

Revelation

Part Five
Behold, He is Coming
Part Two
(Revelation 1:7, 8)

With Study Questions

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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

A common response of the press to dramatic, or tragic, events is to find high-profile religious figures to interview. Whether it's the Corona Virus, hurricane Katrina, 9/11 or some other cultural, political or natural disaster, we'll often see a microphone in the face of some clergy member offering his or her view on where God was during this catastrophe. Sometimes the responses are cringeworthy.

I heard one clerical luminary explain that we, as a country, asked God to leave. Being the gentleman that He is, He left. Therefore, these bad things have happened. Others, I have heard answer with self-appointed prophetic accuracy, drawing clear black lines between the sins of our culture and the subsequent misfortune.

The escalation of the war in Viet Nam was a direct result of removing prayer from schools in 1962, would be an example of one prophetic prognostication. Another example would be that 9/11 was a direct result of abandoning the biblical model of husbands and wives being comprised of one man and one woman.

Drawing lines between the sins and foibles of culture and disastrous events can be a full-time job. I am not a prophet, nor do I believe in modern-day prophets. So I will not offer, nor will I put much credence in, the detailed speculations regarding the cause and effect of human sin and divine judgment. But...

The fact that I don't know with prophetic precision what tragedies or consequences are connected to what human rebellion, does not mean that I don't think it is happening. I am firmly convinced that there comes a time when God will depose leaders and bring nations to naught.

The Lord of hosts has purposed it, to defile the pompous pride of all glory, to dishonor all the honored of the earth (Isaiah 23:9).

He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless (Isaiah 40:23).

Throughout the Old Testament, this was the common practice of God; to bear for a time the rebellion of man, which inevitably results in the abuse and oppression of others, then providentially come and stem the tide of human darkness. In a prophetic, specific, albeit cryptic sense, the early church (represented by the seven churches addressed in Revelation) are being assured that a “**coming**” of Christ was imminent.

Review

Last time we touched on what this coming of Christ is and is not? Though there will most assuredly be a Second Coming, there are numerous reasons to conclude that this passage is not likely referring to the Second Coming. Some reasons include:

- **Many passages which speak of Christ's coming that aren't the Second Coming.**
- **Time-texts indicating this coming will happen soon.**
- **Neglects the impact of the Gospel in history.**

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 they are still distinct events.

The most natural reading of this passage, in context, is the coming of Christ designed to encourage the original readers of the Revelation in their

current duress. It was not pointing them to the end of history. They were to be assured that, in some way, Christ would soon come to address the great oppression and persecution the church was experiencing.

And though the Revelation is addressing specific historical events amidst the early church (the religious oppression of Jews and the political persecution of Rome), the church can be assured that the providential hand of Christ is no less active in history today as it was then.

These heavily persecuted and vulnerable churches of the first century had to be wondering, along with the martyred saints of chapter six, **“how long” (Revelation 6:10)?** How long will it take for God to do something? Perhaps they, perhaps many of us, feel the way David felt in the numerous Psalms where he would write,

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ²How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me (Psalm 13:1, 2. See also Psalm 35:17; 74:9, 10; 94:3)?

In Revelation we are given a very specific example of Christ coming to judge and/or correct. It would happen soon. Just how would that happen? How would Christ come? He is **“coming with the clouds.”** What does that mean?

Clouds

References to clouds in the Bible are numerous and have various meanings. Sometimes a cloud is just a cloud (Luke 12:54). Sometimes clouds are used to shadow the glory of God, as in the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). God used a cloud to guide and protect Israel (Exodus 13, 14). The many meanings of clouds may be why there is such disagreement about what a verse like Revelation 1:7 is saying.

But there are two very noteworthy places where we see the employment of clouds that people often conflate. One of the most significant events in the accomplishment of redemption is the Ascension. Forty days after the resurrection, Christ ascended to the Father. We are told there that

...a cloud took Him out of their sight (Acts 1:9b).

Daniel records what this event looks like from the other side:

I was watching in the night visions, And behold, *One* like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. ¹⁴ Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:13, 14).

The Apostle Paul will seize upon this in a very ministerial way to uplift those to whom he seeks to minister. It comes in the form of a prayer. He will write of the effects of both the resurrection and ascension. Notice the similarity of the language we find in Daniel.

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ *far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.* ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:16-23-italics mine).

It does appear to be the most natural reading of these passages that Jesus rose again, ascended to the right hand of the Father, was given all authority (see Matthew 28:18). So, I must respectfully disagree with, at least today's majority report, that Daniel is writing of the Second Coming. Of the Daniel passage, it's been said:

This is in keeping with the Father's promise to the Son in Psalm 2:6-9 and will be fulfilled at Christ's Second Advent (Matt. 24:30; 25:31; Rev. 11:15).¹

But there is no mention in the passage in Daniel of the Second Advent. We must all be careful. This is what happens when we have a theological system that rides roughshod over our Bible study. We have to be willing to let the passage say what it says.

Going back to the clouds and the ascension. Two verses after they see the cloud receive Jesus out of their sight, they are told that Jesus...

...will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11b).

This second reference is universally understood to be the clearest allusion to the Second Coming in Scripture. The Apostle Paul also seizes the use of clouds in another passage universally understood to point to the Second Coming.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

¹ Pentecost, J. D. (1985). [Daniel](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 1351). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

All this to say that it is at least somewhat understandable, when clouds are mentioned, for people to think of the Second Coming. Briefly restated:

- **Jesus is resurrected and ascends to the Ancient of Days (God the Father) through a cloud.**
- **He is given all power, authority and a kingdom.**
- **He will one day return in the same way He ascended (bodily).**
- **The dead will rise first, the rest will meet Him in the clouds.**
- **That will be Judgment Day, the end of history, beginning of glory.**

So, we see the use of clouds both at the ascension and at the Second Coming. But is that how it is used in Revelation 1:7? There are many reasons that it is not. Let's begin with another way clouds are used in Scripture. They are used, not merely in association with the final judgment, but also of judgments in history. A few examples:

An oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them (Isaiah 19:1).

What is this event? How will this be fulfilled. Notice that the **“Lord is riding on a swift cloud.”** This is fulfilled by the defeat of the Egyptians by the Assyrians. As Calvin wrote:

...he speaks of the defeat of the Egyptians by the Assyrians, and shews that it ought to be ascribed to God, and not, as irreligious men commonly do, to fortune. ²

Another example is recorded in Nahum, prophesying the destruction of Nineveh by Babylon about one hundred and fifty years after Jonah.

² Calvin, J. (1998). [Isaiah](#) (electronic ed., Is 19:1). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

The Lord *is* slow to anger and great in power, And will not at all acquit *the wicked*. The Lord has His way In the whirlwind and in the storm, And the clouds *are* the dust of His feet (Nahum 1:3).

We again see a reference to God and clouds with the fulfillment being what one nation does to another. And it doesn't need to be a righteous nation God uses. What we will see, at least in chapters four through eleven of Revelation will be what Rome will do to Jerusalem (Rome itself will then find itself under judgment, similar to what we read in Habakkuk where God uses Assyria to punish Israel then uses Babylon to punish Assyria).

One last passage indicating both the time and use of clouds. In Matthew twenty-four, Jesus' disciples were showing Him the buildings of the temple. He responds to telling them that the temple would soon be destroyed. In this discourse (known as the Olivet Discourse) we read these words-words that many understand as the end of the world-but Jesus says will happen soon.

Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. ³² "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out 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. ³⁴ Truly, I say to you, *this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.* ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Matthew 24:30-35-italics mine).

Many times throughout the New Testament we read this language of imminence.

When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes (Matthew 10:23).

For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. ²⁸ Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom (Matthew 16:27, 28).

There were cataclysmic events about to happen. These events would open the door for the Gospel to be proclaimed throughout the world. This is the same message given in Revelation. Jesus is **“coming with clouds.”** The context of Revelation is Jesus contending with Jerusalem through Rome, then He will deal with Rome. This will open history for the Gospel. He will ever providentially continue to enter the very history He has ordained.

**Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save;
Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear (Isaiah 59:1).**

From kings to sparrows, Jesus is on the throne of history and we are called to respond appropriately, faithfully. We will complete this portion of the series next time by addressing who those are **“who pierced Him,”** what is meant by **“all the tribes of the earth”** and what it means that they will **“mourn.”**

Questions for Study

1. To what extent can we connect the disasters or tragedies of the common era to the judgments of God (pages 2, 3)?
2. Review why or why not Revelation 1:7 is speaking of the Second Coming (pages 3, 4)?
3. Do you ever feel like asking “How long, O Lord?” Elaborate (page 4).
4. In what different ways do we see clouds used in Scripture (pages 4-7)?
5. Compare and contrast the use of clouds as they speak to the ascension, the Second Coming, and historical judgments (pages 7-9).
6. How do you explain the language of imminence used by Jesus in various portions of the Gospels? How does this minister to you (pages 8, 9)?