

SESSION 08 – REVELATION CHAPTER TWO – PART I

¹“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write...⁸to the angel of the church in Smyrna write...¹²to the angel of the church in Pergamum write...¹⁸to the angel of the church in Thyatira write...(Revelation 2)

I. TO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS

- A. We come to the direct prophetic declarations to both the angels and the congregations over which they have been assigned. Recall Revelation’s prophetic end goal is to encourage, exhort, and edify the believers who read and hear the words of this prophecy (Rev. 1:3). With this in mind, John introduces the first church by noting one of the truths concerning his vision of Jesus from chapter one. Here it begins by saying: “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.’”
- B. We see with the introduction of Jesus to the congregation of Ephesus that He is not bothered by having a declaration to both the *angel* of that church and the *human members* of that assembly, individually and corporately. The initial word is specifically directed to the angel, in effect the assignment and what is needed to *help* that body of believers. Heiser makes the following observation,

The seven spirits/ stars/ angels identified with the seven churches (i.e., the lampstands) of Revelation 1 have direct relevance to the introductory content of the letters to individual churches in Revelation 2–3. The first letter is directed to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:1–7. The “eyes of the Lord” is an expression of God’s omniscience. This expression is drawn from Zechariah 4, where we learned that these “eyes” are God’s heavenly agents who watch and keep watch over people. These lampstands / eyes are in turn associated with churches, which requires some sort of relationship with the stars/ angels/ spirits of those churches. The churches, the angels, and the lampstands, are bound together. One cannot coherently speak of one without talking about the others.¹

- C. Within the framework of Revelation, we see a theme that becomes clear as John moves toward the final judgment against the last Beast Empire and its leader, the Man of Sin. This theme is *the Exodus*. The allusions begin in Revelation 1:5, 10 where the call of Israel from Exodus 19 to be a kingdom and/of priests is declared again over the assembly of the seven churches and the voice John hears is the same as what was heard on the Day Yahweh descended on Mount Sinai. This theme runs concurrent with the exhortations to the churches leading up to the opening of the seven sealed scroll and thereafter. The call is the same and applies to the *one new man* of the Church which is consistent with the redemption of man and the grafting in of the Gentiles into the believing root of Israel’s remnant. (See Eph. 2:11-22; Rom.

¹ Heiser, Michael. John’s Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation: Notes from the Naked Bible Podcast (p. 39). Naked Bible Press. Kindle Edition.

11:2, 11, 17-24). We will return to the Exodus theme as it related clearer to the Passover, the Slain Lamb, and the Plagues upon Pharaoh, a type of the Man of Sin.

- D. Acts 19 points to the beginning of the Church in Ephesus as Paul encountered *about* 12 disciples who had not received the Holy Spirit since they believed in Jesus. They said they had “not even heard if the Holy Spirit is being received.” Then Paul discovered they were baptized into John’s Baptism of *repentance*. Paul re-baptized them into the Name of the Lord Jesus and laid his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came on them, “and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.” Paul then stayed three months and reasoned with those in the synagogue concerning the kingdom of God. When the unbelieving Jews rejected the message of the Kingdom, Paul took the believers to the school of Tyrannus² for two years, “so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”
- E. It is in Ephesus the *extraordinary miracles* by Paul are noted, in particular the anointed cloths or aprons that both healed the sick and drove out demons. (Acts 19:11-12). It is also the place where the sons of Sceva the Jewish chief priest, attempted to cast out devils “by Jesus whom Paul preaches.” We know the story; the *evil spirit* said it recognized Jesus and Paul but not them and proceeded to overpower them through the possessed man. Additionally, it is here new converts who had practiced witchcraft, the occult, and magic brought their spell books and burned them in public. The result of Paul’s preaching concerning the Kingdom of God, the miracles, and the renouncing of occult practice was the “word of the Lord...growing mightily and *prevailing*.” (Acts 19:20) This was, in addition to other truths, aimed at prevailing over the goddess Artemis (Diana) of Ephesus and her silversmiths and idol makers.

²⁷And ***not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be considered as worthless and that she, whom all of Asia and the world worship, is even about to be brought down from her majesty.*** (Acts 19:27 LSB)

This is the starting point for the Church in Ephesus. The Gospel of the Kingdom, Salvation, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, miracles, signs, and wonders, spiritual warfare and deliverance. Your average, every-day, first Century Assembly. This is the same Assembly of Saints Paul addresses in his *letter to the Ephesians*.

- F. The church at Ephesus continued to hold to the truth, faith, and perseverance they were established in. However, the first Assembly addressed by the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who searches the hearts and minds (Heb. 4:12), calls them to repentance:

² [A]ll that can be known about him is based on his name and association with a lecture hall. He may have been a Greek rhetorician who lectured regularly at the hall, the owner of the hall, or the donor after whom the hall was named. (Lexham Bible Dictionary)

⁴But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first. But if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent. (Rev. 2:4-5)

The rebuke concerns an issue of the heart. The Head of the Church says, “I have this against you, that you have left your first love.” Repentance in action looks like *doing the deeds you did at first*. This is an apparent call back to the First and Second Commandments:

³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matt. 22:37-40 ESV; see also Deut.6:4-6)

¹¹ This is the message which you heard from the beginning: that we should love one another!... ¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren... ²³ This is his commandment: that we should believe in the Name of his Son Jesus Christ, and that we should love one another, even as he commanded. ²⁴ All who obey his commandments remain in him, and he remains in them. By this, we know that he remains in us, by the Spirit that he has given us. (1 John 3:11, 14, 23-24 EOB)³

Jesus is calling the Church in Ephesus to Love in Action. A repentance unto the inward and outward call to Loving God in Christ Jesus and to extend that love to the believers and to the call of the Ministry of Reconciliation. This call to walk in love is non-negotiable. Doing the first deeds

⁴ Love is patient and is kind; love does not envy. Love does not brag, it is not proud, ⁵ it does not behave inappropriately, it is not self-oriented. [Love] does not take offence and does not keep track of evil, ⁶ it does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ [Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never fails. (1 Cor. 13:4-8 EOB)

G. Aune notes,

Reminding an audience of the teaching they received in the past (whether or not a verb meaning “to remember” is present) was a device frequently used in early Christian texts to encourage those addressed to live up to or to recapture earlier moral and spiritual standards (see Rom 15:15; 1 Cor 15:1; Gal 1:6-9; 3:2-3; 5:7; 1 Thess 1:5-10; 2:13-14; 4:1-2, 9; 2 Pet 1:12-13; 3:1-2). In the OT and early Judaism, the motif of “remembering” was sometimes used in contexts where people were summoned to repentance (Isa 44:21; 46:8-9; Mic 6:5; Sir 7:28; 23:14; 28:6-7; 38:22).⁴ This may indicate a return to the preaching and teaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom and the corresponding works of righteousness and power. Heal the sick, raise, the dead, cast out devils, and cleanse the lepers; all from a stance of the First and Second Commandments.

³ Laurent Cleenewerck, ed., The Eastern/Greek Orthodox Bible: New Testament (Laurent A. Cleenewerck, 2011)

⁴ Dr. David Aune. Revelation 1-5, Volume 52A (Kindle Locations 13261-13265). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

This call to repentance to do the first works of love includes the help of the *angel of the Church in Ephesus* to do that work. The entire family of God is at work to accomplish His purposes in the earth, through both His Church and His divine sons. They are *flames of fire*, ministers to the heirs of salvation. And here in Ephesus the Angel of the Church is there to help them rediscover *their first love* and to do the works they did when Paul established them.

- H. If they did not repent, Jesus Himself would remove their lampstand. This would entail the recall of the angel of the Church, and the extinguishing of their lamp and thus their light. This impact would not only be individually and corporately, but would affect the entire spiritual climate over the city, the place where the powers of darkness would return. And with it occult practice and worship of Artemis.

Aune makes a strong statement, "This is nothing less than a threat to obliterate the Ephesian congregation as an empirical Christian community."⁵ The good news is Ephesus repented according to Ignatius of Antioch (written between 107-110 AD; shortly after John wrote Revelation in 90 AD):

¹ I BECAME acquainted through God with your much beloved name, which you have obtained by your righteous nature, according to faith and love in Christ Jesus our Saviour. You are imitators of God, and, having kindled your brotherly task by the blood of God, you completed it perfectly. (Ignatius to the Ephesians 1.1)⁶

- I. We see then the promise given to the *overcomers*.

*⁷To **him who overcomes**, I will grant to **eat of the tree of life** which is in **the Paradise of God**.* (Rev. 2:7 LSB)

Here we have the end of Exile and the Return to Eden. Revelation brings to *the present* for believers the participation in the Edenic Paradise. What began in Genesis 1-3 as the Kingdom God present on Earth with Yahweh and Adam and Even in the Garden of God with access to the Tree of Life ended in exile. This was repeated over and over until Israel and Judah were both driven from the Land of Promise. But Judah *returned* in part, awaiting the coming Messiah. They were in the Land, but still oppressed by Beast Empires of the day. Jesus says to the Churches, "To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life in the Paradise of God." He ended the exile and welcomes those who believe in Him back into God's Paradise and with that access to *zoe aionion* from the tree of life.

- J. *⁹And out of the ground **Yahweh God caused to grow every tree that is desirable** in appearance and good for food; **the tree of life also in the midst of the garden**, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... ¹⁵Then Yahweh God took the man and **set him in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it**. ¹⁶And Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, "**From any tree of the garden you may surely eat;** ¹⁷but from **the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat** from it; for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."* (Gen. 2:9,15-17 LSB)

⁵ Dr. David Aune. Revelation 1-5, Volume 52A (Kindle Locations 13272-13273). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Pope Clement I et al., The Apostolic Fathers, ed. Kirsopp Lake, vol. 1, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1912-1913), 173.

²²Then Yahweh God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us to know good and evil; and now, **lest he send forth his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever**”— ²³therefore **Yahweh God sent him out from the garden of Eden**, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴So **He drove the man out**; and at **the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword** which turned every direction **to guard the way to the tree of life**. (Gen. 3:22-24 LSB)

¹³How **blessed is the man who finds wisdom** and the man who obtains discernment...¹⁸**She is a tree of life to those who seize her**, and all those who hold her fast are blessed. (Prov. 3:13, 18 LSB)

¹⁷ “For **there will be a new heaven and a new earth**, and **they will not remember the former things**, and it will not arise in their heart; ^{22b}...for **the days of my people will be like the days of the tree of life**, for the deeds of their labor will grow old. ²³ My chosen ones **will not toil in vain or bear children for a curse**, for they are offspring blessed by God and their descendants with them. (Isa. 65:17, 22b-23 LXX; see Rev. 21-22)⁷

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone **is in Christ**, he is **a new creation**. **The old has passed away**; behold, **the new has come**. (2 Cor. 5:17 ESV)

²⁶Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, **“Take, eat; this is my body.”** (Matt. 26:26 ESV)

⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. **If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever**. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.⁵⁶ Whoever **feeds on my flesh** and **drinks my blood** **abides in me, and I in him**.” (John 6:51, 56 ESV)

K. William Osborne writes the following in the Tyndale Bulletin (emphasis added):

Geo Widengren has ably demonstrated the intimate symbolic relationship between the king and the ‘cosmic tree’ in the ancient world in his work *The King and The Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Religion*. According to Widengren, *the king is not only the keeper of the tree and the possessor of the tree, he is the tree*. Widengren states: ‘It is above all necessary to stress that both Tree and Water of Life as symbols of the king are met in the same glorification of Messiah.’ Simo Parpola in his influential study *‘The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy’*, comes to a similar conclusion regarding this union between the tree and the king. He comments on the sacred tree reliefs at Nimrud: ‘Basically, it symbolised the divine world order maintained by the Assyrian king, but inversely it could also be projected upon the king to portray him as the Perfect Man.’⁸

L. Viewing the Tree of Life as a symbol in this instance is to see the Tree as *Jesus Himself*. Adam’s exile was an exile from the Paradise of God that was restored by Jesus. Sin and disobedience results in exile from His presence. The key is to *him who overcomes (faith in action)* which is contextually linked to being obedient to both the affirmations and rebukes He gives to the Churches. The verses above show from Adam’s exile from the Tree in Eden, the Paradise of God, to the restoration in the New Creation, the Tree

⁷ Rick Brannan et al., eds., *The Lexham English Septuagint* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), Is 65:17–23.

⁸ <https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.29355>; <https://tyndalebulletin.org/>; p. 173

is once again available to the overcomer in Christ, who is the Tree. The realization of eating the bread and drinking the wine is *in part* eating from the Tree of Life Himself. In the *already-but-not-yet*, we have access to Him and this experience *now* and will eat from the Tree in the New Jerusalem when He returns.

M. Aune agrees with Osborne's thought,

The tree of life is not simply a symbol for eternal life alone but also represents the cosmic center of reality where eternal life is present and available, and where God dwells. The cosmic tree or tree of life represents the sacrality of the world in terms of its creation, fertility, and continuation and, therefore, is a tree of immortality.⁹

⁵²*because it is for you that paradise is opened, the tree of life is planted, the age to come is prepared, plenty is provided, a city is built, rest is appointed, goodness is established and wisdom perfected beforehand.*¹⁰ (4 Ezra 8:52)

II. TO THE ANGEL IN THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

⁸ *"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. (Rev. 2:8 ESV)*

- A. Jesus introduces Himself to the Church in Smyrna as, "The First and the Last, who died and came to life." Recall from chapter one, Jesus is called the *Protos* and the *Eschatos*. He is the first in a series that comes after Him, and He completes or finishes the series. Here the last part of the identity, *who died and came to life*, points to what this series concerns: tribulation for the cause of Christ and the reality of martyrdom.
- B. Smyrna was approximately 40 miles north of Ephesus and was also a port city of 100,000 people. Smyrna began to outshine even in culture the great Roman centers Ephesus and Pergamum 65 km (40 mi) S and N of it. Already in 193 B.C. a temple was erected at Smyrna to "the deity Rome"... The temples of Zeus and Cybele were linked by a mall said to surpass all others of the ancient world... in A.D. 23, in consideration of Smyrna's long record of loyalty, it was the one chosen from the eleven cities contending for the privilege of building a temple to the emperor Augustus and his mother (Tacitus Ann iv.56; C. Cadoux, *Ancient Smyrna* [1938]).¹¹
- C. Like many of the Greek/Roman cities, Smyrna also had Temples to the Greek/Roman pantheon of deities, including here, a temple of worship to Caesar Augustus and his mother. It was a seed-bed of false gods and false-worship. We are unsure *who* founded the Church in Smyrna, but it was here Polycarp, the

⁹ Dr. David Aune. *Revelation 1-5*, Volume 52A (Kindle Locations 13425-13428). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

¹⁰ Robert Henry Charles, ed., [*Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*](#), vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 597–598.

¹¹ R. North, "Smyrna," ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 555.

Bishop of Smyrna, who was martyred by the Emperor Antoninus Pius in 155 A.D., some 60 years after John wrote Revelation.

“Polycarp, the venerable bishop of Smyrna, hearing that persons were seeking for him, escaped, but was discovered by a child. After feasting the guards who apprehended him, he desired an hour in prayer, which being allowed, he prayed with such fervency, that his guards repented that they had been instrumental in taking him. He was, however, carried before the proconsul, condemned, and burnt in the market-place. Twelve other Christians, who had been intimate with Polycarp, were soon after martyred.”¹²

To demonstrate what would unfold in these years after John’s exhortation, the Church came under major persecution for refusing to worship the Emperor and the false gods:

¹And with these and many other words [Polycarp] was filled with courage and joy, and his face was full of grace so that it not only did not fall with trouble at the things said to him, but that the Pro-Consul, on the other hand, was astounded and sent his herald into the midst of the arena to announce three times: “Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian.”... all the multitude of heathen and Jews living in Smyrna cried out with uncontrollable wrath and a loud shout: “This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our gods, who teaches many neither to offer sacrifice nor to worship.” And when they said this, they cried out and asked Philip the Asiarch to let loose a lion on Polycarp... ³ Then they found it good to cry out with one mind that he should burn Polycarp alive...¹³

- D. Jesus highlighted their persecution and resulting tribulation and poverty, **“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”** ¹⁰ **Do not fear what you are about to suffer... Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life...** **“The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.”** (Rev. 2:9-11 ESV)”

The Church in Smyrna encountered severe treatment by the Romans and the Jews that opposed them; in the same way Jesus encountered severe treatment by the Romans and the Jews that opposed Him. This gives us insight into why He says, “I am the Protos and the Eschatos, who died and came to life.” He was the First to be persecuted, and die the martyr’s death for His testimony of the Gospel of the Kingdom. He was also the First to be raised from the dead as the First Fruits of the Resurrection of those who are asleep. And He is the Last who will complete the Final Judgment on the Day of the LORD. We will see in Revelation 6 the Martyrs who cry from under the Throne, “How long before You will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

¹² John Foxe. Fox’s Book of Martyrs / Or A History of the Lives, Sufferings, and Triumphant / Deaths of the Primitive Protestant Martyrs (Kindle Locations 598-601). Kindle Edition.

¹³ Pope Clement I et al., The Apostolic Fathers, ed. Kirsopp Lake, vol. 2, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1912–1913), 327–329.

- E. Jesus says, “I know your tribulation.” The word *tribulation* is the Greek *thlipsis* and is the same used by Jesus in Matthew 24:9, 21, and 29 to describe what would happen to believers who would be persecuted *and* the period of time at the end of the age prior to His Return.

⁹Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. (Matt. 24:9 ESV)

²¹For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. (Matt. 24:21 ESV)

²⁹ “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matt. 24:20-31 ESV)

Most Preterists (those who believe Matthew 24 and Revelation were fulfilled in A.D. 70 or shortly thereafter) use Revelation 2:9 as a proof text. However, in context to A.D. 70, Revelation was written *after* the destruction of the Temple. What is *true* the believers in Smyrna were *in tribulation*. Viewing this verse through the *already-but-not-yet* we see *believers* have suffered, and were suffering in *thlipsis* for the name of Jesus. This points forward to the time of the end and *the tribulation* Jesus indicated in Matthew 24:21, and a Church on the earth during that time. Preterists contend it has already been fulfilled, Dispensational-Futurists believe the Church will be *raptured* beforehand. The truth is, tribulation and martyrdom of the Church has happened, is happening, and will happen until the return of Messiah. These *are* tribulation saints in the Church today.

⁹When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness (Gr. *martyria*) they had borne. ¹⁰ They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” ¹¹ Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. (Rev. 6:9-11 ESV)

²⁰...the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke arrogantly and that seemed greater than the others. ²¹ As I looked, that horn made war with the holy ones and was prevailing over them, ²² until the Ancient One came; then judgment was given for the holy ones of the Most High, and the time arrived (Gr. *kairos* LXX) when the holy ones (‘saints’ Gr. *hagios* LXX) gained possession of the kingdom. (Dan. 7:20b-22 NRSVue)

- F. “⁹...the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.” (Rev. 2:9 ESV)

David H. Stern points to an *obvious point* that John explicitly writes,

Virtually all the commentators ignore the obvious and straightforward interpretation that Yochanan is talking here about Gentiles who pretend to be Jews. The same kind of expression is used in v. 2: “... you tested those who call themselves emissaries but aren’t—and you found them to be liars.” It obviously refers to false apostles, and there the commentators accept the literal sense without demur. But here they opt for the metaphorical interpretation that Yochanan is talking about Jews who reject Yeshua as the Messiah instead of the literal understanding that these are non-Jews who lie and say they are Jews but in fact are Gentiles. In this way a verse which says nothing about Jews is given a virulently antisemitic significance. The result is that over the centuries Jews have had the epithet “synagogue of Satan” hurled at them by Christians who thought they understood the Bible. But nowhere in the New Testament are unbelieving Jews called non-Jews.¹⁴

- G. “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life...The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death. (Rev. 2:10-11 ESV)”

Just as He promised *the Tree of Life* to those who overcome and pursue the first love, so here Jesus promises *the Crown of Life* and will not be harmed by the second death. The Greek translated crown is *stephanos* meaning either a crown or wreath. It was used for Jesus’ *crown of thorns* as well as in James 1:12

¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12 ESV)

Aune writes,

The exalted Christ himself promises to bestow the wreath of life on faithful Christians (see Philo, Leg. All. 1.80, where God crowns the person who strives after virtue). The context makes it clear that the wreath is a metaphor for a posthumous reward. Even though such wreaths were never awarded posthumously either to victorious athletes or for military achievements, it appears that this must in fact be a victory wreath expressing the agon motif. The metaphor of the award of a posthumous wreath benefactor is reflected not only here in Rev 2:10 but also in Heb 2:9, where it is claimed that Jesus was crowned with glory and honor for the suffering of death, and in Mart. Pol. 17:1 where it is said that Polycarp the martyr “was wreathed with the wreath of immortality.” In Mart. Pol. 17:1, however, the presence of the term βραβεῖον, “reward, prize,” indicates that athletic imagery is in view.¹⁵

Given this reality of the athlete running the race both Paul and the write of Hebrews indicate what James wrote:

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. ²⁵ Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath (stephanos), but we an imperishable one. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air, ²⁷

¹⁴ David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary : A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament, electronic ed. (Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1996), Re 2:9.

¹⁵ Dr. David Aune. Revelation 1-5, Volume 52A (Kindle Locations 13936-13942). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified. (1 Cor. 9:24-27 NRSVue)

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1-2 NRSVue)

⁹but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (Heb. 2:9 NRSVue)

These verses indicate the truth concerning *eternal rewards* for faithfulness. That points to the *not-yet*. The only Person who can motivate us with this truth is God's Holy Indwelling Spirit. He is the only One who can connect *our future reward* with our *present race* and give us grace for self-control in all things, and power to *preserve* in the test and in the trial. Paul says for himself to win the prize, the *stephanos* that is imperishable, he *beats his body* (or disciplines it) and keeps it under control or the Greek *subjugate* it. In other words, make it mind by your *spirit* gaining control over it. Jesus gives examples of cutting off of the hand and plucking out the eye in order to dominate the lusts of the flesh (Matt. 5:29-30). In other words, keep your actions and your vision clean and cut out anything that would comprise them.

- H. What then is *the Crown of Life* that we would live in such a way? The Greek reads *ton stephanon tes zoes* with life being *zoe*. This word is associated both with *aionios* and *logos* from which *zoe* flows. "In Him was life (*zoe*), and the life (*zoe*) was the light of all people." The Word then is the source of life and the light it produces. Traditionally it has been defined as *life as God has it*.

[It] is used in the NT "of life as a principle, life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in Himself, and which He gave to the Incarnate Son to have in Himself, John 5:26, and which the Son manifested in the world, 1 John 1:2."¹⁶

²³ Jesus said to [Matha], "Your brother will rise (Gr. *anistemi*) again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise (Gr. *anistemi*) again in the resurrection (Gr. *anastasis*) on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am (ego eimi) the resurrection (Gr. *anastasis*) and the life (Gr. *zoe*). Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live (*zao; zestai*), ²⁶ and everyone who lives (*zao*) and believes (*pisteuo*; root *pisits* or faith) in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:23-26 NRSVue)¹⁷

¹⁶ W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1996), 367.

¹⁷ Genesis 2:6 LXX "God...blew into his face the breath of life (*zoe*), and the human came into being as a living (*zao*) soul (*psyche*)"; *zoe* then is the source of life for the *psyche* or soul.

²⁶ And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am (ego eimi)¹⁸ the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? ²⁷ He is not God of the dead, but of the living (zao). You are quite wrong." (Mark 12:26-27 ESV)

The resurrection of Lazarus was one of the final *signs* (*semaino*) Jesus performed before His Crucifixion and His *own* resurrection. These *signs* began at the Wedding at Cana of Galilee.

¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs (semaino), in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him. (John 2:11 NRSVue; c.f., Rev. 1:1, "He made it known (*semaino*)")

That Jesus *delayed His coming* to Bethany and knew Lazarus would *die*, but would raise him from the dead is in itself a sign. When viewed within the context of the already-but-not-yet it is clear in the *delay* of the coming of the Son of Man believers will die physically. But at His coming, He will raise them/us from the dead. Lazarus is proof, as is He Himself.

N.T. Write looks at the *already-but-not-yet* truth surrounding Lazarus' *resurrection* and the pointing forward to Jesus' own Resurrection, and at the end of the age, ours. He has in Himself the power to lay down His own life and to raise it, and all those who will follow Him.

The future resurrection is clearly affirmed; present, undying 'eternal life' is available, anticipating that resurrection, for all who believe. Those who believe are given a real, new identity in the present, a life which now will never die; in other words (drawing on the way John puts it elsewhere), the believer now possesses, already, a divinely given immortal life which will survive death and be re-embodied in the final resurrection. This is John's fullest answer to the set of questions we raised about first-century resurrection beliefs. Though it corresponds in several ways to what we have found in Paul and the synoptics, the way it is expressed remains peculiarly John's. Future resurrection is certain, but the way to it is spelled out more fully, and with different language. 'Resurrection' as a metaphor for something that takes place in the present has to do with the confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the one whom the true [G]od has sent, and with the possession already of the 'life of the age to come' of which that faith is the evidentiary badge. Jesus can thus be spoken of as being himself 'the resurrection', meaning both that through his present work people like Lazarus may be raised to resume normal bodily life, and that those who believe in him already have the life of the age to come, and also that through him, not least through his own forthcoming resurrection, 'the resurrection of the dead', in the sense described in chapter 5, will yet take place.¹⁹

The Crown of Life then is exactly this. It is the ultimate Crown for Believers. By His own death and resurrection, and ascension, he has *freed those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death* (Heb. 2:15). This is the promise for those experiencing the fiery trial and *tribulation* and suffering for the witness of Jesus Christ. The Church in Smyrna stands as the example and the reward. All of the martyrs are *alive*. All of the believers who have *fallen asleep* in Christ Jesus are *alive*. But it is not only for those

¹⁸ Mark only uses *ego* but the quote is from Exodus 3:6 for which the LXX uses *ego eimi*

¹⁹ N. T. Wright. *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Kindle Locations 10076-10086). Fortress Press. Kindle Edition.

who have appeared before Him after physical death. The Crow of Life is for *overcomers* now, in the present. James clearly states when we *endure temptation*, in other words, when we *overcome* or *conquer* temptation in the Grace of God and by the Power of His Spirit,

¹²...Such a one has **stood the test** and **will receive the crown of life** that the Lord has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12 NRSVue)

This reward is the pinnacle of rewards. It is the very life of the Logos and the light produced by that life. Those who stand the test experience the Life of God (and are *crowned*) in new and abundant ways as those who do not stand do not. Is it worth discipling the body and subjugating it to the Spirit/spirit? Abundantly, yes.

Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live (zao; zestai). He is not God of the dead, but of the living (zao).

Single Page on the Interaction of the Seven Angels and the Seven Churches

From G. K. Beale's Commentary on Revelation

1:20b

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μυστήριον follows in v 30. Brown sees a "connection" between Rev. 1:20a and Daniel 2 because of the similarity of usage, and Swete sees an explicit allusion to the "mystery" of Dan. 2:29 in v 20a, but neither sees an allusion to Dan. 2:28ff. in Rev. 1:19c.¹³² The margin of Kilpatrick's edition of the Greek NT is the only source indicating an allusion to Dan. 2:29ff. in both v 19c and v 20a. Since "mystery" occurs with an eschatological sense only in Daniel, the appearance of the word in such a context in Rev. 1:20 confirms its link to Daniel. Perhaps the syntactical awkwardness of beginning v 20 with "the mystery" without any transitional wording was designed to make it a clear part of the larger Daniel 2 allusion that concludes v 19. For the interpretative significance of "mystery" see "Summary of 1:12-20" below, as well as Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (ch. 3, section D), where uses of "mystery" in the OT, Judaism, and elsewhere in the NT are discussed in relation to the uses in Revelation.

20b The "lampstands" now are clearly explained to be the "churches." The reference to "angels" has been variously identified as (1) heavenly beings, (2) heavenly beings who are representatives of or guardians over the churches so that the churches are also in mind,¹³³ (3) human leaders or representatives of the churches,¹³⁴ (4) or personifications of the prevailing spirit or character of the churches.¹³⁵ The observation that ἄγγελος ("angel") refers without exception to heavenly beings in the visionary portion of Revelation (about 60 times) points to the same identification here. These angels could be identified with the seven archangels known to Jewish tradition (e.g., *1 En.* 20:1-8; *Tob.* 12:15), though this is far from certain.

The ἄγγελοι ("angels") in 1:20 include both heavenly beings and the earthly churches, according to the idea of corporate representation, which is suggested further by recognizing that angelic beings are corporately identified with Christians as their heavenly counterparts elsewhere in the book: the angel in 19:10 and 22:9 says, "I am a fellow servant of you and your brothers."¹³⁶ In addition, the angel in Rev. 8:3-4 seems to represent saints, since he receives their prayers and presents them before God.¹³⁷ Consequently, the "angels" in 1:20b refer to heavenly beings who also represent the church (see below for further analysis in favor of this conclusion).

Why are the churches addressed through their angelic representatives in the letters, especially since it does not seem logical to blame and reproach angels for the sins of the churches? The initial answer to this is that inherent to the concept of corporate representation is the representative's accountability for the group and the group's accountability for the actions of the representative. So there is *some* sense in which the angels are *accountable* (e.g., *responsibility* of oversight) for the churches, yet the churches also benefit from the position of the angels.

132. Brown, "Mystery," 36. Swete, *Apocalypse*, cxxxvii.

133. E.g., Holtz, *Christologie*, 16; A. F. Johnson, "Revelation," 430.

134. E.g., Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 69; alternatively human messengers who represent the churches and deliver Christ's message to each church; so Thomas, *Revelation*, 118-19.

135. E.g., I. T. Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 445-46.

136. Noted by Kroll, *Revelation*, 102, but not seen by him as relevant to the "angels" of chs. 1-3.

137. Similarly Mulholland, *Revelation*, 93.

²⁰ Beale, G. K. *The Book of Revelation*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013; p. 217