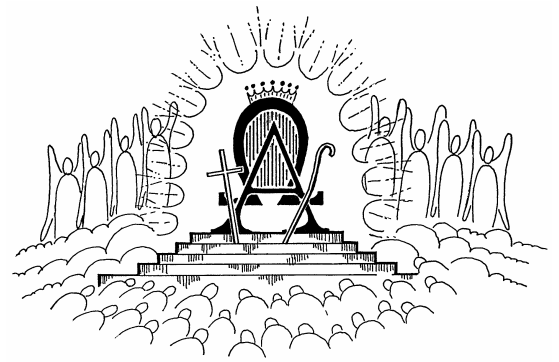


# Journey Into The Heavens



## LESSON 1 . . . Introduction

There is no more fascinating book in the Bible than the prophetic book of Revelation. All of us have an unquenchable curiosity, and nothing makes us more curious than facts about the future. However, we must not let mere curiosity about this intriguing book be our sole motivation for studying it. God did not inspire the book of Revelation to simply fascinate us, but in it He has tucked away some of the most practical truths in the NT. As with any part of the Bible, knowledge of this book apart from personal application falls short of God’s reason for our knowing His Word. *Journey Into The Heavens* is designed not only to lead us to a basic knowledge of this intriguing book, but also to stimulate personal change and spiritual growth.

### Notes

As we begin this study, it must be noted there is much disagreement as to how this book should be interpreted and what the various symbols and visions mean. The purpose of this “journey” is not to persuade us all to agree on the symbols and visions but to help us fulfill God’s purpose in giving us the Scriptures in the first place. According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, in what ways is the study of all Scripture to be *profitable* to us?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. (vs.17) \_\_\_\_\_

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Therefore, if God’s purpose for giving us the Scriptures is accomplished in this study, it will be more *profitable* to us than if we could explain every symbol, every vision, and every verse in the book of Revelation. Hopefully, this “journey,” which begins here on earth and ends with the consummation of the age in the “heavens,” will not only increase our knowledge but also change our lives. With this in mind, let’s begin our *journey into the heavens* by considering **the author of the book, the audience of the book, and the approach to the book . . .**

### I. The Author of the Book

In the book itself we find the author’s name four times—1:1,1:4,1:9 & 22:8. Of course this is the human author, who simply wrote as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit. To refresh your mind and perhaps better acquaint yourself

with this human author, look up the following references, and explain what they reveal about the apostle John:

*Matthew 4:21-22* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Mark 9:2* \_\_\_\_\_

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(Because of modesty in his writing, John does not call himself by name, but simply says, *the disciple whom Jesus loved.*)

*John 13:23 & 21:20* \_\_\_\_\_

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*John 19:25-27* \_\_\_\_\_

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Tradition says John remained in Jerusalem until the death of Mary, the mother of Jesus, which occurred around the middle of the first century. Then, he moved to Ephesus, where he probably wrote the gospel of John and the epistles of 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John.

Later in life, John was banished by the Roman Emperor Domitian to Patmos, a small island in the Aegean Sea. There John was forced to work in the mines, which the Romans hoped would cause him to die from exposure.

While on the isle of Patmos, around 95 A.D., John had a very unique experience. Read Revelation 1:9-11, and explain:

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After Domitian was murdered in 96 A.D. (a plot supported by his own wife), John returned to Ephesus. All historical sources agree that John later died in his nineties of natural causes. He was the only one of the twelve disciples to escape a violent death. It should also be noted that his brother James was the first of the disciples to die a martyr's death (see Acts 12:2).

## II. The Audience of the Book

Who were the original readers of the book of Revelation (Rev..1:4 & 11)?

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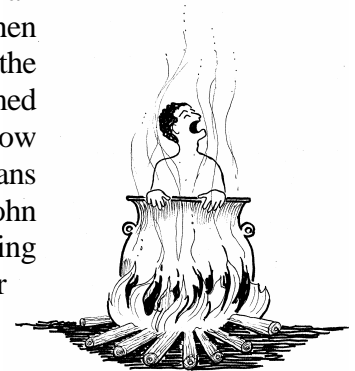
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While this book had a very definite group of first century readers in mind, how does John encourage all believers to read this book in Revelation 1:3?

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God did not inspire John to write the book of Revelation to the seven churches in Asia to satisfy their curiosity and merely inform them about the future. Christians were going through intense persecution under the reign of Domitian from 81 A.D. through 96 A.D. The belief that Caesar was an incarnation of divinity first arose during the time of Augustus, and from then on, homage was paid to the reigning Caesar. However, the worship of the emperor was not rigidly enforced until the reign of Domitian. He claimed divinity and decreed that once a year all Roman citizens and slaves must bow down before an image of him and revere him as “lord and god.” Christians who refused to do this were brutally punished. Therefore, God inspired John to pen this book to encourage and strengthen the Christians who were facing ruthless savagery. There was a vital need for the confirmation of their belief that Jesus is Lord of Lords and King of Kings and that He will ultimately reign forever with His followers.



In keeping with its purpose, the book of Revelation depicts in graphic terms and symbols the ultimate victory of Christ over Satan and the rewards to be bestowed upon His tried and faithful saints. When Christians face trials or persecution in the world today, this apocalyptic book presents a clear and relevant message. Herein is the answer to the persecutions and problems of the Christian life, not only in the past but in our world today. To its original readers this book was not just a textbook on prophecy, but rather an inspiration during a time of trouble, discouragement, and distress, because it tells how everything ends. It should be no less for us today.

## III. The Approach to the Book

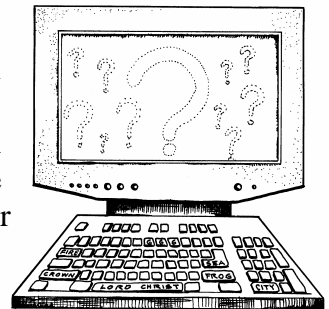
There are a variety of ways to approach the book of Revelation, and as a result, a number of schools of interpretation have developed through the years. There are four primary approaches to this book:

*THE PRETERIST APPROACH.* This view teaches that the events in this book have all taken place in the past, so the book has no meaning for us today other than literary value. The word *preterist* simply means “past.”

*THE ALLEGORICAL APPROACH.* This approach regards all the visions as an allegory of the age-old conflict between good and evil. With this view there are no controls on the imagination of the interpreter, and the true meaning or message is easily obscured.

*THE HISTORICAL APPROACH.* This view looks at *Revelation* as a panorama of the history of the church from the time of John to the end of the age. Those who hold this view see the visions as symbols of the rise of the papacy, the corruption of the church, and the various wars throughout church history.

*THE FUTURIST APPROACH.* This view interprets all the events from chapter 4 on as future happenings. This is a more literal approach, interpreting the judgments described in chapters 6, 8, 9, and 16, as literal future events expressed in symbolic terms. It is apparent that these judgments, the return of Christ in chapter 19, and the resurrections in chapter 20, have not yet transpired. No events in history even come close to these.



Those who object to the *futurist approach* charge that the book of Revelation would not have been a comfort to its original readers if it were largely futuristic. However, one finds it hard to see why the future events described in this book would not bring comfort, since all Christians have always regarded their ultimate victory as future, as clearly pictured in the book of Revelation. Certainly the Lord did not mean to lead the original readers to believe the events in this book would take place during their lifetime, or even worse, not take place at all.

Regardless of the approach followed in interpreting this book, all of the visions and symbols cannot be fully explained or understood. In Daniel 12, which deals with the end of time as we know it, we find why some of the prophecies cannot be understood now. What is the reason, according to verse 9?

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In light of 2 Timothy 3:16-17, how can the study of the book of Revelation be most *profitable* to you?

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