Fulfilled Prophecies

I Am Coming To You": What Did Jesus Mean To The Seven Churches?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† When Jesus addressed the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2-3, He repeatedly warned that He was coming to them. These statements weren't addressed to Christians living thousands of years later. They were spoken directly to congregations that existed in the first century, facing real persecution, compromise, false teaching, and the approaching judgment upon the Old Covenant world (Revelation 1:4, 11).

† Most Christians recognize the coming of Christ in Revelation 1:7 and 22:7, but overlook the repeated announcements of His coming in the letters to the seven churches. Jesus warned Ephesus that He was coming to remove its lampstand. He warned Pergamum that He was coming quickly to make war against those practicing false teaching. He told Thyatira to hold fast until He came. He warned Sardis that He would come like a thief. He assured Philadelphia that He was coming quickly (Revelation 2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11).
† Were these different comings separated by thousands of years? Were they promises of a physical return to earth? Or were they expressions of Christ's authority, involving His immediate dealings with individual congregations and His approaching covenantal judgment? The answer must come from the words Jesus actually spoke, the people He addressed, and the time statements He provided (Revelation 1:1-3).
† The seven churches weren't waiting for events in our generation. They were living in the closing years of the Old Covenant age, when the promised judgment upon Jerusalem was approaching. The distinction between Christ's disciplinary visits to individual congregations and His coming in judgment upon the Old Covenant order is essential to understanding these passages (Matthew 24:34; Hebrews 8:13).

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, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, everything that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads, and those who hear the words of the prophecy and keep the things which are written in it; for the time is near.
† Before examining any coming mentioned in Revelation 2-3, we must establish the timeframe Jesus gave His original audience. The events must soon take place, and the time was near. Those statements governed the entire prophecy, including the warnings addressed to the seven churches (Revelation

22:6, 10).
† Jesus didn't tell those congregations that His coming would occur thousands of years after their deaths. He addressed people who could hear His words, repent, endure persecution, and remain faithful while the promised events approached (Revelation 2:10; 3:10-11).
† The timeframe wasn't left to speculation. Jesus had already declared that His generation would witness the fulfillment of the things He announced concerning Jerusalem. Revelation maintains that same first-century urgency (Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:20-22).

Revelation 2:1, 5
To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:
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.
† Jesus was already walking among the seven golden lampstands, which represented the seven churches. His coming to Ephesus didn't require Him to travel physically from heaven to earth. He was exercising His authority over a congregation that had abandoned its first love (Revelation 1:12-13, 20).
† The threatened coming was conditional. If Ephesus repented, its lampstand wouldn't be removed. If it refused, Christ would judge that congregation by removing its standing as a faithful witness. This was a specific warning to Ephesus, not a prediction of a future worldwide destruction (Matthew 18:20; Revelation 3:19).
† Notice that Jesus didn't say He would destroy the planet or physically appear in the city. He identified the judgment as the removal of its lampstand. His authority over His church was already established, and His threatened intervention would demonstrate that authority (Ephesians 1:20-23).
† We must also distinguish this disciplinary coming from the

consummating judgment of AD 70. Both express Christ's authority, but the text doesn't require every occurrence of coming to describe the identical event (Revelation 2:16; 3:20).

Revelation 2:12, 16
And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:
Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.
† Pergamum faced false teaching and moral compromise. Jesus warned that He would come quickly and make war against those refusing to repent. The weapon He identified was the sword of His mouth, emphasizing His authoritative word and judgment (Revelation 2:14-15; Hebrews 4:12).
† This wasn't a prediction of Jesus physically entering Pergamum with a literal sword. His words describe divine judgment against disobedience within the congregation. The same Lord who commended faithfulness also confronted corruption (2 Corinthians 10:4-6).
† The word quickly must retain its ordinary urgency for the original recipients. Jesus wasn't threatening first-century believers with a disciplinary action that couldn't occur until thousands of years later (Revelation 1:3; 22:7).
† Pergamum demonstrates that a coming of Christ can describe His judicial intervention against a particular group. We shouldn't automatically turn every coming into a separate bodily return or assign it to our future (Revelation 2:5; 3:3).

Revelation 2:18, 25-26
And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and feet like burnished bronze, says this:
Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.
The one who overcomes, and the one who keeps My deeds until the end, I will give him authority over the nations;
† Thyatira was instructed to hold fast until Christ came. The command was directed to believers then living, not to an

unidentified generation thousands of years afterward. They were expected to remain faithful through their own trials (Revelation 2:19-24).
† Unlike the conditional warning to Ephesus, this statement encouraged endurance until Christ's coming. The promise of authority over the nations connects their perseverance with His established kingdom and victory (Psalm 2:8-9; Revelation 1:6).
† The end in this context must be considered alongside the approaching end of the Old Covenant age. Jesus had already taught that His disciples would endure persecution and that those remaining faithful to the end would be saved (Matthew 10:22-23; 24:13).
† Thyatira wasn't instructed to calculate events in the twenty-first century. Its members were told to hold fast to what they already possessed until the Lord fulfilled His promises to that generation (Matthew 16:27-28; Hebrews 10:36-37).

Revelation 3:1, 3
To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, and yet you are dead.
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.
† Sardis had a reputation for spiritual life, but Jesus declared that it was dead. His warning concerned the congregation's failure to remain watchful and obedient. Unless it repented, His coming would bring unexpected judgment (Revelation 3:2, 4).
† The expression like a thief describes unexpected arrival, not the physical manner of Christ's appearance. Jesus used similar language when warning His disciples to remain watchful concerning the approaching judgment (Matthew 24:42-44).
† The warning was conditional. Jesus said that if Sardis didn't wake up, He would come unexpectedly. The congregation could respond to His warning and avoid the threatened disciplinary judgment (Revelation 2:5; 3:19).

† We shouldn't confuse the imagery of a thief with a secret rapture. Scripture doesn't say that believers would disappear from the earth. The emphasis was on readiness, faithfulness, and judgment against those who refused to listen (1 Thessalonians 5:2-6).

Revelation 3:7, 10-11
And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this: Because you have kept My word of perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of the testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who live on the earth.
I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.
† Philadelphia received encouragement rather than the severe rebukes given to several other churches. Jesus promised protection through an approaching hour of testing and declared that He was coming quickly. These promises belonged first to the believers who received the letter (Revelation 1:4; 3:8).
† Notice the language. The testing was about to come, and Jesus was coming quickly. These weren't descriptions of events postponed for thousands of years. They were announcements of approaching circumstances affecting the first-century church (Revelation 1:1, 3).
† The whole world must be understood in its biblical and historical setting. Scripture frequently uses broad geographical language for the inhabited Roman world and the extent of events within that world (Luke 2:1; Romans 1:8).
† Philadelphia was told to hold fast so that no one would take its crown. The promise encouraged perseverance through the approaching crisis, not speculation about an end of the physical universe (James 5:8-9; 1 Peter 4:7).
† The coming announced here fits the approaching consummation of the Old Covenant age in AD 70, when Christ's promised judgment upon Jerusalem brought that covenantal

order to its final historical conclusion (Matthew 24:2, 34; Hebrews 8:13).

Revelation 3:14, 19-20
To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Origin of the creation of God, says this:
Those whom I love, I rebuke 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.
† Laodicea reveals another meaning of Christ's coming. Jesus wasn't announcing a worldwide judgment in this statement. He was inviting repentance, renewed fellowship, and communion with those willing to receive Him (Revelation 3:15-19).
† The promise was personal and conditional. If anyone heard His voice and opened the door, He would come in and dine with that person. This was the language of restored fellowship, not a description of His physical descent from heaven (John 14:23).
† Jesus was already addressing the congregation from His position of authority. His invitation demonstrated that His presence wasn't limited to a future event. He could discipline, restore, and fellowship with His people without physically returning to earth (Matthew 18:20; Ephesians 3:17).
† This passage is especially important because it proves that the word come doesn't always refer to the same event. Context determines whether Jesus speaks of judgment, deliverance, fellowship, or the consummation of the age (Revelation 2:5; 3:11).

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 His bond-servants the things which must soon take place.
And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is the one who keeps 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 reward each one as his work deserves.
† Revelation concludes with the same urgency found in its opening chapter and the letters to the seven churches. The events must soon take place, the time was near, and Jesus declared that He was coming quickly (Revelation 1:1-3).
† Daniel was instructed to seal his prophecy because its fulfillment concerned a later period. John received the opposite instruction because the time was near. The contrast establishes the first-century relevance of Revelation's promised events (Daniel 12:4, 9).
† Jesus connected His coming with judgment and reward. He had already told His disciples that the Son of Man would come in His Father's glory and reward each person according to his deeds, with some standing there living to witness that coming (Matthew 16:27-28).
† The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 marked the historical judgment upon the Old Covenant order and the completion of the covenantal transition. It wasn't the destruction of the physical universe or a bodily return of Jesus to earth (Luke 21:20-22; Hebrews 12:26-28).
† We must preserve the distinction between Christ's particular disciplinary comings to individual churches and His promised coming in covenantal judgment. The former demonstrate His continuing authority, while the latter belongs to the first-century consummation announced throughout the prophecy (Revelation 2:5, 16; 3:3, 11).

Historical References
† Josephus, writing in The Jewish War, Books 5-6, described the siege, famine, internal violence, and destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70. His account provides historical testimony to the catastrophe Jesus had predicted concerning Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-24).
† Josephus also recorded extraordinary events and warnings

preceding Jerusalem's destruction in The Jewish War, Book 6, Chapter 5. His reports show how the approaching catastrophe was remembered in first-century Jewish history, although his descriptions must be distinguished from Scripture itself (Matthew 24:15-21).
† Eusebius, in Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5, reported that Christians in Jerusalem received a warning and departed to Pella before the city's destruction. His account, written centuries afterward, preserves an early Christian tradition consistent with Jesus' instruction to flee when Jerusalem was surrounded (Luke 21:20-21).
† Tacitus, in Histories, Book 5, described the Jewish revolt and Roman campaign against Jerusalem. His Roman perspective independently confirms the historical setting of the conflict that culminated in the destruction of the temple (Matthew 24:1-2).
† These writers establish the historical reality of Jerusalem's destruction. They don't independently prove every theological interpretation of Revelation, but their accounts confirm that the first-century world experienced the judgment and upheaval central to the fulfilled perspective (Luke 21:22).

How It Applies To Us Today
† We must begin by recognizing that the seven churches were real congregations receiving direct instructions from Jesus. Their warnings and promises weren't originally addressed to modern Christians, although their lessons remain valuable to the church today (Revelation 1:4, 11).
† Christ's warnings to Ephesus, Pergamum, and Sardis remind us that He takes faithfulness, sound teaching, and repentance seriously. His authority over His church didn't disappear when the Old Covenant age ended (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18).
† Philadelphia reminds us that faithfulness matters even when believers face opposition. We don't need to place ourselves inside its first-century prophetic timetable to learn from its perseverance (Hebrews 10:23; James 1:12).
† Laodicea reminds us that fellowship with Christ involves

repentance and a willing response to His word. His presence among His people remains a present reality, not something dependent upon another future return to earth (John 14:23; Matthew 28:20).
† We aren't waiting for Jesus to fulfill the first-century comings He announced to those churches. We live under His established authority in the New Covenant kingdom, where believers have already been transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28).
† The fulfilled perspective doesn't deny Christ's continuing presence or His authority to judge and discipline. It recognizes that His promised covenantal coming was fulfilled, while His reign and fellowship with His people continue (1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 3:21).

Q & A Appendix

Q: Did every coming mentioned in Revelation 2-3 refer to the exact same event?
A: No. Some were conditional warnings of disciplinary judgment upon particular congregations, while others emphasized Christ's approaching coming and the completion of the Old Covenant age. Context determines the meaning (Revelation 2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11, 20).

Q: Did Jesus physically return to Ephesus to remove its lampstand?
A: The passage doesn't describe a physical appearance. Jesus threatened to remove the congregation's lampstand if it refused to repent, demonstrating His authority over the church (Revelation 2:1, 5; 1:20).

Q: Why did Jesus tell Pergamum that He was coming quickly?
A: He warned that He would judge those promoting false teaching and compromise. His coming was a threatened judicial intervention, described through the sword of His mouth

(Revelation 2:14-16).

Q: Was the coming like a thief to Sardis a secret rapture?
A: No. Jesus warned an unwatchful congregation that His judgment would arrive unexpectedly if it refused to repent. Nothing in the passage describes believers disappearing from the earth (Revelation 3:2-3; Matthew 24:42-44).

Q: Was Philadelphia promised protection from a tribulation thousands of years in the future?
A: No. Jesus said the testing was about to come and that He was coming quickly. Those statements addressed the congregation's approaching first-century circumstances (Revelation 3:10-11; 1:3).

Q: Does Revelation 3:20 describe the Second Coming?
A: No. Jesus described His invitation to renewed fellowship. Coming in to dine with someone expresses personal communion, not a physical return to earth (Revelation 3:19-20; John 14:23).

Q: How can Christ come in judgment without physically appearing?
A: Scripture frequently describes divine judgment through the language of God coming against a people or nation. Such language communicates His authority and intervention without requiring a bodily appearance (Isaiah 19:1; Matthew 24:30).

Q: When was Christ's promised covenantal coming fulfilled?
A: The fulfilled perspective identifies AD 70 as the consummation of Christ's promised coming in judgment upon Jerusalem and the Old Covenant order, within the generation He addressed (Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:20-22; Hebrews 8:13).

Q: Does Jesus still have authority over His church today?
A: Yes. His first-century coming was fulfilled, but His kingdom and authority continue. He remains the head of His church and

reigns over His people (Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 1:18).

Q: What is the central lesson of the comings announced to the seven churches?
A: We must respect the original audience, recognize the different meanings of Christ's coming in their contexts, and accept the timeframe Jesus Himself provided. The time was near, and His promises weren't postponed for thousands of years (Revelation 1:1-3; 22:6-12).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Revelation 1:1-3; 2:1, 5, 12, 16, 18, 25-26; 3:1, 3, 7, 10-11, 14, 19-20; 22:6-7, 10, 12
† Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Books 5-6; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5; Tacitus, Histories, Book 5

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