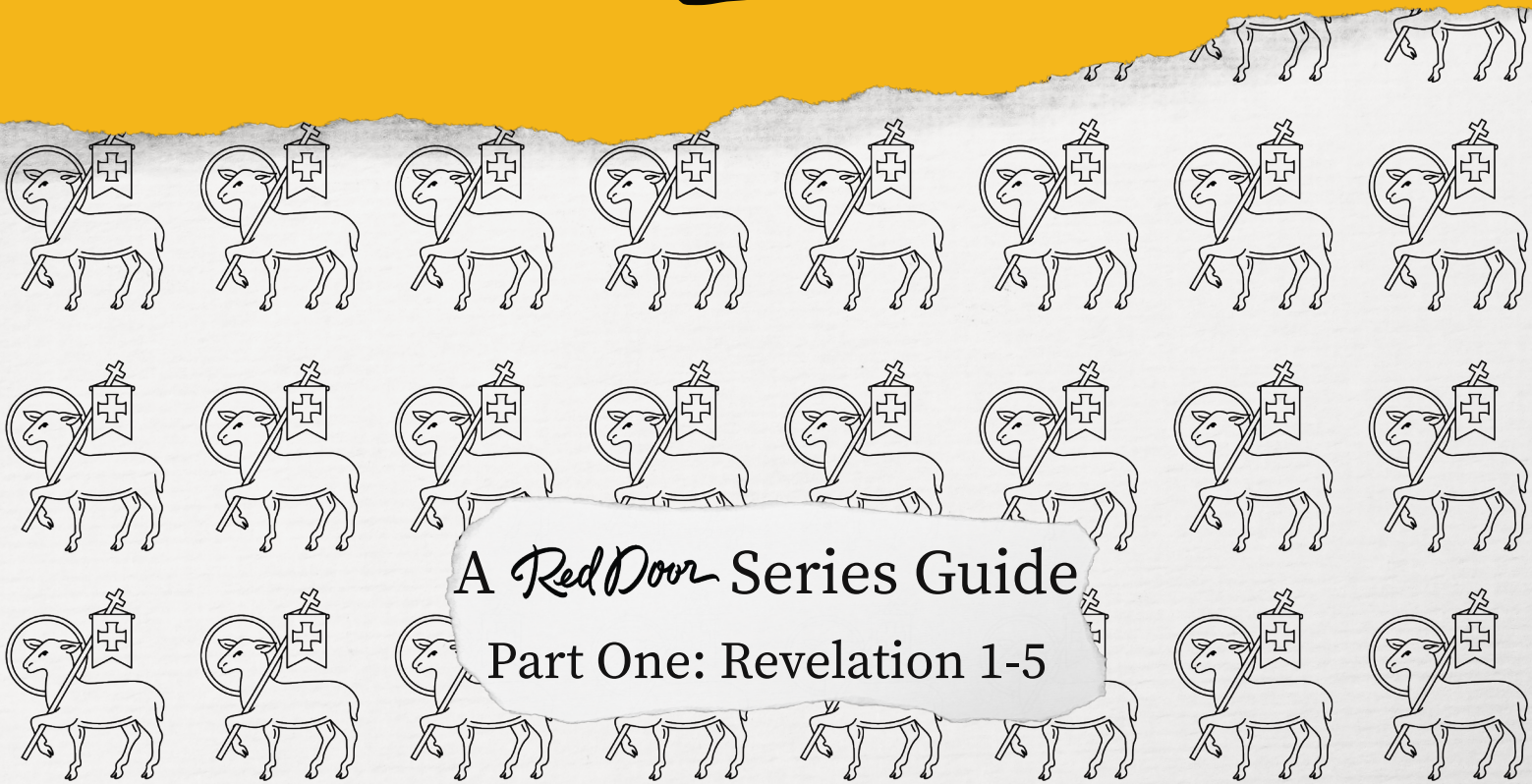


# THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST



A *Red Door* Series Guide

Part One: Revelation 1-5

## ***THE BOOK OF REVELATION IS WEIRD.***

*What begins as a letter to seven churches seems to morph into a fantastical story of battles and beasts and the end of the world. Revelation is weird, but it's mostly our fault.*

*To begin with, it's an apocalypse, a genre of writing we're not at all familiar with. So it's foreign, but like so many tourists we've failed to get to know it on its own terms. Instead, we read our own story into it, and so miss the book's intended message.*

*The result is lamentable. In our own day, we have taken a masterpiece of God's self-revelation and twisted it into the plot of bad movies and novels in which people disappear into the air, global conspiracies abound, and every politician is an evil tyrant in the making.*

*The real message of Revelation is much more powerful - and relevant - to followers of Jesus living in the real world. It's a message of exhortation to remain faithful to Jesus in the midst of a world marked by injustice, a word of encouragement to trust in the ultimate sovereignty of God over all things, and a work of art that reveals our destiny in the new creation.*

*So then, here are three big truths I'm hoping we will absorb from this amazing book...*

- 1. Our willingness to radically *live like Christ* and suffer for *Christ* is the path to ultimate victory over evil and injustice.**

The way of the world (Babylon) is the way of power and dominion. The way of Christ is life, death and resurrection. Rather than the roaring lion of Judah, God's victory is secured by the Lamb that was slain.

- 2. God is absolutely sovereign over human history, even when darkness seems to reign.**

The schemes of Babylon and The Dragon are powerful and pernicious, but God's plan for the redemption and final restoration of his people, and his creation, cannot fail.

- 3. The new creation is the climax of the entire witness of Scripture, and the destiny of everyone who remains faithful to the Lamb.**

Revelation is a book very much rooted in this world, with much to teach us about this life, but the final vision is our ultimate goal: new creation life!

*~ Jonathan*

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**BLESSED IS THE  
ONE WHO READS  
ALOUND THE WORDS  
OF THIS PROPHECY,  
AND BLESSED ARE  
THOSE WHO HEAR  
THE WORDS OF THIS  
PROPHECY AND  
KEEP WHAT IS  
WRITTEN IN IT, BE-  
CAUSE THE TIME IS  
NEAR.**

**- REVELATION 1:3**

## WEEK 1 - REVELATION 1:1-8

### What is Revelation?

When Renée and I were married my siblings bought us a puppy as a surprise gift. It was a mixed breed - a Staffordshire bull terrier - but it must have had some other genetic material mixed in somewhere. Chesterton looked like a regular Staffy, but he had longer legs and was 250% more handsome.

The book of Revelation is a little like Chester when it comes to genre. It's a mixed breed. The first verse informs us that this is an **apocalypse** (which means 'revelation' or 'unveiling'), a genre of writing common in the Hebrew culture of the time, but hardly written at all in the last 1800 years, and practically unknown to us in 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia.

The book is also a **prophecy**. It tells us this in the third verse. It's prophetic in that it contains some

information about the future, but it's prophetic mainly in the sense that it is written in a style similar to the Old Testament prophets (like Isaiah or Ezekiel). Like those books, Revelation is a prophetic call to faithfulness and a pronouncement of judgement on wickedness.

Finally, the book is also a **letter**. This fact often gets overlooked in modern readings, but chapters two and three are *literally* a written correspondence to *the seven churches* which occupy the area of the world we now know as Turkey. Revelation is a letter written to real Christians in a real time and place.

### When is Revelation?

It's not known for sure, but Revelation was probably written towards the end of the first century, under the reign of the Roman Emperor, Domitian. Most scholars date Revelation in the mid-90s AD.

### Who is Revelation? (meet the cast)

#### NARRATOR

**John:** named as the author of the book, tradition identifies him as the same John who authored the gospel and epistles of John. For various reasons, the majority of modern scholars doubt that the author is, in fact, John the son of Zebedee. The exact identity of the author shouldn't concern us too much.

#### DRAGON SQUAD

**Babylon:** the city that embodies injustice and tyranny. Throughout history, many regimes have lived-out the spirit of Babylon, but in Revelation it refers specifically to Rome and the Roman Empire.

**The Dragon:** the cosmic creature that energises the evil schemes of Babylon. In short, Satan himself.

**666:** represents Roman Emperor Nero who persecuted Christians violently during his reign from 54-68 AD. As with Babylon, subsequent rulers have embodied the spirit of Nero in their conduct, but in Revelation John is referring specifically to Nero.

**The Two Beasts (of Sea & Land):** political leaders who use power for the cause of Babylon & the Dragon.

**Jezebel, Nicolaitans, Balaam:** all represent stereotypes for idolatry, sexual immorality, & false teaching.

#### TEAM LAMB

**The Twenty-Four Elders:** Most likely the 12 Tribes of Israel + the 12 Apostles. Representing all redeemed people for all of time.

**The Four Beasts:** surround the throne of God and worship him, as well as guiding John through segments of his visions. They seem to be a blending of the cherubim and seraphim glimpsed by previous prophets (Isa. 6:2-3; Ezek. 1:10, 18). Ultimately, they represent all created things.

**The Woman:** appears to morph from Eve to Israel to Mary to the church. She is hunted by the Dragon who tries to kill her and her baby (Jesus), but she is protected by God.

**The Seven Spirits:** there is debate about this, but I agree with those who see it as symbolising the Holy Spirit. *Seven* doesn't refer to separate spirits, it's the number that symbolises fullness and perfection.

**The Lamb:** no debate! It's Jesus.

**The One on the Throne:** God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The supreme power without rival who will accomplish all of his plans.

**The New Jerusalem:** the world as God intended it to be. The future home of all who trust in the Lamb and stay faithful to him through thick and thin. It's the New Creation, heaven on earth!

### **How should we read Revelation?**

There are four main ways we can read Revelation. Each way will substantially affect how you read the book, so spend a bit of time here thinking through the options. (It's more nerdy stuff you need to know.)

**Historicism:** sees the order of John's visions, especially in 4:1–20:6, mapping onto successive historical events that span history from the beginning of the church to the return of Christ and the new creation.

**Futurism:** also sees the order of the visions as symbolising particular historical events. However, as their name suggests, futurists believe these events are still in the future from our own time, and therefore, are far removed from the context of the original audience.

### **So, in a nutshell...**

*Historicist:* Rev. maps onto the history of the church.

*Futurist:* Rev. is (almost) totally about the future.

*Preterist:* Rev. is written to 1st century people about 1st century things.

*Idealist:* Rev. is timeless truth about evil, the church, and God's plans for all.

**Preterism:** sees the fulfillment of most of John's visions in the distant past, during the early years of the church. Generally, these events are identified as the destruction of Jerusalem (70 AD) or the decline and fall of the Roman Empire (476 AD), or both. For this to be theologically orthodox, preterists must allow that everything after 20:6 (the return of Christ, the new creation etc.) is a future reality and not in the past.

**Idealism:** sees Revelation's visions as symbolising the cosmic conflict of Christ/the church versus Satan/evil, but (unlike the above options) doesn't see them as referring to particular historical events. For the idealist, John's visions represent spiritual realities that exist in every age.

### **How does the pastor read it?**

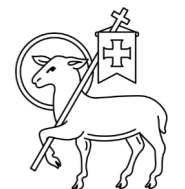
You don't have to agree, but it's worthwhile stating my own position as it will obviously influence the way I teach the text. My method, like my dog Chester, is a mixed breed.

I think the *preterist* position is correct to the extent that it interprets the book as a historical document, written to a historical audience about events and entities *they would understand and recognise*. That said, I also think that Revelation contains timeless truths that can be applied to our own time, and therefore I add to my *preterist* reading a measure of *idealism*.

I agree with scholar, Richard Bauckham, when he writes:

*Revelation offers not an esoteric and encoded forecast of historical events but rather a theocentric vision of the coming of God's universal kingdom, contextualised in the late first-century world dominated by Roman power and ideology. It calls on Christians to confront the political idolatries of the time to participate in God's purpose of gathering all the nations into his kingdom. Once Revelation is properly grounded in its original context it is seen to transcend that context and speak to the contemporary church.*

## **SERMON 1 - READING REVELATION**



### THE BIG IDEA

Revelation is a book written to real Christians about real life in order to encourage them to persevere in faith and reassure them that, in the end, *God wins*.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

*What are your main thoughts and feelings about studying the book of Revelation?*

*Of the four ways of reading Revelation (p.7), which one sits most comfortably with you? How might these different approaches affect how you apply it to your life?*

## WEEK 2- REVELATION 1:9-20

### vv.9-11

John was on Patmos (see map on p.3), an Aegean island where Rome exiled political criminals - hence he is a 'partner in the tribulation'. One Sunday he was 'in the Spirit' when he experienced his first vision. Being in the Spirit is an experience of the manifest presence of God which often leads to prophetic visions. It's something all of us should long to experience\*.

\* For more on this, see 1 Cor. 14:1, or the Red Door teaching series: *Gifted* on 1 Cor. 12-14.

### vv.12-16

What John sees is a vision of the risen Lord Jesus. What he sees is replete with Old Testament imagery: white hair = divine wisdom; eyes like fire = all-seeing; bronze feet = to crush opponents; voice like waters = the sound of God's speech; and two-edged sword = God's word, which searches hearts and divides soul and spirit.

### vv.17-18

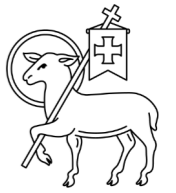
John's response is appropriate! But Jesus reassures him, 'Don't be afraid', because he himself has died and conquered death, and now holds the keys to death itself. John, and the Christians facing persecution, need not fear death.

*Note here: If your current reading of Revelation induces fear, apprehension or anxiety, you are reading it wrong! We are told at the very beginning of the book, that because Jesus is Lord, we have nothing to fear.*

### vv.19-20

John is commissioned to write his book, and Jesus explains the symbolism of the stars and lamp stands. The angels of the churches have sometimes been assumed to be the pastors/bishops, but are most likely literal angels.

## SERMON 2 - JESUS REVEAL



### THE BIG IDEA

In a world of uncertainty, populated by dark forces with dangerous agendas, Jesus Christ is the supreme Lord who loves and leads us.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

*How do you respond to the idea that the world is populated by beings and forces that are beyond the reach of our five senses, and can only be seen 'in the Spirit'?*

*When you imagine the risen Lord Jesus, what is he like? How does your image differ from John's?*

*Focus on what Jesus says to reassure John. How is what he said comforting?*

### NOTES

## WEEK 3 - REVELATION 2-3

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**2:1-7 Dear Ephesus:** commended for theological orthodoxy, but rebuked for a loss of love. This pattern has been repeated throughout church history. This issue is so serious that Jesus threatens to remove his Spirit from them!

**2:8-11 Dear Smyrna:** living under persecution, Smyrna is commended for its perseverance. They may be poor, and threatened with death, but staying faithful to Jesus, even in death, means they are rich beyond comparison.

**2:12-17 Dear Pergamum:** dealing with both persecution and false teaching, they are resisting the former, but not the latter. The result is that they are being seduced by pagan practices and sexual immorality. As a centre for pagan worship, Pergamum is a suitable place for 'Satan's throne'.

**2:18-29 Dear Thyatira:** the inverse of the Ephesian church, they are strong in service and loving works; but lack discernment and tolerate heresy. Jesus calls them to hold fast to the orthodox faith without abandoning their works.

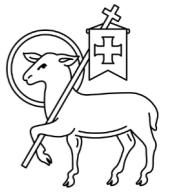
**3:1-6 Dear Sardis:** The command to 'wake up' is a reminder that twice in its history Sardis had been destroyed when the watchmen failed to detect the enemy. Their hope now lies with 'a few people' who remain faithful to Christ, and who may lead the others keep 'what you have received and heard'.

**3:7-13 Dear Philadelphia:** no rebuke for these believers, just a promise that those who persevere in fidelity to Jesus will never be cast out of his presence.

**3:14-22 Dear Laodicea:** no commendation for this church, only rebuke. They believe they are righteous, but they are blind to their true state. As with the Sermon on the Mount, he calls them to recognise their poverty of spirit, and so be blessed. All they need do is open the door to Jesus.

## SERMON 3 - DEAR CHURCH

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### THE BIG IDEA

Jesus is both our Saviour who dies for our sins, and our Lord who commands obedience. We must, therefore, be a church of both mercy *and* purity.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

*Read chapter 2 and 3 aloud (remembering 1:3!). What are the recurring themes or phrases in these chapters, and what do they tell us about Jesus and the church?*

*This is an impossible task, because we lack Jesus' all-seeing, all-knowing insight... but which of the seven churches is most similar to your experience of Red Door? What might Jesus commend or rebuke about us?*

### NOTES

## WEEK 4 - REVELATION 4

### v.1

John's second vision will take him into the very throne room of God.

### vv.2-3

At the centre of the heavenly throne room sits God himself. John lacks words to describe the sight and instead uses the imagery of precious stones and rainbow colours to describe God's beauty, glory and greatness.

### v.4

Twenty-four elders (*see Team Lamb, p.6*)

### vv.5-6a

Lightning and thunder are reminiscent of God's glory on Mount Sinai (Ex. 19), but are juxtaposed by the tranquility of the sea of glass. In the ancient world, the sea was symbolic of chaos and danger and terrifying beasts, but in God's presence, it turns to glass (cf. Ex. 24:10; Ezek. 1:22, 26; Rev. 15:2).

### vv.6b-8

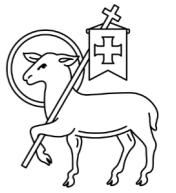
Four living creatures (*see Team Lamb, p.6*)

### vv.9-11

An incredibly moving picture of worship and submission to the One on the Throne. It's difficult to write a commentary on this vision, because I think the best response to this verse is not explanation, but contemplation. The vision should leave us wanting to enter in to God's presence in worship. To be silent, to pray, to sing, to fall down (v.10).

Personally, this vision makes me yearn all the more to join with brothers and sisters in worship at Red Door, and one day gather in the Throne Room itself.

## SERMON 4 - THE THRONE



### THE BIG IDEA

John's vision of the heavenly throne room leaves us in no doubt: God is King, and is worthy of all our worship: every prayer, every song, every breath.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

*Have you ever been overwhelmed by an experience of God? Can you describe it?*

*For reflection, spend some time in artistic expression, i.e., sing some songs, write some poetry or prose, sketch a picture - whatever will enable you to dwell on this magnificent vision of God, and the worship of God.*

*Add to this some time spent praying for your church to be captivated by the glory of God in worship.*

### NOTES



## WEEK 5 - REVELATION 5

### v.1

The scroll John sees is similar to a will that one writes that is to be opened and the contents executed. Broadly speaking, this scroll contains God's plans for all of history, but the seven seals prevent anyone from enacting it.

### vv.2-4

Joh weeps because he longs for *God's will to be done*, but no one can be found who is worthy to open the seals, and so fulfil his plans.

### v.5

In Genesis, Jacob sets apart his son, Judah, as the leader among his brothers and likens him to a lion (Gen. 49:8-12). Jesus fulfils this role, not only as a descendent, but as a conquering king.

### vv.6-7

In an unexpected turn, the lion we expect to see is actually a Lamb who looks like it's been

slaughtered. The lamb's seven horns = great power (Ps. 18:2; Dan. 7:24; Zech. 1:18-21). His seven eyes, = God's seven spirits, which are themselves symbols for the Holy Spirit. This slaughtered Lamb can open the scroll because he is God's messiah, the risen Lord Jesus!

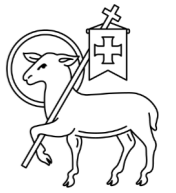
### vv.8-10

The creatures and elders celebrate the Lamb who has won redemption for his people through his death, and also because he will be able to respond to the prayers of the saints (bowls of incense).

### vv.11-14

In a beautiful doxology, Jesus is worshipped as God by all creation.

## SERMON 5 - THE LAMB



### THE BIG IDEA

God and the Lamb are glorified because they have begun to execute their sovereign plan for the redemption and restoration of all creation.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

*This passage celebrates God's sovereignty over creation, but Revelation also features Christians who suffer greatly. How can we hold these two realities together?*

*As disciples of Jesus, we follow the Lamb that was slain. Who does this reality help shape our response to the previous question?*

*This chapter features images of all creation worshipping Jesus. How should our worship at Red Door be informed by this? How could we be more 'true' to this picture.*

### NOTES

## UP NEXT...

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### Part two: Revelation 6-14

After a short break we'll jump back into John's Revelation of Jesus Christ and examine the middle third of the book:

Rev 6-8:5 Faithful Saints

Rev 8-9 Wrath & Judgement

Rev 10-11 Church Triumphant

Rev 12 The Woman & The Dragon

Rev 13-14 Staying True

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Please read ahead between now and then, taking note of things that jump out at you, or that you have questions about. If you would like to do some further reading and study, here is a list of the books I have found to be most helpful:

Richard Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*.

G. K. Beale, *Revelation (A Shorter Commentary)*.

Tim Chester, *Revelation for You*.

John Dickson and Greg Clarke, *666 and all that*.

W. Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*.

Craig Koester, *Revelation (Anchor Bible Commentary)*.

Scot McKnight, *Revelation for the Rest of Us*.

Vern Poythress, *The Returning King*.

**"LOOK, I AM  
COMING SOON!  
BLESSED IS THE  
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OF THIS BOOK."**

**- REVELATION 22:7**

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