

The Church of the Servant King

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PROPHECY SERIES

(Proph21C_Revelation_chps2&3 – Part 6)

AN ALTERNATE VIEW OF CHAPTERS 2 & 3

Introduction

To date, we have examined chapters 2 and 3 from the *historical* perspective and interpretive position. Among dispensational theologians, this is probably the predominant position. The *historical* view of chapters 2 & 3 has several strong arguments in its favor which include (among other points) the following:

- An exegesis of Revelation 1:19 (“**Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things.**”)¹ certainly allows for a division of the book into at least two parts, if not three.²
- The historical background of each of the cities mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 is consistent with Jesus’ message to the churches that could have been located in those cities at the end of the 1st Century A.D.
- The pagan religious influences of the 1st Century A.D. are consistent with the historical background of each of the cities mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 and Jesus’ exhortations to those local churches.

However, while these are certainly strong arguments or points in support of the *historical* interpretation, in the interest of ***objective*** observation and analysis, there are some weaknesses that need to be noted regarding the *historical* perspective. They include the following points.

- There is no precedent anywhere else in Scripture where we see believers of the present age of the Body of Christ and believers of any portion of the Age of Israel addressed within the same Scriptural context.³
- Thus, the dispensational unity of the book is broken within the *historical* interpretive framework.⁴

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

² The threefold division of the book is probably the more common among those who have embraced the *historical* view. The threefold division is based upon the following understanding of 1:19. *First*, “**the things which you have seen**” is interpreted to be Jesus’ instruction and vision to John that is recorded in chapter 1. *Second*, “**the things which are**” is interpreted to be Jesus’ message to then-existing churches in Asia that is recorded in chapters 2 & 3. *Third*, “**the things which shall take place after these things**” is interpreted to be a reference to the remainder of the book – chapters 4 thru 22.

³ Traditional dispensationalists (classic and revised) and progressive dispensationalists who embrace the view that the present dispensation began in Acts 2 would argue that this is not a legitimate weakness since, according to their understanding, Jesus anticipated the “church” (i.e. the “church age body of Christ”) during His public ministry as recorded in select sections of the Gospels, e.g. Matt 16:18; 18:17; John 14:15-17:26. However, we have previously examined these passages and discovered that there is very strong support for an interpretation of these passages to be references to truths related to Jewish or Israel-centric dispensations and “churches” versus the dispensation of the “Body of Christ” and the Gentile-centric “churches” related thereto.

⁴ Some of these same arguments are equally applicable to the *historico-prophetic* interpretation of chapters 2 and 3.

- Revelation 3:10 notwithstanding, there is a strong association of all events and terminology in the entire book with the Lord's 2nd Advent (not Rapture), thus making the entire book a prophecy of events associated with the Tribulation (i.e. the last seven years of the Age of Israel), the 2nd Advent of Christ (the Messiah) and the establishment of the Messianic, millennial kingdom on earth – not events associated with the Body of Christ.⁵

Perhaps one of the most notable proponents of the prophetic view of Revelation 2 and 3, as well as a proponent for the unity of the entire book of Revelation regarding the dispensational placement of its contents, is E.W. Bullinger. His *Commentary on Revelation* contains perhaps the most comprehensive presentation of the prophetic view of Revelation 2 and 3.⁶ While there may be legitimate debate regarding some of the finer points of his analysis of the book of Revelation contained in his *Commentary*, the larger argument that he presents is definitely a valid one. Also, I believe that it is possible that theologians who embrace the threefold division of the book of Revelation based upon Revelation 1:19 reject the prophetic view due to the fact that Bullinger has been classified as an "ultradispensationalist."

An analysis of the use of the description "ultradispensationalist" and an analysis of the entirety of Bullinger's interpretative scheme is far beyond the scope of the present study. However, suffice it to say for now that, as noted by Charles Baker in his *A Dispensational Theology*, the term ultradispensationalist is a description that seems to be used by anyone who believes the dispensational views of another to be too extreme.⁷ Charles Ryrie is considered an ultradispensationalist by anti-dispensationalists.⁸ There is no 100% agreement on the definition of the term.

Personally, I am in the process of analyzing the *prophetic* view of Revelation 2 & 3 as well as the *prophetic* or *futuristic* view of the entire book. I like the fact that this view reconciles nicely with the non-Acts 2 position that I have begun to embrace that sees the Body of Christ beginning with the setting apart of Paul (Saul of Tarsus) as an Apostle, the impartation by the Lord to Paul of the mystery doctrines of the new dispensation and the commissioning of Paul as an Apostle to the Gentiles. (Among other things, the position toward which I have been gravitating for a while places the beginning of the new dispensation within a relatively short period after the events of Acts 2 as opposed to the position of the mid-Acts and Acts 28 adherents).

I also like the fact that the *prophetic* view of Revelation views the entire book as unified in regards to the dispensational setting that is at issue. Admittedly, there are more granular questions and issues that are subject to debate. However, on the whole and from the standpoint

⁵ Many Acts 2 dispensationalists (and perhaps others) interpret Revelation 3:10 to be a reference to the Rapture of the Body of Christ, thus a protection of the Body of Christ from the judgments associated with the seven-year Tribulation period. However, another acceptable interpretation of this passage exists that allows for (or is consistent with) the *prophetic* or futuristic view of Revelation 2 and 3. Revelation 3:10 could be a reference to God's protection of a believing remnant of Jews and Gentiles during the Tribulation (those who "endure to the end" per Matt 24:13 and those who "flee to the mountains" in obedience to the Lord's command in Matt 24:15-28). Thus, through their obedience to Jesus' command in Matthew 24 regarding this period of human history, believers are preserved and "kept from" the hour of testing, i.e. the last three and one-half years of the Tribulation.

⁶ See E.W. Bullinger, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1984).

⁷ Charles F. Baker, *A Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Publications, 1994), 6.

⁸ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 194-195 cited in Baker, *A Dispensational Theology*, 6.

of a larger, interpretive framework, the impression that is forming in my mind is that more questions are being addressed than left on the table by the alternative positions we are examining in contrast to the traditional (classic and revised) and progressive dispensationalist's framework – with regard to both the identification of the beginning of the present age and with regard to the interpretation of the book of Revelation. In the interest of academic and spiritual honesty and integrity, I believe we must not “throw the baby out with the bath-water” just because we disagree with a given point or a portion of any respected theologians position.

What Does All of This Mean in Regard to Our Present Study?

Adherents to the prophetic view of Revelation 2 & 3 see the seven “churches” or “assemblies” named in these chapters as assemblies that will exist during the future Tribulation period – the seven year period leading up to the 2nd Advent of Christ. These assemblies will consist of Gentile and Jewish believers during that period. Revelation 1:19 is legitimately translated in such a way that leads to an interpretation that supports a unified view of the book instead of a tri-partite division of the book.

“Write therefore what things thou sawest and what they are even what things are about to happen hereafter.”⁹

Accordingly, this translation of Revelation 1:19 allows and supports an interpretation of the entirety of this verse as a reference to the entirety of the revelation [*apokalupsis* (Gr. Αποκάλυψις)] given to John, i.e. chapters 1-22. In his analysis, Bullinger includes a comparison of references for each of the seven churches in Revelation 2 & 3 with passages in the rest of the book.

Admittedly, this is not a stand-alone argument for the prophetic view, but when considered with the other information we will review, the credibility of the *prophetic* view is heightened.

Psg.	Text	Psg.	Text
2:3	“and you have <u>perseverance</u> and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary.”	13:10	“If anyone <i>is destined</i> for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the <u>perseverance</u> and the faith of the saints.”
		14:12	“Here is the <u>perseverance</u> of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.”
2:9-10	“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the <u>blasphemy</u> by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 ‘Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”	13:5-8	“And there was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and <u>blasphemies</u> ; and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. 6 And he opened his mouth in <u>blasphemies</u> against God, to <u>blaspheme</u> His name and His tabernacle, <i>that is</i> , those who dwell in heaven. 7 And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. 8 And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, <i>everyone</i> whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.”
2:13	“I know where you dwell, where <u>Satan’s</u>	13:2	“And the beast which I saw was like a

⁹ Bullinger, *Commentary on Revelation*, 159.

	<u>throne</u> is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”		leopard, and his feet were like <i>those</i> of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and <u>his throne</u> and great authority.”
		16:10	“And the fifth <i>angel</i> poured out his bowl upon the <u>throne of the beast</u> ; and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain.”
2:16	“Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with <u>the sword of My mouth</u> .”	19:21	“And the rest were killed with <u>the sword which came from the mouth</u> of Him who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.”
2:18	“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and <u>His feet are like burnished bronze</u> , says this.”	19:15	“And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and <u>He treads</u> the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.”
2:20-23	‘But I have <i>this</i> against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit <i>acts of immorality</i> and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 ‘And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. 22 ‘Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of <i>sickness</i> , and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 23 ‘And I will kill her children with pestilence; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.”	17:2, 4	2 “With whom the kings of the earth committed <i>acts of immorality</i> , and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.” 4 “And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the <u>unclean things of her immorality</u> .”
		18:3	“For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed <i>acts of immorality</i> with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.”
3:3	“Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep <i>it</i> , and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.”	16:15	(“Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame.”)
3:12	“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.”	21:2	“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.”
3:21	“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”	20:4	“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I <i>saw</i> the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”

We will continue our high-level analysis of the prophetic view of Revelation 2 & 3 to include an analysis of the interpretative framework it provides us for the remainder of the book in

our next study. We will see how this position impacts our understanding of some significant concepts as well, e.g. the use of the term “overcomer” in Scripture, the concept of ruling and reigning with Christ, the Body of Christ believer’s role (or lack thereof) in the Millennial kingdom.