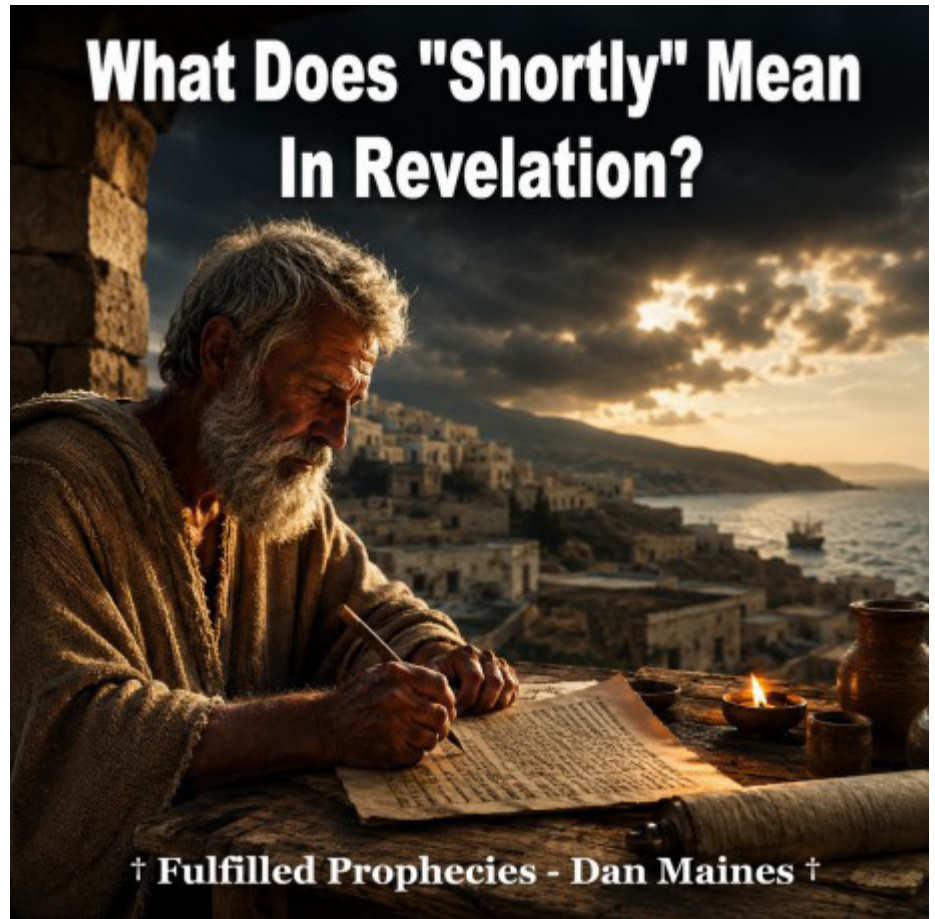


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What Does "Shortly" Mean In Revelation?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† The book of Revelation opens and closes with clear timing statements. The question is whether God meant what He said when He declared these events would happen "shortly" and that "the time is at hand."

† Many modern interpretations push Revelation thousands of years into the future, but the original audience was told these things were near to them.

† When we compare Revelation's timing statements with Jesus'

words in the Olivet Discourse, the evidence points directly to first-century fulfillment.

Revelation 1:1

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,

† John was told the events "must shortly come to pass." The natural meaning is that they were about to occur, not thousands of years later. (Revelation 22:6)

† If God intended a delay of thousands of years, "shortly" would have little meaning to the seven churches receiving the book. (Revelation 1:4, 11)

† Revelation was written to real first-century believers facing real first-century circumstances. (Revelation 2:10)

† The Greek phrase translated "shortly" is *en tachei*, meaning soon, in a short time, or without delay. It is a time indicator showing when the events would occur. (Revelation 22:6)

† The phrase does not describe how fast the events would happen once they started, but rather how near they were to the original audience. (Revelation 1:3)

† The seven churches receiving Revelation would naturally understand "shortly" as referring to events approaching in their own generation. (Revelation 1:4, 11)

Revelation 1:3

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.

† John adds another timing statement by declaring that "the time is at hand." (Revelation 22:10)

† Something that is "at hand" is near, approaching, and imminent. It is not describing an event thousands of years away. (Matthew 26:45)

† The blessing was for those who would hear and obey because fulfillment was approaching in their generation.

(Revelation 3:11)

† John reinforces the meaning of en tachei by stating that "the time is at hand." Both expressions point to nearness rather than a distant future. (Revelation 22:10)

† The time statements in Revelation are consistent from beginning to end, shortly, at hand, and quickly. (Revelation 22:7, 12, 20)

† These phrases lose their normal meaning if they are stretched thousands of years beyond the original readers. (Revelation 2:10)

Matthew 24:34

Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

† Jesus gave the clearest time statement in the New Testament. All the events He described would occur before that generation passed away. (Matthew 24:3, 33)

† Revelation expands upon the same judgment events Jesus foretold concerning Jerusalem and the end of the Old Covenant age. (Luke 21:20-22)

† Revelation's "shortly" and "at hand" perfectly agree with Jesus' statement concerning "this generation." (Mark 13:30)

† The strongest interpretive control on Revelation's timing statements is Jesus' declaration that "this generation" would not pass away until all these things were fulfilled.

† Revelation's "shortly," "at hand," and "quickly" agree perfectly with Christ's first-century time statement. (Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32)

† If "shortly," "near," and "this generation" are allowed to mean what they normally mean, the fulfillment belongs to the first-century audience.

† John was writing to first-century churches about events that were near to them, not thousands of years away. (Revelation 1:4, 11)

† That is exactly what we see in the events leading up to Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70. (Luke 21:20-22)

Matthew 16:27-28

For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.

"Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

† Jesus promised that some standing before Him would still be alive when these events occurred.

† This places the coming of the Son of Man within the lifetime of His first-century audience. (Matthew 10:23)

† The timing agrees perfectly with Revelation's repeated statements of nearness. (Revelation 1:1, 3)

Luke 21:20-22

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are inside the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of punishment, so that all things which have been written will be fulfilled.

† Jesus directly connected the destruction of Jerusalem with the fulfillment of prophecy.

† He did not say some things would be fulfilled, He said all things written would be fulfilled.

† These events occurred during the Roman war that culminated in AD 70. (Josephus, Wars of the Jews)

Hebrews 10:37

FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE,
HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY.

† The writer of Hebrews expected fulfillment in the near future of his audience.

† "A very little while" cannot naturally be stretched into thousands of years.

† Hebrews was written while the Temple was still standing and

before its destruction. (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 9:8)

James 5:8-9

You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Do not complain, brothers and sisters, against one another, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

† James used the same imminence language found throughout Revelation.

† The coming of the Lord was said to be "at hand."

† The Judge was described as standing before the doors, emphasizing nearness.

Revelation 22:6

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.

† The book closes exactly as it opened. The same promise of events occurring shortly is repeated. (Revelation 1:1)

† God reinforced the timing so there would be no confusion regarding the nearness of fulfillment. (Revelation 22:7)

† The repetition shows that the timing was central to understanding the prophecy. (Revelation 22:10)

Revelation 22:7

"And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

† Jesus Himself declared that He was coming quickly.

† The timing statement comes directly from Christ, not merely from John's explanation.

† The blessing was for those who would keep the words because fulfillment was near. (Revelation 1:3)

Revelation 22:10

And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.

† Daniel was told to seal his prophecy because fulfillment was

far away. John was told not to seal Revelation because fulfillment was near. (Daniel 12:4)

† The contrast between Daniel and Revelation demonstrates the nearness of the events John described. (Daniel 12:9)

† The original readers were expected to understand these prophecies as relevant to their own time. (Revelation 1:11)

Revelation 22:12

Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to reward each one as his work deserves.

† Jesus again declared that His coming was near.

† The repetition reinforces the urgency and imminence of the prophecy.

† Revelation continually points its readers toward events approaching in their generation. (Matthew 24:34)

Revelation 22:20

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

† The final promise in Revelation repeats the same timing statement.

† The book opens with "shortly" and closes with "I come quickly."

† The timing statements form a consistent message from beginning to end.

Historical References

† Josephus described the war, famine, false prophets, tribulation, and destruction that came upon Jerusalem between AD 66 and AD 70.

† Eusebius recorded the fulfillment of Christ's warnings and the flight of Christians from Jerusalem before its destruction.

† Clement of Alexandria testified to the apostolic age and the nearness of the events facing the early church.

† Tacitus recorded the turmoil and upheaval throughout the Roman world during the same period.

† Suetonius documented the political instability and events

surrounding the first-century Roman Empire.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We can trust Christ's words because He fulfilled what He promised within the time frame He gave.

† We do not need to reinterpret simple timing statements to fit modern systems of prophecy.

† Understanding Revelation as a first-century prophecy strengthens our confidence in the faithfulness of God.

† Christ kept His promise. He came in judgment upon apostate Israel exactly as He said He would.

† The fulfillment of prophecy reminds us that God is faithful to every promise He makes.

† We should allow Scripture to define its own time statements rather than redefining them to fit modern prophetic systems.

† God's promises were fulfilled exactly when He said they would be, demonstrating His faithfulness and reliability.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Does "shortly" mean rapidly once events begin?

A: The phrase identifies the nearness of the events themselves. Revelation repeatedly states that the time was near and at hand. (Revelation 1:1, 1:3, 22:6, 22:10)

Q: How does Revelation's timing relate to Matthew 24?

A: Both point to the same first-century time frame. Jesus said all these things would occur before that generation passed away. (Matthew 24:34)

Q: Why was John told not to seal the book?

A: Because the fulfillment was near. Daniel sealed his prophecy because fulfillment was distant, but Revelation was for John's own generation. (Daniel 12:4; Revelation 22:10)

Q: Why does Revelation repeat the timing statements so often?

A: God emphasized the nearness of fulfillment throughout the book so the original readers would understand that the events were approaching in their own lifetime. (Revelation 1:1, 1:3, 22:6, 22:7, 22:10, 22:12, 22:20)

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

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Source Index

† Revelation 1:1, 3; Matthew 24:34; Matthew 16:27-28; Luke 21:20-22; Hebrews 10:37; James 5:8-9; Revelation 22:6, 7, 10, 12, 20

† Historical Writers: Josephus, Eusebius, Clement of Alexandria, Tacitus, Suetonius

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