

The Overcomer's Reward

The Greek word for “overcome” is nikao (νικάω) which means to win, to defeat, to conquer in an utterly complete and comprehensive way. The Nike brand is based on this word group and stands for victory in sport. “Nikao” is used of temporary victories such as those of the Antichrist over the saints (Revelation 11:7, 13:7) which results in the martyrdom of God’s Church during the Tribulation. However, it is mainly used for the Christian’s victory over demonic powers and principalities and powers because of the Cross of Christ and the faith and endurance of the believers. It is especially used in the context of victory over accusation in court and is even used once (Romans 3:4) of God’s victory over those who are accusing Him of injustice. We are also to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:20,21). We are rewarded for winning the battle, however it is only because of the work of Christ that we win!

In some of the New Testament verses we find that the past tense is used as in “you have overcome” and in others the victory is a future event “to him who overcomes”. We have overcome the world and all of its delusions by seeing through it all and having faith in Christ Jesus. We have yet to overcome as we battle temptations, persecutions and false doctrine all around us every day.

Overcoming the Strong Man

Luke 11:17-23 *But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. (18) And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. (19) And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. (20) But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (21) When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; (22) but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. (23) Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.*

1 John 2:12-14 *I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. (13) I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. (14) I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.*

We are in the midst of an ongoing spiritual battle in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:10-18) and we are either on one side of the battle or the other (Luke 11:23 above). Jesus entered into this battle by casting out demons. His opponents said that He was using demonic power to do so. Jesus answers them with the “house divided” statements (Luke 11:17-20). At the Cross He takes away Satan’s armor (Luke 11:22) and triumphs over the principalities and powers (Colossians 2:13-15).

In the 1 John passage above, the “young men” are believers who are strong, have the word of God abiding in them, and have overcome the evil one. They are victors in their spiritual battles because they are spiritually strong, rather than spiritually weak, and this has come about because of their deep knowledge and personal application of the Word of God to their lives (which is the sword of the Spirit, Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12). The apostle could say of them that “the word of God abides in you”!

Overcoming the World

John 16:32-33 *Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. (33) I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”*

John 17:14 *I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*

1 John 5:4-5 *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. (5) Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

The “world” (kosmos), in these passages, is the deceptive, evil, cosmological, demonic thought-controlling powers and principalities that keep unsaved people in a state of disobedience (Ephesians 2:1-3) and spiritual and mental hostility to God (Romans 8:7, Colossians 1:21). The world is so opposed to God that friendship with the world is spiritual treason and makes one an enemy of God (James 4:4). We are never to love the world or the things of the world, if we do, then the love of the Father is not in us (1 John 2:15-17).

If we are born of God, we overcome the world by believing that Jesus is the Son of God. First, Christ has overcome the world (John 16:33) and His apostles were “not of this world” (John 17:14) because they had received God’s word, which is why the world hated them. Those who are born of God are living in absolute defiance of the powers and principalities of this dark age (Ephesians 6:12), and they are no longer sons of disobedience (Ephesians 2:1-3) but rather are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms as conquerors and victors, as those saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:4-9). In an interesting side-note, Noah “condemned the world” by having active, saving faith in an age of wickedness and unbelief: **Hebrews 11:7** *By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*

Overcoming Spiritual Deception

1 John 4:1-6 *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. (2) By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, (3) and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. (4) Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (5) They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. (6) We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*

He who is in us (Christ Jesus) is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4) and will give us the victory over the antichrist spirits that seek to deceive the saints (1 John 4:1,3; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). We must test the spirits in order to discern which is the spirit truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:6) and among those critical tests is to test whether they believe that Jesus Christ has actually come in the flesh (1 John 4:2) and whether they truly listen to apostolic teaching (1 John 4:6). We overcome these

antichrists because Christ is in us and the Holy Spirit instructs us in all truth (1 John 2:20,27).

Overcoming Sin and End Times Persecution

In the following passages in the book of Revelation overcoming involves “doing something” to repair a breach in the faith of the church, or to maintain the faith of the saints in the church. Here the overcoming is active. It is the specific action required to win their individual spiritual conflicts.

This includes repenting of some sin (2:5, 16; 3:3,19), doing the holy and worthy works they did at first (2:5,26; 3:2), enduring persecution (2:10), disciplining a false prophet (2:20-24), holding fast to what they have (2:25, 3:11), waking up (3:2,3), and even forsaking a wealthy, closed and arrogant mindset (3:17-20).

Here things are conditional rather than unconditional. If you overcome, then you will be rewarded.

However, if you fail to repent, if you do not overcome, then you will be disciplined, for example:

Revelation 2:5 *Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.*

This is a distinct contrast to the notion that overcoming is identical to salvation; that all we have to do is believe in Jesus and we have automatically overcome, both now and forever.

Revelation tells us that we are part of a raging cosmic battle, that the Devil wants to tempt, deceive, accuse, kill and destroy the saints and that we must contend for our souls against all kinds of spiritual enemies.

We overcome by winning this cosmic battle and we then receive rewards that are more than houses and lands in the Millennium. The overcomer’s rewards go to the core of our spiritual life (2:7,11; 3:5), our spiritual identity (2:17, 3:11,12) and our spiritual authority (2:26-28, 3:21).

Revelation 2:7 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of My God." '*

This is more than just possessing eternal life, it is fully participating in intimate communion with God and in the heavenly city. The leaves of the tree of life were for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2) and it also bore twelve kinds of fruit and one kind of fruit was always in season. Participation in the tree of life was a very great spiritual privilege that was only available to those who had washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (22:14). It is a full restoration of the human spiritual potential that was lost at the Fall (Genesis 2:9, 3:22-24).

Revelation 2:11 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall in no way be harmed by the second death." '*

This is an assurance of the eternal, uninterrupted, continuation of the spiritual life of the faithful. The second death is the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14, 21:8) prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). Those who reign with Christ after the first resurrection are not affected by the second death (Revelation 20:6). Their spiritual life is unceasing and uninterrupted. Those who are utterly selfish (Matthew 25:41), who take the mark of the beast (Revelation 14:10), whose name is not in the book of life (Revelation 20:15), and those with evil characters are thrown into the lake of fire

(Revelation 21:8). When we overcome sin and temptation (Matthew 18:7-9) through self-discipline and faith we become part of those who will reign with Christ during the Millennium.

Revelation 2:17 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to him some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except he who receives it."*

The hidden manna is secret spiritual sustenance. The word "secret" comes from the Greek word *kyrpto* from which we get cryptography. It is the encoded, deeper truth of God. The white stone was used for acquittal in ancient courts, a black stone was used for "guilty" verdicts. It symbolizes divine pardon and acceptance. The new name is in the perfect tense and indicates that it has been written down, once and forever and cannot be altered. No one knows this name except the recipient. This prevents them from being cursed by black magic. It is victory over the occult. The overcomer cannot be cursed because a) they are without fault b) their name is secret c) they know the deep things of God and have the real hidden knowledge not the dark knowledge, and their knowledge is from a higher realm and can defeat the magicians of the age and the Gnostics of the first century.

Revelation 2:26-28 *And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations-- (27) 'And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be smashed to pieces like clay vessels'-- (28) as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.*

The morning star is Christ in His cosmic powers and divine eternal authority (Revelation 22:16). The overcomer participates in Christ's Sonship rule because the believer is a brother/sister (Hebrews 2:11). The overcomer is given absolute (iron rod) authority over the rebellious nations of the world so that they are conquered, even shattered like pottery; so that the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of God and of His Christ (Revelation 11:15). This authority is given to those who are faithfully obedient through intense suffering "*he who keeps My works until the end*" which agrees with **Romans 8:17** *and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.* The overcomer enters into the eternal, cosmic rulership of Christ over all rebellious forces.

Revelation 3:5 *He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and by no means shall I erase his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.*

This is the church of Sardis, that looks alive, but is spiritually dead, and is involved in impurity. It needs to repent, wake up and walk in holiness. The implication is that, at the time of writing, they are an utter disgrace. This promise is a promise of removal of disgrace in return for contrite repentance. They will walk in white garments. Their name will not be erased from the book of life; and Christ will be proud of them and confess their name before the Father and His angels. Their impurity and shame will have become purity and honor! The disgraced church will have become the restored church. Repentance erases the shame of the past and brings in new possibilities. The game is not over!

Revelation 3:10-12 *Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. (11) I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. (12) The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.*

This is the faithful church of Philadelphia, which kept Christ's word of patient endurance even after persecution by a Jewish synagogue in that city. The city was prone to earthquakes so these promises are all about stability, permanence and protection. Keep you "from" the hour of trial can also be rendered "keep you through". The endurance is Christ's own endurance resident in the believers through the power of the Holy Spirit (v.10). They are to maintain their good testimony without become sluggish, so as not to lose their crown. The pillar is a permanent, immovable, stable honorable place in God's holy temple. They will never be removed from the presence of God. They will be completely identified with God; His name will be inscribed on them. They will be spiritually prominent. God will "own" them rather than disown them. They will fully participate in the heavenly realms and the New Jerusalem.

Revelation 3:21 *He that overcomes, I will grant to him to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

The lukewarm church of Laodicea was about to be spat out of God's mouth. They urgently needed "eye salve" to give them some awareness of sin and a longing for spiritual purity. The message was "*be zealous therefore and repent*" (3:19). It seems to have been a wealthy church full of self-important Christians, so God appeals to their self-importance by promising them throne-room authority!

Christ has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18) and is seated at the right-hand of the Father, far above all principalities and powers (Ephesians 1:20-23, 1 Peter 3:22)) and we are seated with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6,7). The repentant, faithful, pure Christian who overcomes worldliness and worldly ways will have great spiritual authority that vastly exceeds anything they could get here on earth by mere human ambition.

Overcoming Satan

Revelation 12:10-11 *Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ, because the accuser of our brothers, the one who accused them before our God day and night, has been thrown out of heaven. (11) And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.*

Revelation 17:12-14 *These (ten earthly kings and the Beast) will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, and elect, and faithful."*

The saints overcome the Devil by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. They are called, elect and faithful. They actively participate in the victory of the Lamb, as part of His triumphant spiritual army, and Satan is cast down. Not just Satan, but all the kingdoms of this world and the Beast, are also defeated by God's Church!

The Church Victorious is triumphant over sin, death, Hell, and the powers and principalities of this age. The saints win because they apply the blood of the Lamb to the problems of the world. Through faith, obedience and endurance Satan is crushed under their feet (Romans 16:20).

The overcomers are martyrs "and they did not love their lives to the death" (Revelation 12:11). Spiritual victory arises out of earthly defeat. The overcomers keep the glorious end in mind!

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, (18) as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

Romans 8:18 *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*

Romans 8:37-39 *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (38) For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, (39) nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The Final Victory

Revelation 21:1-7 *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And there was no more sea. (2) Then I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having been prepared like a bride having been adorned for her husband. (3) And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them. ... (6) And He said to me, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give from the spring of the water of life freely to him that is thirsty. (7) **He that overcomes I shall give to him these things, and I shall be God to him, and he shall be to Me a son.***

In the final victory we will inherit all things, even the new heaven and the new earth with great glory; and we will have an established and permanent divine relationship, where He is God to us and we shall be His sons and daughters. The cosmic consequences of the Cross are now fully manifest and God has finally brought many sons to glory:

Hebrews 2:10-11 *For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory.....That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,*

Romans 8:29-30 *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (30) And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

The Cross does not just get sinners saved, it also justifies, sanctifies and glorifies them, and makes them overcomers. Christ's work on the Cross gives us an eternal spiritual destiny with great glory, for all the ages to come, in a new heaven and a new earth. God's plan to grant us awesome and eternal heavenly rewards is finally complete! We were saved in order to be sanctified, glorified and rewarded!