

## SABBATH THOUGHT 2023-05-27—HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Revelation 2 and 3 have been the source of much discussion over the years but most of the time the real meaning has been overlooked. It is a natural tendency to want to label or associate ourselves according to those God praises rather than those He condemns. But that is exactly what we do when we read these chapters. In all things, Christ is our judge and only He knows our hearts well enough to assign praise (or condemnation) to us.

Regardless, the real message in these two chapters gets lost when we focus on the city labels (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea). Notice what Jesus Christ said SEVEN times: “The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the [ekklesia = *called out ones*].”<sup>1</sup> Seven times He repeated this! And instead of saying it to believers in a particular city, it was to the *ekklesia*—ALL of the called out ones! I do not know of any other words that God repeats seven times.

Moreover, each time Jesus said this, it was accompanied by promises “... to the one who **overcomes** ...” that they:

- Will eat of the tree of life.
- Will not be hurt of the second death.
- Will eat of the hidden manna and receive a new name.
- Will have authority over the nations.
- Will be listed in the Book of Life.
- Will be a pillar in the temple of God and receive the name of God.
- Will sit with Jesus Christ on His throne.

However, these promises are also NOT the message of Revelation 2-3. In fact, do not these promises apply to ALL who overcome, regardless of residence? Or is it just the Ephesians who will eat of the tree of life or some of those in Sardis whose names will be in the Book of Life? No, these promises apply to *everyone*—the *ekklesia*. This is clear in Revelation 21:7, which says, “The one who **overcomes** shall **inherit all things**; and **I will be his God, and he shall be My son.**” To put things into perspective, even Sardis and Philadelphia were warned to OVERCOME! Overcome what? Overcome evil (*ponereos*)<sup>2</sup> and the world<sup>3</sup>! But then these things are obvious, aren’t they?

I believe the main message of Revelation 2-3 is the warning Jesus repeated seven times: “**The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says.**” The fact that Jesus said this to the *EKKLESIA* means that IT APPLIES TO EVERYONE! The question is, do we? Do we REALLY *hear* what the spirit says?? And what is it saying?

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 12:21; 1 John 2:13-14; Rev. 12:10-11.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 4:4; 5:4-5.

Everyone today has the Word of God. Most even study it every day. But, who today “**has an ear**” to hear? From the biblical perspective, having an ear to hear means to *hear* what is said, *understand* what is said, and then *do* what is said. When I consider the ancient Israelites I fear that many of us have trouble hearing. In those days, only the Levites and priests had a copy of the Law of God. It was a hefty cost to commission a personal copy. However, God made provision for this because the Levites were commanded to read the Law *in its entirety* every seven years, during the year of the release of debts, when the people gathered for the Feast of Tabernacles:

DEUTERONOMY 31:9-13 And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel. 10 And Moses commanded them, saying, **At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the Feast of Tabernacles,** 11 When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt **read** this law before all Israel **in their hearing**. 12 Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that *is* within thy gates, that they may **hear**, and that they may **learn**, and fear the LORD your God, and observe **to do** all the words of this law: 13 And *that* their children, which have not known *any thing*, may **hear**, and **learn** to fear the LORD your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.

Can you imagine remembering most, if not all, of the Law of God simply from hearing it once every seven years? Any person who can do that truly “has an ear” to hear what was spoken. I doubt that the same can be said of many of us today. I have personally known one or two who claim to have memorized over 100 verses from the Bible but that is a miniscule number compared to the 23,145 in the OT and 7,957 in the NT for a total of 31,102. Even so, *hearing* the Word of God is just the beginning:

DEUTERONOMY 4:1-2 Now therefore **hearken**, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which **I teach you**, for **to do** *them*, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. 2 Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish *ought* from it, that **ye may keep** the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

DEUTERONOMY 5:1 And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, **Hear**, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which **I speak in your ears** this day, that **ye may learn** them, **and keep, and do them**.

Hearing God’s Word means we *understand* through “teach[ing]” and “learn[ing]” so we can subsequently “do” and “keep” it. The problem for the ancient Israelites was they, like us today, had trouble *remembering* what they heard and the only solution is for God to write His Law in our hearts:

JEREMIAH 31:32-33 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which **my covenant they brake**, although I was an husband unto them, saith the

LORD: 33 But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, **I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts;** and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

This brings us back to the powerful emphasis in Revelation 2-3. Those who have an ear are to “hear what the **Spirit says.**” What does this mean? Notice what happened to the disciples when Jesus finally opened their hearts and minds to Scripture:

LUKE 24:27, 32 And beginning with Moses, and from all the prophets, **He [Jesus Christ] interpreted to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.** ... 32 And they said to one another, **“Did not our hearts burn** within us as He was speaking to us on the road, **while He was opening the Scriptures to us?”**

Jesus Christ began with Moses and ended with the prophets. He explained the ENTIRE Word of God to the disciples and, as He did so, the disciples’ hearts *burned*. The Holy Spirit LIT UP the Word of God in their hearts. The Holy Spirit allowed them to *hear* and gave them *understanding*. Later, after receiving the Holy Spirit, the apostles went about *doing* what they heard and understood. The Holy Spirit speaks to all those who have an ear to hear and “shall **teach you** all things, and shall **bring to your remembrance** everything that I have told you” (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit lights a fire in our hearts by which we “purified [our] lives by obedience to the Truth unto unfeigned brotherly love **through the Spirit, love** [of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and] one another **fervently with a pure heart.**” (1 Peter 1:22). Do our hearts burn and light up the “glorious gospel of Christ”<sup>4</sup> when we *hear* God’s Word? Hearing what the *Spirit* says is the only way to “prepare to meet thy God.”<sup>5</sup>

Gone are the days when the Levites read the Word of God to the nation every seven years. No one today is even capable of remembering most of what they hear, even if it was just the first five books of the Bible. Hearing, understanding, and doing the Word of God requires the Holy Spirit. This is why Jesus Christ emphasized HEARING the Spirit SEVEN TIMES. It is the only way to survive the famine that is coming:

AMOS 8:11 Behold, the days come,” says the Lord GOD, “that **I will send a famine in the land;** not a *famine* of bread nor a thirst for water, but **of hearing** the words of the LORD.

When you read this, do you assume that this is a message to the world? I believe this is directed more at God’s people. Read the full warning:

AMOS 8:3-14 Then the LORD said to me, **“The end has come to My people** Israel: I will not again pass by them any more. 3 And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day,” says the Lord GOD. “The dead bodies *shall be* many. In every place one shall throw *them* out with silence.” 4 Hear this, **you**

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Cor. 4:4.

<sup>5</sup> Amos 4:12.

**who trample upon the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail,** 5 Saying, “When will the new moon be gone so that we may sell grain? **And the Sabbath,** that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small and the shekel great, and perverting the balances by deceit; 6 **That we may buy** the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals; and sell the chaff of the wheat?” 7 The LORD has sworn by the Glory of Jacob, “Surely I will never forget any of their works. 8 Shall not the land tremble for this, and all who dwell in it mourn? And all of it shall rise up like a flood. And it shall overflow and sink like the Nile of Egypt. 9 And it shall be in that day,” says the Lord GOD, “I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the light of day. 10 And **I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into weeping;** and I will bring up sackcloth on all loins, and baldness on every head. And I will make it like the mourning of an only son, and the end of it like a bitter day. 11 Behold, the days come,” says the Lord GOD, “that I will send a famine in the land; not a *famine* of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. 12 And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the Word of the LORD, and shall not find *it*. 13 In that day the **beautiful virgins** and the young men shall faint for thirst. 14 Those who swear by the sin of Samaria and say, ‘As your God lives, O Dan,’ and, ‘As the way of Beersheba lives’—even they shall fall and never rise up again.”

Are we not spiritual Israel (v. 1)? Do the COGs not enrich themselves to build campuses filled with expensive buildings and fancy offices for a few and in doing so withhold helping needy brethren (v. 4)? Do we eagerly look forward to sundown on the Sabbath so we can buy and sell (vv. 5-6) or engage in “fun” activities? Do we dishonor the holydays such that God will turn them into days of “mourning” (v. 10)? Do the “virgins” in verse 13 refer to the foolish five in the parable of Matthew 25:1-13? Solomon warned:

**PROVERBS 28:9 He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.**

Pentecost is the day when the Creator God gave this world His Law. It is the day when He wrote it with His Holy Spirit upon the hearts of a few who live in this age. It is the day when Jesus Christ returns to gather the early harvest of the children of God. Pentecost is a day of SPIRITUAL things. We know that the Law is **spirit**<sup>6</sup>, the mind and power of God is in us by the Holy **Spirit**, and true life is **spirit**<sup>7</sup>. Pentecost is truly the day to remind ourselves that “The one who has an ear, **let him hear what the Spirit says.**”

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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<sup>6</sup> Rom. 7:14.

<sup>7</sup> John 6:63; Rom. 8:2, 10; 2 Cor. 3:6; Gal. 6:8.