

LESSON 9 The Church in Conflict and Anticipation

In Lesson 8, we studied 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, 1 Peter, and Hebrews. These letters showed how the church developed in its structure, learned how to respond to persecution, and gained a clearer understanding of its relationship to Judaism. In this lesson, we will study the letters that were written in the following years, the years after Paul's death. In many ways, these were difficult years for the young church. False teachers arose to challenge the foundational truths of Christianity. Persecution became more intense. Some believers yielded to the growing temptation to compromise with the world.

But again, the Spirit of God gave wisdom and direction. Through letters written by Peter, Jude, and John, believers were warned about false doctrine. Through the book of Revelation, they were encouraged to remain faithful to Christ despite severe suffering, and they were given a magnificent vision of His glorious return and complete victory. As you study this lesson, you will learn many facts that will help you understand these books. You will discover that they have a powerful message for us today. We face similar kinds of false doctrines and temptations, and we are much closer to the fulfillment of the prophecies of Revelation than the believers who first read them.

Lesson Outline

- A. The Church Opposes Error: 2 Peter, Jude, and 1–3 John
- B. The Church Anticipates Christ’s Return: Revelation

Lesson Objectives

When you finish this lesson, you should be able to:

1. Describe the background and content of 2 Peter, Jude, and 1–3 John and the false doctrines against which they were written.
2. Identify aspects of the historical setting, literary features, and overall message of the book of Revelation.

Learning Activities

1. Study all parts of the lesson as usual.
2. Read the books of 2 Peter, Jude, 1–3 John, and Revelation as directed.
3. Find on the maps given at the end of Lesson 5 the seven churches named in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.
4. Review the lesson and take the self-test. Be sure to correct any items you answered incorrectly.

Key Words

antichrists
apostasy
forecast

Gnosticism
heresies

pervert
tyrannical

We will first study the books that spoke against the internal enemy of the early church: false doctrine. Then we will consider the unique features of the book of Revelation and its wonderful message of hope and triumph.

A. THE CHURCH OPPOSES ERROR: 2 PETER, JUDE, AND 1–3 JOHN

Objective 1. *Describe the background and content of 2 Peter, Jude, and 1–3 John and the false doctrines against which they were written.*

Paul had already warned the Ephesian elders, Timothy, and Titus that evil men would arise and teach things that were untrue (Acts 20:29–30; 2 Timothy 4:3–4; Titus 1:10–11). In the letters of 2 Peter, Jude, and 1–3 John, we see how other leaders of the church responded to the specific kinds of errors that appeared.

The Letter of 2 Peter

The letter of 2 Peter was probably written sometime between AD 65–67. Its content indicates that Peter wrote it to the same believers to whom he sent 1 Peter (2 Peter 1:1; 3:1). It appears that their situation had changed, however. They were now in more danger from false teachers on the inside than from persecution on the outside.

In his letter, Peter drew a contrast between the true knowledge of Christ and the heresies of the false teachers. He described to his readers the completeness of this knowledge and its origin (2 Peter 1:1–21). He warned them about the evil character and destructive doctrines of the false teachers (2:1–22). He prophesied the unbelieving attitude some would take toward the coming of the Day of the Lord (3:1–7). He concluded by exhorting his readers to prepare themselves for that day by living godly lives (3:8–18). The believers who accepted the message Peter presented would be equipped to identify the false teachers in their midst and avoid being deceived by them.

Read the letter, using the following outline to guide you.

SECOND PETER: TRUE CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE

- I. The Knowledge of Christ and Its Basis. *Read 1:1–21.*
- II. The False Teachers and Their Judgment. *Read 2:1–22.*
- III. The Day of the Lord and Christian Behavior.
Read 3:1–18.

Application

- 1 According to 2 Peter 2:1–2, the false teachers would
 - a) openly introduce their heresies.
 - b) not gain any followers.
 - c) deny the Lord who bought them.
- 2 Peter said that the false teachers would invent stories to take advantage of the believers (2 Peter 2:3). He said that he did not follow invented stories but that he was an of the majesty of the Lord. He also said that we have the of the prophets that came by men who spoke

(See 2 Peter 1:16, 19, 21.)

- 3 Second Peter 3:1–13 gives several important facts about the Day of the Lord. According to these verses
 - a) the Day of the Lord has not come yet because God wants to give people time to repent.
 - b) those who scoff at the promise of the Day of the Lord do so out of ignorance.
 - c) everyone will be expecting the Lord to return.



Second Peter serves as a solemn warning to any person who tries to destroy the church from within. It declares that the day of judgment for false teachers will certainly come (2 Peter 3:12–13, 17). It also serves as an important reminder to us to be ready for

the coming of the Lord and to “make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him” (3:14).

The Letter of Jude

The writer of Jude was also called Judas; he was the brother of James and the half-brother of Jesus (see Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3, and Jude 1, but note that he is not the same person as Judas the son of James, who is mentioned in Acts 1:13). After the Resurrection, he believed in Christ and was among those who received the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (John 7:5; Acts 1:14). Later, he traveled on missionary journeys, as did the other brothers of the Lord (1 Corinthians 9:5).

Jude is very similar to parts of 2 Peter (compare 2 Peter 3:3 with Jude 18). Jude may have seen Peter’s letter and felt the need to send a similar letter to a group of believers he knew who were facing the same difficulties. Apparently, he had discovered that false teachers had secretly entered their assembly. He wrote to them in haste to warn them, interrupting another project to do so (Jude 3–4). The letter does not mention where these believers lived; Bible scholars have suggested Jerusalem and Antioch as possibilities. Jude likely wrote it sometime after 2 Peter was circulated and before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. In his letter, he described the present behavior and future judgment of the false teachers (vv. 1–16) and told the believers how they should respond to the situation (vv. 17–25).

Read the letter, using the following outline to guide you.

JUDE: DEALING WITH APOSTASY

- I. The Dangerous Presence of False Teachers.
Read verses 1–4.
- II. The Description of False Teachers. *Read verses 5–16.*
- III. The Response to False Teaching. *Read verses 17–25.*

Application

4 In your notebook, briefly describe the characteristics of the false teachers. The verse references are given to help you.

a) (4) How did these men enter into the church?
.....

b) (4) For what did they exchange the grace of God?
.....

c) (4) Whom did they deny?
.....

d) (8) What did they reject?
.....

e) (16) What did they boast about?
.....

f) (19) What did they lack?
.....

5 Jude told the believers to do several things in response to their situation. Complete each instruction by choosing the correct ending (right) and writing its number in front of the beginning phrase (left).

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| a) Contend for the ... | 1) Holy Spirit. |
| b) Remember the ... | 2) people who doubt. |
| c) Pray in the ... | 3) faith given to the saints. |
| d) Keep yourselves in the ... | 4) love of God. |
| e) Have mercy on and rescue the ... | 5) prophecy of the apostles. |



Like 2 Peter, Jude is also a solemn warning against those who pervert the gospel and try to lead believers astray. It reminds us today that we should not be surprised when such people appear. As Jude directs, we should meet the situation by holding firmly to the truths of the gospel and reaching out in mercy to those

who have been deceived. God can also keep us from falling and give us a victorious entrance into His presence.

The Letters of 1, 2, and 3 John

We have seen that Peter and Jude warned their readers against scoffers who said that the Day of the Lord was not going to come and against boastful people who lived immorally. As time went on, other deceivers arose among the believers. They said that Christ had not really come in the flesh (2 John 7). The three letters of John were written to instruct believers who were being exposed to the false doctrine of these evil men and to teach them truths about salvation and Christian living as well.

JOHN, THE EYEWITNESS

The author of 1, 2, and 3 John was the apostle John, the same person who wrote the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation. Certain historical writings indicate that he went to Ephesus after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. He ministered there and in the surrounding area until he was exiled to the island of Patmos during the latter part of the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian (AD 81–96). Apparently, he was released after the death of Domitian and returned to the area of Ephesus to continue ministering there. The three epistles were probably written sometime between AD 85–90 and sent first to churches and believers in Asia among whom John had worked. As an eyewitness of the life of Christ and His close friend, he spoke with great authority against those who denied Christ and His coming in the flesh.

THE FALSE TEACHERS

The false teachers against whom John warned the believers did not acknowledge the truth that Christ had actually become a man. In their view, matter was evil and spirit was good. They taught that it was unthinkable for God, who was good, to become a real human being and thus unite himself with physical matter. Some of them said that Christ only *seemed* to be real, that the disciples saw a ghost or a phantom. Others said that a “Christ spirit” came upon the human Jesus at his baptism and left Him

before His crucifixion. Both of these ideas denied the truth that Jesus Christ was God manifested in the flesh.

Some of these false teachers also believed that a person must strive to escape from the material realm into the spiritual by obtaining a special kind of knowledge. This false teaching came to be called Gnosticism. In contrast to these false ideas, John described the true knowledge that gave assurance of eternal life (see 1 John 2:3; 3:10, 14; and 5:20, for example). He asserted Christ’s full divinity and humanity (1 John 1:1–2; 2:22–23).

THE LETTER OF 1 JOHN

John was a purposeful writer. In his Gospel account, he stated that he wrote his book so that people would believe in Christ and receive life (John 20:31). In 1 John, he said that he wrote what he did so that people would know they had eternal life (1 John 5:13). These two purposes are closely related; John wanted to help believers understand their new relationship to God and gain assurance of salvation. The truths he presented about Christ gave answers to the doubts raised by the false teachers.

Application

- 6 In your notebook, copy the chart below. Read each Scripture. Opposite each reference, state the truth it presents. In the last column, write 1 if that truth opposes the false idea that Christ did not come in the flesh. Write 2 if the truth presented opposes the false idea that Jesus was not the Son of God (the Christ). The first one is completed to give you an example.

TRUTHS ABOUT CHRIST IN 1 JOHN		
Reference	Truth Presented	False Belief Opposed
1:1–3	<i>John heard, touched, and saw Christ.</i>	1
2:22		
3:23		
4:1–3		
4:15		



Along with teaching truths about Christ, John emphasized the certainty and assurance a believer can have. He stated the basis of his own knowledge (1 John 1:1–4). He explained the importance of walking in the light (1:5–2:14) and warned the believers against loving the world and being deceived by the antichrists (2:15–27). He also told them how they could know they were children of God (2:28–3:10) and described how they could know that they were in the truth and recognize those who were not (3:11–4:6). He commanded them to love each other (4:7–21) and gave them assurance regarding their relationship to God (5:1–21). Read the letter using the following outline as a general guide to its contents.

FIRST JOHN: ASSURANCE FOR THE BELIEVER

- I. Assurance by Knowing the Truth. *Read 1:1–4.*
- II. Assurance by Walking in the Light. *Read 1:5–2:14.*
- III. Assurance by Possessing God’s Anointing. *Read 2:15–29.*
- IV. Assurance by Doing Right. *Read 3:1–10.*
- V. Assurance by Showing Genuine Love. *Read 3:11–20.*
- VI. Assurance by Having the Spirit. *Read 3:21–4:6.*
- VII. Assurance by Acknowledging Christ. *Read 4:7–21.*
- VIII. Assurance by Observing God’s Commands. *Read 5:1–12.*
- IX. Assurance by Being in Christ. *Read 5:13–21.*

Application

- 7** Circle the letter in front of each true statement.
- a)** John wrote his Gospel and letters from the standpoint of one who knew Jesus from the testimony of others.
 - b)** The false teachers John warned against did not believe that Christ had come in the flesh.
 - c)** The letters of John show that the main problem among the believers to whom he wrote was whether or not the Gentiles should be circumcised.



THE LETTERS OF 2 AND 3 JOHN

Second and Third John are short, personal notes that John intended to follow up with face-to-face visits (2 John 12; 3 John 13–14). Second John was directed to a “chosen lady and her children” (2 John 1). This phrase might have referred to a certain woman and her children. It also could have meant a church and its members (see Paul’s use of “mother” in Galatians 4:26, for example). Since the letter closes by mentioning a “chosen sister,” the second possibility may be the more likely. In any case, John’s concern is evident: he wanted the believers to walk in truth and love (vv. 1–6) and to completely reject the antichrists who denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh (vv. 7–13). Read the letter and complete the exercise that follows.

SECOND JOHN: WALK IN TRUTH AND LOVE

- I. Obey God’s Command to Love. *Read verses 1–6.*
- II. Reject False Teachers Who Deny Christ.
Read verses 7–13.

Application

- 8** According to 2 John 9–10, are believers required to give hospitality to everyone? Explain your answer.
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The letter of 3 John was directed to John’s friend Gaius. It also deals with the subject of hospitality. In this case, however, the hospitality John had in mind was the kind that should be shown to fellow Christians. Apparently, there were certain men who were traveling for the sake of Christ (3 John 7). Diotrephes, evidently the leader of the church of which Gaius was a member, refused to help these men (vv. 9–10). Demetrius may have been one of the traveling brothers who took John’s letter to Gaius.

In his letter, John commended Gaius for being hospitable to the brothers who were traveling (3 John 1–8). He said that he

would expose the hindering activities of Diotrephes (vv. 9–10). He encouraged Gaius in his Christian life and recommended Demetrius to him (vv. 11–14). Read the letter and complete the exercise that follows.

THIRD JOHN: PRACTICE CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

- I. Praise for a Faithful Host. *Read verses 1–8.*
- II. Warning to a Proud Enemy. *Read verses 9–10.*
- III. Commendation of a Good Worker. *Read verses 11–14.*

Application

- 9 (Complete the sentence.) According to 3 John 8, those who show hospitality to believers who travel for the sake of Christ



The letters of 1, 2, and 3 John give us a glimpse into the heart of the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20). For him, truth and love were inseparable. Those who knew the truth were those who loved, and those who loved were those who knew the truth. He had the highest standards for both. Each of them found its complete expression in the person of Christ himself (1 John 4:16; 5:20).

Together, 2 Peter, Jude, and the three epistles of John form a strong defense against false doctrines and wrong practices. They help us understand some of the problems that arose in the church during the first century and how the leaders responded to them. In addition, they show that it is important for believers not only to know the truth but also to test those who profess to be teachers to see if they are true followers of Christ.

B. THE CHURCH ANTICIPATES CHRIST'S RETURN: REVELATION

Objective 2. *Identify aspects of the historical setting, literary features, and overall message of the book of Revelation.*

The book of Revelation is a fitting climax to the New Testament (and to the entire Bible). It states that Jesus Christ, the Savior who was born in obscurity and rejected by humanity, will one day return to the earth in great power and glory as its rightful king. It leaves no doubt that all of God's purposes will be fulfilled. We will study its background, special features, content, and interpretation.

Background

The Jews of Palestine were in continual rebellion against their Roman rulers. When this rebellion increased and became widespread during the late 60s, Roman soldiers moved in to crush it. Galilee was subdued. Then the city of Jerusalem was surrounded and besieged. Within its walls, many thousands of Jews died of starvation and disease. Thousands more were killed by the Romans. Finally, after resisting the Romans for several years, Jerusalem fell in AD 70. The magnificent temple was destroyed, leaving not one stone upon another, just as Jesus had prophesied (Matthew 24:2). Years before, He had warned His followers to flee from the city when certain events took place (Matthew 24:15–25). John the apostle may have been among those who left before it was too late. As we have already mentioned, it appears that he went to Ephesus in AD 69 or 70 and worked there and in the surrounding areas.

During the years after the fall of Jerusalem, the Roman attitude toward Christians changed from suspicion to hatred. This hatred was first expressed by Nero, who accused Christians of burning Rome in AD 64 and killed many of them. Later, it took other forms. Christians, who earlier had been instructed to submit themselves to governing authorities (Romans 13:1), now found that it was impossible to obey these authorities.

The emperor Domitian (AD 81–96) insisted that he be worshipped as a god, and those who refused to do so were persecuted. John was possibly one of these. This may have been the reason why he was exiled to the island of Patmos during the latter part of Domitian’s reign (Revelation 1:9). While he was there, God gave him a message for the believers in Asia who were being oppressed by the tyrannical Roman state. God’s message was not just for them, however, for it contains a vision of Christ and His final victory that every Christian needs to see.

Application

- 10** (Fill in the blanks.) After the destruction of
 John ministered in the area of
 until he was to the
 island of during the reign of Domitian.
 At the time John wrote Revelation, the Roman attitude
 toward Christianity was one of
 Christians could not obey the emperor Domitian because he
 commanded them to



Special Features

John expressed the message he received in a form of writing called *apocalyptic* (the book of Daniel in the Old Testament has this same form in some parts). In this type of writing, objects are often used to represent other things. For example, John saw Christ among seven golden lampstands (Revelation 1:12–13). A few verses later, we read that these golden lampstands represent the seven churches to whom John was told to write (1:10–11, 20). In apocalyptic writing, certain numbers also may have another meaning. For example, the number seven often speaks of completeness. The fact that seven churches are addressed (1:11) means that the message is not just for them but

for the church through the ages. The fact that there are seven seals, trumpets, and plagues (bowls) means that God's judgments and purposes for the earth will be completed (see 6:1; 8:2; 15:1; 16:1).

In addition to having some apocalyptic features, Revelation is also closely connected with the writings of the Old Testament. There is no doubt that John was thoroughly familiar with them. In his book, there are more than 275 references to various Old Testament Scriptures. However, John did not merely quote from the Old Testament. He combined the images and pictures used there in new ways that powerfully convey the prophetic truths the Spirit of God revealed to him.

Application

11 Compare the descriptions of the tree of life in Genesis 2:9, 3:22–24, and Revelation 22:1–2, and answer the following questions in your notebook.

- a)** Genesis 3:22–24 tells us that Adam and Eve were not allowed to eat of the tree of life after they sinned. What did John say about the tree of life in Revelation 22:2?
- b)** What do you think is the reason for this difference?

12 Following are four verses from the book of Revelation. Circle the letter in front of each one that is a specific example of apocalyptic writing.

- a)** Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy (1:3).
- b)** In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God (4:5).
- c)** I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads (13:1).
- d)** Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me (22:12).



Content and Outline

The content of the book of Revelation can be divided into four sections that contain the four main visions that John had. Each of these visions contains the phrase “in the Spirit” (Revelation 1:10; 4:2; 17:1–3; 21:9–10).

In the first vision (Revelation 1:10–3:22), John saw Christ among the churches. John was acquainted with these churches, for they were in the area of Ephesus in Asia Minor where he ministered after he left Jerusalem. Christ gave John messages that were especially suitable for these churches, revealing to each one a certain aspect of His character. To the church of Smyrna, for example, He spoke as “the First and the Last” (2:8). To the church at Laodicea, He spoke as “the faithful and true witness” (3:14).

In the second vision (Revelation 4:1–16:21), John saw the throne of God in heaven and Christ as the Lamb who was worthy to open the scroll God had in His hand. John described the content of each seal of the scroll. The seventh seal included the seven trumpets. These were followed by seven plagues or bowls of wrath. The events associated with the seals, trumpets, and plagues portray aspects of God’s judgment of the earth and His will for the redeemed. Christ is shown in this vision as the one who has the authority to set God’s purposes in motion.

In the third vision (Revelation 17:1–21:8), John saw Christ as the conqueror of the evil kings of the earth and their armies. He heard the lament over Babylon and saw its destruction. He saw, too, the final doom of Satan, the judgment of the dead, and the new heavens and the new earth. This third vision shows Christ as the triumphant one, the one who brings world history to its final conclusion.

In the fourth vision, John saw the bride of Christ—the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9–22:5). In this vision, Christ is shown as the temple and light of the city, the home of all those whose names are written in His book of life.

Read the book of Revelation, using this outline to guide you.

REVELATION: THE VICTORIOUS CHRIST

- I. Introduction: Greetings and Praise. *Read 1:1–8*
- II. First Vision: Christ Speaks to the Churches.
Read 1:9–3:22.
- III. Second Vision: Christ Controls World Events.
Read 4:1–16:21.
- IV. Third Vision: Christ Conquers Evil Powers.
Read 17:1–21:8.
- V. Fourth Vision: Christ Reigns on His Throne.
Read 21:9–22:5.
- VI. Conclusion: Challenge and Invitation. *Read 22:6–21.*

Application

- 13** In your notebook, write a brief answer to the following questions on the four visions in the book of Revelation.
- a)** First vision: In His message to the seven churches, to whom did Christ make His promises each time (ch. 2–3)?
 - b)** Second vision: Why was Christ worthy to open the scroll (ch. 5)?
 - c)** Third vision: How many angels were necessary to bind Satan and cast him into the Abyss (ch. 20)?
 - d)** Fourth vision: Who will be able to enter the Holy City (ch. 21)?



Meaning

Because of its form and subject material, the book of Revelation is difficult to understand. Through the years, godly people have held differing (and sometimes opposing) opinions regarding its meaning. We will examine the four most important interpretations of its content. Then we will consider the message the book had for its original readers and the message it has for us today.

FOUR INTERPRETATIONS

The *preterist* school of thought holds that the book of Revelation relates only to the immediate time in which it was written. According to this view, the book has no prophetic significance for the future. It is simply a vivid picture of the struggle the church had with the godless power of Rome. This view is good in that it presents the significance the book would have had for its original readers. It is weak because it does not account for many of the events John saw that have not yet occurred, such as the reign of Christ with the martyrs (Revelation 20:4–6).

The *idealist* school of thought believes that Revelation is a symbolic picture of the ongoing conflict between good and evil. Those who hold this view say that the book's real purpose is to reveal God's character and the power of Christ as Savior. This is an important purpose. However, the idealist school is in error because it does not believe that the book's symbols may also point ahead to specific events in the future. It ignores the fact that many biblical prophecies given in symbolic form have already been fulfilled, such as some prophecies in Ezekiel and Daniel.

The *historicist* school sees the symbols of the book of Revelation as a forecast of church history from the Day of Pentecost until Christ's return. In this view, the symbols of the book are linked to historical events that affect the church, some of which have already taken place. (For example, the seals, such as those described in chapter 6, are interpreted as signifying the fall of the Roman Empire, the first-century persecutor of the Christians.) Those who hold this view have many disagreements among themselves because their method allows a symbol to stand for any one of several events or individuals. Therefore, it is impossible for them to arrive at any definite understanding of the book's message.

The *futurist* school maintains that most of the visions given to John concern future events. Those described in chapters 4–19 will take place within a period of a few years shortly before the return of Christ. This period is called the "Great Tribulation."

In this view, for example, the beast of chapter 13 represents the world government and the prostitute (Babylon) of chapter 17 represents the false religion that will exist at the time Christ returns. Some futurists say that the seven churches of chapters 2 and 3 represent seven eras of church history as well as the seven actual churches to whom John wrote.

Application

14 Match the interpretation (right) to each description or example of it (left).

- | | |
|--|--|
| ... a) The events in Revelation are like a calendar of church history from the Day of Pentecost until the return of Christ. | 1) Preterist
2) Idealist
3) Historicist
4) Futurist |
| ... b) All the events described in Revelation came to pass shortly after it was written. | |
| ... c) The fall of Babylon in chapter 18 will occur shortly before Christ returns. | |
| ... d) The locusts in chapter 9 symbolize evil in the ageless war of good and evil. | |
| ... e) The two witnesses in chapter 11 will prophesy during the Great Tribulation. | |



Many Christians are convinced that most of the book of Revelation should be interpreted according to the futurist view, especially chapters 4–22. The futurist interpretation is probably the best approach because it allows the prophecies of Revelation to be harmonized with other Bible prophecies. Those who hold it can show how the prophecies of Revelation expand the meaning of the previous prophecies.

For example, in Daniel 7:13 and Acts 1:11, we read that Jesus will return to earth. The futurist interpretation says that various passages in Revelation, such as Revelation 19:11–21, give more details about how He will return and what will happen when He does. In addition, the futurist interpretation shows that

John's vision of the coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the final separation of the saved and the lost do not simply represent ideas but portray real events that will actually take place.

MESSAGE FOR THEN AND NOW

For the churches in Asia Minor, the book of Revelation contained a message of encouragement and exhortation. The seven letters reveal that some believers were tolerating false doctrine and becoming careless and indifferent toward spiritual things (Revelation 2:4, 14–16, 20; 3:1–3, 15–18). Christ exhorted these believers to respond to His discipline and renew their dedication to Him. The letters also show that some believers were experiencing severe persecution (2:3, 9, 13). The prophecies of the book encouraged them by showing them that God would one day punish the wicked and reward the faithful. Certain symbols in Revelation were probably recognized by these believers as pointing to familiar events or persons. For example, it is likely that they saw in the beast of chapter 13 a picture of the Roman state, which was persecuting them. They learned that God knew their prayers and sufferings (6:9–11; 8:4; 14:13). They found that the martyrs would reign with Christ (20:4) and that God himself would wipe away all tears (21:3–4). Through the prophecy, they were told that they needed to be patient and faithful, for God would punish the beast (Revelation 13:10; 20:10).

Revelation also has a message for us because it was intended for the whole church. We should receive and respond wholeheartedly to its warning, exhortation, and encouragement. There may be times when, like the Ephesians, we need to repent and renew our dedication to Christ (Revelation 2:4–6). There may be times, too, when we suffer affliction and poverty like the believers in Smyrna (2:8–11). At such times, the promises in Revelation can give us great comfort, for they present a vision of our eternal home and assure us that one day God will wipe away all tears (21:3–4; 22:3–5).

The prophecies of Revelation also have significance for us. It is true that some of them predicted the situation that would exist soon after they were written, but it appears that these same prophecies also refer to events that will occur at the end of the world.

They are like other biblical prophecies that have had a double fulfillment. For example, in Genesis 46:4 and 50:24, we read that Jacob's descendants would one day come out of Egypt. This did in fact happen later when Moses led them out (Exodus 12:31–42). Much later, the prophecy was fulfilled again when another descendant of Jacob, Jesus Christ, also came out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15).

In a similar way, some of the prophecies in Revelation have a double fulfillment. For example, many Bible students believe that the prophecy of the beast in chapter 13 points to two things: 1) the Roman government that existed at the time John wrote, and 2) the world power that will be in control during the time just before Christ returns. This prophecy has a warning for us. Like those early Christians, we must be careful not to give our allegiance to any power that demands the worship that belongs to God alone (Revelation 13:5–8; 15:2). Other prophecies in Revelation, such as the ones in chapters 20–22, will have only one fulfillment, for they have to do with eternity and the end of the world.

Application

- 15** A prophecy that has (or may have) a double fulfillment is one that
- a)** actually has only one primary meaning, regardless of its form.
 - b)** quotes at least two times from the Old Testament.
 - c)** points to two similar events separated by a span of time.
 - d)** has one meaning for Christians, another meaning for unbelievers.



It should not surprise us that the prophecies of Revelation often seem difficult to understand. However, we can expect their meaning to become clear when the time arrives for their fulfillment, as has been the case with other prophecies in the Bible. But the book's presentation of the victorious Christ, warnings against apostasy, exhortations to consecration, and call to fellowship can be understood by all Christians, no matter when and where they live.

Application

- 16** The futurist approach to the book of Revelation is good because it
- a)** explains how all the events described were related to the seven historical churches of Asia.
 - b)** gives a detailed description of church history from the Day of Pentecost until now.
 - c)** proves that most of its prophecies are symbolic pictures of the war between good and evil.
 - d)** allows its prophecies to be brought together with and expand previous biblical prophecies.
- 17** A person who had a good understanding of the book of Revelation as explained in this lesson would say:
- a)** “Many of the warnings and commands given in the letters to the seven churches can be applied to believers today.”
 - b)** “Since the prophecies of Revelation were given in symbolic language, they do not refer to real people or events.”
 - c)** “Most of the content of the book of Revelation has little significance for Christians who are not suffering persecution or affliction.”
 - d)** “The book of Revelation contains truths about Christ and His complete victory that all Christians need to know.”
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The book of Revelation closes the New Testament—and the entire Bible—on a note of victory and warning. It gives a vivid picture of our Savior’s triumph and records the last words John heard Him say: “Yes, I am coming soon” (Revelation 22:20). Let us pay attention to its message and prepare for the events it predicts, serving Christ with all our strength and carrying His gospel to every part of the world.

Self-Test

- 1** MATCHING. Match the epistle or book (right) with the title of its outline and each fact about its historical background or content (left).
- | | |
|--|---------------|
| a) Commends Gaius for helping Christian brothers who were traveling | 1) 2 Peter |
| b) Title: Assurance for the Believer | 2) Jude |
| c) Is written in an apocalyptic style | 3) 1 John |
| d) Title: Dealing With Apostasy | 4) 2 John |
| e) Title: Practice Christian Hospitality | 5) 3 John |
| f) Has some content similar to that of Jude | 6) Revelation |
| g) Title: The Victorious Christ | |
| h) Was written to give believers assurance of eternal life and oppose teachers who say that Christ was not a real person | |
| i) Title: True Christian Knowledge | |
| j) Title: Walk in Truth and Love | |
| k) Warns a certain lady not to welcome false teachers | |

2 Match the epistle or book (right) with each sentence that describes a circumstance of the believers with which the epistle or book deals (left).

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| ... a) These believers belonged to seven different churches in Asia. Some were becoming spiritually careless and indifferent, and others were suffering persecution and martyrdom. | 1) Jude
2) 3 John
3) Revelation |
| ... b) These believers had been exposed to false teachers who denied the real humanity and complete divinity of Christ. | |
| ... c) These believers needed to be warned against immoral teachers who had secretly entered in among them and denied Christ. | |
| ... d) These believers lived during the time of the Roman emperor Domitian, who demanded their worship. | |

MULTIPLE CHOICE. Choose the one phrase that best completes each of the following.

- 3** Suppose you needed to teach basic truths about salvation to a group of new believers. The book that would be most appropriate to use in your study would be
- a)** 2 Peter.
 - b)** 1 John.
 - c)** 3 John.
 - d)** Revelation.
- 4** The view of Revelation that most easily allows for its prophecies to be harmonized with other Bible prophecies is the
- a)** preterist view.
 - b)** historicist view.
 - c)** idealist view.
 - d)** futurist view.

- 5** A vivid description of false teachers and the punishment that awaits them is contained in the letter of
- a)** 2 John.
 - b)** 3 John.
 - c)** Jude.
- 6** In Revelation 1:12–13, John said that he saw Christ among seven golden lampstands. This passage is an example of
- a)** apocalyptic symbolism.
 - b)** double fulfillment of prophecy.
 - c)** historical writing.
- 7** Many of the prophecies of Revelation are difficult to understand because
- a)** God did not intend for us to understand them.
 - b)** the time has not yet arrived for their fulfillment.
 - c)** they were written many hundreds of years ago.
 - d)** they were directed to believers in Asia Minor.
- 8** CHRONOLOGY. Put the following events in historical sequence by writing 1 in front of the event that occurred first, 2 in front of the event that occurred next, and so forth.
- ... **a)** The apostle John wrote the book of Revelation.
 - ... **b)** Jerusalem fell and the temple was destroyed.
 - ... **c)** The apostle John was exiled to Patmos.
 - ... **d)** Nero burned Rome and blamed the Christians.

Answers to Application Questions

- 9** work together with them for the truth. (Your answer should be similar.)
- 1 c)** deny the Lord who bought them.
- 10** Jerusalem, Ephesus, exiled, Patmos, hatred, worship him as god.
- 2** eyewitness, word, from God. (Your answers should be similar.)
- 11 a)** He said that its leaves were for the healing of the nations.
b) (Your answer should be similar.) The reason for this difference is that Christ has taken away the sin of the nations and made the tree of life available to them.
- 3 a)** the Day of the Lord has not come yet because God wants to give people time to repent.
- 12 b)** In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God (4:5).
c) I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads (13:1).
- 4 a)** They came in secretly.
b) They exchanged it for immorality.
c) They denied Jesus Christ.
d) They rejected authority.
e) They boasted about themselves.
f) They lacked the Spirit.
- 13 a)** He made them to be the one who overcomes (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21).
b) He was worthy because He was slain and had purchased people for God with His blood (5:9).
c) One (20:1–3).
d) Only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life will be able to enter the Holy City (21:27).

- 5 a) 3) faith given to the saints (v. 3).
 - b) 5) prophecy of the apostles (v. 17).
 - c) 1) Holy Spirit (v. 20).
 - d) 4) love of God (v. 21).
 - e) 2) people who doubt (vv. 22–23).
- 14 a) 3) Historicist
 - b) 1) Preterist
 - c) 4) Futurist
 - d) 2) Idealist
 - e) 4) Futurist

6 Your chart should look similar to the following:

TRUTHS ABOUT CHRIST IN 1 JOHN		
<i>Reference</i>	<i>Truth Presented</i>	<i>False Belief Opposed</i>
1:1–3	John heard, touched, and saw Christ.	1
2:22	Liars deny that Jesus is the Christ.	2
3:23	We must believe in the name of God’s Son, Jesus Christ.	2
4:1–3	The spirit that comes from God says that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.	1
4:15	God lives in those who acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God.	2

- 15 c) points to two similar events separated by a span of time.
- 7 b) is true.
- 16 d) allows its prophecies to be brought together with and expand previous biblical prophecies.
- 8 No. Believers are not to give hospitality to false teachers who deny Christ (Your answer should be similar.)

- 17 a)** “Many of the warnings and commands given in the letters to the seven churches can be applied to believers today.”
- d)** “The book of Revelation contains truths about Christ and His complete victory that all Christians need to know.”