

Article of the Month – February 2011

Power Encounters as Missionary Method – VII – Revelation

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With this article we finish the series about power encounters in spiritual frontline battles. It is the second of two on this topic in the NT and it deals with the book of Revelation. When looking at Acts, we explored some differences between OT and NT theology and saw the appearance of new dimensions of power encounters, especially with regard to the issues of suffering for righteousness' sake, the expansion of God's Kingdom and martyrdom.¹

Whoever looks at Revelation from an eschatological perspective, sees the climax of world-, church- and missions-history. Nothing is small anymore or goes unnoticed by part of the world's population; everything has become very big and visible because occurrences have assumed global proportions. Ignorance cannot be feigned by anyone anymore; private and collective worlds have become everybody's concern. There is no more hiding or fleeing.

The twelve missionary themes we explored in Genesis will have developed into full maturity.² Revelation shows us the climax of disaster (as expressed in the outcomes of the seven seals, trumpets and bowls); in extremes of holiness *and* unholiness³; in fear⁴; in missionary accomplishment⁵ and in the suffering of the saints.⁶

We saw in Acts that after Stephen's power encounter, making him the first martyr⁷ of the early church, much spreading of the Gospel followed. In the book of Revelation we see that *all* power encounters result in the death of saints (see footnotes 5 and 6). After these last birth-pangs Babylon is judged and Jesus returns, establishing His eternal Kingdom on earth.⁸ So, what power encounters do we see in Revelation?

There are the smaller, more personal ones, where the enemy lost because he was unable to have the name of Jesus publicly renounced because of the strength of His witnesses. The first was Antipas⁹; then there were the many named and unnamed martyrs throughout the ages, the number of which is still not complete;¹⁰ and eventually there will be the death-without-burial of the Two Witnesses that the whole world will watch.¹¹ We will refrain from considering the

¹ See my article of November 2010 'Power Encounters ... VI ... Acts'

² I plan another article about that topic in 2013

³ Rev. 22:11

⁴ 6:15-17

⁵ 5:9; 7:9

⁶ 6:9; 7:14; 11:7; 13:7,10 (compare with Dan. 11:33-35 & 12:7b); 14:12; 17:6; 18:20,24

⁷ In Greek, 'witness' and 'martyr' are similar words (*μάρτυς, μάρτυρες* – *martus, martures*; Rev. 2:13; Acts 1:8)

⁸ Rev. 11:15-18; 19:15; Dan. 2:44,45; Luke 19:12,14,15,27

⁹ Rev. 2:13

¹⁰ 6:9,11; 7:14

¹¹ 11:3-10

identity of these Witnesses, because it is beyond the scope of this article. At a later occasion I hope to re-visit the issue, in a new upcoming series on ‘Missions and Eschatology’, which will start in May 2011 and continue into 2013.

A power encounter that the whole world will participate in is the (still future) battle of Armageddon,¹² a battle of all nations against God. The outcome will be the same as ever: all nations will know that the Lord alone is God, when the ‘It is done!’ sounds from the throne of God.¹³ At that precise moment the Lord Jesus will return¹⁴ and do away with antichrist, as Paul wrote earlier.¹⁵ It seems that, what started in biblical history as spiritual power encounters, will become visible in a terrible war of flesh and blood on earth.

The last power encounter that will *ever* occur is described in Rev. 20:7-10. At the end of Christ’s millennial reign on earth, the devil will be released for a short time, after having been incarcerated since Jesus’ return.¹⁶ It seems to be the ultimate test for them who have entered the Millennium as natural people, who survived the horrors of the great tribulation, or those that were born from natural people during the Millennium. They have lived under the absolutely righteous and peaceful rule of Christ and His glorified Church for a very long time, but never had to actively resist the temptations of the devil. But since man has been created as a free moral agent, his loyalty *has to be tested* – just like Adam and Eve were tested by the presence of that infamous tree in the Garden of Eden. They fell into sin, and a number of people will fall similarly at the end of the Millennium. After that rebellion and the Great White Throne judgment which follows, the whole of creation will have been totally cleansed of all sin, its consequences and even memories. Then the new heaven and the new earth will come.¹⁷

This last power encounter will be different from all others, in the sense that God’s people can no longer be victimized by it. They have been clothed with immortal resurrection bodies. But until that time, at the end of the great tribulation, we will have to stick it out with perseverance, not ‘loving our lives unto death’,¹⁸ because Christ *said in advance* that we will suffer persecution in the world.¹⁹ He did not add ‘But don’t worry, when things become real hard, just before I return, I will snatch you out of the misery’. Let’s rather *prepare* for hard times than being *caught* by them!

And that brings us to the whole purpose of studying spiritual power encounters as missionary method: to be so well prepared to stand our ground as witnesses (i.e. ‘martyrs’) for Christ when things become really hard, that He can break the enemy’s power because we ‘don’t love our lives unto death’ – just like Daniel, his friends, Esther, Mordechai, Paul, Peter, John and many others.

¹² Rev. 16:12-16

¹³ 16:17

¹⁴ 19:11-21

¹⁵ 2 Thess. 2:8

¹⁶ Rev. 20:1-3

¹⁷ 21 & 22

¹⁸ 12:11b

¹⁹ Luke 21:8-19; John 15:18-21;16:1-4

