

Rewards for the Saints at Thyatira and All Overcomers

In the last two issues of the *News*, we saw that the church at Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29) was commended by Jesus Christ for five virtues or gracious activities: love, service, faithfulness, perseverance and good works: “I know thy ... charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first” (19). In this concluding article, we will treat the threefold reward of grace that the Son of God gives to His saints at Thyatira and to all who overcome the world, the flesh and the devil by faith (26-28).

First, our Saviour promises, “And he [or she] that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him [or her] will I give power over the nations” (26). This encourages all God’s people to serve in the body of Christ in any way that they can, no matter how small. We are tempted to be discouraged because typically in the church we are only doing little things in a small sphere: “What is my labour in the congregation worth? Surely, it is of little importance!” Perhaps, the children and the elderly are particularly prone to think this way, maybe, in part, because they and their help have been sinfully slighted by more “able” members.

We must be confident of the mind of Christ regarding all our love, service, faithfulness, perseverance and good works in His church, no matter how small or apparently insignificant. The Lord thinks so highly of them—and remember that they are His works in and through us (26)—that He will reward us with the gift of ruling the world! We sow small ecclesiastical labours and we will reap massive cosmic and “political” rewards (cf. Gal. 6:8)! Moreover, we will govern the world from heaven and in the new heavens and the new earth, together with all the glorified saints and in Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Revelation 2:26 speaks of our “power [or authority] over the nations.” This too is significant. In this life, few Christians have civil authority (I Cor. 1:26-29). Some in the church are given spiritual authority by the Lord Jesus in the offices of pastor, elder or deacon. Even then ecclesiastical officer-bearers are forbidden to lord it “over God’s heritage” (I Pet. 5:3). “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” is the calling of all believers (Eph. 5:21). Yet, in the next life, Christ Himself will give us all the authority or right to rule over all the nations. This is an authority of which the President of the United States or the leadership of the United Nations or even the Antichrist, the man of sin and son of perdition (II Thess. 2:3), who will come at the end of this age, can only dream. Truly, “the last shall be first, and the first last” (Matt. 20:16)!

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The Lord Jesus describes our reward further in this second statement: “And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father” (Rev. 2:27). You will have recognized that this verse cites Psalm 2:9, which is an Old Testament prophecy of the coming Messianic king. However, the “he” in Revelation 2:27 is the individual believer, as a consideration of the verse’s last clause and a comparison between verses 26 and 27 makes clear.

The idea is that Christ receives from the Triune God the authority to smash the ungodly nations. He then shares this holy duty with His elect, redeemed, regenerated and glorified people. Thus we are speaking here of our union with the Lord Jesus, especially in His kingly office (cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. & A. 32). It also must be pointed out that we will be administering God’s judicial sentence upon His enemies and not our own sinful, personal vengeance during our earthly lives.

Again, the difference between our good works and our reward as God’s people is startling. In this life, we serve the body of Christ with love and faithfulness; in the next life, we are given the power to destroy the wicked! The text is very graphic. Whereas Christians are currently more used to wielding a vacuum cleaner or a pen or a spade, in the age to come God will give us “a rod of iron,” with the impenitent wicked being clay pots. We will shatter and smash them into pieces, even tiny shivers! This will happen not by political revolution nor by civil rebellion but by our spiritual glorification.

Our Lord Jesus also makes a third promise regarding our eternal inheritance: “And I will give him the morning star” (28). What is meant by “the morning star”? Christ Himself explains at the end of this book of Revelation: “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. *I am* the root and the offspring of David, and *the bright and morning star*” (22:16).

If it strikes you as strange that Christ should give Himself to us as the morning star, you should recall that the Lord Jesus, the bread of life, gives Himself to us as the bread of life (John 6). In general, what else does our Redeemer give us apart from Himself and all things in Him?

So what is the idea of Jesus Christ as “the morning star”? It is an image of beauty and light, *heavenly* beauty and light. Moreover, the morning star is the herald of the dawn of the new day of rich covenant fellowship with the Triune God after death and in the new heavens and the new earth for ever!

Listen to Christ’s words: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev. 2:29). This includes, beloved child of God, believing, remembering and drawing comfort from Christ’s rich promise of a glorious reward to all who overcome by His grace!

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A Plethora of Languages and Christ's Catholic Church

A reader from N. Ireland sent this question for consideration in the *Covenant Reformed News*: "Does Genesis 10:1-5 suggest a plethora of languages (dialects?) before Babel?" I am not quoting the text to which the brother refers because it gives us some of the genealogies of the sons of Noah. The reader himself can look up the verses.

What the questioner apparently assumes is that Genesis 10 precedes the confusion of languages in Genesis 11 chronologically (i.e., as regards time). However, that assumption is wrong.

It is true that the confusion of tongues at Babel is recorded in the next chapter but it is clear that the chronologies of Genesis 10 go beyond Babel chronologically, for verse 25 refers to the "division" at Babel.

In speaking of the children of Shem, Moses tells us that the covenant line that ultimately brought forth the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, was from this son of Noah, not Japheth or Ham. This was in fulfilment of Noah's prophecy in Genesis 9:25-27. In connection with the line from Shem to Eber, Genesis 10:25 states, "And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided." Then Scripture gives us the line of Joktan, Peleg's brother in the rest of Genesis 10. The covenant line, through Peleg, is picked up again and extended in Genesis 11:16-32 from Eber to Abraham.

So the answer to the question above is simply this: Genesis 10 records genealogies chronologically beyond the division of the people at Babel. Scripture then goes on to record for us what took place at Babel in Genesis 11.

The event of Babel was such a tremendous event and so important for an understanding of Bible history that I am going to take the liberty to go beyond the question and say a few things about Babel.

The confusion of languages at Babel was not simply a work of God in which He gave various groups of people a language that they had never had before. The word "languages" is used in Scripture to designate much more than languages. It refers to the fact that God divided all the people of the earth into races. In fact, it was most likely that the three major "races" were created by God at Babel: the Jews and Arabians from Shem; the white race from Japheth; and the yellow and black races from Ham. Each race was not only different in colour, but also different in physical and psychical characteristics.

Gradually, as the races moved in different directions, each race was also given different parts of the world for its possession. Then each race, separated geographically, was in turn divided into individual nations.

God made such differences between the people for two important reasons.

The negative reason was a blow sent to men to prevent them from forming prematurely the Antichrist. Nimrod, the obvious leader of all that lived under his rule, was bent on building a tower that would keep all the peoples of the earth together so that

they could accomplish a one-nation world to make war against God (Gen. 10:8-10). That effort, in building the tower of Babel, would have meant the obliteration of the line of God's covenant and the prevention of the birth of Christ.

Henceforth, because of Babel, the history of the world is characterized by repeated warfare between the races and the nations in the endeavour of each to build a one-rule empire, but one in which each nation wants to be superior to all the others, e.g., Babel, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The line temporarily ends with Rome, because the new dispensation is the time of the gathering of a catholic church. When that elect church is nearly gathered, the final Antichrist will rule.

In discussing all this, Scripture describes what happened at Babel as the "deadly wound" of one of the heads of the beast which will be "healed" (Rev. 13:3). The last Antichrist succeeds, under the sovereign providential government of Christ, to unite the world in one kingdom over which he rules. Babel was God's way of preventing Antichrist's rule until the catholic or universal church is gathered.

That is the positive purpose of Babel. Dividing the world into races and nations, God gathered a truly catholic church from all nations and tribes and tongues. I am not speaking of the false Roman Catholic Church but of Christ's universal church of those elected from eternity, redeemed in the cross and preserved unto glory by the sovereign mercy of the living God.

I cannot go into the beautiful doctrine of the catholic church here. It is sufficient to say that it takes an almost infinite variety of people to reveal fully the riches of God's grace! God's grace is so rich and full that it is like a diamond, each facet of which reveals another colour found in one beam of light. Babel has served its purpose and all the catholic church will be gathered!

Prof. Hanko

Homer C. Hoeksema: "Finally, for a little while at the very end of history, the wicked world will apparently succeed in overcoming the effect of Babel's deadly wound; but that will be only to enable the final kingdom of Antichrist to fill the cup of iniquity to the very last drop in order that the wicked may be cast out into the everlasting confusion and desolation of which Babel is a picture. The only true and lasting unity is made from all the nations of the world in our Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and raised, through his Spirit, beginning on the day of Pentecost. There the difference in tongues falls away, so that in Christ Jesus the elect, new humanity, the church, is united in the bond of faith. That kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ shall have the everlasting victory. Babel is the name of the world. Babel is the world's essential character. God confused them, and he shall confuse them in the end and forever. But they who love the Lord Jesus Christ shall inherit the everlasting kingdom" (*Unfolding Covenant History*, vol. 2, pp. 79-80; available from the CPRC Bookstore for £18, plus £1.80 P&P).

An attractive box set of 9 CDs entitled "The Church's Invisibility, Unity and Catholicity," on *Belgic Confession 27*, is available from the CPRC Bookstore for £10/set (inc. P&P).