

## “TO HIM WHO OVERCOMES”: A FRESH LOOK AT WHAT “VICTORY” MEANS FOR THE BELIEVER ACCORDING TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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We live in a world of power struggles. Nation rises against nation, as Jesus said they would. Political parties vie for influence. Individuals seek to assert themselves and to shape the world around their ambitions and objectives. For those who wrestle in these arenas, victory is variously defined. Politicians “win” elections and votes on critical legislation. Nations “win” wars. Despots seek to “win” the hearts of people who buy into their truth system and consent to their authority, or they simply crush those who refuse to do so. Victory apparently means many different things to different people.

The book of Revelation is about a confrontation of powers. The power and majesty of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb of God are described with forceful images of both severity and beauty. The authority and devastating work of the devil and his forces are cast in bold, dark portraits throughout the drama of the book. These powers clash with thunder that resounds throughout heaven and earth.

The victory of the Lamb is, of course, the assured conclusion of the book. Chapters 19–22 expound the final triumph of the King of kings over all other rulers and peoples. They also declare the full manifestation of his rule throughout creation. Indeed, all this is but the capstone of the building whose foundation was laid at Calvary: The Lamb who rules is the Lamb who was slain. Jesus’ victory consists in his triumph over the power of sin, death, and the devil at the cross<sup>1</sup> and the full expression of that triumph at the consummation of the world.

But the book of Revelation was not written simply to inform believers about the victory of the Lamb. Revelation is not only an apocalyptic portrait of the Lamb’s triumph but also a prophetic exhortation for his followers to triumph in him. “To him who overcomes” is the refrain of Jesus himself in his exhortations to the churches. It is “he who overcomes” that will inherit the blessings of the Lamb’s victory (21:7). But what does Jesus mean by “overcome”? The overcoming or victorious life means different things to different Christians. What kind of victory does the book of Revelation prescribe for believers?

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<sup>1</sup> See Col 2:13–15; Heb 2:14–15.

## I. CALLED TO OVERCOME: PROMISES OF VICTORY

In Revelation 2–3 Jesus addresses seven churches in well-known first-century cities of Asia Minor. They are mentioned in 1:11 and addressed in chaps. 2–3 in the order they appear on a natural travel circuit. According to Colin Hemer, “Ephesus was the messenger’s natural place of entry to the mainland of the province of Asia, and the other cities lay in sequence on a circular route round its inner territories.” He adds: “It may be readily supposed that a regular itinerary had been perfected since Pauline times and that the seven focal cities on the route had acquired a special importance as organizational and distributive centres for the churches of the area.”<sup>2</sup>

There are at least three reasons to believe that these seven churches are intended to represent the universal Church throughout this age.<sup>3</sup> (1) Throughout the book of Revelation seven is symbolic of completeness (e.g. the seven spirits<sup>4</sup> = the Holy Spirit in his fullness; seven seals/trumpets/bowls = complete judgment). (2) The refrain from Jesus to each church is: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” This indicates that all the churches were to heed each message, although it was particularly relevant to the congregation addressed. (3) Church history tells us that the kind of issues addressed in these messages are found in greater or lesser measure in the Church throughout this age. Our own experience confirms that they are still with us in the Church today.<sup>5</sup>

In each message Jesus says, “I know” (*oida*). Five times he says, “I know your deeds”; once he says, “I know where you live”; and once he says, “I know your afflictions.” The Lord of glory speaks not from a distance but as an intimate acquaintance concerned for the welfare of his brothers. Revelation 2:1 confirms this when it says that Jesus not only holds the seven stars (i.e. the angels of the churches) in his right hand but also walks among the seven golden lampstands, which are the seven churches (cf. 1:12–13). He does not speak these messages as a dispassionate judge or outsider but as the one who is touched by the feelings of his people’s infirmities and as the head of his body, which is in need of cleansing, healing and strengthening.

Thus for believers at Smyrna facing severe trials, including imprisonment and possibly death, Jesus is the one “who died and came to life again.”

<sup>2</sup> C. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (JSNTSup 11; Sheffield: JSOT, 1986) 15.

<sup>3</sup> This view is affirmed by e.g. R. H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 84; P. E. Hughes, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 9–10; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 72; G. E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 36.

<sup>4</sup> See Rev 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6.

<sup>5</sup> In this regard certain insights of rhetorical and reader-response criticism are helpful for understanding the function of these messages. R. Wall summarizes this approach well: “The perception of Revelation’s relevancy for its reader’s faith depends on the congregation to which one belongs. If the author’s description of a particular congregation suits a reader, that reader will understand the importance of John’s subsequent vision in ways appropriate to that congregation, whether as a pastoral word of hope (e.g. the congregation at Smyrna) or as a prophetic word of judgment (e.g. the congregation at Laodicea)” (*Revelation* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991] 67).

"Be faithful, even to the point of death," he proclaims, "and I will give you the crown of life" (2:8–10). The church at Thyatira needs to be purged from immorality and idolatry. For them, Jesus is "the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze" (2:18–23). To those at Laodicea vacillating in their Christian commitment, Jesus is "the Amen" and "the faithful and true witness" (3:14).

Each message includes a closing admonition addressed to "him who overcomes" (*tō nikōnti* or *ho nikōn*), and it is apparent that Jesus' goal is to exhort his people to be an overcoming church in challenging times. According to Walther Gunther, the Greek verb *nikaō* expresses "visible superiority in the natural rivalry that takes place among men. But it is also applied to the realm of the gods. It can be translated surpass, overcome, be stronger. It presupposes achievement in physical or spiritual battle."<sup>6</sup> The present participle in Revelation 2–3 gives the dynamic sense of ongoing victory over the forces that oppose God and his Church. In each message the overcomer is promised a share in different blessings of the coming age and the eternal kingdom of God. We are encouraged to overcome here and share forever the victory of God.

We can see more specifically what this overcoming life entails as we look more closely at the individual messages to the churches. The most common element of these seven admonitions is Jesus' call to repentance. Five of the seven churches must repent if they are to be counted among those who overcome.<sup>7</sup> For example, the Ephesians had forsaken their first love, and their lives no longer testified to the love and power of the Lamb who was slain. They were toiling and persevering. They were even doctrinally impeccable. But they had quenched the fire that only love can light. Their path to overcoming was to return to this fire.

This is the essence of repentance: It is a turning to God from all else. Jesus first appears in the synoptic gospels calling all to "repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:14–15). Here in the final book of Scripture he drives home the point again, this time looking back upon the finished work of Calvary. We are dependent upon his victory, and our overcoming life is grounded in this truth.

The churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia are notably the only two that are not called to repentance. Whereas Jesus begins his message to five of the churches with the words "I know your deeds," he tells the church at Smyrna: "I know your afflictions" (2:9). Could it be that the church that suffered the most needed repentance the least? Of course it would be hard to say which of the churches suffered more than the others, but this compassionate address stands out. Jesus goes on to exhort them to remain faithful in this life. Likewise believers in Philadelphia were to hold fast to what they had, patiently enduring severe trials.

<sup>6</sup> W. Gunther, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (ed. C. Brown; Grand Rapids: Zondervan) 1.650. See also O. Bauernfeind, "*nikaō*, etc.," *TDNT* 4.942–945.

<sup>7</sup> See 2:5 (Ephesus); 2:16 (Pergamum); 2:21–22 (Thyatira); 3:3 (Sardis); 3:19 (Laodicea).

Thus the churches are admonished to love, trust, and hold on to Jesus. John has set the stage for this in 1:12–19 by describing the risen Lord with graphic apocalyptic imagery commensurate with his awesome titles. He is “the First and Last,” “the Living One.” He was dead and lives forever. He holds the keys to death and Hades. John explicitly ties this imagery to what follows in chaps. 2–3 by beginning each of the seven messages with one of these apocalyptic descriptions of Jesus. The glorious Son of Man who touched John with his power can strengthen believers in these congregations with power to overcome. In their weakness he is strong. As they face death he can promise them life.<sup>8</sup>

## II. THE FOUNDATION FOR VICTORY

The centrality of Jesus’ victory is then reinforced in chaps. 4–5, which form the foundation for the drama that will unfold in the rest of the book.<sup>9</sup> The effect is heightened by the description of the heavenly assembly encircling<sup>10</sup> the throne and worshiping incessantly. All eyes (and there are a lot of them—see vv. 6–7) are upon the Lord God Almighty. All voices extol him as the Holy One, the Creator and Sovereign of all. At the pinnacle of this clamorous praise, attention suddenly shifts to a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals in the right hand of the Almighty. As no one is found worthy to break the seals and open the scroll an eerie silence prevails, broken only by John’s bitter weeping.

Of course John’s weeping is unwarranted, as one of the elders declares to him: “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed [*enikēsen*]. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals” (Rev 5:5). The image of the lion invokes majesty and authority, and the Davidic Messiah-King is certainly in view here.<sup>11</sup> The aorist verb *enikēsen* is emphatic<sup>12</sup>: This Lion is worthy because he has indeed “triumphed.”<sup>13</sup>

Now all of this describes what John heard. But when he turns to behold this majestic, triumphant King he sees not a Lion crowned in royalty but a

<sup>8</sup> This is apparently in keeping with the use of *nikaō* and cognates in Greek sources outside the NT where “we often read that victory cannot be an achievement of mortals; only divine power can bring it about. A god alone conquers, is unconquered and unconquerable” (Bauernfeind, “*nikaō*” 942).

<sup>9</sup> This is indicated in 4:1b where a voice from heaven says to John, “Come up here and I will show you what must happen after these things (*meta tauta*).” This in turn is grounded in John’s commission from Jesus in his first vision: “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later (*meta tauta*)” (1:19).

<sup>10</sup> The terms *kyklothen* (4:3–4), *kyklō* (4:6) and *enōpion* (4:5–6, 10 [*bis*]) point to the throne as the center of all attention in heaven. Nobody is worried about themselves or about the world at this point. They are worshiping the Almighty.

<sup>11</sup> On the language used here see J. D. Charles, “An Apocalyptic Tribute to the Lamb,” *JETS* 34/4 (1991) 465, and the standard commentaries.

<sup>12</sup> It is prominently placed right after *idou* at the head of the declaration, “unqualified and in an emphatic position” (Mounce, *Revelation* 144).

<sup>13</sup> The older view that *nikaō* here represents a “Hebraic” usage that should be translated “worthy” based on the Aramaic *zēkāʿ* has not held up well. See S. Thompson, *The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax* (SNTSMS 52; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1985) 16.

Lamb (*arnion*) "standing as if it had been slain."<sup>14</sup> The shock value is obvious. Robert Mounce captures the significance of this moment when he observes that "in one brilliant stroke John portrays the central theme of NT revelation—victory through sacrifice."<sup>15</sup> This sacrifice is emphasized by the word translated "slain" (*sphazō*), which is used to describe the slaughter of the Passover lamb in the Exodus account and in NT passages that refer to Jesus as our Passover lamb.<sup>16</sup>

Yet we are also told that the sacrificial Lamb is "standing" by the throne. He is no longer dead but alive in the presence of God.<sup>17</sup> His seven horns and seven eyes represent the omnipotence and omniscience he shares with the Almighty. His authority is also highlighted by the symbolism of receiving the scroll from the right hand of the One on the throne and the marked shift in the object of praise in the heavenly assembly. Revelation 4:9 says that the choir sang a new song, extolling not the One on the throne but his Lamb, and not because of the work of creation but because of the work of redemption: "You are worthy~~ssss~~for you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (5:9). The Lamb is worthy to receive accolades reserved for the Almighty, for he triumphed by giving his own life for the life of the world.

### III. CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

But the triumphant, joyous scene in chap. 5 is not the end of the story. Rather, it is the launching point for the compelling scenes that follow. From his vantage point in heaven John is privy to an insider's view of the conflict that ensues as the Lamb's victory is brought to bear on the world. There is a violent collision—what J. P. M. Sweet describes as "the impact of truth on illusion" that proves to be "agonizing~~ssss~~to victor as well as victim" before it is "liberating and healing."<sup>18</sup> As spiritual forces actively oppose the realization of divine victory, those who follow the Lamb are caught in the crossfire. This is especially clear in chap. 12, which provides the key to understanding the conflict.

<sup>14</sup> *Arnion* is found only in Revelation (28 times) and John 21:15 (in the plural *arnia*) in the NT. While it is true that "*arnion* is to be regarded as a Messianic symbol and not as a symbol of impotence" (G. Dautzenburg, "*amnos*, etc.," *EDNT* 1.71), the emphasis here is certainly on the contrast between the slain Lamb and the announced, majestic Lion. Cf. G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John* (HNTC; New York: Harper, 1966) 73–75.

<sup>15</sup> Mounce, *Revelation* 144; quoted in Wall, *Revelation* 102. J. P. M. Sweet states that "everything the New Testament says about Christ's death can be brought under the headings of sacrifice and victory, and both stories are necessary for a full statement of the truth. In fact in Revelation they are intertwined" ("Maintaining the Testimony of Jesus: the Suffering of Christians in the Revelation of John," *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament* [ed. W. Horbury and B. McNeil; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981] 114).

<sup>16</sup> Exod 12:6; 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:18–19. On the consistent use of Passover themes and imagery in Revelation see D. C. Juster, *Revelation: the Passover Key* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> On the use of the verb *histēmi* ("stand") in the perfect tense to denote victory see Charles, "Apocalyptic" 466 n. 28.

<sup>18</sup> Sweet, "Maintaining" 115.

The dragon in this chapter is explicitly identified as Satan, the antagonist of God's purposes, who marshals an army of fallen angels.<sup>19</sup> The woman seems to be a more fluid image that we might call the "messianic community,"<sup>20</sup> since she gives birth to a male child (who is clearly the Messiah) and other "offspring" identified as Messiah's followers. The drama begins with the dragon seeking to devour the male child about to come forth from the woman. But in one short verse this child is born and snatched up to God's throne, safe from the clutches of evil.<sup>21</sup> Because of this failure the dragon is enraged at the woman, but she also eludes his grasp with divine help. Finally, the adversary sets out to wage war on the rest of the woman's offspring, "those who keep God's commandments and maintain their witness to Jesus" (12:17). John's point is that warfare against believers is rooted in the devil's frustration concerning God's plan of redemption.

Verses 7–12 amplify this picture and clarify the heart of the issues at stake. The devil is not only frustrated but also has been mortally wounded in apocalyptic warfare with Michael and his angels. This is both good news and bad news, as v. 12 indicates: "Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." This is the tension believers face: The one who accused them before God is cast out of heaven, but he now seeks to devour them on earth. How will they overcome him?

The answer is given in v. 11: "They overcame 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." Here, in my estimation, is the centerpiece of the whole book.<sup>22</sup> The emphatic *autoi* and the aorist verb *enikēsan* accent the certainty of the believer's victory: Jesus calls them to overcome, and they will overcome. And their victory is founded upon two main pillars.<sup>23</sup> The phrase "the blood of the Lamb" recalls the portrait of the slain Lamb in chap. 5. Calvary has dealt the devil his mortal blow,<sup>24</sup> and it is Calvary that

<sup>19</sup> Although the fraction ("a third") indicates that the dragon's power is limited (Wall, *Revelation* 360).

<sup>20</sup> So e.g. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation* 198; Mounce, *Revelation* 236.

<sup>21</sup> For a concise summary of the relevance of the mythic imagery here see E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 80–82. For more detail see especially Beasley-Murray, *Revelation* 192–197.

<sup>22</sup> Beasley-Murray calls chap. 12 "the central section of the book" (ibid. 191) and 12:11 "the most significant statement in the chapter" (ibid. 203).

<sup>23</sup> R. H. Charles says that although several older commentators took the preposition to denote the means of victory, "it is best to take *dia* [with the accusative] as denoting the cause. Then the death of the Lamb is the primary and the testimony of the martyrs the secondary ground of their victory" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* [ICC; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1926] 1.329). Likewise H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (New York: MacMillan, 1906) 153; Mounce, *Revelation* 243 n. 28.

<sup>24</sup> "The victory over the accuser in heaven (12:7–9) was won not by Michael but by Christ; Michael's is merely a mopping-up operation, or in Caird's analogy, he is not the field officer who does the actual fighting, but the staff officer who is able to remove Satan's flag from the heavenly map because the real victory has been won on Calvary" (Sweet, "Maintaining" 114, with reference to Caird, *Revelation* 154).

believers now bear witness to. The "word of their testimony" is the witness of their lives that the Lamb who died is the Lion who lives and rules. Jesus himself is "the faithful witness" (*ho martys ho pistos*), according to Rev 1:5,<sup>25</sup> and believers are called to emulate him in this role.<sup>26</sup>

All this clarifies the call to overcome in chaps. 2–3. Believers must repent of works and teachings that in any way connect them with God's adversary and promote the work of this defeated and condemned deceiver. The teachings of the Nicolaitans, of Balaam and of Jezebel are particularly hateful in God's sight because they lead people astray into Satan's "deep secrets" (2:24) and ungodly lifestyles. These are to be rejected by all who claim to follow the Lamb. Believers are instead to pursue a passionate love for Jesus which proves itself in faithfulness to him at all costs. This is the meaning of the last clause in 12:11: "They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."<sup>27</sup> With faith firmly planted in the risen Lord, believers are not uprooted from their testimony even by the prospect of death (cf. Heb 2:14–15).

The surrounding chapters provide illuminating commentary on the dynamics of this kind of testimony. Revelation 11:7 says, "Now when [the two witnesses] have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them and overpower and kill them." We note here that the witnesses are overcome only after they have fulfilled their testimony (*telesōsin tēn martyrian autōn*; 11:7a). The satanic beast's victory is defined in terms of the affliction of physical death. But Jesus said, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28). In Rev 11:11–12 God has the last laugh in the face of the enemy's pseudo-victory: After a mere three and one half days (remember that the witnesses had testified with powerful signs and wonders for three and one half years) God's Spirit of life raises up the witnesses from death and God's voice calls them home to heaven, with their enemies looking on in disbelief.<sup>28</sup>

Chapters 13–14 preach the same message. Revelation 13:7 tells us that a beast was "given power to make war against the saints and to overcome them (*nikēsai autous*)." John is quick to point out that this prospect of suffering and death calls for "patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints" (13:10b). Those who are steadfast in refusing the mark of the beast will find themselves among the 144,000 on Mount Zion in chap. 14 who bear the name of the Lamb and his Father's name on their foreheads. The beast's triumph is no triumph at all, for his supposed victims are safely delivered to their appointed destination in heaven, having delivered their ap-

<sup>25</sup> The very first title John uses to describe Jesus in Revelation.

<sup>26</sup> As John has done: He is suffering on the island of Patmos "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (1:9).

<sup>27</sup> "Since their love for Christ was greater than their love of their own lives, they continued in faith and obedience towards him in whose conquest they shared through unity with him" (Beasley-Murray, *Revelation* 204).

<sup>28</sup> Sweet ("Maintaining" 108) observes that "it is not just their witness, nor their death, that finally shatters their opponents, but their vindication—their resurrection and ascension which (like their witness and death) echo Christ's."

pointed testimony in the world.<sup>29</sup> Thus in 15:2 John sees “what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name.” The beast had been victorious over the saints from an earthly, temporal perspective. But from God’s perspective the lives of these believers had impacted the world for eternity’s sake.

Of course this does not resolve the question of final justice raised by the martyrs in chap. 6. “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true,” they cried out, “until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” (6:10). The answer is that they must wait. In chaps. 19–20 Jesus himself brings this final justice to bear on the world and the devil. The rider on the white horse in 19:11 is called “Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war.” The armies of heaven ride with him, clothed in fine linen, sharing his triumph.<sup>30</sup> The fact that his robe is dipped in blood (19:13) reminds us that this is the consummation of the victory purchased at the cross. The enemies of God are defeated, the devil is locked away, and the saints are raised to reign with Jesus.<sup>31</sup> They have overcome by the blood of the Lamb.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Scripture tells us that every follower of the Messiah participates in the confrontation between the powers of light and darkness, and the book of Revelation amplifies this picture for us. Alan Johnson suggests that Revelation may be viewed “as an extended commentary on Paul’s statement in Eph 6:12” that believers “wrestle against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”<sup>32</sup> Since we live between Calvary and the consummation of the age, we inevitably experience warfare. It is interesting that the only use of the verb *hypernikaō* (“super-overcome”) in the NT (Rom 8:37) is in the context of the great difficulties we face in this life while waiting for the final manifestation of Jesus’ victory throughout creation: “Who shall separate us from the love of

<sup>29</sup> There is a similar emphasis in Hebrews 11 on faith in the face of death (e.g. see Heb 11:13, 19). The faithful men and women of this chapter are a great cloud of “witnesses” (*martyrōn*, 12:1): They bore testimony to the potential impact a life of faith can have, and, though dead, they still speak.

<sup>30</sup> Revelation 17:14 had already anticipated this moment: “They [the beast and the kings of the earth] will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.”

<sup>31</sup> Note the relevant observation by G. Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 160: “The idea of resurrection on the one hand solves a problem that had tormented the generations from Job to Sirach by removing God’s judgment from any possible human determination; on the other hand it painfully distances the hope of seeing merit compensated and guilt punished from the horizons of existence.” This is certainly part of the tension of the book of Revelation as the drama moves toward its climax in chaps. 19–20, although Boccaccini may have overstated his point.

<sup>32</sup> A. Johnson, “Revelation,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (ed. F. E. Gaebelin; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 12.410. On the believer’s spiritual warfare see 2 Cor 10:3–5; 1 Pet 2:11; etc.



Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors (*hypernikōmen*) through him who loved us" (Rom 8:35–37).<sup>33</sup>

Revelation 12:17 tells us that the devil is enraged and seeks to kill "those who hold to the testimony of Jesus."<sup>34</sup> In the midst of this crossfire our lives must declare the victory of Jesus over sin and death, with confidence in the ultimate triumph of his work over all the power of the enemy. This means that we will not love our earthly lives but the author of life;<sup>35</sup> that we will not measure success by human, earthly standards or victory by personal, earthly gain but in terms of our cooperation with God's plan to advance his kingdom; that we will not sacrifice the testimony of Jesus on the altar of compromise and convenience.

To this end the book of Revelation must provoke us to forsake the world, which is passing away, and to embrace the Lord of life. For, as J. P. M. Sweet has put it, the apocalyptic message of this book "is not so much an attack on the world to encourage the Church, as an attack on the Church, which is embracing the world—to its own deadly danger, and in betrayal of its true role of convicting the world by its witness, for the world's salvation."<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Commenting on this passage Bauernfeind ("*nikaō*" 945) says, "For the warrior whom no earthly affliction or defeat perturbs *nikaō* is almost too weak a term."

<sup>34</sup> Cf. 17:6 for graphic imagery on the same theme.

<sup>35</sup> According to Swete (*Apocalypse* 153) this is the point of Rev 12:11: They overcame "because of their testimony to Jesus and their indifference to life itself in comparison with loyalty to Him. *kai ouk egapēsan* ["and they did not love"] states the extent of this victory; for Christ's sake they overcame the natural love of life." Cf. John 12:25.

<sup>36</sup> Sweet, "Maintaining" 102–103.

Overall, "Believer" is about someone who finds meaning in the pain in his life. We don't know for sure that this is autobiographical to anyone in the band, but there's such emotion in the vocalization that it's hard to not believe that this song has deep personal meaning. The song is the declaration of a person who has experienced great pain in his life but who has learned important things about himself through those experiences. Verse 1. There can be multiple theories about what this means, but it seems to be Reynolds telling fans how much they mean to him and how, despite all of the pain, they have given him support and power to continue sharing his songs and himself. Deeper Meaning of "Believer" by Imagine Dragons. I really like "Believer," and I think it has a powerful, deep meaning. Historically, the Book of Revelation pointed to the destruction of Jerusalem and to the end of an era. Down through the ages, empires and nations have crumbled; eras and epochs have come and gone; only God's Kingdom, as proclaimed and made sacramentally present by the Church, has or will survive. Today we are arguably at the end of another era and epoch. The West is crumbling and decadence abounds. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death (Rev 21:7-8). Holman Christian Standard Bible The one who is victorious and keeps My works to the end: I will give him authority over the nations--. International Standard Version To the person who conquers and continues to do what I've commanded to the end, I will give authority over the nations. NET Bible And to the one who conquers and who continues in my deeds until the end, I will give him authority over the nations--. New Heart English Bible He who overcomes, and he who keeps my works to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations. Revelation 3:5,12,21 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels;

The Book of Revelation, often called the Book of Revelations, Revelation to John, Apocalypse of John, The Revelation, or simply Revelation, the Revelation from Jesus Christ (from its opening words) or the Apocalypse, is the final book of the New Testament, and therefore also the final book of the Christian Bible. Its title is derived from the first word of the text, written in Koine Greek: apokalypsis, meaning "unveiling" or "revelation" (before title pages and titles, books were commonly known by the