

united REVELATION kingdom

The Kingdom story from creation to revelation

REVELATION

Introduction

The Good News about Jesus continued to spread, and many joined His followers. However, many followers were persecuted and killed for their beliefs. One of Jesus' closest followers, John, was with Jesus while He was on the earth. John was imprisoned on a deserted island because he told others about Jesus. When John was an old man on this island, God gave him an amazing vision – a vision about the end of time as we know it and how Jesus will come to reign forever as King when He returns to earth. Now John knew Jesus really, really well. When the vision started, John heard Jesus speaking, but the Jesus he saw did not look the same as the Jesus he had known.

Revelation 1:13-18; 4:2-3, 5; 5:11-14

Jesus looked like an amazing King. His eyes were like flames of fire, His feet like ... bronze glowing in a furnace, and His voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. ... And a sharp two-edged sword came from His mouth. ... Jesus was shining like the sun in all its brilliance.

John saw Jesus on a throne in heaven. ... Around the throne were precious jewels ... and from the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. ... There were thousands ... of angels and representatives of those who belong to Jesus around the throne. They fell down in worship and sang, "Worthy are you to receive praise and honour for ever and ever."

(Revelation 6-12) Revelation 13:1-15

In his vision, John saw the future – a place of great violence and destruction. He saw famines, wars, plagues and huge natural disasters.

Then John saw a beast rising up out of the sea ... and Satan gave the beast ... the authority to rule over every people and language. ... (Sometimes we call this beast the 'antichrist.') ... "Who is as great as the beast?" the people exclaimed. "Who is able to fight against him?" ... And the beast was allowed to wage war against God's ... people – those who follow Jesus – and to conquer them ... All the people who belong to this world and did not believe in Jesus worshiped the beast. ...

Then John saw another beast come up out of the earth. ... He acted as a prophet for the first beast. ... He did astounding miracles, even making fire flash down to earth from the sky while everyone was watching. ... And with all the miracles he was allowed to perform on behalf of the first beast, he deceived all the people who belong to this world. ... Then it was commanded that anyone refusing to worship the first beast must die.

Revelation 16:14 & 16

John saw Satan and these beasts grow in confidence and arrogance to such an extent that they believed they could wage war on God and win. ... So they gathered all their forces together in one place, called Armageddon, and prepared to face God in battle.

Revelation 19: 11-21

Then John saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. Its rider was Jesus – named Faithful and True. ... His eyes were like flames of fire, and on His head were many crowns. ... The armies of heaven ... followed Him on white horses. From His mouth came a sharp sword. ... On His robe ... was written this title: King of all kings and Lord of all lords. ... Jesus and His army faced those of Satan. Jesus spoke, and with His voice He destroyed the army. ... The beast and the false prophet were thrown ... into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:1-4

Then ... Satan was ... bound ... in chains for a thousand years. ... Satan could not deceive the nations anymore. ... And John saw the people who had been killed for their testimony about Jesus during the time of the beast's reign. They had been killed because they had not worshiped the beast or his statue. ... John saw the followers all come to life again, and they reigned with Jesus for a thousand years.

(Continued on the next page)

Revelation 20:7-15

When the thousand years come to an end, Satan will be let out of his prison. He will go out to deceive the nations *again* ... in every corner of the earth. He will gather them together for battle – a mighty army, as numberless as sand along the seashore. And *John* saw them as they ... surrounded God's people. ... But fire from heaven came down on *Satan's* armies and consumed them. Then *Satan*, who had deceived them, was thrown into the fiery lake ... *along with* the beast and the false prophet. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. ... Then death *itself* was thrown into the lake of fire. ... *Everyone who had died throughout history was raised to life*, and anyone *who was not a citizen of God's Kingdom* was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:1-6

Then *John* saw a new heaven and a new earth, *because* the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. ... *John* heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's *Kingdom* is now among His people! He will live with them, and they will be His people. ... He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever. ... Look, I am making everything new!" ... And He also said, "It is finished! I am ... the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life." ...

TELLING THE STORY

Why this story?

God's Kingdom reaches it's fulfilment when Jesus returns. Satan is defeated, and heaven is ushered in.

This story is about a vision that God gave John probably between A.D. 81-96, but the vision tells of the future. John was able to see Jesus as he really is – a glorious King on His throne. Then John sees the future of the world – the wars and plagues and disasters to come. Satan tries to rule the world, and he even tries to wage war against God. The first time he does it, his army is destroyed with a word from King Jesus, and Satan is chained for a thousand years. The second time Satan tries to defeat God, he is thrown into the lake of fire, along with death and all those who have not chosen to follow Jesus as their King. Then all those who have ever lived and who are citizens of God's Kingdom are shown the new heaven and the new earth, a place of beauty and light where there is no more sorrow or pain. God will be with His people forever and ever.

Key concepts to include in your story

- Jesus' followers continue to be persecuted, and one of His closest followers is exiled to a lonely island when he is an old man. God gives him an amazing vision of Jesus as King.
- Description of Jesus: shining and majestic – eyes like fire, feet like bronze, sword coming out of mouth, voice like thunder, sitting on a throne with jewels surrounding Him, lightning and thunder coming from the throne, angels worshipping Him
- John sees the future, a place of disaster, pain, war and plagues
- A "beast" (antichrist), who is human, rises up and is given power by Satan to rule over everyone everywhere
- The beast wages war against followers of Jesus, everyone else worships him
- A second beast rises up and acts as a prophet for the first beast
- It is commanded that all who do not worship the beast will die
- Satan and the beasts decide to wage war against God and gather in a valley (Armageddon)
- As they gather, heaven opens and a rider on a white horse leads heaven's army
- The rider – Jesus – is named Faithful and True, and on His robe is written "King of kings and Lord of lords;" a sword comes out of His mouth
- With His voice, Jesus destroys the army and throws the beasts into the lake of fire
- Jesus chains up Satan for 1000 years, and every follower of Jesus who was killed during the time of the beasts raises to life to reign with Jesus
- At the end of 1000 years, Jesus unchains Satan and Satan roams the earth deceiving again
- Satan gathers an army and tries to wage war again
- God destroys the army with fire and throws Satan into the lake of fire, along with death and all who are not citizens of God's Kingdom
- John sees a new heaven and a new earth, and God says, "God's Kingdom is among His people. He will live with them. Everything has been made new. I will give from the springs of the waters of life."
- Anyone who is thirsty should come and drink from the water of life.

Notes about how the story was crafted

As you tell this story, keep in mind that the tense of the story changes throughout. John is talking about what he sees happening in his vision – at times as if it were happening at the moment and at times as if it were happening in the future.

This story is a summary of the main storyline of the book of Revelation. As such, there are many significant details that it does not include; it is meant as an introduction on which to hang the details as people learn more about the book. The storyline has been followed at face value without an attempt to interpret or emphasize any specific belief about the timeline of the end times. The purpose of this story is not to provide a theological opinion about the end times, but to show that as the war between Satan and God intensifies, God is victorious, and King Jesus comes to rescue His people and take His throne in the new heaven and new earth. This story is meant to show the majesty and reality of the final fulfilment of God's Kingdom and our part as citizens of it.

The story begins with a short summary of who John is and why he is on an island. It sets the scene for the vision that he receives from God. Although some modern scholars have questioned the authorship of John the apostle and have argued that a different John wrote Revelation, the traditional view still holds that John the apostle wrote this book, and this story has followed that view.

The story begins with a description of King Jesus in order to show that He is King even before the events of the end times. It also serves to create the atmosphere of foreshadowing what is to come as the battle intensifies.

The famines, wars and plagues described in Revelation 6-12 are too long to include in the story, but they have been summarised to show that the end times were full of hardship and pain for the citizens of the world.

The "beast" has been identified as the "antichrist" in this story because that title may be familiar to your audience. You should be sure to say this in such a way, though, as to make it clear to your audience that the beast is a human.

Several details from Revelation 13:1-15 have not been included in order to make this story as short and retell-able as possible.

We have included the name **Armageddon** in this story because the audience may be familiar with it, but may have a wrong impression of what it signifies. It seems like a good idea to help our audience understand what really happens at that place!

In Revelation 19, Jesus comes riding on the white horse and with a sword coming out of His mouth. The biblical text says that He destroyed the army with the sword coming out of His mouth. Commentators agree that the sword signified His spoken word of judgment on them. We have chosen to unpack that in this story by saying that He destroyed the army by speaking. It seems significant that at the beginning of our time, He spoke, and the world was created. Now at the end of our time, He speaks, and evil is destroyed.

Devil has been replaced by **Satan** for consistency throughout the stories.

In Revelation 21:3, we have substituted **God's Kingdom** for **God's home** in order to create consistency with the theme of the story set. God's home is God's kingdom, as He makes abundantly clear in His desire to be with and live among His people.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Retelling the story

This is a long story, but it is full of vivid description and action. You may find that it is useful for the members of your group to draw scenes from the story as you tell it a second time. Or you could split your group up into smaller groups and have each smaller group take a scene to illustrate. Put the illustrated scenes together and retell the story. Some groups have found it helpful to draw a story arch for the events of the story. Here is one way you could divide the story into scenes:

- **Introduction:** Set the scene with John on the deserted island.
- **Jesus as King:** Describe the vision of Jesus as King that John had from Revelation 1:13-18. Then describe Him sitting on the throne and the worshippers around Him. (Revelation 4:2-3, 5; 5:11-14)
- **End times and the beasts:** Describe the world during the end times and the raising up of the beast and his prophet. Everyone who does not follow Jesus worships the beast, and finally everyone is commanded to worship the beast or die.
- **Battle of Armageddon:** Satan and the beasts decide to wage war against God Himself. Heaven opens, and Jesus comes riding in on a white horse. Describe King Jesus! With a word, He destroys the army, casts the beasts into the lake of fire and chains up Satan for 1000 years.
- **1000-year reign:** Jesus and those who were killed for their belief in Him reign for 1000 years on the earth.
- **Satan's return:** Satan is loosed and comes back to deceive those on earth. He gathers an army to wage war against God again.
- **Satan's defeat:** God destroys Satan's army with fire and throws Satan and death itself into the lake of fire. Everyone who is not a citizen of God's Kingdom is thrown into the lake of fire.
- **New Heaven and New Earth:** John sees a new heaven and a new earth coming. God says, "I will make My Kingdom with My people. There will be no more tears or sadness or pain. All has become new! To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. Let anyone who is thirsty come and drink."

Questions for discussion

You don't have to ask all of these questions in your discussion times. These questions are discussion starters, but you will find that often, once people feel comfortable, they talk about many of these things naturally. However, these questions are helpful to keep a conversation going where needed, and they provide a logical sequence of working through the story. Even if you don't ask all the questions in a group, try to ask people what this story means for them personally. You'll find that as you continue to interact with God's Word at a deep level, God's Spirit will reveal things for your life in a wonderful way!

- What do you like about this story?
- What bothered you about this story?
- What does this story show you about God?
- What does this story show you about people?
- What does this story mean for your life? How will you live your life differently having learned this story?
- How does this story contribute to our understanding of the Gospel? How is this story part of the Gospel?
- How will you remember this story? *(Tell it!)*
- Is there anyone you would like to tell this story to? Or anyone you would like to practice with? E.g. Your children, your best friend, your wife, your husband, a mum at the school gate, your work colleague, your neighbour. (It's true that the best way to learn a story is to tell it. So why don't you give it a go and chat to each other next week about how you found it?)

Questions people may have

This section can never be exhaustive. Remember that during your group discussion times, you want to focus on the above questions rather than get sidetracked by deeply academic issues. Part of the joy of experiencing and studying God's Word in this way is allowing God's Spirit to teach us and reveal His truth to us through the narrative of the individual stories, and ultimately through the narrative of the larger story line. However, we understand that sometimes people feel they need some deeper answers. Sometimes, the storyline has to speak for itself, and we have to trust it to do so. However, if your group needs some deeper answers in order to go on, here are some basics that you can discuss. If you have unresolved questions, please come and ask, and we'll help you find the answers.

The book of Revelation is one of the most written about books of the Bible. For many, it seems unintelligible, and many are hesitant to even read it because they feel that they cannot understand it. This story is meant to give you a skeleton outline of the most important points of the book and the basic storyline without the distractions of the different interpretations. The questions below only scratch the surface of the many questions you may have. We recognise that the discussion below could seem trite in light of the enormity of the questions and the challenge that they present. We do not want it to seem that way – but we simply offer some thoughts rather than answers. We urge you to engage with others in your connect groups, and/or come to Christ Central in the autumn for the Revelation series! Otherwise, please ask an elder for some further reading material or any questions you may have.

- Is the book of Revelation meant to be taken literally?
 - *The book of Revelation is apocalyptic in nature, meaning that it deals with the future and a time when God will come to judge the world with justice and establish righteousness. It is meant to show why the righteous suffer and why the establishment of God's Kingdom is delayed. Apocalyptic literature emphasises that everything that happens is under God's control, and that God will have the ultimate victory. Apocalyptic literature seeks to unveil God's purposes; having said that, the book of Revelation tends to simply narrate visions without providing an explanation for them. However, John's original readers would have understood much more of the symbolism found in the book than modern-day readers will. There are four major ways to interpret Revelation. None of them are sufficient within themselves to provide a full explanation:*
 - *Preterist: This interprets Revelation by placing it in a contemporary-historical setting, with its major prophecies being fulfilled either in the fall of Jerusalem (AD 70) or the fall of Rome (AD 476). However, it seems clear that John was also talking about a final overthrow of Satan.*
 - *Historicist: This view interprets Revelation by placing it in the reader's own historical timeframe. Therefore, one would interpret Revelation based on his current historical situation. Obviously this means that the interpretation of what each element in Revelation symbolises changes as history changes.*
 - *Futurist (eschatological): This view interprets Revelation as dealing with events yet to come (especially the events from Revelation 4:1 onwards). The letters to the churches are sometimes thought to symbolise the periods of church history leading up to the rapture of the church (the rapture is defined as the time when those Christians who are still alive at the time of Jesus' return are caught up with their resurrected fellow Christians to meet Jesus in the air). This view taken on its own can lend the book wholly irrelevant to its audience of the day.*
 - *Idealist: This view says that the events in Revelation do not refer to any specific event, but to the way that God works in history in general. It takes Revelation as allegorical. In this view, there is no specific historical fulfilment at all.*

John probably did think that the events would happen in the future, but he seems to have felt that they would happen in the much nearer future than they have. Whatever the actual outworking of the events described in Revelation, John meant for the book to have an immediate spiritual impact on its readers. Ultimately, the reader is asked to accept the "essential truthfulness" of the book even though the events may or may not play out exactly as described. However one views the book, some truths remain constant: the end of the world as we know it will come to pass. Satan and his evil forces will be completely destroyed and the righteous will be vindicated. These events have not yet fully come to pass. John sums it up well in

Revelation 1:3. Those who read the words of the book will be blessed in that they will have a heavenly perspective on God's redemptive plan in history and therefore obey what God commands.

- Why was Satan bound for 1000 years? What was the purpose of the 1000 years? And why was he released again? Didn't God know he would wreak havoc again?
 - *Unfortunately, there does not seem to be a clear answer to this question. It is possible that the 1000 years is symbolic only, and that the timeframe does not matter as much as the fact that Satan will lose all his power and influence over humanity during this time. Most scholars agree that Satan is not being punished at this time as much as prevented from harassing people. What we do know is that 1000 years of confinement does not alter Satan's basic plan or character, and 1000 years does not alter man's basic nature to rebel against God.*
- It seems unfair that God would throw people into the lake of fire. Is it really their fault, if Satan deceived them?
 - *Considering this question, in light of the rest of the Bible, we can see that God wants all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:1-4). Although Satan does deceive people, God has made it clear who He is through creation, and then through the specific revelation of Jesus, so that people are "without excuse." (Romans 1:18-32)*
 - *In addition, Romans 6:23 says that what we actually deserve is death – so it could be said that it is more "unfair" that eternal life has been offered to us. Throughout history God has gone to great lengths to be sure that everyone has access to Him – even sending His own son to die.*