

Focus on Prophecy GUIDE 8



God Still Leads

- **Facing into a stiff ocean wind, the old man pulled his robe tightly around his shoulders. Surf rumbled against the rocks below. A sea gull screeched as it dipped toward him, searching for food.**
- **John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, stared across the rocky landscape.**
- **This hadn't been his plan for retirement—exiled on the island of Patmos in the middle of the Aegean Sea.**
- **But the Roman emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96) had made plans for him.**
- **History doesn't give us the details, but it probably started with the clatter of Roman soldiers riding into Ephesus in a cloud of dust.**
- **They reined up their horses at the home where John, in his eighties, had retired.**
- **They kicked in the door, dragged him outside, forced him onto a horse, and took him off to Rome in the name of the emperor.**

God Still Leads

- **This happened some fifty years after the death of Christ.**
- **Domitian was a frustrated ruler. He just wasn't getting the respect he coveted from his people. So he'd declared himself a "god" and started building a religion of emperor worship around himself.**
- **The followers of Christ, however, weren't bowing down to him, even when threatened with exile and execution.**
- **So Domitian decided to make an example of John, the well-respected disciple of Christ.**
- **John was brought before Domitian and ordered to worship the emperor.**

God Still Leads

- **John refused. He would worship only the God of heaven. Historians tell us Domitian tried to boil him alive.**
- **But God protected His servant from the bubbling oil! That's when an embarrassed and angry Domitian exiled John to Patmos.**
- **This rocky island, however, proved to be fertile ground in God's plan.**
- **It was here that the Holy Spirit inspired the greatest prophetic book in the Bible.**
- **Guided by the Holy Spirit, John had already penned four books of the Bible: the Gospel of John and three letters—1, 2, and 3 John.**
- **Now God was preparing him to write a fifth, the book of Revelation.**

God Still Leads

- **Revelation delivers a profound message about the war between good and evil, the great battle between God and Satan. It shows how that epic struggle ends.**
- **It is a message of hope and encouragement, yet it deals with the harsh realities of persecution, death, and heartache. It takes us through the sweep of history—from Earth's creation to Earth restored to its original state after the second coming of Jesus.**
- **The book's central theme is that Jesus Christ won the victory over Satan on the cross of Calvary.**
- **Because of this triumph, Jesus can offer peace, hope, and renewal to you and me. Revelation tells us that, with Jesus, we are already on the winning side!**

God Still Leads

- **Revelation is more than just symbols, beasts, and prophetic facts.**
- **It dramatically pictures a God who loves us so much He has sacrificed everything to create a plan for His people in the past, the present, and the future.**
- **God wants to show you how you can become a part of that wonderful plan.**
- **As you face the heartaches and the challenges of this life, God wants to make sure you understand He is in control and walks beside you.**
- **He cares about you.**

God Still Leads

- **Revelation is a gripping, fascinating account of where we are in God's grand design for the human race.**
- **Through the clashes of history, it reveals just how He cares for us.**
- **Let's begin our study of chapter 1 and together unseal the mysteries of Revelation!**
- **THOUGHT QUESTION: Revelation is more than just symbols and prophetic facts; it dramatically pictures a God who loves us. (False or True)**
- **Domitian exiled the apostle John to Patmos because John refused to tell people about God and the visions He had given him. (False or True)**

John's Introduction

- **READ REVELATION 1:1-3.**
- **There are several key points in John's introduction to the book of Revelation.**
- **Let's identify them.**
- **John titled his book, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ."**
- **He says that "God gave [it to] Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place.**
- **And He [God] sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John" (Revelation 1:1).**

John's Introduction

- **There is a lot to unpack in this first verse. John identifies his book as the “Revelation of Jesus Christ.” It is designed to reveal Jesus to us.**
- **God gave John the content of the book through “His angel” so that His servants—you and all of God’s people—could know important information about the future.**
- **Even though the disciple John wrote the book, he wrote down only what Jesus told him to write. Our word, “revelation,” (apocalypsis in the original Greek language in which the New Testament was written) simply means “unveiling,” “revealing,” or “showing” something. In other words, the book of Revelation is an explanation.**
- **In this case, God is explaining that you can always look up even though trials, plagues, persecution, and death may strike this world. Why? Because God has a special plan for you. He cares about you. This plan includes the permanent removal of sin from the universe.**

John's Introduction

- **Notice how verse 1 explains the process of communicating this revelation:**
- **God gave the message of Revelation to Jesus Christ.**
- **Jesus gave the message to an angel.**
- **The angel gave the message to John.**
- **John gave the message (in the Spirit) to the “servants of Jesus” (followers of Jesus).**
- **The message concerned “things which must shortly take place.”**

John's Introduction

- **Today, people all over the world are trying to make sense of the rush of ominous events—famines, earthquakes, wars, terrorist attacks.**
- **They wonder if something called Armageddon is about to take place. They wonder if Jesus could return to Earth in their lifetime.**
- **Guess what? You are privileged! God has given you His answers to the big questions.**
- **He has given them to you in the book of Revelation. It's an incredibly significant message.**
- **God the Father, Jesus the Son, the Holy Spirit, and angelic beings—all were involved in bringing this book to us!**

John's Introduction

- John says that he is bearing “witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus, [and] to all things that he saw” (vs. 2).
- Did you catch the impact of this verse? God is making sure we don’t discount the message John writes. He tells us John read, heard, and saw what he writes about. In other words, John’s an eyewitness. His words are trustworthy. Believe them!
- But there is more! God pronounces a special blessing on those who read and follow what is written in John’s book.
- “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (vs. 3).
- This says that those who study this book will be blessed, because the “time” of the fulfillment of the prophecy contained in Revelation “is near.”
- “Near” implies that the fulfillment of the prophecies contained in this book is about to take place. It’s about to get started. And the sooner the prophetic sequence begins, the quicker all these prophecies will be fulfilled!

John's Introduction

- **How does it make you feel to know that God (a) took special care to make sure the message of Revelation was written down for you, and (b) promises you special favors if you study, believe, accept, and apply the message to your life?**
- ***What kind of blessing or special favor do you think God will give those who study? Why do you feel that way?***
- **THOUGHT QUESTION: God tells us that those who study the book of Revelation will receive a special blessing. (False or True)**

Grace and Peace

- **READ REVELATION 1:4-8.**
- **It's very important to God that readers of the book of Revelation understand how much He cares for them before they study the messages written in its twenty-two chapters.**
- **These verses stress the fact that people matter supremely to God.**
- **John continues, "Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth.**
- **To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever" (vss. 4-6).**

Grace and Peace

- It was common in Bible times to begin a letter with the words “grace and peace.” Today we begin with “Dear Mary, I hope you are doing OK.” In this particular setting, “grace” refers to God’s kindness.
- The peace John speaks of comes when we know we are forgiven by God and when we forgive others.
- Both grace and peace are gifts from God. They come to us from “Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.”
- Jesus, our Savior, is the focus of the book of Revelation, and as we study it and follow what we learn, He is also the One who shares with us His grace and peace.
- God wants not only to assure the readers of Revelation about His feelings for us, He also wants us to know He longs to be with us forever. A relationship with God doesn’t have to ever end.
- Verse 7 makes it very clear that Jesus is returning to Earth for His people. “He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him.”

Grace and Peace

- **Yes, in the tough times of life—in the death of a friend, in divorce, in bankruptcy, in the struggles of the alcoholic or drug addict—God is still there! Harold, an Iowa truck driver, decided to end his life in the bathtub one day.**
- **He'd been fighting a losing battle with the bottle for a long time.**
- **Now a hopeless drunk, he lay down on the cold porcelain, put the barrel of a shotgun in his mouth, and reached down with his thumb to pull the trigger.**
- **He was tired of all his broken promises to his family. He was tired of his little girls hiding in the closet when he came home.**
- **But before killing himself, Harold decided he should tell God why he was doing this.**

Grace and Peace

- **So he got out of the tub, knelt down, and began to explain. Before he knew it, Harold was pouring his heart out to the Almighty. He sobbed for hours. Afterward he felt a kind of peace he'd never felt before.**
- **Harold decided to commit his broken life completely to God. And he found the strength to win his battle with the bottle—for good. He'd found a faithful heavenly Father in his darkest hour.**
- **The same God who walks with His people through the struggles and difficulties of Earth's history, walks with us in the issues of this life.**
- **That is why God identifies Himself as “the One who is and who was and who is to come.” It is important that we grasp this emphasis as we begin our study of the prophecies of Revelation.**

John's First Vision

- **READ REVELATION 1:9-20.**
- **This passage describes John's first vision. Symbols introduced here will reappear throughout the book of Revelation. They help illustrate God's messages.**
- **Some scholars believe these symbols also protected John's message from the censorship of Roman authorities. Revelation's truths have always stood in opposition to political and religious corruption.**
- **If these messages hadn't been given partly in a "code" that needs to be deciphered, God's enemies probably would have destroyed the book long ago.**

John's First Vision

- **In Revelation you'll find beasts, horns, crowns, wicked and pure women, lampstands, locusts, a Lamb, and a dragon—all used as symbols.**
- **We'll find out what each of these symbols means.**
- **We'll also discover why certain numbers have special significance.**
- **Already in this chapter we've encountered “seven spirits” and “seven churches.”**
- **Soon we'll look at “seven lampstands” and “seven stars.”**
- **We'll find out why certain numbers are repeated throughout the book.**

John's First Vision

- **Notice verse 9 states that John was exiled to Patmos because of his faithfulness to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. In verse 5 we discovered that Jesus is the “faithful witness.”**
- **This means that His word is absolutely trustworthy. In court, a witness gives testimony, or testifies.**
- **Jesus told Pilate that He came to Earth to “bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37).**
- **Jesus is doing precisely this in Revelation! He’s telling us the truth about ourselves, about human sin, and about the conflict between God and Satan.**
- **Revelation is a book by Jesus. It’s also a book primarily about Jesus. That’s what the very first verse tells us.**

John's First Vision

- **Take a careful look at 2 Timothy 3:16, 17: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”**
- **God gave us the Bible to teach us doctrine, to reprove and correct us when we sin, and to instruct us in the way of God.**

John's First Vision

- **John says that he was exiled to “the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:9).**
- **What is the testimony of Jesus? According to Revelation 19:10, “the “testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”**
- **1 Corinthians 12 tells us that one of the gifts of the Spirit is the gift of prophecy.**
- **It is the Holy Spirit who inspired the prophets to write the Bible.**
- **John testified that he was on Patmos because he believed and taught what the Spirit communicated to him and to the other prophets who wrote the Bible.**

John's First Vision

- **Revelation 1:10** states that John was in the “Spirit on the Lord’s Day.” He was having a vision; the Spirit of God was speaking to him.
- In verse 11, John is told to send messages from God, which he received on the Lord’s Day, to seven churches located in Asia—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.
- We’ll study these messages extensively in the next two chapters.
- Verses 12-16 describe what Jesus looked like to John in his vision.
- Have you ever thought about what Jesus looks like in heaven?

John's First Vision

- **“I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.**
- **His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass . . . and His voice as the sound of many waters; he had in His right hand seven stars . . . and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength” (vss. 12-16).**

John's First Vision

- **Jesus told John, “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches” (vs. 20).**
- **The number seven is significant in Scripture because it represents perfection or completion.**
- **Back in Genesis, at the beginning, God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day (Genesis 1–2:3).**
- **God said His creation was “good” and “finished” (completed).**

John's First Vision

- **This background helps us understand that:**
- **The seven churches are a complete representation of all churches.**
- **The messages to them represent a complete message of God.**
- **The seven spirits represent the completeness or fullness of the Holy Spirit.**
- **The seven angels (“angel” literally means “messenger”) represent messengers or ministers who bring the messages to their congregations.**
- **THOUGHT QUESTION: In vision, John saw Jesus walking among seven lampstands that represented seven churches. (False or True)**
- **Scripture is inspired by God and is given to us so that we may be complete and equipped for every good work.**

Conclusion

- **After Harold, the alcoholic, found God, he began reading the Bible and praying each day. He was determined to really get to know the God he'd encountered so dramatically. He wanted a complete picture.**
- **He began absorbing God's messages, and these gave him the spiritual resolve to live sober, one day at a time.**
- **One evening Harold was alone, reading the Bible in the living room, when he felt a nudge at his elbow.**
- **He looked up. His two small daughters were standing there quietly in their nightgowns.**
- **He stared at them for a long moment. They had changed so much. And he'd missed so much over the years, buried in the bottle.**

Conclusion

- **Then Carol, the youngest said, “Daddy, we’ve come to kiss you goodnight.”**
- **The father’s eyes blurred. It had been a long time since the children had come for his embrace.**
- **But now their beautiful clear eyes held no fear. Daddy had come home at last.**
- **Harold Hughes went on to become governor of Iowa and a distinguished United States senator.**
- **But more important to him than all the public honors he would receive was that look on his daughters’ faces. They knew they were loved.**
- **And they knew Daddy would always be there for them.**

Conclusion

- **That's the knowledge each of us can have today about our heavenly Father. We don't have to look up at Him in fear. We don't have to be anxious about what may come in the future. We can know that God is there for us.**
- **The same God who lifted Harold up when everyone, including himself, had given up on him, can lift you up no matter what your circumstances. He wants to give you hope and a future.**
- **This first chapter of Revelation highlights the fact that God cares about you and desires the best for you.**
- **It's for that reason that He wants to tell you about events that are coming upon the Earth.**
- **He wants you to be ready. He wants you safe in His arms to the very end.**
- **TO THINK ABOUT: *What do you think of a God like that?***