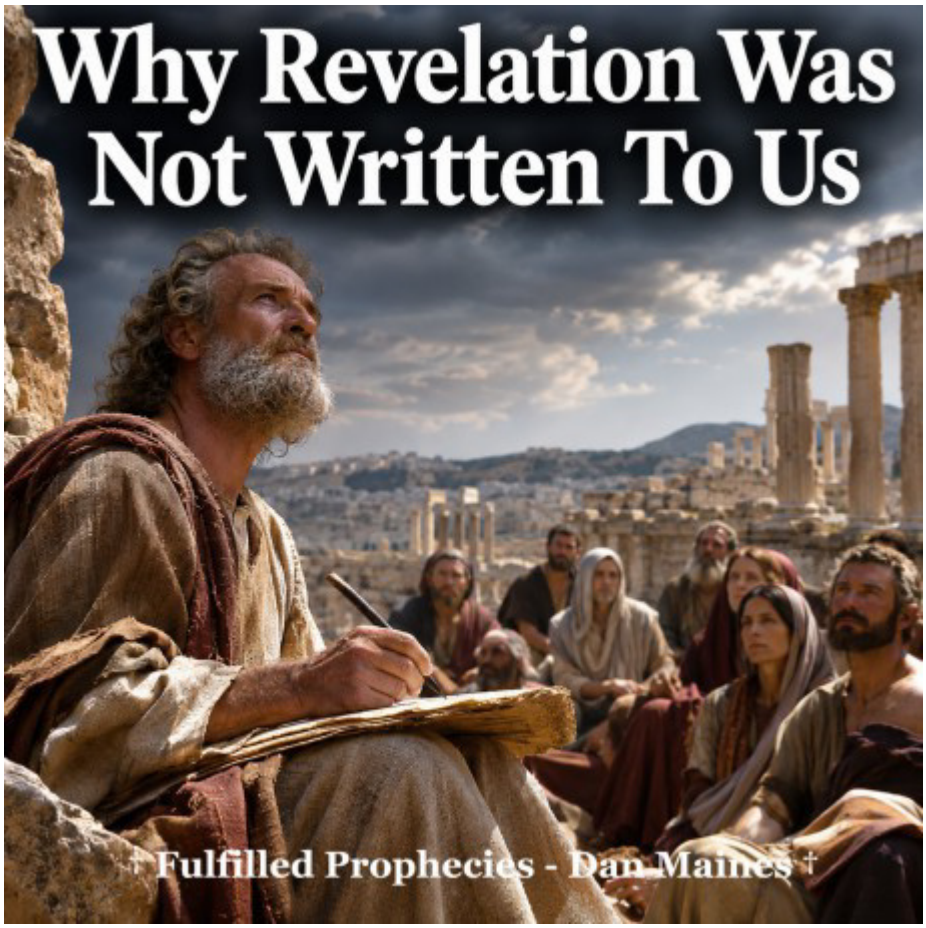
Fulfilled Prophecies

Why Revelation Was Not Written To Us



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† One of the greatest mistakes in interpreting the Book of Revelation is assuming that it was written directly to Christians living thousands of years after the apostles. Revelation was preserved for us, but it wasn't originally addressed to us. It was written to seven actual churches in first-century Asia Minor, and its prophecies concerned events that were approaching in their own generation (Revelation 1:1-4, 11).

† When we read a letter written to someone else, we must first

understand what it meant to those who received it. We don't take their warnings, their circumstances, and their promises and automatically transfer them thousands of years into the future. Yet that's exactly what much of modern Christianity has done with Revelation (2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Peter 1:20).

† Revelation wasn't written as a mysterious prediction of modern governments, future world wars, electronic identification systems, or the destruction of planet Earth. It revealed the approaching judgment upon the Old Covenant order, the vindication of Christ's people, and the establishment of the New Covenant kingdom in its completed form (Matthew 24:34; Hebrews 8:13; Revelation 11:15).

† The question isn't whether Revelation has meaning for Christians today. Of course it does. The question is whether we have the authority to change its original audience and its repeated declarations concerning the nearness of fulfillment. Scripture gives us no such authority (Revelation 1:3; 22:10, 18-19).

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,

† The opening sentence establishes the timing of the entire prophecy. Jesus revealed things that must soon take place. John wasn't instructed to announce events thousands of years away. The revelation concerned things approaching the people who originally received it (Revelation 1:3; 22:6).

† The word soon cannot reasonably mean thousands of years when the same book repeatedly declares that the time is near. The original readers had every reason to understand these statements according to their ordinary meaning (Revelation 1:3; 22:10).

† If soon meant thousands of years to the first-century churches, it would have communicated something entirely different from what those words normally meant. Jesus wasn't

misleading His servants about the timing of His promised judgment (Matthew 16:27-28; Hebrews 10:37).

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 specifically identifies people who would read, hear, and obey this prophecy. In the first century, Scripture was commonly read aloud to assembled believers. These churches were expected to understand the message and respond to it (Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27).
† The blessing was connected to obedience because the time was near. These weren't meaningless words added for dramatic effect. The approaching events made faithfulness and perseverance especially important to those believers (Revelation 2:10; James 5:8-9).
† Notice that John didn't say the time would become near thousands of years later. He declared that it was near when the prophecy was delivered. We must allow the original audience to understand the timing before applying its lessons to ourselves (1 Peter 4:7; 1 John 2:18).

Revelation 1:4
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,
† Here is the original audience plainly identified. John addressed seven churches in the Roman province of Asia, located in what is now western Turkey. He didn't address the United States, modern Israel, or a future generation of Christians (Revelation 1:11).
† These congregations had real members, real problems, real persecution, and real responsibilities. Jesus addressed their spiritual condition rather than offering predictions about modern political systems (Revelation 2:2-5; 3:1-3).
† The fact that Revelation was preserved for later Christians

doesn't change its original recipients. Paul's letters were preserved for us too, but that doesn't mean we become the Corinthians, Galatians, or Thessalonians to whom he originally wrote (1 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1).

Revelation 1:11
saying, "Write in a book what you see, 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."
† Jesus personally identified the seven congregations that were to receive John's prophecy. These were actual first-century churches, not seven imaginary congregations representing seven successive periods of Christian history (Revelation 1:4; 2:1).
† Each congregation received instructions addressing its circumstances. Some were commended for faithfulness, others were rebuked for compromise, and several were warned about approaching suffering or judgment (Revelation 2:4-5, 9-10; 3:1-3).
† If Jesus wanted these churches to understand that the prophecy concerned events thousands of years beyond their lifetime, He could have said so. Instead, He repeatedly emphasized the approaching fulfillment of what John was commanded to write (Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:6).

Revelation 2:10
Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.
† Jesus spoke directly to the church in Smyrna about suffering that was approaching them. The warning concerned some of those believers being imprisoned and tested. It wasn't addressed to Christians living thousands of years later (Revelation 1:11; 2:8).
† The words about to suffer establish an immediate concern for that congregation. Jesus wasn't describing a future worldwide

persecution that the original recipients would never experience (1 Peter 4:12-13).
† The promise of the crown of life encouraged believers to remain faithful even when facing death. That encouragement remains valuable today, but its original historical setting must not be erased (James 1:12; Revelation 14:13).

Revelation 2:13
I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.
† Jesus identified an actual believer named Antipas who had been killed among the Christians in Pergamum. This wasn't a symbolic description of a future Christian martyr. It was a historical circumstance known to that congregation (Revelation 1:11; 2:12).
† The reference to where they lived shows that Jesus was addressing the circumstances of a particular first-century church. He knew their location, their faithfulness, and the persecution they had experienced (Revelation 2:9-10).
† We can't turn every detail into a prediction about our generation while ignoring the people Jesus was actually addressing. Their suffering provides the historical setting for understanding the promises and warnings that follow (Revelation 2:16-17).

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 promised the church in Philadelphia protection concerning an approaching hour of testing. He addressed believers who had already demonstrated perseverance, not a future generation unknown to the original congregation (Revelation 3:7-9).

† The expression about to come reinforces the urgency of the prophecy. It belongs with the repeated declarations that the time was near and that the revealed events must soon take place (Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:6).
† The reference to the whole world must be understood within the first-century context. Scripture sometimes uses broad geographical language concerning the inhabited Roman world, as demonstrated by the census under Augustus (Luke 2:1; Romans 10:18).

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.
† The reference to those who pierced Jesus identifies the generation responsible for His crucifixion. Jesus had already warned the religious leaders of Jerusalem that they would see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven (Matthew 26:64; Zechariah 12:10).
† Coming with the clouds is prophetic judgment language. God used similar language when announcing judgment against Egypt, without describing a physical descent to the ground (Isaiah 19:1; Daniel 7:13-14).
† Jesus connected His coming in judgment with the generation then living. He declared that the events He described would occur before that generation passed away. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 fulfilled that covenantal judgment (Matthew 24:30, 34; Luke 21:20-22).

Revelation 11:8
And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.
† John identifies the great city by saying it was where their Lord was crucified. Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem, making Jerusalem the unmistakable geographical reference in this passage (Luke 23:33; Hebrews 13:12).

† Calling the city Sodom and Egypt expresses its covenantal corruption and rebellion. Jerusalem had rejected the Messiah and persecuted those sent to proclaim Him (Matthew 23:34-37).
† This identification is essential when understanding Revelation's judgment imagery. The city responsible for shedding the blood of God's messengers was approaching the judgment Jesus had already pronounced upon it (Matthew 23:35-36; Luke 21:20-22).

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 conclusion of Revelation, the same timing statement appears again. The prophecy begins with events that must soon take place and concludes by repeating that declaration (Revelation 1:1).
† This repetition matters because the closing chapters include the judgment, the removal of the former covenantal order, and the revelation of the New Jerusalem. The book doesn't suddenly change its timeframe when it reaches its final visions (Revelation 21:1-2; 22:10).
† The New Jerusalem represents the bride, the wife of the Lamb. Scripture identifies believers as belonging to the heavenly Jerusalem and the New Covenant community (Revelation 21:9-10; Hebrews 12:22-24; Galatians 4:26).

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.
† This is one of the strongest statements establishing Revelation's first-century fulfillment. John was specifically told not to seal the prophecy because its fulfillment was near (Revelation 1:3).
† Daniel received the opposite instruction concerning prophecies that extended beyond his own lifetime. He was told

to seal the book until the time of the end. John was told not to seal his prophecy because the appointed time had approached (Daniel 12:4, 9).
† The contrast is unmistakable. Daniel's prophecy pointed forward to the time when the power of the holy people would be shattered. Jesus connected that approaching judgment with Jerusalem's destruction (Daniel 12:7; Matthew 24:15-21; Luke 21:20-22).
† If John's prophecy was intended primarily for events thousands of years later, the command not to seal it because the time was near would lose its ordinary meaning. The first-century audience was being told that fulfillment was approaching (Revelation 22:6-7).

Revelation 22:16
"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."
† Even at the conclusion of Revelation, Jesus reminds John that the testimony was intended for the churches. The original audience hasn't changed between the first chapter and the last chapter (Revelation 1:4, 11).
† Jesus wasn't giving one message to the seven churches and another unrelated message to people living thousands of years later. The entire prophecy was delivered as a unified revelation concerning things that were approaching (Revelation 1:1; 22:6).
† We must distinguish between the original recipients and those who later benefit from the preserved message. Revelation continues to teach us about Christ's victory, His kingdom, and His faithfulness without requiring another future fulfillment (Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28).

Revelation 22:20
He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.
† Jesus concluded the prophecy by declaring that He was coming quickly. This agrees with the opening announcement

that the revealed events must soon take place (Revelation 1:1, 3).
† The first-century believers were waiting for the promised coming of Christ in judgment and vindication. Jesus had already connected that coming with the lifetime of some standing before Him and with the generation that heard His Olivet Discourse (Matthew 16:27-28; 24:34).
† We aren't waiting for another fulfillment of this promise. Christ completed His covenantal judgment in AD 70, and His kingdom continues without end (Daniel 7:13-14; Luke 21:22; Ephesians 3:21).

Historical References
† Flavius Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian who witnessed the Jewish-Roman War, recorded the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. His account describes the terrible suffering, famine, internal violence, and burning of the temple. These events provide historical evidence for the catastrophe Jesus predicted (Josephus, The Jewish War, Books 5-6; Luke 21:20-24).
† Josephus also recorded the destruction of the temple and the removal of its treasures by the Romans. This confirms that the Old Covenant sacrificial center was physically destroyed within the generation Jesus had addressed (Josephus, The Jewish War, 6.4.5; Matthew 24:1-2).
† Eusebius, writing in the fourth century, reported that Christians in Jerusalem were instructed to leave the city and settle in Pella before the war. His account preserves an early Christian tradition consistent with Jesus' warning to flee when Jerusalem was surrounded by armies (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 3.5.3; Luke 21:20-21).
† Tacitus, a Roman historian, also recorded the Jewish revolt and the Roman campaign against Jerusalem. His testimony independently confirms the historical setting of the war that culminated in Jerusalem's destruction (Tacitus, Histories, Book 5).
† The precise date when Revelation was written remains

debated among historians. The fulfilled perspective understands it as a prophecy written before AD 70, during the period when Jerusalem's judgment was approaching. The repeated time statements and the historical circumstances of the churches are central to that interpretation (Revelation 1:1-4; 22:6, 10).

How It Applies To Us Today

† Revelation teaches us to respect the original audience of Scripture. We shouldn't take promises and warnings addressed to first-century Christians and automatically turn them into predictions about our own generation (Revelation 1:4, 11; 22:16).

† We can read Revelation with confidence rather than fear. We don't need to search modern governments, technology, or international conflicts for another fulfillment of prophecies that declared their fulfillment was near (Revelation 1:3; 22:10).

† We live under the completed New Covenant, not under the approaching judgment of the Old Covenant world. The church is God's dwelling place, and believers have access to the Father through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 8:13; Ephesians 2:18-22).

† We aren't waiting for Christ to establish His kingdom. Believers have already been transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son, and that kingdom cannot be shaken (Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28).

† Revelation reminds us that Jesus kept His promises to His original followers. He didn't fail to return within the generation He identified, and He didn't postpone His judgment for thousands of years (Matthew 24:34; Revelation 22:20).

† The message of Revelation remains precious to Christians today because it reveals the victory of Jesus Christ, the faithfulness of God, and the blessings of the New Covenant. Its fulfillment doesn't make the book irrelevant. Its fulfillment demonstrates that God's word can be trusted (Revelation 21:3-4; 22:6).

† We must stop reading Revelation as though John wrote it yesterday. We should read it as a first-century prophecy that was fulfilled in its appointed time and preserved so that every

generation can understand the completed work of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:1-3; 22:10).

Q & A Appendix

Q: Was Revelation written directly to Christians living today?
A: No. It was addressed to seven actual first-century churches in Asia Minor. It was preserved for our instruction, but we weren't its original recipients (Revelation 1:4, 11; 22:16).

Q: Doesn't Revelation describe events that are still future?
A: From the fulfilled perspective, its prophetic judgments were fulfilled in the first century, culminating in AD 70. John repeatedly declared that the events must soon take place and that the time was near (Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10).

Q: Why did Jesus name seven specific churches?
A: Because those congregations were the original recipients of the prophecy. They faced actual circumstances requiring correction, encouragement, perseverance, and faithfulness (Revelation 1:11; 2:10, 13; 3:10).

Q: Doesn't the Book of Revelation describe the end of the physical world?
A: No. The fulfilled perspective understands the passing of the former heavens and earth as the passing of the Old Covenant order. The New Jerusalem represents the bride of Christ, and the earth continues according to God's established purposes (Revelation 21:1-10; Hebrews 8:13; Ecclesiastes 1:4).

Q: Why was Daniel told to seal his prophecy while John was told not to seal Revelation?
A: Daniel was looking forward to events beyond his lifetime, while John was announcing events whose appointed time had approached. This contrast supports the first-century timeframe of Revelation (Daniel 12:4, 9; Revelation 22:10).

Q: Was the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 the fulfillment of Jesus' promised judgment?
A: Yes. Jesus connected Jerusalem's destruction with the days of vengeance and declared that everything He described would occur within that generation (Matthew 23:36; 24:34; Luke 21:20-22).

Q: Does Revelation still have meaning for us if its prophecies were fulfilled?
A: Absolutely. Its fulfilled prophecies demonstrate Christ's faithfulness, the certainty of God's promises, and the reality of His everlasting kingdom. We benefit from the message without becoming its original audience (Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28; Revelation 21:3).

Q: Should Christians still expect another coming of Jesus to fulfill Revelation?
A: No. Jesus declared that He was coming quickly, and His promised covenantal coming was fulfilled in the judgment of AD 70. Believers now live in His established kingdom (Matthew 16:27-28; 24:34; Revelation 22:20).

Q: What is the most important rule when interpreting Revelation?
A: Read it according to its original audience, historical setting, prophetic language, and repeated time statements. Don't move its fulfillment thousands of years beyond the generation to whom it was given (Revelation 1:1-4; 22:6, 10, 16).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Revelation 1:1, 3-4, 7, 11; 2:10, 13; 3:10; 11:8; 22:6, 10, 16, 20
† Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Books 5-6; Eusebius,

Ecclesiastical History, 3.5.3; Tacitus, Histories, Book 5

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