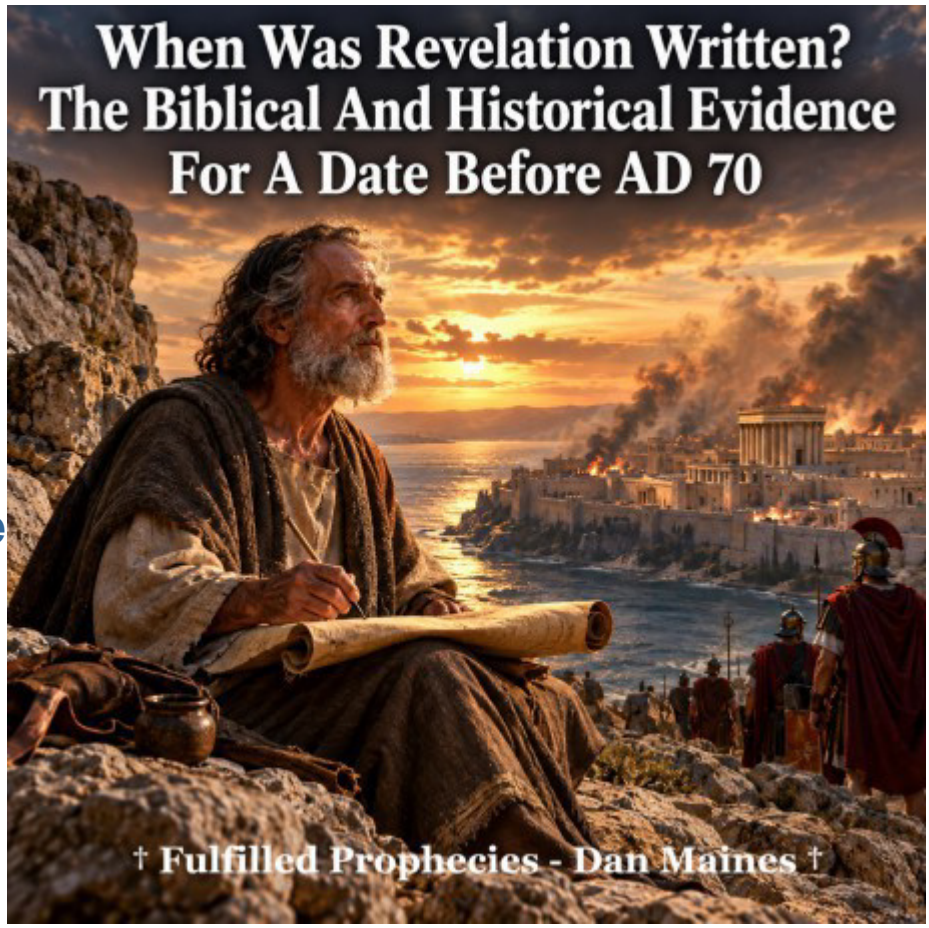
Fulfilled Prophecies

When Was Revelation Written? The Biblical And Historical Evidence For A Date Before AD 70



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† The date of the Book of Revelation is one of the most important questions in understanding biblical prophecy. Was Revelation written before Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70, or was it written around AD 95-96, during the reign of Emperor Domitian?

† Many traditional churches teach the later date and interpret Revelation as describing events still awaiting fulfillment. But

when we examine the book's own statements, its historical setting, and the words of Jesus, we find strong evidence supporting an earlier date during the reign of Emperor Nero, approximately AD 64-68.
† The question isn't simply when John wrote Revelation. The question is whether the judgments he described were approaching his original readers or whether those readers were being told about events thousands of years beyond their lifetimes (Revelation 1:1-3; 22:6-10).
† Revelation identifies its original audience as seven churches in Asia. These were real congregations facing real circumstances in the first century. John wrote to encourage them, warn them, and reveal what Christ was bringing to completion (Revelation 1:4, 11; 2:1-3:22).
† We must also distinguish between biblical evidence and historical testimony. The Bible doesn't give an exact calendar year for Revelation's composition. However, its language and historical circumstances provide substantial evidence for examining the early-date position.
† Let's examine the Scriptures first, then consider what the historical writers actually reported.

Revelation 1:1
The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John,
† Revelation begins by identifying the events as things that must soon take place. John wasn't presenting an unrestricted timetable extending thousands of years into the future (Revelation 1:3; 22:6).
† The Greek expression translated soon communicates nearness or speed. Its placement at the beginning of Revelation establishes the urgency of the prophecy for its original audience (Revelation 22:7, 10).
† If John wrote before AD 70, this opening statement fits the approaching destruction of Jerusalem and the completion of the

Old Covenant age (Matthew 24:2, 34; Hebrews 8:13).
† The early-date understanding takes the original audience seriously. The seven churches weren't receiving a meaningless warning about events entirely disconnected from their own generation (Revelation 1:4, 11; 3:10).

Revelation 1:3
Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.
† John plainly stated that the time was near. This wasn't a statement made by a modern interpreter. It was part of the original inspired message (Revelation 22:10).
† The blessing applied to those who read, heard, and obeyed the prophecy. These were first-century believers who needed to understand the approaching circumstances (Revelation 2:10; 3:10).
† The same language appears near the conclusion of Revelation, forming a consistent message of nearness from beginning to end (Revelation 22:6-7, 10).
† The early-date interpretation understands this nearness in its ordinary historical sense, connecting Revelation's central judgments with the events surrounding AD 70 (Luke 21:20-22; Matthew 24:34).

Revelation 1:7
BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.
† John identifies those who pierced Jesus as participants in the judgment being announced. This naturally directs our attention toward the first-century generation responsible for His crucifixion (Acts 2:22-23, 36).
† Jesus used similar language when addressing the high priest and the Jewish council. He told them they would see the Son of Man sitting at God's right hand and coming with the clouds of heaven (Matthew 26:63-64).

† Cloud-coming language was already used by the Old Testament prophets to describe divine judgment against nations. It didn't require God to appear physically on the earth (Isaiah 19:1; Daniel 7:13-14).
† Jesus connected His coming in judgment with the generation then living. The early-date interpretation places Revelation's cloud-coming language within that same first-century setting (Matthew 24:30, 34).

Revelation 2:9
'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.
† The church in Smyrna was experiencing actual persecution. Revelation addresses identifiable religious opposition, not merely symbolic opponents in an unknown future century (Acts 13:44-50; 14:19).
† The conflict between believers in Christ and those rejecting Him was already taking place throughout the apostolic period (Acts 17:5-8; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16).
† This historical setting fits the years before Jerusalem's destruction, when the separation between the Old Covenant system and the people of the New Covenant was becoming increasingly evident (Galatians 4:25-31; Hebrews 8:13).
† This passage alone doesn't establish Revelation's date, but it contributes to the larger picture of first-century persecution and covenant conflict (Revelation 3:9; Matthew 23:34-36).

Revelation 3:10
'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.
† Jesus addressed the congregation in Philadelphia directly. He promised protection during an approaching period of testing, giving encouragement to believers who were already faithfully enduring persecution (Revelation 3:8-11).

† The language of an approaching hour fits the warnings Jesus gave His disciples concerning the tribulation associated with Jerusalem's destruction (Matthew 24:15-22; Luke 21:20-24).
† The Greek word translated world can refer to the inhabited world, and its exact geographical scope must be determined by context. It doesn't automatically require a modern worldwide event (Luke 2:1; Acts 11:28).
† An early date allows this warning to be understood within the lifetime of the original congregation, rather than moving its primary fulfillment thousands of years beyond them (Revelation 1:3; 22:10).

Revelation 11:1-2
Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it.
"Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months."
† This is one of the strongest internal arguments for an early date. John describes a temple, an altar, worshipers, and a holy city facing judgment (Luke 21:20-24).
† The Jerusalem temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. If John was describing the actual standing temple, Revelation must have been written before that destruction (Matthew 24:1-2).
† The forty-two months correspond to the prophetic period of three and one-half years, closely associated with the time of tribulation and judgment (Daniel 7:25; Revelation 12:6, 14; 13:5).
† Jesus had already warned that Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies and trampled by the Gentiles. John's description closely resembles that earlier warning (Luke 21:20-24).
† Later-date interpreters often understand this temple symbolically or as a future temple. Therefore, this passage is substantial evidence for the early date, but it isn't an

uncontested proof of the writing date (1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:21-22).
† The early-date interpretation doesn't require another temple to be constructed thousands of years later. It understands the judgment within the historical setting of first-century Jerusalem (Matthew 24:2, 34).

Revelation 13:18
Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.
† John expected readers with understanding to calculate the number. This suggests that the identification was meaningful within the historical circumstances known to his original audience (Revelation 13:17).
† The name Nero Caesar, when represented by a commonly discussed Hebrew spelling, produces the numerical value 666. A shorter Latinized form represented in Hebrew produces 616, a number preserved in some ancient manuscripts.
† This connection is important because Nero ruled Rome from AD 54 to AD 68, and Christians suffered persecution during his reign (Acts 25:10-12; Revelation 2:10).
† Nero's persecution following the fire of Rome in AD 64 provides a historical setting consistent with the suffering described in Revelation (Revelation 6:9-11; 13:7).
† The numerical connection supports the early-date interpretation, although identifying Nero as the beast doesn't independently prove when the book was written (Revelation 17:10-11).

Revelation 17:9-10
"Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits,
and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while."
† Rome was famously associated with seven hills. This

geographical detail provides an important historical connection between Revelation's imagery and the Roman Empire (Revelation 13:1; 17:18).
† John also describes a sequence of rulers, stating that five had fallen, one was reigning, and another had not yet come (Revelation 17:11).
† When the emperors are counted beginning with Julius Caesar, the sixth ruler is Nero. This interpretation places the reigning king during the period AD 54-68.
† The identification depends on where the imperial count begins and whether every ruler is included. Some interpreters begin with Augustus or understand the kings differently, so the passage requires careful historical examination.
† Nevertheless, the Nero identification fits the early-date interpretation and the persecution experienced by the first-century churches (Revelation 2:10; 13:7).

Revelation 18:24
"And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth."
† Revelation describes Babylon as guilty of shedding the blood of God's prophets and saints. This language strongly resembles Jesus' accusation against Jerusalem (Matthew 23:34-37).
† Jesus declared that Jerusalem was the city that killed the prophets and stoned those sent to her. He also announced that the accumulated judgment would come upon that generation (Matthew 23:35-38).
† Revelation identifies the great city spiritually with the place where the Lord was crucified, establishing an important connection with Jerusalem (Revelation 11:8).
† Rome is another major historical interpretation of Babylon, particularly because of the seven mountains and imperial power. But the bloodguilt language provides strong grounds for examining Jerusalem as the covenantal object of judgment (Revelation 17:9, 18; Luke 13:33-35).
† Within the fulfilled perspective, Babylon represents apostate Jerusalem under judgment, and her fall belongs to the

conclusion of the Old Covenant age in AD 70 (Matthew 23:36; 24:34).

Matthew 24:34
"Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."
† Jesus gave a definite generational time frame for the events He had described, including the destruction of the temple and the coming judgment upon Jerusalem (Matthew 24:1-3, 29-33).
† His disciples were asking about the temple they could see, not a building that would be constructed thousands of years later (Mark 13:1-4).
† Luke identifies Jerusalem surrounded by armies as the sign that its desolation was near, connecting the prophecy to a recognizable historical event (Luke 21:20-22).
† If Revelation describes the same covenantal judgment, its repeated statements of nearness agree with the time frame Jesus had already established (Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10).
† The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 occurred within the first-century generation Jesus addressed. This provides the central historical framework for understanding Revelation from the fulfilled perspective (Luke 21:32; Hebrews 8:13).

Revelation 22:6
And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place.
† Near the end of Revelation, John repeats the same time statement found at the beginning. The prophecy concerns things that must soon take place (Revelation 1:1).
† This repetition matters because the opening and conclusion establish the time frame surrounding the visions throughout the book (Revelation 1:3; 22:10).
† An early date places the prophecy before the destruction of Jerusalem, allowing its announced judgments to occur within the approaching first-century crisis (Matthew 24:34; Luke

21:22).
† The consistency of this language is one of the strongest reasons for taking the early-date position seriously (Revelation 22:7, 12, 20).

Revelation 22:10
And he said to me, Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.
† John was specifically instructed not to seal the prophecy because the time was near. This contrasts with Daniel, who was instructed to seal his vision because its fulfillment concerned a more distant period (Daniel 8:26; 12:4).
† The contrast is significant. Daniel's prophecy was sealed because its fulfillment was distant from his lifetime, while John's prophecy was left open because its fulfillment was approaching (Daniel 12:9; Revelation 1:3).
† If Revelation primarily concerned events thousands of years beyond John's audience, the command not to seal it would be difficult to reconcile with the stated reason for leaving it open (Revelation 22:6-7).
† The fulfilled interpretation recognizes the urgency of this instruction and places Revelation's central judgments within the first-century covenant transition (Hebrews 8:13; 10:37).

Revelation 22:20
He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.
† Jesus concludes Revelation by affirming the nearness of His coming. This repeats the message of urgency established throughout the prophecy (Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:7, 12).
† His coming in judgment doesn't require Him to descend physically onto the earth. Biblical cloud-coming language describes divine authority, vindication, and judgment (Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 26:64).
† Jesus had already connected His coming with the destruction of Jerusalem within the generation then living (Matthew 24:30, 34).

† The early-date interpretation understands this promise as fulfilled in Christ's covenantal judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70, rather than postponing its primary fulfillment into our future (Luke 21:20-22, 32).

Historical References

† Josephus, writing in The Jewish War, Books 5-6, documented Jerusalem's siege, the destruction of the temple, widespread suffering, and the collapse of the city's religious and political institutions in AD 70.

† Josephus didn't write a commentary identifying Revelation's date, but his eyewitness-era history supplies the background against which an early-date interpretation can be tested.

† Tacitus, writing in Annals 15.44, described Nero's persecution of Christians following the fire of Rome in AD 64. This establishes that severe persecution occurred during the period proposed by early-date advocates.

† Irenaeus, writing in Against Heresies 5.30.3 around AD 180, made a statement commonly translated as placing the apocalyptic vision near the end of Domitian's reign. This is a principal historical argument for the later date.

† Some early-date advocates argue that Irenaeus' wording could refer to John himself being seen rather than to the vision being seen. However, the conventional interpretation favors a Domitianic setting, and the passage must not be presented as unambiguous evidence for an early date.

† Clement of Alexandria, writing in Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved? 42, described John's return from Patmos after the death of the tyrant. Clement didn't identify the emperor in that passage, so it cannot independently establish whether Nero or Domitian was intended.

† Eusebius, writing in Ecclesiastical History 3.18 and 3.20, associated John's exile and return with Domitian's reign. His account demonstrates that the later-date tradition had significant influence in early church history.

† Epiphanius, writing in Panarion 51, included chronological statements associating John's Patmos experience with

Claudius. These statements have been debated because of their historical difficulties and don't securely establish a pre-AD 70 composition.
† The Syriac tradition associated with the title of Revelation in certain manuscripts connects John's exile with Nero. These titles are later manuscript evidence, not direct first-century testimony, but they demonstrate that an early-date tradition existed.
† John A. T. Robinson, in Redating the New Testament, argued for placing the New Testament writings before AD 70, including Revelation. His work is an important modern scholarly defense of the early date.
† Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., in Before Jerusalem Fell, presented a detailed defense of Revelation's composition before AD 70, examining internal evidence, historical testimony, the temple, Nero, and the time statements.
† R. C. Sproul, in The Last Days According to Jesus, discussed the importance of Revelation's dating for interpreting fulfilled prophecy and treated the early-date argument seriously.
† The historical evidence isn't unanimous. The traditional later date retains substantial scholarly support, particularly through the testimony associated with Irenaeus. The early-date case is strongest when its biblical and historical arguments are considered together.

Why The Early Date Matters
† If Revelation was written before AD 70, the standing temple, the persecution of believers, the Roman imperial setting, and the approaching judgment upon Jerusalem form a coherent historical picture (Revelation 11:1-2; 13:18; 17:10).
† The time statements then retain their ordinary urgency for the original churches rather than being transferred to an undefined generation thousands of years later (Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10).
† Jesus had already announced the destruction of Jerusalem and connected that judgment to His own generation (Matthew 23:36-38; 24:34).

† Revelation can therefore be understood as announcing the approaching completion of the Old Covenant age and the public vindication of Christ's New Covenant kingdom (Hebrews 8:13; 12:22-28).
† The date is important, but it must not replace careful interpretation. Even if a pre-AD 70 date is accepted, individual symbols and visions still require examination in their biblical context (Revelation 1:19; 17:7-18).

How It Applies To Us Today
† We don't need to live in fear that every modern war, earthquake, political leader, or technological development is another fulfillment of Revelation (Matthew 24:34; Revelation 1:3).
† We should begin with the people who originally received the prophecy and the circumstances they were facing. Scripture wasn't written without an audience or historical setting (Revelation 1:4, 11).
† Christ's kingdom isn't waiting for a future earthly inauguration. Believers have already been transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28).
† We don't need another Jerusalem temple, another animal sacrifice, or a restored Old Covenant priesthood. Christ's sacrifice is sufficient, and His priesthood continues forever (Hebrews 7:23-28; 10:11-18).
† The New Jerusalem represents the heavenly covenant reality to which believers have come through Christ, not a political city that must descend physically from the sky (Hebrews 12:22-24; Galatians 4:26).
† The early-date interpretation helps us appreciate the faithfulness of Jesus. He warned His generation, identified the approaching judgment, and accomplished what He promised within the time frame He announced (Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:20-22).
† Our responsibility today isn't to keep moving biblical deadlines into the future. It's to live faithfully in Christ's established kingdom and proclaim the completed work of our Lord

(Colossians 1:13-14; Hebrews 12:28).

Q & A Appendix

Q: Does the Bible explicitly say Revelation was written in AD 65?
A: No. Revelation doesn't provide an exact calendar year. The early-date position is an interpretation based on the book's internal evidence, the historical circumstances, and its time statements (Revelation 1:1-3; 11:1-2; 17:10).

Q: Why do many scholars date Revelation around AD 95-96?
A: Primarily because of the traditional interpretation of Irenaeus' testimony and its connection with Domitian's reign. Eusebius also supported that tradition. The historical testimony must be weighed alongside Revelation's internal evidence.

Q: Was the temple still standing when John wrote Revelation?
A: Revelation describes a temple, altar, and worshipers, which strongly supports a pre-AD 70 setting if the temple is understood literally. However, interpreters disagree about whether John's description is literal or symbolic (Revelation 11:1-2; Matthew 24:1-2).

Q: Was Nero the beast whose number was 666?
A: The Nero Caesar calculation is a substantial historical argument, especially because Nero's name can be represented by the numerical values 666 and 616 in different Hebrew spellings. However, this identification remains an interpretation rather than an explicit statement naming Nero (Revelation 13:18; 17:10-11).

Q: Why does Revelation repeatedly say the time was near?
A: The fulfilled interpretation understands these statements as genuine first-century time indicators. The prophecy was relevant to its original churches because the announced judgments were

approaching (Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10).

Q: Does an early date prove every interpretation of Revelation?
A: No. Dating the book before AD 70 provides an important historical framework, but the symbols must still be interpreted through Scripture. The fulfilled perspective understands Revelation's central prophetic judgments as completed by AD 70 (Matthew 24:34; Revelation 22:10).

Q: What happened to the Old Covenant in AD 70?
A: Christ established the New Covenant through His death, and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple brought the Old Covenant sacrificial system to its historical end. The New Covenant remains established through Christ's completed sacrifice (Hebrews 8:6-13; 9:15; 10:11-18).

Q: What should Christians believe about Revelation today?
A: We should recognize its original audience, examine its historical setting, respect its time statements, and trust Christ's faithfulness. We now live under His established kingdom and have access to God through Him (Revelation 1:3; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:22-28).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Revelation 1:1; 1:3; 1:7; 2:9; 3:10; 11:1-2; 13:18; 17:9-10; 18:24; 22:6; 22:10; 22:20; Matthew 24:34
† Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Books 5-6; Tacitus, Annals 15.44; Irenaeus, Against Heresies 5.30.3; Clement of Alexandria, Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved? 42; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.18, 3.20; Epiphanius, Panarion 51; Syriac manuscript title tradition of Revelation; John A. T. Robinson, Redating the New Testament; Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., Before Jerusalem Fell; R. C. Sproul, The Last Days

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