

LVIII. Traveling Route 66: The Bible in Biblical Perspective  
The Journey with Christ, the Promised One  
“Revelation: The Book of the Consummation”  
The Book of Revelation  
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November 24, 2013 – Evening Sermon

We will start by looking at Revelation 1. Revelation 1:1-3, 19-20, says [1] *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,* [2] *who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.* [3] *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, for the time is near.*

[19] *Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.* [20] *As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*

This will not be an in-depth study of the book of Revelation but I do want to recommend two books to you. One is titled The Triumph of the Lamb by Dennis Johnson and the second is More Than Conquerors by William Hendriksen. If you want to go deeper than lay folks would go then I would recommend the Commentary on the book of Revelation by Dr. Greg Beale. It is one of the best Biblically framed, scholarly treatment of the book of Revelation that I am aware of and that I'd recommend to you. You can also go to our website at [www.briarwood.org](http://www.briarwood.org) in the archive section to download the 41 sermons I did on the book of Revelation, for free.

We will start with our overview of the book of Revelation. First of all who wrote the book of Revelation? This is interesting. The author is Jesus Christ. In a sense Jesus is the Author of every book but in this one He makes a big point that He is the author. At the sending of the Father, He has now come and in a sense John is not bearing the message of Christ empowered by the Spirit but he is actually recording the message of Christ by the power of the Spirit. In a sense, John in this case, unlike I, II and III John and the Gospel of John, John is almost like a secretary.

For instance, Peter in I and II Peter and Peter's Gospel, was assisted by John Mark as a secretary in the writing that he put forth. Sometimes the Apostles will have secretaries as they are empowered by the Holy Spirit and in this case Jesus comes to give the revelation to John by the presence of an angel. Therefore John now records for this the book of Revelation. This is why it is challenged on whether John really wrote it or not, because there are phrases, various vocabulary and some grammatical structure that you don't find in the Gospel of John or I, II and II John. Some think he didn't write this book but I would say it's further proof of John being the recorder. This is not John writing out of the context of how he has been trained, this is John writing what has been given to him, this revelation that has come from Christ through him.

There are clearly Johannine statements. There is the emphasis on the Word and the Lamb, his phrase 'we write these things' which is language that is used in I, II, and III John plus the Gospel of John. So this book does bear his mark but it does bear the mark of one who is a secretary as one who is dynamically inspired by the Holy Spirit. He is

carefully inspired by the Holy Spirit as he is recording. This book is from Jesus through John. So that is who is writing it so let's move to the next question.

Where is John recording this book? We are told in Revelation 1 that John is writing this from the place of his exile which is the Isle of Patmos. I have had one opportunity in my life to visit this place and in the traditional site where he wrote this there is a cave there and it's called the Cave of the Apocalypse. Supposedly that is the cave he was in and the Isle of Patmos is not very big so if it wasn't that cave then his had to be close by. So that is where John wrote from.

The next question is when did John write this? We are very much dependent on some extra Biblical sources that tell us he wrote it around the close of the rule of Domitian and so that probably puts it around 95 to 96 AD. There is enough leeway for another consideration to be that he wrote it as late as 101 to 105 AD. That also coincides with the evidence we have of the time he survived the attempt at his being boiled alive in oil, which he was not and his exile to the Isle of Patmos itself.

To whom is he writing it? The original audience are the seven churches that are listed. The longest trip you would have to make to any one of them from one of them would have been 35 miles. It starts with the mother church and that's Ephesus. Then it moves on to the other six churches which were church plants or daughter churches eventually out of the mother church Ephesus. These six others are not the only ones for if you search the epistles you'll find there would about 13 churches in Asia Minor. While it was originally given to the seven churches that are listed in Revelation 2 and 3, it is ultimately given to the church catholic (universal). It is ultimately given to all of us and it is so phrased as to be applicable to all of us from its original giving to the seven churches. It was designed to be given to all of us for all of the ages.

Why is this book given to us? We are told two things about this particular letter. This book is in a letter form. Number one, it is called the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Don't call this book Revelations, because it is The Revelation. Apocalypse is the word used here. In other words, when the Bible uses this it's telling you that this book contains something that you would not know. It's an essential message. It is something you would not know because you would not be able to see it without God having revealed it to you. It doesn't mean it won't be obvious after it is fulfilled and after you see it but you wouldn't know what is going on and what is actually taking place in history as it moves forward without this revelation that has been given to you.

The second thing is that it is a book of prophesy that is given to you in order for you to understand what is to take place. The key for us to understand this is not only does it say three times that this is an apocalypse but it says five times that it is a book of prophesy. For instance at the conclusion it says 'write down this prophesy and let no man add to the prophesy of this book.' So it is a prophetic book and an apocalyptic book. It is revealing what you wouldn't know and it is telling you something that is to come.

Some of the keys to that is the way the book outlines itself for you. Revelation 1:2 says [2] *(John) who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.* In other words, he consistently evangelized and confessed Christ before all that he saw. Revelation 1:3 says [3] *Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophesy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.*

He is saying that this book has practical blessing. If you read it, study it and frame your life in obedience in relationship to it, then you are blessed. It is not only a revelation to you but it's a prophesy. It is to be read. It is to be listened to. Those who hear it, read it and keep what is written in it will be blessed. It is saying what this revelation unfolds and this prophesy predicts, the time is near. This phrase the time is near or the time is at hand is repeated throughout the book of Revelation. It is at hand the things that you are about to see.

Revelation 1:1 says [1] *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants (those even beyond the seven churches) the things that must soon take place.* Now our Lord builds upon this in Revelation 1. Then He gives you a verse that outlines the letter for you. Revelation 1:19 says [19] *Write therefore the things that you have seen (one), those that are (two) and those that are to take place after this (three).* So the letter from Jesus through John, written by John, inspired by the Spirit tells us the things that have been seen, the things that are and the things that will take place after the things that are. So to answer the why question this is revealing the unseen spiritual warfare while giving a prophetic word of the conflict to come and the victorious consummation of the Kingdom that is coming soon. The time is at hand.

Now I'll give you the outline of this book. The outline of this book can get extremely detailed but I'm just going to give you a working outline that you can work from. The introduction is found in Revelation 1:1-8. Then the first is we have the things that are seen, the vision which is found in Revelation 1:9-19. Then we have the things that are now which is found in Revelation 2:1-3:22. Then there are the things that are to come which is found in Revelation 4:1-22:6. Then comes the conclusion of the book which is found in Revelation 22:7-21. Let's go back to Revelation 1 now.

Revelation 1:4-5 says [4] *John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, [5] and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. (Then John gives this glorious visual of Christ) To him who loves us and has freed (loosed) us from our sins by his blood.* Notice that He loves us which includes past, present and future and He has loosed us which He did at the cross when He won the victory over the dominion of sin and the penalty of sin. He did this through His blood and now what does that do for those who have been liberated from sin? Now look what it says.

Revelation 1:6 says [6] *(He) made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.* Why has He done this? The blessing to us is no longer does sin have dominion and hell is our future for we are loved and we have been loosed. So Christ is our King for eternity and the new heavens and the new earth is our future. That is a glorious future that we now are kings and priests with Christ who is the Priest and King. That will be forever and ever and why is that? It is for His glory, worship and praise that God has done this. Then He alerts us to the future.

Revelation 1:7 says [7] *Behold, he is coming with the clouds (symbolic language probably referring to the myriads of angels and the glory that accompanies Him), and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.* Now look at the picture of this Jesus.

Revelation 1:8-20 says [8] *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."* [9] *I, John, your brother and*

*partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. [10] I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, (the first day of the week at the turn of the century has come to take that Isaiah title of the Day of the Lord, the Lord's Day) and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet [11] saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."*

*[12] Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands (the churches), [13] and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest (given to us in the book of Daniel). [14] The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, [15] his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. [16] In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.*

*[17] When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, [18] and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. [19] Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. [20] As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*

He has just given you the first section of the book and the book is in three parts. The first is the things you've seen and here's the vision. The second part is concerning the things which are which deal with the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. The third part is the things that are to come which starts at Revelation 4:1 and goes to the end of the book with the conclusion following it.

The seven churches stand as lampstands and Jesus is in the middle of the lampstands. What does that tell you about the lampstands? There is a circle. The seven lampstands are seven local churches and they all have direct access as a church to Christ but they also are configured in a relationship with each other. They are not just chaotically, independently scattered around. If Christ is in the middle then the churches have to be in a circle. So here is one of the vision reasons I'm a Presbyterian. I don't believe in independent Christians and I don't believe in independent churches. I believe every church has direct access to Christ but no church is the body of Christ. Any local church is the manifestation of the body of Christ but not equal to the body of Christ. Therefore it is incumbent that we build relationships with those of like precious faith even as these seven had that relationship. At times they are called churches and at times all seven together are called the church because they have the regional presbytery relationship that they would have had together.

The seven stars are the messengers. I believe that is referring to the pastors of the church. The one in the middle is compared to the sun (Son). The churches don't revolve around the pastor. The pastor is a lesser light that derives its existence, light and work from the Son itself, while the churches and those who are in it revolve around the sun (Son of Man who is displayed there). Here is this glorious picture and by doing this in

this historical setting he is giving you the picture of the church throughout the ages. I do not believe that these churches represent each one an age. That is pure speculation.

I think you'll find these seven churches and their conditions reflected in churches throughout the ages. You could find those seven churches today in local churches. It is not that each one is an era or epoch until Jesus comes as someone put it "We're in the Laodicean era." No, we have had these kinds of churches ever since the first century. Each one of those churches have been since the first century and throughout the ages. So it is a representation of the church throughout the ages even as he deals with a historical setting of these seven churches.

Then he moves to the things to come. I wish I had the time to look at each church but again you can get my sermons on the book of Revelation on our website, if you want to work through it in a much closer way. I am just going to cover a few basic things of what is being emphasized here.

The first thing is the book of Revelation is apocalyptic and prophetic. It is revealing to you things that are going on that you would not know like angelic warfare, demonic oppression which is Satan's work of trying to devour the church of Jesus Christ, the offspring of Christ. All of those things are displayed and revealed to you in picturesque, symbolic and visual language. It's also prophetic because it's telling you the things that are near at hand but are to come and then it is unfolded for you as you go through the book.

Secondly, it is a vivid narrative, full of symbolism. I think there is only one number in the entire book that is not invested with heavily weighted symbolism and that's the number seven churches, because I think that's referring to the seven churches but even then seven means perfection and it's arranged so that you can look ultimately at the church throughout the ages. This book is meant to give you an audio video picture. It is vivid and he is painting vivid pictures for you but here's the problem. It is also a prophetic book and the pictures and symbols are rooted in prophetic books from the Old Testament. To understand the book of Revelation and the prophesies that are being used, you must spend time in Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah.

I'd like to draw a parallel for you here. The book of James is a New Testament wisdom book. It takes its place alongside of the wisdom books of the Old Testament but it is a Gospel wisdom book of declaration and not a Gospel wisdom book of anticipation as the Old Testament wisdom books. The same thing is true here. What James is to Gospel wisdom, the book of Revelation is to Gospel prophecy. There is the prefiguring and anticipation of Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah and now you have the declarations using that language of fulfillment in Christ and what is to come until Christ comes again. So you are to read it as if you are watching a video.

Thirdly, it is a declaration that God is sovereign and victorious. It reveals to you in the language of apocalyptic narratives and prophetic words that many times in fact it doesn't look like God is sovereign or has the victory but the constant message is what seems to be defeat is actually victory. With books like this men like C.S. Lewis and Tolkien used to write such vivid narratives to speak of Biblical truth such as the Chronicles of Narnia and The Lord of the Rings. Those are vivid pictures and they are kind of using this idea to bring these pictures to you. In their writings there is catastrophe after catastrophe but the catastrophe lends itself to something glorious. I think that is

where Tolkien invented the word eucatastrophe. 'Eu' is the Greek word for good and catastrophe means tragedy. They are good tragedies. They are blessed tragedies.

You see that throughout the Bible, don't we? What you meant for evil, God meant for good. What is the greatest catastrophe possible in all of history? It is the Son of God being crucified by sinful men on a cross and there is the greatest victory of all of history. Those eucatastrophes display themselves continually as you work your way through the book of Revelation.

Fourthly, in the midst of the truth that God has promised that He is sovereign and victorious in the midst of men, His people, the church will suffer. Suffering is not only proposed and decreed but it also is productive. It is in the suffering that He is refining not only the individual Christian but the church. It is in the suffering that He is establishing His witness. It is in the suffering that He is accomplishing these victories because of the victorious suffering of Christ on the cross and our suffering is not only proposed and promised but it is also declared as productive.

Finally, it is a spiritual warfare that is declared throughout the letter that you wouldn't even think is going on. For instance, when I pray in the morning at 6 o'clock for the worship services of the Lord's Day or when I pray with some of the elders in the morning before the worship services, or when I have the privilege to sit at the front before the start of the worship service, one thing is always in my prayer and that is "Lord, will You keep the fallen angels and the demons from doing Satan's work in the midst of this assembling today?" It is because I know I'm about to preach the Word and when the Word is preached one thing Satan wants to do to your heart is to come like a bird and pluck it away. So you might be sitting there thinking "When will this babbler be through? What time is lunch? Am I going to be able to see the football game?" There are all kinds of things that distract us so that the Word is not implanted in the soul and in the heart.

Dr. Schaeffer made this so vivid to me one time as I sat with him up at Covenant College. He said "What do you see in this room?" People began to describe everything in the room and he said "That's it but what else do you see?" People started describing the color of the fabrics in the chairs and the details in the wallpaper in the room. He said "You're getting pretty good but what else do you see?" So we went to the third level and then he said "I see a warfare that is going on for your soul. Satan doesn't know who the elect are. Satan is coming to snatch your heart away from the Lord." It is going on constantly. Spiritual warfare is a continual reality that is always present. You cannot read the book of Revelation without seeing that. It is absolutely impossible.

The past victories are acknowledged in the book of Revelation. The present victories are displayed in the book of Revelation and the future conflict and victories are given to you as well as he unfolds it. There is a clear structure that is there with this use of seven – seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven narratives and then the seven bowls of wrath. One of my professors made the point to us at Westminster Seminary that he actually thinks the book of Revelation is like the Sabbath structure of the Old Testament where there are seven sevens. With all due respect to my seminary professor I think he really strained at getting this seven sevens but I did see five sevens that are there.

Let's look at Revelation 5. Here is the matter of the scrolls that are bound up with the seals. Revelation 5:1-6 says [1] *Then I saw in the right hand of him who was*

*seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. [2] And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" [3] And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll (the book of redemption) or to look into it, [4] and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. [5] And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." Then the seven seals are unrolled.*

It is my conviction that the seven trumpets are the exposition of the seventh seal. When you get to the last trumpet, the seventh trumpet, it is explained with seven narratives. Then the seventh narrative is explained by the seven bowls of wrath and the seven seals give victory for the churches for the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a good book to work your way through but I want to conclude with two passages. First let's start with Revelation 20.

*Revelation 20:11-15 says [11] Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. [12] And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. [13] And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done (which were recorded in the books). [14] Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. [15] And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

This is telling us that all of those in Christ, from the sovereign decree of Christ called the elect from those through the work of evangelism have surrendered to Christ as Lord and Savior, are recorded in the book of Life. If you are not in that book then you're in the books. If you're in the books then you're judged according to your deeds. If you're judged according to your deeds no one can work their way into heaven and they stand under the condemnation of hell so you want to be found in the book of Life, written by the blood of Jesus, having surrendered to Him as Lord and Savior.

Let's now look at Revelation 22. I love the call here from Ezekiel 47 and the River of Life. Revelation 22:6-9 says [6] *And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place." [7] "And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." [8] I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, [9] but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."*

John made the mistake in Revelation 19 and he makes the same mistake here in Revelation 22. He gets so overwhelmed that when he sees the closes thing from heaven he falls down and starts worshipping the angel and the angel says "don't do it!" The angel says what Peter and Paul say when people tried to worship them and when they would come to these pagan cities – don't do it! There is only One who is worthy of worship but more than that the whole purpose of God's plan throughout all the ages is to

bring forth a saved people. The blessing is they miss hell because it hit Jesus and they get the new heavens and the new earth to be with Jesus but the purpose ultimately is to worship God to the praise of His glorious grace. So He tells him to write it down.

Revelation 22:12-16, 20-21 says [12] *“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. [13] I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” [14] Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. [15] Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*

[16] *“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” [17] The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” (The work of the Holy Spirit right now is to draw sinners, “Come!” What is our work in the worship of God right now? It is to say to the lost “Come!”) And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.*

[20] *He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! [21] The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.* So be it forever.

What about that thousand years? I think it’s a symbolic number that stretches between the first and second advent of Christ. I think you have to keep it wide open because of the highly vivid symbolic nature. Some say no and that Jesus will come back before it. You will find it in Revelation 19 and 20. Those are the pre-millennialists. There are those who say no He’ll come after it and those are post- millennialists. Then there are the amillennialists who believe it’s the period of time of perfection (ten times ten times ten) between the first and second advent of Christ. There has been room in Evangelical Christianity for all three of those views for they all hold to a true coming of Christ, true judgment, true salvation and an everlasting hell and heaven, therefore in this symbolic language we have given room for interpretation there.

What about the two beasts? I think the two beasts are very clear in the Bible. There is the beast of the sea shore and the beast that comes up out of the sea and I believe that refers to the power of the state that will become overwhelmingly rampant in tyrannical power, economically, militarily, and politically to the end of the age. I believe the beast of the land refers to the false prophet that refers to false religion and the two at the end of the days, the end of time will work together to bring tribulation against God’s people, but the Kingdom will still keep expanding. Then the King shall come and what looks like a catastrophe is actually the birth pangs that give birth to the coming of Christ as the Gospel goes to all the nations and then earth and heaven flee away as He comes. His people in the book of Life are brought into to a new heavens and a new earth in glory to the Savior forever, even so come quickly Lord Jesus. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You Father that we can have thanksgiving because of what Christ has done, what He has pictured for us, what He is going to do and what He is doing now. To Him who has overcome be praise and glory. To Him who makes us overcomers be praise and glory, Christ our Savior and Lord, faithful and true, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, come quickly, Amen.