

Behold, He Is Coming

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The video version of this teaching is at: <https://youtu.be/xttQbYvXzEM>

The scripture reading is Revelation 1:1-3:22

As we close out this series of the Apostles' Journey, we close where we began, with the promise of Yeshua's return. We began this series with the disciples gathered at the Mount of Olives watching Yeshua ascend into heaven where they received assurance that He would return.

Acts 1:10-11 NKJV 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

Now, over sixty years later, John is the only one of the original apostles still alive. Where is the promise of His return? The Temple in Jerusalem is gone. Its destruction and the carnage in Jerusalem surrounding this event fulfilled Yeshua's prophetic warnings recorded in the gospels, primarily in Matthew 24. Alerted by these warning and other events, Jewish believers had fled Jerusalem.

Matthew 24:15-16 NKJV 15 "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), 16 "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

After the tribulation of these days, they were to see the sign of Yeshua's coming in the skies. Twenty years had passed since the destruction of the temple and their flight from Jerusalem. Where is the sign of His coming in the heavens? Will He really return?

Although most Jewish believers who fled Jerusalem relocated to Pella in the region of Perea across the Jordan, others fled to cities throughout the Roman world. They barely had time to settle in their new cities and absorb the cataclysmic change in their world brought about by the destruction of the temple when Domitian became Emperor in 81 C.E. Like Nero, Domitian's policies authorized and promoted persecution of the followers of the Way. Eusebius records that Domitian hunted down and executed all those of David's line that could be found because of their relation to Yeshua.

Eusebius, also, records that John, who first traveled to Asia at the time of the death of James the Just, became overseer of all the congregations in Asia. Based in Ephesus, John traveled throughout the region strengthening the believers. In his first epistle, John describes the one who overcomes.

1 John 5:4-5 NKJV 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. 5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

In this time of uncertainty about the anticipated return of Yeshua, it was critical to hold on to the faith! Yet, it seemed that events were spiraling out of control. Under Domitian's persecution, John was arrested and exiled to the Isle of Patmos leaving the congregations of Asia without their leader and their last connection to those who knew Yeshua personally. While on the Isle of Patmos, John received the Revelation of Jesus Christ and wrote the message which was delivered to the churches of Asia.

Revelation 1:1-3 NKJV 1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants-- things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. 3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

The word "revelation" comes from the Greek word "ap-ok-al'-oop-sis," number 602 in Strong's Concordance meaning disclosure, appearing, manifestation, or revelation. Specifically, it's a disclosure of what is hidden. In this case it discloses the hidden details about Yeshua's return.

Revelation 22:10 NKJV 10 And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.

The events that God showed John would take place shortly. The Greek word that is translated "shortly" is "takh'-os," number 5034 in Strong's Concordance meaning a brief space of time. It could mean in haste, quickly, or shortly. In the context of "shortly" as the word is usually translated in this passage, it means after a brief period of time. However, it could also mean that the events, when they happen, will happen quickly. Yeshua used a different tense of this same word in the concluding paragraphs of John's message where it is translated as quickly.

Revelation 22:7 NKJV 7 "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

John testified that he was witness not only to this revelation but to Yeshua, the Word of God, and the testimony of Yeshua. He cited his qualifications as a credible witness. He, then, addresses the message to the seven churches of Asia. These are the churches over which John was the spiritual leader.

Revelation 1:4-6 NKJV 4 John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: 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 from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, 6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

John sends greetings to the congregations, not from himself, but from God and from Yeshua. God, the one who is, who was, and is to come sent His greeting. This is the name by which Moses was to make God known to the children of Israel.

Exodus 3:14 NKJV 14 And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

John's greeting was also from the seven spirits that Isaiah wrote would rest upon the Rod from the stem of Jesse.

Isaiah 11:2 NKJV 2 The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

The greeting is from Yeshua the Messiah, the faithful witness sent from God, the One who rose from the dead and was returning as king. In case they had forgotten what Yeshua had done for them, John reminds them that Yeshua cleanses them by His own blood and through Him, they have an eternal inheritance.

After this opening, John gets right to the heart of the message and what the congregations needed to hear.

Revelation 1:7-8 NKJV 7 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."

Yeshua is coming as He said He would. The truth of this statement is attested to by God with five of His names or titles! This is the word of encouragement that they were all waiting to hear. Just like John the Baptist needed reassurance when he was in prison that Yeshua was the one he had been prophesying about all his life, so, also, did the believers need the reassurance that Yeshua was coming again!

John, then, went on to describe the circumstances under which he received the message from God.

Revelation 1:9-11 NKJV 9 I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, 11 saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

John states that he was in the spirit on the Lord's Day. What was the Lord's Day? Remember, John was a Jewish believer. Like all of the apostles, he had not stopped observing the Torah. This would include the observance of the Sabbath and the Feast Days. There are many possibilities of when this day was. First Fruits of Zion, in an article titled "The Day of the Lord" explores many of these options and concludes that it was most probably the gathering for the Saturday evening meal that concludes the Sabbath.

"We see the custom of gathering on Saturday evening in Acts 20:7. "On the first day" and "after the Sabbath" is the time of the Master's resurrection, that is, Saturday night. The early believers seem to have gathered after the Sabbath to commemorate the resurrection and to share a special meal."ⁱ

Eusebius relates a controversy in the late second century over the observance of Passover. The controversy involved the practice of fasting between the day of Passover and Yeshua's resurrection on the first day of the week. The day of Yeshua's resurrection is referred to as the Lord's Day.ⁱⁱ

Clement of Rome who held the office of bishop or overseer of Rome from 88 to 99 C.E., in his work "Ante-Nicene Fathers," he instructed believers to "keep the Sabbath, and the Lord's day festival; because the former is the memorial of the creation, and the latter of the resurrection."ⁱⁱⁱ

So, as the Sabbath came to a close, John was in prayer when he received the Revelation of Yeshua. John describes the vision that he saw.

Revelation 1:12-16 NKJV 12 Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; 16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.

This description is very similar to Ezekiel's description of the throne of God in Ezekiel chapter 1. It also calls to mind images of the Tabernacle and the Temple with its seven lamps of the menorah. Although the earthly temple had been destroyed, the heavenly one still existed and was untouched!

When John saw the one who was like the Son of Man, he fell at His feet. The man identified Himself as Yeshua emphasizing the fact that He rose from the dead.

Revelation 1:17-18 NKJV 17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. 18 "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.

The Son of Man gave instructions to John to write all the words of what was to happen to the seven congregations represented by the seven lampstands.

Revelation 1:19-20 NKJV 19 "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. 20 "The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.

John was only shown these seven lampstands and told to write to these seven churches. Does that mean that there were only seven churches? In context, John was overseer of Asia; these are the churches that he was most intimately familiar with and those which would have been closest to his heart. There were many more than seven churches just in Asia alone! Seven is the number of spiritual completion and we will see the number seven come up repeatedly in this message given to John. Perhaps these seven were chosen as representative of all the congregations of believers.

Each of the seven congregations was watched over by an angel. The word "angel" is "ang'-el-os," number 32 in Strong's Concordance meaning a messenger. This messenger could be either a spiritual being set to watch over the congregation or a human leader. Since the individual messages to the congregations are addressed to the angel or messenger of that particular congregation, it seems that the messenger must be a human leader. Only a human leader is capable of repenting, receiving the promises and overcoming the trials that each congregation faced.

The individual messages to the churches, written as coming directly from Yeshua, all have common elements. Let's look at the first message which was written to the congregation in Ephesus, John's home base.

Revelation 2:1 NKJV 1 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

The message begins with Yeshua identifying Himself as the One who holds the seven stars and walks in the midst of the lampstands. Each of the messages to the churches begins with Yeshua using one or more of His aspects from John's description in the opening paragraphs of the Revelation. This is followed by the statement that He knows their works.

Revelation 2:2-3 NKJV 2 "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 "and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.

The congregation in Ephesus is commended for diligence, patience and intolerance of evil. However, it seems like the toil of their day to day battles against evil have eroded their love.

Revelation 2:4-5 NKJV 4 "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent.

This is a serious short-falling that they must correct or they will lose their lampstand which is their place in the kingdom! We have all seen this attitude of people caught up in doing everything right or even in sanctimonious legalism. They have lost the quality that John speaks frequently about in his gospel and his epistles. They have lost their first love! Each of the messages to the congregations includes an admonition like this of what they need to correct.

He continues with a word of encouragement that they hate the Nicolaitans which he also hates. The Nicolaitans practiced a form of Gnosticism that believed that all flesh was evil and that service to God was strictly through spiritual means. First Fruits of Zion in their work Chronicles of the Apostles explain.

They practiced a type of hedonistic Gnosticism. They believed that they could best "treat the flesh with contempt" by indulging it. They shared common spouses and disregarded other prohibitions, such as the prohibition on foods sacrificed to idols.^{iv}

Yeshua ends with the admonition to hear the words of the Spirit and a promise to the one who overcomes.

Revelation 2:7 NKJV 7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

Each of the messages to the congregations follows this pattern with a few variations. The congregations at Smyrna and Philadelphia do not receive any criticism. The congregation at Smyrna is encouraged to endure the persecution they will soon be facing.

Revelation 2:10-11 NKJV 10 "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."

The congregation at Philadelphia is told they will be kept from the coming trial. In contrast, the congregation of Laodicea doesn't receive any commendations. They receive only chastisement.

Revelation 3:19-21 NKJV 19 "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. 20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. 21 "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

All the letters to the congregations promise that those who overcome will receive a place in the kingdom of God. They will receive eternal life as evidenced by the tree of life, the crown of life, the hidden manna, a new name, being clothed in white, having a place in God's presence, and sharing Yeshua's throne.

John wrote the rest of the vision of what he saw on that Lord's Day. But the most important message had already been communicated. Yeshua was coming!

Revelation 22:20-21 NKJV 20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! 21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

John was eventually released from Patmos after the death of Domitian resuming his leadership role in Ephesus. John, the last of the apostles faithfully testified to the death, resurrection, and return of Yeshua until his death. But John's words remain. Yeshua is coming!

Study Questions:

1. What are the different levels of understanding involved in Yeshua singling out these seven churches to receive this message?
2. In the video, we talked about the word revelation meaning disclosure. What are some of the events that are being disclosed? How is the idea of the "hidden being revealed" reinforced throughout the book?
3. Compare the circumstances of Ezekiel and John when they saw the vision of the heavenly temple. Compare the circumstances of Daniel and John when they saw the vision of the throne of God.
4. What are the warnings and promises to the seven churches? Are they relevant today?
5. How does understanding the historical background when John wrote this letter help us understand the message? In a broader context, how does the book of Revelation complete our series The Apostles' Journey?
6. What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?

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ⁱ The Day of the Lord, The Didache – Chapter 14, Toby Janicki. First Fruits of Zion, 800.775.4807. www.ffoz.org

ⁱⁱ Eusebius. The Church History. Translation and Commentary by Paul L. Maier. Kregel Publications. ©2007. P. 179.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ante-Nicene Fathers. Volume VII. Constitutions of the Holy Apostles. Book VII/Sec II by Clement of Rome. Translated by Philip Schaff. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ante-Nicene_Fathers/Volume_VII/Constitutions_of_the_Holy_Apostles/Book_VII/Sec_II.

^{iv} Torah Club. Chronicles of the Apostles. Daniel Lancaster. First Fruits of Zion. 800.775.4807. www.ffoz.org. Book 1. Page 141.