

THE BELIEVERS' REIGNING IN THE KINGDOM AS UNVEILED IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

by David Yoon

The kingdom of God occupies a crucial place in the ministry of the Lord Jesus and that of the apostles in the New Testament. At the beginning of His public ministry, the Lord Jesus rejected the devil's offer of all the kingdoms of the inhabited earth and proclaimed the gospel of God by declaring that the kingdom of God had drawn near (Matt. 4:8-10; Mark 1:14-15). Throughout His earthly ministry, He repeatedly highlighted the central significance of the kingdom of God as the goal of His mission and that of the disciples' prayer and work. He declared that He was sent by God to "announce the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Luke 4:43); He gave His disciples power and authority over all the demons and sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God (9:1-2); and He taught the disciples to pray for the coming of the kingdom (11:2). During His last week in the days of His flesh, the Lord underscored the spreading of the gospel of the kingdom in the whole inhabited earth as a sign of the consummation of this age, that is, as a prerequisite to the termination of the present age (Matt. 24:14). The book of Acts opens by stating that between His resurrection and His public ascension, the Lord appeared to the disciples through a period of forty days and spoke to them concerning the kingdom of God (1:3), and this book concludes by declaring that the apostle Paul proclaimed the kingdom of God "with all boldness, unhindered" (28:31). Moreover, according to Acts 20, Paul, in declaring the full counsel of God to the believers (v. 27), not only testified the gospel of the grace of God (v. 24) but also proclaimed the kingdom of God to them (v. 25), indicating that, for the apostle, the full counsel of God encompasses both the grace of God and the kingdom of God. In accordance with the book of Acts' revelation of the kingdom of God as the main subject of the apostles' preaching, the authors of the Epistles of the New Testament wrote concerning the kingdom, speaking of it as the great end of the Christian life and work (2 Tim. 4:18; 2 Pet. 1:11; James 2:5;

Rev. 5:10). In brief, the kingdom of God was the focus and aim of the ministry of both the Lord Jesus and the apostles.

Given its prominent place in the New Testament, the kingdom of God has generated a vast body of literature over the centuries. However, the kingdom of God has remained a subject of extensive debate and little agreement. Perhaps most believers agree on a basic understanding of the kingdom of God—that the kingdom of God is a sphere of God's reign, that is, the realm wherein God rules according to His sovereignty and omnipotence (11:15). Although this notion of the kingdom of God certainly accords with the biblical data, it falls short of recognizing the central core of the revelation of the kingdom of God in the New Testament—that the kingdom of God is a realm in which God manifests His glory and exercises His authority through a corporate man possessing His life and nature.

Since this view of the kingdom of God is more intrinsic, it is missed by the vast majority of believers. Many appreciate the host of verses in the Scriptures that testify of God as the eternal King with supreme authority over the universe (Jer. 10:10; Rev. 19:6; 2 Chron. 20:6; Psa. 22:28; 103:19). Yet few treasure the verses in the New Testament that speak of the believers themselves as the kingdom in their reigning with Christ (Rev. 1:6; Rom. 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:12). For instance, believers joyfully proclaim the Lord's eternal reign by singing the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's *Messiah*, which quotes Revelation 11:15: "He will reign forever and ever." However, how many believers have lifted their voices in delightful praise of the Lord concerning their destiny to reign in eternity as stated in 22:5: "They will reign forever and ever"? And even fewer are those who have carefully reflected on the qualification for this eternal reign: participation in the life of God to be His

corporate expression and representation. A believer who sees this revelation will not only worship God as the King sitting on the throne but also seek to be among those who sit on the thrones spoken of in Revelation 20:4 to reign with Christ in the divine life over all things.

Image, Dominion, and Life

God's Original Intention for Man

God's intention to establish His kingdom on earth as a realm wherein He is expressed and represented through a corporate man is revealed in His speaking concerning the creation of humankind in Genesis 1:26: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of heaven and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." Just as the expression *let Us* implies the trinity of the Godhead, so also the expression *let them* implies a collective man. The Triune God's speaking in this verse is a proclamation in time of His eternal purpose to gain a corporate man who bears His image and exercises His dominion. Image refers to God's expression through the manifestation of His being in His attributes, and dominion refers to God's representation through the exercise of His authority. The fact that image is related to glory—God expressed in splendor—is indicated by Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 11:7 that man is "God's image and glory." As Jehovah proclaimed in Isaiah 43:7, humankind was "created, formed, and even made for [His] glory." We were created by God in His image in order to express Him in His glory. Similarly, Psalm 145:13 clearly shows that dominion is closely associated with God's kingdom: "Your kingdom is an eternal kingdom / And Your dominion is throughout all generations." This thought is further corroborated by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar's testimony in Daniel 4:34 concerning God: "His dominion is an eternal dominion, / And His kingdom is from generation to generation." We were made by God not only to shine forth His glory but also to represent Him by exercising His dominion in order to bring His kingdom to the earth. Hence, the kingdom of God involves the manifestation of God's image and the representation of His dominion through humankind.

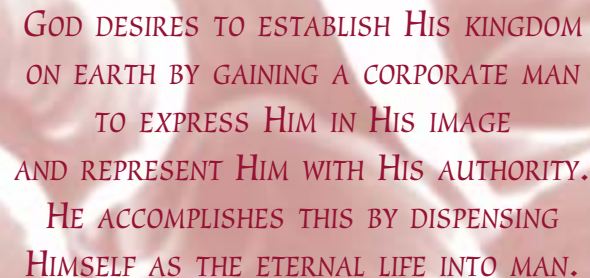
Image and dominion are vitally and intrinsically related.

Image is the source and basis of dominion, and dominion is the issue and validation of image. On the one hand, where God's image shines, His dominion prevails (cf. Ezek. 39:21). This is because God rules mainly by shining, and His shining is His reigning in His kingdom (Matt. 16:28—17:2; Luke 9:27-32). On the other hand, where God's authority is exercised, His glory is expressed (cf. Matt 6:13; Rev. 18:1). This is because the glorification of God in His image is dependent upon the application of His authority; apart from the unchallenged reign of God, there cannot be the unhindered manifestation of His glory.

According to Genesis 1:26, God gave man dominion over all the earth. In verse 28 God went on to commission man to subdue the earth. This implies that God's intention was for man to conquer and recover the Satan-*usurped earth and bring it under His rule. God's granting man dominion over every creeping thing in particular indicates that man is to exercise dominion over "Satan, the serpent (3:1, 14; Rev. 12:9), and his angels (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:4a, 7b), as well as the demons who follow Satan (cf. Luke 10:19)" (Recovery Version, Gen. 1:26, note 6). Rather than lowering Himself from the status of Creator to deal with a rebellious creature directly, God needs man as an obedient creature*

to deal with the rebellious creature Satan. Hence, man's commission to subdue the earth is a commission to rule over and subdue Satan and those who followed him in his rebellion against God.

God desires to establish His kingdom on earth by gaining a corporate man to express Him in His image and represent Him with His authority. He accomplishes this by dispensing Himself as the eternal life into man. For this reason, after creating man in His image and giving them dominion, God placed man before the tree of life, which is "good for food" (2:9). The tree of life symbolizes an organic reality—God in Christ as the Spirit of life made available to man in the form of food (cf. John 15:1; 14:6; Rom. 8:2). The edible fruit of the tree of life speaks of God's intention that man partake of the eternal life and divine nature of the Triune God (John 6:35, 57; 2 Pet. 1:4). The operation of the divine life in the believers not only conforms them to the image of Christ, who is the expression of God (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 4:4), but also energizes them to reign through Jesus Christ over all things created by God (Rom. 5:17). It is by receiving the impartation of the life of God that



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humankind can reach the goal of its creation to be God's expression and representation. Our participation in the kingdom of God may thus be encapsulated in three words: *image*, *dominion*, and *life*. The fulfillment of God's eternal purpose to bring His kingdom to the earth is predicated upon humanity partaking of the divine life for the expression of God's image and the exercise of His dominion.

Man's Ordination Lost through the Fall

Through the fall, however, man not only fell into sin and came under the condemnation of God but also fell short of his purpose in creation to bear God's image and represent Him with His authority (vv. 12, 16). The fall of humanity into sin is related to both God's glory and authority. In the sight of God, to sin is to fall short of the glory of God (3:23). Thus, fallen humanity expresses its sinful self instead of expressing God's glory. To sin is also to practice lawlessness (1 John 3:4), that is, to "live a life outside of and not under the principle of God's ruling over man" (Recovery Version, note 2). Although man was created in God's image for His expression in glory and was given dominion to rule with His authority, fallen man insults the God of glory and rejects the divine government. Moreover, man was barred from the tree of life and thereby estranged from the life of God, the only means by which he could express and represent God to bring His kingdom to the earth (Gen. 3:24).

God's Intention for Man Remaining Unchanged

Although the fall postponed the realization of God's intention for humanity, Psalm 8 reaffirms God's resolve to establish His kingdom on the earth by recovering humanity back to His original purpose. This psalm unveils that despite the ravages of the fall, God's intention for humanity remains firm and unchanged. Here David sings of God's counsel to crown the son of man with glory and honor (vv. 4-5), set him over the works of His hands, and put all things under his feet (v. 6) so that His name may be excellent in all the earth (v. 9). In other words, the psalmist prophesies of man's destiny to manifest God's glory and to rule over all the created things in order that the name of Jehovah might be glorified in all the earth as it is in the heavens. As we will see, this prophecy was initially fulfilled in Christ as the Son of Man and will be ultimately fulfilled in Him and His overcoming believers as the reality of His Body in the coming age of the millennium.

The divine intention revealed in Psalm 8 to bring the kingdom to the earth through humankind is echoed by the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. Here the Lord's prayer, which is focused on the coming of God's kingdom, expresses the desire of God's heart to have His kingdom as a sphere in which He is properly expressed and represented through human beings who participate in His life.

Verses 9 and 10 say, "Our Father who is in the heavens, Your name be sanctified; Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth." These verses indicate that the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth is related to His name and His will. For God's name to be sanctified on earth is "a matter of God's being glorified," and for His will to be done on earth as in heaven is "a matter of the exercise of His authority" (Lee, *Kingdom* 39-40). In other words, in order for the kingdom of God to be established on earth, His image must be expressed through the sanctification of His name, and His dominion must be exercised through the execution of His will on earth. This thought is confirmed by the concluding utterance of the Lord's prayer in verse 13: "Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." Here we should note that power is mentioned separately from glory. The kingdom of God is the realization of His image in glory, and it is the realization of His dominion in power. Hence, the kingdom is "the realm in which God exercises His power so that He can express His glory" (Recovery Version, v. 13, note 4). Moreover, we need to notice that the Lord's prayer begins with the expression *our Father*, not *our God*. *Our God* would emphasize our status as God's creatures, whereas *our Father* emphasizes our status as God's children. In the midst of giving His disciples an example of prayer, the Lord revealed that the believers who must pray and live for the coming of the kingdom of God are the children of the heavenly Father who have His life and nature. Only those who possess and partake of God's eternal life and divine nature can cooperate with Him to bring His kingdom to earth by manifesting His glory and executing His authority.

Christ as the Kingdom of God

The Lord's prayer for the coming of God's kingdom was fulfilled first in the Lord Himself as the God-man, for in His living and work the name of God was absolutely sanctified and His will was fully accomplished. The Lord Jesus is God incarnate, God who became man and dwelt among us (John 1:14). He is both the complete God and the perfect man; He is not only the Son of God, possessing the divine essence with the divine nature, but also the Son of Man, possessing the human essence with the human nature. As the Son of God, He embodies life and is even life itself (1 John 5:12) because, as the Gospel of John records, life is in the Son of God (1:4) and is the Son (14:6). As the Son of Man, He is a genuine man and the perfect representative of humankind because in His human living He lived by the divine life within Him for God's expression and Satan's defeat. On the one hand, the Lord Jesus glorified the Father, expressing the attributes of the Father in His human virtues and thereby manifesting what God is to humankind. He declared the Father and was the manifestation of God in the flesh (1:18; 1 Tim. 3:16). On the other hand, the Lord Jesus was a man under the authority of God who did the will of God and was obedient to

Him, even unto death (Matt. 8:9-10; 26:39; Phil. 2:8). Because the Lord was a man under God's rule (Matt. 8:9), He was approved by God to exercise His rule over all His enemies (John 5:27). Although the Lord was continually opposed by the authority of darkness (Luke 22:53), He withstood the devil's temptations (Matt. 4:3-10), destroyed his works (1 John 3:8), bound him, the strong man, entered into his house (Satan's kingdom), and plundered his goods (the fallen people under Satan) to transfer them into the kingdom of God (Matt. 12:29). The Lord also cast out the demons by the Spirit of God in order to bring in the kingdom of God (v. 28). Because the Lord was a man possessing God's life, bearing His image, and executing His authority, the Lord told the Pharisees that the kingdom of God was in their midst (Luke 17:21). The kingdom of God was in their midst because Jesus was in their midst. Hence, the kingdom of God is nothing less than the Lord Jesus Himself, a living person. The Lord Jesus was the first fulfillment of God's eternal purpose to establish His kingdom on earth as a realm of the divine life, glory, and ruling.

Entering into Glory and Being Seated on the Throne

Hebrews 2 reveals that after Christ suffered death on the cross, resurrected from the dead, and ascended to the heavens, God crowned Him with "glory and honor" and set Him over the works of His hands, thereby entrusting Him with the divine dominion over all things (vv. 7-9). The glory and honor here correspond to the image and dominion that appear in Genesis 1:26. Glory refers to Christ's expression of God in His image, whereas honor refers to Christ's attainment of the highest position in the universe, that is, His being seated "on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb. 8:1). Hence, the man Jesus bears the crown of God's glory and honor, expressing God in splendor and sitting on the throne of God (Rev. 3:21; Acts 7:55). "Glory is the splendor related to Jesus' person; honor is the preciousness related to Jesus' worth, value, and dignity, which is related to His position (2 Pet. 1:17; cf. 1 Pet. 2:17; Rom. 13:7)" (Recovery Version, Heb. 2:9, note 2). Paul E. Billheimer exclaims that "today an authentic human being sits on the throne of the universe, wielding all the authority of the Godhead" (88). Because the Lord of all is not only Jehovah Elohim but also Jesus the Nazarene, we must bow the knee and worship a man, confessing with our mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11; Rom. 10:9).

Opening the Way for the Believers to Enter into Glory and Sit on the Throne

Christ our Forerunner pioneered the way to glory and to the throne, thereby opening the way for us to also enter into glory and to sit on the throne (Heb. 2:10; 6:20; Rev. 3:21). By entering into the glory of God and being invested with the lordship over the universe as a man, Christ introduced humankind into a participation in the divine glory and administration. The glad tidings to humankind is that there is a man in the glory and on the throne, and that "God intends to bring us into glory and to set us on the throne" (Lee, *Ezekiel* 129). Christ as the glorified and enthroned God-man testifies of God's desire to manifest Himself and administrate the universe through man. In order to bring us into glory and set us on the throne, God must reproduce Christ within us by making us the same as He is in life and nature, though not in the God-head or as an object of worship.

To this end, God intends to conform us, the many sons of God, to the image of Christ, the firstborn Son of God, by gradually dispensing the divine life into our entire being (Rom. 8:29) so that Christ as the prototype may be duplicated in us. It is through this

organic process of conformation that we as the Body of Christ may become the enlargement and expansion of Christ as the kingdom of God—the corporate expression and representation of God.

The book of Revelation contains a remarkable vision of God's intention to reproduce Christ in the believers to make them His kingdom so that they may corporately express God's glory and execute His authority. Revelation reveals not only Christ as the center of God's universal administration according to His eternal economy but also the believers as the means by which Christ carries out the divine administration. On the one hand, it unveils that the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Christ has ascended into the heavens to become the worthy and enthroned Lion-Lamb as the heavenly Administrator in God's government, opening the scroll of God's economy and ruling the universe through the operation of the seven Spirits of God (1:5; 4:5; 5:5-8). On the other hand, this book unveils that the overcoming believers reign in the divine life to cooperate with Christ in executing the divine administration (2:26-27; 3:21).

THE LORD'S PRAYER FOR THE COMING OF GOD'S KINGDOM WAS FULFILLED FIRST IN THE LORD HIMSELF AS THE GOD-MAN, FOR IN HIS LIVING AND WORK THE NAME OF GOD WAS ABSOLUTELY SANCTIFIED AND HIS WILL WAS FULLY ACCOMPLISHED.

According to Revelation, the believers may partake of the divine life to become the duplication of the overcoming Christ so that they may reign in the kingdom of God in three stages: the present age, the coming age of the millennium, and the eternal age. This thought can be seen in three places—1:6; 20:6; and 22:3-5—which speak respectively of the believers’ priesthood and kingship in this age, in the next age, and in eternity future. Priests are for the expression of God’s image,¹ whereas kings are for the exercise of His dominion. “This kingly priesthood is being exercised in today’s church life (5:10),” and “it will be practiced intensively in the millennial kingdom (20:6) and will be ultimately consummated in the New Jerusalem (22:3, 5)” (Recovery Version, 1:6, note 2). Revelation unveils that the believers may reign in the church as the reality of the kingdom of God in the present age, that the overcoming believers will usher in and then reign in the manifestation of the kingdom of God in the coming millennial age, and that all the believers will reign in the new heaven and new earth, with the New Jerusalem as the kingdom of God, in eternity future.

The Believers’ Reigning in the Reality of the Kingdom of God in the Present Age

The Kingdom of God as a Present Reality

Two verses in the book of Revelation indicate that Christ shed His redeeming blood in order to make His believers a kingdom. In 1:5-6 the apostle John proclaims that Jesus Christ, the Ruler of the kings of the earth, “loves us and has released us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be the glory and the might forever and ever.”² Similarly, in 5:9-10 the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sing a new song to the Lamb: “You were slain and have purchased for God by Your blood men out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made them a kingdom and priests to our God.” Contrary to a commonly held notion that the purpose of Christ’s redemptive death is merely to rescue us from the condemnation of God, these verses reveal that the primary goal of Christ’s redemption is to make us the kingdom of God.

Moreover, the expression *made us a kingdom* in 1:6 and the expression *have made them a kingdom* in 5:10 indicate that the kingdom of God is an existing, present reality, contrary to some dispensationalists’ assertion that the kingdom has been suspended during the present age of the church. Reinforced by 1 Peter 2:9, which unequivocally states, “You *are*... a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (emphasis added), these verses leave no room for doubt concerning the believers’ present status as kingly priests and as a nation, a kingdom. Peter’s use of the present tense demonstrates that the believers are kingly priests and God’s holy nation, His kingdom, in the present age. The

assertion that the kingdom has been “suspended” until the second coming of Christ deprives the believers of their participation in the priesthood and kingship today, a divine birthright bestowed upon all the children of God.

In Revelation 1:9 the apostle John depicts the kingdom of God as a present reality: “I John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” While the apostle Paul considered himself and his co-laborers as “fellow workers for the kingdom of God” (Col. 4:11), John describes himself and his brothers in the Lord as fellow *partakers* in the kingdom. Inasmuch as he viewed himself as partaking of “tribulation” and “endurance” (by being exiled to Patmos), John equally viewed himself as partaking of the kingdom there and then. Thus, John realized that he and his fellow brothers were already partakers of the kingdom.

This thought is echoed by C. A. Coates, who, in commenting on Revelation 1:9, underscores a vital link between the kingdom and tribulation and endurance:

The kingdom is marked at the present time by tribulation and the exercise of patience. Those who will live godly in Christ Jesus suffer persecution. By-and-by we shall serve God in a scene of glory, but now we are called to serve Him in tribulation and patience. We cannot expect to avoid suffering if we realise that the whole tide of things here is opposed to the character and rule of the kingdom in which we are partakers. (9)

Marvin R. Vincent also interprets the kingdom in verse 9 as “the present kingdom”:

Trench is wrong in saying that “while the tribulation is present the kingdom is only in hope.” On the contrary, it is the assurance of being *now* within the kingdom of Christ—under Christ’s sovereignty, fighting the good fight under His leadership—which gives hope and courage and patience. The kingdom of God is a *present* energy, and it is a peculiarity of John to treat the eternal life as already present. See John iii. 36; v. 24; vi. 47, 54; 1 John v. 11. (420)

The kingdom of God, in its present reality, is the genuine and proper church, where the believers live a corporate life for the expression of God’s image and the exercise of His authority by their participation in the divine life. Witness Lee describes it as follows: “The church produced by Christ’s propagation and multiplication is the sphere in which God is expressed and in which He reigns in Christ; hence, the church becomes the kingdom of God” (Recovery Version, Acts 28:31, note 2). Henry Alford agrees, saying,

The Church even now, in Christ her Head, reigns on the earth: all things are being put under her feet, as under His: and even if this meaning be questioned, we have her kingly rank and office asserted in the present, even in the midst of persecution and contempt. (1827)

Entering into the Kingdom of God through Regeneration

The kingdom of God being a present reality can also be found in the Gospel of John. In 3:3 and 5 the Lord speaks of regeneration as an indispensable requirement for entering into the kingdom of God: "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God...Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The kingdom of which the apostle John partook in Revelation 1:9 is the kingdom of God into which all the believers are reborn. In order to be partakers in the kingdom, we first need to be born into the kingdom. Just as our human generation began with a human birth, so also our divine regeneration begins with a divine birth: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). Regeneration is an organic process in which we are born of the divine Spirit, the Spirit of life, in our human spirit by receiving God's eternal life in addition to our natural life (cf. Rom. 8:2, 11; John 3:14-16). To be regenerated is not simply to be adopted by God to become His children judicially or forensically. To be regenerated is to be reborn intrinsically, that is, to be begotten of God to become His children genuinely and organically, possessing His life and nature (1:12-13; 1 John 3:9; 5:11; 2 Pet. 1:4). Regeneration is an organic entrance into the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine life, the realm of the divine species.³ Through our first birth we have entered into the kingdom of man as the realm of the human species and have become a part of the human kingdom. In like manner, through our regeneration, our second birth, we have entered into the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine species and have become a part of the divine kingdom.

Living in the Kingdom of God by Remaining in Our Spirit

Having been born into the kingdom of God, we should remain in it and partake of it by living in our spirit. After the apostle John declared that he was a partaker *in the*

kingdom (Rev. 1:9), he proclaimed that he was *in spirit* (v. 10). According to 4:2, when John was "in spirit," he beheld a throne set in heaven and the administering God sitting on the throne, the center of God's administration in His kingdom. Hence, if we would participate in the kingdom of God, see the vision of the throne of God, and submit to His throne, we need to be in our spirit. The word *spirit* in 1:10 and 4:2 refers to the regenerated spirit of man enlivened and indwelt by the Spirit of God (John 3:6). The believers are born of the Spirit in their spirit and are thereby joined to the Lord as one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). Our regenerated spirit is the dwelling place for the Triune God and the locus of our life union with the Lord. Today the Lord is not on the cross or in the tomb but on the throne. The Lord who, as the life-giving Spirit, came into our spirit through regeneration is the King with the kingdom (15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17; Luke 17:21). Thus, "to say that the Lord is with our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22) actually means that the king-

dom of God is with our regenerated spirit" (Kangas 58). In order to live in the kingdom of God in its actuality, we need to remain in and walk according to our regenerated spirit (Rom. 8:4). Witness Lee recognizes this fact:

Although the church today is God's kingdom, we are in the kingdom in reality only when we live and walk

in spirit. Whenever we behave according to the old man or live in the flesh or the self, we, in a practical way, are out of God's kingdom. This means that when we are in the flesh, we are in the old realm of the fallen human nature, which has been fully usurped by Satan to form his kingdom. Therefore, a genuine Christian, if he lives in the flesh instead of in the spirit, may live in a practical way not in the kingdom of God but in the kingdom of Satan. Only when we live, walk, behave, and have our being altogether in our spirit, not in our natural man, are we in the kingdom of God and, in reality, are the kingdom of God. (Conclusion 2236).

Our regenerated spirit is indwelt by the Spirit of life, possesses life, and is even life itself (Rom. 8:10). We need to live in our spirit in order to live by the divine life and allow this life to reign in us and to grow in us.

The Overcomers Being the Reproduction of the Overcoming Christ

Although all the genuine believers in Christ have been

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born into the kingdom of God through regeneration, not all of them reign in the kingdom of God, by walking according to their spirit and living by the life of God. The New Testament bears witness that by the end of the period of the ministry of the first apostles, the church had suffered a thorough decline (2 Tim. 1:15; 4:14-17; 2 John 9-11; 3 John 3-10; Jude 11-13). By the time Revelation was written, the degradation of the church had become so intolerable to the Lord that He appeared to the apostle John in order to sound out a call for overcomers to conquer the darkened and degraded situation of the church and build up the Body of Christ as His corporate expression (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). The overcomers are not super Christians but normal Christians in the midst of the abnormal situation of the degraded church.⁴ As such, the overcomers, as representatives of the church, live in the practicality of the kingdom of God and even are the reality of the kingdom of God in the present age.

Revelation unveils that the overcomers are the reproduction of Christ, the prototypical Overcomer.⁵ Christ is “the Pioneer of all the overcomers” (Lee, *Revelation* 449). Revelation 5:5 introduces the ascended Christ as the Overcomer: “Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome.” As the Lion of the tribe of Judah, Christ is the first Overcomer who defeated and subdued God’s enemies (1 Pet. 5:8). In Luke 11:21-22 Christ declared that He, as “one stronger than” Satan, “the strong man,” overcame him, took away his whole armor, and distributed his spoil. In the Gospel of John, Christ testified of His victory over Satan and the world in His human living: “The ruler of the world is coming, and in Me he has nothing” (14:30); “Take courage; I have overcome the world” (16:33). The overcoming Christ desires to duplicate Himself in the believers, thereby making them overcomers in Him. This desire is implied in Christ’s words in Revelation 3:21: “He who overcomes, to him I will give to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne.” As G. H. Lang notes, the words *as I also overcame* “firmly establish the parallel between Christ and His people” (*Firstborn* 70). The believers’ overcoming is based upon and patterned after Christ’s overcoming. It is possible for the believers to overcome, because Christ, the One who has overcome, is in them, desiring to make them the same as He is in life and nature but not in the Godhead. In this sense, the overcoming believers are the enlargement, expansion, and extension of the overcoming Christ.

This thought is woven into the book of Revelation. Jesus Christ is identified as “the faithful Witness” in 1:5 and as “the faithful and true Witness” in 3:14. In 2:13 the Lord speaks of an overcoming believer, Antipas, as His “witness,” His “faithful one.” Just as the Lord is the faithful Witness of God, bearing the testimony of God for the proper expression of God, so also Antipas was the faithful

witness of the Lord, bearing the testimony of Jesus for the proper expression of the Lord. This suggests that the overcoming believers as the faithful witnesses of Christ are the continuation and reproduction of Christ as the faithful Witness of God in order to be the enlarged expression of God in Christ. Further, in 19:11 the Lord on a white horse is called “Faithful,” and in 17:14 the overcoming believers who are with Him also bear the description of being “faithful.” This indicates that Christ, the faithful One, has been thoroughly wrought into these believers to make them faithful. Perhaps the Lord’s intention to duplicate Himself within the believers is most clearly seen by the Lord’s declaration that He will write His new name upon the overcomers (3:12). Concerning this, Witness Lee writes:

The Lord promises to write upon the overcomer His new name. This new name will be according to our experiences...We experience the Lord in an intimate and personal way, and that becomes us. Therefore, the Lord will rightly designate us, writing upon us His new name. This will indicate that we have become a person who has experienced the Lord Himself as the One who makes Himself us.

The name which is upon the overcomers indicates that this is what they are. To have the new name of the Lord Jesus means that they are Jesus, because they have His new name written upon them. Of course, their being Jesus is in life and in nature but not in the Godhead.

The name of the Lord denotes the Lord Himself. That the name of the Lord is written upon the overcomer indicates that the person of the Lord has been wrought into the overcomer. (*Conclusion* 4204-4205)

John also describes the overcomers who constitute the firstfruits as those who have the Lord’s name written on their foreheads (14:1). As those who have the name of the Lamb written on their foreheads, these overcomers are fully saturated with Christ in their inward parts and are mature in the divine life (cf. Phil. 1:8). As such, these overcomers are the reproduction of the resurrected Christ, who Himself is the firstfruits of resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20). In Revelation 5:6 a Lamb stands alone in the midst of the throne in heaven, but in 14:1 the Lamb stands with a hundred and forty-four thousand overcoming believers who are His duplication. Just as Christ the Lamb is without blemish (1 Pet. 1:19), these overcomers are without blemish (Rev. 14:5; cf. 2 Pet. 3:14; Eph. 5:27; 1 Thes. 5:23). Just as no guile was found in Christ’s mouth (1 Pet. 2:22), in the overcomers’ mouth no lie was found (Rev. 14:5). Just as Christ ascended to the Father on the day of His resurrection for the Father’s pleasure and enjoyment (John 20:17), the overcomers who are the firstfruits to God and to the Lamb will be raptured to the heavenly Mount Zion for God’s delight and satisfaction (Rev. 14:1, 4).

The Overcomers Receiving the Dispensing of the Triune God as Life into Them

The overcomers become the duplication of Christ not by self-improvement or self-cultivation but by receiving the dispensing of the Triune God as life into them. In practice, this requires that the overcomers experience the seven Spirits of God. The Spirit in Revelation is the seven Spirits, that is, the sevenfold intensified Spirit. "In essence and existence, God's Spirit is one; in the intensified function and work of God's operation, God's Spirit is sevenfold" (Recovery Version, 1:4, note 5). Certainly the Spirit is always one (Eph. 4:4); hence, seven here should refer not to multiplicity but to intensity. The seven Spirits should be understood as a designation of the intensification of the Spirit in His function to accomplish the divine economy. In other words, although in God's existence the Spirit of God is eternally and uniquely one, in God's economy the one unique Spirit of God has been intensified sevenfold to carry out His function in raising up overcomers amidst the degradation of the church and in producing the church as the testimony of Jesus. Because the Spirit is both the Spirit of life and the Spirit of grace (Rom. 8:2; Heb. 10:29), the seven Spirits of God—the Spirit of life and of grace intensified—dispense a sevenfold supply of life and grace to the believers in order to produce them as overcomers.

The seven Spirits of God also speak to the churches in order to dispense God as life into the believers (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). This impartation of the divine life depends on their hearing, as suggested by the Lord's word in John 5:24-25: "He who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life...An hour is coming, and it is now, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." This corresponds to Galatians 3, where Paul says that it is "out of the hearing of faith" that God "bountifully supplies" the Spirit of life to us and that we receive the Spirit (vv. 2, 5; cf. Rom. 8:2). By exercising their regenerated human spirit, the spirit of faith (2 Cor. 4:13), overcomers hear the Spirit's speaking and thus receive the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19).

Further, according to Revelation 5:6, the seven Spirits of God are the seven eyes of the Lamb. Just as a person and his eyes are one, so also Christ and His eyes are one.

Christ's eyes refer to the Spirit. A person's eyes are also the expression of his inner being (cf. Psa. 32:8); hence, when a person looks at another person, he transmits his feeling into that person (cf. S. S. 4:9; 6:5). Similarly, the sevenfold intensified Spirit as the seven eyes of Christ expresses and bears Him to us; hence, when Christ looks at us, His seven eyes transmit what He is into us in order to transform us into His glorious image (cf. 2 Cor. 2:10; 3:18). Therefore, the seven Spirits of God as the seven eyes of the Lamb not only observe and search us (Rev. 2:23) but, more significantly, transfuse and infuse the element of Christ into us in order to make us the same as He is in life and nature but not in the Godhead. Immediately before speaking of the seven Spirits of God as the seven eyes of the Lamb in 5:6, John records Christ's introduction as the Lion of the tribe of Judah who has overcome (v. 5). Christ as the victorious Lion-Lamb desires to reproduce Himself as the Overcomer within us by gazing at us with His seven eyes, that is, by transmitting His being into us through the sevenfold intensified Spirit.

IN GOD'S ECONOMY THE ONE UNIQUE
SPIRIT OF GOD HAS BEEN INTENSIFIED
SEVENFOLD TO CARRY OUT HIS FUNCTION
IN RAISING UP OVERCOMERS AMIDST THE
DEGRADATION OF THE CHURCH
AND IN PRODUCING THE CHURCH
AS THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS.

The overcomers also receive the impartation of the Triune God as life into them by eating Christ as their food. At the end of two of the seven epistles in Revelation 2 and 3, Christ promises to those who overcome the degradation of the churches that they will partake

of Him as the life supply in a particular way. To the overcomers in the church in Ephesus, He promises to give to eat of the tree of life (2:7). In the Gospel of John, Christ declared that He is life (14:6) and that He is the true vine (15:1), and He stated that those who eat Him will live because of Him (6:57). Thus, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer posits, the tree of life as a type is none other than "the life-giving Lord himself" (57); it refers to Christ, the embodiment of the life of God, whom we need to eat as food for our spiritual nourishment in order to live by Him. To the overcomers in the church in Pergamos, Christ promises to give them to eat of the hidden manna (Rev. 2:17). In John 6, when the Jews told Christ that their fathers ate the manna in the wilderness as "bread out of heaven" (v. 31), Christ unveiled Himself as the reality of the manna by speaking of Himself as the true bread, the bread of God, the bread of life, and the living bread, which came down out of heaven to give eternal life to the world (vv. 32, 33, 35, 51). The word *hidden* in Revelation 2:17 recalls Colossians 3:3-4, which speaks of our spiritual life as being hidden with Christ, who is our life, in God, suggesting a

mysterious and personal dimension of our experience of Christ as our life. This means that eating the hidden manna involves a highly secret and deeply personal aspect of our enjoyment of Christ as our life supply. Therefore, the hidden manna is a type of Christ as the heavenly food that supplies us with eternal life through our most intimate and closest fellowship with Him.

The use of these two types in Christ's promises to the Overcomers unveils that the unique prescription for overcoming is the enjoyment of Christ as spiritual food. Robert Govett points out that the reward the Lord promises to the overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3 may be enjoyed in the present age as an antidote to various aspects of the decline of the church: "We may regard the promises to the conquerors in each church as a divine counterpoise to the temptations locally besetting them" (*Revelation* 169). In a similar vein, while C. A. Coates acknowledges that to eat of the tree of life is "the prize of the overcomer," he underscores that although "this rich reward has its full outlook in the future it brings some of its blessedness, even in the promise which sets it before us, into the present experience and joy of the overcomer" (25). In other words, the enjoyment of Christ as the tree of life and the hidden manna is both the overcomers' reward in the coming age and their portion today. On the one hand, we need to eat Christ as spiritual food in order to be overcomers now. On the other hand, if we overcome by partaking of Christ as our life supply, we will have the fullest enjoyment of Christ as our life supply in the coming age.

The Overcomers Clothed with White Garments to Express Christ

Because the overcomers receive Christ's dispensing by hearing the Spirit's speaking, gazing at His eyes, and eating Him, they express Christ, who is the effulgence of God's glory and the impress of His substance, God's expression (Heb. 1:3). To the overcomers in the church in Sardis, who have not defiled their garments and are thus worthy, Christ promises to clothe them in white garments (Rev. 3:4-5). This promise should be linked to verse 18, in which the Lord counsels the believers in the church in Laodicea to buy white garments, lest the shame of their nakedness be manifested. This has two important implications. First, the believers need not wait until the next age before being clothed with white garments. The white garments are not only a future reward in the coming kingdom age but also a present experience today. Second, since white garments are not a gift that the believers receive at their regeneration but something that the believers buy from Christ by paying a price, they cannot refer to "the garment of justification for our salvation, signifying...the Christ whom we received as our objective righteousness (Luke 15:22; 1 Cor. 1:30)" (Recovery Version, Rev. 3:5, note 2). Instead, they refer to "the garment

of approvedness for our acceptance, signifying...the Christ whom we live out as our subjective righteousness (Phil. 1:21; 3:9)" (Recovery Version, Rev. 3:5, note 2).

The difference between these two garments is seen in the example of the apostle Paul. After Paul believed into Christ and was thus justified in Him (Acts 13:39), he went on to pay a price, suffering the loss of all things so that he might gain, live, magnify, and be found in Christ, having the righteousness which is out of God (Phil. 3:8-9; 1:20-21). If we, like Paul, are willing to pay the price required by Christ, we will be fully constituted righteous (Rom. 5:19), for Christ, the righteous One (Acts 7:52), will be constituted into us and lived out of us so that we may express Him in our daily walk.

The white garments mentioned in Revelation 3:5 and 18 correspond to the wedding garment in Revelation 19:8. After verse 7 announces the arrival of the marriage dinner of the Lamb, verse 8 speaks concerning the garment of His bride: "It was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints." The expression *the righteousnesses of the saints* does not refer to the righteousness that the saints received for their initial salvation; rather, it refers to the righteous deeds in the daily living of the saints, which the indwelling Christ as their life works out through them. Therefore, the expression *fine linen* signifies the Christ interwoven into us and expressed through us in the details of our daily walk as our subjective righteousness.

Henry Barclay Swete offers helpful insight into the significance of the bridal garment: "This clean, glistening, byssus-made fabric represents the righteous actions of the Saints...the sum of the saintly acts of the members of Christ, wrought in them by His Spirit" (244). William Milligan similarly notes that the righteousnesses of the saints are the issue of the operation of the divine life in us in order to conform us to the image of Christ, God's Firstborn:

These acts are not the imputed righteousness of Christ, although only in Christ are the acts performed...No outward righteousness alone, with which we might be clothed as with a garment, is a sufficient preparation for future blessedness. An inward change is not less necessary, a personal and spiritual meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. Christ must not only be on us as a robe, but in us as a life, if we are to have the hope of glory...All our salvation is of Christ, but the change upon us must be internal as well as external. The elect are fore-ordained to be conformed to the image of God's Son; and the Christian condition is expressed in the words which say, not only "Ye were justified," but also "ye were washed, ye were sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God." (322-323)

G. H. Lang also points out that in order to share in the bridal glory, the believers should experience not only justification in Christ—"an initial benefit, granted once for all"—but also sanctification by the Spirit—"a life-long process"—by the washing of the water in the word (Eph. 5:26), that is, by experiencing the Spirit of God as "living water" (*Revelation* 319-320). On the one hand, we were "justified" and thus "have obtained like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:1); on the other hand, we need to advance in our Christian life by becoming partakers of the divine nature and partakers of His holiness (v. 4; Heb. 12:10) "in preparation for the bridal honour and joy" (*Revelation* 320-321). By partaking of the divine life and nature throughout their lifetime, the believers experience an organic transformation of their inner being whereby they are constituted with the element of Christ and conformed to His image so that they may be the glorious bride of Christ, the genuine corporate expression of God in Christ (Eph. 5:26-27).

***The Overcomers
Exercising God's
Dominion to Usher in
the Manifestation of
the Kingdom of God***

By partaking of Christ as their life supply, the overcomers participate not only in Christ's expression but also in His administration. In the present age the overcomers reign in life by conquering various aspects of the defeated situation of the church, including the leaving of Christ as the believers' first love (Rev. 2:4), deadness (3:1), and lukewarmness that results in spiritual pride, poverty, and blindness (vv. 14-17). They also stand against religious teachings that cause devastation in the church, such as the teaching of Balaam—the teaching of idolatry and fornication (2:14); the teaching of the Nicolaitans⁶—the teaching of hierarchy (v. 15); and the teaching of Jezebel—the teaching of the apostate church characterized by the philosophy of satanic mysteries (vv. 20, 24). They have fully come out of Babylon the Great in both its religious aspect and material aspect (cf. 18:4; 17:5; 18:2). Moreover, the overcomers conquer particular facets of the satanic chaos that surround the church: the synagogue of Satan (2:9), the throne of Satan (v. 13), and the deep things of Satan (v. 24).

At the close of this age, the overcomers will ultimately conquer Satan himself, the origin of the chaos in the universe and around the church. Revelation 12 clearly unveils the man-child's function as God's representative to

deal with His enemy and to bring in His kingdom. According to this chapter, a universal bright woman travails in birth and brings forth the man-child, "who is to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod" (v. 5), and the ascension of the man-child to the throne of God will precipitate war in heaven between Michael and his angels and Satan and his angels, which results in the latter being cast down to the earth. The eviction of Satan from heaven gives rise to a loud voice in heaven declaring the coming of the kingdom of God and the victory of the man-child over Satan:

Now has come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ, for the accuser of our brothers has been cast down, who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they loved not their soul-life even unto death. (vv. 10-11)

BY PARTAKING OF THE DIVINE LIFE
AND NATURE, THE BELIEVERS EXPERIENCE
AN ORGANIC TRANSFORMATION OF THEIR
INNER BEING WHEREBY THEY ARE CONSTITUTED
WITH THE ELEMENT OF CHRIST AND
CONFORMED TO HIS IMAGE SO THAT THEY
MAY BE THE GLORIOUS BRIDE OF CHRIST.

The universal bright woman signifies the totality of God's people, yet the man-child signifies the stronger part within the woman (cf. 1 Pet. 3:7), that is, overcomers among God's people as a collective unit fighting against His enemy (Gen. 3:15). That the man-child includes the overcomers in the present age of the church is clearly indicated

by the fact that the destiny of the man-child in Revelation 12:5—to shepherd the nations with an iron rod—is identical to the reward promised to the overcomers in the church in Thyatira in 2:27. Moreover, the man-child is not a single individual but a composition of many overcoming saints. Robert Govett asserts that the man-child "wholly consists of conquerors," for we are told that "they overcame the devil" (*Kingdom Studies* 46), "the accuser of our brothers" (12:10). In other words, the man-child is composed of the brothers who have been accused by Satan yet overcame him.

Further, in 2:10 the Lord calls the overcomers in the church in Smyrna to be "faithful unto death." This charge is fulfilled in the overcomers who compose the man-child, because one of their prevailing characteristics is not loving "their soul-life even unto death" (12:11). G. H. Lang points out that in order to be an overcomer who conquers Satan, a believer must defeat Satan by dying to the self and living to Christ in the minute details of his daily walk.

The believer who would be an overcomer must defeat

Satan as the roaring lion [1 Pet. 5:8] as well as the accuser. It is a dire conflict, a fight to the death, nor can there be discharge in this war save by death or *defeat*. The overcomer must die in the battle. He must die daily to the self-life in all its indulgences, by living daily unto Christ and for others. It is in the multiplied repetition of tiny acts, which put another before self, that much of the battle must be fought daily; and he who loses here, by putting self-pleasing first, is being continually defeated. (*Revelation 205*)

Only those who fight against and overcome Satan by denying the self and losing their soul-life in their lifetime will be qualified to be part of the man-child that defeats Satan in heaven and expels him out of heaven to earth at the end of this age (Matt. 16:24-27).

The man-child's defeat of Satan in Revelation 12 is the consummate fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the seed of the woman bruising the head of the serpent in Genesis 3:15. The incarnated Jesus Christ—God who was born of the virgin Mary to be a man—is the individual seed of the woman (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23; Gal. 4:4). As such, Christ destroyed Satan, the one who has the might of death, through His death on the cross (Heb. 2:14). Satan, the ruler of this world, was judged (John 16:11) and cast out (12:31). Although Christ pronounced the sentence of judgment on Satan, this judgment will ultimately be executed by the man-child, the corporate seed of the woman as the enlargement of Christ. The man-child's destiny is to shepherd the nations with an iron rod, fulfilling the prophecy in Psalm 2:9. In Revelation 19:15 this prophecy is explicitly applied to Christ, yet in Revelation 2:26-27 it is clearly applied to the overcomers. Hence, the man-child as the woman's conquering seed refers not only to the individual Christ but also to the corporate Christ—Christ as the Head joined to all His overcoming believers as the Body (Psa. 2:8-9; Rev. 2:26-27; Col. 1:18).⁷ “The Lord as the leading Overcomer (Rev. 3:21) is the Head, center, reality, life, and nature of the man-child, and the man-child as the following overcomers is the Lord's Body” (Recovery Version, Gen. 3:15, note 3). This means that in order to be a part of the man-child, the believers need to be nourished with the riches of Christ and permeated with His element, thereby allowing Christ to make His home in them and be formed in them (Eph. 3:8, 17; Gal. 4:19).

Since the rapture of the man-child to God's throne immediately precedes not only the ejection of Satan from heaven to earth (Rev. 12:5, 7-9) but also the announcement of the coming of “the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ” (v. 10), it must be the man-child who conquers Satan in order to bring the kingdom of God to earth. The remarkable proclamation in heaven of the coming of the kingdom of God and the authority of His Christ, which is spoken prior to the three and a half years of the

great tribulation, is a prelude to an even more monumental proclamation, given at the end of the great tribulation: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever” (11:15). This declaration signals the greatest dispensational change in God's economy—the conclusion of the present age of the church and the introduction of the coming age of the millennial kingdom. Therefore, because of their pivotal role in defeating Satan, the overcoming saints are God's dispensational instrument that fulfills His intention to close this age and commence the next age in order to usher in the glorious manifestation of His kingdom.

The Overcomers Participating in the Defeat of Antichrist and His Armies

In the present age, the overcomers' exercise of God's authority over His enemies culminates in their participation in the battle at Armageddon. Revelation 17:14 indicates that the ten kings, under the instigation of Antichrist, will wage war against the Lamb in direct rebellion against God. Christ will not fight against these human enemies alone; instead, He will fight with a group of human beings as His army—the overcomers. According to Revelation 19, after the marriage dinner in which Christ is wedded to His overcoming saints as His bride (vv. 7-9), He will come with His newly-wed bride as His army to fight against Antichrist and the kings under him with their armies at Armageddon. Christ will return as the Son of Man (14:14), fulfilling His own prophecy in Luke 21:27. “As the Son of Man, He will need a counterpart to match Him and complete Him” (Lee, *Daniel* 80); this counterpart will be His bride composed of the overcomers as God's corporate expression and representation. In Revelation 19:8 John observes that the bride of Christ at His marriage dinner is clothed in “fine linen, bright and clean,” and in verse 14 he notes that the armies that fight with the Lord against Antichrist and his armies are dressed in “fine linen, white and clean.” That the wedding garment of the bride is the same as the battle dress of the armies reveals that the overcoming believers who constitute the bride of Christ also compose His armies. The relationship between the bride and the armies again confirms that image is the basis for dominion—the overcomers' expression of the Triune God in His image by their participation in His life qualifies them to exercise His dominion over His enemies.

After His wedding Christ will lead His bride to battle in order to destroy Antichrist. Christ will mount a white horse, and His overcoming saints will follow Him, riding white horses (vv. 11, 14). Christ, the embodiment of God, and the overcomers as His armies will descend openly from heaven to clash with Antichrist, the embodiment of Satan, and his army. The descending of Christ's armies will be the fulfillment of the appearing of the mighty ones of Jehovah foretold in Joel 3:11-13:

Hurry and come, / All you surrounding nations, / And be gathered. / There cause Your mighty ones to descend, O Jehovah! / Let the nations rouse themselves and come up / To the valley of Jehoshaphat. / For there I will sit to judge / All the surrounding nations. / Send forth the sickle, / For the harvest is ripe; / Come, tread, / For the winepress is full; / The wine vats overflow, / For their evil is great.

The appearing of the mighty ones of Jehovah, the overcomers of Christ, from heaven to earth will lead to His treading the great winepress of the fury of the wrath of God at Armageddon, where all the evil worldly forces will be gathered and destroyed by the Lord and His overcomers (Rev. 19:15; 14:15-20). Therefore, this ultimate battle will conclude in a joint victory of Christ and His overcoming saints over Antichrist and his kings as prophesied in Revelation 17:14: “The Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and they who are with Him, the called and chosen and faithful, will also overcome them.” Through the tremendous victory achieved by Christ and His overcomers, Antichrist and the false prophet will be cast into the lake of fire for eternity, and Satan will be cast into the abyss, where he will be imprisoned for a thousand years. The removal of these rebellious creatures from the earth will issue in the inauguration of the millennial kingdom under Christ’s earthly reign. Therefore, the overcoming believers who have battled against God’s enemy throughout their Christian life will eventually become Christ’s conquering armies and bring an end to Satan’s usurpation of the earth and bring in God’s reign.

The Overcoming Believers’ Reigning in the Manifestation of the Kingdom of God in the Coming Age

The book of Revelation unveils that participation in the kingdom of God is not only a present reality for the believers in this age but also a future reward for them in the coming age. In the present time Christ reigns mysteriously and intrinsically in the lives of the faithful believers in the proper church life as the reality of the kingdom of God. In the next age Christ will openly and visibly reign with the overcoming believers over the entire earth in the manifestation of the kingdom of God. The overcoming believers who reign in life in the reality of the kingdom of

God in the present age will reign with Christ in the kingdom of God manifested on earth in the coming millennium.

Reigning with Christ

In Revelation 20:4-6 the apostle John provides a description of the millennial kingdom in which the overcoming saints will reign with Christ. Verse 4 says, “I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them.” In this verse *they* refers not to all the regenerated believers but specifically to the overcoming ones. In the coming kingdom only the overcoming believers will sit upon thrones, possessing authority to judge the nations.⁸ Christ promised the overcomers in the church in Thyatira “authority over the nations” so that they may shepherd them with an iron rod (2:26-27).⁹ Since reigning with Christ over the nations is a prize reserved only for the

overcomers, this promise of the Lord clearly indicates that the believers who fail to answer His call to overcome the degradation of the church in this age will not participate in the reign of the millennial kingdom. This view is confirmed by the Lord’s word to the church in Laodicea that only the overcomers will be given to sit with the Lord on His throne,

just as He sat with His Father on His throne (3:21).¹⁰ “To sit with the Lord on His throne will be a prize to the overcomer, that he may participate in the Lord’s authority and be a co-king with Him in ruling over the whole earth in the coming millennial kingdom” (Recovery Version, v. 21, note 2). The believers who are defeated in the current age will forfeit this prize. Only after being disciplined by the Lord in the millennium will they be qualified to represent God in the kingship in the new heaven and new earth for eternity. It is vain for us to hope to reign with Christ on His throne in the coming age if we are not willing to answer the Lord’s call for overcomers in this age. In order to gain the privilege of co-reigning with Christ in the millennial kingdom, we need to receive grace from Him to overcome spiritual decadence in the church and build up the Body of Christ as the testimony of Jesus today.

Revelation 20:4-6 twice speaks of the overcoming believers’ reigning with Christ in the coming millennium. Witness Lee points out that the believers’ reigning implies their deification—the process in which the believers are made the same as God is in life, nature,

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TO SATAN’S USURPATION OF THE EARTH
AND BRING IN GOD’S REIGN.

constitution, expression, and function but not in the Godhead or as an object of worship.

To reign is to be God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. In the universe only God reigns and only He is the King, but we as the children of this King can also reign in His life. God reigns and we reign. Since we reign as God does, by reigning in life we become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. (*Conclusion* 3043)

The overcoming believers' deification is self-evident in their co-kingship with Christ in the millennium. Still, it is necessary to acknowledge that there is an important distinction between Christ's divine kingship and the believers' participation in the kingship. According to 17:14 and 19:16, Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. As such, He is "the King of those who reign as kings and Lord of those who rule as lords" (1 Tim. 6:15). Watchman Nee notes that Christ's title *King of kings* means that He is the King of the believers, who are His co-kings (16:204). Moreover, in Revelation 3:21 Christ speaks of two distinct thrones: "His throne" (the throne of the Father) and "My throne" (the throne of Christ). The throne of the Father is the throne of sovereignty, which is occupied solely by God in His Godhead; hence, it cannot be shared with the believers. But the throne of Christ is the throne of the Son of Man (1:13; Matt. 19:28), which is the throne of co-kingship; this one can be shared with the believers. As Watchman Nee states, "the throne in which we will participate is the throne of the Son of Man" (15:187). The distinction between the throne of the Father and the throne of Christ as the Son of Man reveals an important limitation to the degree of our participation in the divine kingship.

On a similar note, Robert Govett observes that although Revelation 20:6 says that the overcoming believers will reign with Christ, it does not say that they will be "*worshipped with*" Him (2:264). This implies Christ's "superiority of *nature* above" the overcomers (2:264). According to Govett, this notion is also evident in Hebrews 1:8-9, which speaks of the Son of God in His divine kingship:

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of exultant joy above Your partners.

The expression *Your partners* implies the believers' joint interest with Christ in the divine enterprise and their sharing the anointing with Christ, whereas the word *above* indicates Christ's preeminence among the believers as the firstborn Son of God, the Head of the Body, and the King of kings (v. 6; Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18). While we may reign together with Christ by virtue of our organic union with

Him (1 Cor. 6:17), He alone is Lord of all, the Head over all things, and the object of worship (Acts 10:36; Eph. 1:22; Phil. 2:9-11). Thus, Christ's kingship is unique and quite distinct from ours, for we wholly submit to Him as our King and depend on Him for our kingship.

Having Part in the First Resurrection

Revelation 20:6 says, "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no authority, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years." This verse, echoing 1:6 and 5:10, speaks of the overcoming believers' twofold status as priests and kings. The overcomers' kingly priesthood is the fulfillment of God's purpose to have a corporate man bearing His image and exercising His dominion as revealed in Genesis 1:26; it is also the realization of God's intention to gain "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" as mentioned in Exodus 19:6. As priests, the overcomers draw near to God to have intimate fellowship with Him and thus are saturated with His element in order to express His glory; as kings, they reign with Christ over the nations by executing God's authority in order to assert His dominion over the earth.

According to Revelation 20:6, what enables the overcomers to exercise the priesthood and the kingship in the millennium is that they have "part in the first resurrection." The Greek word translated "first" (πρώτη) in this verse is the same word translated "best" in Luke 15:22. Hence, *the first resurrection* in Revelation 20:6 may be translated "the best resurrection." The first resurrection, the best resurrection, is not only the resurrection of life (John 5:29), in which the saved believers will be resurrected at the Lord's coming back (1 Cor. 15:23, 52; 1 Thes. 4:16), but also the resurrection of reward (Luke 14:14), in which the believers will be rewarded at the Lord's return (Rev. 11:18; 1 Cor. 4:5).¹¹ The first resurrection, which will reward the overcoming believers with priesthood and kingship in the millennial kingdom, is "the out-resurrection from the dead" to which the apostle Paul hoped to attain (Phil. 3:11). Robert Govett points out that, for Paul, to attain to the out-resurrection from the dead was to pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus had called him upward (v. 14). Govett posits that the out-resurrection is "a select resurrection"—"a resurrection of *privilege, not obtained even by all believers*" (2:256). In Govett's mind, to attain to the out-resurrection is to seek "a *prize* proposed to believers" (2:256). Witness Lee similarly notes that the out-resurrection is the outstanding resurrection as a prize to the overcoming saints, and he offers valuable insight into the significance of the out-resurrection:

To arrive at the out-resurrection indicates that our entire being has been gradually and continually resurrected.

God first resurrected our deadened spirit (Eph. 2:5-6); then from our spirit He proceeds to resurrect our soul (Rom. 8:6) and our mortal body (Rom. 8:11), until our entire being—spirit, soul, and body—is fully resurrected out of our old being by and with His life. This is a process in life through which we must pass and a race that we must run until we arrive at the out-resurrection as the prize. Hence, the out-resurrection should be the goal and destination of our Christian life. We can reach this goal only by being conformed to the death of Christ, by living a crucified life. In the death of Christ we are processed in resurrection from the old creation to the new. (Recovery Version, Phil. 3:11, note 2)

In order to attain to the out-resurrection and thereby win the kingship as the prize, we need to be transferred from the old creation to the new creation by experiencing the operation of the life-giving Spirit—the reality of resurrection (1 Cor. 15:45), who gradually resurrects our tripartite being by continually imparting the divine life into our spirit, soul, and body (Rom. 8:11).

Reigning by Shining Forth the Glory of God

The overcoming believers will participate in their co-kingship with Christ by expressing the glory of God in the millennial kingdom. This is clearly seen in Matthew 13:43, which says, “The righteous will shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” Contrary to the common traditional understanding, these “righteous” ones do not refer to all believers but to the overcomers, the sons of the kingdom (v. 38). Righteousness is a hallmark of an overcomer who lives and magnifies Christ in his daily life for the expression of God (cf. Phil. 1:19-21; 3:9). In Revelation 19:8 the overcomers who constitute the bride of Christ are clothed with “fine linen, bright and clean,” which fine linen is “the righteousnesses of the saints.” In 2 Timothy 4:8 the apostle Paul proclaims that he was assured that “the crown of righteousness” was reserved for him and that he would be recompensed with it at the day of the Lord’s return. In verse 18 he goes on to declare that the Lord will save him “into His heavenly kingdom.” Hence, the crown of righteousness should be understood as the prize of reigning with Christ in His heavenly kingdom in the millennium. *The crown of righteousness* in verse 8 corresponds to *the righteous* in Matthew 13:43, and *His heavenly kingdom* in 2 Timothy 4:18 corresponds to *the kingdom of their Father*

in Matthew 13:43. In the manifestation of the kingdom of God in the next age, the righteous overcomers will shine forth the glory of God for the expression of the Father.

The overcomers who manifest the glory of God in the millennial kingdom are the reproduction and expansion of Christ as the glorified God-man. According to Christ’s own words, His coming in His kingdom is associated with His transfiguration, that is, His glorification. In Matthew 16:28 Christ said to His disciples, “There are some of those standing here who shall by no means taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” In Mark 9:1 Christ similarly said to the disciples, “There are some of those standing here who shall by no means taste death until they see the kingdom of God having come in power.” Six days after speaking these words, Christ brought three of His disciples up to a high mountain, where He was transfigured before them, and “His face shone like the sun” (Matt. 17:2). On the Mount of Transfiguration, Christ “received from God the Father honor and glory” (2 Pet. 1:17-18), and the disciples saw “His glory” (Luke 9:32). Thus, the transfiguration of Christ, the shining of the glorified Son of Man, is the coming of the kingdom of God in power, and His shining is His ruling

in the kingdom of God. When Christ comes to possess the earth in order to bring in the kingdom of God, His face will be like the sun (Rev. 10:1). Further, when Christ returns, “He comes to be glorified in His saints” (2 Thes. 1:10); and “when Christ our life is manifested,...[we] also will be manifested with Him in glory” (Col. 3:4). Therefore, in the coming kingdom Christ will not shine alone but with a vast company of transfigured, glorified, and radiant overcoming believers, who, as the duplication of Christ, will shine forth like the sun (Phil. 3:21; Heb. 2:10; Rom. 8:17-18, 21, 29-30). Concerning the shining of these glorified believers, Vladimir Lossky writes:

All will become light, all will be penetrated by uncreated light. The bodies of the saints will become like the glorious body of the Lord, as it appeared to the apostles on the day of Transfiguration. God will be all in all, and divine grace, the light of the Holy Trinity, will shine forth in the multitude of human hypostases, in all those who have acquired it; they will become like new suns in the Kingdom of the Father, resembling the Son, transfigured by the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Light. (235)

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Just as Christ will reign in the coming kingdom by shining as the Sun of righteousness (Mal. 4:2), so also the overcoming saints as His co-kings will reign with Him by shining forth like the sun.

Partaking of Christ as the Abundant Life Supply

In the millennium the overcoming believers express God, shining forth like the sun, and represent God, reigning over the nations, by participating in the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8). At the end of this age, the overcomers will be called to the marriage dinner of the Lamb, which will usher them into the enjoyment of the millennium (Rev. 19:9). In the coming kingdom age Christ will fulfill His promise in Revelation 2 that the overcomers will be given to eat of the tree of life and of the hidden manna, both of which refer to Christ Himself as spiritual food (vv. 7, 17). The tree of life and the hidden manna, which are the overcoming believers' portion in the current age of grace, will be their prize in the coming age of the kingdom. In the Gospel of Luke, Christ prophesied concerning His dining with the believers in the coming kingdom (cf. 12:37). In 22:16 Christ, referring to the eating of the Passover, said, "I shall by no means eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." In verse 18 He similarly declared, "I shall by no means drink from now on of the product of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then in verse 29 Christ told the disciples who had remained with Him throughout His trials that He appointed to them a kingdom, and in verse 30 He said, "You may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom; and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." In the manifestation of the kingdom of God, while the disciples sit on their thrones, executing God's authority as co-kings with Christ, they will feast with Him, partaking of His riches. In the coming millennium all the overcoming saints will come together and recline at Christ's table, eating Him as the bread of life (13:28-29; 14:15). It is through the overcomers' fullest participation in Christ as their abundant life supply in this age that they will be priests bearing God's image and kings exercising His dominion in the coming age of the kingdom.

The Believers' Reigning in the New Jerusalem as the Eternal Kingdom of God

In the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth, God's grand work to bring in His kingdom reaches its ultimate issue for eternity. The apostle John opens the book of Revelation with a declaration that God made the contents of the entire book "known by signs," which are symbols with spiritual significance (1:1). In accordance with this statement, the New Jerusalem should not be interpreted as a literal, material city but as the final and ultimate sign in the book of Revelation and the consummating vision in the Bible. As such, the New Jerusalem symbolizes the completion of God's eternal purpose to have His kingdom—a

sphere wherein a corporate man manifests His glory and maintains His dominion over the earth by partaking of His life and nature. The New Jerusalem is the ultimate consummation of an organic corporate expression and representation of the Triune God in Christ composed of all of His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified people. The holy city as the aggregate of all God's regenerated elect is constituted not only with the believers who have overcome in the present age and will reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom but also with the believers who are defeated in the present age and thus will "suffer loss" for the duration of the millennial kingdom but will be "saved...as through fire" into the eternal destiny ordained for God's elect (Matt. 25:26-30; 1 Cor. 3:15).

Revelation 22:3 and 5 reveal that the believers as the constituents of the holy city will partake of the divine priesthood and kingship for eternity. Verse 3 says, "His slaves will serve Him." The Greek word translated "will serve" (λατρεύσουσιν) denotes serving as priests, and the pronoun *Him* refers to God and the Lamb, mentioned in the same verse. In eternity the believers will serve God and the Lamb as priests. Verse 5 says, "They will reign forever and ever." In the New Jerusalem the believers will reign as kings over the nations. To serve God as priests and to reign forever will be blessings to God's redeemed elect in eternity. As Witness Lee points out, the New Jerusalem is "simply the kingship and the priesthood" (*Riches* 42). Robert Govett also declares that the New Jerusalem is "the eternal city of the priests and the royal city of kings" (*Hebrews* 463). For eternity in the New Jerusalem all the believers will be priests and kings, expressing God through their priesthood and representing Him with His dominion in their kingship.

The Realm of the Divine Life

The New Jerusalem, a realm in which God's glorious image and His unchallenged dominion converge, is the issue of the operation of the divine life within the believers. The New Jerusalem is a city of life, as indicated by the river of water of life, which proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, and the tree of life, which grows on the two sides of the river, producing twelve fruits and yielding its fruit each month (vv. 1-2). The river of water of life is a symbol of the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit of life (1 Cor. 15:45; Rom. 8:2). C. A. Coates notes that "the river speaks of the Spirit of God as the blessed current of its life subjectively, pure in crystal brightness" (25). This interpretation is based on John 7:37-39. In verses 37 and 38 the apostle John records the Lord's call for thirsty human beings to come to Him to drink of living water: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." In verse 39 John expounds the meaning of *rivers of living water*: "This He

said concerning the Spirit.” The apostle Paul similarly speaks of the Spirit as living water, declaring that the believers were given to drink the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; cf. 10:4). The river of water of life, which flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb to water the entire city, signifies the Spirit of life—who is the reality of Christ, the embodiment of God—dispensing the life of the redeeming Triune God into the believers to be their eternal supply, substance, and satisfaction. Along the flow of the river of water of life grows the tree of life, which signifies Christ as the embodiment of the divine life and the unsearchable riches of the Triune God (John 1:4; 14:6; 15:1). According to Coates, “the Tree of life is CHRIST known as filling the year with His precious fruits” (238), and “fresh appropriations of Christ continually will mark the city” (239). The enjoyment of Christ as the tree of life, which is the believers’ common portion today (6:35, 57) and which will be a dispensational prize to the overcoming believers in the millennial kingdom (Rev. 2:7), will be the eternal portion of all God’s redeemed elect in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth. This tree fulfills for eternity God’s original intention that human beings partake of the Triune God as life to be nourished with His riches for the purpose of expressing God in the glory of His life. In the New Jerusalem the believers will eternally remain dependent beings, for they will perpetually eat of Christ as the tree of life and drink of the Spirit as the river of water of life, constantly receiving the Triune God as their life supply to be His organic corporate expression.

The Realm of the Divine Glory

The New Jerusalem, the kingdom of God in its ultimate consummation for eternity, is not only a city of life but also a city of glory. Life produces glory. Life is the Triune God dispensed into us; glory is the Triune God expressed through us. As the organic corporate expression of the Triune God, the holy city will manifest who God is and thus bear His glory. According to Revelation 21:11, the New Jerusalem is described as “having the glory of God,” and her light is “like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal.” Elsewhere in Revelation, the appearance of God on the throne is noted as being “like a jasper stone” (4:3), and the river of water of life that proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb is said to be “bright as crystal” (22:1). Thus, the descriptions of the

Triune God correspond to the descriptions of the glory that shines forth from the New Jerusalem. In the holy city the believers’ enjoyment of the dispensing of the divine life into them through their participation in the river of water of life and the tree of life will constitute them with the God of glory so that His glory, His expression in radiant splendor, will shine out of them for eternity (Acts 7:2).

Because the believers as the constituents of the holy city will bear the glory of God, they will be the same as God not only in life and nature but also in expression. According to Revelation 22:4, God’s regenerated, transformed, and glorified elect “will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.” The word *His* refers to God and the Lamb. This verse recalls the apostle Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “We all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image.” This verse

reveals that when the believers behold the glory of the Lord, they simultaneously reflect His glory and are transformed into His image for His expression. Therefore, by seeing the face of God, the believers in the New Jerusalem will bear and reflect His image for His glorious expression for eternity.

Moreover, the name of God will be on the

believers’ foreheads. In his comments on Revelation 22:4, C. A. Coates writes, “The image of God will be impressed on them; His original thought to have man in His image will be fully realised” (242). G. H. Lang also points out that His name being on their foreheads implies the believers’ “perfect resemblance and identification” with God (*Hebrews* 263-264). Since a name is a sign not only of ownership but also of identity, their bearing the name of God implies both His ownership of them and their deification, indicating not only that they are God’s possession but also that they have become the same as He is in life, nature, constitution, and expression, though not in the Godhead. Because what God is will have been thoroughly wrought into them to become their intrinsic constitution, they will bear His name and express Him in His glorious image.

The Realm of the Divine Administration

The New Jerusalem is not only the realm of the divine glory but also the realm of the divine administration. As such, the holy city is the eternal kingdom of God. In Revelation 22:3 John states that “the throne of God and of

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the Lamb” will be in the New Jerusalem. This statement matches Christ’s declaration in 3:21 that He sat with the Father on His throne. Since 21:23 suggests that God is in the Lamb, the single throne of God and of the Lamb implies that “God is in the enthroned Christ, the God-man” and that “God administrates the entire universe from within Christ and through Christ,” the redeeming King (Lee, *Conclusion* 4412). This throne of the redeeming God will be the administrative center of the New Jerusalem, which will be the center of God’s universal administration in the new heaven and new earth. On the one hand, the Spirit of life as the river of water of life flows from the throne in order to convey the throne to the city. This brings the entire city under the rule of the throne, that is, under the authority of God in Christ as the Head. Just as the head of a human being’s physical body supplies all the members of the body and directs their movements, so also the throne in the New Jerusalem will supply all the constituents of the holy city and direct their movements. On the other hand, God in Christ will rule the universe in and through the holy city as the center of His eternal administration. Righteousness will dwell in the new heaven and new earth (2 Pet. 3:13), for everything in the new universe will be under, governed, controlled, and directed by the throne of God and of the Lamb in the holy city. The Lord God will rule over the sons of God as the constituents of the holy city by shining upon them with light as His ruling element, and the sons of God will reign with the Triune God over the nations by radiating this light (Rev. 22:5).

The New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth as the eternal kingdom of God is the consummate fulfillment of the divine economy to head up all things in Christ through His Body (Eph. 1:10, 22-23). The process of heading up all things progresses gradually throughout the ages until it reaches its completion at the fullness of the times. At the close of the millennium, all negative things will have their final termination in the lake of fire. Every vestige of Satan’s rebellion and every trace of man’s fall will be eliminated. Not only the devil—the source of chaos—but also the unbelievers, the demons, death, and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10, 13-15). In the eternal age all things—the things in the heavens and the things on the earth—will be headed up in Christ. There will be absolute peace, full harmony, and a complete rescue out of the heap of the universal collapse. The universe will be in perfect, organic, and beautiful order to display the unlimited glory of God and the unchallenged dominion of God for eternity.

Revelation 21:23-24 unveils that God in Christ rules over nations through the New Jerusalem as the city of light: “The city has no need of the sun or of the moon that they should shine in it, for the glory of God illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. And the nations will walk by its light.” God is light (1 John 1:5), and Christ the Lamb, who is the

embodiment and expression of God, is the lamp that contains and shines forth God as the divine light to illumine the city with the glory of God. The transparent city, composed of glorified sons of God, will be the diffuser, spreading the divine light over all the nations, and the nations will walk under its shining with the divine glory (Rev. 21:18, 21; cf. Isa. 2:5).


The shining of the New Jerusalem fulfills God’s intention to head up all things in the corporate Christ composed of Christ as the victorious Head and the believers as the members of His triumphant Body. God in Christ the Head as the lamp shines out from the center of the city, and the Body, as the transparent city, exhibits the illuminating Triune God. By this shining, which encompasses the new heaven and the new earth, every creature in the universe will be fully headed up. The New Jerusalem as the city of light serves as an eternal confirmation that image produces dominion. The expression of God in glorified humanity produces their representation of His authority over all created things. For eternity, the God of glory as light will shine in and through Christ as the lamp; Christ will shine in and through the New Jerusalem as the diffuser; and the nations will be brought under the authority of God through the light of the city. It is by diffusing the glory of God in Christ the lamp and shining the divine light upon the nations that the believers will reign as kings over the nations as their subjects. This is the believers’ participation in the divine administration in the New Jerusalem as the eternal kingdom of God.

Reigning in Life Today for the Fulfillment of Our Destiny and God’s Purpose

God’s eternal purpose is to establish His kingdom on earth as a realm wherein He is expressed and represented by corporate humanity partaking of His life and nature. Although the first man, Adam, failed to accomplish God’s purpose, the second man, Christ, succeeded in accomplishing this purpose (1 Cor. 15:45, 47). He, a living person, is the kingdom of God—He is a God-man, possessing the life of God to express His image and exercise His dominion. The desire of God’s heart is to reproduce this Christ in all His believers for the enlargement of His kingdom. According to the divine revelation in the New Testament, and in the book of Revelation particularly, the enlargement of the kingdom of God through the reproduction of Christ takes places in three stages: in the current age of grace, in the coming age of the millennium, and in the eternal age. The believers become the duplication of Christ by participating in the divine life to manifest God and reign as kings in the proper church in the present age, in the millennial kingdom in the next age, and in the New Jerusalem in eternity.

Reigning in the reality of the kingdom of God in the present age is the believers’ daily exercise; reigning in the

manifestation of the kingdom of God in the next age is their dispensational reward; and reigning in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth as the eternal kingdom of God is their common portion and eternal destiny. This destiny was determined by God's selection in eternity past and will be fulfilled by His grace in eternity future. No amount of our defeats and transgressions in the present age can nullify this glorious destiny. In other words, no matter how great our sins or how shameful our failures may be, by God's sovereign mercy and abounding grace, we, the believers, will ultimately enjoy His life, express His image, and exercise His dominion, reigning forever with the Triune God in the holy city. However, this blissful assurance should be balanced by a sobering admonition that although our defeats cannot nullify our destiny, they can most certainly postpone its fulfillment. Our destiny to reign with Christ is secured by God's irrevocable calling and unchanging counsel. But the realization of that destiny can be delayed by our failure in this age to cooperate with God who desires to impart Himself as life to enthrone us as kings. There are two choices that lie before us. If we treasure our God-ordained destiny to exercise our kingship, we will receive the abundance of grace to reign in life in the age of the church in order that we may reign with Christ in the coming age of the kingdom (Rom. 5:17). However, if we neglect our destiny, we will defer its fulfillment until eternity future.

More importantly, what is at stake is not just the fulfillment of our personal destiny but the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose to have His kingdom. What God has purposed in eternity past, He will obtain in eternity future. Although God's purpose can be temporarily delayed, it can never be overthrown. We can hinder God from achieving His purpose or cooperate with Him to obtain His purpose. We need to aspire to be the overcomers who bring in the coming age of Christ's millennial reign and eventually usher in the fullness of the times, the completion of God's eternal economy. May we be "fellow workers for the kingdom of God" (Col. 4:11), those who are willing to risk their lives for the realization of God's purpose to bring His kingdom to earth. Blessed are those who enjoy grace to reign in life and live in the reality of the kingdom of God today, for they shall enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of God and reign with Christ in the coming age for the realization of their destiny and the execution of God's purpose. 

Notes

¹The New Testament priesthood involves the believers' partaking of Christ as their life and life supply in order to express God in His glory. In the Old Testament, priests were to eat the offerings (Lev. 2:3; 10:17) and the bread of the Presence (24:9), signifying that the New Testament believers as priests should partake of Christ as the reality of all the offerings and of the bread of the Presence (Rom. 15:16; Heb. 5:12; cf. John 6:48-51). According to Exodus, priests were to wear holy garments for "glory" and "beauty" (28:2), which signify the expression of Christ's divine glory and human virtues. This reveals that the believers as priests should live and magnify Christ in order to express Him with the divine glory and the human virtues (Phil. 1:20-21). Further, in the Old Testament type, priests as messengers of Jehovah (Mal. 2:7) also expressed God by receiving and transmitting His instant speaking to His people by the Urim and the Thummim in the breastplate of judgment (Exo. 28:30; Num. 27:21). The priestly function of being saturated with God in order to express Him is perhaps most vividly portrayed by Moses who served God as a priest by having face-to-face fellowship with God and shining forth His glory (Exo. 33:11, 18). After Moses had spent forty days in the Lord's presence on the mountain, the skin of his face shone with the Lord's glory burnt into him "by reason of His speaking with him" (34:29-35). This signifies that the believers as priests, with an unveiled face, need to behold and reflect as mirrors the glory of the Lord in order to be transformed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18).

²It is fitting that John's doxology here ascribes to God two divine attributes that correspond to image and dominion, respectively: glory and might. This accords with the biblical revelation that the kingdom of God is the sphere in which God's glory is manifested through the expression of His image and that His might is displayed through the exercise of His dominion.

³In *The Kingdom of God* Martyn Lloyd-Jones, commenting on the Lord's words to Nicodemus in John 3, posits that regeneration is not for God to "renovate" or "improve" us—it is for Him to impart "new life" into us, making us "a new creation," "a new man" and "partakers of the divine nature" (194-195). After stating that we need to be born of God because our fallen nature opposes God, Lloyd-Jones speaks of a "much more important" reason that we need to be regenerated by being born of the Spirit:

We need to be born again not only because we are what we are, but also because the kingdom of God is what it

is. It is “the kingdom of God”! It is not something external, it is something spiritual...It is not a morality or a correct code of behaviour. No, it is entering into the spiritual realm. (199-200)

⁴Charles C. Ryrie, mistakenly identifying the significance of overcoming in Revelation 2 and 3 with that in 1 John 5:5, advances an erroneous notion that the expression *he who overcomes* in Revelation 2 and 3 refers to “all true Christians (cf. 1 John 5:5)” (2016). In 1 John 5:4-5 to overcome is to conquer the world, the powerful satanic system, by faith, whereas in Revelation 2 and 3, to overcome is to conquer the degraded situation of the church by the seven Spirits of God. In *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, Joseph C. Dillow also differentiates the meaning of *overcomes* in 1 John 5:4-5 from that in Revelation 2 and 3:

The fact that all Christians in 1 John are overcomers in no way implies that all Christians in Revelation are. The word *nikao* [to overcome] does not imply “true Christian,” only “one who overcomes.” To import the contextually derived sense of “regenerate one” from 1 John into the semantic value of the word and then carry this fuller sense into Revelation is simply an illegitimate identity transfer. The meaning and conditions for becoming an “overcomer” in Revelation are completely different. (471)

⁵In order to be overcomers, we need to behold, enjoy, and partake of Christ, the leading Overcomer. In keeping with this, C. A. Coates declares, “If I want to be an overcomer I must pray much that I may apprehend and appreciate Christ” (23); “it is having Christ before us that we become overcomers; then the overcomer gains more of Christ; there is growth” (31-32).

⁶Witness Lee offers a fine note on the significance of the word *Nicolaitans* in Revelation 2:

The Greek word is composed of two words, one meaning *conquer* or *be victorious over* and another meaning *common people, secular people, or laity*. Thus, it means *conquering the common people, being victorious over the laity*. *Nicolaitans*, then, must refer to a group of people who esteem themselves higher than common believers. This was undoubtedly the hierarchy adopted and established by Catholicism and Protestantism. (Recovery Version, v. 6, note 1).

C. I. Scofield provides similar comments on the meaning of the word *Nicolaitans*:

From *nikao*, “to conquer,” and *laos*, “the people,” or “laity.” There is no ancient authority for a *sect* of the Nicolaitanes. If the word is symbolic it refers to the earliest form of the notion of a priestly order, or “clergy,” which later divided an equal brotherhood (Mt. 23.8) into “priests” and “laity.” What in Ephesus was “deeds” (2.6) had become in Pergamos a “doctrine” (Rev. 2.15). (1332)

⁷C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch affirm that the woman’s seed in Genesis 3:15 includes both Christ and His believers:

Christ is the seed of the woman, who tramples Satan under His feet, not as an individual, but as the head both

of the posterity of the woman which kept the promise and maintained the conflict with the old serpent before His advent, and also of all those who are gathered out of all nations, are united to Him by faith, and formed into one body of which He is the head (Rom. XVI.20). (102)

⁸That only the overcoming believers may reign in the coming millennial kingdom is confirmed by Paul’s writings. In Ephesians 5:5 the apostle Paul says, “Every fornicator or unclean person or greedy person (who is an idolater) has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” According to the context of this verse, Paul’s word here is not a gospel message to the unsaved that they need to repent in order to be saved from eternal perdition; instead, it is a word of admonition to the saved—“the saints who are in Ephesus” (1:1)—concerning the godly living needed in their daily walk. He warns them that, having been saved, they, being members of the Body of Christ and citizens of the kingdom of God, need to walk worthily of God’s calling by imitating God as beloved children and walking in love and as children of light (4:1; 5:1-2, 8), lest they walk in the vanity of their mind like the Gentiles, do that which is not “fitting for saints,” or be partakers with the sons of disobedience (4:17; 5:3, 6-7, 11). In Paul’s view, the believers whose daily walk is indistinguishable from that of unbelievers have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. The expression *the kingdom of Christ and of God* refers not to the present age of the church but to the next age of the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:4, 6; Matt. 16:28; 13:41, 43). Inheriting the kingdom of God differs from entering into the kingdom of God through regeneration (John 3:5). The former is to receive the kingdom of God as a future reward for our enjoyment during the kingdom age, whereas the latter is to be regenerated into the kingdom of God as a realm of the divine life by being born of God in the present age. The believers have entered into the kingdom of God as a realm of the divine species through the new birth (John 3:5), and they may live in the kingdom of God by participating in the genuine church life today (Rom. 14:17). However, not all believers—only the overcoming ones—will participate in the kingdom of Christ and of God, the millennium, in which the unclean, defeated ones have no inheritance.

⁹Robert Govett asserts that the coming age of the millennium is a period that differs from the present age and the eternal age because the millennial age is the only dispensation in which the rule with an iron rod can be fulfilled. In the present age, the age of grace, the Lord Jesus does not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax (Matt. 12:20), but in the coming age, the age of the kingdom, the Lord and the overcoming believers will shepherd the nations with a rod of iron (Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). The reason for this is that during the millennium the rebellious nature of man will still be present in the nations, evidenced by the fact that at the end of the millennial age, Satan will be released to deceive Gog and Magog to rebel against God (20:7-9). Since none of the godless and the unruly may enter the new heaven and new earth in eternity (21:8), says Govett, the reign with a rod of iron can take place only in the “intermediate period of the millennium” (2:226).

¹⁰A parallel between the believers and Christ in participating in the divine kingship, implied in Revelation 3:21, is similarly evident in the Lord's words to His disciples who paid the price to suffer with Him:

You are those who have remained with Me throughout My trials. And I appoint to you, even as My Father has appointed to Me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom; and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Luke 22:28-30)

These words of the Lord suggest that those who bear His reproach and participate in His sufferings will sit on thrones and be entrusted with the divine authority to judge the nations in the next age (Heb. 13:13; Col. 1:24). C. A. Coates agrees, stating that the saints' sitting on thrones in Revelation 20 is "God's righteous recompense for their sufferings," for these saints are "counted worthy of the kingdom of God" (2 Thes. 1:5) (207). This view is reminiscent of the apostle Paul's word in 2 Timothy 2:10-12 that if we endure sufferings for the sake of God and His elect, we will "reign with Him." In order for us to be qualified to reign with Christ in the coming kingdom, we need to be willing to participate in the fellowship of His sufferings by the power of His resurrection in the present time (Phil. 3:10).

¹¹In Luke 20:35-36 the Lord Jesus speaks concerning those who are counted worthy to obtain the coming age and the resurrection from the dead: "Those who are counted worthy to obtain that age and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage; for neither can they die anymore, for they are equal to angels, and they are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection." According to G. H. Lang, "The expression 'that age' must mean the millennial; for reaching the *eternal* ages is not a matter of our, but of our Saviour's, worthiness" (*Firstborn* 72). Robert Govett, echoing this thought, links the resurrection of those accounted worthy to obtain that age with the first resurrection in Revelation 20:5-6:

That resurrection into which none but persons "accounted worthy" can enter, must be a resurrection of the righteous only. It is identified with a special portion of time—"that age."...It must be then the resurrection of Rev. xx, for 'Blessed and holy is he that has part in that.' The righteous only partake of that. (2:256)

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