

# REVELATION STUDY GUIDE

## PREFACE

What Christ thinks of the church is a question of great concern to all Christians. What we ourselves think of it from the inside and what others think of it from the outside are also important. But far more important is the view of Jesus Christ Himself, since He is the Church's founder, head and judge.

So what does Christ think of His Church? Fortunately we are not without the means to answer our question. For the New Testament contains much information about Christ's purposes for His people. From His own words recorded in the Gospels, from Luke's portrayal of the early Church in Acts, and from the detailed instructions of the apostles in their letters we can glean much about the nature and functions of the Church.

But there is another resource at our disposal which tends to be neglected, namely the Book of Revelation. Its second and third chapters contain seven letters, each addressed to a particular first century church in the Roman province of Asia. Although these letters were written by John, they were given to him directly by the resurrected and ascended Christ. Although their message is related to the specific situations of those churches, it expresses concerns which apply to all churches. By praise and critique, by encouragement and warning, Christ reveals what He wants His Church to be like in all places and at all times.

We must grasp where Christ's priorities lie. There is much here to call us to repentance and renewal, much to humble and shame us, much to warn us of the malice of our enemy, and much to inspire us to follow Christ with boldness and perseverance.

- Excerpt from What Christ Thinks  
Of The Church by John R. W. Stott

## **A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THE APOSTLE JOHN**

### **A. FAMILY BACKGROUND**

1. Father: Zebedee – Matthew 4:21
2. Mother: Salome – Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40
3. Brother: James – Matthew 4:21

John's mother may have been a sister of Mary the mother of Jesus. See John 19:25 in conjunction with Matthew 27:56 and Mark 15:40. If so, John would have been a first cousin of Jesus. Some commentators assert that John's mother was a cousin of Jesus. John's mother was one of the women who followed Jesus even to His crucifixion.

### **B. HOME TOWN**

1. Bethsaida, in Galilee: Luke 5:10; John 1:44  
Located on the West coast of the Sea of Tiberius, also known as the Sea of Galilee. Bethsaida may have been the fishing quarter of Capernaum.
2. Residence in Jerusalem: John 19:27  
This may indicate John was a man of some means. His residence in Jerusalem may explain his personal acquaintance with Caiaphas, the high priest.  
John 18:15.

### **C. OCCUPATION**

1. Fisherman: Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-10  
In business with his father, his brother, and Simon Peter. Apparently profitable since Mark refers to hired servants.

### **D. A DISCIPLE OF:**

1. John the Baptist: John 1:35-39
2. Jesus: John 1:35-39  
Peter, James and John are considered to have been Christ's "inner circle." Though there were twelve apostles, these three were closer to Jesus than the others. He referred to himself as the disciple "whom Jesus loved." John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20.

### **E. POSSIBLE INDICATIONS OF HIS CHARACTER**

1. Loving: John 4:17-21
2. Compassionate: John 19:26-27
3. Ambitious: Mark 10:35-45
4. Hot Tempered: Mark 3:17; Luke 9:49-56
5. Intolerant: Mark 9:38-40

### **F. AFTER CHRIST'S ASCENSION**

1. Fifteen years after Paul's first visit (approximately 39 A.D.), John was still in Jerusalem. He was one of the pillars of the Jerusalem Church and took part in settling the controversy between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Acts 15:6, 13; Galatians 2:3-9.

2. Legend: John cared for Mary until her death. Thereafter he left Jerusalem for Ephesus. There is no evidence to indicate how long Mary lived after Christ's ascension. Some commentators believe he went to Ephesus about 65 A.D.
3. Legend: Sometime during the reign of Emperor Domitian (81-96 A.D.), John was exiled to the island of Patmos. He states that he was on the island "because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus." Revelation 1:9. During the reign of Emperor Nerva (96-98 A.D.), John was allowed to return to Ephesus. He died at approximately 100 years of age (commentators range his age at death from 90 to 120) during the reign of Emperor Trajan (98-117 A.D.). It is believed that he was the only Apostle to die from natural causes.
4. Legend: During the reign of Emperor Domitian, John was taken to Rome and thrown into boiling oil. The oil did him no harm, thus adding to the belief many held that Jesus had promised him immortality. John 21:23. Legends such as this grew up in the early Church concerning many of the Apostles. There is no credible evidence to support this legend.
5. Legend: When his capacity to work and teach was gone and he was too weak to even stand, he was carried to the worship services and said in a feeble voice, "Little children, love one another."

#### G. WRITINGS

1. Gospel of John – approximately 85-95 A.D.
2. Epistles I, II and III – approximately 90-100 A.D.
3. Revelation – approximately 95-96 A.D.

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#### SOURCES

H. H. Halley, Halley's Bible Handbook. Zondervan (1965)  
James B. North, From Pentecost To The Present. College Press (1985)  
Lars P. Qualben, A History Of The Christian Church. Thomas Nelson & Sons (1958)  
Merril F. Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary. Moody Press (1966)

## **LESSON ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### I. AN UNFAMILIAR WORLD

- A. Revelation: contains angels, demons, lambs, lions, horses, dragons. It seems to lend itself to bizarre interpretation.
- B. Usual Response: ignore it. Besides, since we're Christians we don't really have to concern ourselves with the end, do we?
- C. Christians Cannot Afford To Ignore Revelation
  - 1. Rev. 1:1 – is a divine revelation given by God to Jesus. God is revealing His will.
  - 2. Rev. 1:3 – those who read it and hear it are called “blessed.”
  - 3. Rev. 22:18-19 – those who would dare to tamper with its message are severely warned. God is telling us to handle His Revelation with care.

### II. CLUES FOR INTERPRETATION

- A. The Revelation Was Made To The Church
  - 1. Revelation: The word means “to reveal” or “to unveil”.  
God is deliberately revealing truths that would otherwise have remained hidden.
  - 2. Purpose: the Revelation was given “to show His servants what must soon take place.” Rev. 1:1.
    - a. The Revelation was granted for the benefit of the Church (God's servants).
    - b. Thus, we must try to understand it.
  - 3. Particular Application
    - a. Rev. 1:4 – Revelation was written to the seven churches in Asia (western part of modern day Turkey)
    - b. Rev. 1:11 – names the seven churches. They are mentioned in the order of a route that a messenger might take in delivering the letter.
  - 4. General Application
    - a. Seven churches – the number seven in the Bible is often symbolic for perfection and completeness. So it is commonly believed that the Revelation has a permanent value and a universal message.
    - b. The seven churches represent the local churches of all ages and of all lands.
- B. Problems Without And Within
  - 1. Systematic Persecution
    - a. The Revelation was probably given to John during the reign of Emperor Domitian (81-96 A.D.).
    - b. The persecution under Domitian was worse than that which occurred during the reign of Nero (64-67 A.D.). Nero's persecutions were sporadic whereas Domitian's were systematic. Nero's persecutions tended to be confined to Rome whereas Domitian's were empire wide.
    - c. The Conflict
      - 1.) Rome – demanded that its subjects engage in emperor worship. Rome did not mind if its subjects also worshipped other gods, provided they also worshipped the emperor.
      - 2.) Christianity – strict monotheism

2. Heresy
  - doctrinal error was invading the Church. References in this regard are made to the Nicolaitans, false apostles, etc.
3. Moral Disintegration
  - immorality was contaminating the Church
- C. The Devil's Tactics
  1. Revelation reveals the Conflict and the Enemy. As you read Revelation, note the following contrasts:
    - a. Good v. Evil
    - b. Christ v. Antichrist
    - c. Lamb v. Dragon
    - d. Holy City, New Jerusalem v. Great City, Babylon
  2. The Tactics: Satan assaults Christians on several levels
    - a. Physical – the persecutions
    - b. Intellectual – the heresies
    - c. Moral – immorality
      - the foregoing tactics are the very same tactics that Satan has employed since the Garden of Eden. We're still facing them today. Let's face it, from Satan's perspective, why should he change something that has worked?
  3. The Christian's Response
    - We are called to resist Satan's tactics as follows:
      - a. Endure tribulation
      - b. Hold fast to the Apostle's doctrine
      - c. Resist temptation

### III. A REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

- A. Not John
  1. Rev. 1:1 – “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him...”
    - a. The Revelation was “made known” to John
    - b. Christ is the grand theme of Revelation
  2. A church with its back against the wall, fighting for survival, needs more than moral exhortation and pious entreaty; it must see Christ.
- B. A Vision Of Christ
  - Rev. 1:5-7 – When Christ is introduced, He is given three titles with an added statement about His past achievement and His future triumph. The three titles are as follows:
    1. The Faithful Witness: Rev. 1:5
      - a. The Church is called to bear witness in the world. In this regard, the Church can follow Christ's example.
      - b. John 18:37 – “...for this reason I was born, and for his I came into the world, to testify to the truth ....”
      - c. John 3:11 – “...we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen ....”
      - d. I Timothy 6:13 – “...Jesus Christ who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession ....”

- e. Conclusion: Christ's witness never faltered even in the face of suffering and death.
- 2. The Firstborn From The Dead: Rev. 1:5
  - a. Others had returned to life only to die again, e.g. Lazarus. But, Christ rose and is alive forever and ever.
  - b. Rev. 1:18 – "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."
  - c. I Corinthians 15:55 – "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"
  - d. Conclusion: A persecuted church facing the possibility of martyrdom needed assurance that death has no dominion over Christ.
- 3. Ruler Of The Kings Of The Earth: Rev. 1:5
  - a. Earthly kings might seek to crush the Church, but Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords. See I Timothy 6:15; Rev. 19:16.
  - b. Psalms 47:9 – "...for the kings of the earth belong to God ...."
  - c. Conclusion: No matter what may occur on this earth, Christians can rest assured that Christ still rules the world.
- C. Christ Appears To John: Rev. 1:12-16
  - 1. Rev. 1:13 – "...like a son of man ...."
    - John apparently saw Christ in a glorified, but human-like, form. His appearance was venerable and holy.
  - 2. Daniel 7:13-14 – Daniel also used the phrase "like a son of man"
  - 3. Isaiah 6:1-8 – note that Isaiah's response to his vision of the Lord is similar to John's. Isaiah cried, "Woe to me. I am ruined!" John states that, "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead." Rev. 1:17.
- D. Christ Appears Among Seven Golden Lampstands: Rev. 1:12-13, 20
  - 1. Seven Lampstands: symbolic of the seven churches in Asia
  - 2. Seven Stars: Symbolic of the leaders (elders, bishops) of the seven churches. Some commentators believe the stars may be the heavenly representatives or guardian angels of the seven churches.
  - 3. Conclusion: Both stars and lamps diffuse light. So also Christ's Church is meant to bear light in the darkness of this world.
    - a. John 8:12 – "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness ...."
    - b. Matthew 5:14-16 – "You are the light of the world ....let your light shine before men ...."
- E. Christ's View Of His Church
  - 1. Rev. 1:11 – "Write on a scroll ...and send it to the churches ...."
  - 2. Matthew 16:18 – "...on this rock I will build My Church ...."
    - a. Christ has a right to comment on the Church. It is His Church. He founded and built it.
    - b. Christ knows His Church. In each of the seven letters Christ begins by saying "I know."
  - 3. Conclusion: What then is Christ's view of His Church? In each of the letters, the risen Lord lays emphasis, either in rebuke or in commendation, on one particular

aspect of an ideal church. Put together, these characteristics constitute the seven marks of a true and living church. They tell us what Christ thinks of His Church, both as it is and as it should be.



\* The island of Patmos is approximately ten miles long and five to six miles wide. It is, for the most part, rocky and barren. It lies about sixty miles south of Ephesus.