The Victory of the People of God

The Book of Revelation doesn't stand in isolation in the New Testament. It should be read in the context of John's Gospel and the three letters of John. John wrote it in his old age in exile on Patmos.

John's Gospel alone states that a man must ***"be born again"*** [Jn. 3:3, 5, 7]. John's first letter takes up what it means to be born again and gives 7 tests of the reality of that experience:

1. (2:29) ***"You may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of Him*** (God)***."***
2. (3:9) ***"No one who is born of God makes a practice of sinning."***
3. (3:9) ***"He cannot keep sinning because he is born of God."***
4. (4:7) ***"Whoever loves has been born of God."***
5. (5:1) ***"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God."***
6. (5:4) ***"Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world—our faith."***
7. (5:18) ***"We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who is born of God, God protects him and the evil one does not touch him."***

Revelation is supremely the book of the **overcomer**—the Lord Jesus and ourselves as overcomers.

John loves his 'sevens'—the number of completion!

- Seven promises to overcomers in the seven churches
- Seven seals—the breaking of which implies the accomplishment of God's hidden purposes
- Seven trumpets—seven thunders (10:3-4)—seven plagues (15)—seven bowls (16)
- Seven songs
- Seven "Blesseds"

The seven promises to overcomers/conquerors

1. (2:7) ***"To the one who overcomes I will grant to eat of the tree of life that is in the paradise of God."***
2. (2:11) ***"The one who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death."***
3. (2:17) ***"To the one who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna. I will give him a white stone with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it."***
4. (2:26) ***"The one who overcomes and keeps my works until the end, I will give him authority over the nations……"***
5. (3:5) ***"The one who overcomes will be clothed in white garments and I will never blot his name out of the Book of Life. I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."***
6. (3:12) ***"The one who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God ……."***
7. (3:21) ***"The one who overcomes, I will grant him to sit with Me on My throne as I also conquered and sat down with My Father on His throne."***

The word occurs several more times in Revelation:

- ***"And they have overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony for they loved not their lives to the death."*** (12:11)
- ***"They will make war on the Lamb and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings……."*** (17:14)
- ***"He who overcomes will inherit all things and I will be his God and he will be My son."*** (21:7)

Revelation is a battle manual! The book is filled with the tramp of armies and the noise of battle. It stirs us to wake up and put on our armour for, ***"There is war in heaven"***—i.e. the cosmos. (12:7)

All the might of hell is arrayed against the Lord Jesus. It is described as a revolt by the hosts of darkness in a supreme attempt to seize His throne. But the rebel armies are hurled back in defeat and ultimate destruction and the triumph is given to, ***"The Kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ."*** (12:10)

Who won the victory over the hosts of hell? It was the "witnesses"—i.e. us! There is a description of us:

"A great multitude that no one could number from every nation from all tribes and peoples and languages. … They have washed their robes and made them white by the blood of the Lamb." (7:9)

How did they/do we overcome?

This is astonishing! We are people made out of dust. Yet we triumph over that seven-headed dragon, crowned with seven crowns! Not because we are huge in number; not because we are super-intelligent and supermen; not because of our great ability to influence people; but because we are sheltered and protected by the omnipotent arm of God.

In fact, we are the ***"Outcasts and offscourings of the world"***. Often we enter glory covered with wounds, victims of the claw and fangs of the dragon. Yet we—feeble folk—are victorious over this seven-headed serpent! How? The method is amazing! There are three elements:

1. ***"They overcame by the blood of the Lamb."*** (12:11)

The power to overcome and overwhelm the kingdom of Satan is found in the blood of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. Overcomers have encountered Satan. He is always active, trying to accuse the saints before God—focusing on our sins—using our sins as grounds to prosecute and claim the death penalty.

Job presents Satan as the great enemy standing before God and saying, **"J'accuse!"** The accusation was that Job served God for the same reason people serve Satan—self-interest. (Job 1:9)

Zechariah saw the high priest, Joshua, standing in the presence of the angel of God (Zech. 3:1) and Satan standing there as well—standing to oppose. Now John sees Satan, ***"the accuser of the believers"*** (3:10) accusing us before God, seeking to charge us day and night with all our sins, claiming that we are guilty before the judge of all men and therefore condemned to eternal death.

No one of us is pure in heart and free from sin. We know Satan's accusations are true. Those sins are ours. We cannot deny the accusation, but we can defy our accuser because the maximum penalty due for all of our sin has been paid by the blood of the Lamb.

The blood of the Lord Jesus cleanses us from all sin. ***"Who can lay any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died."*** (1 Jn. 1:9)

That shed blood was the seal of atonement and the pledge of victory. All who wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb will share in His mighty triumph (7:4) because atonement gives us access to the throne of Almighty God.

Overcomers can approach the throne of the Omnipotent God with courage. We can tell the Lord about the conflicts that are raging about us. We can tell Him about the inequality of the battle status.

> The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
> I will not, I will not desert to its foes.
> That soul though all hell should endeavour to shake,
> I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

So Satan accuses us hoping the truth about our sin will shake our sense of security with God. Satan opposes us to frighten us.

"And the dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent who is called the Devil and Satan—the deceiver of the whole world was thrown down ….." (Rev. 12:9)

Thrown down in the sense that he has lost his place as the accuser of the brethren. There is no cause to fear for the atonement has secured for us an everlasting salvation – an everlasting deliverance. Jesus said, ***"I give to them eternal life and they shall never perish."*** (Jn. 10:28)

The Cross (the blood of the Lamb) is also the place where the Lord Jesus disarmed the principalities and powers (Col. 2:15) including their attempts to cause us to fear.

2. ***"They overcame him … by the word of their testimony/witness."***

They had to battle against Satan before the eyes of people. The prince of this world has been a liar and the father of lies from before the creation of people. So Satan uses lies to wreak his influence on society.

- He mis-represented John the Baptist as an uncouth bedouin saying he was demonised.
- He lied about Jesus saying He was a drunkard and visited prostitutes.
- He lied about Paul and stirred up Elymas to cause resistance to the witness of Paul and Barnabas.
- He stirred up Pergamon to reject the witness of Antipas with the result that he was killed.

He uses slander, falsehood and lies as weapons to discredit and destroy our witness and ultimately to destroy us. He discredits our character; he impugns our motives and actions. He spreads evil reports.

How do we overcome the liar? By our integrity. "Testimony" means speech of **heart** and speech of **life**. It means voice and tongue. The emphasis here is on verbal witness. John says that he is an exile on Patmos, ***"On account of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus."*** (1:9) He goes on to speak of, ***"Antipas, My faithful witness, who was killed among you … for he held fast to My Name and did not deny his faith in Me."*** (2:13)

In Phil. 2:9-11 we read, ***"God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name … that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."***

The world can't mistake the force of that testimony when they see and hear that Jesus is indeed Lord in our lives. So we who confess Him are those who wield the sword of victory in His name. We overcome Satan and all evil powers. We bind them.

3. ***"And they loved not their lives even unto death."***

They hazarded their lives! We will only fight with certainty when we refuse to shrink from the sacrifice of self. It is those who don't count life itself too dear a price to pay, who can defy Satan as he exerts his might and tries to do his worst.

I read recently of the martyrs of the first movement of God in Uganda in 1884. Three new believers were hiding in a pit when they were caught. Two hadn't yet been baptised. They were cruelly tortured. Their arms were cut off. They were bound to a horizontal platform. A fire was lit under them. They were mocked, but they died singing triumphant hymns of praise to the Lord Jesus.

We need to believe we have been bought with a price and our bodies as well as our spirits belong to God. They were following in the footsteps of many—so are we—and theirs is the reward of which this book speaks: ***"He that overcomes shall inherit all things. I will be his God and he will be My son."*** (21:7)

My great longing and prayer is that we will be overcomers who **know** and **embrace** these three great strategies. We are a **fellowship of overcomers.** Our secret theme is overcoming!

We need to avoid militaristic language in relation to respecting, befriending and serving 'neighbours'. This is quite right. Our battle—our unmitigated warfare—is against the principalities and powers. We are to overcome <u>them</u>!

What are the consequences?

- ***"He who overcomes will inherit all things…."***
- All people groups being reached and millions and millions of our 'neighbours' saved!
- Like sub-Saharan Africa where, in the last 50 years, 447 million have become 'Christians'. 50 years ago there were 4 Muslims to every Christian in Africa. Now there are more Christians than Muslims.

- I believe in the next 50 years, if Jesus hasn't returned, we will see a similar 'overcoming' among 'neighbour' people groups.

We need to **be overcomers** and to **recruit and train and equip overcomers**. We need to **model overcoming** to BMBs (Believers from a Muslim Background).

Note that it doesn't say that we **will overcome**. We are told that we **are overcomers**!

"In all these things we are more than overcomers through Him who loved us." (Rom. 8:37)

"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. And they loved not their lives unto death."

Let us encourage one another. This is the victory of the people of God.