

THE UNVEILING

Session 1

The Unveiling of Jesus Christ

Revelation 1

A Fourteen-Session Inductive Study for Young Adults

Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear. (Revelation 1:3, RSV2CE)

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that Revelation opens not as a coded calendar of future disasters but as an unveiling of the risen Jesus Christ, given on the Lord's Day, meant to be read aloud in worship, and addressed to real churches under real pressure.

Catholic Touchstone. The word *apokalypsis* (1:1) means unveiling, the pulling back of a curtain. The Church reads this book above all in her liturgy: the blessing of 1:3 falls on the one who reads aloud and on those who hear, which is the shape of the liturgy of the word to this day. Leader: hold every Mass connection to yourself until Session 9; see Thread Watch.

What You Need to Know

Revelation was written to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia (western Turkey today) facing a mix of persecution, social pressure to join in emperor worship and pagan trade-guild feasts, false teaching, and plain spiritual fatigue. The traditional attribution, going back to the second century, is to John; St. Justin Martyr, writing within about sixty years of the book, names the author as John, one of the apostles of Christ. Some later ancient voices (notably Dionysius of Alexandria) doubted apostolic authorship on grounds of style, and the Church has never defined the question. What the Church does affirm without hesitation is the book's inspiration and canonicity. Be honest with your group on both points.

Dating is likewise a matter of scholarly judgment, not doctrine. The most common view, resting on St. Irenaeus's report, places the vision near the end of the reign of the emperor Domitian, around A.D. 95. A minority of scholars argue for a date in the late 60s, before Jerusalem fell. Either way, the first audience was not a distant future generation but seven flesh-and-blood congregations who heard this book read aloud at worship.

Genre matters more in Revelation than in any other New Testament book. It calls itself three things at once: an *apokalypsis* or unveiling (1:1), a prophecy (1:3), and a letter (1:4 opens with a greeting resembling the Pauline letters'). Apocalyptic writing was a known Jewish genre (Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah are its Old Testament wellsprings) that communicates through symbol: numbers, colors, beasts, and visions carry meaning the way stained glass does. Reading it flat-footedly, as if it were a newspaper report, misreads the genre itself.

Because the genre is symbolic, Christians have read the book through several lenses. Name these four for your group in this first session, because the study will refer to them throughout:

- *Preterist*: the visions chiefly concern the first century, the crisis of the early Church under Rome (and, on some readings, the fall of Jerusalem).
- *Historicist*: the visions map the sweep of Church history between the two comings.
- *Futurist*: the visions chiefly concern the final crisis at the end of history.
- *Idealist*: the visions portray the timeless battle between Christ and evil in every age.

The Catholic Church has not canonized any one school. Her instinct is a both-and: the book spoke truly to its first hearers, speaks truly to the Church in every age, and speaks truly about the real end of history, and it does all of this while being proclaimed in the liturgy. This study will keep all four lenses on the table and will tell you plainly, whenever it matters, what is of faith and what is permitted opinion.

The center of chapter 1 is not a timetable but a Person. John, traditionally understood to have been exiled on Patmos, turns to see a voice and sees the risen Christ: robed like a priest, white-haired like the

Ancient of Days, eyes like fire, holding seven stars, standing among seven golden lampstands which are the churches (1:20). Nearly every image is drawn from the Old Testament, above all from Daniel 7 and 10. The unveiling begins with who Jesus is, and everything that follows in the book depends on it.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- Daniel 7:9–14: the Ancient of Days with hair white as wool, and one like a son of man coming with the clouds. John's Christ carries the traits of both figures, a staggering claim about his divinity. Revelation 1:7 and 1:13–14 draw directly on this scene.
- Daniel 10:5–6: the glorious man with eyes like flaming torches, face like lightning, and a voice like a multitude; compare Revelation 1:13–15.
- Zechariah 12:10 (with Daniel 7:13) stands behind Revelation 1:7: they shall look on him whom they have pierced; St. John's Gospel quotes the same verse at the cross (John 19:37), a textual link your group can verify with the two passages open.
- Exodus 19:6 stands behind Revelation 1:6: a kingdom of priests. What Israel was called at Sinai, the baptized are named in Christ; St. Peter makes the same move in 1 Peter 2:9.
- Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Christ takes this divine self-title on his own lips in Revelation 1:17.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Jerome · *Letter 53, to Paulinus*

St. Jerome wrote that the Apocalypse of John has as many mysteries as it has words, and he added that even this praise falls short of the book's merit, for in each of its words lie hidden manifold meanings. Let that set the tone for your group: patient, humble digging rather than confident decoding.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Justin Martyr · *Dialogue with Trypho, ch. 81*

Writing around the middle of the second century, St. Justin testifies that a man among the Christians named John, one of the apostles of Christ, prophesied by a revelation made to him. It is our earliest clear witness connecting this book to John, and it shows how early the Church received it as prophecy.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons · *Against Heresies, Book 5*

St. Irenaeus, who as a boy had known St. Polycarp, a disciple of John, reports that the apocalyptic vision was seen not long ago, but almost in his own generation, toward the end of Domitian's reign. His testimony anchors the traditional dating of the book to about A.D. 95.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 1137–1139: the Church reads Revelation's vision of heavenly worship as a window into the liturgy she celebrates now; those who take part in the Church's liturgy on earth already share in

the worship of heaven. Read these paragraphs now and hold them in silence: they are the warrant of the Session 9 Assembly, and nothing of them is named to the group before that night.

- CCC 115–118: the senses of Scripture (literal and spiritual). Revelation demands exactly this discipline: the literal sense, what the author actually asserts through his symbolic genre, is the foundation for every deeper reading.
- CCC 128–130: typology and the unity of God’s plan. Chapter 1 is a masterclass in it: Daniel’s visions find their unveiling in Christ.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Furniture of Heaven, planted tonight (the thread the study now turns on): keep a private running list of every object, gesture, or phrase in this book that you would also find inside a Catholic church on a Sunday morning. Tonight yields five entries: the Lord’s Day (1:10), the seven golden lampstands (1:12), the long robe and golden sash (1:13), a kingdom, priests to his God (1:6), and the Amen (1:6–7). Add to it every session and never name the pattern, in session or in passing; the group assembles the whole inventory in Session 9, and that night depends on your silence now. If anyone names a Mass connection aloud at any point, smile, have them write it down, and say: keep that; you will want it in Session 9.

Numbers thread, planted tonight: seven churches, seven spirits, seven lampstands, seven stars. Ask what seven signals; do not yet catalog the book’s other numbers.

Sealed guess: Take-Home 1 carries the My Guess box (Who is the woman clothed with the sun of Revelation 12:1?). Distribute it after the session, have everyone write and seal a guess, and collect or have them keep the sealed sheets. It resolves in Session 8. Do not discuss it tonight beyond reading Revelation 12:1 aloud once, without comment.

Second seal: Take-Home 1 also carries the My Sunday Guess box (what will this book turn out to have to do with what Christians do on Sunday morning?). Everyone writes and seals it tonight alongside My Guess. It opens in Session 9, unrevised, only after the group has said the discovery out loud themselves. Two seals are now in play; they open on different nights.

Session Goals

1. The group can define *apokalypsis* as unveiling and state what the book unveils first: the risen Christ himself.
2. The group discovers the liturgical frame of the book: read aloud, heard, kept, on the Lord’s Day.
3. The group finds Daniel 7 and 10 behind the vision of 1:12–18 by opening the passages themselves.
4. The group can name the four interpretive approaches and the Catholic both-and.
5. Each participant writes and seals both boxes of Take-Home 1: My Guess and My Sunday Guess.

Timed Plan (75–90 minutes)

- Opening prayer: 5 min
- Win questions: 10 min
- Build (Revelation 1, with discovery passages): 45–55 min
- Send questions: 8 min
- Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer, distribute Take-Home 1: 7–10 min

Pre-chosen cuts if time runs short: drop the Dig Deeper box, and compress Question 3 by reading only Daniel 7:13–14 rather than both Daniel passages.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, first and last and living one, you hold the keys of death and you walk among your churches. Pull back the veil for us: unveil your face in these words, unveil our own hearts, and bless us as those who hear. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. When you hear the words Book of Revelation, what is the first image or feeling that comes to mind? Where do you think that came from?
2. Have you ever started this book and stopped, or avoided it altogether? What stopped you?

Build

Read Revelation 1:1–8 aloud.

3. Verse 1 gives the book its name. The Greek word translated revelation is *apokalypsis*. Judging from how verse 1 uses it, what does the word actually mean, and what, or rather who, is being unveiled?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The word means unveiling or uncovering, the drawing back of a curtain. And the first thing verse 1 unveils is not only an event but a Person (the Greek genitive runs both ways, a revelation from Jesus and about Jesus, and the book means both): this is the revelation of Jesus Christ. Before the book shows us anything about the future, it shows us him. If the group walks away tonight knowing only that, the session has succeeded.

4. Look closely at verse 3. Who is blessed, and for what three actions? What kind of setting does the verse assume? Who reads, and who hears?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Two blessed parties, three actions: blessed is the one who reads aloud, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written. One reader, many hearers: that is a congregation at worship, before it is ever a private puzzle. Revelation strongly suggests a setting of public, gathered worship from its third verse. Note verse 10 in a moment: John receives the vision on the Lord's Day, traditionally understood from the earliest witnesses as Sunday, the day the churches gathered. This book was born for the liturgy.

Read Revelation 1:9–20 aloud.

5. John describes the one like a son of man in verses 12–18. This portrait is built almost entirely from older Scripture. Discovery: split into two groups; one opens Daniel 7:9–14, the other Daniel 10:5–6. What details match? And notice carefully in Daniel 7: which figure has hair white like wool, and which figure does Jesus's title one like a son of man belong to?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Daniel 10 supplies the blazing eyes, the glowing feet, the overwhelming voice. Daniel 7 supplies both the son of man who comes with the clouds and the Ancient of Days whose hair is white like wool. Here is the shock: in Daniel those are two figures, God and the one presented before him. In Revelation 1, Jesus carries the marks of both. John has painted the Son of Man with the hair of the Ancient of Days. Without using the word, the vision asserts Christ's divinity.

If someone asks about the robe and sash of verse 13: the long robe and golden sash echo priestly vesture (compare Exodus 28:4), and he stands among lampstands, as a priest tends lamps in the sanctuary. Christ is King, Judge, and Priest among his churches.

6. In verses 17–18 Jesus interprets himself. What does he claim, and why is this exactly what a church under pressure needs to hear? Discovery: have someone open Isaiah 44:6 and read it aloud. Who speaks those words in Isaiah?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

He claims the divine title from Isaiah, where the LORD says: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Then he claims something no vision of angels could claim: I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. The one who holds the keys of death has been through death and unlocked it from the inside. For Christians facing prison and execution, this is not decoration. It is the whole gospel in one breath.

7. Verse 20 decodes two symbols for us: stars are angels of the churches, lampstands are the churches. Why do you think the book decodes these two, and what does it teach us about how to read everything else?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The book teaches us its own grammar: the visions are symbolic, and the symbols have referents. Where Scripture itself, or the Old Testament background, supplies the key, we use it. Where it does not, we hold interpretations with appropriate humility. Also notice what the decoded symbol says: Christ stands among the lampstands. The churches, with all their failures we will read about next week, have the risen Lord in their midst.

BUILD, THEN PRESS: IS THIS BOOK A CODED TIMELINE?

Present this at full strength before answering. A thoughtful Christian might argue: Revelation says it concerns what must soon take place, it is packed with concrete detail, and Jesus meant it to be understood, not to be a fog. Surely the faithful reading is the literal one: these chapters are a precise script of the end times, and our job is to match its beasts and battles to tomorrow's headlines. And the serious futurist adds: recognizing symbolism is not the issue; symbols can carry principally future referents, as Daniel's did, and the literal sense of an apocalyptic text is what its symbols assert, not a wooden reading of the images. Anything less treats God's word as mush.

8. What is right about that instinct? And what have we already seen in chapter 1 itself that pushes back on it?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

What is right: the book is truly prophecy, it truly concerns the future as well as the present, and it is meant to be understood and kept (1:3). Reverence for the text is the right instinct, and so is the futurist's core claim that this book truly speaks of the real end through symbols with future reach; the Church's both-and includes that.

But chapter 1 itself resists the timeline reading. The book says the time is near and addresses seven actual first-century churches by name; whatever it means, it meant something to them. Its self-given genre is apocalyptic symbol, and it decodes its own images as symbols (1:20). And its opening blessing is liturgical, not investigative. The Church therefore refuses to flatten the book into any single scheme: it spoke to its first hearers, speaks to every age, and speaks truly of the real end, all at once. We will name the four classic approaches on the Take-Home; this study will use all four

honestly and will always tell you what the Church has actually defined, which is less than the confident schemes claim and more solid than the skeptics fear.

DIG DEEPER

A kingdom of priests (1:6). Open Exodus 19:6 and 1 Peter 2:9. What God said to Israel at Sinai, and Peter says to the baptized, Revelation says doxologically: Christ made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father. The baptismal priesthood of all believers is a Catholic doctrine (the ministerial priesthood serves it; it does not replace it). Revelation will show this priestly people at worship for the rest of the book.

Send

9. John met the risen Christ in the middle of exile, on the day the Church worships. Where do you actually expect to meet Christ this week, and does tonight change that answer?
10. If Revelation is first an unveiling of Jesus rather than a puzzle about the future, what fear or curiosity of yours does that reframe?

Live It This Week

- Once this week, read Revelation 1:1–8 aloud, even if you are alone: the book blesses the voice that reads and the ears that hear (1:3). Receive the blessing on purpose.
- Read Revelation 1 once more slowly, and read Daniel 7:9–14 beside it.
- Memorize the memory verse below.

Memory Verse

Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. (Revelation 1:17–18, RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, living one, you hold the keys. Whatever this week holds for each of us, let us hear you say: fear not. Keep us faithful until we gather again. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Distribute Take-Home 1. Have everyone write and seal both boxes, My Guess and My Sunday Guess, before leaving.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 1, in order:

- Revelation 1:1–8 (read aloud)
- Revelation 1:9–20 (read aloud)
- Daniel 7:9–14 (discovery, group A)
- Daniel 10:5–6 (discovery, group B)
- Exodus 28:4 (leader background, priestly vesture)
- Isaiah 44:6 (discovery, read aloud)
- Exodus 19:6 and 1 Peter 2:9 (Dig Deeper)
- Zechariah 12:10 and John 19:37 (leader background for 1:7)
- Revelation 12:1 (read aloud once, without comment, for the sealed guess)
- Memory verse: Revelation 1:17–18