizarre. Many present-day interpretations reflect the sense of confusion that commentators can feel when trying to make sense of the last book of the Bible.

None of the Old Testament prophets primarily intended to predict the future. The book of *Revelation* looks forward, but it does not describe specific events. Instead, it relies on previous prophetic images to point to where the Church is headed. This is extremely relevant for present-day Christians, and it is made possible because prophecy does not exist at only one point in time. The author relies on a fluid, non-linear approach to time to explain his mysterious vision.

9 According to the book of *Revelation* 1:7, who will see Jesus at his Second Coming? Consider what the author intends to convey by mentioning that those who pierced Jesus also will see him. Define a tribe, and consider why John has chosen to use this term. Why might all the tribes of the earth wail on account of Jesus?

10 **Read the book of *Revelation* 1:8.** What are the first words attributed to God? How are they similar to God's name revealed to Moses? If necessary, refer to the book of *Exodus* 3:14. How might the new information about God's name found in the book of *Revelation* be interpreted? Why might the Lord emphasize the present tense by saying he "is" before he "was" or "is to come"?

IN THE NICK OF TIME

The introduction to the book of *Revelation* is filled with temporal references, while spatial references are conspicuously absent. Throughout this book, the author uses three key points as barriers to separate time periods—much the way that boundaries on a map function. These three points first are highlighted in the book of *Revelation* 1:8 by the introduction of God—"who is and who was and who is to come . . ." They are the points at which the rules that govern the state of all reality change—the beginning when God creates all things; the midpoint as marked by the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ; and a future when this world will pass into a new reality.

The great innovation of the book of *Revelation* is that it sets Jesus not as the end but as the midpoint of time. The author understands that in Jesus Christ humanity entered a new state of being. The author of the book of *Revelation* uses his intimate knowledge of the period from Creation through the earthly life of Jesus to draw parallels about humanity after Christ's Resurrection—and then to extrapolate profound truths about the end of this final leg of our own faith journey.

FINAL VICTORY

“The book of *Revelation* sets before us a word addressed to Christian communities, enabling them to interpret and experience their place in history, with all its questions and its tribulations, in light of the definitive victory of the Lamb who was slain and rose from the dead. At the same time, it sets before us a word that calls on us to live in a way which rejects the recurring temptation to construct the city of man apart from God or even in opposition to him. For should this ever happen, human society itself sooner or later would meet with irreversible failure. The book of *Revelation* contains a word of encouragement . . . Even if its effects are not yet seen, the victory of Christ already has taken place and is final. This in turn causes us to approach human situations and events with an attitude of fundamental trust, born of faith in the Risen One.” —Pope St. John Paul II
Ecclesia in Europa
(The Church in Europe)

a•poc•a•lyp•tic lit•er•a•ture

a genre of writing using vivid images to describe religious experience

The word *Revelation* comes from the Greek ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalupsis*), which means an “uncovering” or “disclosing.” Because of the vivid images used in the book of *Revelation*, **apocalypse** has come to refer to a catastrophic event such as the end of the world. **Apocalyptic literature** describes an author's religious experience and reveals something about God. It makes up large portions of the Old Testament

Books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, and Zechariah. The book of *Revelation* relies heavily on images from these works, giving rise to the question of whether the author was recording his own vision or was inspired by the Holy Spirit to make use of existing **apocalyptic** images to describe his experience. The book of *Revelation* serves as a backward-looking scriptural exegesis of the Old Testament prophetic visions.