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**The Assurance of Final Redemption as Motivation for
Perseverance in the Johannine Apocalypse**

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Introduction

The book of Revelation can best be understood as a survival manual for persecuted Christians. It is a call to remain faithful under

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pressure, to persevere in the face of hostility from earthly authorities as well as the common trials of life. This paper discusses a key element of the motivation for such faithfulness – the certainty of eternal security as it is held out by this book. The thesis of the paper is that this certainty is closely integrated with and arises out of the overall vision of Revelation.

We will therefore need to begin with an overview of Revelation's core message and settings. Against this background, we can then examine the way in which the call for perseverance is made. We will then discuss more specifically the way in which the key theme of victory is traced out in Revelation. At this point we arrive at the crucial and much-disputed question: does Revelation actually assure its readers that they will participate in this victory? Here we will need to engage in careful discussion of some of the key texts with reference, again, to the overall perspective of the book. Finally, the promise of security and the commands to endure will be brought together to show how assurance operates as a motivation for endurance.

To avoid subsequent confusion, I should make it clear that I shall be following an essentially idealist interpretation of Revelation 4-19. Any writer on Revelation is more or less obliged either to assume, or else to justify at length, their approach to these central chapters. To justify my position is outside the scope of this paper, so the only honest course is simply to state it openly at the beginning. However, while this interpretive stance will affect the argument at various points, the conclusions should not be markedly affected by it.

A. The book of Revelation and its core message

It is well-known that the book of Revelation has been subject to widely differing interpretations. Most of these differences need not concern us here, though some will become significant at various points in the discussion. Here we will summarise the most relevant aspects of the book's setting and message.

By common consent, the immediate context of the book of Revelation is an oppressive world system where Christians must choose between compromise and resistance. If they are faithful and resist, they will be persecuted. If Revelation can be viewed as a letter

with seven introductions, as Bauckham puts it², each of these introductions presents a different response to the pressures facing the seven churches. Not all are faithful; however, the main interest of the book is in the saints who struggle to endure faithfully, both at the time of writing and in the future. Whether the ‘present time’ is Nero’s rule or Domitian’s is not at issue here: the question of dating is tackled in all the standard commentaries and need not detain us now.

That suffering is to be expected, and the consequent need for endurance, emerge even in the prologue³ (Rev 1:9). John makes it clear not only that he is involved in suffering (*thlipsis* – the normal word for ‘trouble’ or ‘tribulation’) and patient endurance (*hupomone*) but also, by describing himself as a partner in these, that his addressees are acquainted with and involved with them too. That John’s experience of suffering is directly related to persecution is made clear in the same verse, where his presence on Patmos is ascribed to ‘the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’. Even before this, in v.3, the book confers a blessing on those who heed and keep (*terountes*) the words of prophecy which it contains. This blessing will be substantially repeated in 22:7, the two blessings adding urgency to the call to faithfulness which is made throughout⁴.

Persecution and endurance, then, are presented from the outset as normal and natural in the life of the faithful Christian. The letters to Smyrna (2:8-11), Pergamum (2:12-17) and Philadelphia (3:7-13) and probably also to Ephesus (2:1-7, where persecution is implied rather than stated explicitly) provide specific examples in the lives of the churches. The hostile circumstances Christians can expect to face throughout the Church age are elaborated in more general terms in the remainder of the book. In terms of the general trials of life, Christians along with the rest of the world will suffer under the onslaught of the

² Bauckham, *The theology of the book of Revelation*, p.14.

³ In common with commentators such as Beale and Mounce, I am using ‘prologue’ here to cover the whole of ch 1. It could be argued that the prologue extends only to 1:3 or to 1:8.

⁴ The relationship of the seven blessings in Revelation is discussed in a fascinating article by Field, who finds a chiasmic pattern in the first six blessings, highlighting the seventh and last. The blessings discussed here are the first and sixth, which form a matching pair. (Field, ‘The seven blessings of the book of Revelation – a brief exegetical note’, *Foundations* 53, Spring 2005, 20-26).

four horsemen who are unleashed as the first four seals are opened in ch 6. In terms of direct assaults against the saints, ch 13 gives the clearest exposition. The ‘war against the saints’ (13:7) is seen in this vision to embrace a forced and deceitful call to alternative worship (13:12, 14) combined with economic tyranny (13:16-17).

B. The call to endurance in Revelation

The word used for endurance in Revelation is *hupomone*. It is variously translated in NIV as ‘patient endurance’ (1:9, 13:10, 14:12), ‘perseverance’ (2:2, 2:19), ‘persevered’ (2:3, translating the Greek *hupomonen echeis*), and ‘to endure patiently’ (3:10). We immediately observe that the word occurs *seven* times: this is most unlikely to be an accident in a book constructed as carefully, and where the counts of different words are so significant, as is the case with Revelation. Many authors have pointed out that key expressions typically occur either seven times (for example ‘the Lord God Almighty’, ‘Christ’) or multiples of seven times (‘Jesus’, fourteen times; ‘Lamb’, 28 times)⁵. With *hupomone*, we find one of the key messages of the book highlighted by a seven-fold repetition.

The general meaning of *hupomone* covers ‘patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, perseverance’⁶. There does not seem to be strong ground for distinguishing variations of meaning between these seven cases: from the context it is hard to justify Bauer and Danker’s suggestion that in Rev 1:9, and possibly in 3:10, the note is more one of patient *expectation*⁷. Of the seven occurrences, one occurs in the prologue and is, as we have seen, a statement of ‘the way things are’. Patient endurance is a necessary part of discipleship. The next four occur in the letters to Ephesus (two), Thyatira and Philadelphia, where they are found in commendations – albeit in the cases of Ephesus and Thyatira this is a prelude to the Lord’s severe criticism. It might be surprising that the specific commendation is absent from the letter to the highly praised church in Smyrna (2:8-11). However, this letter does include a closely related call to endure persecution in

⁵ A very good treatment of this is provided in Bauckham, *The climax of prophecy*, 29-37.

⁶ Bauer and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd edition.

⁷ Bauer and Danker, *Lexicon*.

v10: ‘Be faithful, even to the point of death (*ginou pistos achri thanatou*), and I will give you the crown of life.’ It could even be argued that the use of different language here strengthens the case for identifying the sevenfold use of *hupomone* as specially significant: John deliberately limits the frequency of the key word to the number representing completeness.

Returning to the use of *hupomone* itself, only the last two examples are actually calls to endurance. These occur in 13:10, in the context of oppression by the (first) Beast, and in 14:12, where the context is the announcement of judgement. We shall return to these passages later.

C. Endurance and the grand narrative of Revelation

We must now move on to examine the way that the unique features of Revelation contribute to motivating the call to endurance. To do this we must first discuss the way that the genre of Revelation works. It is well-known that the book incorporates three genres in one. It is framed as a letter, not only in the obvious way that it incorporates letters to seven specific churches which function, as noted earlier, as a seven-fold introduction to the book; but also through its prologue. It is also apocalyptic in character, while it presents itself clearly as prophecy. These last two genres are both relevant to the way the summons to endurance is delivered, and as such demand further attention.

1. The nature of apocalyptic

Consensus on a definition of the apocalyptic genre has proved elusive, but an adequate working definition is as follows. According to the definition adopted by the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) in 1979:

“Apocalypse” is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.⁸

In 1986 the definition was expanded to include the *function* of the genre. Apocalyptic is:

⁸ Beale, *The book of Revelation*, 40.

'intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behaviour of the audience by means of divine authority.'⁹

Essentially, then, apocalyptic claims to look behind the scenes, to reveal what cannot be seen from the perspective of earth, and to provide an understanding of the current plight of the author's community in the light of these revelations. As far as biblical apocalyptic is concerned, a key element is to demonstrate that God is in control, despite appearances to the contrary. This observation accords with the idea that apocalyptic grew out of a sense that God's people were in a difficult or impossible plight; and that it reached its fullest development in Israel at a time when there was an awareness that prophecy had long ceased and the nation was under alien rule in the form of the Roman Empire. In the case of the book of Revelation, the Christian apocalypse, the difficult plight is the hostile situation faced by the churches in the province of Asia.

2. The contribution of the prophetic element in Revelation

It is fair to say that there are two essential differences between Revelation and contemporary Jewish apocalypses. One is obvious: Revelation is centred around the person of Jesus Christ. The other is less so: Revelation is also prophecy, as it makes clear from the outset (1:3). This means that the book aims to do much more for its readers than merely to instruct, or even to inspire them, through its series of visions. Quite explicitly, it also *directs* its readers: it calls them to action in response to what has been revealed. We should therefore expect to find close connections between the truths revealed in the visions and the commands to the addressees; and this is exactly what we do find in the call to faithful endurance. But the fact that the call is given in the context of apocalyptic should already hint to us that it is heavenly realities, and not a merely earthly perspective, that will provide the motivation.

3. The cosmic struggle and its glorious outcome

What is it that Revelation brings to light? John's readers did not need to be told that their world was a dark and threatening place to live out their faith. They did need to be told that the risen Lord was

⁹ Beale, 41.

fully aware of this too. They knew about the idol temples and the slanders from the synagogue: they would be encouraged to know that the Lord could see it all (2:9, 13). But beyond their immediate context, it is the vast cosmic struggle that Revelation displays so powerfully, that above and beyond the pains and pressures of Smyrna or Pergamum an age-long battle was raging. Above and beyond, yes – yet very relevant to their own position.

The heavenly visions in Revelation begin with the double throne-room scene in chs 4 and 5. Undoubtedly a key aspect of this scene is its subversion of the claims of Rome to supreme sovereignty, part of the critique of imperial power that can be traced through the book¹⁰, yet already the scope of the vision is much wider than that. Already in 5:5, the Lamb is said to have ‘triumphed’. By the end of ch 5, the scroll that represents the plans and purposes of God for judgement and redemption¹¹ lies safely in the hands of the Lamb that was slain, and ready to be opened. Jesus Christ is Lord over history. Even if commentators differ in their precise identification of the scroll, all concur that the succeeding chapters display the sovereignty of Christ as its seals are opened.

In chs 12-14, the violence of the cosmic conflict is presented most powerfully. Satan is introduced, his defeat and ejection from heaven are described and his weapons for assaulting God’s people – the two Beasts – are presented. Then the redeemed people of the Lamb are placed on view, safe and secure in his presence; and the section concludes with warnings and visions of final judgement. The universal spiritual battle is comprehensively won by Christ; and he has brought his people safely through. In this section, as we shall see, 12:11 is a key verse. The saints have overcome Satan ‘by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony’. Their part in the ultimate victory of the Lamb is secured objectively by his death on their behalf, and subjectively by their appropriation and declaration of it.

¹⁰ See particularly Bauckham, *Theology*, 35-39, expanded in the relevant chapters of Bauckham, *Climax*.

¹¹ For a survey of the ways in which the scroll of Rev 5 has been interpreted, see Beale, 339-48.

There is still more to be seen and said of the victory of Christ in the closing chapters of the book. We see it displayed in chs 17-18 with the ultimate destruction of Babylon. Babylon has represented the age-long defiance of godless humanity against God. In contemporary context, Babylon represented Rome with its world-wide economic and political domination and its all-embracing claims; but throughout history, Babylon is the beating heart of godless rebellion. Now at last she is fallen (18:2). We see it in ch 19 with the glorious return of Christ at the head of heaven's armies, bringing the final judgement described in ch 20. Whether this happens immediately or at the conclusion of an earthly reign in the millennium makes no difference to the unchallengeable finality of the verdicts. And we see the consummation of the eternal state in chs 21-22 as the Lamb reigns in the new Jerusalem with all his people, citizens of the heavenly city. The victory has been hard-won, but it is now complete: every enemy, including death, has been defeated, and the fruits of that victory can now be enjoyed for ever.

It is this theme of victory, and particularly the knowledge of how the story will end, that motivates the endurance which Revelation both commends and enjoins. However, and this point is crucial, that motivation can operate only if the saints know that they will themselves be part of the final victory. Does Revelation actually provide such assurance? To this question we turn in the next section.

D. The assurance of final redemption in Revelation

There is no doubt that Revelation offers glorious promises to those who endure to the end. However, it is often suggested that these promises are conditional – that Revelation envisages the possibility of beginning as a faithful believer and later losing the inheritance. This impression arises particularly because of the promises made in each of the letters to the seven churches to 'him who overcomes' (*ho nikon*). The use of this title 'overcomer' could be taken to imply that there are some Christians who do not overcome and therefore will not inherit the promise. To a greater or lesser extent, this in turn might involve losing their salvation.

Because Rev 3:5 is the case that seems to have greatest potential to support the view that someone could lose their salvation, and has therefore aroused the greatest controversy, we will proceed by examining this verse closely, along with the issues it raises. The

context is the letter to the very weak church in Sardis. In literal translation, the verse reads:

The one who overcomes thus will be clothed in white garments and I will never wipe out his name out of the book of life and I will acknowledge his name before my father and before his angels.

‘Thus’ (*outos*) may refer either to those ‘who have not soiled their clothes’ (v.4, so NIV) or, possibly, to the overcoming – i.e. by means of overcoming they will be clothed in white, etc. This point will not materially affect the exegesis of the verse. Three promises are made to the overcomer (*ho nikon*): (i) he will be clothed in white, echoing v.4 and paralleling the imagery used in 3:18, 4:4, 6:11, 7:9,14 and 19:8. (ii) his name will never be wiped out of the book of life. This promise connects closely to 13:8 and 17:8 as well as 20:12,15 and 21:27. (iii) his name will be acknowledged before the Father and the angels. The controversy relates to the second promise, which some have understood as holding out the possibility that some names *will* be erased, thereby implying conditional or provisional salvation.

The commentators are far from united in their treatment of this issue¹². At one extreme, we find the avowedly Arminian commentator Reasoner, who surveys all the views, including those discussed below, and concludes ‘the only consistent answer is that their names were written down because they were once saved; their names were erased because they fell away’. Walvoord, the leading dispensationalist commentator, believes the verse definitely implies that the removal of names is a possibility. Some, consequently, have taken this to mean that the book of life originally contains the names of everyone who has lived (in Walvoord’s view, this is equivalent to all for whom Christ died) but ‘as they come to maturity and are faced with the responsibility of accepting or rejecting Christ, their names are blotted out if they fail to receive Jesus Christ as Saviour’¹³. The preterist Chilton rightly points out (very forcefully!) that there is no biblical basis for such a doctrine and includes it in his list of three false answers to the issue. The other two he describes are the Arminian position that those who are truly saved can fall away and be

¹² The usually decisive Mounce appears oddly uncommitted at this point (Mounce, *The book of Revelation*, 96-97).

¹³ Walvoord, *The Book of Revelation*, 82.

eternally lost, their names erased from the book of life; and what he calls the ‘chicken evangelical’ position that all who have accepted Christ will be saved no matter what they do later¹⁴. At this point, however, Chilton is not entirely clear. On the one hand, he says that 3:5 presents a very real threat: there are those whose names are written in the book of life (here he seems to assume that baptism is the key) who profess Christ but who will subsequently apostatise and have their names removed. However, commentating on 2:7 he says that ‘all Christians are overcomers’¹⁵ and on 13:8 that ‘God’s Church Membership roll has existed from the foundation of the world, eternal and immutable’¹⁶. I find it impossible to reconcile all these statements.

An ingenious solution to the apparent problem of Rev 3:5 is proposed by Fuller¹⁷. He lays out three ‘key exegetical pieces’. First, ‘overcomers’ does *not* include all Christians, only those who are faithful. The idea that all Christians are intended is ‘not exegetically sound’ since ‘a command that everyone keeps is superfluous, and a reward that everyone receives for a virtue that everyone has is nonsense’¹⁸. Second, he discusses the ‘book of life’, whose contents depend on the third ‘exegetical piece’ which is the meaning of ‘name’. Noting that ‘name’ may have a range of meanings, he interprets *onoma* here to mean reputation (as in v.1, where *onoma* is so translated in NIV) and what accompanies it, in terms of the special privileges of the true overcomer in heaven. It is this place of special privilege, rather than salvation, which will be lost by believers who fail to overcome. Thus the word to overcomers in v.5 ‘promises a unique and honourable eternal identity’¹⁹.

Clearly, Fuller’s interpretation fails if the book of life is a list only of names, rather than of works. It also fails if ‘overcomers’ really does mean all true Christians. We will examine both these issues shortly. However, Fuller is correct to link ‘name’ in v.5 back to v.1.

¹⁴ Chilton, *The day of vengeance: an exposition of the book of Revelation*, 60-61.

¹⁵ Chilton, *Day of vengeance*, 51.

¹⁶ Chilton, *Day of vengeance*, 138.

¹⁷ Fuller, ‘I will not erase his name from the book of life’.

¹⁸ Fuller, ‘I will not erase his name’, 299.

¹⁹ Fuller, ‘I will not erase his name’, 305.

Surely the link is best preserved by understanding v.5 in the sense ‘whatever may happen to the *church* in Sardis, with its misleading reputation for life, no true *overcomer* will ever be declared dead’.

It seems, then, that a satisfactory exegesis of v.5 rests on two points: (i) who are the overcomers? and (ii) what exactly is this book of life? I will address the second point first. What might appear a rather straightforward question in the light of Revelation alone is complicated by references to ‘books’ at various points in the OT. In Exodus 32:32-33, Moses speaks of his own name being blotted out of the book the Lord has written, and the Lord replies, ‘Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book’. In an imprecatory passage in Psalm 69:28, David says, ‘May they be blotted out of the book of life’ – though, of course, this does not necessarily imply that it will happen. Daniel 7:10 says ‘The court was seated, and the books were opened’; and Daniel 12:1 promises that ‘your people – everyone whose name is found written in the book – will be delivered’. The reference to a ‘scroll of remembrance’ in Malachi 3:16 is much less likely to be relevant. Two of these references envisage names being removed from a book that has some relationship to blessing and salvation.

As in so many cases, then, the roots of the image of the book of life in Revelation are to be found in the OT. However, that does not mean that the interpretation of the image in Revelation is controlled by OT usage. Just as the first Beast of Revelation 13 is an amalgam of the four beasts of Daniel 7 and yet takes the meaning further, and the two witnesses of Revelation 11 are based partly on the olive trees of Zechariah 4, and yet develop the meaning, so the image of the book of life is taken up and thrown into much sharper relief in Revelation. We need to remember that doctrines of salvation are developed much further in the NT than in the OT. Thus I think that Beale’s discussion of the OT roots of this image, while helpful, is over-complex²⁰. Revelation’s own usage of the term ‘book of life’ provides more than sufficient clarification.

²⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 281-82. He finds reasons to prioritise the ‘two-book’ image of Daniel over that of Psalms and Exodus. I am not convinced that Daniel’s can justifiably be described as a ‘two-book scheme’.

As we noted above, the expression recurs five more times in the book – Rev 13:8, 17:8, 20:12b, 15 and 21:27. In 13:8, the names of the ‘inhabitants of the earth’ are said *not* to have been written in the book of life: the temporal expression ‘from the creation (or ‘foundation’) of the world’ could qualify *either* the Lamb’s death *or* the writing of the names. In the parallel expression in 17:8, however, the temporal phrase is unambiguously attached to the writing of the names (though, again, the statement is made in negative terms of the ‘inhabitants of the earth’. The references in chs 20 and 21 make the connection between the Lamb’s book of life and final salvation absolutely explicit. Moreover, no suggestion is found that the book of life consists of anything more than a list of names. Against Fuller, the usage cannot be pressed to imply additional information such as a special reputation which implies additional heavenly privileges. It is the other books, mentioned in Rev 20:12a, that contain records of people’s works that are the basis for judgement.

We must now decide how to understand ‘overcomer’ in 3:5 and elsewhere. If we conclude that ‘overcomer’ is a description of all true Christians – i.e. all true Christians finally ‘overcome’ – then it follows that no true Christian’s name will be erased from the book of life and that 3:5 does not in fact imply that possibility. If, however, ‘overcomer’ describes only a sub-set of Christians, then 3:5 leaves open the idea of names being erased.

We must begin by noting, with Beale, that the possibility of erasure is ‘not a logically necessary inference’ and that all the parallel promises (in 2:7,11,17,26-27, 3:12,21) are couched positively, with no hint that the promised blessing could be forfeited²¹. In his paper ‘The overcomer of the Apocalypse’, James Rosscup highlights Rev 21:7, pointing out that the verse is naturally taken to apply to all Christians, the only contrast being with the unsaved described in the following verse. No third group is envisaged²². Indeed, the whole of Revelation is notable for the starkness with which it divides humanity into two, and only two groups. Each individual belongs either to the Beast or to the Lamb, and wears the respective mark (of the Beast, 13:17, 14:9,11; of the Lamb, 14:1 – note the close proximity to 14:11,

²¹ Beale, *Revelation*, 279.

²² Rosscup, ‘The overcomer of the Apocalypse’, 265.

emphasising the contrast). Everyone is either an ‘inhabitant of the earth’ or a ‘saint’.

Stephen Homcy reaches the heart of the issue when he emphasises that it is Christ’s victory that is foundational for believers’ own. At the moment of his appearance in the heavenly throne-room, he is identified as the one who has ‘triumphed’ (NIV) – the word is *enikesen*, ‘overcome’²³. Homcy rightly identifies ch 12 as the key to understanding how the battle has been won, describing v.11 as the ‘centrepiece of the whole book’. Here the emphatic words *autoi enikesan* ‘accent the certainty of the believers’ victory: Jesus calls them to overcome, and they will overcome’²⁴. Tellingly, the Beast’s apparent victory in the subsequent chapter (13:7) proves false: the saints are secure because their names are written in the book of life (13:8) and in 15:2 it is the same group who are seen standing by the heavenly sea²⁵. The same group who are sealed in 7:3-4 are seen again in 14:1-5, finally redeemed. They have all, without exception, come safely home.

At this point we need to recall the way that apocalyptic works. It looks behind the scenes to display reality as it can be seen only from the perspective of heaven. The question of ‘overcoming’ is an aspect of this reality. From heaven’s viewpoint, the matter is perfectly decided. Rev 5:9-10 speaks (sings!) in decisive terms. The objective work, the act of redeeming people for God, has been done, fully accomplished by the blood of the Lamb. From a heavenly perspective, no doubt is ever raised. From earth, where the issue is clouded by the heat of the battle and by deceptive appearances, it may indeed seem that some are ‘written in the book’ only to fall away. But the genuineness of the saints is revealed through their response to the trials they undergo (Rev 2:10); those who are not genuine will not overcome, and therefore will not inherit the promises. Those who are truly redeemed prove faithful, will overcome along with Christ and will inherit all the promises. The ‘overcomers’, then, are all genuine Christians. In view of the completed work of Christ, their names are

²³ Homcy, ‘To him who overcomes’: a fresh look at what ‘victory’ means for the believer according to the book of Revelation, 196.

²⁴ Homcy, ‘A fresh look’, 199.

²⁵ Homcy, ‘A fresh look’, 199.

eternally written in the book of life, from which they will never be erased.

E. Assurance as motivation

Having established that Revelation does indeed clearly teach the final security of the saints, we must now return to the link between this assurance and the call to endurance. As we have already mentioned, there are two passages where this connection is made explicitly. The first is Rev 13:8-10. Rev 13 supremely represents the onslaught of Satan, via his servants and emissaries the two Beasts, against the saints. In the preceding verses, the war against the saints is outlined, and from the Beast's point of view it seems to be going very well (v.7). Persecution is clearly intense. v.8 highlights the division of humanity along the lines of their allegiance in this situation: they are either 'inhabitants of the earth' who worship the Beast, or else their names are written in the Lamb's book of life. v.9 echoes the words which close each of the letters to the seven churches in chs 2-3, accentuating the urgency of the message. Then v.10a, alluding to the words of Jeremiah 15:2-3 and 43:11, warn the faithful saints of the suffering that lies ahead²⁶. v.10b reads literally, 'here is the endurance (*hupomone*) and the faith of the saints'.

In context, the English versions are right to interpret this sentence with the sense '*this calls for endurance*'. But the force of this call must be more than 'It's going to be tough, so you'll have to endure'. Apart from being obvious, that message would hardly justify the pointed addition of v.9. Something stronger must surely be intended. It is much more likely that the security of the saints has been highlighted in v.8 as a basis and motivation for the endurance enjoined in v.10. Endurance under persecution is both possible and desirable precisely because they are guaranteed to pass safely through it – even if it means captivity or slaughter – to ultimate glory. Assurance thus becomes a motive for faithful endurance.

²⁶ So, rightly, Beale, *Revelation*, 704-05 and Mounce, *Revelation*, 252-53. Walvoord, however, while adopting the same reading of the disputed Greek text, takes it to refer to 'the law of divine retribution', promising divine vengeance on those who persecute the saints (Walvoord, *Revelation*, 204). This understanding does not fit the context.

The second passage to make this connection is the somewhat similar Rev 14:9-12. The context is different: in view here is not the suffering of the saints under the authority of the Beasts, but the warning of judgement on the worshippers of the Beast. Once again, a sharp line is drawn between these and the saints. The key verse is v.12, literally translated 'Here is the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commands of God and the faith of Jesus'. Again, the English versions rightly render this with the sense '*This calls for endurance*'. This time, persecution is not immediately in view (though it is the persecutors who are to be judged). It is the eternal reality of judgement of the Beast's followers, who have seemed to have the upper hand in the present age, that is cited as motivation. The obvious and implied corollary is the eternal blessing of the saints themselves. Indeed, this blessing is then stated explicitly in v.13. Even those who die under persecution, along with all those others 'who die in the Lord' will share in the blessing of eternal rest and reward. Because of these certainties – judgement for the Beast's worshippers, blessing and eternal reward for the saints – the followers of the Lamb are motivated to endure patiently. They know what lies ahead: not immediately, but ultimately.

Conclusion

We have seen how a grasp of the workings of apocalyptic and of the major themes of Revelation – especially the victory theme – provide clues to understanding the way it portrays the eternal security and the endurance of the saints. By taking us behind the scenes, Revelation shows us who has won the great victory and the security of those who are joined to him. Eternal realities are not viewed best from an earthly perspective!

The assurance of final redemption, once grasped, becomes a powerful motivation for perseverance in the face of this life's trials and the spiritual battle which still continues. Revelation is, more than anything, a clarion call to faithful perseverance in this battle; and that perseverance is greatly assisted when the saints are assured that they are full participants in the final victory. Their patient endurance will provide the proof of their true identity. For them, it is certain that blessing lies ahead – the blessing that is received in full only after their death.

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