

HOW SOON IS "SHORTLY"?

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The Book of Revelation opens, "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must **shortly** come to pass..." (Rev1:1a). The remainder of the book is a revelation of the details concerning the coming Rapture of the Church, the 7-year Tribulation period (i.e., Daniel's 70th Week), the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom on this earth. When the Lord Jesus revealed these things to John the Apostle at the end of the 1st century, he said these were events that "must shortly come to pass". To date, they have not come to pass, and almost two thousand years later we still await their fulfillment (to the scoffing of the world; Cp., 2Pet3:3-4).

Preterists connect the "shortly" of Revelation 1:1 with "this generation" of Matthew 24:34 and insist that the events of the Book of Revelation had to have occurred within the lifetimes of the Jews who were alive at the first coming of Christ. Clearly, that understanding of "shortly" cannot be valid, as the second coming of Christ did not occur in the 1st century in any literal sense. Thus, "shortly" did not mean within one generation. The question, therefore, remains, "How soon is **shortly**"?

The beginning of an answer to this question is found in the very passage in which the Apostle Peter warns of second coming scoffers who would arise "in the last days" (2Pet3:3-4). He goes on to conclude, "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2Pet3:8; Cp., Ps90:4). The point is that God's experience of time is not the same as ours, and this truth is observed throughout the scriptures.

Consider the following examples:

- (1) "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall **soon** utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over the Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed" (Deut4:26). The LORD spoke these words through Moses c. 1400 BC. The first dispersion of the Jews from the Promised Land, the Babylonian exile, occurred c. 600 BC, followed by the Roman Diaspora in 70 AD. Thus, "soon" in this context meant at least ~800 years into the future, and perhaps ~1,500 years.
- (2) "Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall **soon** be cut down like the grass, and wither like the green herb" (Ps37:1-2). This psalm of David would have been written c. 1000 BC. The judgment of the wicked occurs at the Great White Throne, which takes place at the end of the Millennial Kingdom. Thus, "soon" in this context meant at least ~4,000 years into the future.
- (3) "For our light affliction, which is but for **a moment**, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2Cor4:17). Here, the Apostle Paul characterizes the lifetime of a person (i.e., 70-80 years; Ps90:10) as "a moment". In Psalm 90:10, a man's life is said to be "**soon** cut off".

- (4) "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet **shortly**. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen" (Rom16:20). The Apostle Paul spoke these inspired words in the 1st century. Depending on one's understanding, the defeat of Satan will either come at the second coming of Christ, when Satan is bound in the bottomless pit (Rev20:1-2), or at the end of the Millennial Kingdom, when Satan is cast into the lake of fire (Rev20:10). Thus, "shortly" in this context meant at least ~2,000 years into the future, and perhaps ~3000 years.

Thus, when the Lord Jesus Christ told the Apostle John that the events of the Book of Revelation "must **shortly** come to pass" (Rev1:1), the fact that they were yet ~2,000 years into the future was entirely consistent with the way in which God characterizes time, from His perspective, throughout the scriptures (Cp., Hos5:15-6:2).