

Make the Most of Your Bible Study

How to Use the 2010–2011 *Horizons* Bible Study

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Journeys Through Revelation: Apocalyptic Hope for Today

If you are not a part of a circle or other Bible study group using *Journeys Through Revelation: Apocalyptic Hope for Today*, this “Make the Most” is especially for you! As a *Horizons* subscriber you get a copy of the Bible study, and simply reading it as you would an issue of the magazine may not be the best way to encounter this challenging book in the Bible. If you downloaded this free “Make the Most” resource, but do not subscribe to *Horizons* Magazine, you can still order a copy of the Bible study for your own use.

This particular resource will give you a way to use the Bible study on *Revelation* on your own, so you too can explore, learn about, better interpret and enrich your faith through reading and studying the book of *Revelation*. It’s a step-by-step guide:

1. Begin by establishing a schedule that works for you. Set aside some time weekly for ten weeks, bi-weekly over five months, monthly for ten months . . . whatever works for you.
2. Plan to respond in a way that feeds your preferred way of learning. For example,
 - a. You might follow the guide for a lesson, then write a journal entry in response, tracking your growing understanding and insights as you work your way through the book of *Revelation*.
 - b. You might keep a notebook with your study and your Bible, making notes as you move through each lesson, answering the questions in the margins and in the guide that most engage you, and note further questions the material raises for you.
 - c. You might even decide to meet with a couple of friends who, like you, are not in a Bible study situation. In that case, you can definitely use the guide together, reading the chapters from *Revelation* aloud or in silence, reading the lesson material and moving through the “watch for” items (listed below) together. This gives you the added opportunity of discussing the ideas that need more explanation and interpretation, and sharing all the questions that arise.
3. Work through the introduction and each lesson following the plan below. It suggests what to read, and in what order, guiding you to new insights and responses.

Revelation is sure to stimulate additional questions, even though the study itself will answer many of the questions that have been raised for centuries about this image-full, endlessly fascinating book. As I tell my Bible study partners every time we meet, “Having and asking questions are good things! Questions show we are growing and changing and moving beyond simplistic understandings of multi-dimensional ideas. We worship a big God!” So come along on the Bible study journey through *Revelation*. It’s a fascinating conversation partner, and sure to be worth your while. Expect to encounter hope for your journey of faith—hope is plentiful in *Revelation*!

Introduction (pages 2–5)

1. When you read the introduction, watch for:
 - What Revelation is not
 - What Revelation is
 - Six principles to guide your study (Regarding #5: If you are studying on your own, think about and choose a “Christian community” in another country and culture that you know a bit about—China, Korea, Guatemala, Iraq, etc. Imagine that community as your continuing silent conversation partner on this journey.
2. Between now and when you move on to Lesson One, set aside a two-hour block of time to sit and read the whole book of Revelation, beginning with chapters 21 and 22 as author Barbara Rossing suggests, then chapters 1–22 in order.
3. Turn to page 82, “Hymns Inspired by *Revelation*.” Pick some favorite hymns and go to their texts—I expect you can borrow a hymnbook from your church if you don’t have one at home. Either read them, or sing them aloud or in your head. Notice what moves you in each one.
4. Go to the website <http://horizons.pcusa.org/>. Download the Workshop for Leaders and print the two-page chart of the book of *Revelation*. Notice the kinds of information provided to you there. Put the chart with your study book as a reference. Check off the chapters as you read them with the lessons.
5. Read the text box, “About the Art,” on page 5. Notice what the art is intended to reflect.
6. Finally, look at the art for the introduction on page 2. You will do this for each lesson. Read *Revelation 1:8*, then give yourself five minutes to simply gaze at the image:
 - a. What do you see?
 - b. What do the details suggest to you?
 - c. What does the color suggest?
 - d. What hope does this image offer you?

Lesson One (pages 6–12)

1. Read *Revelation 1*.
2. When you read Lesson One, watch for:
 - What you learn about the author of *Revelation*
 - The author’s purpose in writing *Revelation*
 - The three styles of writing in *Revelation*, and a definition of each as they appear in *Revelation*
 - The meaning of “empire”
3. Read page 80, the additional information on “Empire.”
4. Summarize what you have learned in *Revelation 1* and Lesson One, focusing especially on new insights. What hope does this lesson offer you?
5. Look at the art for Lesson One on page 6. Read *Revelation 1:10*, then give yourself five minutes to simply gaze at the image:
 - a. What do you see?
 - b. What do the details suggest to you?
 - c. What does the color suggest?
 - d. What hope does this image offer you?
6. Pray using the prayer on page 12, or your own prayer of gratitude for new insights that grow out of your exploration of *Revelation*.

Lesson Two (pages 14–20)

1. Read *Revelation 2–3*.
2. When you read Lesson Two, watch for:
 - A description of the structure of the letters to the seven churches
 - How each church is performing—as you do so, watch for the description that most matches your sense of your own faith community
 - What wake-up call might your own faith community receive?
 - For what might Jesus praise your own faith community?
3. Summarize what you have learned in *Revelation 2–3* and Lesson Two, focusing especially on new insights. What hope does this lesson offer you?
4. Look at the art for Lesson Two on page 14. Read *Revelation 2:1*, then give yourself five minutes to simply gaze at the image:
 - a. What do you see?
 - b. What do the details suggest to you?
 - c. What does the color suggest?
 - d. What hope does this image offer you?
5. Pray using the prayer on page 20, or your own prayer of gratitude for new insights that grow out of your exploration of *Revelation*.

Lesson Three (pages 22–28)

1. Read *Revelation 4–5*.
2. When you read Lesson Three watch for:
 - What the author means by “lamb power”
 - How we are to understand the visionary journey described in *Revelation*, and the relationship between heaven and earth
 - The power of songs of praise
 - For what might Jesus praise your own faith community?
3. Read the additional information, “Apocalypses: 2 Esdras,” on page 82.
4. Reflect on how this lesson changes or adds to your understanding of Jesus.
5. Summarize what you have learned in *Revelation 4–5* and Lesson Three, focusing especially on new insights. What hope does this lesson offer you?
6. Look at the art for Lesson Three on page 22. Read *Revelation 5:12*, then give yourself five minutes to simply gaze at the image:
 - a. What do you see?
 - b. What do the details suggest to you?
 - c. What does the color suggest?
 - d. What hope does this image offer you?
7. Pray using the prayer on page 28, or your own prayer of gratitude for new insights that grow out of your exploration of *Revelation*.

Lesson Four (pages 30–36)

1. Read *Revelation 6*.
2. When you read Lesson Four, watch for:
 - The purpose of the images of conflict and judgment as a wake-up call
 - What the images are not
 - Reminders of how these images can offer hope
 - Connections between these images and images of the Hebrew scriptures that would have been familiar in John's time
3. Reflect on how different this understanding of the images is from other understandings you may have had. What do you find helpful about this way of looking at these images?
4. Summarize what you have learned in *Revelation 6* and Lesson Four, focusing especially on new insights. What hope does this lesson offer you?
5. Finally, look at the art for Lesson Four on page 30. Read *Revelation 6:12–13*, then give yourself five minutes to simply gaze at the image:
 - a. What do you see?
 - b. What do the details suggest to you?
 - c. What does the color suggest?
 - d. What hope does this image offer you?
6. Pray using the prayer on page 36, or your own prayer of gratitude for new insights that grow out of your exploration of *Revelation*.

Lesson Five (pages 38–44)

1. Read, “Strategies for Getting Through the Middle Chapters of *Revelation*” on pages 84–85.
2. Read *Revelation 7–8:5*. If you have time, also read *Revelation 11–12*, and 14)
3. When you read Lesson Five, watch for:
 - The powerful message of hope in the midst of images of the wake-up call delivered by the seven seals
 - The kinds of encouragement this message points to and teaches
 - The significance and symbolism of “sealing” Christians
 - What 144,000 does not mean, and what it likely means
 - The multi-cultural dimension of *Revelation*. How might this help us address diversity in our churches today?
 - How might you picture yourself “sealed and protected”? From what do you need to be protected? For what?
4. Summarize what you have learned in *Revelation 7–8:5* and Lesson Five, focusing especially on new insights. What hope does this lesson offer you?
5. Look at the art for Lesson Five on page 38. Read *Revelation 7:9*, then give yourself five minutes to simply gaze at the image:
 - a. What do you see?
 - b. What do the details suggest to you?
 - c. What does the color suggest?
 - d. What hope does this image offer you?
6. Pray using the prayer on page 44, or your own prayer of gratitude for new insights that grow out of your exploration of *Revelation*.

Lesson Six (pages 46–52)

1. Read *Revelation 12*.
2. When you read Lesson Six, watch for:
 - The story of the birth of the god Apollo used in *Revelation 12* to point to the already accomplished victory in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Notice who/what each of these symbolize: the woman, the baby, the dragon, the wilderness
 - What the story of the defeat of Satan intends to depict, and John's answer to why bad things continue to happen to God's people on earth
 - The view of the earth in *Revelation*
3. Summarize what you have learned in *Revelation 12* and Lesson Six, focusing especially on new insights. What hope does this lesson offer you?
4. Finally, look at the art for Lesson Six on page 46. Read *Revelation 12:1*, then give yourself five minutes to simply gaze at the image:
 - a. What do you see?
 - b. What do the details suggest to you?
 - c. What does the color suggest?
 - d. What hope does this image offer you?
5. Pray using the prayer on page 52, or your own prayer of gratitude for new insights that grow out of your exploration of *Revelation*.

Lesson Seven (pages 54–60)

1. Read, “The So-Called Rapture,” on page 81.
2. Read *Revelation 13, 15–16, 19*.
3. When you read Lesson Seven, watch for:
 - The misuse of *Revelation* to promote violence against enemies, including people of other nations and other faiths
 - The author’s understanding of the two beasts in *Revelation 13* and of the “mark of the beast”—666
 - Reminders of the true hope in *Revelation* and how the violent imagery might be helpful to us today
 - Connections between our Christian journey in *Revelation* and the journey out of Egypt in the Exodus story, and the ultimate purpose of the threats of the violent images
 - Explanations of “Armageddon” and the battle imagery along with the part Jesus plays, and has already played, in “victory”
4. Summarize what you have learned in *Revelation 13, 15–16, 19* and Lesson Seven, focusing especially on new insights. What hope does this lesson offer you?
5. Look at the art for Lesson Seven on page 54. Read *Revelation 15:2*, then give yourself five minutes to simply gaze at the image:
 - a. What do you see?
 - b. What do the details suggest to you?
 - c. What does the color suggest?
 - d. What hope does this image offer you?
6. Pray using the prayer on page 60, or your own prayer of gratitude for new insights that grow out of your exploration of *Revelation*.

Lesson Eight (pages 62–68)

1. Read *Revelation 17–18*.
2. When you read Lesson Eight, watch for:
 - The challenges, insights and meaning of the personification of the evil empire, Rome (“Babylon”) as a whore
 - Descriptions of what “fornication” intends to portray, and does not portray, about Rome
 - Descriptions of Rome’s wealth, slave trade and exploitation of creation. What parallels might you draw to today’s major societal ills?
 - The description of the trial of Rome, its ultimate message, and the implications for us
3. Summarize what you have learned in *Revelation 17–18* and Lesson Eight, focusing especially on new insights. What hope does this lesson offer you?
4. Look at the art for Lesson Eight on page 62. Read *Revelation 18:17b–18*, then give yourself five minutes to simply gaze at the image:
 - a. What do you see?
 - b. What do the details suggest to you?
 - c. What does the color suggest?
 - d. What hope does this image offer you?
5. Pray using the prayer on page 68, or your own prayer of gratitude for new insights that grow out of your exploration of *Revelation*.

Lesson Nine (pages 70–76)

1. Read, “Eschatology—The Last Things,” pages 78-79.
2. Read *Revelation 21–22*.
3. When you read Lesson Nine, watch for:
 - The transition from the bride as the wife of the Lamb to the bride as the city
 - Images of the New Jerusalem, the tree of life, the river of life
 - The real “rapture” in *Revelation*
 - Reminders of the meaning of the continuing warnings and threats
 - God’s desire for the earth and for us
4. Summarize what you have learned in *Revelation 21–22* and Lesson Nine, focusing especially on new insights. What hope does this lesson offer you?
5. Look at the art for Lesson Nine on page 70. Read *Revelation 22:2*, then give yourself five minutes to simply gaze at the image:
 - a. What do you see?
 - b. What do the details suggest to you?
 - c. What does the color suggest?
 - d. What hope does this image offer you?
6. Pray using the prayer on page 76, or your own prayer of gratitude for new insights that grow out of your exploration of *Revelation*.

Concluding your study:

I trust that your faithfulness to exploring *Revelation* and what it might mean for you and for the Christian community of faith has been rewarded with many new understandings and insights. Set aside some time to sit and reflect on the book as a whole and your experience of it on this journey. Ask yourself the questions provided here. Journal your thoughts, or talk about them with a friend, or turn them into a prayer for continued opportunities to better understand and to wrestle with this challenging and fascinating book.

- What are some of the things I used to think about the book of *Revelation*?
- What are some of the new understandings I have of *Revelation*?
- What are two or three of the most important new insights I have? What do these new insights mean for me as I continue my Christian journey?
- How will I live differently because of my encounter with *Revelation*?
- Because of my journeys through *Revelation*, what are some of my hopes for my lifetime with God now and into God's future?