

# The Time Is Near

## Revelation 1

Today we begin a new series on the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation fascinates many people because they want to know the future. The only one who knows the future is God. The future is secure because God has willed it. He alone knows the end from the beginning. His knowledge is infinite and exhaustive. He knows everything before it happens. Nothing takes him by surprise. Everything that happens in this life is part of his perfect plan. We can rest assured that whatever happens to the believer is for God's glory and our good. Everything!

Non-Christians mock the book of Revelation. Recently, I saw the following on a website: "John the Revelator recorded some wild imagery from his Aegean island hideout mushroom trip. (At least that's my theory)."<sup>1</sup> In that writer's opinion, the events that are foretold in the book of Revelation are nothing more than the products of a hallucinated mind. But though the world may mock, the book of Revelation is the word of the living God, given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is a book of Holy Scripture, God's written word. Actually, it is an *important* part of Holy Scripture, for it ties together the loose ends of the story. Themes that begin in the book of Genesis are completed in Revelation. Genesis records Paradise lost; Revelation records Paradise restored. Genesis records God's curse because of man's sin; Revelation records the lifting of the curse and eternal blessedness. Christian, you have a great future ahead of you! Let us begin our a series on the book of Revelation. First, consider

### 1. The topic: "the Revelation of Jesus Christ"

We have read Revelation chapter 1. The first five words are exceedingly important. As a matter of fact, it is hard to exaggerate their importance. So many interpreters miss these first five words. They go into wild speculation concerning how they think history is going to turn out. They seem to think the purpose of the book of Revelation is to reveal what is known in theology as the doctrine of last things. The Greek word for *last* is ἔσχατος. Is a fairly common word, occurring some 46 times. The study of last things is called *eschatology*, from the word ἔσχατος. The dictionary defines *eschatology* as "a branch of theology concerned with the final events in the history of the world . . . specifically: any of various Christian doctrines concerning the Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead, or the Last Judgment."<sup>2</sup> That is a fair definition, but let us not lose sight of the opening five words of the book of Revelation: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ."

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Solomon, <https://www.unz.com/article/deconstructing-next-gen-synagogue-of-satan/> accessed 3-13-24

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eschatology> accessed 3-16-24

The Greek word for revelation is ἀποκάλυψις. The basic meaning of this word is to uncover, to lay open what has been veiled or covered up, to disclose, make bare, make known, make manifest, disclose what before was unknown.<sup>3</sup>

The Bible says, “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29).

This is a comforting truth. Christian, your God knows the future! There is an old gospel song that says, “I know who holds the future, and I know he holds my hand.” There is a lot of truth in that song. A child, walking with his father, may say, “Daddy, are we there yet?” The child does not know how to get to the destination, but his daddy does! Not one of us has been to the future. But we know the God of Scripture who has revealed himself to us. We know that he has foreordained all things from the foundation of the world. We know that he has loved us with an everlasting love. We know those things. How do we know them? God has revealed them to us in the Holy Scriptures, his love letter to his church.

The Lord Jesus is the main character of Scripture. He is the one who was foretold in the Old Testament, the one whose incarnation and coming to earth are recorded in the New Testament. It was recorded by eyewitnesses, men who wrote the holy gospels. The meaning of his life and the interpretation of his life are spelled out in the epistles. Now we come to the book of Revelation. This is the last book of Holy Scripture. God pronounces a curse upon anyone who would add more books of Scripture to the one we are holding our hands now. The main character is Jesus Christ.

## **2. The timing: “the time is near”**

This is an oft-repeated theme in the book of Revelation. It is expressly stated in the first and last chapters of the book, neatly tying up the contents at both ends. This shows us, among other things, that the book of Revelation was self-consciously intended to be elegant, serious literature. A lot of thought went into the composition of the book. Furthermore, the Christian knows that the one who put it together is none other than the Holy Spirit of God. The mind of Christ is behind the composition and arrangement of this book. It is good literature, and it is good theology. Here are six texts where the Holy Spirit teaches that the fulfillment of the major events of the book is near. Please follow along in your Bible.

“. . . things which must shortly take place [ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει]” (Rev. 1:1).

“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* [ὁ καιρὸς ἐγγύς]” (Rev. 1:3).

And in chapter 22:

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<sup>3</sup> Enhanced Strong's Lexicon (Logos Bible Software)

“And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must *shortly* be done [ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει]” (Rev. 22:6).

“And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for *the time is at hand* [ὁ καιρὸς ἐγγύς]” (Rev. 22:10).

“And, behold, I come *quickly* [Ἰδοὺ, ἔρχομαι ταχύ]; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:12).

“He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come *quickly* [Ναί, ἔρχομαι ταχύ]. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

Six different times the Holy Spirit tells us that the events prophesied were to take place “quickly” and “shortly,” for “the time is at hand.” Yet according to the theological system known as dispensationalism, the events recorded in the book of Revelation would not happen for thousands of years. How much simpler to take the words of Revelation at face value!

Dispensationalists and some Reformed date the composition of the book of Revelation to 95 or 96 AD. This is likely the dominant view. I have difficulty believing it, however. The Lord Jesus, just before his death in AD 30, referring to the buildings of the temple, said to his disciples, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matt. 24:2). Here is a precise prophecy concerning the destruction of the temple. Later in that chapter Jesus says emphatically, “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.” This prophecy is recorded in all three synoptic gospels: three witnesses, a sufficient number to establish a fact in a court of law.<sup>4</sup> Our Lord’s prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. Exactly 40 years after Jesus spoke these words, the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. Rabbinic Judaism was demolished. In God’s providence, the unbelieving Jews, who had cried out, “Crucify him! Crucify him! His blood be on us and on our children,” lost the symbol of God’s holy presence among them: the central temple. God no longer dwells among the Jews. The Jews did not believe the messianic promises that were fulfilled in Christ. They chose not to believe the testimony of the many miracles that Jesus did in their midst. So he withdrew his presence from Israel. Jesus prophesied this at the end of Matthew 23, where he told the Jews, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Matt. 23:37–39). Now, God dwells in the midst of his

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<sup>4</sup> Matt. 24:34, Mark 13:30, Luke 21:32

faithful people, the church. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:19, “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you?” The word for “you” is plural. Since the death of Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells in the midst of his church. At Pentecost, Christ poured out his Spirit upon the church. Rabbinic Judaism is a false religion. God no longer dwells in the midst of apostate Judaism. He dwells in the midst of his church. We read in Hebrews, “For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, *in the midst of the church* will I sing praise unto thee” (Heb. 2:11–12).

Why do I have difficulty believing that the book of revelation was composed some 25 years after the destruction of the temple in AD 70? Because of the importance of the temple in biblical theology. It is hard for me to imagine that a book of inspired Scripture allegedly written 25 years after an event of such monumental importance as the destruction of the temple would not mention that destruction as a fulfillment of prophecy. The book of Revelation contains at least sixteen references to the temple, and never points out that the temple of which it speaks is no longer standing.

It is much simpler to understand that the book of Revelation was written a few years before the destruction of the temple in AD 70. John wrote that the events of which he was speaking would happen “quickly”; the time was “at hand”; they would “shortly come to pass.” The fact that the temple was destroyed by the Romans, never to be rebuilt, is a dramatic fulfillment of our Lord’s specific prophecy; and that this major event is never even once mentioned in the book of Revelation, speaks volumes about the date of its composition. Here, then, is the timing: “the time is near.” The God who speaks is the God of truth. His Word will come to pass, no matter how impossible it may seem at the time. Thirdly, consider

### **3. The attitude: worship**

John, alone among the apostles, was given a vision of the exalted Christ, now ascended to heaven and sitting at the right hand of the Father. It is actually quite significant that God did not give every revelation of himself to just one of the apostles. He revealed to Peter, “I will build my church.” He gave the apostle Paul a vision of the glories of heaven, when Paul heard inexpressible things that it was not lawful for a man to utter. And he gave to John the vision of the exalted Christ, now ascended to heaven and sitting at the Father’s right hand. If all of those revelations had been given to just one disciple, perhaps quarrels would have taken place, with one of the disciples claiming that he was the greatest, because he had received the most important revelations.

In verses 13–16 there is a description of the Son of man. This is the only physical description of the Lord Jesus Christ in Scripture. A lot of artists have tried to represent Christ in drawings and paintings. But significantly, there is no physical

description of Christ, during the time when he walked this earth with his disciples, anywhere in Scripture. The second commandment, “Thou shalt not make any graven image,” forbids the making or using pictures of God. All such are idolatry. Christians are not to make pictures of God. That is the clear teaching of Scripture. It is undeniable. And Jesus Christ is God. That is also undeniable. Where are therefore not to make pictures of Jesus Christ. All such pictures are products of human imagination, not of divine revelation. They are not revealed by the Holy Spirit, speaking in Scripture. To reverence such pictures is idolatry. It is a dishonoring of Christ. A person cannot venerate supposed pictures of Christ and be an obedient Christian.

What John saw was a vision of the exalted Christ, of the Christ after his resurrection, now ascended in glory. When John saw the ascended Christ in glory, what did he do? He fell down in worship. When believers now, through the preaching of the Word, see the Christ of Scripture, what should we do? We should fall down in worship. The Christian’s attitude toward Christ must be worship.

The words “someone like the Son of man” (v. 13) are to be understood in connection with Daniel 7:13 as a reference to the heavenly Messiah who is also human. Jesus preferred the title Son of Man for himself throughout his earthly ministry, though he did not deny, on occasion, the appropriate use of “Son of God” as well.<sup>5</sup>

“I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:13).

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3. The attitude: worship

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Expositor’s Bible Commentary, New Testament (Pocket Bible)