



[Revelation 1:1-2](#)

(1) The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John, (2) who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

New King James Version

The book itself tells us, right at the beginning, what it is about, but because of the way it is translated into English, we can read right over it and miss the book's own declaration of its contents. We are immediately told that this book contains the *revelation of Jesus Christ*. This phrase is the title of the book. But what does "revelation" mean? It is the Greek noun *apocalypsis*, which is why this book is often called the "book of the Apocalypse." This noun comes from the verb *apocalupto*, which literally means "to take away the veil," such as when a painting or statue has its covering taken away. Even though *apocalypsis* is most often translated "revelation," the best equivalent word in English is "unveiling."

In common usage, when someone refers to the "Apocalypse," or describes an event as being "apocalyptic," he is usually talking about widespread devastation or ultimate doom. Mel Gibson recently produced and directed a movie entitled *Apocalypto*, which portrayed the end of the Mayan civilization—and it was a very bloody end.

Using "apocalypse" this way derives from the content of the [book of Revelation](#), not from the word's Greek meaning. Simply, *apocalypsis* and *apocalupto* refer to "taking away a veil" or "unveiling" rather than to cataclysmic events. However, in this specific instance of apocalypse, of a veil being taken away (when [Jesus Christ](#) returns), widespread devastation will in fact occur as this present age closes with wars and disasters.

In the Greek New Testament, *apocalypsis* appears in two senses. When used figuratively, it has the sense of "bringing someone to knowledge," as in the English phrase "remove the veil of ignorance." For example, when we say that a mystery is

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unveiled, we mean that the veil of ignorance is lifted so that the matter can be plainly understood. In terms of the book of Revelation, this is the sense that most interpreters and readers recognize in it. They see it as the unveiling of prophetic events to understanding.

However, when *apocalypsis* is used in a literal sense, it refers to "the visible appearance of one previously unseen," as a woman shrouded by a veil is revealed when her covering is removed. In Revelation's case, as the book of the Unveiling, *apocalypsis* literally refers to the visible appearance of One who is now hidden from human sight, and that One is, of course, Jesus Christ.

The New Testament consistently supports the literal sense of *apocalypsis* rather than the figurative, and that the "revelation of Jesus Christ" is not limited to His testimony or to His unlocking of prophecy. Instead, the "revelation of Jesus Christ" is, in fact, an advance record of His *visible appearance* in glory, to overthrow the spirit and human rulers of [this world](#) and to establish His Kingdom on earth.

A key to effective Bible study is to let the Bible interpret itself. Another key is to let the Bible's usage of a word determine its meaning rather than to rely solely on what it means in secular Greek or Hebrew. *Apocalypsis* appears in eighteen places in the New Testament, and in ten of those places—including [Revelation 1:1](#)—it is used literally, referring to a person or a thing. In every case, it denotes the "visible appearance" or "unveiling" of that person or thing, confirming how it should be understood in [Revelation 1:1](#).

— David C. Grabbe

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[What Is the Book of Revelation?](#)

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