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Planning Your Study

As a leader, you have the freedom to choose how to use these resources in a way that will work best for your group. Below, we've sought to outline some considerations as you decide on the homework to assign, the length of your study, and how you'll divide up your time together.

How to Structure Your Study

This study can be done with or without the video version of the teaching. The content of the videos is the same content as is in the chapters in the book. If you'd like to use video with your group, you can order a digital download or a thumb drive (but not DVD) at nancyguthrie.com/blessed.

Some studies are oriented toward simply watching a video and discussing the content, with no individual or group time spent in the text of Scripture. I strongly recommend against that for this study of Revelation. Participants need to spend time in the text. Without time in the text, your group discussion may devolve into a free-for-all of opinions rather than careful examination of God's Word.

If your group eschews homework outside your time together, I strongly urge you to work through the Personal Bible Study questions as a group before watching the video teaching and/or reading the chapter in the book. If this is your approach, depending on the amount of time you have together at each meeting, you may want to plan to work through this material over 25 weeks, spending one week working through the Personal Bible Study together and a second week either discussing the chapter participants have read or viewing the video together and using the Discussion Guide.

For your first meeting, I suggest you either have participants read the introduction in the book in advance, read the introduction aloud in your gathering, cover its content in your own words, or watch the introduction video and work through the Group Discussion questions provided for the introduction session. You might also use this time to talk about how your time will be structured, clarify expectations, and set some ground rules for bringing in other sources of teaching or discussing disputed interpretations or approaches to Revelation. Then your participants can work on the Personal Bible Study on their own prior to the next gathering. In this way, you will gather 13 times to cover the study.

If participants are working on the Personal Bible Study on their own, we would generally not recommend that you plan to spend your time together going over all the Personal Bible Study questions. These questions are invaluable for laying a foundation of understanding and helping participants immerse themselves in Scripture prior to reading the chapter or watching the video, but they do not always lend themselves very well to group discussion because they often generate simply factual responses.

You will want to use the Discussion Guide as your primary source for generating thoughtful discussion. These questions are designed to lead you from the text of the Bible and the chapter or video presentation into real life, drawing out a variety of perspectives and making personal applications. They do sometimes bring in questions from the Personal Bible Study where we think discussion would be helpful.

Note: If you assign the Personal Bible Study as homework and have someone in your group who repeatedly does not complete it, you might see if she would be interested in meeting for lunch, coffee, or a study session to work through it together. Perhaps there is an intimidation or frustration factor that you can help with.

Using your group time

Following are some examples of how you might plan your group time together based on how long you meet, whether you're using the book or the video, and whether you want to work through the Personal Bible study individually or as a group. Of course, these examples are not exhaustive, but we hope they will give you ideas as you plan your study in a way that will work best for your group.

If you are using the videos, you will find that the teaching videos in this series vary significantly in terms of time, from 25 minutes to 60 minutes in length. You will want to check the time of the video each week (listed below) to make appropriate plans for your time together.

60 minutes using book only, with participants reading the chapter in between gatherings:

- 5 min: Welcome and prayer
- 10 min: Leader talks through main points of chapter, asking participants to share parts of the chapter that were significant to them
- 40 min: Work through Discussion Guide Questions
- 5 min: Prayer of response to material, close

60 minutes using video:

- 5 min: Welcome and prayer
- 45 min: Watch video

Note: Because most of the teaching videos are long— 50 minutes—it will be nearly impossible to watch the videos and have any significant discussion if you only meet for 60 minutes.

- 10 min: discussion

90 minutes using video:

- 5 min: Welcome, get settled, announcements
- 45 min: Watch video teaching session
- 25 min: Discussion using the Discussion Guide
- 5 min: End with various participants praying in response to what has been presented and discussed. (Be sure that the prayer time is not only about personal needs but also praying through the truths presented in the passage you're studying. This will likely need to be modeled by the leader and/or assigned to one of the people praying.)

Based on the length of some of the videos, you may decide that watching the video and having adequate time to discuss it will require more than 90 minutes, especially if you have eager talkers in your group. You may decide that you will need to schedule your gatherings to last 120 minutes to allow ample time for discussion.

Week	Title	Passage	Length
1	Introduction		33 minutes
2	Lesson 1: Blessed by Hearing the Revelation of Jesus	Revelation 1:1-8	37 minutes

Personal Bible Study

Lesson 1: Revelation 1:1–8

1. We could read the first four words of Revelation as a title for the book or as a description of what is contained in it. The Greek word translated “revelation” is *apokalypō*. Take a look at some other places a form of this word is used in the New Testament. What is revealed and by whom?

- **Matthew 11:27:** Jesus reveals God, the Father, to whom he chooses
- **Matthew 16:16–17:** The Father revealed to Peter that Jesus is the Christ
- **2 Corinthians 12:1–3:** The third heaven, or paradise, was revealed to Paul through a vision or experience
- **Galatians 1:12, 15–16:** The risen and glorified Jesus was revealed by God to Paul on the road to Damascus

2. How does this help clarify what the word “apocalypse” means in Revelation 1:1?

An “apocalypse” is an unveiling or revealing of heavenly reality by God himself. It’s always about what God is doing in the world through Jesus, and it offers heaven’s perspective on reality in a way that we can’t see from our earthly perspective. In Revelation, John gets invited to look at what’s happening on earth from heaven’s perspective.

3. Revelation 1:1 describes the chain of communication by which the content of the book of Revelation came to be written. Trace the delivery of the revelation from source to recipients.

God → Jesus Christ → angel → John → all God’s servants

4. How is this chain of communication and the content of the communication re-affirmed at the end of the book in Revelation 22:6, 8, and 16?

v. 6: The Lord sent his angel to show his servants “what must soon take place”

v. 8: John heard and saw what the angel showed him

v. 16: Jesus sent his angel to testify about these things to John for the churches

5. Revelation 1:3 says, “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear.” What does this indicate about how the first audience will experience the content of Revelation?

The letter will be read out loud to the gathered churches—the people will not have written copies but will listen to the message together.

6. **Revelation 1:3 also says that those who are blessed are those who “hear and who keep what is written in it.” What do you think that means, and what does it tell you about the content of this letter?**

To “hear and keep” what is written in Revelation means that the hearer listens actively, eager to learn its meaning and implications. Just to hear it is not enough (Jam. 1:22–25)! It would be foolish to hear this teaching and then walk away forgetting it; the recipients must be doers of this word and not hearers only. The person who hears and keeps this message is eager to remember and obey what it teaches; she values, guards, lives out, puts into practice the implications of what is communicated. This indicates that just as with Old Testament prophecy, Revelation is not simply a prediction about the future. Rather, it has implications for how the person hearing it should live in the present.

7. **We’re going to discover that the number seven is used a significant number of times in the book of Revelation (over fifty times) and has significant symbolic meaning. Beginning with the seven days of creation, the number seven is identified throughout Scripture with something being “finished” or “complete.” In verse 4, John addresses the letter of Revelation to “the seven churches that are in Asia.” We know that there were more than seven churches in Asia. So what might John be seeking to communicate by addressing this letter to seven churches?**

Because seven is the number of completeness, this letter is written to the whole of the church—the complete church—living in the century in which it was written and in every century since then.

8. **This book is a revelation *from* Jesus, but it also is a revelation *of* Jesus. What do you find in verses 5–7 about who Jesus is, what he has done, and what he will do?**

- **Who he is:** The faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of kings on earth
- **What he has done:** He has demonstrated his love for his people, freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father
- **What he will do:** He will come with the clouds, visible to all, and cause all tribes of the earth to wail

9. **Which one or two of these aspects of who Jesus is, what he has done and what he will do is particularly meaningful to you and why?**

Personal response.

10. **Two times in this passage (v. 4, 8) God is called or calls himself, “him who is and who was and who is to come.” This phrase will appear two more times in Revelation. How do you think it helps those who hear the message of Revelation to hear it as coming from “him who is and who was and who is to come”?**

Perhaps they would make the connection between this revelation and the first time God revealed himself to Moses as “I am who I am” (Ex. 3:14). This sometimes-hard-to-hear message is

coming from the God who has been revealing himself and caring for his people throughout all generations. He is the unchanging God who always was—who created the world, who rescued his people from Egypt, who chose and preserved for himself a people over thousands of years and sent his Son to die for their sins. He is the God who is—aware of their circumstances in that moment and not detached. And he is the God who is going to come in judgment and salvation as pictured in this book. He can be trusted.

11. We’re going to discover throughout Revelation that John, who was thoroughly steeped in the writings of the Old Testament, often draws upon Old Testament texts without quoting them exactly. In what phrases from Revelation 1:1–8 do you see allusions to the following Old Testament texts?

Old Testament Referent	Revelation Allusion
<p>Exodus 3:14 “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’”</p>	<p>1:4: “him who is and who was and who is to come”</p>
<p>Isaiah 11:2 “And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.”</p>	<p>1:4: “seven spirits”</p>
<p>Psalm 89:27, 36–37 “And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. ...His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me. Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies.”</p>	<p>1:5: “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth”</p>
<p>Exodus 19:6 “...and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”</p>	<p>1:6: “made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father”</p>
<p>Daniel 7:13 “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.”</p>	<p>1:7: “behold, he is coming with the clouds”</p>
<p>Zechariah 12:10 “...when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.”</p>	<p>1:7: “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him”</p>
<p>Isaiah 41:4 “Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.”</p>	<p>1:8: “I am the Alpha and the Omega”</p>

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”?

Our use of the word “apocalypse” or “apocalyptic” in modern culture, apart from biblical usage, tends to connote catastrophe and the end times. We often think of cataclysmic death and destruction, chaos and confusion.

2. How would you explain what apocalypse is in the Bible? What’s the difference between receiving an apocalypse and having an epiphany?

An apocalypse is an unveiling or revealing of heavenly reality to a person from God. It’s given by someone outside ourselves. An epiphany, on the other hand, typically means something a person figures out on his or her own, an idea she comes to herself.

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?

God’s sovereignty is a major theme of Revelation. The fact that these things “must” take place demonstrates that God is in control of their present and future suffering and even martyrdom. It means that all things will unfold in his timing and to fulfill his ultimate purposes. It strengthens us as his servants because we don’t have to fear that we are at the mercy of persecuting powers, the impact of the curse, random chance, or human-directed history.

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?

Unlike many of the prophets throughout the Bible who received a message in words, John was given a message in the form of pictures. The visions he received portray reality from the vantage point of heaven. They allow us to see what’s presently invisible in a way that will enable us to make sense of the visible things we experience in this world.

Because John’s mind was saturated with the Hebrew Bible, his descriptions of what he saw are likewise saturated with images and language from the Old Testament. In his visionary experiences, he encountered things he recognized from the writings of the prophets—and described them in similar ways.

As we recognize that John is describing something he saw, we must remember that we’re meant to seek understanding of the picture’s overall meaning, rather than to try to discern the meaning of

every detail. We need to constantly step back and ask ourselves, “What is the central meaning of the picture John is painting for us?”

Because the visual descriptions are intended not merely to inform, but to make an impression and evoke a response, we’re meant to be affected by them. We should be moved to respond in repentance and faith, in holy fear, in glad anticipation, and with a determination to patiently endure suffering as we wait for Christ to return.

Since what John saw can seem not only difficult to put into words, but also difficult to put together into one image, John sometimes combines a variety of images to communicate various facets of truth about spiritual realities. Rather than understanding him as describing things in literal terms, we need to understand him describing them by analogy, saying, “It’s *like* this.” But when we say that he’s often describing spiritual realities rather than physical realities, we’re *not* saying that what he describes is not “real”! By telling us what he saw, John presents the reality of who Jesus is, the present and future state of the church, real suffering, real hostility, real deception, real judgment, and real glory. We’re simply saying that he uses metaphorical language and imagery to describe what is real.

- 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?**

While God intends for us to live by faith, putting our trust in his word, he has given us a word that is worthy of our trust. He does not call us to blind faith, but to informed faith. He has a detailed plan for history. And while he hasn’t revealed everything we might like to know, he has revealed what we need to know to inspire faith. He is kind to reveal these things to us in order that we will be comforted, encouraged, and strengthened.

- 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?**

Personal response.

- 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?**

Many people in our world (and in the church) today think of blessing primarily as experiencing or having things we would describe as “good.” We equate blessing with being comfortable, healthy, and happy, devoid of hardship and loss in the here and now. But the blessing promised here is a deeper satisfaction in God, regardless of comfortable, healthy, or happy circumstances. It is the blessing of being in right relationship with him now and into the future. It is the anticipation of receiving the inheritance that he has promised to all who are in Christ.

- 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?

To hear and keep Revelation 1:1–8 begins with a prayer for open eyes, ears, hearts, and minds. We want the Holy Spirit to show us what we need to know in order to live as faithful servants of Jesus, eagerly waiting for him to come again. We want him to move us, challenge us, perhaps even shock us out of our complacency and radically adjust our perspective. And we want him to fill us with courage to live in light of what we see.

As we open ourselves up and pray for grace, we'll be blessed as we rest in God's sovereign control over the past, the present, and the future. We'll be free from regrets over the past, frustrations in the present, and fears about the future. Instead, we'll rejoice that grace has covered our past and is empowering us to live in the present as those who have really been freed from our sins by his blood.

We'll be blessed with peace now because we really do believe that we are loved in the way we most need to be loved. And we'll have peace about the future because we know that the Alpha and Omega, the Almighty, has it firmly in his grip. He will bring everything John saw to pass.