

The Church of the Servant King

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PROPHECY SERIES

(Proph21C_Revelation_chps2&3 – Part 7)

AN ALTERNATE VIEW OF CHAPTERS 2 & 3 (CONT'D)

In our previous study, I introduced an alternative interpretation of Revelation 2 & 3 to the historical view that we have previously considered and examined. The alternative interpretation of these chapters is called the *prophetic* view. In today's session, we will continue our examination of the *prophetic* interpretation of these chapters. I will reference E.W. Bullinger's Commentary on Revelation since he is perhaps the most oft cited representative of the *prophetic* interpretive position.

One of the more critical and important observations regarding the seven "churches" mentioned in Revelation 2 & 3 is that the English word "church" or "churches" is the Greek word *ekklesia* (Gr. ἐκκλησία). This word means "assembly" and any dispensational connotations of the word must be derived from its context. It is frequently and most commonly translated "church" in the English Bible. However, there can be a vast difference between an "assembly" of believers and a local gathering of some of the members of the universal Body of Christ. We have observed this distinction on numerous occasions.¹

The *prophetic* interpretation of Revelation 2 & 3 understands the "assemblies" (Gr. ἐκκλησία) to be churches that will exist during the Tribulation period – not historical churches in existence at the end of the 1st Century A.D. when John received the Revelation [*apokalupsis* (Gr. Αποκάλυψις)]. These assemblies will consist of Gentile and Jewish believers during the Tribulation period.

One of the arguments for the *prophetic* interpretation of Revelation 2 & 3 is the unity of the book – the entire book is a unit and as a unit, it is prophetic in nature. Here are some interesting points in that regard.

- Revelation 1:2 indicates the vision that John experienced was the entirety of what is recorded in the book of Revelation.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him to show His bond-servants, **the things which must shortly take place**; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to his bond-servant **John, who bore witness** to the Word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, **even to all that He saw**. (Rev 1:1-2)

- The things that John saw was everything contained in the book of Revelation.²

Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the **things which must shortly take place**. (Rev 22:6)

¹ See E.W. Bullinger, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1984), 63-66 for a very helpful analysis of the word "assembly" or "church" (ἐκκλησία).

² Note the phrase "I saw" or equivalent phrases in 1:12, 19, 20; 4:4; 5:1, 2; 6:1, 9; 7:1, 2; 8:2; 9:1, 17; 10:1, 5; 13:1-3, 11; 14:6; 15:1, 2; 16:13; 17:3, 6; 18:1; 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12; 21:1, 22.

“Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.” (Rev 22:7)

Now I, John, **saw and heard these things**. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. (Rev 22:8)

I, Jesus, have sent My angel to **testify to you these things in the churches** [*ekklesia* (Gr. ἐκκλησία)]. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.” (Rev. 22:16)

- John was commissioned to write all that he saw - not just what he saw in chapter 1.
- The phrase “all of these things” is not just chapter 1 or even chapters 2-3 – it is the entire *apokalupsis* (Gr. Αποκάλυψις) or Revelation.
- The entire book consists of chapters 1-22.
- Chapters 4-22 are definitely future and prophetic and given the lack of precedent for a New Testament book that addresses both church age Body of Christ believers and a believer of another dispensation, the conclusion of the *prophetic* view that chapters 2 & 3 are prophetic has sound basis.

Accordingly, Bullinger summarizes the essence of the *prophetic* view of chapters 2 & 3. There are more supporting points for this position than we will have time to examine. We will only have time to examine a few of those supporting points. However, the following statements provide a helpful summary and articulate the general framework supported by the more detailed nuances of argument.

We hold that the Apocalypse contains a record (by vision and prophecy) of the events which shall happen “hereafter” in the Day of the Lord; that the whole book is concerned with the Jew, the Gentile, and the Earth, but not with the Church of God, or with Christendom; or with the latter only so far as the present corruption of Christianity shall merge in the great apostasy, and form part of it, after the Church, the Body of Christ, shall have been removed.

But there will be a people for God on the earth during these eventful years. There will be the remnant of believing Israelites; the 144,000 sealed ones; the great multitude; and other bodies of faithful ones who are referred to all through the Book (see chaps. vii., xi., and xii. 17). In which latter passage we read of the “remnant of her (the woman’s) seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

Will not these need special instruction? Have these been forgotten by Him who sees the end from the beginning? The Pauline Epistles will of course be of use as an historical record of what will then be past, just as we have the record of Israel’s history in the Old Testament now.

Our answer to these questions is that God has provided for their instruction, and warning, and encouragement, in the second and third chapters of this book.³

A selection of some of the other arguments for the prophetic view of Revelation 2 & 3 is presented in the analysis to follow. Again, this is not a comprehensive or exhaustive list – only illustrative. The purpose is to introduce the prophetic view of these chapters as a legitimate alternative to the historical view that we have previously examined. Each student of God’s Word is responsible for examining the evidence and drawing their own conclusion. Ultimately, one’s interpretive position regarding Revelation 2 & 3 should have no impact upon one’s understanding

³ Bullinger, *Commentary on Revelation*, 68-69.

of the dispensational setting for chapters 4-22. In addition, one's interpretive position regarding Revelation 2 & 3 should have only limited (albeit potentially important) impact upon selected passages in chapters 4-22. I will attempt to highlight those differences as we progress through our study.

Selection of Additional Arguments in Support of the Prophetic View of Chapters 2 & 3

Psg.	Title	Description
NA	Doubts regarding the existence of the "assemblies" in the 1 st Century A.D.	According to Bullinger, there is little evidence that the assemblies were in existence. In some cases, the evidence is against their existence. Tertullian (ca. 2 nd – 3 rd Cent. A.D.) indicated that some were rejecting the Apocalypse on the grounds that there was no Christian church in existence at the end of the 1 st Century A.D. in Thyatira. Epiphanius (ca. A.D. 367) recorded similar concerns during the 4 th Century A.D. At the Council of Laodicea (A.D. 363) thirty-two bishops (including the bishop of Ephesus) listed books to be included in the canon. The list did not include the Apocalypse.
1:12, 20	The seven lampstands	The golden lamp-stand immediately gives rise to Tabernacle and Temple imagery (Ex 25:31-39). There, we find one lamp-stand with seven lamps which is interpreted to represent Israel's unity in the Land. In Revelation, we see described seven golden lamp-stands which are no longer united in one lamp-stand. This is interpreted to represent Israel in its dispersion out of the Land and away from Jerusalem as its center of worship. The separate lamp-stands also represent the seven "assemblies" (1:20).
1:7; 3:10; 19:11-21; 20:4-6	Emphasis upon the 2 nd Advent (and events surrounding the 2 nd Advent)	The emphasis in the book is upon the 2 nd Advent – notwithstanding the commonly held interpretation of 3:10 as a reference to the Rapture of the Church. If correct and if the book is a unit in terms of the period of history addressed, then the whole of the book is set within the context of the Last Days of Israel. As discussed in the previous session, 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. See also Revelation 12:6, 13-17.
Various verses in chp. 2 & 3	The "overcomer" terminology is closely related to obedience in time and rule in the Messianic Kingdom	While there may be debate about whether the role and destiny of the Body of Christ believer in regard to the Millennial Kingdom (e.g. 2 Tim 2:11-13, a Pauline epistle, mentions reigning with Him, but there is no Millennial context), one thing is very clear. Revelation 2 & 3 very clearly connect the believer's deeds and obedience to entrance and position in that earthly kingdom (e.g. Rev 2:7, 10, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 15, 21). There is no Pauline concept of the believer's secure position in Christ, our perfect and complete status in Him and nothing in regard to the no condemnation or separation from Him (cf. Rom 8:37; Eph 1:3). John, in his epistles written in the early A.D. 90's, speaks of those who belong to the church of God as having already overcome (e.g. 1 Jn 2:13; 4:4; 5:4-5). So, clearly, in Revelation, John makes a different use of the term "overcomer" than in his epistles – a positional term in the epistles that is more consistent with Pauline doctrine than we find in Revelation.

In our next study, we will move forward in Revelation to examine chapter 4.