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The Congregations of God During “the Lord’s Day”

The last book of the New Testament is known as “Revelation,” which means an unveiling or “uncovering” of divine information that is in this case said to have been given by God to Jesus Christ, who in turn “sent forth his angel and presented [it] in signs through [his angel] to his slave John” (Revelation 1:1). John, in turn, “bore witness to the word God gave and to the witness Jesus Christ gave, even to all the things he saw,” and wrote to “the seven congregations that are in the [district of] Asia” (Revelation 1:2, 4).

But what John saw and what he wrote does not appear to have application only for his day, for he said, “By inspiration I came to be in the Lord’s day” (Revelation 1:10). Does this mean that John was given visions of a later time, the “appointed time” that he spoke of as being “near” (Revelation 1:3)? How might what John saw and wrote affect our view of God’s congregations today?

While it is impossible to know for any certainty whether there is a special, initial fulfillment and then a later application of what John wrote in the book of Revelation concerning the congregations of God, many today believe we are in the time John described as “the Lord’s day.” In particular, many Jehovah’s Witnesses, especially those responsible for and loyal to the publications of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society believe this. But not all Jehovah’s Witnesses think such a belief is necessary, though they at the same time look to what John wrote for guidance and understanding wherever possible.

The focus of this article will be on the understanding of “the Lord’s day” by Jehovah’s Witnesses and how, in light of their understanding, what is said to the congregations to whom John writes could be understood in relation to the congregations of God today. My objective is to provide a clear understanding of the Watchtower Society’s view and the view of many (but not all) of Jehovah’s Witnesses regarding the time when “the Lord’s day” undergoes fulfillment, and what that fulfillment might mean for the congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses throughout the earth today. This study of the congregations of God during “the Lord’s day” will be based primarily on a reading of Revelation Chapters 2–3, which I will cite in full and then comment on briefly and as appropriate for the stated purpose of this article. First, however, I will discuss the Society’s view of the time when “the Lord’s day” began.

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society’s Interpretation of 1914 and “the Lord’s Day”

I am one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. I believe that Jesus is alive and that he is doing what God has appointed him to do. I believe this for good reasons and after having considered arguments to the contrary. I do not believe what I believe simply because I find the beliefs convenient, self-assuring, or for some other reasons that are not themselves good reasons similar to reasons that form other, non-religious beliefs of mine (see “The People of God, Part Two: ‘On the Side of the Truth,’” *IN MEDIO*, April 1, 2007, ElihuBooks.com).

But the good reasons that I have for belief in the Bible and the subsequent good reasons I find in the Bible for beliefs about such things as the time when Jesus began to rule as “King” do not result in my believing that any particularly identifiable year is the year that marked the start of Jesus Christ’s heavenly reign as King of God’s kingdom. From the Bible, I cannot make a definite determination about the date when God’s kingdom with Christ as King was born so that I could differentiate between, say, today and 200 years ago where this question is concerned. I do not believe there is clear and convincing evidence in the Bible or elsewhere that one could rely on in making such determinations, let alone requiring that others make and hold to them in order to be approved by others, by God, and by Christ himself. Further, for me and for many other Jehovah’s Witnesses whether Jesus Christ was enthroned as King in 33 CE, 36 CE, 100 CE, 1100 CE, 1874 CE, 1914 CE, or 2008 CE makes no real difference in terms of why I am a Christian and why I try to help others learn the truth about Jehovah God, Jesus Christ, the Bible, and living a wholesome, moral life in general. The only thing I could say, based on my belief that Jesus is alive and that he is now ruling as or is destined to become King of God’s kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:25), is that we are either closer to the realization of that rule or further along in the midst of it. For any other position on this matter, I have no good reasons to believe.

But make no mistake about it: An event such as the enthronement of Jesus Christ is, of course, immeasurably special. However, again, there is no clear and convincing evidence in the Bible or elsewhere that suggests that this event took place on a particular date so that I should, in light of the clear and convincing evidence, then proclaim and feature it prominently in my Christian message and life. So, I and many other Jehovah’s Witnesses don’t so feature, for example, the belief that Jesus’ enthronement occurred in 1914 CE, the date that many other Jehovah’s Witnesses, primarily those loyal to the publications of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, believe is the year that this event took place.

The publications of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society have for well over a century been consumed with prophetic speculation and interpretation. As mentioned, one of the most important dates if not *the* most important date interpreted by those responsible for the publications of the Watchtower Society as having impacted the world scene and

the people of God, is 1914. But why 1914, and what significance does it have for our understanding of the congregations of God during “the Lord’s day”?

According to the publications of the Watchtower Society, 1914 CE is the year that “the appointed times of the nations” mentioned by Jesus in Luke 21:24 were fulfilled, which fulfillment in turn signaled the birth of God’s heavenly kingdom with Jesus now actively “ruling in the midst of his enemies” (Psalm 110:2), whereas prior to 1914 and after his resurrection to heaven he was ‘sitting at God’s right hand until God placed his enemies beneath his feet’ (Psalm 110:1). In spite of the fact that the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus will “rule as king until [God] has put all enemies under his feet” (1 Corinthians 15:25), thus at least quite possibly if not actually clearly contradicting the notion that prior to the placement of his enemies beneath his feet Jesus was not at the same time ‘ruling as king,’ the Society’s publications advance the belief that Jesus became King in 1914 after his enemies were ‘placed beneath his feet’ by God, primarily in association with Bible chronology that is said to clearly point to 1914 as the year when the kingdom of God was “born.”

One of the most concise presentations of the Watchtower Society’s view of the Bible in this regard comes from one of their long-standing Bible study publications, *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), pages 138–139 (with underline and bracketed words added), under the heading, “When God’s Government Begins Its Rule”:

[Paragraph 14:] So, in a more important way, this heaven-high tree [of Daniel chapter four] comes to represent the supreme rulership of God, particularly in its relationship to our earth. Jehovah’s rulership was expressed for a time through the kingdom that he set up over the nation of Israel.

[Paragraph 15:] According to the Bible account in Daniel chapter four, the heaven-high tree was cut down. However, the stump was left, and bands of iron and of copper were put on it. This would keep the stump from growing until it was God’s time to remove the bands and let it start growing again. But how and when was God’s rulership cut down?

[Paragraph: 16:] In due course, the kingdom of Judah that Jehovah had set up became so corrupt that he allowed King Nebuchadnezzar to destroy it, to cut it down. This happened in the year 607 B.C.E. At that time Zedekiah, the last king of Judah to sit on Jehovah’s throne, was told: “Lift off the crown. . . . it will certainly become no one’s until he comes who has the legal right, and I must give it to him.”—Ezekiel 21:25–27.

...

[Paragraph 21:] We have already learned that “the appointed times of the nations” began in the year 607 B.C.E. So by counting 2,520 years from that date, we come down to 1914 C.E. That is the year these “appointed times” ended. Millions of people still living remember the things that happened in 1914. In that year, World War I began a period of terrible trouble that has continued to our day. This means

that Jesus Christ began to rule as king of God’s heavenly government in 1914.
 And because the Kingdom has already started its rule, how timely it is that we pray for it to “come” and wipe Satan’s wicked system of things from the earth!—
 Matthew 6:10; Daniel 2:44.

I can appreciate the thought that the Society put into constructing this chronology, and I understand why for a time it might have seemed interesting to many. But, having said that, and with the above *Live Forever* book quotes and arguments clearly in mind, I cannot find one single place anywhere in the Bible where the removal of the “heaven-high tree” of Daniel 4 is said to represent anything but Nebuchadnezzar’s removal from and return to his kingdom:

Daniel 4:13–17, 20–26 (NWT)

I continued beholding in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, look! a watcher, even a holy one, coming down from the heavens themselves. He was calling out loudly, and this is what he was saying: “CHOP the tree down, and cut off its boughs. SHAKE off its foliage, and scatter its fruitage. Let the beast flee from under it, and the birds from its boughs. However, LEAVE its rootstock itself in the earth, even with a banding of iron and of copper, among the grass of the field; and with the dew of the heavens let it be wet, and with the beast let its portion be among the vegetation of the earth. Let its heart be changed from that of mankind, and let the heart of a beast be given to it, and let seven times pass over it. By the decree of watchers the thing is, and [by] the saying of holy ones the request is, to the intent that people living may know that the Most High is Ruler in the kingdom of mankind and that to the one whom he wants to, he gives it and he sets up over it even the lowliest one of mankind” . . . The tree that you beheld, that grew great and became strong and the height of which finally reached the heavens and which was visible to all the earth, and the foliage of which was fair, and the fruit of which was abundant, and on which there was food for all; under which the beasts of the field would dwell, and on the boughs of which the birds of the heavens would reside, **it is you, O king,** because you have grown great and become strong, and your grandeur has grown great and reached to the heavens, and your rulership to the extremity of the earth. And because the king beheld a watcher, even a holy one, coming down from the heavens, who was also saying: “CHOP the tree down, and RUIN it. However, LEAVE its rootstock itself in the earth, but with a banding of iron and of copper, among the grass of the field, and with the dew of the heavens let it become wet, and with the beasts of the field let its portion be until seven times themselves pass over it,” this is the interpretation, O king, and the decree of the Most High is that which must befall my lord the king. And you they will be driving away from men, and with the beasts of the field your dwelling will come to be, and the vegetation is what they will give even to you to eat just like bulls; and with the dew of the heavens you yourself will be getting wet, and seven times themselves will pass over you, until you know that the Most High is Ruler in the kingdom of mankind, and that to the one whom he wants to he gives it. And because they said to leave the rootstock of the tree, **your kingdom will be sure to you after you know that the heavens are ruling.** [Underline and bold added.]

Is it possible that this “tree” was symbolically cut down after the last king of Judah, Zedekiah, was removed? I suppose so. But on what biblical basis? What are the good reasons from the Bible that suggest the removal of Zedekiah was ever meant to be associated with the above “dream” and its “interpretation”? You can argue all you want about whether Jerusalem was desolated by the Babylonians in 607 or 587/586 BCE. But what’s the point if there is never anything in the Bible that associates the “seven times” of Daniel 4 with the “appointed times of the nations” mentioned by Jesus in Luke 21:24 in the first place? Besides, there is nothing today that suggests that the nations are not ruling as they always have, with ‘man dominating man to his injury’ (Ecclesiastes 8:9), all the while God uses them to punish “the one practicing what is bad,” as God’s “servant” in this respect (Romans 13:1–4), at least until they are all destroyed (until their ‘appointed time is up,’ you might say) by Jesus himself (Revelation 6:15–17; 19:19–21).

Setting the above aside for now, the point to remember is that the publications of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, specifically the *Live Forever* book, moves from Nebuchadnezzar to Zedekiah (the last king to sit on the throne of Judah [and not a king chosen by Jehovah to represent his rulership, either]) in the above quote without any connection being expressed between the two anywhere in Daniel 4 or elsewhere in the Bible text itself. Therefore, rather than use such speculative interpretations without any clear biblical connection as motivation for serving God or as a feature of one’s Christian ministry, when it comes to being alert and ready for “when the Son of man arrives” (Matthew 25:31) all that should ever be needed or used in warning others are the clear teachings of the Bible itself, such as (with underline added):

1 Thessalonians 5:1–3 (NWT)

Now as for the times and the seasons, brothers, YOU need nothing to be written to YOU. For YOU yourselves know quite well that Jehovah’s day is coming exactly as a thief in the night. Whenever it is that they are saying: “Peace and security!” then sudden destruction is to be instantly upon them just as the pang of distress upon a pregnant woman; and they will by no means escape.

Yet, when it comes to ‘writing about’ these very things, the Watchtower Society has written more about it (“the times and the seasons”) than it has about the clearly expressed biblical ‘form of worship that is clean and undefiled before our God,’ namely, “to look after orphans and widows in their tribulation” (James 1:27). For example, consider what you will find if you do a search for “widows,” “orphans,” and “1914” in the Watchtower Library 2006 CD ROM, which contains Watchtower Society publications since 1950:

Table 1
Mention of “Widows,” “Orphans,” and “1914 in the
Publications of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society since 1950

	“Widows”	“Orphans”	1914
Bible	33	6	0
Insight Books	74	13	11
WT Publication Index	41	32	242
The Watchtower	508	154	3,882
Awake!	98	96	619
Kingdom Ministry	28	12	91
Various Books	64	38	1,119
Year Books	5	10	231
Brochures	1	1	80
Booklets	1	1	76
Tracts	0	0	11
Totals	853	363	6,362

The point of the above is not to criticize the 853 references to “widows” or the 363 references to “orphans” in the Watchtower Society’s literature over a fifty-seven year period. Those references are commendable. But, comparatively speaking, for 1914 (a teaching concerning “times and seasons” about which Paul said ‘nothing needed to be written’ beyond what he noted in the same reference [again, 1 Thessalonians 5:1–3]), to be mentioned nearly seven and a half times more than “widows” and over seventeen and a half times more than “orphans,” when ‘looking after widows and orphans in their tribulation’ is considered “the form of worship that is clean and undefiled from the standpoint of our God and Father” (James 1:27), is rather startling.

Clearly, then, the Watchtower Society has a great interest in and desire to promote 1914 in relation to the Bible. Whether it should be done to the extent that they choose to do it, I leave between them and Jehovah. But belief in 1914 by the Society and by Jehovah’s Witnesses who are loyal to it involves much more than accepting it as the time from which Jesus began to rule as King. Indeed, a whole host of associated beliefs are attached to 1914, one of which is described as follows:

“By inspiration I came to be in the Lord’s day.” (Revelation 1:10a) When is this “day”? Do the dramatic events of these tempestuous times have any connection with it? If so, we should pay close attention to the prophecy, as affecting our very lives—even our survival.—1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21. ... That “day” begins with the crowning of Jesus as heavenly King. Even after Jesus executes judgment on

Satan's world, the Lord's day continues, with the restoration of Paradise and the perfecting of mankind, until Jesus finally "hands over the kingdom to his God and Father."—1 Corinthians 15:24–26; Revelation 6:1, 2. The fulfillment of other Bible prophecies helps us to see when the Lord's day begins. For example, Daniel described a chopping down of rulership in the line of King David; after "seven times" it would be known "that the Most High is Ruler in the kingdom of mankind, and that to the one whom he wants to he gives it." (Daniel 4:23, 24, 31, 32) The major fulfillment of that prophecy started with the desolating of the kingdom of Judah, which is indicated by Bible evidence to have been completed by October 607 B.C.E. Revelation 12:6, 14 shows that 3 1/2 times amounts to 1,260 days; hence, seven times (twice that number) must be 2,520 days. Reckoning "a day for a year," we arrive at 2,520 years as the duration of the "seven times." (Ezekiel 4:6) Therefore, Christ Jesus began his heavenly rule in the latter part of 1914. The erupting of the first world war in that year marked "a beginning of pangs of distress" that have continued to plague mankind. Since 1914, how remarkably events in this bloodstained earth have confirmed that year to be the start of the "day" of Jesus' presence!—Matthew 24:3–14. Hence, this first vision and the counsel it contains are for the Lord's day, from 1914 onward. [*Revelation—Its Grand Climax At Hand!* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1988 [2006]), pages 22–24, paragraphs 1–4; underline added.]

I have already discussed the limitations with linking the "tree" of Daniel 4 with the "kingdom of Judah." But here we see that in addition to believing that 1914 marks the time of Jesus' 'crowning as heavenly King,' the Society believes that "the Lord's day" that John is taken to when he is shown the "revelation by Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:1, 10) is also "from 1914 onward." While those Jehovah's Witnesses who do not look to 1914 as a date relevant for their motivation and belief, nor as one that for any outstanding reason in the Bible should feature prominently in their Christian message, for Jehovah's Witnesses loyal to the Watchtower Society's publications 1914 is a big deal for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the belief that from "the latter part of 1914 ... onward" we have been living in "the Lord's day," the time of the fulfillment of the visions given to John by Jesus in the book of Revelation.

With this in mind, what do we find said about the congregations of God during "the Lord's day" in the book of Revelation? How can what is there said help the congregations of God deal with internal and external pressures, persecution, and keep them from becoming corrupted by "wicked men and imposters" (2 Timothy 3:13) whom the apostles themselves foretold would "enter in among [the congregations and] not treat the flock with tenderness" (Acts 20:29)? I consider this one of the most important things any person desiring to please God and Jesus Christ has to always consider. Because if the congregations are corrupted, if those who come to worship and learn among other believers are mistreated or deceived by false teachers, then it is time for those "on the side of the truth" to "resist them face to face" (Galatians 2:11) as 'pillars and supports of the truth' (1 Timothy 3:15). Therefore, the balance of this article will be a commentary

on Revelation Chapters 2 and 3, with consideration of how what is there said may apply to the congregations of God today.

Revelation Chapters 2–3: The Congregations of God During “the Lord’s Day”

Accepting for the sake of discussion the very possible belief that we are in fact in the uniquely prophetic time known in the Bible as “the Lord’s day” (Revelation 1:10), regardless of whether this has anything to do with 1914 CE, what does the revelation given to Jesus Christ by God which he in turn communicated through his angel to John (Revelation 1:1) tell us about the congregations of God? The best way, the only way to find out is to read what John was told to tell others, by reading what is accepted as the best record of what he wrote. An accurate translation as represented by the *New World Translation* of the Bible is what follows, along with brief commentary appropriate to what is otherwise clearly expressed:

Rev 2:1: “To the angel of the congregation in Eph'e·sus write: These are the things that he says who holds the seven stars in his right hand, he who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands,

The one who “holds the seven stars in his right hand” is Jesus Christ; the “seven stars” are or “mean” the “seven angels” or “messengers” (human or spirit) of the “seven congregations”; and the “seven lampstands” are or “mean seven congregations” (Revelation 1:12–20).

Rev 2:2: ‘I know your deeds, and your labor and endurance, and that you cannot bear bad men, and that you put those to the test who say they are apostles, but they are not, and you found them liars.’

The very first things Jesus says to the first “angel” or “messenger” of the first ‘congregation’ of God he addresses shows how closely he watches what his people do, in particular, that they “cannot bear bad men” and that they “put those to the test who say they are apostles.” This shows how important such things are to Jesus Christ as he oversees the congregations, and it shows that such things would also be present for his loyal servants to “test,” because some people make claims that only upon ‘testing’ can one find out if they are “liars.”

Therefore, the congregations of God would have, in at least some of them, those who lie about who they are. But they would also have in them those who endure and who ‘put to the test’ those who make claims equivalent to being “apostles,” that is, persons ‘sent forth’ or ‘appointed’ by God or by Christ Jesus. Some who do so are “liars,” according to Jesus, and he approves the ones in his congregations who test those who make such claims. Obviously, too, those testing others would not object to being tested themselves, for they have nothing to fear as they do not make false or inappropriate

claims so that they are in fear of such testing. Even those approved here by Jesus are warned about the things they still need to change, for his congregations must be holy (compare Hebrews 12:22–24):

Rev 2:3: You are also showing endurance, and you have borne up for my name's sake and have not grown weary.

Rev 2:4: Nevertheless, I hold [this] against you, that you have left the love you had at first.

Rev 2:5: "Therefore remember from what you have fallen, and repent and do the former deeds. If you do not, I am coming to you, and I will remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Though these Christians 'labored and endured' for Christ's name's sake, though they 'could not bear bad men' and they 'put liars to the test,' even though they did not 'grow weary,' they had "left the love they had at first," such that if they did not "repent" and return to that from which they had fallen (that is, to "the former deeds") their "lampstand," their 'congregation,' would be 'removed.'

Surely this shows how important it is to do what Jesus says and to not make allowances for error or for wrong thinking or action. 'Repentance' is needed in order to receive forgiveness for the sins of the congregations, not excuses or casting blame on others.

Rev 2:6: Still, you do have this, that you hate the deeds of the sect of Nic·o·la'us, which I also hate.

Jesus again approves of the attitude of these Christians toward the deeds of certain "bad men," in this case, "the deeds of the sect of Nicolaus." What "deeds" were these? The Nicolaitans are described in later times by early, post-apostolic church writer Eusebius of Caesarea (who lived around 263–339 CE) in his *Ecclesiastical History*, where it is said that, based on the record of Clement of Alexandria (who lived around 150–220 CE), this sect 'perverted the truth' by trying to live according to rules that appeared to be more rigorous in devotion to Jesus by 'fighting against the abuse of the flesh' and by not giving "way to it for the sake of pleasure, but [strengthening] the soul by faith and knowledge" (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, Chapter 29.4). They are similar, then, to those whom Paul describes when writing to Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:1–5 (NWT)

However, the inspired utterance says definitely that in later periods of time some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to misleading inspired utterances and teachings of demons, by the hypocrisy of men who speak lies, marked in their conscience as with a branding iron; forbidding to marry, commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be partaken of with thanksgiving by those who have faith and accurately know the truth. The reason for this is that every creation of God is fine, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with

thanksgiving, for it is sanctified through God’s word and prayer over [it].
[Underline added.]

Whether those about whom Paul writes are the same as the Nicolaitans, no one can say for sure. But the reports of those who followed Nicolaus from later writers show a similar tendency to adopt traditions and beliefs that have the appearance of being more rigorously devoted to truth and to Christ, but they are not. They are in fact dangerous for the very reason that they are more rigorous than is necessary to be in service to God and to Christ Jesus, just like the traditions of the scribes and the Pharisees who represented the people of God but whom Jesus condemned (Matthew 15:1–9). No wonder Jesus hates the deeds of the “sect of Nicolaus” that similarly ‘invalidate the word of God’!

Rev 2:7: Let the one who has an ear hear what the spirit says to the congregations: To him that conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'

Instead of listening to “Nicolaus” or to those of his “sect” who promoted their own “deeds” and ways of life beyond what Jesus and the apostles taught was necessary, Jesus says to listen to “what the spirit says to congregations,” which speech we find recorded in the Bible, specifically, in this case, in the book of Revelation. What we find said here by “the spirit” is, for the most part (symbolism and imagery aside), rather simple, “To him that conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7). This idea of ‘conquering’ will recur throughout Jesus’ words to the “seven angels” of the “seven lampstands,” and its meaning will become more apparent as we consider his words.

Rev 2:8: "And to the angel of the congregation in Smyr'na write: These are the things that he says, 'the First and the Last,' who became dead and came to life [again],

Rev 2:9: 'I know your tribulation and poverty—but you are rich—and the blasphemy by those who say they themselves are Jews, and yet they are not but are a synagogue of Satan.

Jesus commends those who endure tribulation, those who seem to be “poor” but who are in fact “rich” in spite of the “blasphemy by those who say they themselves are Jews, and yet they are not.” “Those who say they are Jews...” These would have to be either physical Jews whom Jesus rejects as spiritual Jews, or persons who claim to be spiritual Jews, such as described by Paul in Romans 2:28–29, but who are not. This, and its implications for the congregations of “the Lord’s day,” will be made clearer as we proceed.

Rev 2:10: Do not be afraid of the things you are about to suffer. Look! The Devil will keep on throwing some of YOU into prison that YOU may be fully put to the

test, and that YOU may have tribulation ten days. Prove yourself faithful even to death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Rev 2:11: Let the one who has an ear hear what the spirit says to the congregations: He that conquers will by no means be harmed by the second death.'

Christians are under test and trial, constantly. The Devil is 'waging war' with "with the remaining ones of [the heavenly woman's] seed, who observe the commandments of God and have the work of bearing witness to Jesus" (Revelation 12:17). One of the reasons Satan is obviously consumed with hatred for them is because he knows that the "four winds" are being withheld until the 'slaves of God are sealed in their foreheads' (Revelation 7:1-3). These are the ones who 'stand with Jesus upon Mount Zion' and who have "his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads" (Revelation 14:1). They will 'sit on thrones with power of judging' because they 'proved themselves faithful even to death,' as Jesus wrote to John above, and they receive from him "the crown of life" because they 'conquered' by being "executed with the ax for the witness they bore to Jesus and for speaking about God" and by not 'worshiping the wild beast or its image' (Revelation 20:4).

Rev 2:12: "And to the angel of the congregation in Per'ga · mum write: These are the things that he says who has the sharp, long two-edged sword,

Rev 2:13: 'I know where you are dwelling, that is, where the throne of Satan is; and yet you keep on holding fast my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of An'ti · pas, my witness, the faithful one, who was killed by YOUR side, where Satan is dwelling.

Jesus recognizes faithful individuals who give their life for his name, and he knows that some must live in places and under conditions on this earth that are severe, for Satan keeps trying to test us like he did Job, to get us to 'curse God to his very face' (Job 1:11; 2:5) or to 'deny our faith in Jesus,' which the faithful "Antipas," like Job, did not do.

Rev 2:14: "Nevertheless, I have a few things against you, that you have there those holding fast the teaching of Ba'laam, who went teaching Ba'lak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication.

Rev 2:15: So you, also, have those holding fast the teaching of the sect of Nic · o · la'us likewise.

Rev 2:16: Therefore repent. If you do not, I am coming to you quickly, and I will war with them with the long sword of my mouth.

When Jesus says he "will war with them with the long sword of my mouth" he is talking to the congregation. He says such things because even though conditions are hard, living as they are near "the throne of Satan," their false teachings were not acceptable. To "conquer" means you must bear up under the most trying of conditions. But even if

one or more of us fails, Jesus warns us first before coming to “war” with us. We can “repent” and keep ourselves from his righteous wrath, for we bear his name. So if there are ever among us, in the congregations, those teaching falsely like the Nicolaitans or misleading and stumbling others like Balaam, they must be warned before it is too late to “repent.” But Jesus gives us time, a little time, for he knows the pressures of this world and the weaknesses of our flesh are great, for he was once flesh like us (John 1:14; Hebrews 4:15).

Rev 2:17: "Let the one who has an ear hear what the spirit says to the congregations: To him that conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white pebble, and upon the pebble a new name written which no one knows except the one receiving it."

Something special awaits those who ‘conquer.’ They will receive “a new name.” But a reward is not their primary motivation. They love what is right, even if sometimes they do what is bad because of human sin and imperfection (1 John 1:10–2:2). But in terms of their intent “no falsehood was found in their mouths” (Revelation 14:5). When it comes to the ‘new heavens and new earth’ anyone that “carries on a disgusting thing and a lie will in no way enter into it” (Revelation 21:1; 27).

Rev 2:18: “And to the angel of the congregation in Thy·a·ti’ra write: These are the things that the Son of God says, he who has his eyes like a fiery flame, and his feet are like fine copper,

Rev 2:19: ‘I know your deeds, and your love and faith and ministry and endurance, and that your deeds of late are more than those formerly.

Rev 2:20: “Nevertheless, I do hold [this] against you, that you tolerate that woman Jez’e·bel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and misleads my slaves to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols.

More false teaching in the congregations. Not only false teaching represented by the horribly wicked Old Testament figure “Jezebel,” but *toleration of her!* Again, in spite of the “good figs” (compare Jeremiah 24:1–10), namely, those who “cannot not bear bad men” and those who ‘put liars to the test,’ those who are faithful for Jesus’ name sake, and those who “keep conquering the evil with the good” (Romans 12:21), the wickedness in the congregations of God during “the Lord’s day” is startling: holding fast the teachings of Balaam and Nicolaus and tolerating “that woman Jezebel”!

Jezebel was the wife of Ahab, king of Israel, and these two “came to do more to offend Jehovah the God of Israel than all the kings of Israel that happened to be prior to him” (1 Kings 16:29–33). That is who Jesus associates with the congregations of God during “the Lord’s day.” Israel tolerated Jezebel and her wickedness in association with Ahab, even allowing her to ‘kill Jehovah’s prophets’ (1 Kings 18:4, 13), which shows her position and power at that time and what would also be true during “the Lord’s day.” That is why she is ‘tolerated,’ because she has power or position within the

congregations. But Jesus Christ, though incredibly patient and merciful, will not tolerate her forever:

Rev 2:21: And I gave her time to repent, but she is not willing to repent of her fornication.

Rev 2:22: Look! I am about to throw her into a sickbed, and those committing adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.

Rev 2:23: And her children I will kill with deadly plague, so that all the congregations will know that I am he who searches the kidneys and hearts, and I will give to YOU individually according to YOUR deeds.

“She is not willing to repent ...” Nothing can be done if the person or people represented by “Jezebel” are not “willing” to stop teaching falsely in Christ’s name and misleading others to follow in the paths of Jezebel, Balaam, and Nicolaus. “Jezebel” holds herself out to be “a prophetess,” using her claims to intimidate and to coerce others, even “her children,” into a path of sin that results in her receiving a “deadly plague” from the one who, like Jehovah himself, “searches the kidneys and the hearts” (compare Jeremiah 11:20). Thus, Jesus will judge each of us, not merely by our association with others, but “individually according to [our] deeds.” Still, not all have followed the paths and ways of Jezebel, Balaam, and Nicolaus and his sect:

Rev 2:24: "However, I say to the rest of YOU who are in Thy·a·ti'ra, all those who do not have this teaching, the very ones who did not get to know the "deep things of Satan," as they say: I am not putting upon YOU any other burden.

Rev 2:25: Just the same, hold fast what YOU have until I come.

Those who do not mislead others like Balaam, those who do not teach false doctrine in the congregations like the sect of Nicolaus, and those who do not ‘kill the prophets of Jehovah’ like Jezebel remain faithful ‘until he comes,’ which faith “works out endurance” so that we are “not lacking in anything” (James 1:3–4). That is why Jesus said he was putting “no further burden” (Revelation 2:24) on such ones.

Rev 2:26: And to him that conquers and observes my deeds down to the end I will give authority over the nations,

Rev 2:27: and he shall shepherd the people with an iron rod so that they will be broken to pieces like clay vessels, the same as I have received from my Father,

Rev 2:28: and I will give him the morning star.

Rev 2:29: Let the one who has an ear hear what the spirit says to the congregations.'

These are the promises of God through Jesus Christ, for those who will “shepherd” and for those who will be ‘shepherded.’ It is not enough for the congregations to start out following the Lamb “wherever he goes” (Revelation 14:4) only to later fall away and

follow the likes of Balaam, the sect of Nicolaus, and Jezebel. Our faith must remain firm “down to the end.” Just because the congregations may have at one time had a ‘first love’ that Jesus approved, if they leave that love and do not “repent and do the former deeds” (Revelation 2:4–5) then they will not have ‘observed Jesus’ deeds down to the end’ and they will not receive “the morning star” (Revelation 2:28). But Jesus gives us all “time to repent,” if we are “willing” (Revelation 2:21).

Rev 3:1: "And to the angel of the congregation in Sar'dis write: These are the things that he says who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, 'I know your deeds, that you have the name that you are alive, but you are dead.

Rev 3:2: Become watchful, and strengthen the things remaining that were ready to die, for I have not found your deeds fully performed before my God.

Jesus ‘knows our deeds.’ He knows when people have “the name” or reputation ‘that they are alive’ when in fact they “are dead,” for he is the one “who searches the kidneys and hearts” (Revelation 2:23). No one can fool him, even if they can fool others. But since we can all be fooled we must “become watchful,” so that our deeds are “fully performed before” Jesus’ God, not only partially, with some deeds performed but other deeds like ‘putting liars to the test’ or not ‘bearing bad men’ unperformed, or by our ‘tolerating’ the likes of “Jezebel,” the teaching of “Balaam,” and those similar to the “sect of Nicolaus.” There are things in the congregations that are “ready to die” if we do not help “strengthen” them.

Rev 3:3: Therefore, continue mindful of how you have received and how you heard, and go on keeping [it], and repent. Certainly unless you wake up, I shall come as a thief, and you will not know at all at what hour I shall come upon you.

Jesus looks to us, “individually” (Revelation 2:23), to be involved in doing these things and to “repent” where necessary. We are not to just sit back and wait for him or for his Father to take care of all the problems in the congregations without our showing them ‘that we are alive, and not dead’ (Revelation 3:1). We must “wake up” if we are asleep, and stay awake, for we do not know the hour of his coming. This alone is sufficient motivation to “continue mindful of how [we] have received and how [we] have heard.” We do not need speculations about dates, times, and seasons, for he will “come as a thief ... upon [us].”

Rev 3:4: "Nevertheless, you do have a few names in Sar'dis that did not defile their outer garments, and they shall walk with me in white ones, because they are worthy.

Rev 3:5: He that conquers will thus be arrayed in white outer garments; and I will by no means blot out his name from the book of life, but I will make acknowledgment of his name before my Father and before his angels.

Rev 3:6: Let the one who has an ear hear what the spirit says to the congregations.'

“A few names ...” Not a lot, but “a few” who “did not defile their outer garments” and for that reason, in Jesus’ eyes, “they are worthy” to ‘walk with him.’ That, namely, Jesus’ view of us, is really all that matters, for it is he who will or will not “make acknowledgment of [the person’s name] name before [his] Father and before his angels.” What others think about what we do, so long as what we do what is true and right, is not important.

Rev 3:7: “And to the angel of the congregation in Philadelphia write: These are the things he says who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens so that no one will shut, and shuts so that no one opens,

Rev 3:8: ‘I know your deeds—look! I have set before you an opened door, which no one can shut—that you have a little power, and you kept my word and did not prove false to my name.

Rev 3:9: Look! I will give those from the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews, and yet they are not but are lying—look! I will make them come and do obeisance before your feet and make them know I have loved you.

Jesus “is true,” and those who listen to him are “on the side of the truth” (John 18:37). Before these Jesus ‘sets an opened door’ because they ‘kept his word and did not prove false to his name.’ That is why Jesus makes those “who say they are Jews, and yet they are not” come and “do obeisance” or “worship before [their] feet,” not as objects of religious devotion, but so that those lying will know that Jesus ‘loves them.’ This is a complete reversal of fortune, if you will, similar to the removal of the “bad figs” and the replacement of them with the “good figs” in the days of Jeremiah, by Jehovah (Jeremiah 24:1–10). Jesus once again follows in the steps of his Father, for his followers have the same problems that Jehovah’s people had as recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Rev 3:10: Because you kept the word about my endurance, I will also keep you from the hour of test, which is to come upon the whole inhabited earth, to put a test upon those dwelling on the earth.

Rev 3:11: I am coming quickly. Keep on holding fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

Jesus knows those who have endured to the point where no further test is necessary, but for those who have sinned in ways connected to the congregations or otherwise as described by Jesus in the preceding references from Revelation 2–3, they must endure further in order to show Jesus that “they are worthy” (Revelation 3:4). These would have already lost their crown were it not for Jesus’ love and patience, but now they must “keep holding fast what [they] have,” or they could lose it still.

Rev 3:12: “The one that conquers—I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will by no means go out [from it] anymore, and I will write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which descends out of heaven from my God, and that new name of mine.

Rev 3:13: Let the one who has an ear hear what the spirit says to the congregations.'

Those who conquer and resist having “the mark” associated with the wild beast put “upon their foreheads and upon their hand” (Revelation 20:4) will have something else to mark them, “the name of [Jesus’] God and the name of the city of [Jesus’] God,” and the “new name” that Jesus Christ himself has been given (compare Revelation 7:3; 14:1; 19:12; 22:4).

Rev 3:14: "And to the angel of the congregation in La·o·di·ce'a write: These are the things that the Amen says, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation by God,

Rev 3:15: 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or else hot.

Rev 3:16: So, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth.

People who just sit by and watch the congregations of God suffer from false teachings, wickedness, and from “bad men” who “say they are apostles” (Revelation 2:2) are not ‘conquerors.’ They are “neither hot nor cold” but rather they are complacent, thinking that they have done all they need to do by giving a witness to those on the outside, all the while ignoring the problems that Jesus describes in the congregations of God during “the Lord’s day.” Further, Jesus says of these:

Rev 3:17: Because you say: “I am rich and have acquired riches and do not need anything at all,” but you do not know you are miserable and pitiable and poor and blind and naked,

Rev 3:18: I advise you to buy from me gold refined by fire that you may become rich, and white outer garments that you may become dressed and that the shame of your nakedness may not become manifested, and eyesalve to rub in your eyes that you may see.

Rev 3:19: “All those for whom I have affection I reprove and discipline. Therefore be zealous and repent.

Again, they think they are ‘rich’ in a spiritual way, but these are really “miserable and pitiable and poor and blind and naked.” That is how Jesus describes such persons, persons in the congregations of God during “the Lord’s day.” That is why they are not given freely in response to their merely asking (compare John 16:23–24), but they must instead “buy” from Jesus that which they need in order to heal their sick spiritual condition and outlook, again, having fooled themselves into thinking that things are fine when in fact they are “naked” and they do not even realize it. Jesus still loves these people, even though they are unappealing for a time, because he wants them to respond to his discipline and to “be zealous and repent.”

Rev 3:20: Look! I am standing at the door and knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into his [house] and take the evening meal with him and he with me.

Rev 3:21: To the one that conquers I will grant to sit down with me on my throne, even as I conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Jesus will enter into the house of anyone who “hears [his] voice and opens the door.” He will “take the evening meal” with such ones and they will eat it with him and if they “repent,” if they “conquer,” if they “do the former deeds,” if they ‘keep the word about his endurance,’ if they “do not bear bad men,” if they “put to the test those who say they are apostles,” if they do not tolerate the likes of “Balaam,” “the sect of Nicolaus,” or “Jezebel,” influences that are present in the congregations of God during “the Lord’s day,” they will be will granted to “sit down with [Jesus] on [his] throne, even as [he] conquered and sat down with [his] Father on his throne.”

Rev 3:22: “Let the one who has an ear hear what the spirit says to the congregations.”

Conclusion

It is Jesus Christ’s desire for the congregations of God to be “harmoniously joined together and being made to cooperate through every joint that gives what is needed, according to the functioning of each respective member in due measure ... for the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16; compare Colossians 2:2, 19). But the congregations have many enemies, powerful spirit and human enemies that seek to corrupt and to destroy, from within and from without, what God through Christ Jesus has “built up” (2 Corinthians 11:13–15; Ephesians 2:20, 22; 6:12).

If we are, in fact, in “the Lord’s day,” then where the congregations of God are concerned it is nothing short of “war” (Revelation 12:17). But like “Michael and his angels” we are made ready by God to ‘battle with the dragon’ and his human servants (2 Corinthians 6:7; 10:4–6; Ephesians 6:11, 13). In this battle, death is certain for most (Matthew 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; Revelation 2:10; 12:11; 20:4), but so is life (John 3:16; 5:25; 6:57; 1 John 2:25; Revelation 7:17; 21:6; 22:1–1).

It is time to take back the congregations of God from those who have corrupted them or who have allowed them to become corrupted. It is time to take them back from “the teaching of Balaam” (Revelation 2:14). It is time to take them back from “the sect of Nicolaus” (Revelation 2:6, 15). It is time to take them back from “that woman Jezebel” (Revelation 2:20). It is time to “put to the test those who say they are apostles” (Revelation 2:2) and to ‘resist face to face’ those in the congregations responsible for the toleration of error and the promotion of that which is false (Galatians 2:11). Surely

no one interested in “walking straight according to the truth of the good news” (Galatians 2:14) will have any problems with my speaking out about removing these influences from the congregations of God. If some do, then I would very much like to know why.

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***This article was revised only with respect to its formatting. No changes were made to the content of the original article.**