

Route 66

Revelation: The Final Exit

Part 66 – October 2, 2011

Were you aware that the actual “Route 66” ends (in the west) at the Pacific Ocean, on the Santa Monica pier?



That’s fitting, because *our* “Route 66” ends at the glassy sea before God’s throne with 24 elders worshipping and four beings (resembling a blend of Ezekiel’s and Isaiah’s visions¹) proclaiming:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come. – *Revelation 4:8b NIV*

It’s curious how we tend to avoid the only book of the Bible that so clearly promises a blessing to those who learn from it.

Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. – *Revelation 1:3 NIV*



The Temple of Domitian, Ephesus

Remember in 2nd John, we saw the ruins of the Temple of Domitian which was built in Ephesus while the aged Apostle John lived there?

A huge statue of the cruel Emperor stood here, but was smashed after Domitian was assassinated and “damned by decree” of the Roman senate.



Domitian reigned from 81-96 AD

But the head and clenched fist were discovered. 90-year-old John had a run-in with this Emperor who proclaimed himself “Lord and God”.

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering ... was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. – *Revelation 1:9 NIV*



The Greek Island of Patmos

Patmos (40 miles off the coast of Turkey) is believed to have been a Roman prison island where Domitian exiled John. Visitors can tour the cave where they claim John received his vision.



Cave of the Apocalypse

¹ See: Ezekiel 1:5, 1:10, 10:12 and Isaiah 6:2-3

It's the *Cave of the Apocalypse* which means *unveiling* or *revelation*.

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. – *Revelation 1:1a NIV*



It's "revelation" (singular) not revelations (plural). John's letter unveils a single portrait of Jesus as Righteous Judge and Conquering King!

When John was released he returned to Ephesus, sent his letter, and died about a year later (circa 100^{AD}), ending the age of the apostles.



In the vision, Jesus instructs John to ...

Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. – *Revelation 1:11 NIV*

It was sent to them as a prophetic encouragement and exhortation as they suffered under Domitian's reign and stood up for Christ.

The first thing John describes is the terrifying awesomeness of standing in the presence of Jesus glorified - a sight so beyond our capacity to grasp, John can only describe it with symbolism.

I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. – *Revelation 1:12-17a NIV*

Because that's what you'd do! The Ancient of Days, brighter than a welder's torch, thundering with holiness, with a razor-like tongue ready to cut away spiritual cancer with his Word! "I died." Jesus touches his old friend's shoulder and basically says, "John, it's me. This is what I look like when I'm home." It's the final and most reliable portrait of Jesus in scripture.

After reviving John, Jesus explains that the "golden lampstands" represent the seven churches and the "stars" their guardians.

Q: Any idea why Jesus depicts them with stars and lampstands?

A: They both shine light. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus said ...

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a **lamp** and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its **stand** ... - *Matthew 5:14-15 NIV*

There was a lampstand in the temple, and the priests' were commanded to make sure it *never* burned out. And now Jesus addresses how brightly these seven churches are shining.



Ephesus



Smyrna



Pergamum



Thyatira



Sardis



Philadelphia



Laodicea

1. The church in **Ephesus** didn't tolerate wickedness, but their initial blaze for the Lord had dimmed considerably.
2. **Smyrna** was shining in spite of poverty and persecution.
3. **Pergamum** was flickering but wouldn't burn brightly without repenting from their compromise with the world.
4. **Thyatira's** glow was getting stronger. But an inability to confront in love was depriving them of oxygen.
5. **Sardis** was fading fast and almost out.
6. **Philadelphia** was small but wouldn't be extinguished.
7. And **Laodicea** had the infamous *lukewarm* flame.

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ... So be earnest and repent. ... Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. - *Revelation 3:15-16; 19b; 22 NIV*

Each message is followed by a promise for those who overcome. In fact, the whole book is an encouragement and warning to keep our lamps on a stand until the final, certain victory in Christ.

When he began, Jesus told John to ...

Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.
- *Revelation 1:19 NIV*

These seven letters (in the first three chapters) serve as the "what is now", the rest of Revelation's 22 chapters are focused on "what will take place later."

Because of all the symbolism that John uses, interpretations and theories *abound* (as you well know). Some believe it's all allegory and others say it's already been fulfilled by Rome. Don't buy any theory that denies Jesus' Second Coming.

The Theology Statement in our Membership Manual is clear: we expect a literal, physical second coming in fulfillment of God's plan. But even among those who believe Revelation depicts Christ's role in end-times events, there is much disagreement regarding the meaning, the order, and the church's role.

So, our Position Statement makes it clear that we allow for varying views among those who are expecting Jesus' return. But it also says that ...

"We discourage an excessive preoccupation with end-times speculations. [Because] It usually distracts the believer, and detracts from the Gospel."

Ever try to tell someone a story that you're *really* excited about, but they keep interrupting with questions about all the *wrong* things?! Well, we can be like that if we're not careful.

It's not really about a bowl and a scroll and seal and a trumpet and a harlot and beast and a dragon ... they're all symbols for the one-and-only truly thrilling message that John is sharing: Satan's victories are temporary but Christ's are eternal!

I can sum this book up in three words: "God defeats Satan!" Want it in two words? "Jesus reigns!" Ooo, one word: "Triumph!"

I believe it's written in these wild, graphic pictures, instead of direct teaching, so that it can sneak past our tendency to intellectualize God's story and instead get caught up in it!

But, there's something *incredible* that's easy to miss. There are over 250 references and quotes from the Old Testament. The "What will take place later" is a stringing together of OT prophecies! The OT prophets portray the Messiah as a Suffering Servant *and* a Conquering King, and Jesus showed up as the former.

Remember on the road to Emmaus, Jesus hid his identity from two depressed disciples, and explained how the Christ had to suffer?

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. - *Luke 24:27 NIV*

I think John got the second half of the road-to-Emmaus-lesson! Jesus brings John to heaven not only to unveil himself as the Conquering King *and* to reveal how God's perfect plan is going to unfold ... but how it's *all* been foretold through God's prophets!

... the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets. - *Revelation 10:7b NIV*

That's why the imagery is all over the place! Every unique, unfulfilled, Old Testament vision is being pieced together!

And this revelation, of how all these remaining prophecies pull together like a drawstring, so overwhelms John, that he drops to the ground to worship the angel who's escorting him!

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, "Do not do it! ..." - Revelation 22:8-9a NIV

And the angel basically says, "Get up; we're on the same team!"

Part of why Revelation is difficult to follow is because, as he writes, John can't stop talking about the celebration in heaven! So, I'm going to give you a way to make it easier to follow.



When you get home, go to Revelation, **chapter 4** and write "Meanwhile ..."

John describes tens of millions of angels encircling God's throne, as the slain Lamb who is the Lion of Judah *and* the Root of David prepares to open the sealed scroll.

Then go to **chapter 6** and write "Uh-Oh!" Six seals are opened and the wrath of God begins to pour out in a last-ditch mission of mercy to reach those who have completely abandoned him.

Then at **chapter 7:9** and write "Meanwhile ..." A multitude from every nation (too many to count) are worshipping at the throne, and God is wiping away every tear from their eyes.

Then at **chapter 8** write "Uh-Oh!" The seventh seal is opened, the trumpets sound, the suffering greatly intensifies, and the two witnesses God sends as messengers are killed and resurrected.

At **chapter 11:15** write "Meanwhile ..." John gets to see a "home movie" of Jesus birth from heaven's side, as the Red Dragon (the devil) pursues Mary's and tries to kill her and her baby.

Go to **chapter 13** and write "Uh-Oh!" The beast from the sea and the beast of the earth (with the heads and the horns representing earthly powers and authorities) arrive.

At **chapter 14** write "Meanwhile ..." Everything advances according to God's plan, and culminates at the battle of Armageddon.

At **chapter 17** write "Uh-Oh!" The great harlot is destroyed.

At chapter 18 write “Meanwhile ...” Babylon falls, there’s a hallelujah chorus, a marriage feast, and Jesus rides in on a white horse, locks up Satan for 1000 years, and judges the dead.

When the 1000 years are up, the devil makes one last vain grab for power and is thrown into the lake of fire to join the beast and the false prophet (an *unholy trinity*).

This is followed by a new heaven and a new earth a New Jerusalem where God and man dwell together in perfect peace. There’s a river of life, trees of life, and perfect garden.

The last chapter of the Bible (Rev 22) ends with the restoration of Eden (only infinitely better and eternally longer) and the overturning of the curse: no more sin or death or suffering! I can’t imagine a more fitting way for the story to end!

Jesus final recorded words are in Revelation 22:20 ...

He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” [And our response should be the same as John’s] Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. - *Revelation 22:20 NIV*