

### Revelation 1–3

**Memory Verse:** *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me* (Rev. 3:20 NIV).

#### Background Helps:

Revelation! The climactic book of Scripture! With the study of Revelation over the next five weeks, we complete our three year tour through the Book of Books, the Bible. Written in the form of a letter, Revelation is a book of prophecy foretelling future happenings, especially the return of our Lord Jesus Christ and other events associated with the consummation of history. The literary style is known as "apocalyptic," that is, the prophecy is given through a series of visions, with much imagery and symbolism, and expressing the hope of God's ultimate intervention in history, rescuing His people from tribulation and defeating His enemies.

The apostle John is the author of Revelation (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8), writing from exile on the island of Patmos (1:9) off the coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) to the seven (7) churches of Asia (west coast province of Asia Minor see a Bible Map!), probably about the year A.D. 95 during the reign of the Roman Emperor, Domitian.

Interpreters of Revelation fall into four main groups:

1. **Preterists** understand the book to be mostly fulfilled in John's own day (first century) in the church's conflict with Judaism and pagan Rome. The book is seen as descriptive rather than prophetic.
2. **Historicists** see the book as a continuous prophecy of events from the first century to the second coming, like the unrolling of a scroll. Thus, the fall of Rome, the rise of Islam, the Roman Catholic church, etc., are all predicted here. The trouble is there is no agreement among Historicists as to the identity of the various symbols.
3. **Idealists** see little or no prophecy of future events. They view the book as teaching important spiritual principles about the age-long conflict between good and evil with the ultimate triumph of God.
4. **Futurists** understand the book to be largely yet unfulfilled. It is a prophecy of end-times events to be fulfilled just prior to and at the coming of Jesus Christ.

There is some merit to each of these approaches to Revelation. The book definitely had a message to John's own day and to the readers from the seven churches of Asia (preterists view). It certainly has a message for the church in every century (historicists view) and it undoubtedly teaches spiritual principles applicable to the church in every age (idealists view). But, for the most part, Revelation is to be understood from the futurist point of view, the apostle John assuring the church that the Lord Jesus Christ, who even now reigns invisibly from heaven, will at last triumph over all His enemies.

The book can be outlined according to the four visions which John receives, each time being led by the Spirit into an exalted state in which he receives a new revelation from God.

1. 1:1-8 Introduction or prologue
2. 1:9-3:22 The first vision: Christ among the seven churches
3. 4:1-16:21 The second vision: Christ ruling over the future from His heavenly throne
4. 17:1-21:8 The third vision: The fall of Babylon and the final triumph of Christ
5. 21:9-22:5 The fourth vision: The heavenly Jerusalem
6. 22:6-22 Conclusion or epilogue

You will see that the second vision is the longest, including the seven seals, the seven trumpets the seven judgments, and the seven last bowls of wrath. Each of these series brings us closer to the point of consummation and all of these events are under the sovereign control of Jesus Christ.

As you prepare to teach, don't be put off by fears of the supposed difficulties of Revelation. God twice promises a blessing to those who read, hear and obey this book (1:3; 22:7). The title Revelation means an "unveiling." The Lord wants to disclose wonderful truths to you and your class over these next five weeks. As much as any other book of Scripture, Revelation exalts the Lord Jesus Christ He ought to be central in your teaching of this prophecy. While there are differences among sincere Christians in their interpretation of parts of this book, plan to concentrate on those aspects where we all agree so that all may be edified.

After the brief introduction (1:1-8), John moves into his first vision—the glorified Son of Man in the midst of His churches (1:9-20) In chapters 2 and 3, Christ sends a message to each of seven churches in Asia. These seven churches are representative of all local churches of every generation in every place. In other words, these seven letters are Christ's message to us!

#### **Lesson Helps:**

1. Use 1:1-8 to give some basic background on the book of Revelation, perhaps including some of the information found in this Forecast.
2. Read 1:9-20. Discuss: What does this vision reveal about the present status of Jesus Christ? Where is He? Help your class to see that the glorified Christ is among and in His churches—including ours!
3. The Lord has a message for His churches. Discover the basic outline used for each of the seven letters. The repetition of this form causes the absence of praise or reproof to stand out in several of the letters. Perhaps you will want to prayerfully select one or two of the letters to concentrate on according to the needs of your class. Or, if you have a large class, you could divide up into seven small groups (select leaders in advance!) and have each discover the main message of one letter, reporting back their finding to the group.
4. As you close, emphasize the points of application to our personal lives and to our church.

#### **Assignment:**

-  Read Revelation 4–7.
-  Memorize: Revelation 5:13 NIV.