THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST TO HIS SERVANT JOHN  
Lesson 1: Introduction Part I

*From this we learn that this [book] is called an Apocalypse, that is, "revelation," which manifests those secrets which are hidden and unknown to the senses, and that unless [Christ] himself reveals them, he who perceives [the revelation] will not have the strength to understand what he sees.* Bishop Apringius of Beja (6th century AD), *Commentary on the Apocalypse 1.1*

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There are five statements that we will be using to guide us in interpreting the last book in the New Testament canon, the book of *Revelation*:

1. **Jesus' revelation to John is linked to the Old Testament and Old Testament symbolism.**  Although there is no single quote from the Old Testament books, the book of *Revelation* is filled with references to events, symbols and persons of the Old Testament.  One scholarly count is that there are 348 allusions which are traceable both by verbal and by contextual connection to the Old Testament.  Of the 348 references approximately 95 are repeated.  That is an average of more than ten references for each chapter.  Bible scholar Merril Tenney breaks them down even further to 57 Scripture references from the Pentateuch, 235 from the Prophets, and 56 from the historical and poetic books of the Old Testament (Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation,* pages 101 and 104).  Therefore, the book of St. John's visions cannot be properly interpreted without studying the references to the Old Testament events and the symbolism revealed in Old Testament Scripture.
2. **Jesus' revelation to John is revealed during heavenly liturgy**. St. John received his visions "on the Lord's Day" ([Rev 1:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation1.htm#v10)) when he was "caught up" into the heavenly assembly where angels and saints worship God and the Lamb ([Rev 4:1-5:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation4.htm#v1)).  Throughout the book of *Revelation* the reader is aware that St. John is present in the heavenly assembly witnessing heavenly liturgy at the same time that the visions are revealed to him.
3. **Jesus' revelation to John is a covenant lawsuit against Judah, prophesizing destruction for covenant abuses and violations.**  The book of *Revelation* is a covenant lawsuit in much the same way God's prophets Isaiah, Hosea and Jeremiah delivered covenant lawsuits against the Northern Kingdom of Israel prior to the Assyrian conquest in 722 BC and the Southern Kingdom of Judah prior to the Babylonian conquest, which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/6 BC (i.e., [Is 1:1-9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah1.htm#v1); [34:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah34.htm#v8); [Hos 2:4/2:2-15/13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hosea/hosea2.htm#v2); [4:1-10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hosea/hosea4.htm#v1); [12:3/2-3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hosea/hosea12.htm#v2); [Jer 1:14-16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jeremiah1.htm#v14); [4:3-8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jeremiah4.htm#v3); [11:1-17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jeremiah11.htm#v1)).  The covenant lawsuit in *Revelation* is a judgment that was announced by Jesus two days before His unjust trial and crucifixion in [Matthew 23:33-36](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew23.htm#v33) when He prophesied that God's judgment against the murder of all God's righteous prophets by the Old Covenant people would recoil on those of His generation in Judah/Judea: *In truth I tell you, it will all recoil on this generation* ([Mt 23:36](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew23.htm#v36)).
4. **Jesus' revelation to John reveals Jesus Christ as Bridegroom of the Church, King of Kings and the High Priest of the heavenly Sanctuary.**Jesus is the King of the Kingdom of God He came to establish on earth ([Mt 4:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew4.htm#v17); [Mk 1:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark1.htm#v15)), and He serves in the heavenly Sanctuary as both the sacrificial Lamb and the High Priest of the New Covenant people of God ([Heb 8:1-3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hebrews/hebrews8.htm#v1); [Rev 5:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation5.htm#v6)).
5. **Jesus' revelation to John is the unveiling of the New Israel -** the New Covenant Bride is the universal Church and her role in God's plan for man's eternal salvation ([Rev 19:1-9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation19.htm#v1); [21:1-2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation21.htm#v1)).

The book of *Revelation* of is written in common Greek.  The Greek title is literally "The Apocalypse of John" or "The Revelation to John."  The word "apocalypse" is merely a transliteration into English of the Greek word *apokalypsis,* which means "revelation" or "revealing."  The title *Revelation* is from the Latin *revelation,* meaning "an uncovering; revelation."   Often the term apocalypse is confused with the Greek word *apocryphal*, which means "hidden" and refers to books for which divine authorship is believed to be falsely claimed.  Protestants apply the term to the seven Old Testament books that were dropped from the Jewish Old Testament canon in the Middle Ages and from the Protestant canon in the sixteenth century AD, but Catholics refer to those seven texts as *Deuterocanonical*, meaning "second canon."

Some *apocryphal* texts may also be *apocalyptic* literature, writings which focus on the eschatological future, i.e., divine judgment and the end of world history when the powers of darkness launch a final struggle against God.  Some narrative apocryphal literature that are non-canonical and therefore not judged to be Holy Spirit inspired texts that refer to events in the Old Testament are: *3rd Maccabees,* the *Book of Jubilees,* the *Books of Adam and Eve*, and the *Martyrdom of Isaiah*.  Some New Testament era apocryphal (non-canonical) texts are the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Philip*, the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, and the *Gospel of Judas* (these are Gnostic documents which have always been judged by the Church as heresy). Other books considered by the Church to be non-canonical but worthy of study are the *History of Joseph the Carpenter*, and the *Protoevangelium of St. James.*  Books that are both apocryphal (non-canonical) and apocalyptic (focused on the final struggle in the "end times") are the *Books of Enoch*, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, and the *Assumption of Moses*.  Apocalyptic books of the Old Testament that are accepted in the canon include: the books ofthe prophets [*Daniel*](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel.htm), [*Zechariah*](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/zechariah/zechariah.htm), [*Joel*](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joel/joel.htm)([2:1-11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joel/joel2.htm#v1):[4:1-21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joel/joel4.htm#v1)), [*Isaiah* (chapters 13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah13.htm) and [24-27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah24.htm)), [*Ezekiel* (chapters 38-39](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel38.htm)), and [*Zephaniah* (chapter 1:14-18)](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/zephaniah/zephaniah1.htm#v14).  The books of the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel have strong ties to Revelation.  The single example of this type of literature in the New Testament is the *Apocalypse of John*, also known as *The Revelation to John*, or the book of *Revelation*.

As a literary form apocalyptic literature became popular about 200 years before the birth of Jesus and remained popular until about 200 years after His Resurrection.  These works are characterized by the revelation of future catastrophic events that mark the end of time.  The visions associated with these revelations reveal the future in complicated symbolism which is sometimes, but not always, explained. The works of non-canonical apocalyptic literature have these major theses in common:

1. Hopeless, "end of the world" message
2. Obscure use of symbolism
3. Vivid imagery

However, St. John's *Apocalypse/ Revelation* is unlike non-canonical apocalyptic literature:

1. John's use of symbolism and imagery is not obscure like other texts. His imagery is firmly rooted in Old Testament texts.
2. Unlike the pessimism found in other apocalyptic texts (i.e. the world will get worse and worse until it ends) John does not give up on world history but sees all of human history as the scene of divine redemption and the triumph of "The Lamb."
3. John's concern is with ethical conduct as his readers take an active part in the unfolding of revealed prophecy ([Rev 1:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation1.htm#v3); [16:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation16.htm#v15); [22:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation22.htm#v14)).
4. Unlike the non-canonical apocalyptic texts John's work is above all revealed divine prophecy, as St. John himself testifies ([Rev. 1:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation1.htm#v3); [10:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation10.htm#v11); [22:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation22.htm#v7), [10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation22.htm#v10), [18-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation22.htm#v18)).
5. Jewish apocalyptic literature of the first two centuries AD longs for "justice" in the destruction of the oppressive Roman Empire.  Christians did not want to destroy Rome; instead they wanted to convert Rome and to use the power of the Roman Empire to spread Christianity to the ends of the earth in fulfillment of Jesus' divine commission to His disciples in [Matthew 28:19-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew28.htm#v19).

Biblical scholar David Chilton sums up these differences with the statement: *The apocalyptists said: The world is coming to an end: Give Up!  The Biblical prophets said: The world is coming to a beginning: Get to work!"* (Chilton, *Days of Vengeance,* page 26).

It is important to understand that in the book of *Revelation*, as in other parts of sacred Scripture, the "passing away" of heaven and earth is not necessarily the end of the world as we know it, nor is it necessarily the dissolution of the existing universe.  It was St. Peter' message in his great homily given during the Jewish Feast of Shavuot / Weeks (known as the Feast of Pentecost in the first century AD; see [Acts 2:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts2.htm#v1)) when he quoted from [Joel 3:1-5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joel/joel3.htm#v1) ([Acts 2:16-21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts2.htm#v16)), announcing that the "Last Days" have come to mankind with the apocalyptic event of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension.  St. Peter's message to the crowd of Jews on their way to the Temple to celebrate the feast that commemorated the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai was that those of his generation were now living in the "new and final" age prophesied by the prophet Isaiah as the time of "new heavens and a new earth" ([Is 65:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah65.htm#v17); [66:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah66.htm#v22)).

St. John's revelation is apocalyptic literature concerned with the apocalyptic events as they unfolded in the time after Jesus' ascension to the Father as the "gate" or "door of heaven" now stood open ([Rev. 4:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation4.htm#v1))'the "door" of heaven having been closed since man's fall from grace in Eden but an event now made possible through Christ's sacrifice on the altar of the Cross (Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1026).   In St. John's visions God's judgment unfolds as prophesied by Jesus in the synoptic Gospels'there is a "mini-apocalyptic" prophecy in every Gospel except the *Gospel of St. John*, perhaps because his prophecy was intended to be revealed in a separate book of sacred Scripture'the *Revelation* of Jesus Christ to His servant John.

**The Synoptic Gospels versus Revelation The Judgment on Jerusalem**

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| **REVELATION Chapter 6** | **MATTHEW Chapter 24** | **MARK Chapter 13** | **LUKE Chapter 21** |
| 1. Wars: [verses 1-2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation6.htm#v1) | Wars: [verse 6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew24.htm#v6) | Wars: [verse 7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark13.htm#v7) | Wars: [verse 10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke21.htm#v10) |
| 2. International Strife: [verses 3-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation6.htm#v3) | International Strife: [verse 7a](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew24.htm#v7) | International Strife: [verse 8a](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark13.htm#v8) | International Strife: [verse 10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke21.htm#v10) |
| 3. Famine: [verses 5-6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation6.htm#v5) | Famine: [verse 7b](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew24.htm#v7) | Famine: [verse 8c](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark13.htm#v8) | Famine: [verse 11b](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke21.htm#v11) |
| 4. Pestilence: [verses 7-8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation6.htm#v7) |  |  | Pestilence: [verse 11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke21.htm#v11) |
| 5. Persecution: [verses 9-11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation6.htm#v9) | Persecution: [verses 9-13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew24.htm#v9) | Persecution: [verses 9-13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark13.htm#v9) | Persecution [verses 12-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke21.htm#v12) |
| 6. Earthquakes [verses 12-17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation6.htm#v12) | Earthquakes [verse 7c](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew24.htm#v7) | Earthquakes [verse 8b](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark13.htm#v8) | Earthquakes [Verse 11a](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke21.htm#v11) |
| 7. Judgment & destruction [verses 12-17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation6.htm#v12) | Judgment & destruction [verses 15-31](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew24.htm#v15) | Judgment & destruction [verses 14-27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark13.htm#v14) | Judgment & destruction [verses 20-27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke21.htm#v20) |
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**Views on Authorship and Authenticity through the Centuries**

Many modern scholars believe that the author of this revelation is not St. John Zebedee, the Apostle.  The opening verses of the book identify the author as Jesus Christ ([Rev 1:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation1.htm#v1)), and the receiver and recorder of the revelation identifies himself as "John" five times: [Rev 1:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation1.htm#v1); [1:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation1.htm#v4); [1:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation1.htm#v9); [21:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation21.htm#v1); and [22:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation22.htm#v8) (all Bible quotes in this lesson are from the *New Jerusalem Bible* translation, all links are teh New American Bible):

1. *A revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him so that He could tell His servants what is now to take place very soon; He sent His angel to make it known to His servant John, and John has borne witness to the Word of God and to the witness of Jesus Christ, everything that he saw* (Rev 1:1).
2. *John, to the seven churches of Asia...* (Rev 1:4).
3. *I, John, your brother and partner in hardships...* (Rev 1:9).
4. *I, John, saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride dressed for her husband* (Rev 21:2).
5. *I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things* (Rev 22:8).

**The Earliest Testimonies** **Concerning Authorship** **in the Second Century AD:**

* St. Justin: *There was a certain man named John, one of the Apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation...* (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 81, 3).  St. Justin's testimony is especially valuable because Justin was converted to Christianity in Ephesus in c. 135AD.  Not only is Ephesus one of the seven Churches to which the book was written ([Rev 2:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation2.htm#v1)), but Ephesus was by tradition and by the testimony of the Fathers of the Church the home of St. John the Apostle for many years where he served as bishop until his death.  Justin testified that St. John Zebedee the Apostle was the inspired writer of the book of *Revelation* only a few decades after St. John wrote down his visions.
* St. Melito, Bishop of Sardis, a contemporary of St. Justin and bishop to another of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation ([Rev 3:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation3.htm#v1)), wrote a commentary on the book of *Revelation*.  Only fragments of his commentary have survived, but in Bishop Eusebius' 4th century AD history of the Church he refers to St. Melito's testimony that John the Apostle was the author (*Church History*, IV, 26, 2).
* St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, made extensive use of *Revelation* in his writings and in c. 180 AD ascribed authorship of the book to "John, the Lord's disciple" (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies 4.20.*11).  He testified that St. John was the author, having written the book of *Revelation* while a prisoner on the island of Patmos.  Irenaeus' testimony is important because he was a disciple of St. Polycarp (69/70-155 AD) who was a disciple of St. John the Apostle.  St. Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna, one of the seven churches to receive letters in from Jesus Christ ([Rev 2:1-11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation2.htm#v1)) and the only church to receive high praise with no criticism.  The point is that Irenaeus' testimony is very valuable because he is a second generation disciple with a direct connection to the traditions of St. John.
* Muratorian Fragment:  This document dates to c. 155 AD*.*It contains the oldest list of canonical New Testament books and records: *For John too, in the Apocalypse, though he writes to only seven churches, yet speaks to all* (Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers,* vol. 1 page 107).

**Third Century Testimonies on the Authorship of *Revelation***:

* Biblical scholar Origen of Alexandria, head of the Alexandrian Catechetical School (c. 185-253/254 AD), testified that the author of *Revelation* was the man who wrote the fourth Gospel and had the good fortune to rest his head on Jesus' breast. (Origen, *Commentary of the Gospel of John* 1, 14; 2.45; 5.3).
* Tertullian (c. 155/160 - 240/250 AD), Roman lawyer and Catholic apologist, wrote that paradise was revealed to St. John is his visions (*The Soul, 55, 3* cited in Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. 1,* page 144).  He indentified St. John the Apostle as the witness to the visions (*Against Marcion* 3, 14) and he wrote c. 220 AD his explicit belief that it was none other than St. John the Apostle and Evangelist wrote down the visions he received from Christ in *Revelation* while a prisoner on the island of Patmos (Tertullian, *Against Heresies 3.24*).
* St. Hippolytus (c. 235 AD) wrote: *the blessed John, Apostle and disciple of the Lord* authored *Revelation* (Hippolytus, *On the Antichrist 36*).
* A Roman priest named Caius suggested Cerinthus, a prominent proponent of the Gnostic heresy and a contemporary of St. John, was the author (Eusebius, *Church History*, III, 28,2).
* Dionysius of Alexandria (d. 264 AD) denied the book's canonicity because the millenarianist heresy used the *Apocalypse*/ *Revelation* to support its views (Dionysius of Alexandria*, Ex libro de promission,* 3-7).  He used arguments based on the differences he believed he identified between the style and vocabulary of the *Apocalypse/ Revelation* and the *Gospel of St. John*.
* Other writers of the same period called *alogoi* disputed St. John's authorship and the authenticity of the *Apocalypse* because they rejected St. John's teachings of Christ as the divine *Logos* (St. Epiphanius, *Heresies, 51, 1-35*).

**Views on the Canonicity and Authorship of *Revelation* in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries:**

* A quote in Bishop Eusebius' (d. 340 AD) fourth century *Church History* muddied the waters concerning the authorship of *Revelation* by his interpretation of a statement by second century AD Bishop Papias of Hierapolis (d. c. 130 AD): *I shall not hesitate to set down for you along with my interpretations whatever I learned well from the presbyters and recall clearly, being thoroughly confident of their truth.  Unlike most people, I do not delight in those who talk a great deal, but in those who teach the truth; nor in those who relate the commandments of others, but in those who relate the commandments given by the Lord to the faith, and which are derived from Truth itself.  And then too, when anyone came along who had been a follower of the presbyters, I would inquire about the presbyters' discourses:  what was said by Andrew, or by Peter, or by Philip, or by Thomas or James or by John or Matthew, or by any other of the Lord's disciples; and what Aristion and the Presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord say.  It did not seem to me that I could get so much profit from the contents of books as from a living and abiding voice.* Eusebius interpreted Papias' statementto suggest that there were two men named "John" in the early Church at Ephesus and that it is uncertain whether St. John Zebedee or the other John wrote *Revelation*.  Eusebius wrote: *Here it is worth noting that he twice mentions the name of John: the first in connection with Peter and James and Matthew and the rest of the Apostles, clearly referring to the evangelist; but the other John he mentions after an interval, and groups him with others outside the number of the Apostles, placing Aristion before him; and he distinctly calls him a presbyter.  In this way he makes it quite evident that their statement is true, who say that there were in Asia two persons of that name; and that there are in Ephesus two tombs, each of which even to the present time is called the tomb of John.  It is important to take note of this: because if anyone would not prefer the first, then probably it was the second who saw the Revelation which bears the name of John* (Eusebius, *Church History, book III, ch. 39*).

Eusebius' statement is far from clear and his thinking may have been colored by the danger posed by the heresy of millenarianism.  Some modern scholars interpret Eusebius' statement to say that he regarded St. John the Apostle, John the Evangelist and John the author of the *Apocalypse* as one and the same John but then adds that if anyone prefers to consider that the Apostle-Evangelist John is not the author of the *Apocalypse,* then, in this view, it is probable that the author of the *Apocalypse* is "Presbyter John."  Other scholars point out that there is only one John'the Apostle and presbyter.

* St. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria (d. 373 AD), accepted the book as canonical and recognized St. John the Apostle as author.  He cited the book in his fight against Arianism (*Oratio II Contra Arianos, 23*).
* St. Basil (d. 379 AD) accepted the authenticity of the book.
* St. Gregory of Nyssa (d. 389 AD) accepted authenticity of the book.
* The Catechetical School of Antioch denied both authenticity and canonicity.
* The Eastern Church Fathers: St. Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem (d. 386 AD), St. John Chrysostom,  Bishop of Constantinople (d. 407 AD), and Theodoret of Cyr (d. 466 AD) opposed the unanimous acceptance of the Latin Church to the canonicity and authorship by John the Apostle of the *Apocalypse/ Revelation* as well as the *Epistles of John* 1-3.
* The regional gathering of bishops known as the Council of Hippo (393 AD) and Council of Carthage (397 AD) pronounced the authenticity of St. John as the author and canonicity of the *Apocalypse of St. John* (*Revelation*). These early Church councils were not councils composed of the entire Magisterium of the worldwide body of the Catholic Church but were local councils which also addressed serious issues that concerned the universal Church.
* St. Jerome, the great Biblical scholar, (d. 420 AD) identified St. John the Apostle as the author of the *Apocalypse/ Revelation*.
* St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, theologian and scholar, (d. 430 AD) identified St. John the Apostle as the author of the *Apocalypse/ Revelation.*
* In the fifth century AD the churches of Syria, Cappadocia and Palestine finally include the *Apocalypse/ Revelation* in their canon.

**Views on the Canonicity and Authorship of the book of *Revelation* in the Sixth through Sixteenth Centuries**:

* Authenticity of the book was undisputed in these councils: Council of Toledo 633, Council of Florence 1431-39, and Council of Trent 1545-63.
* Bishop Apringius of Beja, sixth century AD bishop serving the Church in Iberia (Spain) wrote a commentary on *Revelation* and attributed authorship to St. John as the writer of the visions: *It was during this time that he ordered John, the Apostle of our Lord, Jesus Christ, to be transported into exile, and he was taken to the island of Patmos, and while there confirmed this writing* (Apringius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse 1.9*).
* Church historian and Biblical scholar Bede the Venerable (c. 672/673-735 AD), who was considered to be one of the most learned men of his age, identified St. John the Apostle as the author in his commentary on the *Apocalypse/ Revelation*: *History notes that John had been banished to this island by the emperor Domitian on account of the gospel, and that then he was, appropriately, allowed to penetrate the secrets of heaven while [at the same time] prohibited from leaving a small space of the earth* (Bede, *Explanation of the Apocalypse 1.9*).
* Erasmus (1466-1536) priest, doctor of divinity, and great Renaissance humanist, expressed doubts about the canonicity of *Revelation.*
* Martin Luther (1483-1546), excommunicated priest and leader of the Protestant Reformation initially argued against authenticity but later changed his view (16th century).

**The Views of the Eighteenth Century Rationalists:**

These scholars rejected all prophecy outright and therefore rejected the book of *Revelation*.  They denied St. John's authorship and used arguments based on what they considered internal evidence (some similar to those put forth by Dionysius of Alexandria) and on the basis of the passage in Bishop Eusebius' *Church History*.

**The Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Views**:

There is general disagreement among scholars - some Protestant scholars have expressed the opinion that the author of the book of *Revelation* could not be the same man as the author of the fourth Gospel given the differences in style and language. Other scholars, mainly Catholic Biblical scholars, accept that John the Apostle is the author given the evidence of the writings of the early Church Fathers and the strength of tradition that supports St. John the Apostle as the receiver of the visions in the book of *Revelation.*  Catholic scholars also point out that the differences in subject matter between the fourth Gospel and the book of *Revelation* can account for the differences in style (it was also common for the Apostles, as Bishops today, to use a secretary to record their letters and to make literary corrections; i.e. [Rom 16:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans16.htm#v22)), and they also point to the similarity in imagery between the two works, like the "living water" imagery and other unique passages in both books.

**Arguments against Johannine Authorship**:

* Language and style differences
* Possible explanations:
  1. The author's use of an amanuensis (secretary): i.e. see [Romans 16:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans16.htm#v22); [1 Corinthians 16:21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1corinthians/1corinthians16.htm#v21); [Colossians 4:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/colossians/colossians4.htm#v18); [1 Peter 5:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1peter/1peter5.htm#v12).
  2. Differences in subject matter reflect style (the unique style of 1st century AD apocalyptic literature).

**Arguments in Favor of Johannine Authorship:**

The use of Johannine vocabulary, imagery, and theological themes are unique to the *Gospel of St. John* and *Revelation*.  Note: in quoting these Bible passages from the *New Jerusalem Bible* all the underlining is my emphasis.

1. **Water imagery**:
   1. The term "living water" is used by St. John as a metaphor for God the Holy Spirit. See the [Gospel of John chapter 4:7-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john4.htm#v7) in the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well: *Jesus replied to her: If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me something to drink,' you would have been the one to ask, and He would have given you living water* ([Jn 4:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john4.htm" \l "v10)).  The same term is used by the woman in reply to Jesus in [John 4:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john4.htm#v11): *'You have no bucket, sir,' she answered, 'and the well is deep: how do you get this living water?* Jesus' reply is: *...the water that I shall give him would become in him a spring of water, welling up for eternal life* ([Jn 4:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john4.htm" \l "v13)).  Also see [John 7:37-39](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john7.htm#v37) when Jesus announced in the Temple on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles: *Let anyone who is thirsty come to me!  Let anyone who believes in me come and drink!  As Scripture says, "From his heart shall flow streams of living water."  He was speaking of the spirit which those who believed in Him were to receive; for there was no Spirit as yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified.*
   2. Compare those passages from the fourth Gospel to the use of water imagery in *Revelation*: ([Rev 7:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation7.htm#v17))*...because the Lamb who is at the heart of the throne will be their shepherd and will guide them to springs of* *living water...,* and in [Rev 22:1-2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation22.htm#v1) (Trinity is expressed in this verse): *Then the angel showed me the river of life, rising from the throne of God and of the Lamb and flowing crystal-clear.*  Also see the connection between "water" and "thirst" in *Revelation* and the *Gospel of St. John*: *The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'  Let everyone who listens answer, 'Come!'  Then let all who are thirsty come: all who want it may have the water of life, and have it free* ([Rev 22:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation22.htm#v17))*.* Compare the similarity between that verse and Jesus' statement in the *Gospel of St.* [*John 7:37*](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john7.htm#v37)*: In the last day, the great day of the festival, Jesus stood and cried out: 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink!'*
2. **The "Word of God" (Logos)** **imagery:**  
   The "Word of God" imagery in the prologue of the *Gospel of John* and in the *First Letter of St. John:* 
   1. *In the beginning was the Word, and* *the Word was with God and the Word was God* ([Jn 1:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john1.htm" \l "v1)).
   2. *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father* ([Jn 1:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john1.htm" \l "v14)).
   3. *Something which has existed since the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have watched and touched with our own hands, the Word of life this is our theme* ([1 Jn 1:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1john/1john1.htm#v1))*.*

Compare those passages with "word of God" imagery in *Revelation*:

* 1. *A revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him so that He could tell His servants what is now to take place very soon; He sent His angel to make it known to His servant John, and John has borne witness to the Word of God and to the witness of Jesus Christ everything that He saw* ([Rev 1:1-2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation1.htm#v1)).
  2. *And now I saw heaven open, and a white horse appear; its rider was called Trustworthy and True; in uprightness He judges and makes war.  His eyes were flames of fire, and He was crowned with many coronets; the name written on Him was known only to Himself, his cloak was soaked in blood.  He is known by the name, The Word of God*  ([Rev. 19:11-13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation19.htm" \l "v11)).

The only other use of "Word" in the Bible in this theological sense is in [*2 Titus* 4:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2titus/2titus4.htm#v2)).

1. **"The Lamb of God" imagery**:   
   "Lamb of God" imagery in the *Gospel of John:* 
   1. *Look, there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world* ([Jn 1:29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john1.htm" \l "v29)).
   2. *Look, there is the Lamb of God* ([Jn 1:36](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john1.htm" \l "v36)).

This comparison with Christ is not found in the Gospels of Sts. Matthew, Mark or Luke.   
Compare these passages with the use of the same imagery in *Revelation*:

* 1. *I saw a Lamb standing that seemed to have been sacrificed* ([Rev 5:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation5.htm#v6)).
  2. *The Lamb came forward to take the scroll...* ([Rev 4:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation4.htm#v7)).
  3. *Then in my vision, I saw the Lamb break one of the seven seals...*([Rev 6:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation6.htm" \l "v1)).
  4. *I could not see any temple in the city since the Lord God almighty and the Lamb were themselves the temple, and the city did not need the sun or the moon for light since it was lit by the radiant glory of God and the Lamb was a lighted torch for it* ([Rev 21:22-23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation21.htm#v22)).
  5. "Lamb" imagery connected to Christ is used 30 times in *Revelation.*

1. ***"*Light" imagery:**  
   In Johannine writings "light" is a metaphor for Jesus Christ.  Light imagery in the *Gospel of John* and in *1 John*:
   1. *What has come into being in Him was life, life that was* ***the light*** *of men* ([Jn 1:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john1.htm" \l "v4)).
   2. *The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone* ([Jn 1:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john1.htm" \l "v9))*.*
   3. *And the judgment is this: though the light has come into the world people have preferred darkness to the light because their deeds were evil* ([Jn 3:19-21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john3.htm" \l "v19)).
   4. And [John 8:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john8.htm#v12) and [9:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john9.htm#v5): ([8:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john8.htm#v12)): *When Jesus spoke again to the people He said: " I AM the light of the world: anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark but will have the light of life"* (J[n 8:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john8.htm#v12)).
   5. *As long as I AM in the world I AM the light of the world* ([Jn 9:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john9.htm" \l "v5)).
   6. Also see [John 11:9-10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john11.htm#v9); [John 12:35](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john12.htm#v35), [36](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john12.htm#v36) and [46](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john12.htm#v46); [1John 1:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1john/1john1.htm#v5), [7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1john/1john1.htm#v7); [2:8-10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1john/1john2.htm#v8).

Compare with these passages with "light" imagery in *Revelation:*

* 1. *I could not see any temple in the city since the Lord God almighty and the Lamb were themselves the temple, and the city did not need the sun or the moon for light since it was lit by the radiant glory of God and the Lamb was a lighted torch for it* ([Rev 21:22-23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation21.htm#v22)).
  2. *The nations will come to its light and the kings of the earth will bring it their treasures.  Its gates will never be closed by day'and there will be no night there...* ([Rev 21:24-25](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation21.htm#v24)).
  3. *And night will be abolished; they will not need lamplight or sunlight, because the Lord God will be shinning on them* ([Rev 22:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation22.htm#v5)).

**The Symbolic use of numbers in the *Gospel of John* and *Revelation*:**

1. Both books are arranged in a series of sevens: The number seven is used fifty-two times in the book of *Revelation* and the first chapter of the fourth Gospel builds to the climax of the "seventh day" using the words "the next day" and "on the third day" until the wedding at Cana in chapter two: day #2 = [Jn 1:29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john1.htm#v29); day #3 = [Jn 1:35](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john1.htm#v35); day #4 = [Jn 1:43](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john1.htm#v43); "On the third day" ([Jn 2:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john2.htm" \l "v1)); four days plus three days = seven days.
2. John's Gospel begins the countdown to the Crucifixion of Christ by announcing in that it is six days to the Passover ([Jn 12:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john12.htm" \l "v1)).  Six is the number of man and symbolizes man in rebellion against God.  Jesus will be crucified the day after the Passover sacrifice, on a Friday, the sixth day of the week, but it is the seventh day from St. John's announcement in [Jn 12:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john12.htm#v1).
3. In *Revelation* the word "seventh' is used five times and a phrase using the number(s) seven is used thirty-five (5x7) times.  There are also multiple sevens as in the seven letters to the seven churches in *Revelation* chapters 2-3. According to Hebrew tradition every number has a symbolic significance.  Three, seven, ten, and twelve are known as the "perfect" numbers.  Seven is the second perfect number signifying fullness and perfection, especially spiritual perfection; it is also the number of covenant union and it is the number of the Holy Spirit.  For a list of sevens in the book of *Revelation* see the chart below:

For more information on the symbolic meaning of numbers in the Bible, please see the document "The Significance of Numbers in Scripture" in the Documents Section under the subtitle "Scripture Study" and a summary of the symbolism of numbers in the Bible in the appendix to this lesson.

**Both the *Gospel of St. John* and *Revelation* are structured in terms of the Holy Days of the Jewish Liturgical Calendar and Heavenly Liturgy (sacred time and sacred space):**

1. The *Gospel of John* revolves around the Old Covenant liturgical calendar and the liturgical feasts in which three Passovers divide Jesus ministry.  The first Passover is in [2:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john2.htm#v14), the second in [6:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john6.htm#v4), and the third during Jesus last visit to Jerusalem in [12:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john12.htm#v1). Other feasts that are mentioned are the sacred feasts of Pentecost'not named but assumed to be this feast by most scholars ([Jn 5:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john5.htm" \l "v1)), Tabernacles ([Jn 7:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john7.htm" \l "v2)) and the national feast of Hanukkah/Dedication ([Jn 10:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john10.htm" \l "v22)).
2. The majority of St. John's visions are given to him in the heavenly Sanctuary during heavenly liturgy (beginning from the time John is taken up into heaven in [Revelation 4:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation4.htm#v1)).
3. In his revelation St. John is involved in time in two directions: the time in which he was living and through his visions he is projected forward in time to the judgment on Jerusalem, the Second Advent of Christ, the Final Judgment, and the creation of the New Jerusalem at the end of time.

Most, though not all, Christian scholars agree that letters sent to the seven churches in Asia Minor in the first three chapters of *Revelation* describe the problems and triumphs of the historical faith communities that flourished when St. John was bishop of Ephesus, messages that have remained meaningful to the Church down through the centuries and meaningful to Christians in all generations.  Most scholars also agree that the last half of chapter 20 ([verses 11-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation20.htm#v11)) and all of chapters [21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation21.htm) and [22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation22.htm) apply to the end times: the Second Advent of Christ, Judgement Day, the consummation of all things, and the eternal life of the saints with God. But, the time frame of the middle part of the book in chapters [4:1-20:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation4.htm#v1) has been, and continues to be, in dispute.  In lesson 2 we will discuss the different schools of thought for interpreting the time-frame of the unfolding events recorded in the book of *Revelation*.

The Magisterium, composed of the Council of Bishops and the reigning Pope, has pronounced on both the authenticity and canonicity of the *Apocalypse/Revelation* in the councils of Hippo (393 AD), Carthage (397 and 419 AD), Florence (1441 AD) and Trent (1545-63). At Trent the Ecumenical Council, in the decree *De Canonicis Scripturis* (April 8, 1546), gave a formal definition of the "Canon of the Bible" and in accepting the list approved in the previous councils, which included the last New Testament book, *Revelation*.  However, even though the Church has dogmatically defined the book of *Revelation* as canonical, it has not pronounced as strongly on who wrote it (*The Navarre Bible Commentary: Revelation* page 15).

**An Important Key to Interpreting the Visions of John**

A significant key to unlocking the meaning of St. John's extraordinary visions may be found in the Old Testament books of the sixth century BC prophets Ezekiel and Daniel.  The books of *Ezekiel* and *Daniel* resemble the book of *Revelation* more than any of the other Old Testament books.  This Old Testament link will be one of the main themes of our study.

Parallels between the visions in the book of *Revelation* and the visions of the prophet Ezekiel in the Old Testament book of *Ezekiel:*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **The Vision** | **Ezekiel** | **Revelation** |
| 1.  The throne vision | [Chapter 1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel1.htm) | [Chapter 4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation4.htm) |
| 2.  The book opened and eaten | [Chapters 2:9-3:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel2.htm#v9) | [Chapter 5:7-10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation5.htm#v7); [10:8-9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation10.htm#v8) |
| 3.  The four plagues | [Chapter 5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel5.htm) | [Chapter 6:1-8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation6.htm#v1) |
| 4.  Those slain under the altar | [Chapter 6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel6.htm) | [Chapter 6:9-11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation6.htm#v9) |
| 5.   The wrath of God | [Chapter 7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel7.htm) | [Chapter 6:12-17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation6.htm#v12) |
| 6.   The seal on the Saint's foreheads | [Chapter 9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel9.htm) | [Chapter 7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation7.htm) |
| 7.   The coals from the altar | [Chapter 10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel10.htm) | [Chapter 8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation8.htm) |
| 8.   The 1/3 destruction | [Chapter 5:1-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel5.htm#v1) &[12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel5.htm#v12) | [Chapter 8:6-12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation8.htm#v6) |
| 9.   No more delay | [Chapter 12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel12.htm) | [Chapter 10:1-7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation10.htm#v1) |
| 10. The eating of the book | [Chapter 2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel2.htm) | [Chapter 10:8-11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation10.htm#v8) |
| 11.  Prophecy against the Nations | [Chapters 25-32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel25.htm) | [Chapter 10:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation10.htm#v11) |
| 12.  The measuring of the Temple | [Chapters 40-43](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel40.htm) | [Chapter 11:1-2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation11.htm#v1) |
| 13.  Comparing Jerusalem to Sodom | [Chapter 16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel16.htm) | [Chapter 11:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation11.htm#v8) |
| 14.  The cup of wrath | [Chapter 23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel23.htm) | [Chapter 14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation14.htm) |
| 15.  The vine of the land | [Chapter 15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel15.htm) | [Chapter 14:18-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation14.htm#v18) |
| 16.  The great harlot | [Chapters 16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel16.htm), [23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel23.htm) | [Chapters 17-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation17.htm) |
| 17.  The lament sung over the city | [Chapter 27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel27.htm) | [Chapter 18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation18.htm) |
| 18.  The scavenger's feast | [Chapter 39](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel39.htm) | [Chapter 19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation19.htm) |
| 19.  The resurrection | [Chapter 37](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel37.htm) | [Chapter 20:4-6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation20.htm#v4) |
| 20.  The Battle of Gog and Magog | [Chapter 38-39](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel38.htm) | [Chapter 20:7-9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation20.htm#v7) |
| 21.  The New Jerusalem | [Chapters 40-48](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel40.htm) | [Chapter 21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation21.htm) |
| 22.  The River of Life | [Chapter 47](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel47.htm) | [Chapter 22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation22.htm) |
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Parallels between the visions in the book of *Revelation* and the visions of the prophet Daniel in the Old Testament book of *Daniel:*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **The Vision** | **Daniel** | **Revelation** |
| 1.  Three and a half time period (a time, two times and half a time) | [Chapter 12:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel12.htm#v7) | [Chapter 11:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation11.htm#v9), [11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation11.htm#v11) |
| 2.  The 10 horns | [Chapter 7:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel7.htm#v8) | [Chapters 12:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation12.htm#v3); [13:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation13.htm#v1); [17:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation17.htm#v3), [8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation17.htm#v8) |
| 3.  The Leopard, the Bear, and the Lion | [Chapter 7:4-6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel7.htm#v4) | [Chapter 13:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation13.htm#v2) |
| 4.  The Beast mouthing boasting and blasphemies | [Chapter 7:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel7.htm#v8), [11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel7.htm#v11) | [Chapter 13:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation13.htm#v5) |
| 5.  The war against the Saints | [Chapter 7:21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel7.htm#v21) | [Chapter 13:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation13.htm#v7) |
| 6.  The worship of the Beast's statue | [Chapter 3:5-7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel3.htm#v5), [15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel3.htm#v15) | [Chapter 13:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation13.htm#v15) |
| 7.  The Son of Man coming on the Glory-Cloud | [Chapter 7:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel7.htm#v13) | [Chapter 1:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation1.htm#v7) & [14:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation14.htm#v14) |
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The book of *Revelation* only identifies the receiver of the visions as a man named "John," however, St. John Zebedee's identification with the book was virtually universal in the early centuries of the Church, as St. Justin Martyr wrote: *John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation that was made to him* (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho,* 81).  If St. John Zebedee is indeed the writer of the book of *Revelation,* then his life and experiences recorded in Scripture and in the writings of the Church Fathers are relevant to the study of this book of amazing visions.

**St. John the Apostle in the New Testament**

* John son of Zebedee, in Hebrew Yehohanan ben Zabiyah (transliterated as "Yahweh's faithful/merciful) love son of Yahweh's gift"), was the son of the Galilean fisherman Zebedee and his wife Salome ([Mk 14:40](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark14.htm#v40) and [16:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark16.htm#v17)).
* He may have been one of John the Baptists' disciples and was possibly the "other" disciple who went with St. Andrew to where Jesus was staying and spent the day in conversation with Him ([Jn 1:35-42](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john1.htm" \l "v35)).  In John's Gospel the Apostle John is never named.  The writer of the fourth Gospel always refers to himself as "the other disciple" and as "the one Jesus loved" (sometimes translated as "the beloved disciple").For references to the writer of the fourth Gospel as the "other" see [Jn 18:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john18.htm#v16); [20:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john20.htm#v2), [3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john20.htm#v3), [4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john20.htm#v4), [8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john20.htm#v8), and [25](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john20.htm#v25). For references to "the one Jesus loved" or "the beloved disciple" see [Jn 13:23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john13.htm#v23); [19:26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john19.htm#v26); [20:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john20.htm#v2); [21:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john21.htm#v7), [20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john21.htm#v20).
* The Apostle John gave up everything to follow Jesus: *He* [Jesus] *walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James and John.  They were in a boat with their father Zebedee mending their nets.  He called them and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him* ([Mt 4:21-22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew4.htm#v21)).  [Mark 1:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark1.htm#v20) addsthat they*...left their father and their hired men*...to follow Jesus.
* John is named in all the lists of the Apostles ([Mt 10:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew10.htm#v2); [Mk 3:16-17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark3.htm#v16); [Lk 6:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke6.htm#v13); and [Acts 1:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts1.htm#v13)). In the lists found in the Gospels, John Zebedee, the youngest of Jesus' Apostles, is always listed after Peter, Andrew, and his brother James Zebedee, but after Jesus' crucifixion his status in the lists is altered.  In the list in [Acts1:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts1.htm#v13) he is named immediately after Peter and in Acts he is always mentioned in association with Peter ([Acts 3:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts3.htm#v1); [4:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts4.htm#v13); [8:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts8.htm#v14)).

Scripture suggests St. John had a strong personality:

* [Mark 3:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark3.htm#v17): *James, son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James, whom he* [Jesus] *named Boanerges, that is "Sons of Thunder* (in Aramaic = ben ereges).
* [Luke 9:49](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke9.htm#v49); [9:51-56](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke9.htm#v51):  (John is rebuked by Jesus) [verse 49](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke9.htm#v49): *Then John said in reply: 'Master we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we tried to prevent him because he was not following our company.'  Jesus said 'Do not prevent him for whoever is not against you is for you.'*
* [Luke 9:54](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke9.htm#v54): *When the disciples James and John saw this they asked 'Lord do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?' Jesus turned and rebuked them."*

Scripture suggests that St. John was ambitious to serve Jesus in His Kingdom:

* [Matthew 20:20-24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew20.htm#v20):  *Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee approached Him with her sons and did Him homage wishing to ask him for something.  He said to her: 'What do you wish?'  She answered him 'Command that these two sons of mine to sit one at your right and the other sit to your left in your kingdom.'  When the ten heard this they became indigent.*
* [Mark 10:35-40](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark10.htm#v35):  *They* [James and John Zebedee] *said to him, 'Allow us to sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your glory.'  But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking.  Can you drink the cup that I shall drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I shall be baptized?'  They replied, 'We can.'  Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I shall drink you shall drink, and with the baptism with which I shall be baptized you shall be baptized, but as for seats at my right hand or my left, these are not mine to grant; they belong to those to whom they have been allotted.'*

Jesus selected John for certain experiences not shared with all the other Apostles:

* St. John was singled out from among the other Apostles at certain times as he was singled out with Peter and James in the curing of Peter's mother-in-law ([Mk 1:29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark1.htm#v29)).
* In the curing of the synagogue official's daughter: .*..he did not allow anyone to accompany him inside except Peter, James and John* ([Mk 5:37](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark5.htm#v37)).
* At the Mt. of Transfiguration experience: *... Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John...* ([Mt 17:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew17.htm#v1)).  *After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.  And He was transformed before them* ([Mk 9:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark9.htm#v2); also see [Lk 9:28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke9.htm#v28)).
* Only Peter and John were assigned the task of preparing the banquet room for the sacred meal of the Passover victim on the first nigh of the Feast of Unleavened Bread'the meal of the Last Supper: *The day of Unleavened Bread came round, on which the Passover had to be sacrificed, and he sent Peter and John to make preparations for Passover* ([Lk 22:7-8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke22.htm" \l "v7)).
* John was with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: *Then Jesus came with them to a plot of land called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Stay here while I go over there to pray.'  He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with him* ([Mt 26:36-37a](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew26.htm#v36)).
* From the time St. Peter and St. John were assigned to prepare the Upper Room for the Last Supper, John was always paired with Peter.  It was St. Peter and the "other disciple" who waited at the High Priest's palace as Jesus was being tried by the Sanhedrin ([Jn 18:15-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john18.htm" \l "v15)).  In [John 18:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john18.htm#v16) the unnamed disciple who was with St. Peter was known at the high priest's palace and was able to get Peter and himself into the courtyard after Jesus was arrested.
* It is the "disciple whom Jesus loved" who was the only Apostle to stand with the Virgin Mary and the other women at the foot of the Cross.  It was to this disciple that Jesus entrusted the care of His mother ([Jn 19:25-27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john19.htm" \l "v25)).
* Mary Magdalene went to St. Peter and "the other disciple" to tell them that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and St. Peter and the "other disciple, the "one whom Jesus loved," went together to the tomb to see that Jesus was no longer there ([Jn 20:1-10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john20.htm" \l "v1)).
* John was with the other Apostles (except Thomas) when Jesus came to the Upper Room on Resurrection Sunday and breathing on them gave them the power through the Holy Spirit to govern the universal Church and to bind or loose the sins of men and women ([Jn 20:19-22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john20.htm" \l "v19)).
* In *Acts of Apostles* it was Sts. Peter and John, teaching at the Temple after Jesus' Ascension ([Acts 3:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts3.htm#v1)), who were questioned by the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts [4:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts4.htm#v1), [13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts4.htm#v13), [19-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts4.htm#v19)).  Later they were the Church's representatives who went together to Samaria to confirm the baptism of converts by laying hands upon the converts and empowering them with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit ([Acts 8:14-17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts8.htm#v14)).
* John was present with the other Apostles at the first universal Church council: the Council of Jerusalem ([Acts 15:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts15.htm#v6)).
* St. Paul testified in his visit to Jerusalem to confer with the Apostles that he met with St. Peter (Paul calls him Cephas from his Aramaic title "Rock"/ Kepha, given to Peter by Jesus), St. James Bishop of Jerusalem, and St. John who Paul wrote were recognized as "pillars" of the Church ([Gal 2:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/galatians/galatians2.htm#v9)).

Other interesting facts about John Zebedee from the writings of the Church Fathers:

* Bishop St. Irenaeus (d. c. 200) wrote that at the Last Supper St. John was the one called the "beloved disciple" who was put at the place of honor at the table reclining with Jesus on the same couch and who wrote the fourth Gospel while residing at the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor(Irenaeus, *Against Heresies, 3, 1,* 1).
* Bishop Eusebius also recorded that St. John reclined with Jesus at the Last Supper (Eusebius, *Church History, XXXI, 3; XXIV, 3;* [Jn 13:21-25](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john13.htm#v21)).
* There is documentation that testifies that St. John, Bishop of Ephesus in Asia Minor, and St. James, Bishop of Jerusalem, both wore a sacred head-plate similar to the one worn by the Jewish High Priest (Eusebius, *Church History, XXXI, 3; XXIV, 3*).
* Bishop St. Polycrates of Ephesus (ca. 125-196 AD) wrote in his letter to Pope St. Victor (ca. 190 AD): ... *moreover John, who was both a witness and a teacher, who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord, and being a priest wore the sacerdotal plate* (*The Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. I,* page 82)*.*  St. Polycrates' testimony is especially significant because he was the bishop of the same church in the Roman city of Ephesus were St. John had served as the first Christian bishop for many years until his death.
* St. Clement of Alexandria (prior to 200 AD) wrote about John's long life as the Bishop of Ephesus and his title "father of the Eastern Church." Quoting St. Irenaeus he wrote: *(Irenaeus) writes in one place in the second of his books Against the Heresies, as follows: 'And all the presbyters who had been associated in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord, bear witness to his tradition, for he remained with them until the times of Trajan.' And in the third book of the same work he makes the same statement as follows: 'Now the Church at Ephesus was founded by Paul, but John stayed there until the time of Trajan, and it is a true witness of the tradition of the Apostles'* (Kovak, *Christianity and the Roman Empire*, page 42).

The Roman Emperor Trajan ruled after the death of the Emperor Domitian from 98 AD until 117 AD.  If John was about 20 years old when Jesus was crucified in 30AD (he could have been younger), and if he did live until the year 100 AD or later, it is understandable why St. John says of himself at the end of his Gospel that there were those who thought he wouldn't die until Jesus came again.  In the last chapter of the *Gospel of John,* Jesus revealed to St. Peter the kind of death he was to suffer ([Jn 21:18-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john21.htm" \l "v18)): *Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them - the one who had leant back close to his chest at the supper and had said to him, 'Lord, who is it that will betray you?'  Seeing him, Peter said to Jesus, 'What about him, Lord?'  Jesus answered, 'If I want him to stay behind till I come, what does it matter to you?  You are to follow me.'  The rumor then went out among the brothers that this disciple would not die.  Yet Jesus had not said to Peter, 'He will not die,' but, 'If I want him to stay behind till I come.'* According to the history of the early Church St. John was the only Apostle who wasn't martyred, and he was the last of the original twelve Apostles to pass from this earthly exile to join his Savior and Lord in the eternal kingdom.

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Appendix:

**The Symbolic Significance of Numbers in the Bible**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Number** | **Symbolic Significance** |
| One | Unity, primacy, sovereignty, divine completeness: Christians saw this number as symbolic of God the Father. |
| Two | Difference, division: on the second day God created light and darkness.  Christians saw this number as a symbol of the second person of the Trinity, God the Son (see Jesus' comment in [Mt 10:34-36](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew10.htm#v34)). |
| Three | This number symbolizes that which is real, solid, substantial, complete and of importance or significance.  The number three always signifies some important event in Salvation History: Jesus' ministry lasted three years (as the ancients counted); He arose from the dead on the third day (as the ancients counted); the earth was separated from the waters on the 3rd day.  It is one of the four "perfect" numbers.  Christians saw this number as symbolic of the Trinity. |
| Four | This number signifies God's creative works in association with the earth (four seasons, four winds, etc.). |
| Five | This number is symbolic of God's grace and power. |
| Six | This number is symbolic of man who was created on the 6th day; a symbol of man in rebellion against God (especially in multiples of six, i.e. "666"). |
| Seven | This is the second "perfect" number signifying perfection and fullness, especially spiritual perfection.  It is the number of the Holy Spirit and the number of covenant. |
| Eight | The number symbolizing salvation, rebirth, resurrection and regeneration: i.e., eight people were saved in the Ark, an Israelite child was reborn into the covenant with YHWH on the 8th day of life, and Jesus was resurrected from the dead on the 8th day. |
| Nine | This number signifies God's divine judgment. |
| Ten | This is the third perfect number which signifies perfection of divine order (i.e., the Ten Commandments). |
| Eleven | It is the number that symbolizes disorder, disharmony, imperfection and disintegration. |
| Twelve | The fourth perfect number signifying divine government = the Covenant people/ the Church.  It is the number of Israel (descendants of the 12 physical sons of Jacob) as well as the number of the New Covenant Church (spiritual descendants of Jesus' Twelve Apostles). |
| Thirteen | The number and its multiples signify ill omen, hostility, rebellion, apostasy, defection and corruption (i.e., see [Gen 14:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis14.htm#v4); [17:25](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v25)). |
| Fourteen | It is the number signifying a double blessing of spiritual perfection. |
| Forty | The number signifying trial and/ or consecration: i.e., the series of 40 days in the Flood narrative, Moses' 40 days on Mt. Sinai, and Jesus 40 days of testing in the wilderness. |
| Fifty | The number symbolizing divine deliverance/ mercy: i.e., the celebration of the Jubilee Year every 50th year. |
| Seventy/ seventy-two | The number which signified spiritual perfection times divine order (10 x 12) in God's plan of salvation: i.e., the 70 nations in Gen 10, the 70 men of Israel's family who migrated to Egypt, the 70 elders of Israel, and Jesus' 70/ 72 disciples. |