

Discussion Guide: Introduction

Preparing for a Study of Revelation

1. What are reasons that some people love to study Revelation while others are not interested in studying it at all?
2. How about you? What are you thinking and feeling about investing yourself in a study of this book? What are you hoping to get out of it?
3. For some people, studying Revelation generates some fear. What might be fear-producing in this book or about this study? What are some ways to address those fears?
4. To get the most out of our study, we're going to be working through questions on the text on our own before we meet each week. (If this is not the case for your group, adjust this question accordingly.) Have you participated in studies that required this in the past? What helped you to be successful in working through the homework each week? When do you plan to work on it during your week?
5. At the end of the introduction, Nancy said, "I've realized something as I've been studying Revelation. We begin our study of this book thinking that our biggest challenge is going to be understanding it. And it isn't. The biggest challenge is opening ourselves up to the adjustments in our lives that this book calls for. Yet this biggest challenge is also what promises the greatest blessing."

Let's spend some time in prayer for each other and for our study together, asking God to give us the grace we need to open ourselves up to the adjustments in our lives that Revelation calls for.

Discussion Guide: Chapter 1 (Revelation 1:1–8)

Blessed by Hearing the Revelation of Jesus

1. What do you think most people think of when they hear the word “apocalypse”?
2. How would you explain what apocalypse is in the Bible? What’s the difference between receiving an apocalypse and having an epiphany?
3. This first verse tells us that the content of Revelation is meant to show servants of Jesus Christ “what must soon take place.” If the things described in this book “must” take place, what does that reveal about what was happening in John’s day, what is happening in our day, and what we anticipate about the future? How does this strengthen us as his servants?
4. John was told to write down “all that he saw.” Over thirty times in Revelation, John will say, “I saw . . .” And then he will try to describe to us what he saw. How might our study be affected by recognizing and remembering that John is describing something he saw?
5. We see in verse 4 that this book is a letter written to seven churches—seven real churches in the first century that represent all of the churches in that day and throughout church history. It was written to them so they would not be in the dark, but so that they would know “what must soon take place.” What does this reveal to us about the mind, the will, and the heart of God toward his people?
6. In verses 4–7 we’re presented with numerous statements and titles that tell us about who Jesus is, what he has done, and what he will do. Which are particularly meaningful to you?
7. This book begins and ends with a promise that those who hear and keep it will be blessed. How do you think the blessing promised here is different than most people think about what it means to be blessed?
8. In each lesson we’ll consider what it will mean for us to hear and keep the passage we’re looking at in that lesson. What will it mean for you personally to hear and keep these first eight verses of Revelation? And if blessing is promised to those who hear and keep what is written, what form do you think that blessing might take?

Discussion Guide: Chapter 2 (Revelation 1:9–20)

Blessed by Seeing the Glorified Jesus

1. John addressed this apocalypse-prophecy-letter to the seven churches in Asia. What do you think it meant to those who first heard this letter read to them for John to identify himself as their “brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus”?
2. While the letter was written to those specific seven churches, we also learned that those seven churches represent all of the churches in John’s day and ever since. So that means John is also our brother and partner in these three things—tribulation, the kingdom, and patient endurance. Do you think most people who call themselves Christians think of themselves and their lives in this way? Why or why not?
3. John didn’t live in our day of social media. But if he did, what kind of posts or tweets do you think he might have written that got him exiled to Patmos?
4. In Revelation 1:13–16, John uses several analogies to describe the figure that he saw and heard—his appearance, his clothing, his hair, his eyes, his feet, his voice, his mouth, and his face. Which one is most intriguing to you? Which one challenges you the most regarding how you think about or relate to Jesus?
5. John described what he saw and heard in ways that are very much like the Old Testament prophets. Why do you think that is? Does that take away from or add to John’s credibility in your estimation?
6. John’s response to seeing the glorified Son of Man was similar to the responses of people in the Old Testament: He fell down on his face. What is the significance of that response? How should it impact how we think about and respond to Jesus?
7. Of all the things Jesus could have said to John in that moment, why do you think it was important for John to hear Jesus say, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades”?
8. What will it mean for you personally to hear and keep Revelation 1:9–20? And if blessing is promised to those who hear and keep what is written, what form do you think that blessing might take?

Discussion Guide: Chapter 3 (Revelation 2–3)

Blessed by Being Known by Jesus

1. Before we get into discussing specifics about Jesus' message to the various churches, think for a moment about the overall picture. Jesus rebuked a lot of issues. What does that tell us about the challenge of maintaining faithfulness to Christ as we live in the world?
2. Notice that each letter includes: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (plural). How does that shape how we should read, understand, and apply what is in these letters?
3. Consider the fact that Jesus' message is to churches, not to believers as individuals. What is the significance of this? What does it reveal about what it means to be a Christian according to Jesus? What do you think these first-century Christians would have thought about someone who called herself a Christian but had a casual commitment, or no commitment, to a local church?
4. After hearing Jesus' message to seven churches that faced different kinds of challenges in very different settings, what sticks with you about what is really important to Jesus? In light of that, what must become more urgent to you?
5. Sometimes we think of repentance as something we did one time when we became a Christian. But Jesus repeatedly calls the believers in these churches to repent. How would you describe the kind of repentance Jesus calls for in these letters? More significantly, how do you think we find the will and the power to repent in this way?
6. In each of the seven letters in Revelation 2–3, Jesus emphasizes the necessity of persevering in faith and obedience in order to receive final salvation. This can sound like the believers in the church are in danger of losing their salvation. Do you think that is what is being communicated here? If not, what is the intended message?
7. Jesus knows the good and the bad, the private and the public, our actions and our motives. Does this reality comfort you or unsettle you? Why?
8. What will it mean for you personally to hear and keep Revelation 2–3? And if blessing is promised to those who hear and keep what is written, what form do you think that blessing might take?

Discussion Guide: Chapter 4 (Revelation 4–5)

Blessed by Worshiping the Worthiness of Jesus

1. Most of the first “readers” of Revelation were actually hearers. They heard John’s apocalypse read to them, almost as a dramatic performance in which the audience entered the world of the drama. How do you think hearing this vision would have affected those in the seven churches who first heard Revelation 4–5? How might they have been surprised, stirred, challenged, or encouraged?
2. It can be challenging to interpret what is being conveyed by the symbolism John uses to describe what he saw in heaven in Revelation 4:3–6. But what aspects of God’s character and nature do you think John is trying to express through his descriptions?
3. Nancy said that the scroll represents the decrees of God concerning judgment and salvation, established before the foundation of the world. In other words, God’s plans for the unfolding of history and the future have been written down and sealed. What does this tell us about the events of the past, what is happening in our present day, and what will happen in the future?
4. We heard repeated promises of blessing in Revelation 2 and 3 for those who “conquer” or overcome. And here in Revelation 5:5 we’re told that the Lion has conquered. How would you describe the relationship between the conquering called for in the lives of believers in Revelation 2 and 3, and the conquering of the Lion?
5. If we were to examine these two chapters for repeated words and images, we would see that “worthy” and “worship” are at the heart of their message. On what basis are the Father (chapter 4) and the Son (chapter 5) shown to be worthy of worship?
6. As we see a glimpse of worship in heaven, how does that challenge us regarding how and why we worship God (or the other things we are tempted to adore and admire instead)?
7. Perhaps those who gather for weekly worship at your church pray together the words of the Lord’s Prayer: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:9–10). How does Revelation 4–5 give us insight into what we’re praying for and whether or not that prayer will be answered?
8. The visions given to Ezekiel and Daniel while they were living in exile in Babylon are very similar to the vision John received while in exile on Patmos. How would their visions have helped Ezekiel, Daniel, and John as they suffered in exile? How could John’s vision be helpful to us as Christians living as exiles in this world (1 Pet. 2:11)?
9. What will it mean for you personally to hear and keep Revelation 4–5? And if blessing is promised to those who hear and keep what is written, what form do you think that blessing might take?

Discussion Guide: Chapter 5 (Revelation 6-7)

Blessed by Being Protected by Jesus

1. Revelation draws pictures of dramatic scenes intended to make an impression on us. These visions are meant to shape our perspective about life in this world and the next. So, before we start to discuss the specifics of Revelation 6–7, what is the primary impression these two chapters have made on you about the present and the future?
2. The first four seals form a unit of sorts. How do they fit together? What are some things we can point to in history that give evidence of each of these realities and what are some things in our present day that reflect these realities?
3. The fifth seal can be troubling. We don't particularly like to think about people being killed for bearing witness to Christ—in the past or today. Do you ever think about brothers and sisters who live under this kind of persecution today? How much do you pray about it? How could we grow in our understanding of and prayer for persecuted believers? What do you think we might stand to gain from it?
4. What is the difference between being persecuted for your witness for Christ and being persecuted, marginalized, or criticized for your political commitments, social status, racial identity, or personality traits? Why is it important that we recognize the difference?
5. The devastation described in Revelation 6, with the explicit reference to the murder of Christians in v. 9–11, in one sense shouldn't surprise us. It's exactly what Jesus told his followers to expect (Matt. 5:10–12; Luke 21:16–19). Yet we don't typically expect our lives to be like this. Why is that? What is your reaction to the idea of letting these passages reshape your expectations?
6. Nancy said that we should examine our lives for evidence that we have been sealed by God for God. But sometimes self-examination can be troubling. We can become discouraged if we don't see as much evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives as we might hope. It's important to understand that examining our lives for fruit is not about asking *how much* fruit has been borne in our lives, but rather, asking if there is *any* fruit of the Spirit's work in and through our lives. What would you say to the person who says they do not know for sure if they will be counted in this 144,000/"great multitude that no one could number"?
7. How does Psalm 23 anticipate the blessings of the New Creation articulated in Revelation 7:15–17? Which of these promises is most exciting or comforting to you?
8. What will it mean for you personally to hear and keep Revelation 6–7? And if blessing is promised to those who hear and keep what is written, what form do you think that blessing might take?

Discussion Guide: Chapter 6 (Revelation 8-11)

Blessed by Being on Mission for Jesus

1. Before we begin to discuss the specifics of Revelation 8–11, what are some of your initial responses to the picture John presents in these chapters?
2. How does the blowing of the seven trumpets relate to the plagues of Egypt and the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart as well as the defeat of Jericho when the Israelites entered the promised land?
3. Nancy suggested the first four trumpets point to “the false gods people build their lives around that simply cannot sustain them or give them the security they crave.” What are some of the things people build their lives around that fail them? And when their false gods fail them, have you seen people turn toward God in repentance and faith?
4. In the fifth trumpet, we see demons coming out of hell to torment people who are not sealed by God. Some of the imagery used to describe them (human faces and women’s hair) makes them seem attractive rather than ugly or dangerous. What does this reveal about the true nature of demonic activity in the world? What are some ways Satan and his demons torment and destroy people so that their lives resemble the desolation wrought by a plague of locusts?
5. Nancy suggested that the horses in the sixth trumpet with “fire and smoke and sulfur” coming out of their mouths point to the demonic deception of false teaching both inside and outside the church. Do you agree that we tend to excuse or minimize the danger in false teaching? Why or why not?
6. While the trumpet judgments in Revelation 8–9 are aimed at the unbelieving world, the interlude about the little scroll and the two witnesses was a message for the seven churches of Asia and for us today. How do John’s words about the little scroll and the two witnesses scare you, intimidate you, challenge you, or motivate you?
7. When the seventh trumpet is blown, we see what will happen in the final judgment to those who have Abaddon/Apollyon as their king, contrasted with those who have Christ as their king. What are some of the specifics in Revelation 11:15–19 that sober you or encourage you?
8. What will it mean for you personally to hear and keep Revelation 8–11? And if blessing is promised to those who hear and keep what is written, what form do you think that blessing might take?

Discussion Guide: Chapter 7 (Revelation 12–14)

Blessed by Living and Dying in Jesus

1. Many modern people think the idea that a real devil is at work in the world is merely a religious scare tactic. But from Genesis to Revelation, Satan is presented as very real being. In fact, John shines a spotlight on him in Revelation 12–13. Why do you think it was important for the first audience of John’s letter to come to terms with the reality, intentions, and limitations of Satan? And why is it important for people in our day to come to terms with his reality, intentions, and limitations as well?
2. John focuses on the dragon as a deceiver of the whole world and the accuser of the brothers. How does the way believers conquer (12:11) relate to these two aspects of Satan’s efforts?
3. How would you explain the identity of the beast of the sea?
4. Revelation 13:7 says that the beast was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. Who “allowed” the beast to make war on the saints? What does it mean that the beast conquered them? How does this relate to the repeated refrain in this passage calling the saints to endurance and faith?
5. How would you explain to someone what “the mark of the beast” is or means?
6. How would you explain the relationship between the beast of the sea and the beast of the earth?
7. Revelation presents a cosmic battle that is ongoing. But Revelation is not the first place we read about this ongoing conflict. Read the following passages aloud and discuss how they relate to what is presented in Revelation 12–14:
 - 2 Corinthians 11:13–15
 - Ephesians 6:11–13
 - James 4:4
8. What strikes you about the gathering and the song portrayed in Revelation 15:1–4? Is it difficult for you to imagine having this response? Why or why not?
9. What will it mean for you personally to hear and keep Revelation 12:1–15:4? And if blessing is promised to those who hear and keep what is written, what form do you think that blessing might take?

Discussion Guide: Lesson 8 (Revelation 15-16)

Blessed by Being Ready for the Return of Jesus

1. Can you relate to Nancy's suggestion that many of us don't really want to look too closely at God's wrath? What are some reasons we are uncomfortable with it?
2. How can seeing the parallels between Revelation 15–16 and the plagues in Exodus help to shape or adjust our perspective about God's wrath?
3. What elements and imagery in Revelation 15–16 can help us if we see God's wrath as unjust?
4. When the sixth angel pours out his bowl, the leaders of God's enemies—the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, which are described as demonic spirits— assemble their kingdom subjects for a final battle against the kingdom of God. We're told what is coming out of their mouths: deception. They are deceiving the inhabitants of their kingdom and all the kings of the earth into gathering for battle against the saints. What kind of lies do you think they might they be spreading about God and the people of God?
5. In the midst of the sixth bowl judgment, as the unholy trinity assembles the kings of the whole world for a final battle against the saints, Jesus interrupts. He speaks directly to the saints, assuring them that he is going to show up for that battle: "Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!" (Rev. 16:15). What do you think it means for us as believers to "stay awake" and to "keep our garments on"?
6. Slowly read Psalm 2 together, stanza by stanza. What correspondences do you see between Psalm 2 and Revelation 15–16?
7. Nancy said that God's people see "the wisdom, goodness, and covenant love of God" in his wrath poured out on their persecutors. In what ways does God's judgment against the wicked demonstrate wisdom, goodness, and covenant love?
8. What will it mean for you personally to hear and keep Revelation 15–16? And if blessing is promised to those who hear and keep what is written, what form do you think that blessing might take?

Discussion Guide: Chapter 9 (Revelation 17:1–19:10)

Blessed by Being Prepared as a Bride for Jesus

1. Let's begin by thinking back to the original recipients of this letter from John. Turn back to Revelation 2–3 and look at these churches through the lens of how attracted they were to what Rome had to offer. Which ones were being lured away from Christ? What luxuries were tempting them? How do you think this vision of the great prostitute, which was a symbol of Rome, would have challenged or encouraged them?
2. John is carried away by the Spirit into the wilderness to be shown the great prostitute riding on the beast. It's almost like he has to get away from Babylon to have perspective on it. Similarly, we are so immersed in the world and its values that it can be difficult for us to see how we are being seduced. Consider the following list of areas where we might be vulnerable to spiritual adultery and need perspective. How would a person who is pursuing faithfulness to Christ approach these aspects of life differently from a person who has been seduced by Babylon? (You can pick and choose from this list or work through them all depending on the time available.)
 - material goods
 - sports and recreation
 - work
 - retirement
 - media (including movies and television, music, news, podcasts, social media, and books)
 - sexual ethics
 - physical beauty, fashion, and aging
 - shame and self-image
 - political commitments and opinions
 - education
 - personal ambitions
 - finances
 - parenting
 - travel
 - leisure time
 - friendships, socializing, hospitality
3. A central message of this passage is that if we allow ourselves to be seduced by the great prostitute and love the world instead of Christ, her destruction will also be our destruction. There is a clear distinction between being seduced by the prostitute or being faithful to the Lamb, between mourning or rejoicing when Babylon is destroyed. We can be a little uncomfortable with this sharp distinction, perhaps because we see both faithlessness and faithfulness in ourselves. Can you relate to that? What do we do with that?

4. Believers are called to “come out” of Babylon (18:4) so that we will not be caught up in her destruction. It can be hard to know how to do that. What do you think that might mean for the ordinary believer living in your time and situation?
5. Nancy presented this passage in terms of preparing for a wedding in four ways: (1) Don’t allow yourself to be seduced by a love that won’t last, (2) Break up with all your old lovers, (3) Say “yes” to the dress, and (4) Keep talking about our Bridegroom. Which one of these is most challenging to you and why?
6. Nancy identified a tension in Revelation 19:7–8 between the Bride’s making herself ready and her being granted or given clothing. How would you explain the reality that both are true?
7. What will it mean for you personally to hear and keep what is revealed in Revelation 17–19? And if blessing is promised to those who hear and keep what is written, what form do you think that blessing might take?

Discussion Guide: Chapter 10 (Revelation 19:11–20:15)

Blessed by Sharing in the Resurrection of Jesus

1. As Revelation 19–20 brings the end of history as we know it into view, Nancy presented the passage in terms of what it will mean to be on the right side of history. She said that according to this passage, being on the right side of history will result in:
 - sharing in the victory of King Jesus
 - feasting at the marriage supper
 - reigning with Christ
 - sharing in the resurrection of Jesus
 - being preserved through the fire of God’s judgment
 - being rewarded based on what is written in the books

How is this different from what is generally meant when people in our culture talk about being on the right side of history?

2. If we look again at this list of what it will mean to be on the right side of history, we realize that we would never know to set our hope on these things apart from the Bible, particularly from what is unveiled in Revelation. The writer of Hebrews says that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). How does what we see in Revelation 19–20 inspire or challenge your faith?
3. We saw some vivid pictures in this chapter: the arrival of the warrior king; his treading the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God; a gruesome feast; the throwing of the dragon, beast, false prophet, and their allies into the lake of fire. How do these images strike you? Why do you think the first recipients of this letter needed to see them? Why do you and I need to see them?
4. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Satan was bound “so that he might not deceive the nations any longer” (Rev. 20:3). So this is describing a time period during which people from every nation, rather than just Jewish people, are able to see clearly who Jesus is and embrace him by faith. Think about stories you have heard or even witnessed, where people from other nations, cultures, or belief systems have heard the gospel, believed it, and been changed by it. Who are some of the individuals or people groups that you know or have heard about who have heard and received and been changed by the gospel of Christ?
5. Throughout Revelation, we’ve seen some vivid pictures of what Satan is like and what he is doing in the world. Perhaps these images have generated fear for some of us. But in Revelation 20, we get to see how limited Satan really is. This must have been a significant source of encouragement to the original readers of Revelation. In what ways does it encourage you as you consider how Satan is at work in the world, in your nation, in your family, or in your own life?

6. In this passage we read the fourth of seven beatitudes, or “Blessed are” statements, in the book of Revelation: “Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection!” Based on the passages you read in the Personal Bible Study and on what was presented by Nancy, what do you think it means to share in the “first resurrection”? In what ways is this a blessing, both now and in the future?
7. We read in 20:12 about being judged according to what is in the books—the record of our deeds. In light of what we’ve been reading in Revelation, what kinds of deeds do you think John would say will be found in “the books” for genuine believers? What do you think will be in “the books” for someone like the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39–43)? What do you hope will be read in the “the books” about you?
8. What will it mean for you personally to hear and keep Revelation 19:11–20:15? And if blessing is promised to those who hear and keep what is written, what form do you think that blessing might take?

Discussion Guide: Chapter 11 (Revelation 21:1–22:5)

Blessed by Living in the New Creation with Jesus

1. Nancy speaks of Revelation 21–22 in terms of the way it presents:

- the happy marriage relationship we were made to share
- the land we were meant to inherit
- the multicultural community we were made to be a part of
- the glory we were made to bask in
- the satisfaction we were made to enjoy forever

Which of these brings you the most joy to think about and why? Which is most challenging for you to imagine?

2. Not only are we at the last part of the book of Revelation, we're at the last part of the Bible. The story of the Bible faced an immediate crisis in Genesis 3 and came to a climax in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Here at the end of Revelation, the story comes to resolution. How does the new creation as described in Revelation 21–22 provide resolution to the crisis of the curse presented in Genesis 3? What impacts of the curse do we see being healed or eradicated?

3. In what ways is it surprising that God has always intended to dwell with his people? Do you find that you long to dwell in God's presence? And if not, why not?

4. As modern readers, we often wonder why the Old Testament spends so much time talking about the tabernacle and then the temple. These details can seem so archaic and irrelevant. How does Revelation 21, with its announcement of God's dwelling with man and its description of the new creation as a temple, help us to understand why God was so particular about the design of the temple and the cleansing of the priests who entered it?

5. Because so much of Revelation 21 is about the environment of the new creation, it is easy to think of it primarily as a speaking of a place. But the imagery John uses throughout this chapter is very much about the people who will inhabit the new creation. How does John describe God's people in this passage? What aspects of who we will be and what we will experience in the new creation are most significant to you?

6. Many of us may have spent most of our Christian life oriented toward going to heaven when we die, living as disembodied souls somewhere away from this earth. How is Revelation 21, with its picture of our eternal existence in the new heaven and new earth, different from how we might have imagined eternity?

7. Nancy said, "The newness of this new creation—its intimacy with Jesus and belonging to Jesus, its beauty, security, community, satisfaction, illumination, holiness, healing, and happiness—is not solely reserved for the future. It is an increasing reality in the interior of our lives right now if we

are in Christ.” How are you experiencing that newness in your life now? Think about some ways God has transformed you. (This isn’t bragging; be encouraged and glorify God for his work in making us new creations in Christ!)

8. What will it mean for you personally to hear and keep Revelation 21:1–22:5? And if blessing is promised to those who hear and keep what is written, what form do you think that blessing might take?

Discussion Guide: Chapter 12 (Revelation 22:6–21)

Blessed by Keeping the Words of Jesus

1. Three times in Revelation 22:6–21, Jesus has said, “I am coming soon.” Why do you think it is important to him that we know this? Based on what we have seen in the book of Revelation, what difference should knowing that he is “coming soon” make in our lives?
2. Do you think most believers today think much about or long for Jesus to return? Why? What distracts us from this?
3. How would you answer someone who asked you, “Why was Revelation written and what is it about?” How have your ideas regarding what the book of Revelation is all about been challenged or changed throughout this study?
4. Revelation includes seven promises of blessing, which together present a picture of the person who is truly blessed:
 - 1:3— Blessed is the one who reads aloud, hears, and keeps the words of this prophecy.
 - 14:13—Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.
 - 16:15— Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on.
 - 19:9—Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.
 - 20:6— Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection.
 - 22:7—Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.
 - 22:14—Blessed are those who wash their robes.

How do you think these seven statements were intended to shape the thoughts, beliefs, and values of the original readers of Revelation?

5. How does Revelation’s definition of the blessed life differ from the way most people in the world, and perhaps even many in the church, perceive what it means to be “blessed”? How do you want this study of blessing according to Revelation to change how you think about what it means to be blessed?
6. At each step along the way, we’ve considered what it will mean to hear and keep that part of Revelation. Let’s do that one more time, this time thinking not only about the last passage but also about the entire book. What will it mean to hear and keep Revelation 22:6–21? And what will it mean to hear and keep Revelation as a whole?