

THE ORGANIC REWARDS TO THE OVERCOMERS IN THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN REVELATION

BY JOHN PESTER

Promises of blessings are present throughout the Bible, and Christians should confidently regard and hope for their bestowal both in this age and in the ages to come. These blessings, however, have routinely been characterized on the pages of Christian commentaries and construed in the minds of most Christians as being material in nature when in fact, they are spiritual in nature. We have been blessed with spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3), that is, blessings that are by the Spirit, through the Spirit, and of the Spirit. The material “blessings” that most Christians seek and regard are more accurately depicted in the New Testament as being merely “things” that are added to those who seek first the kingdom and our Lord’s righteousness (Matt. 6:31-33).

For the most part, the New Testament references to blessings are associated with God’s people blessing God or blessing others (Luke 1:64; 24:53; Eph. 1:3; James 3:10; 1 Pet. 3:9; Rev. 5:12-13; 7:12) rather than receiving material blessings themselves. When the content of a blessing is mentioned, it is most often spiritual, such as not having sin accounted to us (Rom. 4:7-8), coming in the fullness of the blessing of Christ (15:29), receiving the cup of blessing in the fellowship of the blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16), and receiving the blessing of the promised Spirit (Gal. 3:14). The one instance that speaks of material blessings is in the context of the material giving by one local church to another local church in need, not to God giving material blessings to an individual (2 Cor. 9:5-6).

The association of material things with the rewards that are promised to the overcomers in the seven local churches in Revelation 2 and 3 is also a common understanding in the minds of most Christians. In contrast to the general New Testament references to blessing, chapters 2 and 3 contain detailed descriptions of these rewards, which serve the purpose of providing specific incentives to encourage the believers to endeavor to overcome the degraded situations in the local churches to whom the Spirit is speaking. Without clearly defining these rewards, few believers would be incentivized to pursue toward the goal of God’s high calling. Without contextualizing the granting of these rewards to the coming millennial kingdom, few believers would receive the admonitions inherent in the depictions of these rewards. And without seeing the spiritual and organic nature of these rewards, few believers would appreciate the depths of the divine and mystical nature of these rewards. These rewards are specific to the challenges that believers should endeavor to overcome in order to manifest the testimony of Jesus. These rewards are reserved for the overcomers who have, through their life and service, been qualified to participate in the millennial kingdom. And these rewards are intrinsically organic, coming from the Lord who identifies Himself to John as the living One (1:18) and who imparts Himself as life through the Spirit’s speaking to the churches.