

# BOOKS OF THE BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

by WAYNE PALMER

R E V E L A T I O N





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3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Book of Revelation is unlike any other New Testament book. Not because it veers away from proclaiming that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Son, the promised Messiah, who saved the world by His life, death, and resurrection; that is the heart of Revelation. The difference is strictly the style in which it presents that message. That style is much more like the later chapters of Daniel and the Book of Ezekiel in the Old Testament. It is a style called apocalyptic.

Apocalyptic literature is a style particularly well suited to a captive people suffering bitter persecution. Using cryptic symbols, numberings, and images, it permitted the reader to understand the content, yet if it fell into the hands of the oppressors it would look like nonsensical gibberish.

## **PURPOSE**

Let's clear up one misconception. This book contains only one revelation, not a series of revelations. This vision was not originally given by Jesus Christ to the apostle John. It was first given to Jesus Christ by God the Father. Jesus sent an angel to reveal this revelation to John. John, in turn, was to share it with the seven churches in Asia Minor, during a time of severe Roman persecution. Its message brought hope to Christians in a time when it must have seemed that Satan had triumphed and Christ Jesus was nowhere to be seen. Revelation reminded them that Christ was still in control of His entire creation, and in time, would return to eliminate evil, suffering, and death. He would restore peace and righteousness for all eternity.

In our day, we face an ever-increasing persecution, but it is more subtle. It usually takes the form of our culture labeling us as

intolerant, unloving—family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors asking us to keep our faith to ourselves. Like those early Christians, we are tempted to remain silent and hide our faith. Revelation reminds us of the eternal cost of denying Jesus before the world—and the eternal reward awaiting those who boldly remain in faith.

## **OUTLINE**

The one revelation actually consists of a series of visions and scenes.

Chapters 1–3 consist of two visions in which Jesus appears to John, then asks him to share seven individual messages with seven churches in Asia Minor.

Chapters 4–5 establish Jesus' worthiness to save His people and judge the world.

This is followed by seven scenes of the end times. In the first scene (6:1–8:5), Jesus opens seven seals. In the second scene (8:6–11:19), seven trumpets are blown. In the third scene (12:1–14:20), John describes the battle between the Holy Trinity and the anti-trinity. In the fourth scene (15–16), seven bowls of wrath are poured out. In the fifth scene (17–19), God overthrows Babylon the prostitute. In the sixth scene (20:1–21:8), we see the final judgment. And in the final scene (21:9–22:5), we see the holy Church, the Bride of Christ.

Revelation concludes with an epilogue in which we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus!" (22:20).

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# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## THE PROLOGUE

### **Read Revelation 1:1–8.**

The first verse clearly shows the entire book is one revelation given by God the Father to His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus intends to share it with the entire Church through His servant John. He sends an angel to bring that revelation to John.

### **Q 1: In verses 4 and 5, what words are used to identify the three persons of the Trinity? Where is John using code language?**

- God the Father is identified by the mysterious phrase “Him who is and who was and who is to come.” In Revelation, whenever you see that phrase speaking of God who “was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,” you are reading about God the Father.
- The Holy Spirit is called “The seven spirits who are before His [the Father’s] throne.” He is also called the sevenfold spirit. References to seven angels or seven golden lampstands often refer to the work of the Holy Spirit in building and sustaining the Church.
- Jesus Christ. Note the names used of our Savior throughout Revelation:
  1. the faithful witness—referring to His testimony before Pontius Pilate.
  2. the firstborn of the dead—referring to His resurrection to eternal life.
  3. the ruler of kings on earth—since all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him, He is King of kings and Lord of lords.
- The code language is seen in these rather strange ways to refer to the persons of the Trinity. A Christian would know who is being spoken of, not a Roman persecutor (except for the name “Jesus Christ”).

# THE GLORY OF CHRIST AND THE LETTERS TO SEVEN CHURCHES

## **Read Revelation 1:9–3:22.**

The seven lampstands among which Jesus stands represent the seven churches of Asia Minor that John addresses back in 1:4. In this section, Jesus dictates a letter to each church. The seven angels are the pastors over those congregations. How comforting to see that Jesus holds them in His hand. Note the powerful description of the Son of God glorified in heaven. An awesome and reassuring person indeed.

## **Q 2: List the names Jesus uses to refer to Himself in the seven letters. What reassurance do those names give in the midst of severe persecution?**

- “The first and the last” (1:17)—Jesus is the first, that is, the origin or cause of our salvation through His suffering, death, and resurrection. He is the last, that is, the goal of our faith, which is eternal life with God our Father.
- “I have the keys of Death and Hades” (1:18)—Jesus holds in His hand the destiny of all mankind. He has power to free believers from death and hell and to punish our enemies with the same.
- “The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life” (2:8)—Jesus has conquered death; therefore, we should not fear the worst our enemies can do to us.
- “Him who has the sharp two-edged sword” (2:12)—This is the sword of judgment against God’s enemies—the sword is the Word of God, and the two edges are Law and Gospel by which He will judge unbelievers and believers. The imagery of our powerful defender holding a sword against a powerful enemy is reassuring.
- “The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze” (2:18)—Jesus’ eyes flash with the righteous anger against the enemies of the truth both inside and outside the Church. His feet show His firmness and intention to trample all His enemies.
- “The holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens” (3:7)—Jesus emphasizes the purity and truth of His Gospel about God the Father’s love and grace. The key shows that Jesus is over the household of God, and He alone has the authority to control the entrance into heaven.
- “The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation” (3:14)—Jesus is the witness of His Father’s words and actions, and He attests to the faithfulness of the message of His witness in His

ministry. He is the beginning of creation in that He is the one through whom everything was created, and He shares our human nature as the Son of Man. He is our Savior, and we can be confident He will lead all events in our lives to our benefit and ultimately our eternal inheritance.

# WORTHY IS CHRIST THE LAMB

## **Read Revelation 4–5.**

John is brought to the heavenly throne room. God the Father sits on the throne, and before Him are seven torches of fire (which are the seven spirits of God—that is the sevenfold spirit, the Holy Spirit). The Father holds a scroll sealed with seven seals. No one is found worthy to open that scroll until the Lamb comes forward.

## **Q 3: What makes the Lamb worthy to unseal the scroll?**

- In 5:5, He is called the “Lion of the tribe of Judah” (lion being the symbol of Jesus’ messianic rule) and the “Root of David” (referring to Jesus’ coming from the line of David as prophesied). In 5:6, He is the Lamb who stands “as though it had been slain” (clearly referring to Jesus, the Lamb of God, who died and rose again).

# CHRIST OPENS THE SEVEN SEALS

From here on, the history of the world from the ascension of Christ to His return for judgment is played out from different perspectives in a sequence of visions.

## **Read Revelation 6–8:5.**

The first view of human history from Christ's ascension to His return for judgment is portrayed in the opening of the seven seals and the scroll. The scroll is the contents of Revelation, that is, the destiny of the Christians here on earth. As its seals are removed, that story moves along, highlighting the suffering and tribulation of humanity on earth—including the Church—until Jesus returns in judgment.

### **Q 4: Briefly describe the first six seals and the suffering that results for humanity (and creation) when each is opened.**

- The first four seals are the famous Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (another word for Revelation).

**First seal:** White horse—conqueror. He unleashes military might and prowess, the plague of warfare or tyranny on humanity.

**Second seal:** Red horse—bloodshed. He symbolizes warfare, but also all forms of killing and murder.

**Third seal:** Black horse—famine in one place, abundance in another (“do not harm the oil and wine” [6:6]). He symbolizes the hunger and famine that persist in parts of the world, while other places enjoy abundance.

**Fourth seal:** Pale horse—death and the grave. Think of the hundreds of millions who were killed in the wars of the twentieth century (World War II alone is estimated at between 50 and 80 million soldiers and civilians).

**Fifth seal:** The martyrs pray for God to avenge those who put them to death, so He can vindicate His truthfulness, Jesus' sacrifice, and the Gospel they proclaimed. It shows that Christians are not immune from the sufferings in this world, but in some ways suffer even more than others.

**Sixth seal:** The shaking of creation at the return of Christ to judge the world. Notice how the formerly mighty try to hide themselves from God and His Son—their judge.



**Q 5: These seals remind us of events already taking place around the world—as they have been ever since Jesus ascended into heaven and long before that. How can these events be helpful to keep Christians focused on their Savior?**

- When life is going well and things are abundant, it is easy to forget about God and our need of a Savior. We can be lulled to spiritual sleep, unprepared for the hour of Jesus' return. These things remind us that the end is coming, and Christ will return. They force us to be watchful and ready.

**Q 6: Almost as an intermission, we are given a glimpse of the triumphant saints in heaven and the tremendous, tender care God is taking of them as they gather around His throne night and day. How would this reminder be comforting to a persecuted Christian?**

- It reminds us that though we may face severe persecution and abuse, perhaps even death for the faith, God will comfort us and it will have all been worthwhile.

# THE BLOWING OF THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

This second seven-part vision provides a second glimpse at the history of mankind from Jesus' ascension to His return for judgment. This time it is initiated by the prayers of Christians. God answers those prayers by having seven angels blow seven trumpets. We will see the torments from these trumpets fall particularly on nonbelievers. Thus this vision shows how God protects His Church in a way that enables believers to fulfill their mission of proclaiming the Gospel message. The torments are intended to drive nonbelievers to repentance, so they will hear and heed the Gospel proclamation of the Church.

## **Read Revelation 8–11.**

**Q 7: The first four trumpets signal the destruction of one-third of some natural feature of earth. What is the significance of one-third being destroyed?**

- It shows the serious damage our sin has done to us and to creation, but also God's mercy and grace toward His people and toward nonbelievers He is trying to bring to repentance. Losing a third of anything is a huge blow, but better than losing everything.

The events brought on by the last three trumpets are far more devastating than the first four—as the flying eagle announces. The plagues shift from natural to demonic. The fallen star of 9:1 introduces us to Satan, the king of the abyss, who will act prominently in the remainder of Revelation until his judgment.

**Q 8: In 9:6, John writes of unbelievers who will seek death and not find it. What is wrong with the things unbelievers hope to gain through death?**

- Unbelievers (like many mass shooters, terrorists, and despotic rulers like Adolf Hitler) see death/suicide as a way to escape justice, suffering, and torment—if their lives do not hold the promise of a good quality of life, they would rather end it all, not believing in life after death. But they do not realize the first death is immediately followed by a personal judgment and punishment in hell (see Luke 16:23); while the public judgment of Judgment Day is followed by the second death of body and spirit in hell for unbelievers. God withholds death from them in mercy, because He does not want the sinner to suffer the second death, but to have time to repent, trust in Christ, and live.

# THE BATTLE BETWEEN THE TRINITY AND ANTI-TRINITY

Between the second and third visions in Revelation, chapters 12–14 give us a view of the struggle between the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and the anti-trinity (Satan and two beasts). Just as the first two chapters in Job help us understand all his suffering, loss, and affliction was instigated by Satan, these chapters help us understand what is behind all the suffering and chaos occurring on earth. Understanding Satan’s role in the persecution of the Church is pivotal for the reader of Revelation who is living through great suffering, persecution, and loss.

## **Read Revelation 12.**

The woman represents Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church. The dragon represents Satan, who claims authority over the earth and all human kingdoms. The male child is Jesus Christ, whom the dragon tried to devour shortly after his birth (through King Herod slaying all the boys in Bethlehem two years old and younger [see Matthew 2]).

### **Q 9: How does it help a persecuted Christian to understand Satan’s furious rage at being cast down from heaven, and being aware he has only a brief time before his eternal punishment in hell on Judgment Day?**

- It seems strange that the world’s reaction to the Gospel of Jesus Christ is totally out of balance—so hostile, even sometimes leading to our loss of property, freedom, and life. And this bitter reaction often comes from a culture that preaches tolerance.

## **Read Revelation 13.**

This chapter describes two beasts that team up with Satan to form an “anti-trinity.” The first beast has a powerful and fearful appearance. It seems to represent worldly power and authority run amok. In John’s time, this was seen in the Roman emperor (Caligula or Nero) who demanded to be treated like a god and prayed to. When the Christians refused, they were severely persecuted. The second beast looks less threatening as it rises out of the ground. It is reminiscent of Jesus’ warning to beware of wolves masquerading as sheep. It speaks of false prophets and teachers who come from within the Church teaching false doctrine.

### **Q 10: Which do you think does more damage to denominations and local congregations—outside threats or false teachers from within?**

- Opinions will vary. Outside threats are multiple—some subtle and deceptive, others open and aggressive. They include governmental

interference, cultural pressures, social morals, and so on. Inside threats can be devastating when someone we respect and admire begins twisting Scripture to justify their own ungodliness or that of others.

**Read Revelation 14.**

This chapter turns to look at the saints in heaven singing the new song. Three angels fly over the earth, warning unbelievers that God's judgment is coming soon and will be severe for those who refuse to repent and trust in Jesus Christ. Notice the contrast between the unbelievers' fate in hell and the believers' eternal rest in heaven in verses 9–13.

**Q 11: Why is it important for every Christian to not lose their eternal perspective—especially those facing persecution?**

- We easily get caught in the here and now and forget the things that seem so monumental today will be long forgotten in a few weeks, months, or years. If we fall away to avoid suffering and persecution on earth, we risk much more severe and eternal suffering and torment in hell. Only through Christ Jesus—who endured that suffering in our place on the cross—can we find true peace and rest forever.



# POURING OUT SEVEN BOWLS OF WRATH

Now we reach the third and final sevenfold vision. Like the two before it (seven seals and seven trumpets), the seven bowls of wrath portray the time between Jesus' ascension and His return on Judgment Day.

## **Read Revelation 15.**

Chapter 15 sets a joyous tone for believers before they learn of the wrath God will pour out on the earth. The saints stand beside the sea of glass and fire and sing the song of Moses. This takes us back to the exodus, when the children of Israel stood on the banks of the Red Sea, looking upon the Egyptian army drowned and dead, and Moses leads them in songs of praise for God's great acts.

## **Q 12: Why is it important to think of God's great acts of deliverance—especially the cross—when we consider the wrath of God that will be poured out on the earth?**

- We all go through times of loss, pain, hurt, and sorrow. As we remember God's great acts of deliverance in the past (Passover/Red Sea, the cross and empty tomb), we can take confidence that God will deliver us through our perils and trials and bring us safely to His presence, where we will join in the song of Moses.

## **Read Revelation 16.**

The bowls of wrath are reminiscent of the ten plagues on Egypt.

1. The first bowl is reminiscent of the sixth plague on Egypt (see Exodus 9:8–12). Just as that plague struck only Egyptians and not Israelites, the sores come only upon those who bear the mark of the beast.
2. The second and third bowls turn water into blood—like the first plague on Egypt (see Exodus 7:14–24). It is another case of the punishment fitting the crime—they shed the blood of the martyrs, now they must drink blood.
3. The fourth bowl is a reversal of the ninth plague (see Exodus 10:21–29). Instead of the sun being darkened, its heat is intensified. God uses these plagues to bring them to repentance, but the unbelievers only become more hostile toward Him.
4. As a result of the blasphemies of the unbelievers, the fifth bowl exposes the lies of the beast. Darkness strikes his kingdom and his weakness against God's power is exposed. Yet the people still refuse to repent.

5. The sixth bowl sets the stage for the last great battle of Armageddon—where the kings of the east combine their armies to fight against God’s people. This is reminiscent of the Assyrian and Babylonian armies that conquered Israel and Judah from the east. It is also similar to two battles in Joshua where kings of southern Canaan and later northern Canaan banded together to fight Israel with huge armies.
6. The seventh bowl shatters the great city of Babylon (which will be explored in depth in chapters 17–19). The monstrous hailstones are like the seventh plague of hail (see Exodus 9:13–35), and the hailstones God sent upon the massive army of south Canaan (see Joshua 10:11).

**Q 13: Describe some natural and man-made disasters that make you think of the plagues on Egypt or these seven bowls of wrath. How do these events remind you of the need to repent of your sins and trust in Jesus Christ alone?**

- Answers will vary, but whether it is tornado, hurricane, fire, flood, earthquake, volcano, wars, riots, or crime, these events remind us of sin that brought them into God’s creation and the judgment to come. Since we are all sinners, we need to turn from our sin and guilt and cling to Jesus’ salvation alone.

# OVERTHROWING BABYLON THE PROSTITUTE

One of the prominent images in Revelation is the Holy Christian Church as the Bride of Jesus Christ. In the next three chapters, we see the overthrow of an evil counterpart—Babylon the prostitute.

## **Read Revelation 17.**

John sees the prostitute of Babylon. Babylon, the capitol of the Babylonian Empire, was a code name early Christians used for Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire. Rome was wealthy, decadent, extravagant, and filled with all kinds of vice and evil.

### **Q 14: Why do you think the drunkenness and sexual immorality of the prostitute is so vividly portrayed?**

- The Lord wants His persecuted people to see the true nature of their persecutors and know that He clearly sees what His people are suffering and promises to avenge them. The description of the prostitute being drunk on the blood of the Christian martyrs is graphic, but so true. Especially when we think of the great festivals that were held by the Roman emperors like Nero as they tortured and executed the Christians in the Roman Colosseum. Rome seemed indestructible, but seeing the destruction of the prostitute was an important reminder for Christians not to give up their faith because of the pressure from Rome. If they do, they will share the eternal torment of hell with their unrepentant persecutors.

## **Read Revelation 18.**

Chapter 18 includes the angel's announcement of the fall of Rome, followed by the lament of the kings, merchants, shipmasters, and seafaring men who became wealthy from her. Notice the sharp contrast between the believers' view of this event and the view of unbelievers. Rome represented a worldview complete with religion, wealth, power, selfishness, sin, and vice. The culture and worldview of the Church is very different.

### **Q 15: Which worldview do you see at work in your culture? How can we be light and salt of the world?**

- The angel warned the people of God, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven and God has remembered her iniquities" (Revelation 18:4–5). As we see our culture drift further away from God's righteous ways and revel in those shameful things God forbids, we need to remember God's judgment and speak the Law and Gospel clearly so

the Holy Spirit can bring some people to faith and save them from the punishment to come.

**Read Revelation 19.**

This chapter makes abundantly clear that despite the chaos and sin that surround us in this world, God is completely and totally in control, and He will vindicate His people. We hear the rejoicing in heaven of the saints who have now been vindicated, as well as the marriage supper of the Lamb (Jesus) and His Bride (the Church). Then Jesus rides out in triumph on a white horse to crush His enemies and cast them into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. What is currently for us a matter of faith as we live in this sinful world will one day be a matter of sight and our own personal experience as Jesus returns.

**Q 16: Revelation 19:21 shows that Christ defeats His enemies not with the swords of angels or saints, but with the sword that comes from His mouth—that is, the Word of God. How does this align with the Gospel accounts of Jesus driving out demons—and how He ended the forty days of temptation in the wilderness?**

- Jesus ended His time of temptation with the devil by a single command, “Be gone, Satan!” (Matthew 4:10). He likewise drove out demons with His Word alone. This reminds us of the power of God’s Word, stilling storms on the Sea of Galilee or calling all creation into existence out of nothing by His Word alone.



# THE FINAL JUDGMENT

This passage of Scripture has led to some wild interpretations among Christians of various denominations. Especially the various theories regarding the millennium—the thousand-year reign of Christ.

## **Read Revelation 20.**

The final judgment is presented in the next vision. It begins with Satan being bound for one thousand years until right before the Last Day. This is the same thousand years spoken of in the theories of the millennium, the thousand-year reign of Christ.

### **Q 17: What do you understand the millennium to be?**

- Answers will vary. There are three views of the millennium that are taught among Christians:
  - Premillennialism—Jesus will return to physically reign on earth for a thousand years, then Satan will be released for a short time, and then Christ will return to judge the world.
  - Postmillennialism—Christ will come for Judgment Day after a golden age in which Christian ethics will prosper as Christians establish Christ's kingdom on earth. The thousand years are not literal.
  - Amillennialism—The thousand years is not a literal period of time, but symbolic for the time span between Christ's ascension and His return on Judgment Day. Christ rules through His New Testament Church. This is the historic Lutheran view.

### **Q 18: What is the difference between the first (20:5) and second death?**

- The first death is the death of our physical bodies. The second death is the eternal death of an unbeliever in hell.

### **Q 19: What is the difference between the first (20:5) and second resurrections?**

- The first resurrection was from spiritual death to spiritual life—it occurred when we were brought to faith through the Word or the waters of Baptism. Only Christians experience the first resurrection. The second resurrection is the physical resurrection from death when Christ returns. All people will be raised on that day and face judgment—believers and unbelievers alike—and the angels and devils will be judged also. Believers will share in Christ's eternal kingdom while unbelievers will suffer eternally in hell. The fact that no unbeliever will escape this resurrection and judgment should compel us to want to

share the Gospel so the Holy Spirit can bring them to repentance and faith and save them from hell.

**Q 20: What happens to Satan on Judgment Day?**

- Unlike popular thoughts of hell, Satan and his demons do not rule hell, tormenting unbelieving humans with pitchforks. God created hell to punish the devil and his angels eternally for their rebellion against Him and for their tempting and tormenting of humans. Notice, too, that death itself is thrown into the lake of burning sulfur—it never was a natural part of God’s creation, and it will not be found in the new heaven and the new earth.

# THE BRIDE NEW JERUSALEM

Finally, God has purged His creation of all sin, death, and evil. Now He gives us a glimpse of what follows the judgment.

## **Read Revelation 21–22:5.**

The new heaven and new earth described here is just like our resurrected body. God does not discard the present heaven and earth; He cleanses it, perfects it, and makes it new. Likewise, we are not given a totally new body, but we are raised in our own body, but now glorified and made perfect—a new spiritual body (see “my eyes shall behold” in Job 19:27).

## **Q 21: What parts of creation do you most enjoy? What parts do you find most inhospitable?**

- Answers will vary. Some love being outdoors and “getting back to nature”; others hate being outdoors because of bugs and dirt or temperatures that are too hot or too cold. The new earth will be a delightful place for us to live and explore. But best of all, God will be here with us, and we will be able to look upon His face with our sinless eyes.

## **Q 22: What is the new Jerusalem?**

- It is the full number of saints—Old and New Testament believers made pure in the blood of Jesus Christ by faith. Notice that it comes down from heaven to live in the new earth. Of course, those who have died in faith are currently in heaven with the Lord, so they will be “coming down” with Jesus to the new earth. But what about believers who are left alive on earth on the Day of Judgment? First Thessalonians 4:17 says after Jesus returns and instantly transforms and glorifies our bodies, we “will be caught up together with them [the departed saints] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” This is what is happening in the so-called “rapture” in Matthew 24:40–41. It will happen on Judgment Day, not some different day at the start or end of the millennium as other Christians teach and believe.

# THE EPILOGUE

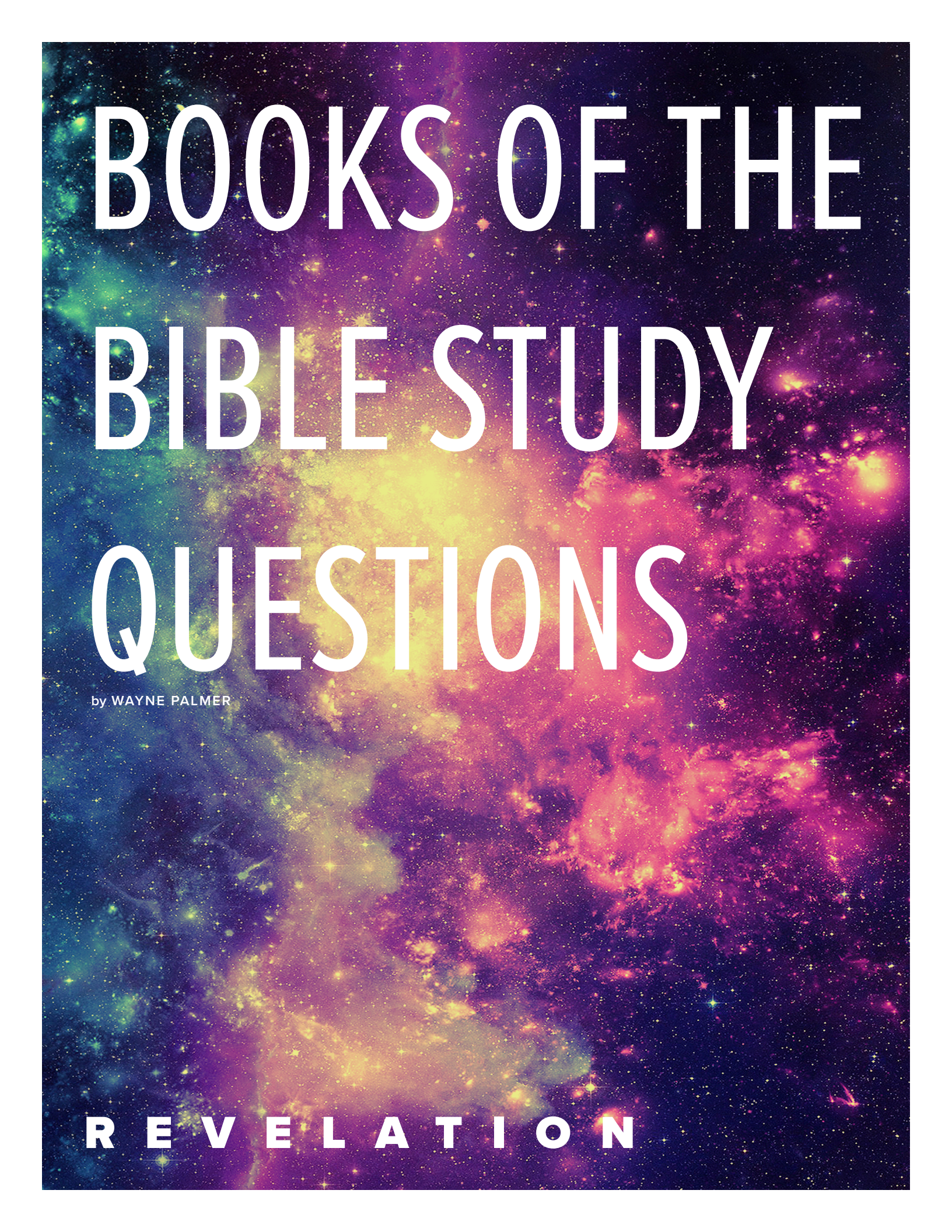
## **Read Revelation 22:6–21.**

Revelation closes with a quick recap of all that has been said before, Christ's promise that He is coming soon, and the Church's plea: "Come, Lord Jesus."

## **Q 23: What do you normally think when you pray, "Thy kingdom come" in the Lord's Prayer or "Come, Lord Jesus" in the common table prayer?**

- We are often thinking of Jesus Christ coming into our lives and homes in this present day and age. But it is wise to remember the second coming and pray for Christ's return. That way God lifts us up out of this life and shows us the necessity of faith—and puts our daily life in its proper, eternal perspective.





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