



Daily Reading Guide

the book of
Revelation

INTRODUCTION



Revelation is one of those biblical books we can be tempted to avoid. It has a bit of a history and reputation for being misused, abused and misconstrued. Its odd and even disturbing imagery can make it quite an uncomfortable and perplexing read. But this pastoral letter, written by an elder sage to a diverse group of committed yet messy, tired, hurting and confused churches can actually offer us a lot of comfort and instruction about how to live hopefully, faithfully and lovingly as God's people today, however challenging a time and place we might find ourselves in.

Use this **Daily Reading Guide** to digest the book of Revelation in 30 days. Reflect, ponder, note down your thoughts and see what revelation God has for you.

DAY 1

1:1-1:8 Introduction to Revelation

Welcome to the Revelation of Jesus Christ! We often abbreviate the title to just 'Revelation,' but as the opening words make clear the whole book is about Jesus, revealed in signs or imagery (Greek *semaino*, v. 1). In v. 8 God speaks directly, telling the listener (this is meant to be read aloud, see v. 3) that he is the Alpha and Omega, and the ruler of the world (Greek *Pantokratōr*). This happens once more at the end of the book.



Why do you think Revelation is bookended like this – can you think of a book or film that does something similar?

DAY 2

1:9-1:20 A vision of Christ

We see Jesus described in a way that is symbolic – designed to make the listener think of something else: Daniel 10 in this instance. The robe signifies Jesus as a king and priest, the sword signifies Jesus as a judge. There was a big lampstand in the Temple in Jerusalem, which had been destroyed at the time of writing. Seven new lampstands represent the churches; the light was not destroyed, but changed.



What is the significance of Jesus being in the midst of these lampstands – does it feel like Jesus is there among us when we gather in churches?



DAY 3

2:1-2:29 Letters to the churches, part 1

The churches receive their letters, a bit like a school report! Ephesus has lost its first love; Smyrna gets a glowing report; Pergamum and Thyatira (the hometown of Lydia, from Acts 16) are warned to stay away from idolatry.



Why do you think idolatry was such a problem back then? Do you think the situation is different today?

DAY 4

3:1-22 Letters to the churches, part 2

Sardis is called to wake up and learn from the example of a few star pupils. Philadelphia does well, but Laodicea needs to repent and open the door to Jesus once more – they have gone lukewarm.



If you are part of a church, is its door fully open to Jesus?

The reports end with an incredible promise: that we, regular people, will be entitled to a place on the throne, as described in the next chapter.



DAY 5

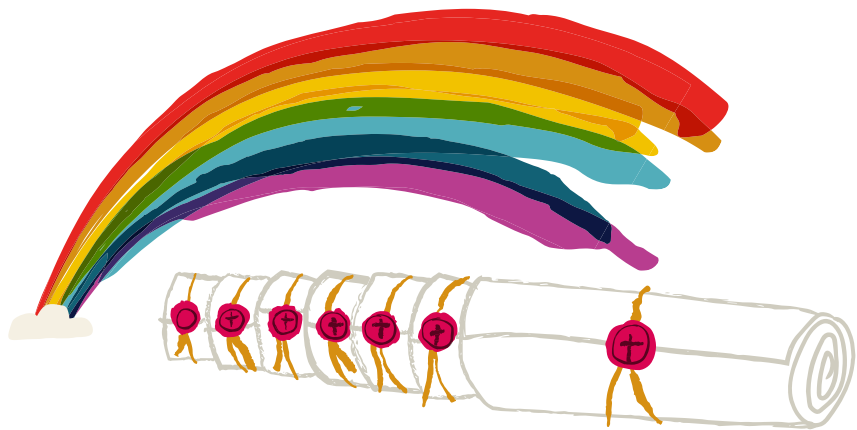
4:1-11 From earth to heaven

We get an exciting glimpse into heaven, which is depicted like a Roman throne hall, with a court of attendants with crowns and scrolls for business. Subversively, it claims that God, and not the Roman Emperor, is the true ruler of all.



If Revelation was rewritten in 2023, what would be the contemporary equivalent: the Houses of Parliament, the White House, Twitter HQ?

No attempt is made to describe God in a human form; a rainbow is the best the author can do. The living creatures represent all of nature.



DAY 6

5:1-14 The Lamb on the throne

John is told to look for the Lion of Judah, but sees instead a slain lamb on the throne. Unlike the Roman Empire which expanded through violence and force, Jesus' power and authority comes from his sacrifice. The description of Jesus as a lamb is likely a reference to the lamb led to slaughter in Isaiah 53:7. It might also remind the listener of the exodus lamb, the means by which the people were spared during their release from captivity to another violent empire.



Take a moment to read Exodus 12:1-13. What is similar and different about this new lamb?

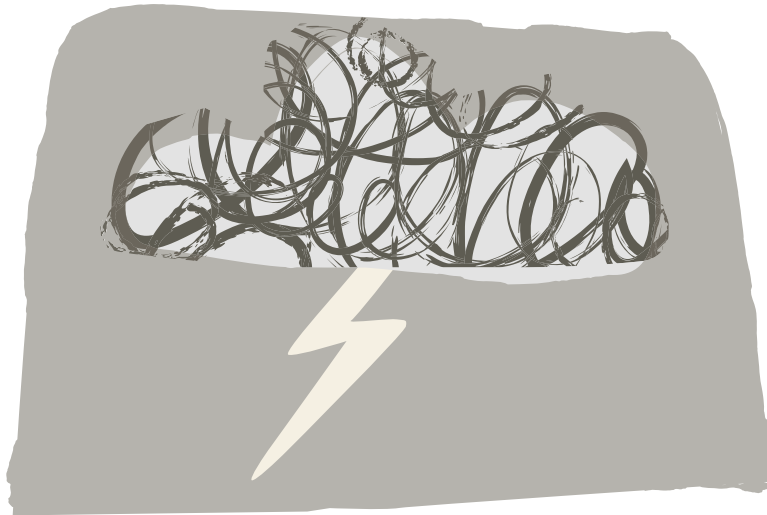
DAY 7

6:1-8 Four horsemen

The Roman Empire claimed to be spreading peace; the *Pax Romana*. The four horsemen of the apocalypse reveal the truth behind the imperial propaganda. It brought violent military expansion, warfare not peace, inflation and food insecurity, and death and disease.



The text is ambiguous about God's involvement in the release of the horsemen; do you think God would willingly unleash such evils?



DAY 8

6:9-17 Martyrs and kings

The text is written in an exaggerated style, anticipating the downfall of the corrupt human rulers. We are introduced to the martyrs who plead with God for vindication. This will be answered, but not yet; it happens in chapter 20.



Why do you think the author delayed the response?
Can you think of a book or film that waits to the end to settle a problem?

DAY 11

8:1-5 Justice at last

Suddenly there is silence. As the seventh seal is opened the endless cacophony of worship pauses. There is an intake of breath. An angel stands by the altar, under which the martyrs have been crying out for justice (6:9-10). The heavenly pause comes because this is the moment their prayers are answered. The author describes what happens as the censer is thrown onto the earth, using dramatic language reminiscent of Isaiah 29:6.



Take a moment to pause and pray for justice, knowing that God hears you.

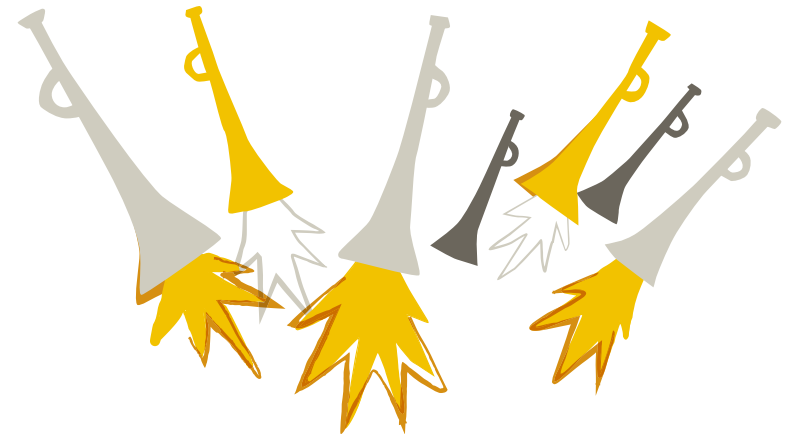
DAY 12

8:6-13 The seven trumpets

Seven letters have been read, and seven seals have been opened; now seven trumpets sound. Like the story of the plagues of Egypt before the exodus, the author describes what follows the first four trumpets as an undoing of creation. Like much of Revelation, these terrifying depictions of destruction are not factual predictions of what will happen, but a warning, written in powerful mythological language.



How do these sorts of texts make you feel? What response do you think the author is trying to trigger in you?



DAY 13

9:1-20 Destruction unleashed

The next two trumpets unleash a full-scale horror movie. The language here is meant to disturb and provoke the listeners to change. The scorpion-like tormentors represent a reality beyond themselves, in which pain and suffering are acute. The power of the death-dealing horses is in their deception: their words are poisonous, their tales like the serpent in Eden. The leader of this terrifying army is 'Destruction' itself.



Have you ever used a scary story to make someone change their behaviour, or been on the receiving end of such a strategy?

DAY 14

10:1-11 Before the world

Now we have another pause. Just as we did between the undoing of the sixth and seventh seals. Here the seer tells us why they think God's judgement has been so limited. He takes on the role of 'witness', like those dressed in white from the previous pause (7:9-17). Only he does not witness before the throne, but before the nations. Eating a scroll of heavenly words – he receives the bittersweet task of calling God's enemies to repentance.



Who do you feel called to witness to? How bitter or sweet do you find the task of telling others about Jesus?



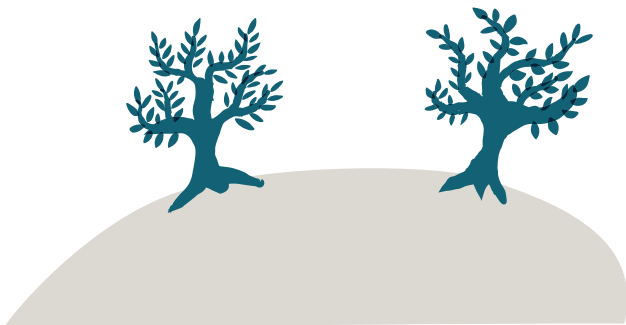
DAY 15

11:1-14 The two witnesses

This passage is dense with Old Testament language. The seer measures out the blueprints of God's new temple like Ezekiel did (Ezekiel 40 – 42). The two olive trees reference Zechariah's vision of the restoration of the priesthood and the monarchy – the twin pillars of Jewish authority (Zechariah 4). These witnesses are anointed with authority like that of both Moses and Elijah, to devour with fire (2 Kings 1), stop it raining (1 Kings 17), and strike the earth with plagues (Exodus 7 – 11). The crucifixions remind us of Jesus, whilst the resurrection of the dead witnesses reads a lot like that of Ezekiel's dry-boned army (Ezekiel 37). The purpose of all these references is to make it clear that even when it looks like the enemy is winning, God's plan is to deliver and restore.



Do you have any stories of God restoring desperate situations in your own life? Do you know anyone who might be encouraged by them?



DAY 16

11:15-19 The end and beginning

The seventh trumpet emphatically announces the arrival of the kingdom, accompanied by more singing. Last time a chorus in heaven was sung God was the God who *will* save (7:15-17), now God is the God who *has* saved (11:17-18). The arrival of the kingdom comes with a full revelation of God. Now John sees behind the temple curtain, into the Holy of Holies. God's glory is made fully visible. This moment is marked by more flashes of lightening, earthquakes and peals of thunder (8:5) to indicate God's awesomeness.



What sounds, signs or symbols might you use if you were trying to depict the awesomeness of God?

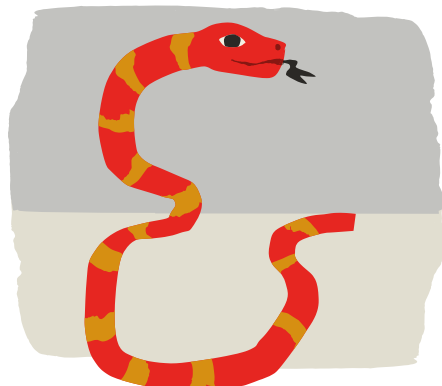
DAY 17

12:1-6 Heavenly pantomimes

The narrative here reads a like a dramatic, heavenly pantomime. The characters and actions are exaggerated. Events unfold on a cosmic scale. This passage actually borrows heavily from Greek and Roman mythology. In one legend Leto, the mother of the god Apollo, flees to earth to escape the great Python – a dragon who is determined to kill Zeus' new son. The god Poseidon hides Leto until Apollo is born. Apollo then kills Python. Roman emperors actually used this story as propaganda, casting themselves in the role of Apollo. Here the seer re-appropriates the story to be about God's bride (Israel/the Church), God's son (Jesus), and 'the great serpent' (the devil – see 12:9).



Are there any myths, legends or famous characters that we could use to help us explain what Jesus is like to those outside the Church?



DAY 18

12:7-17 From heaven to earth

This is the second half of the cosmic pantomime. Thus far, the child has escaped and gone to the throne of God (12:5), and the woman has escaped into the wilderness to be nourished (much like God's people in the exodus). Now the dragon gets its comeuppance. We are told six times that it is 'thrown down' (12:9-12:13). Satan loses, emphatically. Once cast out of heaven and unable to get at the son, the dragon instead goes after that which is most precious to him on earth – the mother and her other offspring: God's people. The seer here is telling us that God's witnesses experience pain because they live in that time between the initial and final victory of God over evil.



How can this strange story offer hope to you in difficult times?

DAY 19

13:1-13:9 The sea beast

The dramatic, pantomime imagery continues with the addition of a terrifying sea beast. Note that this beast has great authority; it is a king that looks like it should be dead but is somehow alive. The suggestion here is that this great earthly power appears almost messianic – which is often how the Roman emperors would present themselves. But any such claims are blasphemous. God's people are warned to be mindful of this earthly power and its lies.



Political powers can often try to present themselves as saviours. How can we, as God's people today, engage with politics whilst staying focused on our true Messiah?



DAY 20

13:11-18 The land beast

Here, a second beast completes the unholy trinity of the dragon, sea beast and land beast. This beast mimics the Holy Spirit. It calls down fire from heaven (like in Acts 2) and gives breath to the beast's image (like in Genesis 2).



Where the sea beast represented political power, this beast represents religious power; deceiving the people with signs and wonders, encouraging idolatry. Can you think of times when the Church has helped uphold injustice and evil? How can we guard against that happening?



DAY 21

14:1-5 Another hope-filled interlude

Similar to verses 7:1-8, the same great multitude gathered around the throne now sing a new song.



When you hear a new song by a favourite artist, how does that feel? What do you think this new song symbolises?

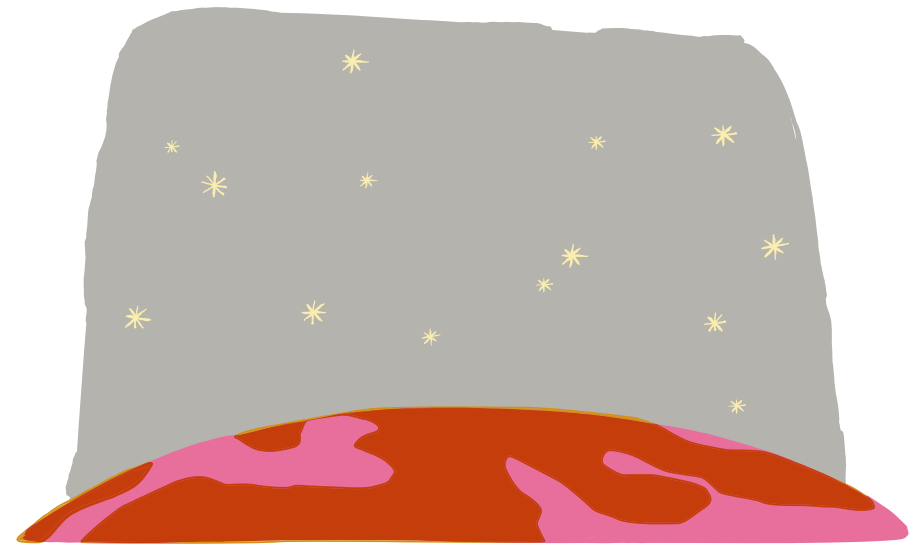
DAY 22

14:6-13 Three gospel messages

Three angels bring good news in three parts. Firstly, creation has not been forgotten. Secondly, the evil power represented by Babylon has been/will be defeated; Revelation does not stick to a strict chronological order! Thirdly comes a warning to resist evil and idolatry.



Think of a time when you've resisted evil; did that feel like good news, a victory?



DAY 23

14:14-20 The Son of Man's harvest

This is a difficult passage that has divided opinion; there is no straightforward interpretation. Two things are worth noting though. The Bible uses the imagery of reaping and harvest time as a picture of God's intervention and salvation and that is the focus here. Second, the language of judgement and wrath is intended as a warning to provoke the listeners to stay faithful. These things are true for the whole of Revelation.



What other Bible passages describe reaping and harvests? How might they help us understand this passage?

DAY 24

15:1-8 Peace for God's people

John is quick to underline, again, that everything he is seeing is 'good news'. The faithful are praising God for the great and amazing deeds of justice that are taking place. These deeds will bring the nations to worship. A little more wrath is still to come, God is about to act powerfully. But for those singing, all they experience is peace. For them, this fiery sea (made up of two great symbols of fear and chaos in the ancient world) is as still as glass.



What symbols represent fear and chaos to you? What might it look like for God to overcome and still these?



DAY 25

16:1-21 Chaos for God's enemies

We've had seven seals broken, seven trumpets blown and now seven bowls are poured out. These bowls follow the same pattern as the trumpets, impacting the same things. Only this time, the author describes a judgement that is total and complete. Verses 2, 10 and 13 suggest these judgements are aimed at the unholy trinity (or the dragon and the two beasts) but those who have sided with them are also caught up in it. In the Bible Month **30 Days with Revelation** booklet, Helen Miller compares Revelation to CS Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. In it, the human character Edmund sides with the White Witch, and later has to go and have a conversation of confession and redemption with Aslan.



Are there ways in which you have found yourself siding with or influenced by the beasts? Talk these through with Jesus prayerfully and receive forgiveness.

DAY 26

17:1-18 Babylon

Babylon is described as an iniquitous woman, a counterpoint to the holy woman depicted in chapter 12. At the time of writing cities were commonly described as feminine, like ships are in British culture today. No disparagement to female humans was intended. The reference to the seven mountains tells us that Babylon is a representation of the city of Rome, whose splendour, wealth and power are parodied here.



In what ways can our own culture 'seduce' us away from the way of Jesus?

[For more information, please refer to the Bible Month booklet, 30 Days with Revelation, p. 18-19.]



DAY 27

18:1-24 The end of Babylon

This passage strongly resembles Jeremiah 50 – 51, where God calls the people out of their exile in Babylon and announces doom on that city. Here, Babylon's destruction represents God's judgement on all seemingly robust systems of violent power. The faithful are warned to disassociate with such systems, while, those seafarers, who profited from trade with Babylon, receive particular condemnation.



Have you ever benefitted financially from a corrupt system?

*[For more information, please refer to Gary Hall's essay in the Bible Month booklet, **30 Days with Revelation**, p. 4.]*



DAY 28

19:1-21 A wedding and a war?

More songs of celebration are sung here. This time they are wedding hymns. Finally, the bride of the Church, perfect and beautiful (a deliberate contrast with Babylon), is united with her powerful, victorious groom. The wedding is almost derailed by a heavenly war, but no battle is described. The armies of the beasts gather but without a single blow being struck the beasts are captured (v. 19-20) and their armies are vanquished by Jesus' teaching. In what ways does your church feast and celebrate together?



What are some of your favourite celebratory hymns?

DAY 29

20:1-15 The end of death?

This is a difficult text and there are many interpretations of it. We have to remember what we're reading is highly symbolic. What is important is that this passage focuses on the complete overthrow of Satan (v. 10), the end of death and the grave (v. 14), and the absolute authority of God on the throne (v. 11). All of which is good news for God's people.



Do these three things form part of what you think of as 'the good news'? What are the main hopes of your faith?



DAY 30

21:1 – 22:21 A new heaven on a new earth

At the end of the book we are given an incredible vision of a future of peace, a new heaven and a new earth. The holy city is vast, with room for all. The gates are always open. There is no temple, because God is here, on earth, healing and restoring all that was broken. And God speaks once more; while the book is full of turmoil, it is bookended by God, the Alpha and Omega. So all will be well.



How can you share this optimism and hope, without it sounding like wishful thinking?

[For more information, please refer to the Bible Month booklet, 30 Days with Revelation, p. 18-19.]



Bible Month is an annual campaign that celebrates Scripture by inviting the whole Methodist Connexion to feast on one particular book of the Bible together.

Split into 30 days of readings, with questions for reflection and space to make your own notes, the ***Daily Reading Guide*** equips and encourages you to read through the book of Revelation in a month.

To get more involved in Bible Month, visit **methodist.org.uk/biblemonth**

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