

VISIONS OF REVELATION

Session 2: John's Vision of the Churches (Revelation 2-3)

THE STRUCTURE OF JOHN'S APOCALYPSE

"Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later." (Rev 1:19)

"After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.'" (Rev 4:1)

"The angel said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.'" (Rev 22:6)

A. Prologue (Rev 1:1-20)

B. Part I: The Revelation of "What Is Now" [= John's Present] (Rev 2:1-3:22)

C. Part II: The Revelation of "What Will Take Place Later" [John's Future] (Rev 4:1-22:6)

1. Introduction: John's Heavenly Vantage Point (Rev 4:1-5:14)

2. First Vision of the Future (Rev 6:1-8:1)

3. Second Vision of the Future (Rev 8:2-11:19)

4. Third Vision of the Future (Rev 12:1-22:6)

D. Epilogue (Rev 22:7-21)

THE REVELATION OF "WHAT IS NOW" (A.D. 95-96)

A. Historical Setting of John's Apocalypse:

1. First Readers: Churches in the Roman Province of Asia (now western Turkey)

2. The Letters to Seven Churches of Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (Rev. 1:11)

3. Date: AD 95-96, late in the reign of Emperor Domitian

4. Occasion: Persecution for not worshipping the Roman gods and not worshipping Caesar as a god

B. Pressures from Within the Christian Community:

1. Ephesus (Revelation 2:2, 6):

²I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.... ⁶But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

2. Pergamum (Revelation 2:14):

Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.

a. Balaam and Balak (see Numbers 22-25; 31:16; cf. Philo, *Vita Moses* I.48-55; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* IV.126)

b. Sins of Balaam:

(1) "Eating food sacrificed to idols":

(2) "Sexuality immorality" (see, for example, Hosea 4:12; cf. Revelation 2:20-22; 9:20-21; 14:8; 17:1-5, 15-16; 18:3, 9; 19:2; 21:8; 22:15.):

3. Thyatira (Revelation 2:20-25):

²⁰Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. ²¹I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. ²²So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. ²³I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. ²⁴Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): ²⁵Only hold on to what you have until I come.

a. The Old Testament Jezebel (see 1 Kings 16:29 – 2 Kings 9:37)

b. The Asian "Jezebel" and Her Sins:

(1) "Eating of food sacrificed to idols":

(2) "Sexual immorality" or "adultery":

(3) "Teaching...Satan's so-called deep secrets":

C. Opposition from Outside the Christian Community:

1. Philadelphia (Revelation 3:9):

I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.

2. Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-10):

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

“OVERCOMERS” IN REVELATION

A. “To overcome” (*nikao*):

B. Three “Overcomers” in Revelation:

1. _____ “overcomes” _____ by _____ them.

[The beast from the sea] was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer (*nikao*) them. (Revelation 13:7, NIV)

Now when [the two witnesses] have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower (*nikao*) and kill them. (Revelation 11:7)

2. _____ “overcomes” _____ and his angels (demons) and his human allies by _____ as our sacrifice.

⁵Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed (*nikao*). He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

⁶Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders....

⁹You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. ¹⁰You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:5-6, 9-10; see also the texts below)

3. _____ “overcome” _____ and his angels (demons) and his human allies by the _____ of the Lamb and by their _____ and by remaining _____ even to death.

⁹The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

¹⁰...the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. ¹¹They overcame (*nikao*) him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (Revelation 12:9-11)

[Ten kings] will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome (*nikao*) them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers. (Revelation 17:14)

CHRIST'S PROMISES TO “HIM WHO OVERCOMES”

A. Revelation 2:7:

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

1. "Paradise" (*paradeisos*):
2. “The tree of life”:
 - a. See Genesis 2:8-9; 3:22-24:
 - b. See 1 Enoch 25:4-7 (Jewish apocalypse, ca. 1st century B.C.):

⁴And as for this fragrant tree, not a single human being has the authority to touch it until the great judgment, when [God] shall take vengeance on all and conclude (everything) forever.

⁵This is for the righteous and the pious. And the elect will be presented with its fruit for life. He will plant it in the direction of the northeast, upon the holy place—in the direction of the house of the Lord, the Eternal King.

⁶Then they shall be glad and rejoice in gladness, and they shall enter into the holy (place); its fragrance shall (penetrate) their bones, long life will they live on earth, such as your fathers lived in their days."

⁷At that moment, I [Enoch] blessed the God of Glory, the Eternal King, for he has prepared such things for the righteous people, as he had created (them) and given it to them. (James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 Vols. [Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1983])

c. Testament of Levi 18:10-11 (Jewish, 2nd century B.C.):

[The priestly Messiah] shall open the gates of paradise; he shall remove the sword that has threatened since Adam, and he will grant to the saints to eat of the tree of life. (from Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*)

3. Conclusions:

B. Revelation 2:11:

He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

1. "The second death" in Revelation 20:11-15:

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. ¹⁴Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

2. Conclusions:

C. Revelation 2:17:

To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

1. The "hidden manna":

a. Manna in Exodus 16:

³²Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded: "Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt." ...

³⁴As the LORD commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna in front of the Testimony, that it might be kept. ³⁵The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan. (Exodus 16:32-35)

- b. The Legend of How the Manna Became Hidden (2 Maccabees 2:4-8, but compare 1 Kings 8:9):

⁴It was also in the writing that the prophet [Jeremiah], having received an oracle, ordered that the tent and the ark should follow with him, and that he went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God. ⁵And Jeremiah came and found a cave, and he brought there the tent and the ark and the altar of incense, and he sealed up the entrance.

⁶Some of those who followed him came up to mark the way, but could not find it. ⁷When Jeremiah learned of it, he rebuked them and declared: "The place shall be unknown until God gathers His people together again and shows His mercy. ⁸And then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear, as they were shown in the case of Moses, and as Solomon asked that the place should be specially consecrated." (from *The Apocrypha*, RSV)

- c. Manna at the Messianic Banquet:

- (1) What is the Messianic Banquet?

(seen, for example, in Matthew 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Revelation 19:6-9)

- (2) The Foundational Text—Isaiah 25:6-8:

⁶On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. ⁷On this mountain he will destroy the [burial] shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; ⁸he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.

- (3) The Messianic Banquet in 2 Baruch 29:3-8 (Jewish apocalypse, ca. A.D. 100):

³And it will happen that when all that which should come to pass in these parts has been accomplished, the Anointed One will begin to be revealed. ⁴And Behemoth will reveal itself from its place, and Leviathan will come from the sea, the two great monsters which I created on the fifth day of creation and which I shall have kept until that time. And they will be nourishment for all who are left. ⁵The earth will also yield fruits ten thousandfold. And on one vine will be a thousand branches, and one branch will produce a thousand clusters, and one cluster will produce a thousand grapes, and one grape will produce a cor of wine. ⁶And those who are hungry will enjoy themselves and they will, moreover, see marvels every day. ⁷For winds will go out in front of me every morning to bring the fragrance of aromatic fruits and clouds at the end of the day to distill the dew of health. ⁸And it will happen at that time that the treasury of manna will come down again from on high, and they will eat of it in those years because these are

they who will have arrived at the consummation of time. (from Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*)

The Menu at the Messianic Banquet:

(a) _____

(b) _____ and _____ (compare Job 40:15-41:34)

(c) _____

d. Conclusions—the Promise of “Hidden Manna”:

2. The “**white stone**”:

I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote (*psephos*) against them. (Acts 26:9-10)

Summoned from Sicily by the Athenians to be tried for his life, [Alcibiades] went into hiding, saying that it is silly for a man under indictment to seek a way to get off when he can get away.

When somebody said, "Don't you trust your fatherland to decide about you?" he replied, "Not I; nor would I trust even my mother, lest in a moment of thoughtlessness she unwittingly cast a black stone instead of a white stone." (adapted from "Sayings of Kings and Commanders," pp. 100-101, in Plutarch, *Moralia*: Volume III, Loeb Classical Library Vol. 245, translated by Frank C. Babbitt, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931. The excerpt is taken from Alcibiades 5-6.)

3. “**With a new name written on it**”:

a. “Newness” (*kainos*) in Revelation:

Compare "new song" (5:9; 14:3), "new names" (2:17; 3:12), the "new Jerusalem" (3:12; 21:2), "a new heaven and a new earth" (21:1), and the Lord making "everything new" (21:5).

b. “[A name] known only to him who receives it”:

Compare Genesis 1:26;
2:29-20; Luke 8:26-39

D. Revelation 2:26-28:

²⁶To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—²⁷He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' just as I have received authority from my Father. ²⁸I will also give him the morning star.

1. The Quote from Psalm 2:9:
2. "The morning star" (compare Revelation 22:16):

E. Revelation 3:4-5:

⁴Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. ⁵He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

1. "Dressed in white":

"Fine linen, bright and clean, was given [the bride of the Lamb] to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) (Revelation 19:8; compare 3:18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13; and 19:14)

2. "The Book of Life" (compare Revelation 13:8; 20:12, 15):

F. Revelation 3:12:

¹²Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.

1. "A pillar in the temple" (compare, for example, Exodus 29:44-46; 1 Kings 9:3):
2. "I will write on him the name of my God...the new Jerusalem (compare Revelation 21-22)...my new name":

G. Revelation 3:21:

²¹To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.