

“Why We Believe in an Optimistic Future, Part 4”
(Revelation 1:1-7)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. We’ve seen that we have reasons
 - a. To be optimistic about the future:
 - (i) Jesus is reigning and in absolute control of all things,
 - (ii) He has a promise from the Father
That all His enemies will be subdued under His feet,
 - (iii) And there are several indications in Scripture
 - (a) That this will have a universally positive impact
 - (b) On the entire world.
 - b. We’ve also begun to see
 - (i) That the things that appear to be
 - (a) In the way of this optimistic future
 - (b) Might not be in the way after all.
 - (ii) There are two things of this nature:
 - (a) Passages of Scripture that appear
 - (b) To warn of troubled times ahead for the church,
 - (c) And those passages that seem to indicate
 - (d) That Jesus could come to put an end to all things
 - (e) At any moment – His imminent return.
2. Last week, we considered one passage that seems to warn of troubled times ahead: Daniel 9:24-27.
 - a. I don’t have time to review all we saw last week
 - b. But let me simply remind you of this:
 - (i) The prophecy stated
 - (ii) That after the issuing of a decree
 - (iii) To restore and rebuild Jerusalem
 - (iv) To the coming of Jesus Christ
 - (v) Would be 69 weeks of years.
 - c. Jesus’ ministry began at the fulfillment of that time –
 - (i) As He begins His ministry in Galilee
 - (ii) Just after John is taken into custody,
 - (iii) He says, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1:15).
 - d. He began the process of establishing the New Covenant with Israel
 - (i) And ratified it in the middle of the week

- (ii) By shedding His own blood,
- (iii) Putting an end to the OT sacrifices
- (iv) And bringing in everlasting righteousness.

- e. The prophecy went on to say
 - (i) That because He was rejected by His people,
 - (ii) He would send His agents of vengeance to destroy
 - (iii) Their holy city and their sanctuary
 - (iv) Which is what He did in 70 AD.
 - (v) The event Daniel wrote about isn't in our future,
 - (vi) It's in our past.

B. Preview.

1. This evening, let's consider two more passages that appear to stand in our way:
 - a. The Olivet Discourse,
 - b. And the Book of Revelation.
2. If it can be shown that Jesus
 - a. Was again speaking of the past
 - b. Rather than the future,
 - c. It further clears the way
 - d. For optimism regarding the work of the Kingdom
 - e. Jesus has given us to do in the present age.

II. Sermon.

A. First, let's consider the Olivet Discourse.

1. Is Jesus speaking here of the future or the past?
 - a. I believe again, He is speaking of the past.
 - b. We just went through this in the Gospel of Mark,
 - c. So you can get more of the details in that sermon series.
2. Here, I'll just bring out the salient points:
 - a. Jesus was speaking to His disciples in these passages.
 - (i) He was answering their questions
 - (ii) Regarding the destruction of the Temple –
 - (iii) That took place in 70 AD.
 - (a) He told them what to look for as that event drew near –
They actually saw these things take place.
 - (b) He told them what to do when it came –
They actually did what He told them.
 - (c) He told them that they should be ready for it –
Many of them were ready.
 - (d) He gave them a time frame
 - (1) In which these things would take place –
 - (2) That generation –
 - (3) And those things happened in that generation

(4) Just as He said.

- b. Jesus wasn't speaking about a temple
 - (i) That would be rebuilt by the Jews in the future
 - (a) When the Antichrist would make a covenant with them
 - (b) Only to break it, bringing in the Great Tribulation.
 - (ii) He was speaking about what would happen
 - (a) To the Temple that was then standing,
 - (b) About things that concerned them '
 - (c) Because they would live to see it.
 - (iii) He wasn't speaking about our future,
 - (a) But about our past.
 - (b) This passage doesn't stand in the way of an optimistic future.

B. Neither, for that matter, does the Book of Revelation.

1. Revelation is a large and difficult book.
 - a. Obviously, we don't have time
 - b. To look at everything it says this evening.
 - c. But I believe I can give you some good reasons
 - d. Why this book is as well
 - e. Not speaking about the future from our perspective,
 - f. But the past – the same event as the Olivet Discourse –
 - g. And because it does,
 - h. It doesn't stand in the way of an optimistic future
 - i. For the Kingdom of God on earth.
2. First, consider to whom John was writing.
 - a. He wasn't writing to seven symbolic churches
 - (i) That represent the different states
 - (ii) The church can potentially fall into.
 - b. He wrote to the seven historic churches of Asia Minor
 - (i) Because something was about to happen
 - (ii) That had to do with them: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like *the sound* of a trumpet, 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'" (1:10-11).
3. Why did Jesus want John to write to them?
 - a. "To show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place" (1:1).
 - b. What was soon to take place is open to interpretation,
 - (i) But I believe he was writing to warn them
 - (ii) Of the judgment that was about to fall on the Jews

- (iii) For their rejection of the Messiah.
4. When did John say these things were going to take place?
- a. This is key: He said it would be soon –
 - (i) NB: He didn't say these things would *begin* to happen soon;
 - (ii) Nor did He say anything that would have led them
 - (iii) To expect a fulfillment in the distant future –
 - b. He said the time was near.
 - (i) "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place" (1:1).
 - (ii) "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" (v. 3).
 - (iii) "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" (22:6).
 - (iv) "And behold, I am coming quickly" (v. 7).
 - (v) "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done" (v. 12).
 - (vi) "He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (v. 20).
 - c. Whatever John was speaking of,
 - (i) He expected it to happen in the near future.
 - (ii) Which is why He wanted these churches to pay attention: "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" (v. 3).
 - (iii) The angel says to John at the end toward the end: "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near" (22:10).
5. Another key is the date this book was written.
- a. Many believe it was written in 90 AD, and so can't be speaking of 70 AD.
 - b. If it was written in 90 AD,
 - (i) Then some of the things the book speaks of
 - (ii) Don't make a great deal of sense.
 - c. For one thing, the temple was still standing.
 - (i) The angel said to John in 11:1, "Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months."
 - (ii) If John wrote this in 90 AD,
 - (iii) The angel would be commanding him to measure
 - (iv) A temple that was destroyed 20 years earlier.
 - (v) This wouldn't be prophecy,
 - (vi) It would be history.

- d. In Revelation, the Lord was warning
 - (i) Of something catastrophic
 - (a) That was coming *very soon*,
 - (b) Something that would greatly impact the church.
 - (ii) But nothing like this has happened
 - (a) For almost 2000 years.
 - (b) If it was written in 90 AD
 - (c) It wouldn't make any sense.
 - (d) But if it was written before 70 AD, it does.
- e. John was writing about a coming of Christ
 - (i) In which those who pierced Him would see Him: "BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him" (1:7).
 - (ii) Was John speaking of the resurrection? Many think so.
 - (iii) But it seems more likely
 - (a) That He was referring to 70 AD
 - (1) When many of those who pierced Him
 - (2) Were still alive.
 - (b) When the high priest asked Jesus
 - (1) Whether He was the Christ,
 - (2) Jesus said, "You have said it *yourself*; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN" (Matt. 26:64).
 - (3) This one responsible for His crucifixion
 - (4) Would see this coming.
- f. In the vision, we are told that a sixth king,
 - (i) Represented by the sixth head of the beast, was ruling, "And the angel said to me, 'Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. . . . Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while'" (17:7, 9-10).
 - (ii) If Ken Gentry is correct,
 - (a) And these heads were referring to the Roman Caesars
 - (b) This would have been Caesar Nero who reigned from 54-68 AD.
- g. John also indicates that the tribulation he warns them of
 - (i) In some sense had already begun,

- (ii) “I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in *the tribulation* and kingdom and perseverance *which are* in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (v. 9).
 - h. If these things are correct,
 - (i) Then it would place the date of the book shortly before 70 AD.
 - (ii) If that’s true
 - (a) Then what John wrote would make a great deal more sense,
 - (b) “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, *even* to all that he saw. 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” (vv. 1-3).
6. Does this mean everything in the book has been fulfilled?
- a. Not necessarily.
 - (i) It does look forward to the time between the first and second coming,
 - (ii) To the release of Satan at the very end,
 - (iii) At the Second Coming of Christ,
 - (iv) The Final Judgment,
 - (v) And the New Heavens and Earth
 - (vi) In the closing chapters (Rev. 20-22).
 - b. But it does mean that the vast majority of it has.
 - (i) It’s dealing with the same theme as Daniel 9:26-27, “The people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. . . . on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate;”
 - (ii) And the Olivet Discourse, “Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!” (Matt. 23:38).
 - (iii) God’s judgment against the Jews in 70 AD,
 - (a) For their spiritual adultery,
 - (b) Their murdering of their Messiah,
 - (c) And their persecution of His church.
 - c. The point again is, these events are past,
 - d. And so don’t stand in the way of an optimistic future.
7. Next time, we’ll consider the second objection
- a. If Jesus could come at any time,
 - b. Then how can there be a glorious future yet for the church on earth?

8. But for now let's just remind ourselves
 - a. If Jesus is reigning now,
 - (i) If He is in absolute control of what's happening now,
 - (ii) If the Father is now subduing His enemies under His feet,
 - (iii) And will subdue them all before He returns,
 - (iv) This should give us the hope
 - (v) That the things we do towards advancing this work
 - (vi) Will not be in vain.
 - (vii) You can be optimistic about the future
 - (viii) And so about the work you do for the Lord.
 - b. At least you can if you are a believer.
 - (i) If you aren't,
 - (ii) Trust in Him now,
 - (iii) Submit to Him now,
 - (iv) And prove yourself to be
 - (v) One of His chosen ones
 - (vi) Who will spend an eternity with Jesus Christ
 - (vii) As part of His beloved Bride – the Church. Amen.

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