

Serving in Multicultural Ministry

Reader 3

The Beatitudes: A Servant's Character in Christ

Matthew wrote His gospel from a Jewish perspective addressing Jewish Christians during a time of great conflict over their identity after the second temple destruction. While they accepted Jesus as the Messiah, they still lived within the Jewish community and followed its traditions though different from Israel. The gospel author sought to reframe their new identity within the Christ community aligned to the nature and character of Jesus, King of Israel. This new identity also pertains to contemporary Christians. As Card wrote for this purpose “Jesus, tell me who you are, so I know who I am” (2013, Chapter 1, Section 2, para 8). Since Christ Himself embodied each trait, so too must His servants reflect His identity through their nature as salt of the earth and light to the world. The Beatitudes characterize servant citizenship in the Kingdom of heaven in their fellowship with God (vertical relationship) and all people (horizontal relationship) they encounter comprising their ideal heart character. To lead as servants of the Lord, believers in Christ then must surrender their former citizenship and take on the nature of the new with the eight Beatitude traits. Thus, what Kingdom characteristics should its members reflect for the ideal heart character as servants?

Kingdom Citizenship: Ideal Heart Character

The Beatitudes describe the ideal heart character for every citizen in the Kingdom of heaven. The heart character is critical to Christian character. While “man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Sam 16:7c). The Lord judges and values what lies on the inside, not the outside. Jesus taught eight beatitudes (5:3-10) as part of His Sermon on the Mount with the ninth explaining the one prior to it (vv. 10-11): Poor in spirit (v. 3); mourners (v. 4); meek (v. 5); hungry (v. 6); merciful (v. 7); pure (v. 8); peacemakers (v. 9); and persecuted (v. 10). Each beatitude functions in an if...then format based on the Old Testament (Ps 1:1) and Greek literary forms (Keener, p. 165). In Matt 6:33, Jesus said, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things will be added unto you” (KJV). Thus, if believers seek His Kingdom and righteous first, then they receive His spiritual provisions. Thus, a blessing accompanies each beatitude Jesus pronounced for people who display it.

The biblical definition of the blessed (Greek: makários) does not connect to any worldly means or sense rather to God's favor and salvation from His approval (Matt 5:3 AMP). In other words, the blessed receive God's provisions (favor) and grace (benefits) because they obeyed the "Lord's inbirthings of faith" (Strong, 2015). Jesus taught a new type of blessing, which ran contrary to ancient Middle Eastern culture. Society in His day believed only the elite, wealthy, and powerful—those whose worldly riches and power raised them above the lower class—gained makários. Jesus proposed a new standard for living with blessings only found in His Kingdom. Consider this story to understand Beatitude blessings. A rabbi told his pupil, "In olden days there were men who saw the face of God." His student asked, 'Why don't they any more?' The rabbi replied, 'Because, nowadays no one stoops so low.'" (Stoffregen, n.d.). God gives His blessings to those who stoop low to seek Him, as opposed to those who desire gain through their own might and wealth. In Rom 12:2, Scripture directs believers not to be "conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. With a renewed mind and in-birthings of faith, the Holy Spirit transforms the believer's character to live out Kingdom actions: poor in spirit, mourners, meek, hungry and thirsty after righteousness, merciful, poor, peacemaker, and persecuted.

Jesus conveyed the Beatitudes in passive grammatical construction, a Semitic-fashioned Greek tense, indicating a divinely completed action. Only God delivers these blessings as rewards in the new heaven. He gave nine "Blessed are" promises (Matt 5:3a-11a) originating from God through Christ as Kingdom in cause and effect terms. For every mentioned action (vv. 3-11) a disciple of Christ takes, God fulfills it with an eschatological promise. Jesus bookended the beatitudes in verses three and ten with the overarching now promise (present passive tense) of "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (NIV)—as Keener called them, kingdom-time blessings (Keener, p. 165). Then, He followed the Beatitudes in verses four through nine with the specific then promises (future passive tense): "they will be comforted" (5:4 NIV); "they will inherit the earth" (5:5); "they will be filled" (5:6); "they will be mercied" (5:7); "they will see God" (5:8); and "they will be called sons of God" (5:9).

The Beatitudes relate to relationship within the fellowship of believers, directly linking to God's Kingdom. They build upon each other: vertically in a relationship between the disciples and their Master Jesus—poor in spirit to mourner to meek to hungry and thirsty (vv. 3-6)—and horizontally between the disciples and other people—merciful to pure to peacemaker to persecuted (vv. 7-10). The virtue of humility undergirds the Beatitudes.

Poor

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3 KJV). When first thinking about the meaning of the poor, a lack of material goods comes to mind. Likewise, poor in spirit reflects an emptying out of oneself for a total dependency on God. At the most fundamental level, Jesus became poor to save humankind from sin. Once people accept Him as Lord and Savior, the richness of the kingdom of heaven blesses them with an inner condition resulting from the work of God. As the opposite of a proud or haughty spirit (PBC, p. 1884), humbling oneself before God requires dependency on Him (v. 3b). A person poor in spirit impoverishes oneself to gain the riches of spiritual wealth and prosperity that comes from God's sustenance. Inward spiritual humility and a circumcised heart shape an outward impoverished state. The external display of piety from rituals does not produce an impoverished demeanor (Lev 26:41-42). Through an impoverished state believers have the kingdom of heaven, the dwelling place of the saved steeped in the richness of grace.

Greatness in leadership results from relying on God and living out His ways in their entirety for blessings of spiritual prosperity. This does not mean that the road will come easy. God will push a leader to the limits while journeying it, but won't let one's clothes wear out or feet blister. He will make a leader go hungry, only to feed the leader with the Word (Deut 8:2-7).

Mourners

“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (Matt 5:4). Mourners bear spiritual sadness. They recognize themselves as weak (Ps 6:2). Those who mourn do so over their own sin and losses as well as the world's wickedness and suffering. Jesus blesses them with His comfort over their confession of weakness in sin. Jesus,

the fulfilled Messiah, changes the grieving state of a mourner through His atonement of our sin from beauty instead of ashes, oil of joy instead of mourning, garment of praise instead of a heavy, burdened, and failing spirit (Isa 61:3). He turns mourners into “trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified” for uprightness, justice, and right standing (v. 61:3b; cf. 2 Cor 7:10). Mourners also grieve over what grieves God. When Christ followers mourn for the sins of the lost, God comforts them with His compassion.

Meek

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt 5:5). The meek seek the Lord (Ps 22:6; 69:32) and live out His will (Matt 26:39). The meek bondservant shows gentleness and humility (Gal 5:22) giving gentle correction for the truth of Scripture and patience when wronged (2 Tim 2:25). The Greeks used the word meek, *praus*, to describe “a wild animal who had been tamed and made gentle” (Forest, 1999, p. 49). To the Jews, a meek (Hebrew: *anaw*) person described one aligned in relationship with God, welcoming obedience to the Law. The meek make choices and exercise power from a divine rather than worldly reference point. Since God’s Spirit rules their heart, they have the inner strength to obey Him.

When a person inherits something, it indicates a handing down of a valued belonging. Jesus promised the meek would inherit the earth. God “adorns the humble with victory” (Isa 29:19). The humble (or meek) have God’s adornment of victory. This beatitude demonstrates the victory of both physical and spiritual promise of the Kingdom. Believers have spiritual citizenship in the Kingdom of heaven now and yet to come. Thus, the meek not only inherit the blessings of heaven, but also share in the Kingdom of God upon earth. The author of Ps 37:11 confirms this same, and expands upon the meek by noting they delight themselves in peace: “But the meek [in the end] shall inherit the earth and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”

Hungry and Thirsty

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt 5:6). Those who hunger for God, long for Him in a spiritual sense. In Ps 42:1, the psalmist compares the deer panting for the water brooks to the soul panting

after the living God (Ps 42:1-2). As a deer searched for water when thirsting in dry places, needing refreshment, or wanting shelter from danger to meet its basic need, so too the hungry look to God (Gill, 1746-63). To the hungry comes sustenance from the Word of the Lord—the Gospel of salvation (Amos 8:12; Luke 1:53). Those who feel full, suggests origination from their self-sufficiency, and they will hunger (Luke 6:25). Jesus satisfies both hunger and thirst as the Bread of Life. People who go to Him will never hunger, and believe in Him will never thirst (John 6:35). Through this bread, His flesh, He gave life to the world (John 6:51). The hungry who taste of His bread, live forever. Jesus invited the thirsty to come to Him and drink: “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38).

Merciful

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Matt 5:7). The Hebrew word for mercy, *khesed*, provides a first glimpse of the Beatitudes’ intent. It means tenderheartedness, kindness, graciousness, loving kindness, and self-giving unconditional love. It describes God’s defining attribute in the Old Testament (Exod 20:6; Deut 5:10; Num 14:18-19; Ps 25:10) and asks for His help (Ps 51:1). In the case of the beatitude mercy (Greek: *eleos*), the action presents itself in a horizontal relationship showing one who sighs, groans, moans, sobs, and laments for others conditions. Servants also will pardon them, just as Christ pardons those who seek His mercy: “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” (Matt 6:12). Jesus highlighted its importance in the parable of the Good Samaritan. When Christ asked, “Which of the three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who was beaten by robbers,” the man answered, “The one who showed mercy on him.” Jesus responded to him, “Go and do the same” (Luke 10:29-37). In Jas 3:17, Scripture illustrates the merciful show compassion. Jesus will show mercy to those who showed mercy to the least for Him (Matt 25:40) in a reciprocal action. He called us to become people living the mercy of God, to love others without judgment, and forgive without bounds. In the final judgment of the nations, Jesus stressed six merciful actions that the faithful servant must accomplish for a blessed life: To minister by feeding the hungry; giving drink to the thirsty; welcoming the stranger; clothing the naked; visiting the sick and imprisoned.

Believers live according to the one living God, rich in grace and who by grace “quickened us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6-7).

Pure

“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matt 5:8). The pure walk with biblical integrity and obedience to truth, abstaining from passions of the flesh (1 Pet 1:22; 2:11). They seek God for a steadfast spirit (Ps 24:4; 51:10) because they depend on Him in His righteousness. God calls His children to righteousness (or holiness) leading to a pure heart (Prov 22:11; Matt 5:8). “Without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14b KJV). The children of God must draw continually near to Him at the throne of His grace since sin runs in opposition to a pure heart. “Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded” (Jas 4:8).

To the pure, the Lord will give righteousness from His salvation through Jesus. “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7b NIV). In Ps 24:3, David posed the questions, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?” (KJV). Then, scripture in Matt 5:8 answered these questions with the response the pure will see God. The two questions from Ps 24:3 relate to those who will have the qualifications for fellowship with the fulfilled Messiah in His holy place as He reigns on His hill at the spiritual Mount Zion, “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (literally, Zion is Jerusalem in this context; cf. Heb 12:22; Rev 14:1; Segraves, 2007).

Peacemakers

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matt 5:9). The peacemaker (Greek: *eirénopoios*), an adjective descriptor, occurs once in the New Testament. It means “pacifist, loving peace” (Thayer, 2009, p. 188). To view *eiréopoios* from a peace-loving standpoint elicits a topical dimension void of its spiritual significance. Anyone can serve as a peacemaker, but not every peacemaker can call oneself a son of God. So, what precondition does God require of peacemakers so “they will be called sons of God” (5:9b)? Christian peacemakers conform to God’s will in

thought and deed through His righteousness. He imparts heavenly wisdom—pure and undefiled—to the sanctified. In turn, His Spirit’s purity of wisdom inwardly manifests the outward nature of peace. Heavenly wisdom does not exhibit “jealousy (envy), contention (rivalry and selfish ambition), confusion (unrest, disharmony, rebellion) or evil and vile practices (Jas 3:16 AMP). Internally, peacemakers think on whatsoever holds true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praise so that the God of peace guards their heart and mind (Phil 4:8 AMP). Externally, they endeavor to keep unity of the Spirit (Eph 4:3 KJV).

“When believers in Christ submit to His Spirit’s leading for peace with themselves and others, peacemaking actions produce a harvest of righteousness namely, “concord, agreement, and harmony between individuals, with undisturbedness, in a peaceful mind free from fears and agitating passions and moral conflicts” (5:18b). God is peace (Phil 4:7). The peace of God through Christ Jesus guards believers’ hearts and minds (Col 3:15) against earthly bitter, envying, and strife (Jas 3:14). When believers enter and live in the peace of Christ as peacemakers (Eph 4:7c) “they will be called sons of God” (Matt 5:9b NIV).

Persecuted

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:10). The structure of the Beatitudes swings full circle in this verse to “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (vv. 3; 10), both promises of God. Jesus emphasized the persecuted must rejoice highlighting expanded linkage with continuity of the prophets (vv.11-12). Rather than seeking praise from the world for His righteousness, believers should expect persecution in the same manner as Jesus (John 15:20). The opposition pursued Him with hatred. Luke 6:22 described the Pharisees reviling Jesus to the point of being “filled with madness” (or rage) as they conspired of what they might do to Him (KJV). In reference to end signs (v. 10), Jesus told His disciples people will seize (12), betray (16), and kill some of them for their association with His name.

Despite tribulation, tried faith (Jas 1:2-5), and suffering, the persecuted should stand like conquerors and testify about Him (14). As God, Who commanded the light to

shine out of darkness, Christ followers must reflect the light of the progressively revealed God in flesh for His glory and majesty (2 Cor 4:6). The power of God from the indwelt Comforter will bear witness of Himself (John 15:27 AMP). Their reward is victory from Him Who loved us. Though people will revile and passionately despise God's people for their stance as servants in the Kingdom,

neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:37 KJV).

The love of God in Christ Jesus always remains in His beloved.

Servants of the Lord should view testings of their faith from persecution as building Christian endurance, which leads to their spiritual maturity and inner peace. "Let endurance have its perfect result and do a thorough work, so that you may be perfect and completely developed [in your faith], lacking in nothing" (Jas 1:4 AMP).

The lesser becomes greater in Christ Jesus with rewards those in power cannot attain on their own. In short, the persecuted servants gain much from Kingdom of heaven benefits indwelt during their earthly walk and carried over into eternity. The blessings provide Jesus' presence, strength, and perfection creating character not found in this world and receiving a crown of glory in heaven.

New Citizenship: For Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

"And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:" (Matt 5:1 KJV). Before taking on citizenship in the Kingdom of heaven, servants must surrender their worldly passport by abandoning their former identity and yielding to the new. Christian discipleship requires citizenship in a new kingdom—life in the Kingdom of heaven. Disciples must commit their hearts to God's Kingdom of heaven. The question remains, can you abandon your old ways and follow Him for a beatitudes nature?

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Seven Overcoming Statements

So much focuses on what God will do now, but the greatest rewards come when believers complete the journey as overcomers from the power of God. Pain and suffering occur in life even if they believe in Jesus Christ. Humankind confronts obstacles from the first cry during birth to the parting breath at death. Christ followers can do things that may stop some situations from happening, but cannot end them all. God does deliver and give strength to go through challenges with trust and reliance on Him. By trusting God, believers can overcome a problem. Although God provides great blessings and rewards, He also gives seven promises to His beloved who overcome all situations to the end of their physical journey.

Phil Bradley/September 15, 2014

Background

The Lord Jesus directed John the Revelator to write to the angel^[1] of seven churches in Asia Minor, namely Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (Rev 2-3). When the Lord addressed each of these churches, He either commended or rebuked them for their actions. He told five out of the seven to repent.^[2] After Jesus had addressed each church, He provided guidelines to overcome for every member in the community of believers.

The phrase “he or (him) that overcometh” occurs seven times in Rev two and three after the Lord Jesus gave instructions to the Asia Minor churches (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, and 21). These form the overcoming statements. With each, He gave something great in return for the person who overcomes. This article discusses these seven overcoming statements.

Before examining the actual statements, one should look at the various aspects of overcoming. First, what does it mean to overcome (Greek: *nikaō*, νικάω)? The term means “properly, conquer (overcome), to carry off the victory, come off victorious” (Thayer, pp. 425-446) Moreover, the verb implies a battle (*Pulpit Commentary*, 1985). Next, what does a believer overcome? Though the overcome statements do not answer this, anything that might destroy a believer’s relationship with Jesus Christ gives the

best response. Finally, how do believers overcome? Revelation 12:11 tells how to overcome the devil: “And they overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death” (KJV).

Another dimension of overcoming begs attention. Revelation 12:11 uncovered additional information about overcoming according to three main parts. One part related, “And they overcame by the blood of the Lamb” (12:11a). No one can defeat the devil or overcome the stain and grip of sin without the blood of Jesus, which He shed on the cross at Calvary. Without the blood of Jesus, the other two parts cannot happen. A second indicated, “and by the word of their testimony” (v. 11b). This part referred to more than giving a testimony at church. God gave humans the opportunity for forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ, but everyone needs to receive this gift of forgiveness. A true testimony comes when people put their faith in Jesus and experience what He does for others and them. Psalm 66:16 stressed these facts, “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.” The last reads, “and they did not love their lives unto the death” (Rev 12:11c). A critical passage, it emphasizes that believers should examine their hearts and ask, “Do I love Jesus this much?” Believers increasingly face ridicule in the U.S. Professing your faith holds life and death decisions in many countries like Iran, North Korea, and Nigeria. Regardless of where believers live, they must love Jesus this much. They will not get to where they need in relationship with God consumed by the worries and cares of life. Leaders in the body of Christ have an additional burden. They not only need to persevere and overcome themselves, but remember that what they do greatly affects what other believers will do during their persecution.

Overcoming Statement 1

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7b).

When reading the account of Adam and Eve (especially Gen 3:22), it seems the two never ate from the tree of life. It begs the question, “Why?” At first glance, it seems that Adam and Eve only made one decision in relation to eating from this tree. Since

they probably knew of it, consequently, they made two decisions. Therefore, another decision Adam and Eve considered was should they eat from the tree of life. God did not forbid them. Then, why did they not eat from it? The Bible does not say. Pursuing this question, people might ponder these thoughts. First, since Adam and Eve never experienced death, they did not know the fear and pain it brings. As a result, they had no motivation to act. Second, Adam and Eve probably just put it off for another day because they did not comprehend death. When people put off or make no decision (like giving their heart to God), this means they made a decision. Leaders in the Body of Christ need to convey the message never to wait to make a decision for Christ.

What does this mean for those who overcome? When experiencing the fear and pain of death, God will restore the human race to paradise. When believers see the tree of life, “which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (a literal place; cf. Rev 22:2), they will not have to be told twice to eat of it. What Adam and Eve did not take advantage of in the garden, God will offer to those who overcome.

Overcoming Statement 2

“He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (Rev 2:11b).

To understand the second death, the first warrants discussion. With respect to the first death, this generation will die if the rapture does not come. The believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has the promise of eternal life, while the non-believer does not. Scripture in Rev 20:11-15, explained the second death. Simply stated, people who do not have their name in the Book of Life will go to the lake of fire.

Many do not want to talk about hell. Its reality still exists and necessitates a topic for discussion. Jesus talked quite a bit about hell. So too, must believers. Some people view God as cruel because they believe that He sends humans to hell. God loves us, and He does not want to see anyone go there (2 Pet 3:9). To prevent this, God manifested Himself in the flesh (Jesus), and then died on the cross to redeem humankind. When people repent and turn to Him, they need not worry about the second death. Humans send themselves to the lake of fire when they reject Him, not God.

Overcoming Statement 3

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” (Rev 2:17).

Hidden Manna

Jesus will give the hidden manna to those who overcome. God gave manna to the children of Israel to eat while in the wilderness for 40 years during Moses' leadership. Moses spoke of manna in Exod 16:15, “This is bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.” Now connecting this to Jesus, He said, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:48), and similarly, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat this bread, he shall live for ever” (6:51). The manna that Jesus will give is Himself, and thus, believers can live forever with Him.

The Book of Revelation taught about the hidden manna. God knew humankind would fall into sin, and He already planned the remedy. Revelation 13:8b supports this idea referring to “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” The New Testament described God's action as a mystery (Greek: *mystērion*, μυστήριον), meaning “hidden thing, secret, mystery” (Thayer, 2009, p. 420). Paul discussed the mystery in Eph 3:9. He wrote, “And to make men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.” He also addressed it in Col 1:26, “Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is manifest to his saints.”

With this information, the work of God through Jesus Christ was hidden from humankind with glimpse given to the prophets. For many people, the truth of Jesus Christ remains hidden because their minds are void of the truth (2 Cor 4:4). A person cannot say, “Jesus is Lord” without the Holy Spirit revealing it (1 Cor 12:3). All believers, especially leaders, need to tell people Jesus is Lord, but only the Holy Spirit can truly make someone believe. Those who overcome get to partake of the hidden manna and have eternal life.

White Stone

The next thing Jesus talked about in this verse was the white stone. He “will give him (overcomers) a white stone” (Rev 2:17b). One explanation of the white stone argued, “The white stone speaks of the custom of casting such a stone into a voter’s urn with the name of a candidate, indicating the approval of the one who cast it” (Feinberg, 1994, p. 2662). Jesus chooses people who overcome. It does not get any better than the Lord Jesus selecting His people!

New Name

The third part in this verse reads “in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” (v. 17c). God changed the names of various individuals in both testaments, such as Abram to Abraham, Jacob to Israel, and Simon to Peter. The changes regarded things God did and was going to do in the lives of these individuals. God has a new name for believers, which will reflect specifically what He did in each of the overcomer’s lives. Every name (other than Jesus) has baggage of past wrongs attached to it. The new name comes from a clean slate, and gloriously connects to the Savior.

Overcoming Statement Four

“And he that overcometh, and keepeth my words unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as received of the Father. And I will give him the morning star” (Rev 2:26-28).

Power Over the Nations

It seems many Christians have the idea that when they pass from this life into the next, heaven just will function as an eternal church service or chill time. All believers have a purpose, an important job God wants them to do. When Adam was in the Garden of Eden, he had jobs to do. God commanded Adam to “replenish the earth and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen 1:28). Additionally, Adam had to dress and keep the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:15). Just as God gave Adam

responsibilities, He will give overcomers the same. The Lord will give responsibilities to overcomers based on the faithfulness of their assignments in this life (Matt 25:14-30). All believers, but especially leaders in the Body of Christ must remember that labor for the Lord effects not just this life, but that to come.

What will overcomers do? When Jesus returns, He will reign a thousand years. During that time, He will bind the devil in the bottomless pit (Rev 20:2-3). Upon the Lord Jesus' return, believers will return with Him (Rev 19:15 and Jude 14). Just as He will return bodily form, likewise believers will the same. Physical bodies need a physical earth. As Christ reigns on earth, believers will reign with Him (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 1:5; 5:9; 20:6).

Rule With a Rod of Iron

People may ask over whom overcomers will reign. Simply stated, Jesus will reign over the physically alive who did not take the mark of the beast (Rev 13:16-18). These overcomers will reign with the Lord Jesus over forthcoming generations of offspring. After a thousand years, the devil will return (released from the bottomless pit) to deceive the earth's inhabitants. Perhaps, God lets it happen to test the people of the earth's faith in Him because most (at least) never experienced the devil's influence. In the end, God has the victory (Rev 20:9-10).

Give Him the Morning Star

Now, what does it mean when Jesus stated, "And I will give him the morning star" (2:28)? Feinberg noted, "The morning star is the promise of being with Christ before the day breaks; it is the promise of the rapture. Israel awaits the Sun of righteousness (1994, p. 2662; cf. Mal 4:2); the church looks for the Morning Star (cf. Rev 22:16). Believers need to desire the Morning Star to rise in their hearts (2 Pet 1:19 NKJV).

Overcoming Statement 5

"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels" (Rev 3:5).

Clothed in White Raiment

First, this passage tells that God will clothe overcomers “in white raiment” (3:5b KJV). The color white symbolizes purity and righteousness in Scripture (*Bible Basic*, n.d.). Only the blood of Jesus makes them pure and righteous. In regards to righteousness, 2 Cor 6:21 stated, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” The Lord will clothe overcomers (bride of Christ) in a special wardrobe. Revelation 19:8 stated, “And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” Other versions, such as the NASB, translate righteousness as righteous acts.

Name in the Book of Life

The Lord further promises that He will not “blot out his name out of the book of life” (Rev 3:5b). Having one’s name in the Book of Life holds great importance for the believer and only occurs through the blood of Jesus. God will cast those names not in the Book of Life, into the lake of fire at the Great White Throne of Judgment (20:15). Leaders must have the focus of leading people to salvation, so others have their name in the Book of Life.

I Will Confess His Name

In the last part of the verse Jesus said, “but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” (3:5c). Jesus communicated this in the Gospels with, “him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven” (Matt 10:32). Further, He said, “him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8). In both these statements, Jesus will confess only after a person confesses before men about Him (Matt 10:32, Father and Luke 12:8, angels). The word confess (Greek: *homologeō*; ὁμολογέω) means, “properly, to voice the same conclusion; i.e., agree (“confess”); to profess (confess) because in full agreement; to align with (endorse)” (*HELPS Word-Studies*, n.d.). A person who overcomes will confess Jesus before men. In fact, Rom 10:9 tells that believers have to confess Him for their salvation. How wonderful that the Lord Jesus supports people upon confessing Him!

Overcoming Statement 6

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name” (Rev 3:12).

A Pillar in the Temple

What does it mean when Jesus said, “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God?” This statement does not suggest that person will stand in place holding up a building for eternity. “A pillar is constantly used as a figure of strength and durability” (Feinberg, 1994, p. 2664; cf., Jer 1:18; Gal 2:9). A robustly constructed pillar holds up a building. When believers overcome in this life, God rewards them with a position of prominence build upon the foundation, which is Jesus Christ.

Go No More Out

The Lord Jesus told the overcomer “he shall go no more out” (Rev 3:12a). Most believers (if not all) at some point feel that God is far away. Leaders especially can feel this way because of personal and ministry issues. Sadly, far too many stories of pastors committing suicide exist. Overcomes will not experience the feeling of not being in God’s presence anymore because they will be with Him forevermore. They never encounter loneliness again for, “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain (21:4).

Name of the City of My God

Now, looking at the Lord writing the name of God and the name of the city of God on those who overcomes points to another aspect (3:12 b). Though the context of this passage remains unknown, it will identify the person as an overcomer of God. The devil has a counterfeit to it with the mark of the beast (13:16-18). Some will choose the mark of the beast, showing their alliance to the anti-Christ.

Write Upon Him a New Name

Jesus stated that He, “will write upon him my new name” (3:12d) In Scripture, God revealed names and titles of Himself, such as I AM THAT I AM and YHWH (or YHVH). In the New Testament, revealed Himself as Yeshua (or Jesus), which indicates,

“name which is above every name” (Phil 2:9). God hid His name (Jesus) throughout history until Gabriel revealed it to Mary and then Joseph. Some Christians might believe they know all about God, but they do not. God will disclose a new name, which He will make known something else about Him that they do not know.

Overcoming Statement 7

“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and sit down with my Father in his throne” (Rev 3:21).

Sit With Me on the Throne

Christians must understand the importance of the promise of sitting with the Lord Jesus on His throne (3:21), rather than how they all fit on it. People who sit on thrones might hold positions of royalty and honor. First Peter 2:9 named believers a “royal priesthood.” Further, God made us kings (Rev 1:6). Moreover, Scripture calls us “joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). Through God’s grace, overcomers gain the great honor of sitting on the throne with Him!

An interesting point: Some people, including this writer, believe the 24 elders will consist of the raptured believers (Rev 4). First, the term “church” or “churches” does not appear between Rev 3 to 22:16. The believers in chapter seven will come out of the tribulation. Then, the 24 elders will wear white raiment and have crowns (Rev 4:4), the very same items given to believers. Additionally, Rev 11:16 stated that the 24 elders “sat before God on their seats.” To have a seat that close to the throne of God shows great honor. The closeness of God and His people here truly fulfills what Jesus prayed in John 17:21b, “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.”

Close

Some concluding thoughts about overcoming come to mind with, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev 4:20). Some people believe that this verse only pertains to believers since chapters two and three deal with seven different churches. This thought does not hold true because this verse specified, “if any man”

and “any man” means all (believers and non-believers). If people read this article and have not given their life to God, they should repent and turn to Him. This article told of the great rewards for believers, who overcome and finished their journey. The rewards God has for overcomers cannot be comprehended because of their greatness (1 Cor 2:9).

All believers (both individuals and churches) need to examine their hearts (2 Cor 13:5). Of the seven churches from Rev 2 and 3, Jesus told five to repent. Today, Jesus knocks on the hearts of believers and churches. Too often believers and churches do not open the door for Him. We need a great repentance for the sins in the Body of Christ. It is only after repentance that a great revival in the Body of Christ will occur.

Of utmost importance to ministry, leaders in the Body of Christ must open the door when Jesus knocks. When the leaders do not, it affects others who do not open the door in their hearts. God will judge the leaders for leading the flock astray (Matt 23).

After the instructions Jesus gave each church in Revelation two and three, even after telling five of those churches to repent, He gave a promise for overcomers. If believers sin and fall away from God, they have a promise from God. In 1 John 1:9 Scripture said, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Ending this article, a very important event will happen whether people think it will or not—the return of Jesus. The Lord said in Rev 22:12, “And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.” The last part of Rev 22:20 stated, “Even so, come, Lord.

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (Rev 22:21).

Endnotes

[1] Thayer's Lexicon defines an angel as a minister, presiding presbyter, or bishop.

[2] Many people (including this writer) believe these churches and the order of mention indicate the seven periods of the Church Age. The article will not focus on this subject.

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A Speck in Specs

Phil Bradley/2012

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, at some point, you will confront the question “If God is a loving God, how could He at times command the Israelites in the Old Testament to kill men, women, and children of non-Israelites?” Hopefully, this article will dispel this inaccurate view. Richard Dawkins wrote from this viewpoint in the God Delusion: “The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction...” [\[1\]](#) Some of the things he contends is the God of the Old Testament was an “unforgiving control freak, a vindictive, and a bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser.” [\[2\]](#)

Phil Bradley/March 17, 2013

How and why would God sometimes command killing men, women, and children of whom the Israelites fought? My first point, of which I will not spend much time, is that God is the Creator of the universe. He has the right do you want He wants. Romans 9:21 reads, “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?”

My next point is, the one of my focus, God is a holy God. He demands holiness from His people. I want to lay some groundwork before I go back to this article’s question. Preachers often focus on the love of God, which is very powerful and important. In fact, a well-known Bible verse says “God is love” (1 John 4:8 KJV). Most notable, though, what often does not get the focus that it deserves is that our God is a holy God.

God is Holy

What exactly does the word holy mean? In the Old Testament, one of the Hebrew words for holy is *qadosh* (קָדוֹשׁ), signifying “to be sacred (ceremonially or morally); selected, pure, holy, consecrated, pious.”[\[3\]](#) The Bible stresses the importance of God’s holiness by expressing it in two different verses (Isa 6:3 and Rev 4:8.) These verses highlight this attribute of God in a thrice-repeated term for emphasis: “Holy, holy, holy.” Scripture does not stress God’s other characteristics this way. There is no “Love, love, love” or “Merciful, merciful, merciful.”

With our God being a holy God, He wants His people to be holy. Leviticus 11:45 reiterates God's desire, "ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy." In order to be holy, you need to be pure. In order to be pure, you must rid yourself of things in your life that will lead you away from purity. In this lies the problem of co-living with the people of Canaan. You cannot surround yourself with evil, without experiencing its effects.

God Desires You to Be Holy—Drive Out Evil from the Land

The Bible stresses the importance of God's holiness by expressing it in two different verses (Isa 6:3 and Rev 4:8.) These verses highlight this attribute of God in a thrice-repeated term for emphasis: "Holy, holy, holy." Scripture does not stress God's other characteristics this way. There is no "Love, love, love" or "Merciful, merciful, merciful." What were the sins of the people of the land? God is the only true God and He only is to be worshipped (cf. Exod 20:2-5). The people of the land worshipped idol/false gods. Along with worshipping false gods, they burned their children and practiced loathsome vices like sodomy and bestiality.^[4] In fact, God said in Lev 18:24-25, "for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants."

God gave the Amorites time to repent. He told Abram "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen 15:16). The Amorites were one of the groups of people who inhabited Canaan, four hundred years before the Canaanite conquest. We are not sure what exactly the measurement "not yet full" means but assume that the Amorite society was evil, which kept adding to their evil deeds.

The Amorites did not repent of their ways. Since the Amorites and other people of the land continued in their evil ways, the Lord told the Israelites, "But of the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save nothing that breatheth: But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and Jebusites; as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee: That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods: so should ye sin against the Lord your God" (Lev 18:24-25). Later, when the Israelites conquered the Promised Land, they did not completely drive out the people of the land. The Israelites kept some of

them as servants. Since they did not drive them out, God let the people of the land remain. The people of the land would be “thorns in your sides and their gods shall be a snare unto you” (Judg 2:3).

Don't Keep Sin Around —You'll Become Its Servant

A person cannot keep sin around and not have it destroy you. You cannot keep sin as a servant because evidently, you will become the servant. The Bible uses leaven to symbolize sin. In 1 Cor 5:6 it reads, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump.” If you leave even a little sin around, it is something that can destroy you. This is what happened to Israel.

Sin continued as problematic throughout ancient Israel's history. Since the people of the land remained, the Israelites learned their ways. During much of the Old Testament, the Israelites would serve God for a while and then reject God and take up idol worship, which involved vile practices. This brought great judgment throughout ancient Israel's history, being conquered many times with much suffering of which sin leads.

Killing of Children From the People of the Land

What about the killing of children of the people of the land? First, idol worship and the evil practices involved with it affected many children of native inhabitants. These children, including babies, would keep the memory of the evil idolatry alive, which then would influence the Israelites. Also, though Bible does not say it, but possibly, the satanic strongholds that consumed the people of the land gripped their children even before these youth came of age and knew right from wrong. This likelihood would have a great effect on the Israelites, too.

What does this mean for a Christian in the 21st century? In the *Age of Grace*, we are not to use violence to deal with sinful people, but we are to do whatever it takes to stop the effects of sin from destroying us. What occurred in the Old Testament serve as examples we can use today. Apostle Paul mentioned certain things that happened in the Old Testament, and said “Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they were written for our admonition” (1 Cor 10:11).

Contemporary Application

In Matt 5:29-30, Jesus talked about the need to pluck your right eye and cut off your right hand if it “offend thee” (KJV) or “causes you to sin” (ESV). It is better for a member of your body to perish than your “whole body should be cast into hell.” We should not start chopping parts of our bodies off, but we need to do whatever it takes to stop sin from getting an open door and destroying us.

You find examples of these as such. If God sets you free from pornography, do not keep any in your home. Also, the same goes with alcohol. Then again, If you had a sexual relationship with someone in the past, you cannot go hang out with them at his/her home. The issue is when you are strong in the Lord you can resist these things. However, when you get your eyes off the Lord, and are weak, those things tempt you to go back. If you leave the door open to sin, the chances are great that sin will enter.

I can imagine that it was a difficult task for the army of Israel to kill all the people in a city. Also, it is hard to kill the things that lead us to sin. It means giving up some things you love and ending or separating yourself from some relationships. It is about killing things that will separate you from Christ. It is hard to do, but it will be worth it.

Earlier on, I talked about the love of God. How does this article connect with the love of God? With the children of Israel and the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, God has great love for us. God knows how sin destroys a person. Naturally, He desires to see His children avoid sin’s destruction. His commandments are not to bring us down, rather give us a blueprint for the greatest life possible. Since “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son” (John 3:16 KJV), God does not want anyone to suffer because of sin. In fact, He wants “all to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9).

Closing

I pray this article helped you answer why God at times commanded the Israelites to kill all men, women, and children of their enemies. This article was about a specific situation in the Old Testament. Do NOT use this article to explain why bad things happen to children. It would be very destructive to the people who are hurting. For all believers, remember what 1 Thess 5:22 says: “Abstain from all appearance of evil.”

Endnotes

- [1] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusional* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 51
- [2] Dawkins, *The God Delusional*, 51.
- [3] F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010), 872-73.
- [4] Quartz Hill School of Theology, *The Religion of the Canaanite*, n.p. [cited 14 March 2013]. Online: <http://www.theology.edu/canaan.htm>