



living
the
bible
today

TheBig Picture

Tim Foster

Revelation

The big picture

Tim Foster

Series Editor: Tim Foster



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Dear Leader

The key to running a successful Bible study is for the leader to know the study thoroughly and to be flexible. The format of these studies allows you to use them with groups of all ages and levels of Christian maturity.

All quotes are from the *New International Version* of the Bible.

The study format

The studies have four sections.

The first section is entitled '**I Exercises**'. This is designed to motivate people and to help them focus on a theme in the study. The questions should get people talking – after all everyone can talk about themselves. But be careful not to spend too much time on this section.

The second section, **A First Glance**, gives a basic understanding of the passage. The comprehension-style questions, the comments and explanations should help people to grasp the ideas being presented and to understand difficult words and concepts.

Within this section are harder questions, flagged by the magnifying glass icon. These questions take people a step further. The intention is to provoke group members to think more deeply about the issues and to understand how they are developed elsewhere in the Bible.

In many ways **Looking at Me** is the most important section of each study. This is where group members are challenged to apply what they have learned to their own lives. As a leader you will need to be very sensitive here. Be aware that not everybody will be willing to bare their soul to the group. On the other hand, encourage people to think carefully and honestly about the application and to 'do business with God'.

Each study ends with one or two **Curly Questions**. These questions are designed to stimulate debate. They should get your group talking, thinking and applying the passage more deeply.

The movement in each study is from the big picture to the details. This structure enhances understanding and gives the leader flexibility.

Being Flexible

It is important to recognise two things. First, the aim is not to do all the questions, indeed very few groups will. Second, as you move through the study, notice that the questions become deeper, more open-ended and more searching. These factors give you flexibility.

For example, with a younger group you might focus on **A First Glance** and only one or two of the harder questions. You might like to vary your format, dividing the longer studies over two weeks allowing more time for prayer. Whatever you do, it is important to leave plenty of time for the **Looking at Me** section. It would be a great pity if people left the group knowing what the passage meant, but not knowing what it meant for them.

The commentary, *Apocalypse Now and Then* (1989), written by Paul Barnett, is highly recommended for both group leaders and participants. It simplifies and demystifies the book and helps us understand both the context in which Revelation was written, and also what it means for us today.

Tim Foster
Series Editor

Introduction

Revelation is often studied for its fascinating and futuristic themes. However, the message of Revelation is very much for God's people today.

Much has been made of the symbolic language and the 'codes' in the text, adding to the intrigue of the book. But the secret to understanding Revelation is not primarily in cracking the code, but in understanding the context in which John received his Revelation.

The Revelation is for a people who are confused and losing faith as they face persecution, written by a fellow sufferer (1:9). Their enemy is Rome and the Roman emperor. He is the alternative god, possessing power, authority, and invincibility. He demands a behaviour that includes idolatry, sexual immorality and sorcery. Most difficult of all, this alternative god appears to have defeated Jesus by crucifying him.

Was Jesus worthy of worship? Had he won for his people the victory he promised? Could they really enjoy the benefits of Jesus' kingdom? What hope was there in the face of suffering? When could his people expect Jesus to return?

Revelation answers these questions by painting a set of dramatic pictures that lift the reader into the throne room of Jesus. From there we see our lives, our world and our history from an amazing new perspective – the perspective of the victorious Lord of history. The scene is breathtaking and the perspective life-changing.

Enjoy the view.

Tim Foster

About the author

Tim Foster is passionate about the 'big picture' of the Bible. He also wants Christians to understand how to live in the world as citizens of heaven.

After a three year stint in youth ministry he studied at Moore Theological College graduating with a B.Th (hons), Dip. Arts (hons) and Dip. Min. This was followed by five years as Assistant Minister at Gympie Anglican Church where he was responsible for evangelism and small groups. In this time he wrote the *People of God* evangelism tool and a book about the big picture of the Bible – *From the Garden to the City*. He also began this series of Bible studies to help people 'live the Bible today'.

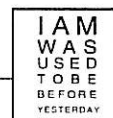
Tim is Director of the Church Resource Unit at Anglican Youthworks. He is also Director of the Youthworks College where he lectures in evangelism. He is currently completing a Doctor of Ministry degree through Fuller Seminary where his thesis is on the missional church in suburban culture.

Tim is married to Alison, and they have three children, Caitlyn, Harry and Lucy.

Study 1

Revelation 1

The Alpha and the Omega



'I' Exercises

1. Who is the most famous person you have ever seen?



A First Glance

Read Revelation 1

The opening chapter sets the scene for the book. It is written by the aged Apostle John while he is imprisoned on the island of Patmos late in the first century – a time when the church is small, persecuted and marginalised. Rome and the Roman Emperor hold considerable power and demand allegiance and even worship. The power of the Emperor raises serious concerns for the early Christians. Has Jesus really defeated Satan? Perhaps Jesus has somehow lost his battle with both the heavenly and earthly powers and it would be better to give their allegiance to Rome.

We are introduced to John and his circumstances and, most importantly, to the vision of Jesus who is described as the Alpha and Omega. Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and so the image describes Jesus as the Lord of history, the Creator of the world and the reason for its existence. This is the theme that dominates this chapter and, in fact, the entire book of Revelation.

Verses 1–8

2. What is the purpose of this letter (verses 1–3)?
3. In the table below write beside the verses listed how the angel describes Jesus:

Verse 4
Verse 5a
Verse 8

4. How do these descriptions address the concerns of the suffering Christians in the seven churches?
5. What has Jesus achieved for his servants (verse 5)?



6. Why will 'all the peoples of the earth' mourn at the coming of Jesus? Note: 'all the peoples of the earth' in verse 7 means those who are not Christians.

Verses 9–20

7. What does John have in common with the recipients of the letter (verse 9)?
8. What does the description of the one speaking to John convey to you (verses 13–16)?

Explanation: Someone like a Son of Man (Revelation 1:13)

The title 'Son of Man' was used frequently by Jesus of himself (for example Luke 19:10). The expression comes from Daniel 7:13–14, where a human figure appears in the last days to ascend into heaven where he is given an everlasting kingdom. The Son of Man is a victorious king who brings justice and peace to his people. The vision here in Revelation of someone 'like a son of man' appearing in glory is a statement that Jesus has won the final victory for his people. Despite the apparent might of Rome, Jesus is the one with all authority, glory and power.



9. We learn that the seven lampstands are the seven churches (1:20). What then is the significance of the location of the 'son of man' in verses 12 and 13?

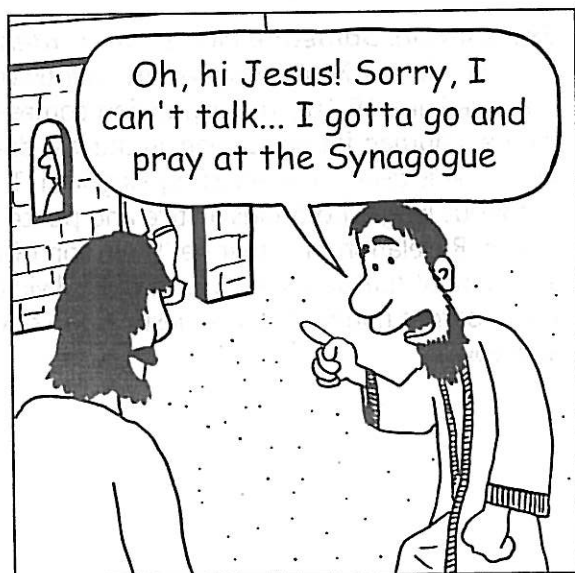
10. What claims does Jesus make in verses 17 and 18?

11. Why did Jesus give John this Revelation?



Looking at Me

12. Who or what demands your loyalty? Do they ever compromise your loyalty to Jesus?



13. What has Jesus achieved for you? How does this give you confidence in the face of persecution and temptation?



Curly Questions

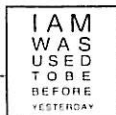
'The church is suffering because it is no longer persecuted.' How does persecution help the church? What should we pray for those who face persecution?

Pray together

Study 2

Revelation 2-3

Under threat



'I' Exercises

1. Have you ever felt threatened? Tell the group what happened.



A First Glance

Read Revelation 2 and 3

In its original context, the Book of Revelation was a letter to seven churches in the Asia Minor region. Following the dramatic introduction in chapter 1, the book continues with a specific message for each of these churches. Each message follows the same basic pattern, first commending the church's faithfulness in certain areas and then warning the church against certain false teachings and immoral practices that undermine their faithfulness to Jesus.

2. In the table below list what Jesus commends in each church and what he holds against them. Note: There is not an entry in both columns for each church.

Church	Commends	Holds against them
Ephesus		
Smyrna		
Pergamum		
Thyatira		
Sardis		
Philadelphia		
Laodicea		

3. Reflecting on the above list, what do you see as the major threats to these churches?

These churches are small and struggling, and the people feel overwhelmed by pressures from the world. In the face of the power of Satan, Jesus offers them a vision of who he is and what they will become.

4. a) Note from the verses below how Jesus describes himself to each church:

2:1

2:8

2:12

2:18

3:1

3:7

3:14

- b) In general, how would these descriptions of Jesus help the struggling churches?

5. What promises does Jesus offer to those who persevere?
2:7

2:11

2:17

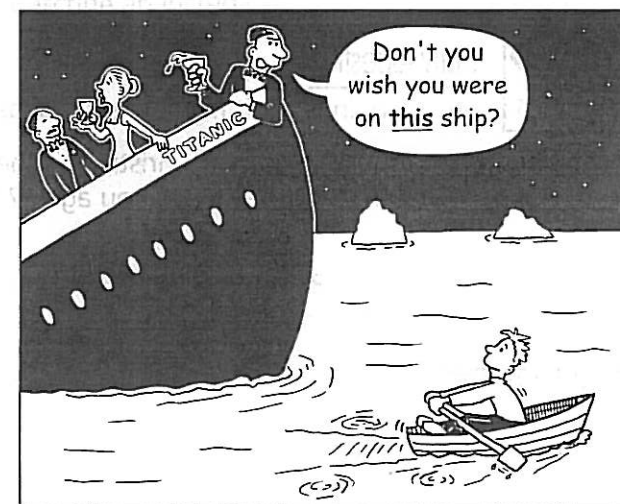
2:26

3:5

3:12

3:21

6. How is false teaching to be dealt with?





Looking at Me

7. 'The world offers us two alternatives. It will either persecute us or seduce us.'
 - a) Which of these alternatives are you drawn to?
 - b) How does the world persecute or seduce you?
8. What overwhelms you in life? How does Jesus' portrayal of himself help you in your struggle?



Curly Questions

'Materialism and affluence among Christians is the greatest threat to the contemporary church in Australia.' Do you agree? Why or why not?

Pray together

Study 3

Revelation 4-5

A vision of heaven

I AM
WAS
USED
TO BE
BEFORE
YESTERDAY

'I' Exercises

1. Describe the most spectacular view that you have ever seen.



A First Glance

Read Revelation 4 and 5

Verses 1–6a of chapter 4 describe an incredible scene. This is the throne room of heaven.

2. How would you describe the scene in the opening six verses?
3. The four living creatures in Revelation 4:6b–8 and the twenty-four elders in 4:9–11 are in a remarkable position to know the truth about God. What is their message to the seven churches?

Paul Barnett comments that 'Worship is not to be thought of, primarily, in either aesthetic or emotional terms ... Worship is the expression of agreement by the people of God about the truth of God' (*Apocalypse Now and Then*, p71).

4. Why should we worship God?



5. How do we worship God? (see also Romans 12:1–3)

The scroll of Revelation 5:1 would tell John, and us, the story of the world's future. However no-one is worthy to respond to the angel's call in verse 2.

6. Why is Jesus the only one worthy to open the scroll (5.9)?



7. Why is knowledge of the future so important to the seven churches?

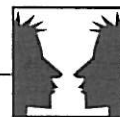


8. The image of the helpless lamb is a dramatic contrast to the powerful symbols adopted by the great world empires. What does this tell you about the Christian faith? (See also 1 Corinthians 1:18.)

9. What is the effect of Jesus' death according to Revelation 5:9–10?

10. a) From what you read in Revelation 5:12–14 what is heaven like?

b) Why is church 'a glimpse of heaven'?



Looking at Me

11. How does your life reflect the:

a) kingship of God?

b) holiness of God?



12. Who or what in your life tries to take the place of Jesus as king or lord?



Curly Questions

'We need to recover the awesomeness of God in our worship.' Do we? How do we experience the awesomeness of God?

Pray together

Study 4

Revelation 6-7

The victorious life



'I' Exercises

1. What is the scariest movie you have ever seen?



A First Glance

Read Revelation 6 and 7

Verses 1-8

The language of Revelation becomes even more vivid in chapter 6. The picture that emerges is that the present time is a period of suffering and death at the hands of monstrous tyrants. It is a time of increasing hostility and violence against the people of God. Despite the suffering and tyranny, Jesus is still seated on the throne and will establish his purposes.

2. Complete the chart below.

	Colour	Result
Rider 1	White	
Rider 2	Red	
Rider 3	Black	
Rider 4	Pale	

3. How has this prophecy proved true in the last 2000 years?



4. What hints are there in these verses of:

a) God's control (sovereignty)

b) God's mercy

Special Note

The middle section of Revelation (chapters 6 to 16) presents four sequences describing human history in the period following the death of Jesus. As Paul Barnett shows (*Apocalypse Now and Then*, pages 8–9, 77), these are **not** to be understood as four separate periods of time occurring in chronological sequence. Rather each section represents the same era of history – the entire period between Christ's ascension and his return, symbolically described as 'one thousand years' – but depicts that history through a different theme and with a different emphasis.

6–7 Seven seals depicting TYRANNY

8–11 Seven trumpets depicting CHAOS

12–14 Seven signs depicting PERSECUTION

15–16 Seven plagues depicting DESTRUCTION

Revelation 6:9–17

5. Why do the saints utter the cry of verse 10?

6. What event is described in verses 12–17? How is this a response to the cry of the saints?

Revelation 7:1–17

7. Who are the angels protecting? What are they protected from?

8. Who do the 144 000 represent?



9. Why shouldn't the number 144 000 be taken literally?

10. What lies beyond this time of tyranny (verses 9–17)?



Looking at Me

11. a) Who are the great tyrants of our day?

b) What hope do these chapters offer to those who suffer at their hands?

12. Do you ever ask 'How long, Sovereign Lord?' What hope and assurance does this vision bring to you?

13. What should we pray for the persecuted church throughout the world?



Curly Questions

Consider worship in your church. What do you think is emphasised? Are there any dangers with the emphases in contemporary worship?

Pray together



Study 5

Revelation 12-14

Worship the Lamb



'I' Exercises

1. If you could be an animal what would you be and why?



A First Glance

Read Revelation 12-14

This is the third of four sequences in the book. It is different in that it covers the entire era from the birth of Jesus and some historical events of the early church through to the final judgment.

Revelation 12:1-13:1a

2. The first six verses point to historical events of the first century.
 - a) Can you identify the woman (verses 1-2), the dragon (verses 3-4) and the child (verse 5)?

- b) What event is verse 6 referring to? (If you're stuck see Matthew 2:13-15.)

3. What battle is referred to in verses 7-9? (Verses 10-11 give a bit of a hint.)

4. Why will the people of God experience more suffering rather than less in the period after Jesus' death (verse 12b)?



5. How can the present suffering of Christians be proof that Jesus is now ruling in heaven?

Verses 13-17 allude to actual events when the Jerusalem Christians fled to Pella prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Chapter 12, then, makes the point that the church has been persecuted from its inception. Even Mary and her son were not exempt. Jesus' victory over Satan leads to more persecution and suffering for God's people rather than less. Satan is angry at the preservation of the Jerusalem church. This explains, at the time this prophecy was given, why the church was under severe attack.

Revelation 13:1b–18

The focus of the dragon (verse 1a), and the focus of this chapter shifts to Asia (western Turkey), the home of the letter's original recipients. The first beast described as coming out of the sea (verse 1b) is the Roman Emperor, while the second beast (verse 11) is the High Priest who presided over Emperor-worship in Asia. The passage is full of veiled allusions to actual events around the time of John's vision.

6.
 - a) How does the first beast attack God and his people (verses 5–7)?
 - b) What weapons are used by the second beast (verses 15–17)?
7.
 - a) How does the world respond to the beasts?
 - b) How are God's people to respond?

Verses 16–17 describe action taken by the High Priest to enforce worship of the Emperor. As a result, Christians were under enormous pressure to conform.

Revelation 14:1–20

8. What are the attributes of the 144 000 (verses 1–5)?



9. How are the announcements of the three angels (verses 6–11) 'gospel' (that is 'good news')?

10.
 - a) What is being harvested in verses 14–18?

- b) What event is being described (verses 19–20)?

- c) What has happened to God's people (verse 13)?

We are given a picture of judgment at the end of this scene. We see judgment in each of the three other sections (6:12–17; 11:18–19; 16:1–21) which clearly shows that the events in these four sections happen simultaneously and not one following the other



Looking at Me

11. Have times of suffering or persecution ever caused you to doubt God? How does this passage give you strength and encouragement to continue?
12. What sort of cooperation are we to give to those in authority over us? At what point do we need to recognise the greater authority of Jesus?



Curly Questions

Would Christians in the Western world be better or worse off if they were to experience persecution?



Pray together

Study 6

Revelation 17-20

The overthrow of evil

I AM
WAS
USED
TO BE
BEFORE
YESTERDAY

'I' Exercises

1. Who do you think is the most powerful individual in the world?




A First Glance

Read Revelation 17:1-18:8

2. The image of Revelation 17:3-6 causes John to be 'astonished' or 'shocked'.
 - a) Which words are so shocking?
 - b) What does the image convey?

Verses 9–14 provide a specific and detailed description of the Roman Empire, including provincial governors and emperors of the past, present and (from John's perspective) future. We are given a picture of a powerful and enduring empire which makes 'war against the Lamb' (verse 14a). The turning point comes in verse 14b, for, despite present circumstances, 'the Lamb will overcome them'. What follows is a description of the defeat of this seemingly invincible power.

-  3. What causes Babylon's downfall (verses 16–17)?


The future destruction of Babylon is the basis for the call to God's people to 'Come out of her' (Revelation 18:4). Today we see many people giving themselves 'glory and luxury' (18:7) unaware of the world's imminent destruction and judgment.

4. What does it mean for God's people to 'come out'? How do we 'come out' of the world?
5. What is Babylon's punishment (verses 6–8)? Is it fair?

Read Revelation 19:1–21

Verses 1–10

6. What has God done and what is the response of God's people (verses 1–8)?

-  7. How has the bride 'made herself ready' (verses 7–8)?

Verses 11–21

The armies of heaven prepare for the final battle. The Lord Jesus is majestic and intimidating. The battle is over before it has begun and the beast and the false prophet (the emperor and high priest) are unceremoniously dispatched (verses 19–21).

8. How is Jesus different at his second coming compared to his first?

Revelation 20:1–6 describes the period of 'a thousand years' which signifies the era between Christ's resurrection and his return. It is a time when Satan's power is diminished by the faithful witness of Christians. The dragon, or Satan, is finally thrown into the lake of fire, an event that is also recorded in a brief unceremonious manner (verse 10). Jesus has won the victory at Calvary so that this final battle is, in fact, no contest.

Read Revelation 20:11–15

9. What is the final act of judgment? Where does it take place? Who is the judge?
10. Christians should not fear judgment. According to the book of Revelation what do Christians need to fear?



11. Look back over Chapters 17–20. Who or what is destroyed? What is left? What remains to be done?



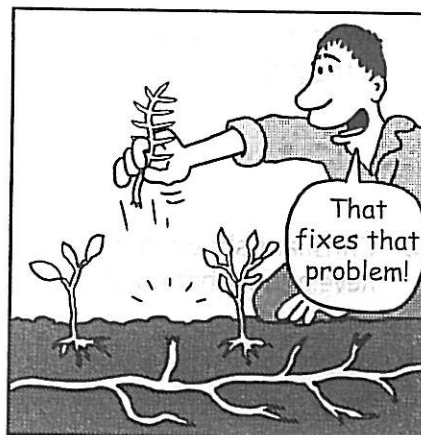
Looking at Me

12. How similar is our own culture and society to 'the great prostitute' or 'Babylon the Great' (that is, Rome)? What fate awaits it? How does this make you feel?
13. How can you be sure that Jesus will do as he has promised? How does believing that he will return change us?



Curly Questions

Is there any value in trying to change our society for the better?



Pray together

Study 7

Revelation 21–22

The new world order



'I' Exercises

1. What do you think heaven will be like?



A First Glance

Read Revelation 21:1–22:6

The finale comes with the magnificent vision of the new creation. The purposes of God are fulfilled as finally 'the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God' (21:3).

2. What has happened to:
The first heaven and earth?

The church?

Jerusalem?

God?

3. How was the promise of verse 4 significant for John's first readers? Who does it comfort today?
4. Who will enjoy the new creation? Who will not?
5.
 - a) What does the imagery of verses 9–21 say about the future of the church?
 - b) How does this image compare with the present state of the church?
 - c) How does this image compare to the great institutions of the world today?
6. What will God's people do in this new creation (22:3b–5)?



7. What similarities are there between the New Heaven and Earth and the Garden of Eden (note especially 21:1–4 and 22:1–5)?

8. Will our eternity be spent 'in heaven'?

Revelation 22:7–21

9. What indications are there in these final verses of the importance of 'this book'?
10.
 - a) What is the final comfort and assurance offered by Jesus (verses 7, 10–12, 20)?
 - b) What are his final warnings?



Looking at Me

11. a) What is your hope?
- b) Why do Christians need to be reminded of their hope?
- c) When do you need to be reminded of your hope?
12. There are many attempts today to re-establish the church as a major institution in society. *is this necessary? is it helpful?* What does God call the church to be?
13. How do you feel about your life – self-satisfied, or does it leave you crying 'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.'?



Curly Questions

'The whole purpose of God was to create a bride of his Son.' Is this true?

Pray together



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