

## ***Look! Listen! - And Overcome!***

### **The Revelation of Jesus Christ**

**"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."**

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***Look! Listen! – And Overcome!***  
**(Introduction to the Revelation of Jesus Christ)**

**Lord's Day Morning**  
**January 18, 2009**  
Pastor Jeff Crippen

#### **Introduction**

NKJ Revelation 1:1 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.

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.

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.

You are up against an invisible, mighty, cunning enemy who wants to overcome you. If you are not in Christ, then this enemy *has you in his clutches right now* and is taking you down to hell – and you don't even know it. If you are a Christian, if you indeed have been born again through genuine faith in Christ, then this enemy still pursues his war against you. He wants to overcome you by destroying your faith, by seducing your mind with his lies, by making this world seem so alluring and wonderful that you just cannot see anything wrong with eating some of that

forbidden fruit. He wants to overcome you by bringing persecution against you for the sake of Christ's name and then convincing you that you just cannot endure it – that surely God has abandoned you, so that you may as well just curse Him and put an end to your troubles.

So *we* must overcome *him*. We must stand against his assaults. We must somehow see through his deceptions. We must put on some kind of "truth spectacles" so we can see the world for what it really is. So that our *faith* in Christ, our trust in the goodness and wisdom and love of God remains unshaken even in the darkest hours.

And this is the purpose of this book. Revelation. Apocalypse. Unveiling – remember? We desperately need *apocalypse* because –

*"...in this present life of sense and men and the earth and time – very little is as it appears to be."*

**NOTE:** The Bible is really our "truth spectacles," is it not? God has spoken. God has given us *revelation, apocalypse*. In His Word, He shows us what is really true, what lies behind, what we must know if we are to persevere in faith and overcome. Therefore – LISTEN NOW –

***"If you have not spent serious time in the Word, then you have been running blind. And you are in trouble."***

Why do you keep "bumping" into things? Why do you keep going wrong in your thinking? why do you keep yielding to various temptations and becoming discouraged or alone or well, overcome? It is because –

*"...in this present life of sense and men and the earth and time – very little is as it appears to be."*

But without eyes, you are seeing things and believing things *as they seem, rather than as they really are.*

***"The Word of God will change you – it will change your mind, it will change how you see things and how you think about things. But sinful neglect of it will enable the enemy to overcome us."***

I am becoming increasingly convinced that most of our troubles – most of the Christian's troubles – stem from a habitual neglect of personal, prayerful study of the Word of God. Listen -

***"Either sin will keep you from the Book or the Book will keep you from sin."*** [John Bunyan]

***"The Bible is a disturbing book, a hammer, a fire and a sword." [Vance Havner]***

***"The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold on me." [Luther]***

*Look! Listen! And Overcome! Or else, you will be overcome!*

This book of Revelation, this final chapter in the Bible – *is above all else, a book about how we can overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil.* Or, perhaps better put – *it is a book about how things really are, in spite of how things might look. So that the man or woman who sees and looks behind the uplifted veil loses his fear and by faith is enabled to overcome.* No matter what seductions, deceptions, and persecutions come our way. *No matter what!*

***"The Bible is a window in this prison world through which we may look into eternity." [Timothy Dwight]***

***"There can be no courage in men unless God supports them by His Word." [John Calvin]***

## **I. How to Understand the Revelation of Jesus Christ**

We will call upon Dr. Dennis Johnson once more at this point to help us get hold of some basic principles necessary for the proper understanding of Revelation. Keeping them in mind will keep us from straying into fanciful interpretations. We have already considered one such principle –

***"Revelation is for a church under attack."***

It is given to enable us to overcome the world, not being intimidated into silence. Therefore, Revelation is for US. It is for the people of God as long as they live in this present world, enabling them to meet the enemy, understand that he is defeated, know where he is going, and to then *stand*.

Here are the other principles Dr. Johnson sets out for the student of Revelation –

### 1. Revelation is given to reveal.

We will not understand perhaps every single word in this book, nor fully grasp every single aspect of every symbol – *but Apocalypse is given to reveal.* God has given us this book to show us things we must know, and therefore we can be confident that it is possible to know it! *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants...blessed is he who reads and those who*

*hear...and heed the things which are written...".*

## 2. Revelation is a Book to be Seen.

The Apocalypse is *apocalyptic*. It shows us through images and visions and symbols. *"Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches"* (1:11). And thus the Lord Jesus, in pulling back the veil, is showing us how things REALLY are, though we see them differently here in this realm. This seeing of heavenly things so foreign to us comes to us in vision form and therefore *a literal interpretive hermeneutic becomes troublesome and even problematic.*

As Dr. Johnson reminds us, "this usage of 'literal' overlooks the fact that the literal meaning of a piece of language depends on what type of language it is, its genre. The literal meaning of symbolic language depends on what type of language it is, its genre. The literal meaning of symbolic language is the symbolic correspondence between the imagery of that language and the referent that it describes....If we are to follow an interpretive rule of thumb in reading Revelation, it should be that we take what John sees as symbolic where possible."

## 3. Revelation Makes Sense Only in Light of the Old Testament

How are we to interpret the symbolic language of apocalyptic literature then? The answer lies in the Old Testament. Old Testament quotations and allusions pepper the pages of this book. For example –

- Christ appearing to John (cf Ezek 1; Dan 9-10);
- The beast from the sea in chapter 13 (cf Daniel 7);
- The two witnesses of Rev 11 (cf Zechariah 4:14);
- The tree of life (see Gen 2);
- That old serpent the devil (Gen 3);
- Plagues in Rev 8, 9, 11, 16 (cf the Egyptian plagues in Exodus);
- Elijah and Jezebel;
- Balaam;
- Sodom and Gomorrah;
- The winepress of God's wrath;
- Jerusalem.

And on and on we could go. Revelation takes Old Testament images and assigns fuller meanings to them, meanings not entirely the same as they had in the Old Testament, yet not completely divorced from those meanings.

*"The key to understanding the writer's interpretation of history is to understand the symbols that he uses. John did not intend us to understand them literally. Admittedly, this can be tough-going for modern Americans, since the symbols John used were probably immediately understood by Jewish Christians living when the book was written toward the end of the first century. They knew the Old Testament much better than we, and they intuitively knew where to look for the wisdom for which John calls. As moderns, unfamiliar with what these things meant in the first-century world, we must be careful not to read apocalyptic literature without due regard for its historical context. To argue, as one popular dispensationalist writer has, that the locusts of Revelation 9:3 are a premodern depiction of Bell UH-1B Huey helicopters is surely to wrongly divide the Word of truth. Rather, a Christian should look to Exodus 10:1-20 and Joel 1:2-2:11 for interpretive help with the meaning of the locusts in Revelation." [Riddlebarger, A Case for Amillennialism]*

#### 4. Numbers Count in Revelation

Here is still another interpretive key suggested by Dr. Johnson. Revelation is filled with numbers. But not just any numbers – many of them have already been met in the Old Testament.

- Seven;
- Ten (and its multiples);
- Twelve (and multiples such as 144,000);
- 1260, "time, times, and half a time".

Once more then in this apocalyptic genre, we must take care not to leap to a literal interpretation of such numbers.

#### 5. Revelation Concerns "What must Soon Take Place"

*"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place...(1:1)"*

*"...for the time is near." (1:3b)*

*"These words are faithful and true; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place..." (22:6)*

We will have more to say about this when we get into the actual exposition of verses 1-3, but we must consider right at the outset that, as Dr. Johnson puts it –

*"Revelation gave first-century Christians insight into the purposes of*

God in their time. We can at least conclude, therefore, that interpretations of the visions that lie completely beyond the original readers' frame of reference are suspect. If we begin our inquiry with the assumption that God intended first-century believers to get the message of Revelation, we read its visions against the backdrop of Old Testament imagery rather than forcing them into the template of twenty-first century technologies or politics." [pp 20-21]

## 6. The Victory Belongs to God and to His Christ

Here is still another major principle Dr. Johnson sets out for us. This is perhaps the most important and central theme of Revelation. Christ is Victor! The Lamb has conquered! God's people will be fully vindicated. The devil is defeated and is headed for the Lake of Fire. This fallen, evil world is going away. That seductive harlot drunk with the blood of the saints is going to the pit as well.

THIS is how things *really are*, in spite of how they may appear here.

## II. The Overlapping Structure of Revelation

Most of us have been taught that Revelation proceeds in a linear, chronological path, the events of one

chapter following in time those of the preceding. For example, when we read of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in chapter 19, then of a 1,000 year millennium in chapter 20, it is alleged that the one follows the other. For example, turn to the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter and follow along as we read it.

### [Revelation 12]

Now, we have here the birth of Christ and the devil's attempts to destroy Him. There is the church being protected by God in the wilderness. There is this war in heaven which ends with Satan being cast down to earth where he makes war with the saints.

All of these events *precede* the events of chapters 2-3, obviously, and even precede those judgments pronounced in chapters 6-11. Furthermore, if you will turn to Revelation 20 –

NKJ Revelation 20:1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. 2 He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3 and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were

finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

This is quite apparently a return to the events of chapter 12.

*"We misunderstand John's visions if we insist on seeing them as a chronologically arranged timeline of history." (D. Johnson)*

William Hendriksen's commentary on Revelation is entitled More Than Conquerors. In it, Hendriksen observes that Revelation is structured around *seven parallel sections*. They are –

1. Christ in the midst of the lampstands Chs 1-3
2. The Vision of heaven and the seals 4-7
3. The Seven Trumpets of Judgment 8-11
4. The Woman and the Man-child persecuted by the dragon and his helpers 12-14
5. The Seven Bowls of Wrath 15-16
6. The fall of the great harlot and of the beasts 17-19

7. The judgment upon the dragon followed by the new heaven and earth, new Jerusalem 20-22

These sections are seven parallel sections. That is to say, as Dr. Hendriksen proposes –

*"The book of Revelation consists of seven sections. They are parallel and each spans the entire new dispensation, from the first to the second coming of Christ."*

**APPLICATION:** Do you see the significance of this conclusion? It returns Revelation to us, and to all believers of all eras from the first coming of Christ until His second coming. The futurist interpretation of Revelation has done just the opposite. It teaches that everything from chapter 4 onward is future, dealing with events that will happen during the last few years before Christ returns to earth to rule for 1000 years in Jerusalem. One harmful consequence of this view (which IS the prevailing, popular view of our day) is that the very purpose for which Christ gave it to us is largely negated.

Why did Christ give His Church this book? *So that we might see things as they really are, and thereby overcome!* But if the book is merely future prophecy about events and people that have yet to happen, then Revelation is removed from us. It is removed from

those persecuted Waldenses in the Alps so long ago. It could be of no present comfort to them – yet Christ gave it to them, and to all of His Church in every age so that they might *overcome*. This is why we need to emphasize once more –

"Revelation gave first-century Christians insight into the purposes of God in their time. We can at least conclude, therefore, that interpretations of the visions that lie completely beyond the original readers' frame of reference are suspect." [Johnson]

Revelation doubles back on itself. It *re-capitulates*.

"When reading historical narrative, you start at the beginning and read through the narrative until you come to the end. The events described therein more or less follow a chronological sequence. Not so with apocalyptic literature such as the Book of Revelation. Revelation contains a series of visions, each of which functions like a different camera angle looking at the same event. Therefore, the order in which the various visions contained in Revelation are recounted by John does not necessarily reflect the order of historical occurrence of the reality which those visions symbolize. This is what is known as *recapitulation*, in which the same basic

pattern is repeated in a variety of formulations. Put more simply, the visions were arranged topically, not chronologically. Although the cycles of judgment in Revelation increase in intensity as the return of our Lord draws near, the vision which was described in Revelation 20 might come to pass at the same point in history as previous visions in the book.

The fact that Revelation is a series of consecutive visions, each depicting the course of the present age from a different perspective (recapitulation), should warn us. We are not to read Revelation with the assumption that because something appears in an earlier chapter, the historical fulfillment of that vision must occur in history prior to that which is revealed in later chapters....A careful study of chapter 20 will reveal that this chapter describes a period which is synchronous with that of chapter 12. This can be clearly demonstrated by simply comparing Revelation 12:7-11 and Revelation 20:1-6." [Riddlebarger]

For the most part, pre-millennialism embraces a lineal, chronological approach to Revelation. The events of one chapter follow in time those of the chapter preceding. But we are going to come at Revelation from an amillennial aspect, accepting the



position that there is indeed recapitulation in it.

### **III. Progressive Recapitulation or Progressive Parallelism**

We have mentioned that William Hendriksen identified 7 major divisions in Revelation. Each division parallels the others and each covers the entire Church age, from the first coming of Christ to His second coming.

But, as Hendriksen concludes, there is not only a recapitulation of events, *there is a progression each time these events are recapitulated.* This, Hendriksen calls progressive parallelism. And here is what this means –

*"...the book of Revelation consists of seven sections which run parallel to each other, each of which depicts the church and the world from the time of Christ's first coming to the time of His second coming...Note that though these seven sections are parallel to each other, they also reveal a certain amount of eschatological progress. The last section, for example, takes us further into the future than the other sections. Although the final judgment has already been briefly described in 6:12-17, it is not set forth in full detail until we come to 20:11-15. Though the final joy of the redeemed in the life*

*to come has been hinted at in 7:15-17, it is not until we reach chapter 21 that we find a detailed and elaborate description of the blessedness of life on the new earth (21:1-22:5). Hence, this method of interpretation is called progressive parallelism." [Anthony Hoekema, The Bible and the Future],*

This means, for example, that after we have the account of Christ's return to earth in chapter 19, at 20:1 we are taken back once again to the *beginning of the Church age*. We have arrived at a new section, and each section begins at the first coming of Christ. Therefore, the 1,000 years spoken of in chapter 20 does not come after the second coming of Christ in chapter 19 – but before.

Let me set before you some of the arguments used to support this recapitulation/progressive parallelism approach to Revelation.

#### 1. Section 1, Chapters 1-3

Christ appears, the One who is firstborn from the dead..."who loved us and released us from our sins by His blood...Behold, he is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him." These seven churches of Asia, therefore, span the entire Church age and represent the whole Church in all eras, in all circumstances.

## 2. Section 2, Chapters 4-7

Christ is the Lamb who was slain and now rules in heaven. At the end of this section, final judgment is introduced – *"And they say to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One sitting on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.'"* At the same time, the eternal felicity of believers is described.

## 3. Section 3, Chapters 8-11

Here are the seven trumpets. At the close of the section, there is a very plain description of the final judgment –

NKJ Revelation 11:18 The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great, And should destroy those who destroy the earth."

## 4. Section 4, Chapters 12-14

This section opens with the birth of Christ and the devil's attempt to destroy Him and the Church. It ends with a pronouncement of blessing for those who die in the Lord, and then

gives still another account of the final judgment –

NKJ Revelation 14:17 Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. 18 And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." 19 So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw *it* into the great winepress of the wrath of God. 20 And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.

## 5. Section 5, Chapters 15-16

Here are the seven bowl judgments. It leads up, once again, to the final judgment –

NKJ Revelation 16:20 Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 21 And great hail from heaven fell upon men, *each hailstone* about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the

plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

## 6. Section 6, Chapters 17-19

This section opens with John being shown a woman sitting on a scarlet beast. She is drunk with the blood of the saints. A description of events that lie behind the persecution of the Church through the centuries is given and the section then leads up to the second coming of Christ –

NKJ Revelation 19:20 Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. 21 And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

## 7. Section 7, Chapters 20-22

As we have already noted, this section propels us back once again to the time of the earthly ministry of Christ when, by His cross, He effected the binding of Satan. We are taken on up into the future once more to that final judgment (20:11-15) and then (further

progression) into the details of the new heavens and new earth.

This, then, we suggest is the structure and pattern of Revelation. Seven sections that recapitulate – from a different "camera" angle – *what really is behind what we see here*. At the end of each section we have the victory of Christ, the vindication of His people, and the righteous judgment of the wicked.

Therefore, when we read Revelation, *we are reading about US!* That is to say, we are indeed being shown, we are being given an apocalypse, by Christ Himself, of the things that took place and are still taking place from the time of His first coming to the final day when He comes again. The veil is pulled back, and we see what really is.

And by seeing, by listening, *we can overcome!*

NKJ Revelation 22:1 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of

the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. 4 They shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads. 5 There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. 6 Then he said to me, "These words *are* faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. 7 "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed *is* he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."