

which are" alludes entirely to events occurring during the present time of the seven churches. Since these seven represent the church universal, this phrase would thus refer to the "present" of the entire church age. In other words, these are as relevant for us today as are Paul's instructions to any of the churches he wrote to.

Furthermore, the correct understanding of the last phrase in v. 19, "the things which shall take place after these things" is crucial. We will attempt to show that this last clause is not to be limited to events of the far-off future, but rather encompasses all the events of the period between the resurrection and the return of Christ. Critical to a proper understanding of this verse is the fact that God is communicating with John in the words He inspired Daniel to speak six centuries earlier. If God speaks prophetically in the OT, the fact that He fulfills these prophetic words in the NT should be no surprise to us. More surprising would be the thought that God communicated such significant visions to John without any reference to how He had spoken in earlier days to His servants the prophets. This verse, along with three others (1:1; 4:1; 22:6), is heavily influenced by the words spoken through Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar in the interpretation of his first dream (Dan. 2:28, 29, 45). In section 6, above, we noted how John's statement in 1:1 ("The Revelation . . . which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants the things which must shortly take place") is taken from Dan. 2:28, 29, 45, where God shows Daniel what must take place "in the latter days" or "after these things":

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| "He has made known . . . what will take place in the latter days" (Dan. 2:28) | |
| ". . . what would take place after this" (Dan. 2:29) | |
| ". . . what will take place after this" (Dan. 2:45) | |
| | "to show . . . the things which must shortly [or quickly] take place" (Rev. 1:1) |

If we compare Rev. 1:1 with the passages in Daniel, the thought is almost identical. The significant difference in what God speaks to John involves the replacement of "the latter days" or "after this" (years yet far off to Daniel) with "shortly" or "quickly," thus implying that Daniel's "latter days" (= "after this") are on the brink of unfolding, in fact beginning to unfold. What was far off to Daniel is starting John in the face. In 1:3, John says that the time is "near," using a word similar to that spoken by Jesus

10. The Significance of 1:19 as a Key for the Interpretation of the Book

As stated in an earlier section, 1:19 is a significant interpretative key in Revelation for a proper understanding of the futurist understanding of the book: "Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things." The approach we will take in the commentary below is that a different understanding of 1:19 comes from wrestling with a variety of issues in the immediate context and throughout the book.

Those understanding Revelation from a futurist perspective (i.e., all the events spoken of in the visions are yet to come and will unfold in chronological order) view 1:19 in the following way: the "things which you have seen" refer, on this view, to the initial vision of the *past* described in the immediately preceding verses. The "things which are" concern the *present* situation in the seven churches dealt with in the letters, and the "things which shall take place after these things" concern the events of the *future*, specifically the events immediately prior to the return of Christ and that return.

This view has deficiencies which need to be addressed. To begin with, the command to write "the things which you have seen" does not seem to be merely a reference to past time, or to what John has seen in the preceding verses. It seems rather to pick up on 1:11, where the angelic voice tells John to write "what you see." There is no reason to limit the scope of this to the first vision John has; it seems more naturally to refer to the contents of the entire book. But what of "the things which are" and the things which are yet to come? It could very well be that "the things

in Mark 1:15, “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God *at hand*.” It is likely that “the kingdom of God is at hand” is parallel with and a further explanation of “the time is fulfilled.” If so, the idea of “near” is a close synonym of “fulfilled.” The Greek verb for “nearness” has the sense of “about to arrive” or “beginning to arrive.” It will not be happening far off in the future; it is beginning to happen now, and much more is around the corner.

In Luke 20:18 Jesus equates the “stone” of His ministry with the end-time rock of Daniel’s last-days kingdom. To Jesus, the prophetic words of Daniel are on the verge of fulfillment. And John is no different from Jesus in his understanding. Note the other parallels in Revelation 1 to Daniel. There are references to the kingdom (vv. 6 and 9), as in Dan. 7:14, which John sees being inaugurated in fulfillment. This kingdom belongs to a “Son of man” (1:13), just as in Dan. 7:13, and this Son of man is described in a heavenly vision (1:13-16), just as in Dan. 7:13-14. Jesus has begun in John’s own time to begin to fulfill Daniel 7’s Son of man prophecy. Out of this we draw the conclusion that Daniel 2 and Revelation 1 are describing the same reality, and that what is prophesied in Daniel is beginning to be fulfilled in Revelation. The events prophesied are actually occurring or beginning to occur. The death and resurrection of Christ have brought about the inauguration or beginning of the kingdom of God prophesied in Daniel. Such an understanding will have profound importance for our interpretation of Revelation as a whole.

Now we look at 1:19, in the light of both 1:1 and the passages in Daniel:

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| “What will take place in the latter days/after this” (Dan. 2:28, 29, 45) | “The things which must shortly [or quickly] take place” (Rev. 1:1) | “The things which shall take place after these things” (Rev. 1:19) |
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It is clear that Daniel’s phrases “*in the latter days*” (Dan. 2:28) and “*after this*” (in Theodotion’s translation, “after these things,” exactly as in Rev. 1:19) are identical in meaning. The phrase “after this” (in the Hebrew text) or “after these things” (Theodotion) refers in Dan. 2:29 to something lying far off in the future, to which the phrase “in the latter days” also refers. However, in Revelation they allude to something which is already beginning to happen; as we have already seen, Rev. 1:1 replaces “in the latter days” with “shortly,” and v. 3 adds the nuance “near,” meaning “at hand.” The phrase “after these things” in 1:19, therefore, is not a reference to events only of the future but to events that are already unfolding in these last days, since “after these things” is to be identified with the “latter days” in Dan. 2:28-29, which have

been inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ. Thus, each of the three phrases in Rev. 1:19 may very well refer to the same reality of the entire church age. The interpretation of Rev. 1:19 is complex, and there are a variety of interpretations; for that reason no *overall view* of Revelation should be based primarily on it, whether futurist or any other.

The other place where the phrase “after these things” appears is at 4:1 which, significantly, is the introduction to the vision section of the book. The angelic voice tells John, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.” Again, this is an allusion to Dan. 2:29. If “these things” is synonymous with “the latter days,” as it is in Dan. 2:28-29, it refers to the events of the last days understood as being inaugurated by the cross and resurrection of Christ. This is clear from John’s understanding throughout Revelation 1 that the Daniel 2 and 7 prophecies have begun fulfillment in Christ’s first coming. Consequently, the visions unfolding in the rest of the book will tell us what is going to unfold throughout the time period of these last days — that is, throughout the entire history of the church between Christ’s resurrection and His return. We should expect, therefore, that the visions will speak to the life and history of the church in every age, including that in which the recipients of the book lived, even though there may be aspects which speak specifically to the time period immediately before Christ’s return. It is important to remind ourselves that such an understanding runs completely contrary to much popular literature on Revelation, which takes the entire visionary portion of the book to refer only to the future events immediately surrounding the return of Christ. The understanding we have adopted, we are persuaded, provides a more satisfactory view of Revelation in another way, for otherwise the vast majority of the book would not have as much relevance either for those to whom it was written (the churches under John’s apostolic authority) or to any believer who has ever lived since. This majority portion of the book would then refer primarily or only to one group of people living through the last tribulation and then later during the millennium. Though futurists protest that the book is still relevant in various ways for readers throughout the church age, we think our point still stands. As we proceed with our study, we will see our view supported by the text in a variety of other ways.

The final reference to Daniel occurs at 22:6, where the heavenly voice says to John, “The Lord . . . sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must shortly take place.” Thus the concluding verses of the book repeat the same words as occurred at the very beginning (1:1). The things which have been unfolded to John are the things that are about

to unfold before his eyes and that have been unfolding ever since. It is interesting to note that the four main sections of the book, the introduction (1:1-18), the letters (1:19-3:22), the visions (4:1-22:5), and the conclusion (22:6-21) are all introduced by allusions to Daniel 2:28-29, 45, which themselves form the introduction and conclusion of Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream. This is hardly an accident. Thus the content of the dream in Daniel 2 provides a framework by which to interpret Revelation as a portrayal of the end-time battle between good and evil and of the establishment of God's kingdom, all of which has begun with the death and resurrection of Christ and will be consummated at His final coming.

11. The Main Theological Messages of Revelation

In the commentary below, we will attempt to outline from the text some of the major themes of Revelation. We would suggest that the following themes in Revelation express the heart of God in giving this series of visions to John:

Willingness to Suffer for Christ Is the Path to Ultimate Victory. Even as the cross turned out to seal Christ's victory over Satan, so the present suffering of Christians seals their victory over the powers of darkness. Even while, like Christ, Christians suffering tribulation and hardship (1:9) also share in Christ's kingly reign (1:6). In this present age, believers may suffer physical hardship, but their spirits will be kept safe (11:1-12). The church's persecutors, on the other hand, will find themselves in the same position as Satan. Even as Satan's apparent victory triggered his ultimate defeat, so the present evil actions of unbelievers (11:10) are only laying the basis for their final judgment (11:13, 18). One of the main goals of the book, therefore, is to exhort believers to remain faithful to Christ in spite of present sufferings and in spite of the temptation to engage in idolatry represented by compromise with the world-system, because this faithfulness will eventually be rewarded in the heavenly kingdom. Notice that after the portrayal of the heavenly kingdom in 21:1-22:5, the final words of the book revert to the command to remain faithful. The heavenly visions serve as motivators for Christians now suffering in adversity to hold to the glorious promises of God and not to fall away. And so in the same way, Christians today should still read Revelation and allow its portrayal of the divine majesty to motivate us to continued faithfulness. Christians are to live according

to the values of this new world, not those of the world in which they live. Churches should be reminded that the scenes of heavenly worship are to be the model for our earthly worship every Lord's Day — for remember, it was as John readied himself for worship on the Lord's Day that he was given this vision.

The Sovereignty of God in Human History. In chs. 4 and 5 John is given a vision of the throne room of God. The word "throne" appears seventeen times in these two chapters (out of thirty-four times in the book as a whole), and signifies the sovereignty of God. In the vision, the Lamb is given a place of equal honor to God Himself, and so the chapters as a whole portray the victory of God and the Lamb. Because this vision serves as the introduction to all the subsequent visions in the book, its significance is to demonstrate the authority of God and of Christ over all that is about to unfold in the remainder of the book. The trials of the believers, the apparent triumph of the forces of the enemy, the eventual destruction of the latter, and the victory of the church are all under the sovereign control of God. It is therefore true to say that, according to Revelation, the hand of God is directly behind the tribulations of believers as well as those of unbelievers. Such trials are sent by God to refine His people. Not only that, but the OT passages which influence the visions of the seals, trumpets, and bowls also picture God as the cause of the woes which befall believers and unbelievers alike (see Zech. 6:1-8; Ezek. 14:21; Lev. 26:14-33 and their use in the seals in Rev. 6:2-8, or the sending of the Exodus plagues as formative for the trumpet and bowl plagues). The mystery as to how God would allow believers also to suffer is answered throughout the book: God's strategy is to use the woes to refine their faith, while reserving unbelievers for ultimate punishment. As the heavenly vision leads into the picture in ch. 6 of the horsemen and the initial unleashing of the divine judgments, it is clear that the resurrected Lamb (6:1) is in control of what is happening. The cross has been transformed from tragedy into triumph, and so also will God transform the earthly woes of believers into heavenly and eternal victory. The people of God have no other destiny during the church age than that of the Lamb during His earthly ministry. This is why Rev. 14:4 says that they "follow the Lamb wherever He goes."

The New Creation as Fulfillment of Biblical Prophecy. The main prophetic themes of both OT and NT culminate in the new covenant, the new temple, the new Israel, and the new Jerusalem, all of which are summed up in