

Study 2 - Revelation 1:9-3:22

To Him who Overcomes

Introduction

Welcome to the "easy bit" of the Book of Revelation. It's straightforward, and in plain language a series of seven letters to seven churches arced around the west of Asia Minor; or at least, seven specific introductions to the one big letter that makes up the whole of the book.

We're not going to focus on particular details - instead, we'll be looking for patterns in the seven letters, and their similarities and key differences. We'll also see briefly how they fit into the structure of the book as a whole.

The seven churches are in an area where John had spent much of his long ministry. Some of the towns were prosperous, particularly those located close to ports and trade routes. Often John's comments relate to the commercial and social lives of the towns he is speaking to - for example, Laodicea was a famous exporter of eye ointment. John makes the point in 3:17 that they are actually "spiritually blind" - they need to buy some "spiritual eye ointment" from Jesus rather than relying on their own abilities and prosperity. Almost all the letters have some similar features, which you can find in commentaries, or at www.luthersem.edu/ckoester/Revelation/main.htm. But again... don't worry if you don't understand all the details. We'll still get the picture!



Discussion Questions

Read the passage carefully, either silently or aloud - perhaps one reader could read the opening section in chapter 1, then others could take turns reading the seven letters.

1. Who are the seven letters from? Note the details of the description, and compare the "son of Man" in John's vision with Daniel 7:9-14.

What do you notice? What are the similarities?

What are the differences, and why?

Have you ever known a kid from humble circumstances who has risen to impressive career heights? Maybe they come back to visit the old neighbourhood in the new Mercedes? That's nothing compared to Jesus. John's vision, which he is told to write down and share with the seven churches, is from the ruling "Son of Man" who Daniel foresaw so many hundreds of years before. And the identity of this Son of Man is none other than the once-crucified Jesus of Nazareth! John and the churches should rightly be in awe of his words!

2. John sees Jesus standing among seven lampstands. What are we told that they represent? What does it mean that Jesus is standing among them?

Is this a good thing, or a bad thing?

3. You'll notice an interesting pattern between the vision in chapter 1 and the letters to the seven churches.

Each letter starts with a reminder of the vision of Jesus. Complete this list ...

2:1..... 1:16 Holding seven stars

2:8

2:12.....

2:18.....

3:1.....

3:7.....

3:14.....

4. What different types of opposition are being faced by the churches

5. Which churches are NOT criticised? What is it that they have done right?

6. What are the key criticisms Jesus has of each of the churches?

Which ones do you think are the biggest dangers to us?

7. All the letters conclude in a similar way. Who is it that will receive the promises in each case. (See 2:7,11,17,26 and 3:5, 12, 21)

8. What do you think it means to "overcome."? Look at 2:25,26, 3:8, and 17:14. Can you see a connection with 13:10?

9. THINK ABOUT IT...What other views of "overcoming" are popular both in the church and the world? Why are they so tempting?

10. Look at 3:21. How did Jesus "overcome and sit down with his Father?" In what ways is this a reassurance for us?

11. Look at the promises at the end of each letter. Each of them are picked up in the final chapters of the book. For homework, you may like to compare 2:7 with 22:14-15, 2:11 with 20:6,14, 2:17 with 19:12-maybe you can find the others yourself.

CONCLUSION

The seven letters are closely tied up with the structure of the book as a whole -there are links with both the vision of the majestic Jesus in chapter 1 and the promised future in Chapter 21 and 22. The message of the letters is simple... the victory has been won by the Son of Man, so press on! Your heavenly future is secure.

Here's a review of the key points...

If you have zeal but no love, recover your love. (How are we doing with this?)

If you are faithful but fearful... endure suffering for the crown of life that's waiting. (Will we?)

If you're seduced by false teaching and immorality... repent. (What are we prepared to tolerate? Where should we draw the line?)

If you're lazy, asleep or dead in your faith... wake up! (How do we urge members of our church family in this direction?)

If you're feeling weak and weary in your faith... remember it will be worth it! Keep at it! (Are you?)

If your obedience is lukewarm and you're complacent ... turn back and find your wealth in Jesus. (Are we maybe quite a bit too complacent?)

Maybe your group would like to finish by writing a letter to our church family?

