

The REVELATION *of* JESUS CHRIST

THE FAITHFUL WITNESS

**JENNIFER MCGAW PHELPS
& MATTHEW PHELPS**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TAMI PALLADINO



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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

1 ¹The 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, ²who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ³Blessed 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, ⁵and 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 blood ⁶and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. ⁷Behold, 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?

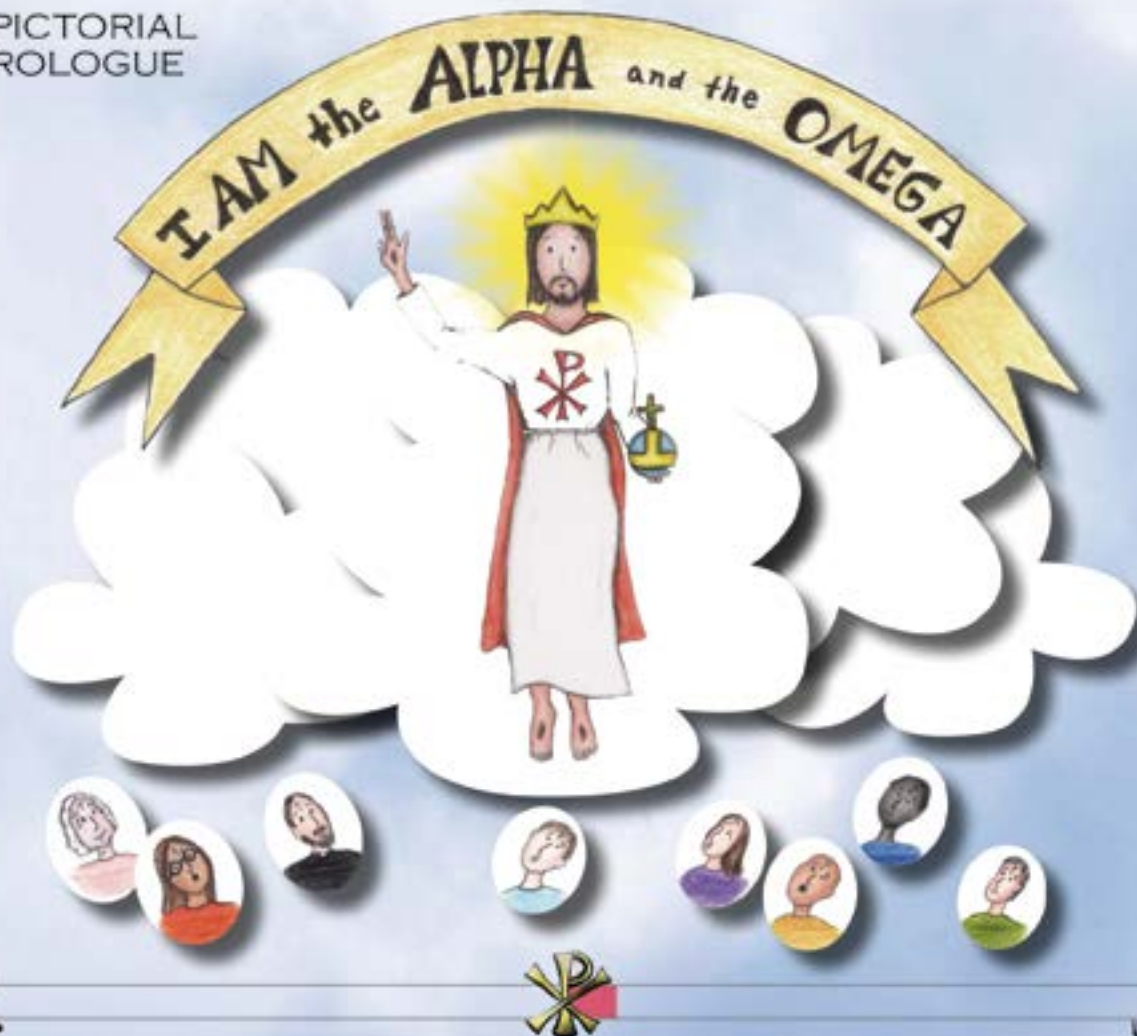
1 Read the book of *Revelation* 1:1–2. What claim does the author make about the source of his information? How did he come by this knowledge? How does the author describe his relationship to God? Consider whether this author might have any doubts about whether the events that he is describing are going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



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.

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| *Psalms reflect the numbering system followed in *The Abbey Psalms and Canticles*. Numbering in other translations may vary.

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all Scripture is inspired by God

and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,
that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

—the *Second Letter of Paul to Timothy* 3:16–17

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RELATED CHURCH TEACHING

CCC 60 (page 109): That Abraham's descendants are trustees of God's promise of a unified Church.

CCC 81 (page 6): Transmission of the Word of God through the Tradition of the Church.

CCC 122: The mystery through which the Old Testament bears witness to the New.

CCC 144 (page 24): An explanation of the link between listening and the obedience of faith.

CCC 302: A description of the world that includes the fact it wasn't created in a state of perfection.

CCC 310: That God created a world in which evil is allowed to exist.

CCC 359 (page 16): The relationship between humanity and the mystery of the Incarnation.

CCC 391: About Church teaching regarding the origin of Satan.

CCC 457–460: The four positive effects for humanity that result from Jesus' Incarnation.

CCC 507: That the Blessed Virgin Mary is a symbol of the most perfect realization of the Church.

CCC 677 (page 131): An explanation of how God's final triumph over evil will occur.

CCC 697 (page 95): An explanation of cloud and light as images of the Holy Spirit.

CCC 698 (page 61): The three sacraments that leave an indelible mark or seal on Christians.

CCC 705 (pages 118 & 139): Teaching that Jesus restores humanity's likeness to God.

CCC 737 (page 22): Teaching that Jesus' mission is brought to completion in the Church.

CCC 750: An examination of the necessity of believing in the Church as well as in God.

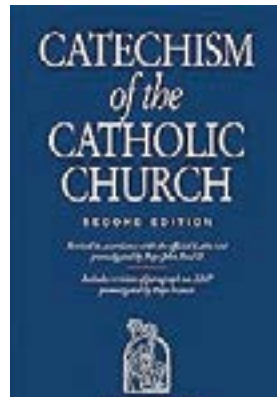
CCC 760 (pages 20 & 84): The startling teaching that the world was created for the sake of the Church.

CCC 773 (page 124): Discussion of the Church as the way to connect with love that never ends.

CCC 774 (page 110): Jesus in the Church as the mystery of salvation present in the sacraments.

CCC 811: The four characteristic marks that distinguish the Church.

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CCC 1008 (page 47): Teaching that the covenant stipulates death as a consequence of sin.

CCC 1019 (page 53): That Jesus conquers death in order to make salvation possible for humanity.

CCC 1021–1022 (page 131): Paragraphs describing how the final destiny of the soul is determined.

CCC 1022 (page 133): About the particular judgment for each person at the moment of death.

CCC 1030–1032 (page 133): Paragraphs describing the purification that occurs in Purgatory.

CCC 1138 (pages 33 & 34): Who's included among those described as being recapitulated in Christ.

CCC 1213 (page 34): Teaching that Baptism is the door to all of the other sacraments.

CCC 1214 (page 16): Symbolism connected with the sacrament of Baptism.

CCC 1219 (page 35): The Church's view of Noah's ark as an Old Testament type of Baptism.

CCC 1219–1220: Church teaching that water in the Scriptures can represent either life or death.

CCC 1257 (page 35): The Church's interpretation of Jesus' words to Nicodemus.

CCC 1274 (page 137): The benefits of being sealed or marked as belonging to God.

CCC 1832 (page 141): The Church's traditional list from Scripture of the 12 fruits of the Holy Spirit.

CCC 1861 (page 35): A discussion about judging others in terms of real or perceived mortal sin.

CCC 1996 (page 7): That the free, undeserved help God gives his people is given as a divine favor.

CCC 1997 (page 7): Teaching about grace as the participation into the Trinitarian life of God.

CCC 2014: The spiritual life as a movement toward increased union with God.

CCC 2089 (page 23): Definitions of incredulity, heresy, and apostasy.

CCC 2162 (page 86): Teaching about the second commandment and improper use of God's name.

CCC 2174 (page 98): A discussion of Jesus' respect for the sabbath as a time of honoring God.

CCC 2175 (page 13): That the Christian meaning of Sunday is built on the Jewish idea of sabbath.

CCC 2266 (page 59): Church teaching that punishment assumes the value of expiation.

CCC 2424 (page 109): That profit is unacceptable as the ultimate goal of economic activity.

CCC 2728 (page 113): Suggestions for overcoming common obstacles to prayer.



NUMBERS IN REVELATION

1 The number one never appears in the book of *Revelation*. While it is tempting to think that “one like a son of Man” points toward the unity of the Blessed Trinity, the numerical element of the term shows up only in English translations and is missing from the original Greek.

2 John’s apocalyptic vision divides time into two periods: the first from Creation until Jesus’ birth, and the second from Jesus’ birth until the end of time. Two is the number of witnesses required by Old Testament law to testify at trial, which in the book of *Revelation* precedes Final Judgment.

3 In the book of *Revelation*, three is linked with the devastation of a third of humanity, and it can be seen in woes and proclamations from heaven. Triple repetitions recall Hebrew liturgical chants and indicate extremes of holiness (the *sanctus* of heaven), as well as its opposite, total distancing from God (666 or six, six, six). It also represents the three realms of heaven, earth, and under the earth.

3^{1/2} In the book of *Revelation*, three and a half shows up in pairs adding to seven. Forty-two months is three-and-a-half years, and “a time, and times, and half a time” adds to three and half if “times” is interpreted as “two times” from prophecy in the *Book of Daniel* 7:25. Numbers, not units of measurement, are what matter.

6 Based on the first six days of Creation, the number six stops short of the seventh day of the week, designated for God’s sabbath rest. In the book of *Revelation*, six signifies humanity’s attempts to ignore God as Creator.

4 In the book of *Revelation*, when the number four appears as the midpoint of a series of seven it represents the Chi-Rho (Jesus Christ), the mid-point between Alpha (Creation) and Omega (the new heaven and new earth). Four also indicates the geographic limits of the earth, symbolized by the earth’s four corners.

7 Seven points toward the completion of an event or of a time period, and it can be seen in the first seven days of Creation. The number forms the foundation for humanity’s recurring seven-day week while simultaneously anticipating a time of future fulfillment.

8 In the book of *Revelation*, eight represents perfection, symbolized in the Church by “the ancient first and eighth of days.” The celebration of the Lord’s day on Sunday replaces the Hebrew and Jewish sabbath celebrated on Saturday (the seventh day) with the first day of Creation. Commemoration of Jesus’ Resurrection falls on the eighth day and marks the re-Creation of humanity in Jesus Christ.





10 In John's apocalyptic vision, the number 10 is associated with trial and tribulation. This can be seen in the 10 days of testing that the members of the church at Smyrna are warned they will have to endure in order to receive the crown of life.

12 Throughout the Old Testament, 12 is the number of the sons of Jacob who become founders of the 12 tribes of Israel. In the New Testament, that number is echoed when 12 shows up again as the number of Jesus' apostles.

24 Adding the 12 apostles of the New Testament to the 12 tribes of Israel in the Old gives 24 important figures in both religious traditions. Twenty-four also is the number of elders seated on the thrones seen in close proximity to God's throne in John's vision of heaven.

42 In the book of *Revelation*, 42 months is significant because it represents three-and-a-half years (also represented by 1,260 days), which is half of seven.

666

Because six can be understood to symbolize men and women's attempts to ignore God, then 666 (six, six, six) symbolizes the extreme form of humanity's attempt to distance itself from worship of God.

1000 "A thousand" represents an extremely large but imprecise number. When another number is multiplied by one thousand, the resulting number carries the symbolism of the original number but has become unfathomably large and too numerous to be counted.

1260 In the book of *Revelation*, 1,260 days reduces to three-and-a-half years, assuming 360 days in a year. In two instances this three and a half is paired with 42 months (three and half years) to add to seven, creating two of the seven liturgical "weeks" in John's vision.

1600

Created by multiplying four times four and then multiplying that result by 100, the number 1,600 points to universality by referencing the four corners of the earth. The multiple of 100 indicates that there is no small corner of the earth that falls outside of God's judgment.

144000

In John's vision of heaven, 144,000 is the number of those to be sealed as servants of God "out of every tribe of the sons of Israel." Arrived at by multiplying 12 times 12 times 1,000, this number symbolizes ultimate fulfillment for God's chosen people. This multiple of 1,000 indicates that the author of the book of *Revelation* considers the final number of those entering heaven too large to count.



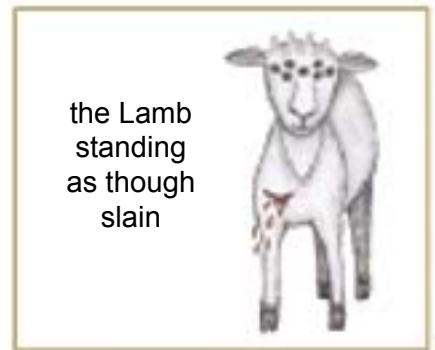
WHO'S WHO IN REVELATION



one like a Son of man



the woman clothed with the sun



the Lamb standing as though slain



four living creatures



the dragon



the child of the woman clothed with the sun



John, the author of the book of *Revelation*



the rider on the white horse