

The Book of Revelation, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: The Revelation of Jesus Christ; the Son of Man Among the Lampstands

Revelation 1:1-20

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This opening lesson sets the lens through which the entire study must be read. Doctrinally, the stakes are twofold. First, verse 1 tells us the message is “signified,” given in signs and symbols, which means we read Revelation as apocalyptic picture-language addressed to seven real first-century churches, not as a literal almanac of future dates, microchips, or political headlines. Establish this now, gently and clearly, because every premillennial and dispensational misreading begins by forgetting that single word. Second, the lesson plants the central claim of the whole book: the crucified and risen Christ already reigns. He is “the ruler of kings on earth” (1:5), He is the Alpha and the Omega (1:8), and He holds the keys of Death and Hades (1:18). The kingdom is not postponed to a future earthly thousand-year reign; the King is enthroned and walking among His lampstands now (Acts 2:29–36; Ephesians 1:20–23).

But this lesson is not merely about getting our interpretive method right. It aims at the heart. John, an old man in exile, is shown not a chart but a Person, and that sight drops him to the ground. The pastoral purpose of the vision is to comfort frightened saints by showing them who actually governs history. Your students live in their own kind of Patmos: fear of the future, weariness in faithfulness, the temptation to think the world's powers have the last word. The aim is that they would leave this lesson not better informed about timelines but more steadied, more worshipful, more able to hear Christ say “Fear not” because He died and is alive forevermore.

So teach for transformation. The truth that Christ stands in the middle of the lampstands is meant to change how a believer walks into the assembly, endures hardship, and faces death. If your class merely learns that seven means completeness, you have undersold the hour. Press them to see the living Christ, present in His church, and to respond with the awe, the courage, and the obedience that John's blessing in 1:3 promises to those who keep this word.

Question 1

Student Question:

Revelation 1:1 says God gave this revelation to Jesus Christ to show His servants, and that it was “signified” (made known in signs) through His angel to John. What does this opening verse teach us about both the source of the book and the symbolic, picture-language way we are meant to read it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 1 lays out a chain of communication: the revelation comes from God, who gives it to Jesus Christ, who shows it to His servants by sending His angel to John, who bears witness to all he saw (1:1–2). This is not John’s private speculation; it is a revealing that descends from the Father through the Son. Establishing the divine source matters, because Revelation is the close of the canon, the last inspired word, not the opening of some ongoing stream of new revelation (22:18–19; 2 Timothy 3:16–17).

The pivotal word is “signified.” The Greek term carries the sense of making something known by a sign. John is telling us at the outset that what follows comes to us in symbols. Lampstands, stars, swords, beasts, bowls, and a Lamb are signs that carry theological weight, not literal photographs of future hardware. This is the single most important interpretive key in the book, and it is given in the very first verse.

Help the class feel the difference between two ways of reading. One way treats Revelation like a coded newspaper, matching beasts to modern nations and counting days toward a predicted end. That way violates verse 1 and the Lord’s own words that no one knows the day or hour (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7). The other way watches a divinely painted drama, asking what each sign meant to the seven churches under Rome and what it means for the church in every age that faces beastly, persecuting world-power.

Note too that the book is addressed to real congregations the writer names (1:4, 1:11). It was meant to be understood by its first readers, comforted and warned in their own setting, even as the patterns it reveals recur until Christ returns. Reading it this way keeps us honest and keeps the book pastoral rather than sensational.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- Revelation is apocalyptic, symbolic literature, “signified” (1:1), to be read in signs and pictures, not as a literal calendar of events.
- The book is genuine revelation from God through Christ, and as the canon’s close it brings no expectation of new revelation today (22:18–19).
- It was written to seven real first-century churches under Rome and could be understood by them, which anchors our reading in history.
- The symbolic approach guards against date-setting and against identifying signs with current persons, nations, or technologies (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7).

Discussion Prompts

- Ask the class to name ways they have heard Revelation taught, and gently test each against the word “signified” in verse 1.
- Discuss why God might choose to communicate to a persecuted church through vivid pictures rather than plain prose.
- Have someone trace the chain of revelation in verses 1 and 2 aloud and discuss what it means that this word descends from the Father Himself.

Question 2

Student Question:

The book opens with a blessing on “the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and those who hear, and who keep what is written in it” (1:3). Honestly, do you tend to treat Revelation as a puzzle to decode or as a word to obey, and what would change in you if you read it for the blessing of keeping it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 3 pronounces the first of the seven beatitudes scattered through Revelation: “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it.” The blessing is not on the one who decodes it but on the one who keeps it. That single emphasis reorients our whole posture toward the book.

Notice the setting implied by “reads aloud.” Revelation was written to be read in the gathered assembly, where one reader voiced it and the congregation heard. This is a book for the church at worship, not a private cipher for the curious. Its aim is obedience and faithfulness, the patient endurance it will commend again and again.

Press the self-examination here without scolding. Most believers, if honest, approach Revelation with more curiosity than obedience. We want to know who the beast is far more than we want to keep what the book commands. The text quietly rebukes that instinct and offers a better promise: there is a blessing for the one who hears and holds fast.

Help students name what keeping this book would look like for them: enduring under pressure, refusing the idolatries of the age, worshiping the Lamb, staying faithful unto death. That is the obedience the blessing has in view.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- The first beatitude (1:3) blesses hearing and keeping, not merely understanding or decoding, the prophecy.
- Revelation was written to be read aloud in the assembly, underscoring its place in corporate worship.
- Scripture aims at obedience, not curiosity; the test of right reading is a changed and faithful life (James 1:22).
- The nearness of “the time” (1:3) calls every generation to readiness and faithful endurance, not to calculation.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask each student to say honestly whether they come to Revelation more to decode it or to obey it.
- Discuss what it means that this book was first read aloud in worship, and how that should shape our use of it.

- List together two or three concrete ways a believer “keeps” the words of this prophecy in daily life.

Question 3

Student Question:

John calls Jesus “the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth” (1:5). How do these two titles together answer the fear of a church facing Roman power, and what do they claim about where real authority sits right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John piles up titles for Jesus in verse 5: “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.” Each answers a fear of a church under empire. “Faithful witness” means Jesus bore true testimony even unto death, modeling the faithfulness His saints are called to. “Firstborn of the dead” means His resurrection is the first of many, the guarantee that death does not have the last word for His people (Colossians 1:18).

The third title is the most provocative in a Roman context: “the ruler of kings on earth.” Caesar claimed that throne. John quietly announces that it belongs to a crucified Galilean who is now risen. This is the amillennial heartbeat of the book: Christ reigns now, not at some future moment, but presently, over the very emperors who exile His servants (Acts 2:36; Ephesians 1:20–23).

Teach this against the dispensational notion that Christ’s reign is postponed to a future earthly thousand-year kingdom from Jerusalem. The text says ruler of kings on earth, present tense, written to comfort believers who could see Caesar’s soldiers from their windows. The kingdom came with Jesus and was established when the church began (Daniel 2:44; Mark 9:1; Acts 2; Colossians 1:13).

For the persecuted, this is everything. The power that seemed to hold their lives in its hand was itself under the hand of the risen Lord. The same comfort steadies us: no government, no ideology, no power that opposes Christ sits above Him. He already rules the kings of the earth.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- Jesus is “the ruler of kings on earth” (1:5) now, in the present, not in a postponed future reign.
- His resurrection as “firstborn of the dead” guarantees the resurrection of His people (1 Corinthians 15:20–23).
- Christ’s present reign refutes premillennialism: the kingdom is established and He governs from the Father’s right hand (Acts 2:29–36).
- “Faithful witness” sets the pattern of costly faithfulness the persecuted church is called to follow (Revelation 2:10).

Discussion Prompts

- Ask how a first-century Christian under Caesar would have heard the words “ruler of kings on earth.”
- Discuss the difference between believing Christ will reign someday and believing He reigns right now.
- Have the class name a present-day fear that this title of Jesus directly answers.

Question 4

Student Question:

Verse 5 says Jesus “loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,” and made us “a kingdom, priests to his God.” When you consider the cost at which you were freed and the dignity to which you were raised, what response does that stir in you toward Christ this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 5 moves from titles to tenderness: Jesus “loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.” Note the present tense of “loves.” This is not merely a past affection but an ongoing love that holds the believer now. And the freedom is costly, purchased not with silver but with His own blood, the very theme that will crown the worship of heaven later in the book.

Then comes the dignity: He “made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” (1:6). Believers who felt small and powerless under Rome are told they are royalty and priesthood. This is not a future promotion but a present identity given to the church (1 Peter 2:9). The doxology that follows, “to him be glory and dominion forever and ever,” is the only fitting response.

Use this question to move from doctrine to worship. The believer who grasps both the cost of redemption and the height of the dignity given cannot remain unmoved. The aim here is the formation of gratitude and reverent love, not just information about atonement.

Tie the freedom to the New Testament pattern of how that blood is applied: we are buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27). The redemption John praises is the redemption every obedient believer has entered.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- Christ’s love for His people is present and ongoing: “loves us” (1:5), not merely loved us once.
- Freedom from sin is purchased by Christ’s blood, the costly heart of the gospel (Ephesians 1:7).
- Believers are now a kingdom and priests (1:6; 1 Peter 2:9), a present dignity, not a future one.
- This redemption is entered through obedient faith, including baptism into Christ (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27).

Discussion Prompts

- Ask the class to sit with the present tense of “loves us” and what it changes about a hard week.
- Discuss what it means to live this week as one who is already a king and priest before God.
- Have someone read the doxology of verse 6 aloud and ask what response it should stir in us.

Question 5

Student Question:

God declares, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (1:8). In a book written to comfort the persecuted, why does it matter that history is bracketed by God Himself, and how does this guard us against reading Revelation as a nervous countdown to the end?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In verse 8 God Himself speaks: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, a way of saying He is the beginning, the end, and everything between. History is not an open question; it is bracketed by God on both ends.

This matters immensely for a persecuted church and for our reading of the whole book. If God Himself stands at the beginning and the end of all things, then the church’s suffering is not a sign that history has slipped out of control. The outcome is already secured. The book will replay the same war from many angles, but the ending never changes: the Almighty wins.

Use this to guard against turning Revelation into a nervous countdown. People who treat the book as a code for predicting the end implicitly doubt that God already holds the end. Verse 8 says He does. Our task is not to calculate the timeline but to trust the One who owns it (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7).

“The Almighty” is the title that towers over Caesar’s pretensions and over every power since. The church endures not by knowing when the end comes but by knowing Whose hands hold it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- God is the Alpha and the Omega (1:8), sovereign over the beginning and end of all history.
- Because the outcome is secured by the Almighty, the church’s suffering is never evidence that history is out of control.
- This truth rebukes date-setting; we trust the One who holds the end rather than try to predict it (Acts 1:7).
- “The Almighty” outranks every earthly power and is the ground of the church’s confidence (Revelation 19:6).

Discussion Prompts

- Ask what it changes to know that the same God stands at both the beginning and the end of history.
- Discuss why a focus on predicting the end can actually reveal a lack of trust in God's sovereignty.
- Have the class name where they are tempted to feel history is out of control, and apply verse 8 to it.

Question 6

Student Question:

John names himself our “brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus” (1:9). He does not promise escape from tribulation but endurance through it. Where are you tempted to expect that faithfulness should spare you suffering, and how does John’s honesty reframe your expectations?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John introduces himself with striking humility: “your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus” (1:9). He does not pull rank as an apostle but stands beside his readers. And notice the three words he joins: tribulation, kingdom, and patient endurance belong together in this present age. The kingdom is here, but so is tribulation, and what holds them together is endurance.

This shatters the expectation that faithfulness should spare us suffering. John is on Patmos precisely because of “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” His exile is the fruit of his faithfulness, not a failure of it. The Lord never promised His servants an exemption from hardship; He promised His presence through it (John 16:33).

Help students examine where they quietly assume that obedience should buy them an easier life. When trouble comes, that assumption breeds resentment or doubt. John’s honest naming of tribulation as part of the package frees us from a false gospel and prepares us to endure.

The word “patient endurance” will echo throughout Revelation as the chief virtue of the saints (13:10; 14:12). It is not passive resignation but steady, hopeful faithfulness that keeps holding on because it knows how the story ends.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- Tribulation, kingdom, and patient endurance belong together now; the kingdom does not exempt us from suffering (1:9).
- Faithfulness may lead to suffering rather than spare us from it, as John’s exile shows (2 Timothy 3:12).
- Patient endurance is the central virtue Revelation commends to the saints (13:10; 14:12).
- Christians are called to remain faithful through trial, not to expect escape from it (John 16:33).

Discussion Prompts

- Ask where students have assumed that doing right should protect them from hardship.
- Discuss the difference between passive resignation and the active, hopeful endurance John describes.
- Have the class consider how John's standing beside his readers as a "brother" rather than above them shapes Christian leadership.

Question 7

Student Question:

John was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (1:10). What does this phrase tell us about the first day of the week as the day Christ's people gathered to worship, and how does the risen Lord meeting His exiled servant on that day dignify the assembly we still keep?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John says he was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (1:10). This is the earliest occurrence of that phrase, and it points to the first day of the week, the day of Christ's resurrection, as the distinctive day of Christian worship. The New Testament shows the church gathering on the first day to break bread (Acts 20:7) and to give (1 Corinthians 16:1–2).

There is something fitting and moving here. The risen Lord meets His exiled servant on the very day His people gather to remember the resurrection. Even alone on a prison island, cut off from the assembly, John keeps the Lord's day, and on it the Lord comes to him. The day belongs to Christ, and Christ honors it.

Use this to dignify the assembly your students keep. We can grow casual about the first day of the week, treating worship as one option among many. John's experience reminds us that the Lord's day is the Lord's, set apart by His resurrection, and that He meets His people when they gather to honor Him.

Keep the focus pastoral. The point is not merely to defend first-day worship, true as that is, but to stir reverence and longing for the gathering where the risen Christ is present among His lampstands.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- "The Lord's day" (1:10) refers to the first day of the week, the day of Christ's resurrection and Christian worship.
- The New Testament church gathered on the first day to break bread and to give (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1–2).
- The day is set apart by the resurrection and belongs to the risen Lord, who meets His people on it.
- Even in isolation, the believer honors the Lord's day, and the Lord honors that faithfulness.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask why it is significant that the risen Christ appeared to John on the Lord's day specifically.
- Discuss how the church's worship on the first day connects every Sunday to the resurrection.
- Have the class name attitudes that erode reverence for the assembly and how this verse counters them.

Question 8

Student Question:

Before John sees the vision he is told the lampstands are the seven churches (1:20). Knowing that Christ Himself walks in the middle of His congregations, watching and present, how does that change the way you will walk into the assembly and live as part of His church this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 20 gives us the interpretation we need: the seven lampstands are the seven churches, and the seven stars are their angels or messengers. Seven, throughout Revelation, signifies completeness, so these named churches also represent the whole church in every place and age. The number is symbolic, not arithmetic.

The stunning truth is where Christ stands: "in the midst of the lampstands" (1:13). The risen Lord is not a distant observer of His congregations; He walks among them, present, watching, knowing each one's works, love, and endurance, as the letters of chapters 2 and 3 will show. The church is never alone, even under persecution, because Christ is in the middle of it.

Press this toward the way students enter the assembly. If we truly believed Christ stood in the midst of the gathered church, holding its messengers like stars in His hand, would we drift in casually or distracted? The vision calls for reverence and seriousness about our life together as His people.

It also brings comfort. The same Christ who sees the church's sins also sees its faithfulness, defends it, and refuses to let go of it. He holds the stars in His right hand (1:16). His church is secure in His grip, which is the great encouragement the seven letters will build upon.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- The seven lampstands are the seven churches, and seven signifies completeness, so they represent the whole church (1:20).
- Christ stands in the midst of His congregations now, present and attentive to each (1:13; 2:1).
- The church's life is lived under the watchful, loving gaze of the risen Lord, which calls for reverence.

- Christ holds the churches and their messengers securely in His hand (1:16), a ground of comfort and security.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask how the awareness that Christ walks among the lampstands should change how we enter worship.
- Discuss what it means that Christ both sees the church's faults and holds it securely in His hand.
- Have the class reflect on the symbolism of seven as completeness and what it says about the whole church.

Question 9

Student Question:

The vision climaxes with the glorified Christ saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (1:17-18). Drawing on the whole vision, what does this reveal about who is reigning right now, what authority the risen Christ already holds over death itself, and why this single truth is the foundation of the entire book?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here we reach the doctrinal summit of the lesson. John has fallen at Christ's feet as though dead, overwhelmed by the vision of the glorified Son of Man. And the risen Lord lays His right hand on him and says, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (1:17-18). Every word here is a foundation stone for the entire book.

"The first and the last" is a title used of God Himself in Isaiah (44:6; 48:12), now claimed by Jesus. The One walking among the lampstands shares the very being and authority of God. This is no created angel; this is the divine Son, eternal, sovereign, the same yesterday and forever. The church under Rome worships the One who outranks every god and Caesar the empire could name.

"I died, and behold I am alive forevermore" places the cross and resurrection at the center. The glorified figure with eyes like flame is the same Jesus who was crucified. He passed through death and came out the other side, alive in a life that can never end. This is the firstborn of the dead reigning, and His resurrection is the guarantee of ours.

Then the climax: "I have the keys of Death and Hades." Keys mean authority. Death and Hades, the grave and the realm of the dead, the very powers that terrified the ancient world and still cast their shadow over us, are under His control. He opens and shuts; He holds the authority over the last enemy. Caesar could kill a Christian's body, but he could not hold that Christian in the grave, because the keys belong to Christ.

This is why the lesson insists that the crucified and risen Christ already reigns now. Not in a postponed future kingdom, but presently He holds the keys of Death and Hades and rules the kings of the earth (Acts 2:29–36; 1 Corinthians 15:24–26). For a church facing martyrdom, and for every believer facing the grave, this single truth is the bedrock: the worst the world can do is death, and death itself answers to Jesus. “Fear not” is not sentiment; it is the only rational response to a Lord who holds the keys.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- Jesus claims the divine title “the first and the last” (1:17), used of God in Isaiah 44:6, affirming His full deity.
- The crucified and risen Christ is “alive forevermore” (1:18); His resurrection grounds the believer’s hope (1 Corinthians 15:20–23).
- Christ holds “the keys of Death and Hades” (1:18), present authority over death and the grave itself.
- This present reign refutes premillennialism: Christ rules now and will reign until death, the last enemy, is destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:24–26).
- Because death answers to Jesus, “Fear not” is the church’s settled posture even under threat of martyrdom (Revelation 2:10).

Discussion Prompts

- Ask what it means for facing death that Jesus, not any other power, holds the keys of Death and Hades.
- Discuss how Christ’s claim to be “the first and the last” connects Him to the God of Isaiah and affirms His deity.
- Have the class explain why this verse, more than any chart of the future, is the true foundation of the whole book.

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back over the whole vision, from the chain of revelation in verse 1 to the keys of Death and Hades in verse 18, name one specific way the sight of the glorified, reigning Christ is reshaping how you will face this coming week, and what concrete change it calls for in you.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question asks students to gather the whole vision and let it land on their lives. Trace the arc with them once more: a revelation that descends from God through Christ (1:1), given in signs, sealed with a blessing on those who keep it (1:3), centered on a Christ who loves us, freed us by His blood, and rules the kings of the earth (1:5), the Alpha and Omega (1:8), present among His lampstands (1:13), holding the keys of Death and Hades (1:18).

The aim is not another fact but a formed life. Ask each student to name one specific way the sight of the glorified, reigning Christ is reshaping how they will face the coming week. Resist letting them answer in generalities. Push for the concrete: a fear surrendered, a faithfulness renewed, a worship deepened, an obedience begun.

Connect their answer back to the blessing of verse 3. The one who is blessed is the one who keeps what is written. So the question is finally a question of obedience: now that you have seen the living Christ holding the keys of death, what will you do differently because of Him?

Let this be a worshipful, hopeful close. The same Christ who steadied John with “Fear not” steadies them. The point of the whole vision is that the Lord already wins and is already present, and that truth is meant to send them into the week with courage rather than dread.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- Right reading of Revelation aims at transformation and obedience, the blessing of keeping it (1:3).
- The vision of the glorified, reigning Christ is meant to form courage, worship, and faithful endurance in the believer.
- Christ’s present reign and authority over death are the ground of Christian hope and fearless living (1:17–18).
- Spiritual formation is concrete; the student should name a specific change Christ is working in them.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask each student to name one concrete change the sight of the reigning Christ is calling for this week.
- Discuss how the blessing of verse 3 ties this whole lesson to obedience rather than mere information.
- Have the class share where they most need to hear Christ’s “Fear not” as they face the days ahead.