

Revelation

*Part Four
Behold, He is Coming
Part One
(Revelation 1:7, 8)*

With Study Questions

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Part One

(Revelation 1:7, 8)

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. ⁸“I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the Beginning and the End,*” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:7, 8).

Introduction

The social, political, religious and moral disorder by which we find ourselves surrounded in the twenty-first century west is relatively insignificant when compared to the original recipients of the Revelation. Religion was so corrupt that Jesus had declared the ministers to be servants of hell and their converts even worse (Matthew 23:15). And it would be near impossible, in any survey of history, to find political leadership to be as psychopathic as the Caesars of Rome. History informs us that Nero killed his own mother, his ex-wife, his current pregnant wife and staged unthinkable atrocities upon the Christians of his era.

The idea that first century Christians would form political coalitions, have cultural clout and, in any way, find a smooth path must have seemed unthinkable. One thinks of the rhetorical question of David against, what appeared to be insurmountable odds.

**If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do
(Psalm 11:3)?**

We have concluded that the theme of Revelation is the victory of Christ over all evil or opposition. We have also established that, as a kingdom of priests, we have a roll in that process. What we will see in the passage before us, is what we can count on in terms of Christ's mighty, providential hand in assuring that good will prevail.

Review

Being the relatively difficult book that it is, it may be helpful to have a review, from time to time, to help us maintain context and the big picture found in Revelation.

In verses one and two we see the *order*, or chain, of the communication, as well as the *type* of communication. The order is from the Father to the Son to His angel to John and finally reaching the ears and eyes of **“His servants.”** In order for this book to be of value, we must be numbered among His servants.

We also see the type of communication. It is **“sent and signified it”** *esemanen* or ‘sign-ify’. This verb carries the idea of figurative representation. We must read Revelation, recognizing the genre of literature. Literal when literal, symbolic when symbolic.

We also learn that it is **“the word of God”** and **“the testimony of Jesus Christ.”** Let us not lose focus on the principle character in all of Scripture, which is Jesus Christ Himself.

Twice in the first three verses we are told that the events of which John will write, **“must shortly take place...for the time is near.”** For all the sensational theological speculation about the end of the world, the most natural reading of the Revelation must bring our thoughts to something that the original readers would have understood to happen soon.

To be sure, there will be a Second Coming. But the lion’s share of Revelation must be understood as imminent from the perspective of the first century church. They would have been the initial recipients of the blessings found by those who **“read”**, **“hear”** and **“keep”** what is written on these pages. Of course, that is not to say there aren’t similar blessings for those who find themselves in similar situations throughout history. Like all of Scripture, the book is not designed to aid one generation of Christian-whether it’s the first century church or the last century church.

Verses four through six are rich and deep in terms of the **“grace”** and **“peace”** found in and from God. John writes of the Triune God as well as the three offices of Christ (prophet, priest and king). We also read of the great love with which we are loved and being **“washed”** or released from our sins. The drama of Revelation, truly the drama of our entire existence, must ever be engaged in light of the Gospel in order for the blessings to be ours.

The Gospel is the good news of what God has done in saving us, but that does not mean we are merely be spectators in the unfolding of God's redemptive plan. We are "**kings and priests**" or a "**kingdom of priests**" to His glory and dominion. We have marching orders and must ever be ready and willing to live a life of servitude, sacrifice and perseverance.

For the first century church, and many churches throughout the world today, this may include the call to "**Be faithful until death**" that Christ may give "**you the crown of life**" (**Revelation 2:11**). There is a battle in which we are called to participate. At the same time there is a promise that the church will prevail upon the "**gates of hell**" (**Matthew 16:18**).

The covenant people of God have always been given the surety that due to their union with God through Christ, those who bless them will be blessed and those who curse them will find themselves under a curse (Genesis 12:3). Remember the theme found in Revelation is *the victory of Christ over all evil or opposition*. And the victory of Christ becomes the victory of His body-all those who are found in Him.

Preface

With that in mind, we now look at a verse that many believe to be principle thematic verse of that very victory. If verse nineteen of chapter one is the outline of Revelation (things which you have seen, which are, and which take place after this) verse seven may be a suitable title for the book, "**Behold, He is coming.**"

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen (Revelation 1:7).

What is the event of verse seven? What is the "**coming**" of Christ and what is meant by "**clouds**?" Who is included in "**every eye**?" Who are those "**who pierced Him**?" What is meant by "**all the tribes of the earth**?" and what does it mean that they will "**mourn**?" We will spend only a little time on verse eight, not because it is unimportant, but because it is less complicated. It is clearly a reference to the Almighty God. Suffice it to say for now, that whatever is being conveyed in verse seven requires we

recognize and savor that there is an Almighty God governing the affairs of history. Finally, how is all of this ministerial to our hearts?

Coming of Christ

I recall leading a Bible study many years ago, before I was a pastor. I read a passage then gave what I thought the passage taught. There was a more seasoned pastor attending the Bible study who raised his hand. When called upon, he commented that though what I had just taught was theologically accurate, he didn't think the passage I had just read was the place in the Bible that taught it. I believe that happens a great deal in the verse before us.

What is this coming of Christ? Many commentators will offer that this is the Second Coming which ends history (or initiates the millennium). And although it may be theologically accurate to proclaim that there will be a Second Coming, it is questionable whether it is exegetically accurate to conclude that this verse is teaching of the Second Coming. Numerous are the reasons as to why this is not likely referring to the Second Coming. I will only mention a few.

First, we have already established that the events of which John writes "**must shortly take place...for the time is near.**" To open the letter with this premise then, within a few verses, start talking about the end of the world seems to be a *non sequitur*, i.e. it doesn't follow. We seem to be ripping verse seven from the context of verses one and three.

Second, it turns the Revelation into an almost entirely ethereal epistle. This will become more apparent as we study on, but Revelation is not merely telling us that heaven awaits us (not that that is of not of paramount importance). It is addressing the impact of Christ upon human history. Again, a quote from Rushdoony may be of service:

To deny the triumph of Christ in time is to undercut the validity of the resurrection and its implications for history; it is to reduce Christianity to any otherworldly cult and to make a retreat from life the essence of faith.¹

¹ Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come*. p. 88.

Setting our entire focus on the rapture or the end of the world is in stark conflict with the proclamation in Revelation of Christ's victory over all evil in history. Or, as we will read in chapter eleven,

Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).

Note that it is the "**kingdoms of this world.**"

Third, there are many references to Christ coming in Revelation that are clearly not references to the Second Coming. Jesus warns the church at Ephesus,

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent (Revelation 2:5).

To the church in Philadelphia he writes,

Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown (Revelation 3:11).

To the church at Laodicea, Jesus promises,

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me (Revelation 3:20).

These are but a few examples of the coming of Christ that are not the Second Coming of Christ. Let us realize that any coming of Christ should tell us a bit about His Second Coming, just as any judgment of God in history (e.g. Sodom and Gomorrah) should instruct us regarding His final judgment. But that does not make them the same event. As Beale writes,

Furthermore, Christ's "coming" in the letters in chs. 2 and 3 appears to be his conditional visitation in judgment of the

churches, though an allusion to the second coming could be included.²

Beale continues:

Therefore, Christ's "coming" in 1:7 and elsewhere in the Apocalypse is understood better as a process occurring throughout history.³

This agrees with Rushdoony who writes,

This Christ comes continually in the clouds of judgment over history.

This brings us to all the talk of "**clouds**". But first, let us be comforted, as with the early heavily persecuted church, that we serve a Savior who frequents the history of fallen man. We are not deists. We do not believe God wound up history, like a clock, and is simply watching it tick away. He entered history, first and foremost, as God made flesh to save sinners. But also, to assure throughout the course of history, that the...

...earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, As the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

We fret when we see those, especially in political power, who have no regard for man or God. In the time of the writing of Revelation, as well as throughout the world today, they will seek to snuff out all opposition, especially those who proclaim a King above all kings.

I think of our dear brothers and sisters in China, students I had, and every one of them had suffered in labor camps (or worse) because they would preach that the powers over them ought to bow the knee to Christ.

² Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 198). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

³ Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 198). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

They were called to be faithful and they were faithful. But what chance do they have against the overwhelming power of communist aggression?

Yet it is the atheistic communist who has no chance. It is the nominal, non-God-fearing quasi Christian who has no chance-those who honor God **“with their lips”** but whose **“heart is far from [Him]”** (Matthew 15:8) have no chance. And we know who these are, according to Jesus, because of their false teachings (Matthew 15:9). There is a promise in the second Psalm that the rebellious and oppressive **“kings”** and **“judges of the earth”** will perish in their evil and recalcitrant ways, at the hand of Christ. I am submitting that Revelation 1:7 gives an example of this as Christ comes **“with clouds”**.

We will discuss the many references to clouds in our next meeting.

Questions for Study

1. Describe the social, political, religious and moral culture experienced by the first century church. How do you suppose the Christians in that era faced the world in which they lived (pages 2, 3)?
2. Review the first six verses of Revelation. What jumps out at you that you had not previously considered (pages 3, 4)?
3. What are some questions provoked by verse seven of chapter one (pages 4, 5)?
4. Discuss the merits for and against Revelation 1:7 presenting the Second Coming of Christ (pages 5, 6).
5. If Revelation 1:7 is not speaking of the Second Coming, of what does it speak? How is this of comfort to oppressed and persecuted Christians (pages 7, 8)?