

*Excerpt from Overcoming with Christ*  
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In the light of all we have written about the need to conceal the real meaning of apocalyptic writing from the persecuting authorities, it might sound like the truth of God in this book is concealed, but such is not the case. In fact the inspired author begins with the astounding statement: “The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to him to show his servants what must soon take place” (1:1). This is not a concealment, it is a REVELATION. It was meant to be understood, and it was understood by the churches to which John was writing. Then it cannot be too difficult for us to get the message today. If we are trying to make a pattern of future events fit into the symbols and cannot do so, then we must be searching the wrong place for the message of the Apocalypse. I do not mean by this that there is no element of prophecy in the Revelation. There is, but it is not the main message that God wished to impart to the Church.

What is John’s view of history and of the Church? His view is controlled by his concept of God and of Christ—his theology. In this book God is pictured as supreme and sovereign. He sits on the throne of the universe and controls the events of history. Christ reveals himself in a variety of ways, as priest and pastor in chapter 1, as the lamb slain for our salvation in chapter 4, and the King of kings and Lord of lords in chapter 19.

This understanding of God and his character and purposes is the basis of John’s confidence in the final destruction of all evil forces and the triumph of the faithful under Christ’s command. In his visions, John sees history and the Church through God’s eyes.

In the light of these considerations, we conclude that the book of Revelation was written to promise Christians under persecution the rewards of serving Christ in this life and the power to overcome evil. It dramatically pictures the evil forces arrayed against the Church, and pictures their final destruction, the triumph of Christ and the Church, and the eternal rewards awaiting those who overcome.

The Church in John’s day understood this message and it had a profound effect on their lives. They understood the warnings against complacency and failure—only the overcomers will be saved. They understood that the Church will suffer persecution from many sources but that they could overcome. They took to heart the exhortations to patient continuance in the faith and faithfulness in spite of persecution. They experienced a rebirth of faith and hope and looked forward to the rewards of Christian living in this life and in the life to come. Probably the greatest message they received was the assurance that God was on their side, all the resources of God was at their command and that they would ultimately triumph completely over all types of sin and dwell with Christ forever. In the light of this, it did not matter much who the persecutors were or what they did. They would eventually fail.

(from p.24-25)