

# ON THE ISLE OF PATMOS

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The Book of Revelation was written by the apostle John (Rev 1:4). It is one of the five New Testament books inspired by God through “that disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:7). The first two verses of the book make it clear where John’s words came from: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.” As he was given this vision, John was instructed, “*What thou seest, write in a book*” (Rev 1:11), and this is exactly what we have preserved in this last book of the Bible. Revelation 1:9 informs us that John wrote Revelation while on the isle of Patmos. The circumstances that led to John’s presence on that island, along with the main theme of the book itself, should serve as a source of great encouragement to every Christian. Indeed, Revelation 1:3 says, “*Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.*”

## **Domitian’s persecution of Christians**

Patmos is a small (13 square miles), rocky island located in the Aegean Sea about 70 miles southwest of Ephesus. It was used by the Romans for the banishment of criminals. It is known from secular history that John was banished to Patmos by the Roman emperor Domitian in 94 or 95 A.D., where he remained until the emperor’s death in 96. This is partly how we know the approximate date of the writing of Revelation. This was written during a very difficult time for Christians. The emperor Nero had reigned from 54-68 A.D. and during the last five years of his reign he had many Christians in Rome put to death in cruel, merciless ways. But Nero’s persecution had been restricted to the city of Rome itself. Domitian reigned from 81-96 and brought systematic persecution upon Christians throughout the provinces of the Roman Empire which had never been seen until that time. Previous emperors had accepted the worship of the people, but Domitian was fanatical about it. He adopted the Latin title *dominus et deus* for himself, which means “Master and God.” When writing him letters, Domitian’s ministers were required to address him as “God.” Domitian was determined that everyone in the Roman Empire should worship him, and when Christians refused, he brought upon them a terrible

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persecution. Many thousands were put to death for the faith during the years 89-96, especially towards the latter part of that time. This is the climate during the time in which Revelation was written. This is also what John meant when he said he was their “*companion in tribulation*” (Rev 1:9). Remember, John was a prisoner banished to the isle of Patmos. Banishment typically included scourgings, constant chains, inadequate clothing, poor food, sleeping on the ground, and often work under a military overseer. John was experiencing firsthand what he wrote about.

## **To him that overcomes**

We see many references to the horrible sufferings being inflicted upon Christians in Revelation (see Rev 2:13; 6:9; 20:4). For example, there were Christians in Smyrna in prison for the faith and to them was written the encouragement: “*Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*” (Rev 2:10). The very purpose of this book is to encourage and strengthen Christians as they face persecution and trials in this life. The message of the book is uplifting, one of great hope and especially of overcoming (Rev 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21; 5:5; 6:2). The devil and his servants may overcome us physically (Rev 11:7; 13:7). But faithful Christians are the ones who ultimately prevail. Revelation 12:11 says, “*And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.*” We can overcome every temptation that we face just as Christ overcame (Rev 3:21). In the end, those who persecute us and triumph physically over us in this life will be overcome by Christ in the end and face a horrible eternal punishment (Rev 6:2; 17:14). But the great promises of Revelation are of a powerful, eternal reward for those who overcome in this life (Rev 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21; 15:2; 21:7). What a wonderful, powerful and essential message for every Christian! This book had deep meaning to the Christians who originally read it. It should also have deep meaning to us, since all Christians must suffer persecution (2 Tim 3:12). It is no wonder that Revelation 1:3 promises us a great blessing if we study this book and follow its teachings.