

## Revelation 2-3 • He Who Overcomes

### **Introduction [Note to Group leaders: This is a longer study than usual.]**

Because of an egregious, yet popular, false teaching recently making the rounds in the Western Church which attempts to redefine an "overcomer" as some kind of over-achiever which the average believer does not have to attain to, this lesson begins with a New Testament survey of the definition and use of the word "overcome". While false teachings always ultimately fail the common sense and plain meaning of Scripture tests, time will not be devoted to explaining their mindset, but it should be noted that in parallel with redefining the "overcomer" they have invented a new category not found in Scripture they call the "overtaken" — people who may acknowledge Jesus in some fashion, but never live a crucified, changed life going forward, and yet who are purportedly given a second chance to make up for it in spite of rejecting His Word and ways.

This false teaching is particularly related to the book of Revelation because it offers that the Millennial Reign will be a kind of "Christian purgatory" (my description, not theirs) so the "overtaken" can have a second chance to earn their way into heaven, and a higher level of leadership and authority granted the "overcomer" at that time. Never mind that in every parable and illustration of the End Times that the "overtaken" are always rejected, excluded and thrown out to experience the worst consequences of judgment in hell, and the "overcomer" is always welcomed and rewarded, this false teaching creates the illusion the unfaithful can escape Jesus' direct warnings to the contrary.

At present we are witnessing many who regularly attend church, but according to biblical standards will find out too late that because they were overtaken by the cares of the world to the detriment of their faith, they will not experience what awaits those who are scripturally authentic "overcomers".

<sup>33</sup>"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

### **Introduction: Jn. 16:33**

**Observation:** Every use of the word "overcomes" to each of the seven churches derives from the Greek word "nikao" (Strong's #3528)—"to conquer, to subdue, to be victorious over". If we cannot successfully conquer it, subdue it, or ultimately have victory over it, by definition we **cannot possibly overcome it**. To fall short of this goal is to fail and suffer the consequences of rejection and disqualification.

**Q: Over what has Jesus conquered, subdued, and been victorious—in other words, what has He overcome?**

A: "I have overcome the world".

**Q: What does Scripture define as the "world"?**

A: Rather than the planet or population as a whole, it refers to the "world system"—the fleshly and satanic standards contrary to the Word and ways of God.

**Q: What does Christ say will come upon every believer of every age? What does it mean in this context?**

A: "In the world you have tribulation". It means that every believer is tested and tried so that they must ultimately conquer, subdue, and be victorious over the ways of the world.

**Application:** The biblical definition of an "overcomer" is someone who successfully conquers, subdues and has victory over the world; the "overtaken" are themselves conquered and subdued by the world.

<sup>4</sup>Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; <sup>5</sup>and one of the elders said to me, “Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.”

### **[Read Rev. 5:4-5]**

**Q: What is the specific qualification this search is looking for?**

A: Someone who is “worthy to open the book or to look into it”. (v.4)

**Q: Who is found to be “worthy” and why?**

A: The Lamb is found to be worthy—that is, Christ—because He “has overcome”.

**Q: What did He do to “overcome”?**

A: By never sinning, always doing that which He was directed by the Father, and completing the work on the cross, Christ is the ultimate example of overcoming Satan and his world system.

**Observation:** Jesus used this same word to describe the act of overpowering an opponent, which is exactly what He accomplished over Satan:

<sup>22</sup>“But when someone stronger than he attacks him and **overpowers** him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied and distributes his plunder. (Luke 11:22)

**Application:** Christ Himself is the ultimate example of what it means to be an “overcomer”.

<sup>4</sup>For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. <sup>5</sup>Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

### **[Read 1 Jn. 5:4-5]**

**Q: If “whatever is born of God overcomes the world”, what would it mean if someone is themselves overcome by the world?**

A: It means they are not actually born again!

**Q: How does this relate to our main tool of victory—“our faith”?**

A: In both Greek and Hebrew, in both the Old and New Testaments, the underlying words for “faith” can be translated as **either** “faith” or “faithfulness”. It is faithfulness to put God’s Word and ways into practice which defines someone who is “born of God” and can therefore overcome the world.

**Q: Why doesn’t John place v. 5 before v.4? Why doesn’t he begin by saying that an overcomer is “he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God”?**

A: Because the proof of belief is faithfulness—obedience to God’s Word and ways. Without faithfulness, there is actually a lack of belief and victory over the world. Scripturally, this completely nullifies the concept that the “overtaken” do not have to act like the “overcomer” and will be given a second chance to make up for it.

<sup>36</sup>“**He who believes in the Son** has eternal life; but **he who does not obey the Son** will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” (John 3:36)

<sup>23</sup>Jesus answered and said to him, “**If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word**; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. (John 14:23)

**Application:** A born again “believer” is proven by their faithfulness; it is not enough to simply acknowledge Christ but to live in obedience to His Word.

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<sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

### **[Read Rom. 12:21]**

**Q: How might this help us understand the greater meaning of “overcome”?**

A: The Apostle Paul contrasts a personal condition—“Do not be overcome by evil...”, with a personal action—“...but overcome evil with good”.

**Point:** *We achieve victory in the course of pursuing good deeds in Christ—that is, by our treatment and relationships with others.*

**Q: What is the implication for those who are not producing spiritual fruit in keeping with a crucified, sanctified life in Christ?**

A: They themselves are overcome.

**Application:** *An “overcomer” is not simply passively resisting the world personally, but is actually overcoming the world by their treatment of others.*

<sup>13</sup>I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. <sup>14</sup>I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

### **[Read 1 Jn. 2:13-14]**

**Q: What is the source of “knowing” Christ as well as “overcoming” Satan and his world system?**

A: “...the word of God abides in you”.

**Q: What does it mean to “abide”?**

A: This is a word derived from “abode”—the house in which we live. It means to permanently take up residence in obedience to Christ’s Word and ways and to always remain there rather than live in the world. It is not merely being a “hearer” of the Word, but a “doer”.

*<sup>4</sup>“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. <sup>5</sup>I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. (John 15:4–6)*

**Application:** *An overcomer is not a part-time or casual participant with Christ, but takes up permanent residence with Him because “apart from Me you can do nothing”.*

<sup>1</sup>Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup>By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; <sup>3</sup>and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. <sup>4</sup>You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. <sup>5</sup>They are from

### **[Read 1 Jn. 4:1-6]**

**Q: In addition to Satan, who else are effectively handled by authentic overcomers?**

A: Both those who have “the Spirit of God” and those with “the spirit of the antichrist”. (v.2)

**Q: How is this accomplished?**

A: We “test the spirits to see whether they are from God”. (v.1) This is accomplished by measuring **everyone** against the standard of God’s Word.

**Q: According to v.4-5, what is the difference between the “overcomer” and the “overtaken”?**

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the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. <sup>6</sup>We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

A: The “overcomer” has Christ within them, meaning that they live faithfully according to His Word and ways (v.4); the “overtaken” are “*from the world*” and “*speak as from the world*” (v.5)

**Q: What is the contrast in v.5-6 between the “overcomer” and the “overtaken”?**

A: Where the “overtaken” are concerned “*the world listens to them*” (v.5), but “*he who knows God*” listens to the “overcomer”. (v.6) This is further qualified by specifically stating, “*he who is not from God does not listen to us*”. (v.6)

**Application:** *Do you wonder why there are those claiming to be Christian and yet follow false teachings who steadfastly do not listen to you? If you are approaching them prayerfully in sincerity and love in the absence of provoking them, what might be their core spiritual problem?*

**Q: What is ultimately guiding each party? What is the chief advantage attributed to the “overcomer”?**

A: The “overcomer” is living according to “*the spirit of truth*” while the “overtaken” is living according to “*the spirit of error*”. The advantage for the “overcomer” is that they alone know the difference not just within themselves, but recognize **both** working in others.

**Application:** *An overcomer does not accept things at face value, but tests all things to validate who is operating according to “the spirit of truth and the spirit of error”.*

<sup>17</sup>These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. <sup>18</sup>For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, <sup>19</sup>promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. <sup>20</sup>For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. <sup>21</sup>For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.

**[Read 2 Pe. 2:17-21]**

**Q: What does the Apostle Peter say is the ultimate, true spiritual condition of the “overtaken”?**

A: “...for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved”. (v.19)

<sup>9</sup>*But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? (Galatians 4:9)*

<sup>22</sup>*But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. (Romans 6:22)*

**Q: In v.17-19, what are the main characteristics of the “overtaken”? What is “reserved” for them as their ultimate fate?**

- (v.17) They are malnourishing (“*springs without water*”)
- (v.17) They are directionless (“*mists driven by a storm*”)
- (v.18) They are arrogant and vain
- (v.18) They are themselves living in and enticing others by the sensuality of the flesh
- (v.19) They teach a false freedom while being “*slaves of corruption*”

Ultimately they are “reserved” for “*the black darkness*”, a Hebrew idiom for hell.

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**Q: What insight do v.20-21 provide into the “overtaken”? Is Scripture referring to non-believers?**

A: The scriptural definition of the “overtaken” is someone who at one time was a believer in Christ to the degree that they “*escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*”. They return to being once again “*entangled in them*”—that is, they return to being enslaved by the world rather than Christ. This is actually the definition of “apostasy”—“to fall away”; one cannot “fall away” from something they never were a part of in the first place.

**Q: What is the nature of their true spiritual disposition?**

A: “...the last state has become worse for them than the first”. (v.20)

*<sup>4</sup>For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup>and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup>and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. <sup>7</sup>For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; <sup>8</sup>but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. (Hebrews 6:4–8)*

**Observation:** *This is what is so egregious about the false teaching that the “overtaken” will be given a second chance during the Millennial Reign to make up for their unfaithfulness in the course of this present life, because it directly contradicts the plain text of God’s Word to the contrary. Instead of a second chance, such are being set up for hell.*

**Q: How does this relate to John’s teaching concerning the spirit of antichrist? What, precisely, does “antichrist” mean?**

A: The “anti” in “antichrist” means “in place of” Christ. The “overtaken” have once again allowed something else to take the place of Christ.

**Application:** *The “overtaken” are not those who never came to believe in Christ, but temporarily came out of the world only to return to and become re-enslaved to it once again.*

### **Summary to this Point:**

*For those having studied the New Testament writings given prior to the book of Revelation, they would possess a foundational understanding of the what it means to “overcome”:*

- *It is the spiritual battle encompassing all the complimentary elements of the world-system’s values and behavior.*
- *It is the biblical response to evil by choosing to do biblical good.*
- *It is not just countering the antics and tactics of Satan, but his working through false christs, false prophets, false teachers and their associated works of deception.*
- *The only antidote is to become enslaved to Christ by putting His Word and ways into practice and abiding in Him alone.*

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To “overcome” is strongly connected with taking on deception, apostasy and persecution which is not only characteristic of every historic age of the Church, but becomes unprecedented in its scope and intensity in the shadow of Christ’s Return.

Revelation’s letters to the seven churches are a more detailed extension of these chief problems where the Church is concerned, and whether we meet Christ tonight through death and resurrection or are supernaturally taken in the Rapture, each of these seven churches represent a different aspect of what it means to “overcome” at any time for every believer, but especially for the End Times Christian.

<sup>7</sup>“He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. <sup>8</sup>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.”

### **[Read Rev. 21:7-8]**

**Q: What is the main contrast presented in this overall summary promise for overcomers versus the “overtaken”?**

A: The contrast of inheriting the new heaven and earth (“*these things*”) which has just been described for overcomers, and the lake of fire for the “overtaken”.

**Q: What are the characteristics of the “overtaken”? Do any of these terms relate to each other?**

- “Cowardly”, “unbelieving”, and “abominable” all relate to spiritual states ranging from afraid to make a commitment, to a lack of faith, to twisting the authentic into something offensive to God.
- “Murderers” and “immoral persons” reflect those who treat others in the worst possible manner completely opposite of Christ’s commandment to love others.
- “Sorcerers”, “idolaters” and “liars” summarize the basic categories of deception and false teaching ranging from false spiritual signs and activity, to worshipping something in place of the One True God, to outright maligning the truth.

**Application:** The book of Revelation is itself summarized with a plain explanation of the ultimate destination for those who overcome versus those who are “overtaken”.

<sup>7</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.’

### **[Read Rev. 2:7—Ephesus]**

**Q: What is the meaning of the name “Ephesus”?**

A: “Ephesus” means “desirable” or “beloved”.

**Q: According to Christ’s letter to the church in Ephesus, what are its chief characteristics?**

A: This is a church who endures deception, false teachers and apostasy, but needs to return to its first love.

**Q: How does this promise to overcomers relate to their spiritual condition?**

A: They were warned to repent and return to their first love “*or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place*”. (Rev. 2:5)

**Application:** Overcomers are faithful and consistent to the end so as to experience the eternal rewards of their salvation.

<sup>11</sup>‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.’

### **[Read Rev. 2:11—Smyrna]**

**Q: What is the meaning of the name “Smyrna?”**

A: “Smyrna” comes from the word myrrh, used to anoint corpses.

**Q: According to Christ’s letter to the church in Smyrna, what are its chief characteristics?**

A: This is a church rich in its stance against persecution in its most extreme form.

**Q: How does this promise to overcomers relate to their spiritual condition?**

A: They were encouraged to “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life”. (Rev. 2:10)

**Application:** Overcomers can endure even the worst earthly circumstances because their gaze is fixed on eternity.

<sup>17</sup>‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.’

### **[Read 2:17—Pergamum]**

**Q: What is the meaning of the name “Pergamum”?**

A: “Pergamum” relates to “much marriage” and is connected to the root words from which we derive the terms “bigamy” and “polygamy”.

**Q: According to Christ’s letter to the church in Pergamum, what are its chief characteristics?**

A: This a church who needs to repent of the false teaching and immorality they have allowed to gain a foothold within its walls. It reflects its name in that it is not exclusively devoted to Christ alone.

**Q: How does this promise to overcomers relate to their spiritual condition?**

A: Manna is a biblical metaphor for God’s Word. In combination with being given “a new name”, this is a picture of returning to Christ exclusively through the sanctification of His Word.

**Application:** Overcomers are sustained by God’s Word and their exclusive devotion to Christ alone.

<sup>26</sup>‘He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; <sup>27</sup>AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father; <sup>28</sup>and I will give him the morning star.’

### **[Read Rev. 2:26-28—Thyatira]**

**Q: What is the meaning of the name “Thyatira”?**

A: “Thyatira” is provided various meanings by Bible dictionaries and lexicons, one of the most common being “sacrifice of labor” as well as something to do with a tower or castles. Many sources, however, offer an alternative of “feminine oppression”.

**Q: According to Christ’s letter to the church at Thyatira, what are its chief characteristics?**

A: This is a church who is enduring spiritually and holding on in spite of the spiritual seduction taking place in the character of Jezebel, who leads others to “commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols”. (Rev. 2:20)

<sup>5</sup>He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

**Q: How does this promise to overcomers relate to their spiritual condition?**

A: Instead of being broken by the false influences of immorality and idolatry, overcomers are ultimately victorious and themselves break such influences.

**Application:** Overcomers effectively deal with the personal issues of immorality and idolatry.

**[Read Rev. 3:5—Sardis]**

**Q: What is the meaning of the name “Sardis”?**

A: “Sardis” conveys the meaning of “remnant”, “escaping ones”, or “those who come out” as related to the idea of restoration.

**Q: According to Christ’s letter to the church at Sardis, what are its chief characteristics?**

A: This is a church whose deeds have soiled their garments from God’s point of view and who need to wake up and “strengthen the things that remain” so as to not be overtaken by Christ’s Return.

**Q: How does this promise to overcomers relate to their spiritual condition?**

A: It if does not repent or “wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will know at what hour I will come to you”. (Rev. 3:3) Restoration to Christ while there is still time will replace their soiled garments with “white garments” and prevent erasure of their “name from the book of life”.

**Application:** Overcomers make the necessary course corrections while there is still the opportunity to do so.

<sup>12</sup>He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

**[Read Rev. 3:12—Philadelphia]**

**Q: What is the meaning of the name “Philadelphia”?**

A: “Philadelphia” means “brotherly love”.

**Q: According to Christ’s letter to the church at Philadelphia, what are its chief characteristics?**

A: This is the church whose perseverance and good deeds have opened a door of opportunity leading to not just overcoming the world, but “those of the synagogue of Satan”. (Rev. 3:9) They are the prime example of being “salt” and “light” to the world. (Mt. 5:13-16)

**Q: How does this promise to overcomers relate to their spiritual condition?**

A: For both those like Smyrna who must endure the harshest of circumstances on behalf of the Kingdom, and those like Philadelphia who enjoy the most success on behalf of the Kingdom, the focus is not on the rewards in this life, but the one to come.

**Application:** Overcomers recognize that everything accomplished for the Kingdom of Christ is rooted in eternity, even the seasons of accomplishment in this life.

<sup>21</sup>He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

**[Read 3:21—Laodicea]**

**Q: What is the meaning of the name “Laodicea”?**

A: “Laodicea” conveys the meaning of “people’s opinions” or “rule of the laity”.



**Q: According to Christ's letter to the church at Laodicea, what are its chief characteristics?**

A: The worst and most apostatized of the churches, they are not just lukewarm in their faith, but spiritually blind so that they do not realize how blind. Jesus is portrayed as on the outside knocking in order to gain entrance.

**Q: How does this promise to overcomers relate to their spiritual condition?**

A: If they will give up attempting to themselves sit upon their own throne and submit to Christ's discipline to restore them, they gain the throne of Christ—a proper mutual relationship. "...if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me". (Rev. 2:20)

**Application:** Overcomers ensure that it is Christ alone who is always and exclusively seated upon the throne of their life.

## **Overall Application**

Side-by-side with the examples of what it means to be an "overcomer" we find stark contrasts defining someone who is "overtaken". A modern-day, prominent false teaching concerning the "overtaken" offers that the kinds of behaviors we have just studied, which unambiguously stipulate will cause them permanent, eternal loss, can be given a second chance that is not actually stated in Scripture. However, consider the following case presented by Christ Himself:

*<sup>21</sup>"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. <sup>22</sup>Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup>And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'" (Matthew 7:21–23)*

*If those actively attempting to work in Christ's name are excluded and rejected by Him because their spiritual efforts were rooted in practicing lawlessness, how could those who personally pursue a lifestyle of lawlessness without making an effort in Christ's name—the very definition of being "overtaken", be given some kind of second chance?*

*The chief characteristic of an "overcomer" is faithfulness in this life to God's Word and works in order to achieve all the benefits of the life to come.*