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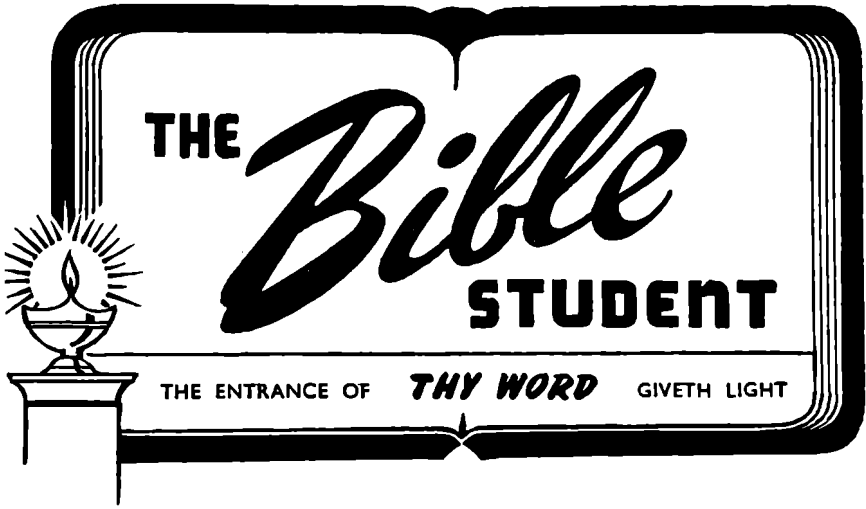
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THE APOKALYPTIC LETTERS

Revelation chs. 2 and 3—(Concluded)

E. W. ROGERS

There is a parallelism between the history of Christendom and that of the Old Testament. The 'tree of life' and the 'paradise of God' naturally turn us to Genesis 3. Smyrna's affliction reminds us of Israel's affliction under Pharaoh in Egypt. The mention to Pergamos of Balaam and Balac takes our thoughts to Israel's wilderness journey and Balac's fear of, and designs upon, God's redeemed people. The reference to Jezebel in the Thyatiran letter takes us on to the days when Israel was in the land in an apostate condition. The 'book of life' spoken of in the Sardis letter takes us on still further in thought to the Babylonian captivity and the registers so carefully searched in Ezra's day. The 'opened door' of the Philadelphian letter reminds us of Cyrus opening the door for a remnant to return to the land, and if the Laodicean letter is put side by side with Malachi's prophecy it will be seen that each has much in common.

There is also a similar parallelism between these letters and the Kingdom parables of Matthew 13, if not so distinct or detailed. The parable of the 'Sower' shows the commencement of Christendom, while that of the 'tares and the wheat' signifies the mixture which very soon occurred, 'perverse men' having crept in among the true people of God. The 'mustard' seed parable envisages that which was established by Constantine who made Christendom a powerful 'tree' in the world (see the imagery in Dan. 3). The leavening of the whole in secret by the woman adumbrates Jezebel, ultimately resulting in the total rejection of the entire scheme. The 'pearl' and the 'treasure' are both within Christendom, just as the 'rest' and the 'few' are within the folds of the professing church.

In all cases the letters are sent to 'the church in' such and such a place (consult the RV). At that time all believers in one town met together in one place and the havoc wrought by sectarianism did not then openly exist. In the present time no company of saints can claim to be '*the church*' in such and such a place. 'The' should be substituted by 'a'. The preposition 'in' indicates separation from the surrounding population: 'they are

not of the world': they are but 'sojourners' in that particular place for the time being. As a whole they could be called 'the churches of Asia' but Scripture never speaks of 'the church of' any town or country. The Spirit is very careful in His use of words and phrases and we should endeavour to 'hold fast the form of sound words' in this as in all other respects.

It should further be added that we have not in these seven letters directions for the ordering of local churches. Were that so it would seem that loyal believers were to remain in the company of the spurious: that despite false teaching and corrupt practices they were to remain among them who were guilty thereof. But we must look elsewhere in Scripture for guidance as to how to act locally. These letters do not touch that.

Here the Lord always presents Himself in a manner appropriate to the condition. It will suffice merely to mention this. The student may examine each case. How suitable it was for the Lord to present Himself to Smyrna as the 'One who had been dead' and now 'lived again'. How appropriate the 'sharp sword' of ch. 2:12 to meet the corrupt 'doctrine' of verse 14. The Lord is always sufficient for every condition and He had His own way of dealing effectively with every evil.

In each letter the Lord says 'I know'; a knowledge resulting from what He saw (cf. *oida* and *eido*). In each He praises before He reproveth. How like Him! In each there is a promise to the 'overcomer'. Nothing escapes His eye, nor will the smallest thing done for Him be overlooked. He knows who is true and He knows who is false.

The 'overcomer' is not a special class of believer who is superiorly victorious. It is a term which denotes all believers. 'Gad, a troop shall overcome him, but he shall overcome at last' (Gen. 49:19). It is the last battle of a campaign that counts for victory or defeat. The earlier reverses of an ultimately victorious General are not held against him. He fights on despite reverses. So does the believer. 'Who is he that overcometh the world? he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God' (1 John 5:5). Believers are 'more than conquerors through Him that loved us' (Romans 8:37). Overcomers are distinguished from unbelievers

in Rev. 21:7 and 8. And all are in either the one or the other of these last two verses: if we are not in verse 7, then we are in verse 8; there is no neutral ground.

Those who believe that all God's children are not overcomers will have insuperable difficulties to encounter in interpreting the promises of these seven letters. Will not all saints be immune from the 'second death'? Will they not all 'eat of the tree of life'? Overcoming implies life; dead fish cannot swim against the stream: it is *life* that ensures victory.

In these letters there are, however, some differences which should be noted. 'He that hath an ear . . .' is placed *after the promise* in the last four letters, whereas it comes *before* it in the first three. This would appear to be because of increasing degeneracy and the Lord's recognition of the 'remnant' in the midst (see 2:24; 3:4; 3:20).

In the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia no complaint is made: this would seem to be accounted for by the fact that it is unlikely that the professing mass would willingly submit to Smyrna's persecutions, or would enthusiastically enter a Philadelphia's 'door' of evangelistic opportunity. Mere professors are not likely to suffer for Christ, or at personal cost to seek to win souls for Him.

Lord, open our ear to Thy voice in these letters!

THE COMPENSATING GRACE OF GOD

A Study of Psalm 49

HAROLD ST. JOHN

Two Psalms commence by propounding a 'dark saying' or enigma for solution; in 78:2 Asaph offers the riddle of a saint's failures, and in the Ode before us we are called to consider life's apparent injustice in the light of the inevitable adjustment which lies on the other side of the grave.

The Sons of Korah boldly face the question as to whether wealth is really a master force or not; whether the poor ought to cringe in the presence of the rich or even envy them at all; and