

SESSION 01 – THE ALREADY-BUT-NOT-YET VIEW OF REVELATION

¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.
(Revelation 1:19 ESV)

I. ἀποκάλυψις OF THE ALREADY-BUT-NOT-YET (REV. 1:19)

- A. One of the major keys of reading, observing, interpreting, and applying the truth of John's Letter to the Seven Churches, the Book of Revelation, is found in Revelation 1:19. The prophetic command given to John by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself occurs immediately after His appearing as the Son of Man, arrayed in fullness of glory, majesty, and honor. The vision is of the Triumphant Messiah he had seen glimpses of on the Mount of Transfiguration and after His resurrection.
- B. The first thing Jesus tells John to write in this Letter (Epistle) are those things that you have seen. As we will see in this letter/book, the prophecy is both *forthtelling* as a present-tense, *now* word from Jesus to His Church, and *foretelling* as future prophecy. The audience that is to receive this *now* and *future* word is the Seven Churches listed in verse 11: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The entire book of Revelation is then a letter written to these Churches. They represent however, due to their number, seven, the general total and complete Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The number appears many times in Revelation and can be considered both *symbolic* and *literal*. The Churches *were* literal congregations of believers. They also represented the same issues that were prevalent in the Church as a whole.
- C. John is prepared to receive a series of visions that he will see that is described as *that you have seen*. Aune makes the following observation concerning how this phrase should be understood as written and the practical implication of what John writes (emphasis added),

The second person sing. aor verb εἶδες **is translated "will see"** (cf. RSV, "see"), **rather than with a past tense (NEB, NIV, "have seen"; AV, "has seen")**, because it functions very much like an epistolary aor (Allo, 15); i.e., **while the visions that John was about to record were yet to be seen by him, from the standpoint of the reader they belong to the past**. εἶδες can therefore be taken as a general statement that includes the two specific aspects ἃ εἰσὶν, "what is" (i.e., "the present," or "the events that are now happening"), and ἃ

μέλλει γενέσθαι, “what will be” (i.e., “the future,” or “the events that will happen hereafter”).¹

So John was going to receive a series of prophetic words and visions from Jesus and His *Messenger* (Gr. *angelos*). But after John writes down the vision and the reader reads it, it is in fact a *past* vision. Thus the only way to write this verse down is to say, “*what you have seen.*”

- D. This does not negate the reality of the already-but-not-yet view however. At the time the recipients in the Seven Churches read the letter, they were living in the *already* of the truths John wrote, at least in some real sense, especially with regard to the persecution and the judgments that were to come upon the Lord’s enemies.
- E. Robert Mounce confirms this thought and restates it this way:
The initial command to write what is about to be seen (v. 11) is repeated and expanded. Many commentators find a threefold division of the verse interpreting “what you have seen” as a reference to the vision of the Son of man (in the verses immediately preceding), “what is now” as referring to the present condition of the church in chapters 2 and 3, and “what will take place later” in reference to the visions beginning with chapter 4 and continuing to the end of the book. The proper division, however, is twofold, not three.⁴² The first statement (“Write, therefore, what you have seen”) is the essential unit and parallels the earlier command in v. 11 (“Write on a scroll what you see”). The two relative clauses refer to the visions to be unfolded in the coming chapters. They are expegetical² and make more specific what John is to write. So translate, “Write, therefore, the things you are about to see, that is, both what now is and what lies yet in the future.” This relationship between present and future underlies the entire Apocalypse. It recognizes that the great throne-room drama of chapters 4 and 5, the vision of the woman giving birth to the man-child in chapter 12, and much of chapter 17 belong in the past and the present as well as the future. The Apocalypse is an unveiling both of the great principles at work in the world at the present time and of the final eschatological conclusion to which they point. Moffatt is right in holding that “the contents of the vision ... consist of what is and what is to be.”³ Mounce, quoting Moffatt, shows the concept of the already-but-not-yet as *what-is-and-what-is-to-be*.

¹ Dr. David Aune. Revelation 1-5, Volume 52A (Kindle Locations 10703-10708). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

² *the addition of a phrase, clause, or sentence to a text to provide further explanation*

³ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 62.

II. THE REVELATION OF WHO IS AND WHO WAS AND WHO IS TO COME – THE ALREADY-AND-NOT-YET OF THE REALITY OF GOD (REV. 1:4, 8)

⁴... *Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,* ⁵ *and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.* ⁸ *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."* (Rev. 1:4-5,8 ESV)

A. Revelation 1:4's description of the *One on the Throne* is distinct from the verse 5 description of *Jesus Christ, the Faithful Witness, et. al.* Verse 4 and 5 then clearly make a distinction between the two. But verse 8 and then Revelation 22:12-13 blur the lines in and of the union of Christ Jesus and His Father, the High King of Heaven.

¹² *"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.* ¹³ *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."* (Rev. 22:12-13 ESV)

B. Beale writes,

The description of God as "the one who is and was and is to come" is an interpretation of the name "YHWH," based on reflection on Exod. 3:14 together with twofold and threefold temporal descriptions of God in Isaiah (cf. Isa. 41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 48:12), which themselves likely are reflections on the divine name in Exod. 3:14. The name in Exod. 3:14 was also expanded in a threefold manner by later Jewish tradition, most notably Tg. Ps.-J. Deut. 32:36, "I am he who is and who was, and I am he who will be." The first element, "the one who is" (ho ōn), derives from Exod. 3:14 LXX (egō eimi ho ōn), and although the preposition apo calls for the genitive, John keeps ho ōn in the nominative in order to highlight it as an allusion to Exodus (for a full account of the phrase, see McDonough 1999). It is possible that John employs such kinds of constructions here and elsewhere as Hebraisms (in Hebrew the noun in the indirect cases is not inflected [see Charles 1920: 1:13]) in order to create a "biblical" effect upon the reader and so to show the solidarity of his work with that of God's revelation in the OT (for further examples of such kinds of intended solecisms, see commentary on Rev. 1:5; 2:20; 3:12; 9:14 in Beale 1999a; see also Beale 1997b).⁴

⁴ G. K. Beale; D. A. Carson. Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament (Kindle Locations 41390-41399). Baker Books. Kindle Edition.

In other words, Beale want to point out John is on purpose using a formula from the LXX translation of Exodus 3:14 to point us to *who* this description concerns.

Exodus 3:14 LXX – *ego eimi ho on (I am the One who exists)*

Revelation 1:4, 8 ESV – *ho eimi kai ho eimi kai ho erchomai*

Targum Pseudo Jonathan Exodus 3:13-14⁵

¹³. And Moses said before the Lord, "If I go^[20] to the children of Israel and say to them 'The Lord, the God of your fathers sent me to you,' if they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴. And the Lord said to Moses, "He who said and the world was,^[21] (who) said and everything was." Then he said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel '*I-am-who-I-am-and-who-will-be*^[22] *has sent me to you.*'"⁶

Targum Pseudo Jonathan Deuteronomy 32:36

³⁶ *When the Word of the Lord shall reveal Himself to redeem His people, He will say to all the nations: Behold now, that I am He who Am, and Was, and Will Be, and there is no other God beside Me.*⁷

He very well could have called Himself; "I AM the ALREADY (who was and is) AND THE NOT YET (who is to come)."

C. John also calls back to the Isaiah Scroll,

⁴Who has performed and don this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD (YHWH), the first, and with the last; I am he. (Isa. 41:4 ESV)

⁴ *Who has produced and made these things? The one who called her from the beginning of generations has summoned her. I, God, am at the first, and I am in [the future]. (Isa. 41:4 LXX)*

(ego theos protos kai ego eimi eperchomai)

Revelation 1:4, 8 ESV – *ho eimi kai ho eimi kai ho erchomai*

⁵ A Targum is an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew text with commentary

⁶ McNamara, Martin. Targums Neofiti 1 and Pseudo-Jonathan: Exodus. Liturgical Press, 26 Apr. 2024. Pp. 168-169

⁷ https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jonathan_on_Deuteronomy.32.39?lang=en

⁶Thus says the LORD (YHWH), the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD (YHWH) of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god." (Isa. 44:6 ESV)

(ego protos kai ego meta houtos)

¹³I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (Rev. 22:13 ESV)

(ho protos kai ho eschatos)

Here John changes *meta houtos* (I am the last) with *ho eschatos*, from which we derive the Eschaton, or eschatology.

John then identifies the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last from Isaiah with Jesus the First and the Eschaton, or the One who is brought with Him into the Incarnation and His earthly ministry the age to come; that is the *end of this present evil age, and the beginning of the age to come*. But this word derives from the Hebrew, *acharit*. And this is where we see a direct connection to Jesus in Exodus 33:18-23 where Moses prays to see Yahweh's Glory, and in the passing by of Moses, the Visible Manifestation of Yahweh as the Second Person of the Two Powers, Pre-Incarnate Jesus, the Glory of God, Moses sees His *back* (*acharit*). This word, *that which comes after* or *behind* is applied to the Hebrew Day of the LORD as the End of Days, or the *b'Acharit Ha-Yamim*.⁸

- D. John applies the *first and the last* to the Greek Alphabet by pointing to the first letter Alpha and the last letter Omega. That could also correspond to the Hebrew Aleph and the last letter Tav. Both are used in the Scriptures.

Aune makes this observation,

In Jewish alphabet symbolism, the Hebrew word 'emet, "truth," (אמת) was understood as a way of designating God as beginning, middle, and end, because *was* the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the middle letter, and the last letter.⁹

Mounce adds,

⁸ https://hebrew4christians.com/Articles/Perilous_Times/perilous_times.html; see also Joel 2:28, At it shall come to pass afterward, "hyh/hayah achare"; same for the Name of Yahweh, "hyh/eheyeh asher eheyeh" (Ex. 3:14)

⁹ Dr. David Aune. Revelation 1-5, Volume 52A (Kindle Locations 10219-10223). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

As the divine response to what has been said about Christ and his relationship to believers and the unbelieving world, God himself now speaks. Only here and in 21:5ff. does God speak. He declares that he is “the Alpha and the Omega” (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet). In 21:6 the same title is expanded and interpreted by the parallel expression, “the Beginning and the End.” Alpha and Omega represent the Hebrew Aleph and Tau, which were regarded not simply as the first and last letters of the alphabet, but as including all the letters in between. Hence, the title sets forth God as the sovereign Lord over everything that takes place in the entire course of human history.¹⁰

- E. As we peer into the mystery of the Divine Name and the light and revelation that we have from it and in it, among the glories of that name is the composition of all that was, that is, and forever will be. His very reality, whatever that is, is in essence *already* revealed to us, *but not yet* in fulness. He *is* the *already and not yet*. And it is because of this we can apply this *truth*, ‘emet’, to our view of this letter to the Seven Churches, the book of Revelation. Further, this applies to every believer.

² *Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. (1 John 3:2 NRSVue)*

- F. Our view and approach then that brings us closer to the center of the target uses Revelation 1:19 as a lens through which we do not have to pick and choose the four common *systems*, **preterist, futurist, idealist, or historical views**. Rather we acknowledge the value of each, but recognize they fall short in holding to an all-or-nothing stance. The Already-and-Not-Yet gives us the best of each of these. We see what has already been fulfilled as faith builders to what is currently at work in our lives, the Church, and the world, that gives us confidence for the great End Time culmination at the End of this Age.

III. FOUR OTHER VIEWS OF REVELATION (PRETERIST, HISTORICIST, FUTURIST, IDEALIST)

- A. The first view or approach to studying the Book of Revelation is called the ***PRETERIST VIEW***. The word *preterist* refers to what is in the past. It is from the Latin root *prae* meaning “before” and from our English prefix *pre* which means the exact same thing. Key example here, the word *prefix*, a part of a word that appears first or before the

¹⁰ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 51–52.

rest of the word to add meaning. The *Preterist* sees the Revelation as already have been fulfilled.

B. Beale writes,

This view holds that Revelation is a prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 and that everything in the book has already been fulfilled—and hence is “past.” But we have seen, it is unlikely that Revelation was even written until some years later than the fall of Jerusalem. On the preterist view, “Babylon” represents rebellious Israel, which persecutes the church... A variation of this view is that “Babylon” refers to the Roman Empire and that the prophecies in the book were completely fulfilled when that empire was destroyed in the fifth century.¹¹

Steve Gregg writes,

The preterist approach views the fulfillment of Revelation’s prophecies as having occurred already, in what is now the ancient past, not long after the author’s own time. Thus the fulfillment was future from the point of view of the inspired author, but it is past from our vantage point in history. Some preterists believe that the final chapters of Revelation look forward to the second coming of Christ. Others think that everything in the book reached its culmination in the past.¹²

The first clear preterist was Spanish-Catholic Jesuit Luis Alcazar (1554–1613) in his *Investigation of the Hidden Sense of the Apocalypse*. Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) of Holland was “the first Protestant recruit to Preterism.” Grotius was “extremely liberal in his religious views” and took a critical approach, called “the historical-philological method,” to interpreting Scripture... The preterist interpretation rarely appeared in Protestant scholarship until the 1800s. It gained a wide following among German liberals who did not believe the Bible contained predictive prophecy.¹³

The root of Preterism then was a result to discount *predictive* prophecy. The irony is found in the proof of *past* fulfillment in 70 A.D. was in fact a fulfillment of *predictive* prophecy from 30 A.D., some forty years prior. The failure of this

¹¹ G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 7.

¹² Steve Gregg. *Revelation* (Kindle Locations 228–232). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

¹³ <https://israelmyglory.org/article/a-history-of-preterism/>

view is to see things predicted by Jesus and His Disciples did in fact happen, *in part*. **It's hard to circle this square when using the square to make the circle. In other words, to disprove predictive prophecy by using predictive prophecy to claim the event predicted already happened does not disprove predictive prophecy, it confirms it.**

- C. The next view of Revelation is referred to as the **HISTORICIST (HISTORICAL) VIEW**. Beal helps define this view as,

The historicist view suggests that the seals, trumpets, and bowls paint a picture of the successive ages of the church. It sees the symbolism of Revelation as referring to a series of specific historical events (always in the history of the western or European church), such as the collapse of the Roman Empire, the corruption of the papacy, the Reformation, and various events since.¹⁴

Gregg notes,

The historicist approach, which is the classical Protestant interpretation of the book, sees the book of Revelation as a prewritten record of the course of history from the time of John to the end of the world. Fulfillment is thus considered to be in progress at present and has been unfolding for nearly two thousand years.¹⁵

What is problematic of this view is each interpreter views the book based on their *own* interpretation, in which case the events of their own time are placed in the book and is always seen as the *final one* before the Lord's return. They force certain, specific historical events into the symbols of John's visionary experiences. Beal makes the excellent point, "Nowhere does Revelation indicate, for example, that the order of seals, trumpets, and bowls represent the chronological order of western church history."¹⁶ To try to read the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* and their judgments into definite historical events such as the black plague's impact on the population of Europe in the 1340/50's misses the point of the Seal Judgments, and the rest of humanity and the rest of the Church.

- D. Next, we see the **FUTURIST VIEW**. Beal helps us define it as,

¹⁴ G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 7.

¹⁵ Steve Gregg. *Revelation* (Kindle Locations 225-227). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

¹⁶ G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 7-8.

The Futurist View. The futurist view holds that the entire book, apart from the letters to the churches in chs. 1–3, prophesies events surrounding the return of Christ at the end of history. This view takes two forms. Dispensational futurism (or classic dispensationalism) interprets the visions very literally and chronologically as referring to events of history.

Modified futurism takes various forms, some affirming that the church is true Israel and that there will be no “pretribulation rapture.” Rather, Christians will pass through the final period of trial. Most if not all events recorded in chs. 4–22 refer to a final period of tribulation and to succeeding events (though some hold that 4:1–8:1 covers the period from Christ’s resurrection up to the end of history). This still leaves other difficulties of interpretation, including the fact that the book would have had less relevance for Christians of most ages than for those believers living later in the purported future fulfillment of Revelation’s visions.¹⁷

Gregg’s definition is a little more concise, “The futurist approach asserts that the majority of the prophecies of Revelation have never yet been fulfilled and await future fulfillment. Futurist interpreters usually apply everything.”¹⁸

The futurist rightly sees a predictive, prophetic voice in the future unfolding that leads to the End of this Age, the Return of Jesus, the Earthly Millennial Regain, and the New Heavens and New Earth into Eternity. However, it fails on this side where Preterists and Historicists fail on theirs, everything is future and has not happened yet. And yet clearly the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. Clearly many things *have happened* in Church and world history that *look* like the judgments found in Revelation. To discount those is to *miss* the already-but-not-yet truths. They are pointing us toward a certain and faithful conclusion.

E. Finally, we have the **IDEALIST VIEW**. We turn again to Greg Beal,

The idealist view sees the entire book as a symbolic presentation of the battle between good and evil. The seals, bowls, and trumpets speak over and over again to the events of human history in every age and give believers of all ages an exhortation to remain faithful in the face of suffering (hence “redemptive-historical”). We believe this view is substantially correct but must be modified in light of the fact

¹⁷ Ibid. pp.8–9

¹⁸ Steve Gregg. Revelation (Kindle Locations 232–234). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

that parts of Revelation do definitely refer to future end-time events concerning the return of Christ, His final defeat of the enemy, and the establishment of His heavenly kingdom.¹⁹

Gregg gives an excellent summation of this view, [T]he idealist approach to Revelation does not attempt to find individual fulfillments of the visions but takes Revelation to be a great drama depicting transcendent spiritual realities, such as the perennial conflict between Christ and Satan, between the saints and the antichristian world powers, the heavenly vindication of the martyrs and the final victory of Christ and his saints. Fulfillment is seen either as entirely spiritual or as recurrent, finding representative expression in various historical events throughout the age, rather than in onetime, specific fulfillments. The prophecy is thus rendered applicable to Christians in any age.²⁰

- F. If we were to combine the ideals of each of these views, we would have in essence the already-but-not-yet view. We can confidently apply this approach because the Kingdom of God is *Eschatological*. It has already broken into this present evil age to set humans free from the powers of darkness through our Lord and King, Jesus the Messiah. To repeat the Already-But-Not-Yet View, we see past predictive prophecy as proofs of present *and* future fulfillments, not as disproving them. However, though they do confirm them, they are not clear in fulfillment, as in specific events, but in kind and nature, as patterns to be seen and observed.

32 “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 33 So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. (Matt. 24:32-33 NRSVue)

²He answered them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ ³And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. (Matt. 16:3-4 NRSVue)

In other words, look at the fig tree and the patterns in the sky and see the patterns to apply to the signs of the times.

¹⁹ G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 9.

²⁰ Steve Gregg. *Revelation* (Kindle Locations 235-239). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

The Already-But-Not-Yet View allows us to look for the patterns in the past, not necessarily specific events, and see how to apply them to present and future patterns in order to discern the times. Into this we can add the *idealist view* and see the cosmic war that has been waging, is waging, and will be waged up until the End of the Age. And into that we see the Victorious King and His Kingdom, our Lord Jesus Christ prevailing as *Who Was, Who Is, And Who Is to Come*.