

# The Book of Revelation by John the Apostle

This book has captivated the hearts of many throughout the years since it was written. Especially in the last few centuries. Every generation since John wrote it has had some prediction of when such events would take place.

The interpretations of this book are as varied as any text in scripture can be. With some suggesting that it wasn't really written by John the apostle and others suggesting that every word was meant to be understood as literally as possible. I know many believers that have avoided the book simply because the interpretations are too varied.

For me, the varied interpretations drew me to this book like a moth to a flame. I love the tension, dissention, and discussion that comes from opening this book around others who have knowledge of its content. That said, I also love to help others who have not looked, to see that the book is not as scary as it might seem.....well sort of... it is scary in parts regardless of interpretation. However, *“.. God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” Timothy 1:7.* So let us open the book and see what message God has for us.

First, you must know where I stand on the interpretation scale for this book. As with all books of the Bible, I believe that the scripture was inspired by God and preserved as His word by His Spirit. Since I believe that and I believe Paul when he wrote *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,<sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God<sup>[a]</sup> may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* Then I must also believe that the message contained in the book of revelation is also important for me to be thoroughly equipped. Moreover, I believe it what it says *“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.”* More on this later...

When the book says that it was written by John, *“The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant **John**,<sup>2</sup> who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.”* Then I believe that it was written by John. This interpretation is supported by the similarities in writing styles from the Gospel of John, his epistles, and this book.

John wrote to seven churches about things they were struggling with *“Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira,*

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*Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.*”, but also wrote of things that seem to be beyond the present of his time. He was commanded to “*Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.*” It is my belief that the “*later*” has yet to take place in full. Since I believe that, I also believe that some of what John saw was of the future to our time and he had no words to describe what he saw. I believe in real miracles and that God is active even today performing miracles. He is not a street magician, and is under no obligation to have His miracles definitively recorded by others or us. They are recorded in scriptures however, and, as previously stated, I believe the bible when it tells us things. Anyway the topic of “why doesn’t God reveal himself to everyone right now?” is a Sunday school topic for another time.

I am not a historian, so I have to rely on others who are to add a “when” to this book. According to such sources, it was written around 95-96 AD. The texts tells us where he was “*9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*” Though it does not tell us any more specifics other than “*because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*” Contemporaries of the time suggest that he was sent there because the emperor at the time thought he was god and did not like others talking about “other” gods other than himself. There are rumors that he tried to kill John by boiling him alive, but that he was not burned by the oil. This is not recorded in scripture, and the historical references are sparse, but it does make for a fun story and I do not think it is inconsistent with scripture to believe such a thing actually took place.

So with the stage set, let’s look at the first chapter verse by verse. The first three verses we have already seen “*1 The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.*”

The first thing to note is that the revelation, although recorded by John, comes from Jesus and to Him by God. “but wait, isn’t Jesus God?” why yes He is. This is one of the many references to the trinity. “God” here is a reference to the Father.

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*“what must soon take place”* “Ah ha! If this is written in 96 AD, then what is written in this book must have already taken place if it was to take place ‘soon’” it is a reasonable argument, however, I have two counter points. One, to God’s perspective 2000 years is but two days; and second, that this phrase could also be translated “the time in which the events described will take place will be sudden” it is more like, “if you are waiting for a sign, you will miss the event”. This is consistent with Jesus’ own descriptions of the end times happening in a blink of an eye.

*“He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup> who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.”* Self-affirmation that what John is writing is meant to be scripture.

*“<sup>3</sup> Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.”* Now this is interesting, as this is the only book that references itself as the means to blessing one’s own life. There are certainly scriptures that suggest blessing from reading scripture in general. However, the difference is that John is specifically targeting the words that follow in the book of revelation. He even repeats himself in the end *“Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”*” So to any who have not read through this book because it is too confusing, you are also denying yourself the potential blessing the book promises.

To the question of what exact blessing comes from reading this book, I don’t have an answer. I am not suggesting that there is some sort of good luck charm on the words of this book only that there is a strong suggestion from scripture that you read these words and that by reading them and understanding them, it could change your life. I would also point back to my earlier point made by Paul *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God<sup>[a]</sup> may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

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Let's look at the next few verses before we wrap things up for this week.

*“<sup>4</sup> John,*

*To the seven churches in the province of Asia:*

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

*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, <sup>6</sup> and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”*

Again a direct message from John to the “Seven Churches.” There were certainly more churches than seven in that time, however, these were those founded by Paul on his missionary journeys and were all in a line along a common road. Despite the historic persecution those who believed in Christ suffered in that time, they still found ways to gather and encourage one another. God, through John, is also seeking to encourage those who were struggling at that time. Since God is God, he can also write things that are an encouragement to us now. It even says in the text that God is the one who “*is, and who was, and who is to come*”. This where we get the idea that God is not bound by time.

“*and from the seven spirits<sup>[a]</sup>*” this is a bit more controversial as there are those who suggest that these are separate spirits that are watching over the churches and there are others that suggest that the seven spirits are simply one Spirit with a capital ‘S’, a reference to the Holy Spirit. There are stronger references to the Holy Spirit for me so I could see things either way.

“*and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, <sup>6</sup> and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*” We will end with this list of descriptions for Jesus, and probably begin next week with them as well as there is a lot to unpack here.

First is “*Jesus Christ.*” It is easy to look past this as we so often hear Jesus named so. Christ means Messiah, savior of all mankind, Not something we should pass up lightly.

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“*who is the faithful witness*” or the one who testifies in truth. Jesus’s life story is one we can take to the bank. His words are the very words of God, and there can be no higher testimony.

“*the firstborn from the dead*” He was the “first” to be resurrected post crucifixion. I use quotes there as we have several stories of dead people coming back to life before Jesus did, but what you don’t have is those people living forever at the right hand of God. It is safe to say that, though those people were brought back from death, they were not saved from death. The salvation from death comes through the resurrection of Jesus, thus he was the firstborn from the dead.

Lets leave the next part for next week, I hope you will join me then to hear about “*him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,<sup>6</sup> and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen*”