Fulfilled Prophecies

The Seven Churches Were Waiting For Something To Happen Soon



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† The seven churches of Revelation were real congregations living in the first century. Jesus addressed their circumstances, warned them about approaching judgment, and promised blessings to those who remained faithful. These weren't letters written to Christians thousands of years later. They were messages to people who were alive when John received the Revelation. (Revelation 1:4, 11)

† Each church received a personal message from Jesus. Some were commanded to repent, others were warned about persecution, and others were promised deliverance and reward. What united these messages was the approaching fulfillment of Christ's coming in judgment and the completion of the Old Covenant age. (Matthew 24:34; Hebrews 10:37)
† The question isn't whether these churches expected something to happen. Jesus explicitly told them that He was coming, that an hour of testing was approaching, and that they needed to remain faithful until the end. We must understand these promises within their original historical setting. (Revelation 2:25; 3:10-11)

Revelation 1:1, 3
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,
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.
† Jesus established the time frame before addressing any of the seven churches. The events must soon take place, and the time was near. These statements governed everything that followed. (Revelation 22:6, 10)
† John wasn't announcing events that would begin thousands of years later. He was warning his contemporaries about the approaching conclusion of the Old Covenant age. (Matthew 24:34; Hebrews 8:13)
† Every warning and promise to the seven churches must be understood within this declared time frame. We can't separate the letters from the prophecy's opening announcement. (Revelation 1:1-3; 22:10)

Ephesus: Jesus Was Coming To Remove Their Lampstand

Revelation 2:4-5
But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent.
† Ephesus had remained active in defending the truth, but the congregation had abandoned its first love. Jesus warned that continued unfaithfulness would bring judgment upon that church. (Revelation 2:2-4)
† Notice that Jesus said He was coming to them. This was a warning of direct judgment against their congregation, not a prediction that the physical universe would be destroyed. (Revelation 2:5)
† The removal of the lampstand represented the loss of their standing as a faithful congregation. Jesus was calling them to immediate repentance because His judgment wasn't something they could safely ignore. (Revelation 1:20; 2:5)
† The warning to Ephesus demonstrates that Christ's coming language could describe His intervention in the affairs of a particular church. It also belongs within Revelation's larger first-century expectation. (Revelation 1:1, 3)

Smyrna: Persecution Was About To Begin

Revelation 2:10-11
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.
'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'
† Jesus didn't tell Smyrna that persecution would begin thousands of years later. He told them they were about to suffer. The warning concerned people who were actually attending that congregation. (Revelation 2:10)

† The ten days represented a limited period of testing. Whether understood as a literal duration or symbolic expression, the suffering was approaching those original believers. (Daniel 1:12-15; Revelation 2:10)
† Jesus promised the crown of life to those who remained faithful, even unto death. Their persecutors could kill their bodies, but they couldn't take away the eternal life Christ promised. (Matthew 10:28; James 1:12)
† The second death wasn't something faithful believers needed to fear. Their victory rested in Christ, whose resurrection had already secured their hope. (John 11:25-26; Revelation 20:6)
† Smyrna was waiting for persecution, deliverance, and vindication. Jesus was preparing them for events within their own lifetime, not describing an unknown generation in the distant future. (Revelation 2:10-11)

Pergamum: Jesus Was Coming Quickly To Make War

Revelation 2:16-17
Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.
He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'
† Pergamum tolerated false teaching associated with Balaam and the Nicolaitans. Jesus commanded repentance and warned that He would come quickly against those who continued in rebellion. (Revelation 2:14-16)
† The sword of His mouth represented the authority of His word in judgment. Jesus wasn't promising a future military battle with physical weapons. (Isaiah 11:4; Hebrews 4:12)
† The word quickly mattered to Pergamum. Jesus was warning living members of that congregation that judgment was approaching if they refused to repent. (Revelation 2:16)
† Those who overcame were promised hidden manna and a

new name. These blessings represented their spiritual provision, acceptance, and identity in Christ. (John 6:35; Revelation 3:12)
† Pergamum shows that Christ's coming could mean judgment against corruption within His own churches, while His faithful people received covenant blessings. (Revelation 2:16-17)

Thyatira: Hold Fast Until Jesus Came

Revelation 2:25-28
Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.
He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end,
TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS;
AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father;
and I will give him the morning star.
† Jesus told the faithful believers in Thyatira to hold fast until He came. This command was directed to people living in that congregation, not to an unidentified generation thousands of years later. (Revelation 2:24-25)
† The church was dealing with false teaching and immorality associated with the woman called Jezebel. Jesus warned that judgment would come upon those who refused to repent. (Revelation 2:20-23)
† The faithful were told to persevere until the end. This corresponds to Jesus' earlier promise that those who endured to the end would be saved. (Matthew 24:13)
† Authority over the nations reflected participation in Christ's victorious kingdom. Jesus had already received authority from His Father, and His people would share in His reign. (Matthew 28:18; Revelation 1:6)
† The morning star pointed to Christ Himself, who later identified Himself as the bright morning star. Their reward was inseparable from belonging to Him. (Revelation 22:16)
† Thyatira wasn't instructed to wait indefinitely. Jesus gave them a command connected directly to His coming, and Revelation

had already declared that the time was near. (Revelation 1:3; 2:25)

Sardis: Jesus Would Come Like A Thief

Revelation 3:3, 5
So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.
He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.
† Sardis had a reputation for being alive, but Jesus declared that the congregation was spiritually dead. They needed to wake up and repent before judgment overtook them. (Revelation 3:1-3)
† Coming like a thief described unexpected judgment upon the unprepared. It didn't mean Jesus was postponing His coming for thousands of years. (Matthew 24:42-44; 1 Thessalonians 5:2-4)
† Jesus warned that Sardis wouldn't know the hour of His coming if they remained spiritually asleep. The warning only had its intended urgency because the danger was relevant to those original believers. (Revelation 3:3)
† The faithful were promised white garments and acknowledgment before the Father. Their hope wasn't the survival of an earthly institution, but their secure standing in Christ. (Matthew 10:32; Revelation 3:5)
† Sardis demonstrates the distinction between readiness and spiritual carelessness. Jesus was warning them to prepare for His approaching judgment. (Revelation 3:2-3)

Philadelphia: The Hour Of Testing Was About To Come

Revelation 3:10-12
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.
I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.
He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.
† Philadelphia provides one of the clearest time statements in the seven letters. Jesus declared that an hour of testing was about to come and immediately announced that He was coming quickly. (Revelation 3:10-11)
† These statements were directed to a first-century congregation that had already demonstrated perseverance. Jesus promised to preserve His faithful people through the approaching crisis. (Revelation 3:8-10)
† The hour of testing belongs to the approaching judgment described throughout Revelation. From the fulfilled perspective, its covenantal climax came with Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70. (Matthew 24:21, 34; Luke 21:20-22)
† Jesus didn't promise Philadelphia an escape into the sky. He promised to keep them from the hour of testing. The text doesn't describe a rapture or the removal of believers from the earth. (Revelation 3:10)
† The promise of becoming a pillar in God's temple pointed to permanent belonging in His spiritual dwelling. God's people are His temple, built together in Christ. (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5)
† The New Jerusalem wasn't a future earthly capital. It represented the covenant people of God, the bride of Christ, whose identity would be fully established with the passing of the Old Covenant order. (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22-23; Revelation 21:9-10)
† Philadelphia was explicitly told that Jesus was coming quickly. To move that promise thousands of years into the future removes the urgency Jesus gave to the original congregation.

(Revelation 3:11)

Laodicea: Jesus Was Standing At The Door

Revelation 3:19-21
Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.
Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.
'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.
† Laodicea was wealthy in material possessions but spiritually poor. Jesus warned that their lukewarm condition was unacceptable and called them to repentance. (Revelation 3:15-19)
† Jesus standing at the door wasn't a prediction of a distant physical return. He was calling the members of that congregation to respond to Him and receive fellowship with Him. (Revelation 3:20)
† The invitation to dine with Christ represented restored fellowship. The door was open to those who heard His voice and responded in faith. (John 14:23; Revelation 3:20)
† The promise of sharing His throne pointed to participation in His kingdom. Christ had already overcome and sat down with His Father, and the faithful would share in His victory. (Ephesians 2:6; Revelation 3:21)
† Unlike Philadelphia, Laodicea wasn't explicitly told that Jesus was coming quickly. Nevertheless, its warning belonged to the same Revelation that declared the time was near. (Revelation 1:3; 22:10)
† The message was urgent because Jesus was addressing their present spiritual condition and calling for repentance before judgment. (Revelation 3:19-20)

The Seven Churches And The End Of The Old Covenant Age

Revelation 22:6-7, 10, 12
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.
And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.
And he said to me, Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.
Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.
† Revelation begins and ends with the same time statements. The events must soon take place, the time was near, and Jesus was coming quickly. (Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:6-12)
† These declarations weren't symbolic expressions for thousands of years. They communicated urgency to the original recipients, who were commanded to heed the prophecy. (Revelation 1:3; 22:7)
† Daniel was told to seal his prophecy because its fulfillment concerned a later time. John received the opposite command because the fulfillment of Revelation was near. (Daniel 12:4; Revelation 22:10)
† The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 marked the decisive end of the Old Covenant age, the judgment of the unfaithful covenant nation, and the full establishment of the New Covenant order. (Matthew 24:3, 34; Luke 21:20-22; Hebrews 8:13)
† The seven churches weren't waiting for the end of planet Earth. They were living during the transition between the covenants and were instructed to remain faithful as the approaching judgment unfolded. (Hebrews 9:26; 10:37)
† Not every promise to the churches described the same event. Some concerned local discipline, others persecution, fellowship, or reward. Yet the prophecy's overall time frame remained firmly

anchored in the first century. (Revelation 2:5, 10, 16; 3:10-11)

Historical References

† Flavius Josephus, writing in The Jewish War, Books 5-7, described the Roman siege of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple in AD 70, famine, internal conflict, and the suffering of the Jewish population. His account provides historical evidence of the judgment Jesus had foretold against Jerusalem. (Luke 21:20-24)

† Tacitus, in Histories, Book 5, discussed the Jewish revolt and Roman campaign against Jerusalem. His account independently confirms the historical setting of the war that culminated in the temple's destruction. (Matthew 24:2)

† Eusebius, in Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5, recorded the tradition that Christians in Jerusalem departed for Pella before the city's destruction. This later historical testimony is consistent with Jesus' instruction to flee when Jerusalem was surrounded by armies. (Luke 21:20-21)

† These historical writers didn't establish the meaning of Revelation. Scripture establishes the prophetic time frame, while historical testimony helps document the first-century events surrounding Jerusalem's destruction. (Revelation 1:1-3; Luke 21:22)

How It Applies To Us Today

† We aren't waiting for Jesus to fulfill the warnings He gave the seven churches. Those messages were addressed to real congregations facing circumstances within their own historical setting. (Revelation 1:4, 11)

† We can still learn from their faithfulness, failures, repentance, and perseverance. Their original prophetic expectations were first-century expectations, but the spiritual principles remain valuable to believers today. (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11)

† Like Ephesus, we must never abandon our love for Christ while defending sound teaching. Knowledge without love doesn't reflect the character of our Savior. (Revelation 2:4-5; 1 Corinthians 13:2)

† Like Smyrna, we can remain faithful through suffering because eternal life is found in Christ, not in the preservation of our physical bodies. (Revelation 2:10-11; John 11:25-26)
† Like Pergamum and Thyatira, we must reject false teaching and remain faithful to the truth revealed in Scripture. (Revelation 2:14-16, 20-25)
† Like Sardis, we must recognize that outward religious activity doesn't necessarily demonstrate spiritual life. (Revelation 3:1-3)
† Like Philadelphia, we can rejoice that we belong to God's spiritual temple and heavenly Jerusalem through Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 2:19-22; Hebrews 12:22-23)
† Like Laodicea, we must never allow material prosperity or self-sufficiency to replace our dependence upon Christ. (Revelation 3:17-20)
† The fulfilled perspective doesn't remove the relevance of Revelation. It restores its original meaning and allows us to appreciate what Christ accomplished in bringing the Old Covenant age to its appointed conclusion. (Matthew 5:17-18; Hebrews 8:13)
† Jesus kept His promises. The seven churches were waiting for events that were near to them, and we now live under the completed New Covenant established through His finished redemptive work. (Revelation 22:6-7; Hebrews 12:28)

Q & A Appendix

Q: Were the seven churches real congregations?
A: Yes. Jesus addressed seven actual congregations in Asia Minor, each with its own circumstances, warnings, and promises. (Revelation 1:4, 11; 2:1-3:22)

Q: Did Jesus promise to come to every church in exactly the same way?
A: No. Ephesus was warned about losing its lampstand, Pergamum about judgment against false teachers, and Sardis about an unexpected coming. Other churches received promises of perseverance, fellowship, and reward. (Revelation

2:5, 16; 3:3, 20-21)

Q: Was Smyrna waiting for a future tribulation thousands of years later?
A: No. Jesus told them they were about to suffer and that some would be imprisoned. His warning concerned their own approaching persecution. (Revelation 2:10)

Q: Did Philadelphia receive a promise of a future rapture?
A: No. Jesus promised to keep them from the approaching hour of testing. The passage doesn't describe believers being taken physically into heaven. (Revelation 3:10-11)

Q: Did the New Jerusalem promise refer to a physical city descending onto Earth?
A: From the fulfilled perspective, no. The New Jerusalem represents God's covenant people, the bride of Christ, and our heavenly citizenship. (Revelation 3:12; 21:9-10; Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22-23)

Q: Was Jesus' coming quickly a promise for our generation?
A: No. Revelation explicitly says the events must soon take place and that the time was near for its original recipients. The fulfilled perspective understands the covenantal coming as accomplished in the first century, culminating in AD 70. (Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:6-7, 10, 12)

Q: Does Revelation still have meaning for Christians today?
A: Absolutely. Its prophetic judgments belong to their original historical setting, but its teachings about faithfulness, repentance, perseverance, and fellowship with Christ remain valuable today. (Romans 15:4; Revelation 2:7; 3:19-21)

Q: What is the greatest lesson from the seven churches?
A: Jesus was faithful to His promises. He warned His people about events that were near, called them to persevere, and promised them the blessings of His kingdom. We don't need to

move those promises into our future to appreciate their fulfillment. (Revelation 1:1-3; 3:11; 22:6-12)

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Revelation 1:1, 3; 2:4-5, 10-11, 16-17, 25-28; 3:3, 5, 10-12, 19-21; 22:6-7, 10, 12

† Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Books 5-7; Tacitus, Histories, Book 5; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5

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