

Revelation: The Overcoming Witness

Introduction

A. Bauckham (1993) The Theology of the Book of Revelation (Cambridge: CUP)

B. Purpose to:

- i. reveal to readers the heavenly reality, normally hidden
- ii. encourage those who are suffering
- iii. challenge them to obedience, perseverance and
- iv. keep from compromise with the world.

C. Exhortation to Jesus' followers to:

- i. endure through tribulation
- ii. maintain witness
- iii. Look forward to victory already won on cross
- iv. Chapters 4 & 5 shows God's continued sovereignty.
- v. Book finishes by giving glimpse of newly created heaven & earth

D. Theme of reinstatement of the relationship enjoyed in Eden.

- i. God will dwell with his people.
- ii. There will be no more pain or suffering.
- iii. City is temple (only other cube in Bible is holy of holies).
- iv. The new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31 comes to pass.

Structure

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| 1 | Introduction |
| 2-3 | Letters to the churches |
| 4-5 | Throne room of God & the scroll. |
| 6-10 | Opening of the scroll. |
| 11 | The scroll's contents. |
| 12-19 | The scroll acted out.
Satanic Trinity controlling the nations
Conversion of the nations
The Satanic Trinity overcome |
| 20 | The victory of the overcomers |
| 20-21 | The new Jerusalem. |

Introduction (Chapter 1)

- A. John describes the book as a revelation (apocalypse).
 - i. Common genre of literature.
 - ii. Shows events on earth from heaven's eye view.
- B. Letter also a prophecy. Built on many OT prophecies (esp. Ez & Isa).
- C. Also circular letter to 7 churches. Shows wide applicability

Letters (Chapters 2-3)

- A. Ephesus: lost first love.
- B. Smyrna: suffering slander.
- C. Pergamum: Nicolaitans. Throne of Satan
- D. Thyatira: immorality and compromise.
- E. Sardis: relying on reputation for vitality.
- F. Philadelphia: loyal.
- G. Laodicea: rich, self-reliant and lukewarm.

The Scroll (Chapters 4-11)

- A. The Throne Room and the Scroll (Chapters 4-5)
 - i. God is not pictured,
 - ii. Vision into the throne room of God.
 - iii. God is worshipped and a just government is carried out by 24 elders.
 - iv. Jesus is shown as the mighty lion but also the slain lamb
 - v. The Lamb has won the right to open the scroll of prophecy.
 - a. He has many eyes to signify omnipresence
 - vi. Many horns to show omnipotence.
- B. The Opening of the Scroll (Chapters 6-10)
 - i. The scroll is sealed with 7 seals.
 - ii. Opened one by one.
 - iii. Each seal accompanied by judgment of God (limited to 1/4 of earth)
 - iv. When fifth seal opened those already martyred cry out "how long" .
 - v. They're told that more must be martyred before the end.
 - vi. 6th seal accompanied by OT imagery describing "Day of the Lord"
 - vii. Messianic army of 144,000 following census in normal OT manner.
 - viii. The forming of this army of martyrs brings with it worship.

- ix. When 7th seal opened silence follows
- x. Then seven trumpets herald the scroll being finally unsealed.
- xi. Judgment affecting 1/3 of earth accompanies each trumpet
- xii. But the seventh is not sounded at that time.
- xiii. There is no more time for warning judgments.

C. The Contents of the Scroll (Chapter 11)

- i. Shows nations will be brought to faith by faithful witness to God by church, even to death.
- ii. There are two witnesses, since the Law requires two (Deut. 19:15).
- iii. The witnesses bring the majority to faith.
- iv. The prophecy is accompanied by the seventh trumpet and worship.
- v. Scroll's prophecy fulfilled by events in following chapters
- vi. These are worked out in more detail.

The Messianic War (Chapters 12-19)

A. The Satanic Trinity (Chapters 12-13)

- i. Dragon
 - a. Primordial opposition to God.
 - b. There is imagery of Eden (Genesis 3) and Isaiah 66:7-9.
 - c. The woman is Zion, from whom Messiah is born.
- ii. Sea Beast
 - a. Imperial might.
 - b. Conquering by sheer brute force and given authority by the dragon.
- iii. Earth Beast
 - a. Imperial Cult – the religious underpinnings of the empire.
 - b. You can only trade if worship within the prescribed Roman manner.
- iv. These three control the nations.

B. Overcoming the nations (Chapter 14)

- i. 144,000 fight by their faithful witness, even unto death (cf 11:7, 12:11).
- ii. Ritually pure to fight holy war (Dt 23:9-11, 1Sam. 21:5; 2Sam 11:9-13)
- iii. They are the firstfruit offering (Lev 23:9-14).
- iv. Question being asked is who are the real victors?
 - a. Beast who kills the witnesses, or the witnesses who overcame?
- v. Zion is held by the army of martyrs and three angels go out.
 - a. The first proclaims the gospel,

- b. the second Babylon's fall and
 - c. the third warns not to follow the beast.
- vi. Two harvests then follow (cf Joel 3:13):
 - a. Grain: the converted nations gathered to Christ.
 - b. Vintage: the gathered (cf 16:12-14) and are judged (cf 19:15).
- C. The Conversion of the Nations (Chapters 15-16)
 - i. Echo of Exodus: victorious stand by sea, sing version Moses' song.
 - ii. Final, unlimited wrath God poured out
 - iii. Poured on those who continue to worship the beast.
 - iv. Seven bowls poured out, the contents of which echo the 10 plagues.
- D. Quick recap of the story so far...
 - i. By his life, crucifixion and resurrection Jesus has formed a kingdom drawn from all nations in the midst of a hostile world.
 - ii. The scroll reveals how these people are to participate in the conversion of all nations.
 - iii. It shows Jesus' followers need to faithfully bear witness, even to death.
 - iv. This will bring repentance and faith.
 - v. The remaining nations will be judged.
- E. The Victory of the Lamb (Chapters 17-19)
 - i. Whore of Babylon represents the corrupting influence of Rome (v18).
 - ii. The scarlet beast with 7 heads (hills) represents geography of Rome
 - a. and the kings are those who have co-operated with Rome.
 - iii. Eventually they rebel against the prostitute.
 - iv. Faithful called out of Babylon (Rome), physically and philosophically.
 - v. When Babylon falls, international markets mourn
 - vi. But the heavens rejoice at the fall of Babylon.
- F. The Word of God (Chapter 19)
 - i. Christ wages war on remaining nations with army of faithful martyrs.
 - ii. No longer "faithful and true witness" but simply "faithful and true"
 - iii. Now acts as judge.
 - iv. With the coming of Christ, the heavenly reality is manifested on earth.
 - v. Beast and false prophet are defeated.
 - vi. However, Satan remains.

The End (Chapter 20)

A. The Martyrs' Vindication (Chapter 20)

- i. Final judgment delayed whilst martyrs reign with Christ for 1,000 yrs.
- ii. Much longer than their adversary!
- iii. Satan is imprisoned for this time
- iv. On his release, Satan draws an army but fails to defeat the saints.
- v. Satan himself is then defeated
- vi. Joins the beast and false prophet in the lake of fire.

B. The Final Judgment (Chapter 20)

- i. All that have lived brought before throne to be judged.
- ii. Death is finally overcome.
- iii. Those whose names are not in the book of life are cast into the lake.

The New Jerusalem (Chapter 21)

A. The Perfect City

- i. The New Jerusalem is envisioned as a pure bride
- ii. Unlike the prostitute that was Rome.
- iii. Nations walk by glory of God and kings voluntarily bring their glory in
- iv. Unlike Babylon who took by force and persuasion.
- v. Unlike Babylon, uncleanness, abomination and falsehood excluded.

B. The Fulfillment of Prophecy

- i. Much Old Testament imagery is used in this passage
- ii. Shows the fulfillment much prophecy
- iii. Isa 52:1; 54:11-12; 60; Eze 40:2-5; 47:1-12; 48:30-34 & Zech 14:6-21.

C. The Presence of God

- i. In New Jerusalem no need for a temple for God dwells with his people
- ii. Echoes of Eden.
- iii. City built with the proportions of the Holy of Holies
- iv. Lit by the presence of God.
- v. Jerusalem now populated by pure who have the mark of God
- vi. (and not of the beast)
- vii. Watered by the river of life.
- viii. The tree of life, withheld from Adam, is now available.