

## **Response to: “When will the prophecies of the Apocalypse be fulfilled?”**

### **Introduction**

In the September-October 2003 issue of *La Terre Sainte*, the editors published a biblical study by the Argentinian priest and theologian, P. Ariel Alvarez Valdés, entitled “When will the prophecies of the Apocalypse be fulfilled?”<sup>1</sup> After presenting his extreme version of the Preterist interpretation, which sees the entire text as a description of the struggles of the early Church against the Roman Empire, the author comes to the following conclusion, with an almost audible sigh of relief: “So all the prophecies of the Apocalypse are already fulfilled”.<sup>2</sup> Many Christians will have been shocked and surprised by this conclusion, since it is equivalent to saying that the Day of the Lord has already come. They may even wonder what the Church says about it, since, in a similar situation, St. Paul felt the need to respond to those who were saying the Day of the Lord had already come (2 Thess 2). The present moment is especially appropriate for an open and critical review of this article, since its author has recently been suspended by the Church Authorities from further teaching, publishing and distribution of his academic work.<sup>3</sup>

One of the main problems in discussing the Apocalypse is that there is very little agreement on what it is about. Biblical scholars identify at least four fundamentally different approaches to the text (Preterist, Idealist, Historicist and Futurist). There is no other book in the Bible, including the Song of Songs, whose interpretation is subject to such a wide divergence of opinion, even among the scholars. This means that any discussion of the text must begin with a return to first principles, in order to ensure agreement on the basic approach.

Evidently aware of this, P. Ariel persuades us to accept his Preterist approach by drawing attention to the emphasis in the text on the imminence of the events it prophesies. The author of the Apocalypse does indeed affirm that these events will happen promptly (1,1; 22,6), and that “the time is near” (1,3; 22,10) and that Christ’s second coming will take place soon (22,7.20). In view of this imminent expectation, P. Ariel infers: “that the book prophesies events that are very close to the times of the author and its first readers”.<sup>4</sup> He asks us therefore to stop looking for the fulfilment of these events in our own days: “The book assures the readers of the first century that these events were going to be realized promptly. We ought to believe this and abandon the idea that the events will come to pass in our own age.”<sup>5</sup> Basing himself entirely on this premise, he goes on to explain which historical events he thinks the Apocalypse is referring to.

According to his version of the Preterist interpretation these events refer to the break with Judaism in the first century AD and the persecution of the early Church by the Romans. The woman of ch. 12 is the Church, the dragon confronting her is the Roman Empire, the two beasts of ch. 13 represent the Roman State and its official religion, and Babylon of ch. 17 is the ancient city of Rome. The judgments depicted in these chapters represent the punishment that has long since fallen, from our twenty-first century point of view, on Rome and on her

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<sup>1</sup> *La Terre Sainte* is the French version of the monthly journal of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. The original title was «Quand les prophéties de l’Apocalypse s’accompliront-elles?»

<sup>2</sup> «Donc sont déjà accomplies toutes les prophéties de l’Apocalypse» (p.256).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. [http://aica.org/index.php?module=displaystory&story\\_id=13395&format=html&fech=2008-08-22](http://aica.org/index.php?module=displaystory&story_id=13395&format=html&fech=2008-08-22)

<sup>4</sup> «Il est donc visible que ce que prophétise le livre, ce sont des événements très proches du temps de l’auteur et de ses premiers lecteurs» (p.252). P. Ariel is certainly not alone in using this argument to promote the Preterist approach (another, for example, is R.H.Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1915, 4-5), although he may be one of only a few scholars who go so far as to use it to assert the complete fulfillment of all the prophecies of the Apocalypse (like, for example, G.B.Caird, “On deciphering the Book of Revelation”, *The Expository Times*, 74, (1962-3) 13-15; 51-53; 82-84; 103-5).

<sup>5</sup> «Le livre assurait aux lecteurs du premier siècle que ces événements allaient se produire promptement. Nous devons les croire et abandonner l’idée que c’est à notre époque que surviendront ces événements» (p.252).

ruling authorities. The thousand-year period of ch. 20 has passed and the new Heaven and the new Earth of chs. 21-22 have already appeared, obliging us to conclude that the final judgment (Rev 20,11-15) has also taken place.

In P. Ariel's view, the purpose of the Apocalypse was to assure its desperate readers that Christianity was destined to last forever, under the protection of God, and would emerge triumphant over the two major threats confronting the early Church: Judaism and the Roman Empire. Even though "all the prophecies of the Apocalypse have already been fulfilled", the text nevertheless has a meaning for Christians today: Christianity will emerge victorious against its contemporary foes, just as it did in its early days. "John's book is a book of hope"<sup>6</sup> concludes P. Ariel, but it is a hope that has nothing to do with the consummation of the age, or with the present day, for time and again he insists: "The Apocalypse does not therefore speak of the end of the world, as certain people believe. Of what use would it have been to these desperate and persecuted Christians to know a few details about the end of the world, which was not going to take place for thousands of years? Why would John warn them of what was going to happen many centuries later, if they did not know whether they would still be alive the next day?"<sup>7</sup>

Leaving aside, for a moment, P. Ariel's interpretation of the nearness of the end-time in the Apocalypse, on which he bases his entire argument, there are two general objections to his Preterist interpretation. They concern:

1. The history of interpretation and reception of the text of Apocalypse
2. The accommodation of the text to the history of the early Church.

### **The history of interpretation and reception of the text of Apocalypse**

According to the eminent biblical scholar, R.H. Charles, there are no references to, or quotations from, the Apocalypse in the writings of the early Church, until at least 60 years after it was said to have been written.<sup>8</sup> This curious silence can best be explained by a reluctance of the first recipients to write about a text they did not fully value and appreciate. It suggests, but does not prove, that the first readers understood very little of this book. This finds some confirmation in a writing ascribed to St. Dionysius, the Bishop of Alexandria (c. 250 AD), in which he refers to its reception as follows: "Some before us have set aside and rejected the book altogether, criticizing it chapter by chapter, and pronouncing it without sense or argument, and maintaining that the title is fraudulent. For they say that it is not the work of John, nor is it a revelation, because it is covered thickly and densely by a veil of obscurity".<sup>9</sup> Being careful not to slander the Apocalypse, Dionysius included himself among those who did not understand it,<sup>10</sup> and was joined a century later by Jerome, one of the greatest biblical scholars of the early Church.<sup>11</sup> Most of the early Church Fathers who

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<sup>6</sup> «Le livre de Jean est un livre d'espérance» (p.256).

<sup>7</sup> «L'Apocalypse ne parle donc pas de la fin du monde, comme le croient certains. Qu'auraient servi à ces chrétiens désespérés et persécutés des détails concernant la fin du monde qui ne viendrait que des milliers d'années après? Pourquoi Jean les préviendrait-il de ce qui arriverait des siècles plus tard, alors qu'ils ne savaient pas s'ils seraient encore vivants le lendemain?» (p.256)

<sup>8</sup> "Unhappily no work survives giving us the view of the earliest readers of the Apocalypse. Quite sixty years pass before we find any references to it, and over a hundred before any writer deals at length with its expectations." *Studies in the Apocalypse*, 7-8.

<sup>9</sup> As reported by Eusebius, Bishop of Caesaria, in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VII, 25.

<sup>10</sup> Eusebius quotes the following revealing admission from a lost work of Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria: "But I could not venture to reject the book, as many brethren hold it in high esteem. But I suppose that it is beyond my comprehension, and that there is a certain concealed and more wonderful meaning in every part. For if I do not understand I suspect that a deeper sense lies beneath the words. I do not measure and judge them by my own reason, but leaving the more to faith I regard them as too high for me to grasp. And I do not reject what I cannot comprehend, but rather wonder because I do not understand it" *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VII, 25.

<sup>11</sup> In his Letter to Paulinus, Bishop of Nola (*Ad Paulinum*, LIII, 8 dated to A.D. 394) Jerome wrote "Apocalypsis Joannis tot habet sacramenta, quot verba. Parum dixi pro merito voluminis. Laus omnis inferior est: in verbis singulis multiplices latent intelligentiae" (The apocalypse of John has as many mysteries as words. In saying this

referred to the Apocalypse in their writings (e.g., Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Hippolytus, Tertullian, Cyprian) saw it as a prophecy of the concluding period of history, and not as a book that was addressed primarily to the Church of their times. So the writings of the Fathers and Scholars of the first few centuries certainly do not support the claim that the message of the Apocalypse was primarily addressed to the early Church.

This conclusion is further strengthened by the fact that the Apocalypse was not received as quickly or widely as one would have expected if it had been generally understood to refer to the contemporary situation. In fact, in the Eastern Church, the text was not accepted into the canon until at least the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century, and although it was included much earlier into the canon of the Western Church, its acceptance was by no means unopposed.<sup>12</sup> At the turn of the last century, H.B. Swete, a Cambridge scholar and churchman, remarked that “no book in the New Testament with so good a record was so long in gaining general acceptance.”<sup>13</sup>

Far from supporting the ‘Preterist’ interpretation, then, the history of interpretation and text reception actually go a long way to confirm that the Apocalypse was largely ignored by the early Church as a whole. With the possible exception of the first three chapters, which contain messages for the seven local churches in Asia, the early Church does not appear to have understood St. John’s visions to refer to her contemporary situation.

### **Accommodating the text to the history of the Early Church**

If we then go on to study the historical situation of the Christians who were persecuted in the first few centuries, and compare this situation with the visions of the Apocalypse which are said to represent it, we certainly do not find a convincing correspondence.

For example, a persecution as severe or diffuse as the one described in the Apocalypse (Rev 7,9-17; 13,5-10) never took place in the history of the early Church. The persecutors never performed miracles in order to induce the people to worship an image of the emperor, nor did they ever try to control them by giving them a mark, without which they could not buy or sell (13,11-17). Never did a Roman emperor destroy his imperial city in the definitive way the beast and his allies destroy the city called ‘Babylon’, according to the description in the Apocalypse (17,15-17; ch. 18). There has never been environmental damage on the scale described after the blowing of the first four trumpets in the visions recorded by St. John (ch. 8), nor has there ever been a ministry of two prophets like the one described between the blowing of the sixth and seventh trumpets (11,3-13).

Furthermore, the final judgment has evidently not yet occurred, since its main result is the removal of all sin, evil and suffering, in order to make way for the fulfilment of eternal salvation (Rev 21-22). No one can seriously argue that evil and suffering have been eradicated from the world or that creation has yet reached this state of eternal perfection.<sup>14</sup>

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I have said less than the book deserves. All praise of it is inadequate; manifold meanings lie hid in its every word).

<sup>12</sup> The main opponents were Marcion, the Alogoi, and Gaius of Rome, cf. Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices*, London: Macmillan and Co, 1906, cvi – cix.

<sup>13</sup> H.B. Swete, *Apocalypse*, cxiii. He goes on to add: “The key to the interpretation disappeared with the generation to which the book was addressed, perhaps even with the relief which the Asian Churches experienced upon the death of Domitian, and apart from any clue to its immediate reference, it was little else but a maze of inexplicable mysteries” (op. cit. cxiv). From the total lack of documentary evidence from the time, it is doubtful that even the generation to which the book was addressed possessed the key to its interpretation.

<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the most compelling indication that we have not yet reached this state of perfection is the presence of suffering, mourning and pain in the world, for all these will be absent in the Holy City after the consummation and renewal of Creation (cf. Rev 21,3-4). It is interesting, in this light, to examine the self-description of the city called Babylon as a woman who claims royalty and denies suffering (18,7). She appears to think that she is the Holy City, in which there will be no more suffering. This gives rise to the term “Babylonian Theology” for those habits of thought that deny the reality of a future, final Judgment by claiming that the consummation has already arrived.

It should also be noticed that the only part of the Apocalypse which is explicitly concerned with the situation prevailing around the time it was written (Rev 2-3), hardly mentions the problem of persecution: in the letters to the churches only one persecution is predicted, of brief duration and limited to a few people (2,10), and there is only one passing reference to a martyr (2,13).

By attributing to the text a meaning which it clearly did not have at the time of its composition, but was the product of a later method of interpretation, the 'Preterist' interpretation cannot, and should not, be considered the result of sound exegesis, but rather an example of what is called eisegesis, or accommodation.<sup>15</sup> In other words, it is the result of projecting on to the text a meaning that is quite foreign to it, in this case the history of the early Church in the Roman Period.

### **The imminence of the second coming in the Apocalypse**

After raising these objections against the Preterist interpretation in general, we can return to the original premise of P. Ariel's argument, which is that since "the book assures its first-century readers that these events were going to be realized promptly", then "we ought to believe this and abandon the idea that the events will come to pass in our own age". For P. Ariel, the only way to understand the book's emphasis on the nearness of the second-coming and the end-time is to restrict its prophecies to the first few centuries of the Christian era. But having rejected P. Ariel's interpretation for the reasons presented above, we are obliged to look for another explanation for this prominent feature of the text.

We quickly find that "this emphasis on the nearness of the end is not a peculiarity of Revelation...it appears not only in Revelation but in other apocalypses, in and out of the Bible."<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, it appears in so many passages of the New Testament<sup>17</sup> that it would be fair to say that the early Church adopted the apocalyptic notion that they were living very near to the end-time. The resurrection of Jesus was interpreted as the 'first fruits' of the eschatological resurrection, soon to be followed by the rest at the end of the age (cf. 1Cor 15,20). Coherence and consistency with the rest of the New Testament, and with the apocalyptic tradition, would go some way to explain the same emphasis, in the Apocalypse, on the imminence of the end.<sup>18</sup>

In relation to the Old Testament Scriptures, the relevant passages in the Apocalypse contrast with corresponding passages in the book of Daniel. In Daniel, the author is told to "shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end" (Dan 12,4), whereas the author of the Apocalypse is told "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the

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<sup>15</sup> The Preterist interpretation is the child of the historical-critical method, which actually starts from the assumption that the entire book was planned to respond to the needs of the Church under persecution at the end of the first century. It is an assumption that restricts the principal meaning of the Apocalypse to the situation which prevailed at the time it was written. In fact, it is actually in the making of this assumption that the limits of the historical-critical method become evident, as recognized by the Pontifical Biblical Commission: "To be sure, the classic use of the historical-critical method reveals its limitations. It restricts itself to a search for the meaning of a biblical text within the historical circumstances that gave rise to it and is not concerned with other possibilities of meaning which have been revealed at later stages of the biblical revelation and history of the Church" (*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993, I A 4, p.80). Since the Apocalypse embraces such a vast horizon – nothing less than the complete fulfilment of the entire mystery of God at the end of time (cf. Rev 10,7) – it is not surprising that the limits of the historical-critical method become particularly apparent when the method is applied to the interpretation of this book. Owing to these limits, the 'Preterist' interpretation of the Apocalypse offers an understanding of the book which does not arrive at explaining the precise or literal meaning of the text.

<sup>16</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation: Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Louisville, Ky: John Knox Press, 1989, 70.

<sup>17</sup> Boring gives the following references as examples: Matt 4:17; 10:23; 16:28; 24:34,44; Mark 1:15; 9:1; 13:28-30; Luke 9:27; 12:40; 18:8; 21:25-32; Rom 13:11-12; 16:20; I Cor 7:25-31; 15:52; Phil 3:20-21; 4:5; I Thess 1:9-10, 4: 13-18; James 5: 7-9; I Peter 4:7; 1 John 2:18.

<sup>18</sup> So Robert Mounce *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT series, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1977, 65.

time is near” (Rev 22,10). The implication is that, in contrast to the situation at the time of Daniel, the advent of the Messiah has brought near the eschatological consummation of all things. The emphasis on the imminence of the end-time in the Apocalypse can therefore also be understood as way of highlighting this contrast between the situation before and after the advent of Jesus Christ, in particular on the aspect of ‘inaugurated fulfillment.’<sup>19</sup>

There are many other proposals to explain this prominent feature of the Apocalypse. Beasley-Murray compares the text’s emphasis on the expectation of the end-time to the foreshortening that characterizes some of the prophecies in the Old and New Testaments, which he terms a ‘telescopic’ view of history.<sup>20</sup> This may in itself be understood an attempt to promote the authentic life of faith in God, since living in imminent expectation of the end can help to increase awareness of the divine will and resist temptation to sin. It has recently been suggested that this was a rhetorical tactic to appeal to the emotions of fear and confidence.<sup>21</sup>

Another approach has been to show how the Apocalypse tempers the imminence of the end-time with the anticipation of certain delays, in a way that realistically reflects the historical situation in the first century, after it became clear that the Parousia would be delayed.<sup>22</sup> By means of this technique, the imminence of the end-time is sustained throughout the text in spite of considerable delay. In brief, a quick glance at the commentaries would have shown P. Ariel that there is no shortage of explanations, apart from his own, for this prominent aspect of the text.

However, there remains a sense that St. John did seriously want to inform his readers of the nearness of the end, not simply as a tactic or as a technique, or for the sake of conformity to tradition or doctrine, but precisely because the Lord revealed it to him in that way. This impression is confirmed by the observations of Schüssler Fiorenza: “In sum, Rev. does not comfort the community with a reference to God’s plan for history but with the assurance of the immediate coming of its Lord to judge the world...By the use of apocalyptic, mythological, and historical materials and by the application of traditional eschatological schemata John qualifies the present time as the “short time” before the end. He knows that the end and the coming of Christ are imminent, but he is also aware that until then only a short but definite time must elapse.”<sup>23</sup> The author is indeed serious about the proximity of the end and when he writes that ‘the time is near’, “the simple meaning cannot be avoided”.<sup>24</sup>

Nineteen hundred years later, though, we are in a good position to know that the author of the Apocalypse was not referring to the persecution of the early Church in his prophesy, for the reasons stated above. The only apparent alternative is to admit that he must have been wrong to expect the end so soon. After a reasoned discussion of various viewpoints, this is precisely what M. Eugene Boring concludes, associating it with his error of referring to the earth as if it was square and had four corners (cf. Rev 7,1).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. G.K.Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1999, 182.

<sup>20</sup> G.R.Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, NCB, London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott 1974, 52-53, also George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, 22.

<sup>21</sup> David A. Desilva, “The Strategic Arousal of Emotions in the Apocalypse of John: A Rhetorical-Critical Investigation of the Oracles to the seven Churches”, *New Testament Studies*, 54.1 (2008), 90-114 (esp. 99-100).

<sup>22</sup> When the End failed to arrive, the majority of faithful did not abandon or reject the prediction of the end-time as a mistake. Instead, the delay was explained in such a way that the faithful could continue living in imminent expectation of the End. For a thorough look at the ways this delay was justified, in Jewish and Christian writings, see Richard Bauckham’s Tyndale Biblical Theology Lecture (1979) published in *The Tyndale Bulletin*, 31 (1980) 3-36.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1985, 49, see also “The author of Rev. is, indeed, aware of time, but he knows only a “short time” before the eschaton. The eschatology of Rev. is, therefore, not dependent on or legitimated by a certain course of historical events. Rather, time and history have significance only insofar as they constitute the “little while” before the end.” (op. cit. 46).

<sup>24</sup> Ladd, *Revelation*, 22.

<sup>25</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 72-3.

In the remaining part of this review, I would like to propose another explanation for the author's emphasis of the nearness of the end-time – an interpretation that takes account of the presence of the author on earth, for the renewal of his prophetic vocation, just before the sound of the seventh trumpet (Rev 10,7-11; 11,15-19).

The first task is to define precisely which 'time' St. John is referring to when he writes that "the time is near" (Rev 1,3; 22,10). It is clearly linked to the Parousia, since this is mentioned a few lines later (Rev 1,7), but the use of the same distinctive word for 'time' (*ho kairos*) later in the text shows precisely what this involves. At 11,18, the heavenly chorus praises God because: "the nations were angry and your anger has come, and also the time (*ho kairos*) for the dead to be judged, and to give the reward to your servants the prophets and to the saints, and to them that fear your name, and to the small and the great, and to destroy those who are destroying the earth" (Rev 11,18). Evidently, 'the time' refers principally to the final judgment, when the dead will be raised (20,11-15), the destroyers condemned and the servants of God rewarded by the realization of the new Jerusalem (Rev 21–22). This meaning of the word in reference to final judgment is consistent with its use elsewhere in early Christian writings.<sup>26</sup> So when the author announces that "the time is near", there should be no doubt that he is referring to the realization of all the events prophesied in his book, right up to the end.

It should not escape our notice, though, that among these events is the period of a thousand years – a period of partial fulfillment during which Christ and his saints reign on the earth (Rev 20,4-6). The author was clearly aware that this period of a thousand years had to pass before the end, but he nevertheless wrote that the end was near. So there is no question, then, of the author making a simple mistake about the imminence of the end, because he himself had prophesied a delay of the order of a thousand years. We return, therefore, to ask how he could say that the time of the consummation of all things is 'near' and that events at the end of the thousand years will happen 'soon'? There are two ways of answering this question:

1. The present time of the author is the time of writing, which is at the start of the thousand year period. However, according to Psalm 90,4 "a thousand years in your sight [Lord] are like a day", and so from a divine point of view a thousand years is in fact only a short period of time. Speaking from the divine point of view, then, the author is not wrong in saying that the 'end is near', even though it may take a thousand years, or two, from a human point of view. This response is supported by the almost identical use of Psalm 90,4 at 2 Peter 3, 8-9, in a passage that was specifically written to explain the delay of the final judgment and complete fulfillment of God's promises.
2. The present time of the author is toward the end of the thousand year period, shortly before the final events take place. In this case, the author is speaking from the point of view of the renewal of his prophetic vocation, which is placed in the text between the sixth and seventh trumpet blasts (Rev 10,7-11). Since the sounding of the seventh trumpet announces the time for the consummation of all things, without further delay (10,7; 11,15-18), then St. John is literally accurate in saying that, from this point of view, the end is near and that the events prophesied will happen soon. This view is supported by the fact that the chain of reception of the "Revelation of Jesus Christ" in the opening verses of the book (Rev 1,1-3),<sup>27</sup> in which we are also told that the end is imminent, seems to converge specifically on this account of the author's prophetic renewal (Rev 10,1-11). It is here that we actually see the author receiving "the

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<sup>26</sup> David E.Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, WBC 52A, Dallas: Word Books, 1997, 21.

<sup>27</sup> I.e., the passing of the Revelation from God to Jesus Christ, then to his angel, and then finally to John the prophet (Rev 1,1-3).

Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him” (Rev 1,1 and 5,7) from the hand of the Lord’s angel (Rev 1,1 and 10,8-10). Since this passage forms the introduction to the mission of the two witnesses (Rev 11,3-13), who will publicly announce John’s prophecy,<sup>28</sup> then the author’s present time is identified here with the public announcement of his prophecy by the two witnesses. And since the mission of the two witnesses takes place immediately before the brief, 42-month reign of the ultimate antagonist of Christ and his saints – the ‘Beast from the sea’ described in Rev 13<sup>29</sup> – this interpretation matches the author’s self-orientation during the reign of the sixth king in “five kings have fallen, one is [now], the other has not yet come, and whenever he comes he must remain for just a short time” (Rev 17,10): the author’s point of view – his ‘now’ – is just before the full and final end-historical manifestation of the Beast, which is exactly the time of the announcement of his prophecy by the two witnesses.

In summary, we suggest that, by means of the unique structure of his book, the author’s present time can be understood in two ways: the first is the time of writing at the start of the thousand year period, and the second is the time of the public announcement of his prophecy by the two witnesses, which takes place towards the end of the thousand years. It is quite possible that the author has been deliberately ambiguous, with the purpose of sustaining the imminent expectation of the final consummation throughout the thousand-year period of partial fulfillment, while nevertheless knowing that a relatively long delay was inevitable. Either way, whether from the point of view of writing or of announcement, the author was justified in warning us that “the time is near”, and that the contents of his prophecy will soon be fulfilled. Having said that, though, there is no doubt that he is more literally accurate, from the human point of view, when he places himself at the moment of the announcement of his prophecy by the two witnesses, for this will take place just before the short, end-historical reign of the Beast. On the basis of this finding, we can be sure that a large part of the prophecy of Revelation has not yet been fulfilled, especially the part about the two witnesses in chapter 11 and the events in the prophecy they will have to announce.

John Ben-Daniel,  
P.O.Box 1106,  
Jerusalem 91010.

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<sup>28</sup> This is inferred from the fact that their mission forms the continuation of the author’s commission to ‘prophecy again’ (10,8-11). In the words of one commentator “they come forward in response to the prophetic calling addressed to the seer”, Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, English trans. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2001, 349. “Rev.10 reports a prophetic calling which is then fulfilled in the ministry of the 2 witnesses/prophets of chapter 11” (op. cit. 88).

<sup>29</sup> To be consistent with the details in the text, the 1260-day mission of the two witnesses (Rev 11,3) must precede the 42-month reign of the Beast, which is to say that the two time periods should be considered as consecutive, with the period of 1260 days preceding that of the 42 months (for further explanation see <http://www.newtorah.org/The%20two%20time%20periods.html> ). The 1260-day mission of the two witnesses is brought to an end by the Beast (11,7), at the start of his 42-month reign (13,5). At the end of his 42-month reign, the Beast is removed from power by Christ’s return, or Parousia, at the end of history (17,14). The arguments for the identity of the Beast of Rev 11,7 with that of ch. 17, and between this Beast and the Beast of ch. 13, have been clearly presented by Adela Yarbro Collins in *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, (2001) 170-72.