

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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God's Message to Seven Churches: Pergamos: Hidden Manna and a White Stone

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. (Revelation 2:17, KJV 1900)

The blessings the Lord promised in our study verse are conditional. He only gives them to "...him that overcometh." The two word pictures that follow overflow with rich assurances of the Lord's ever-present goodness and goodness to us in our trials and our needs that grow out of those trials.

"Hidden manna" and a "White stone" speak of blessings that the Lord promises to His faithful children. His words serve to assure us that we shall never face a trial that His grace cannot overcome—if we stand firm and faithful in our service to Him. The whole subject of assurance is a fascinating one to consider. Sometimes preachers lose sight of the Lord's priorities and make "Assurance of salvation" the ultimate objective or end of all their preaching and study. Inevitably, this strategy fails. Those who stumble into this snare measure out assurance as if a famine of monumental proportions had restricted the amount of assurance, so they must restrict it and withhold it. They often seem to have precious little assurance themselves, and they give next to no assurance to their hearers. More often, they are the purveyors of no-assurance than of assurance.

Scripture provides us with a far better attitude toward assurance than we see in these professional assurance-withholders. Scripture consistently applies the foundations of discipleship to our personal attitude. ***We must be willing to lose our life, or we shall never find it.*** If we make the gaining of personal assurance, a self-benefit, our objective in our actions, we shall indeed find assurance in short supply. However, if we truly lose self, forget about assurance, and busy ourselves in the faith-walk, serving God faithfully by serving His people, a surprising and glorious side-effect of that service always appears in abundance, assurance!

What does the term "hidden manna" mean? If we look for an Old Testament parallel for manna, we readily find it, the miraculous food that God provided to His people during their wilderness wanderings. However, that manna was not hidden. Six days a week the Israelites arose and freely gathered the day's supply. It was present and readily accessible, not hidden.

An interesting "Hidden manna" possibility; during the wilderness era, the Lord directed Moses to gather a small container of manna and deposit it in the Ark of the Covenant inside the tabernacle.

(Exodus 16:33) This jar of manna was to remain in the Ark, a perpetual reminder of the Lord's supernatural provision during Israel's wilderness wanderings. This point opens up some rich thoughts for our study.

1. First, this manna was not temporary. It was to remain permanently in the Ark.
2. The Lord restricted the contents inside the "Holy of Holies" to a rather short list. Anything that He commanded to be placed there had a powerful significance to the people of His intimate care for them. To be granted access to this manna would be a memorable event. Look back over your life to some very special occasion when the Lord surprised you with a great blessing. You retain the memory of that event as an intimate reminder of the Lord's love and grace that took care of you during your time of need. You tasted the "Hidden manna."
3. Although the amount to be gathered was not particularly large, the Lord supernaturally blessed it to always supply the day's need. When Paul faced his "Thorn in the flesh" trial (2 Corinthians 12), the Lord's response that gave him peace was "My grace is sufficient for thee...." (2 Corinthians 12:9) Do not overlook the personal application that the Lord made of His word, "...for thee." We do ourselves a sad disservice when we indulge in endless speculation about what Paul's thorn was. Scripture doesn't tell us, so the Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of Scripture considered it irrelevant to our need. The greater point of the lesson that we should study is what the Lord said to Paul. Apply these words to your life, to your most recent trials or setbacks. Don't read this lesson and dumb it down to a generic "My grace is sufficient." Keep that intimate personal point intact. Apply Jesus' words to Paul to you and to your trial, your own personal "Thorn in the flesh." Hear Jesus speak to you, saying, "My grace is sufficient ***for thee!***" Wow! That is good manna. In the wilderness, the quantity gathered seemed small, but it was

always sufficient. The amount that Moses had Aaron store in the Ark was small, but the whole theme of manna tells us that it is always sufficient. His grace can surpass and dissolve your need with a rich supply.

4. The Lord gave manna in daily, measured quantities. Only on the day before Sabbath could the people gather more than a one day supply. The Lord's grace for our needs likewise comes in measured portions; always enough for the present need, but never enough to store up for indefinite future needs.

We could expand this list extensively, but these four points will hopefully serve to stir your mind.

...and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. In his commentary on this verse, Ray Summers, *Worthy is the Lamb*, identifies four common uses of "White Stones" in the first century.

1. "The white stone was given to a man who had been tried and justly acquitted." He could carry that stone with him from the courtroom, a permanent reminder and evidence of his acquittal.
2. "The white stone was given to a man who was freed from slavery and made a citizen of the province." Again, the possessor of the white stone would treasure this stone, a constant reminder of his new and blessed state, "A slave no more."
3. "The white stone was given to the winner of a race or contest as an indication that he had overcome opposition." A reminder of past overcoming serves convincingly to encourage us in our present struggles, our present "...race or contest...."
4. "The white stone was given to a warrior returning from battle with victory over the enemy." New Testament writers frequently use the analogy of warfare to exhort believers to faithfulness in their conduct.

The "white stone" seems to allude to the *tesseron*.¹²¹

A *tesseron* was, "... given to those who were invited to partake, within the precincts of the temple [at Pergamum], of the sacred feast, which naturally consisted only of meats offered to the idol. That stone bore the secret name of the deity represented by the idol and the name was known only to the recipient."¹²²

¹²¹ 121. Mounce, p. 99.

¹²² 122. Tatford, p. 82.

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Re 2:17 (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).

At first glance, we try to evaluate one of these ideas as the best match to the words of promise. However, we might better honor the text by keeping all of the meanings in our minds. At various times following different experiences in our Christian walk, each of these ideas will rise to fit the occasion and describe the blessings of grace in our overcoming.

If we revisit the first three paragraphs of this study and the frustrating observation of those who make assurance the centerpiece of their teaching, though they consistently dole out almost no assurance to anyone, we will begin to see how dreadfully misguided these famine-tidbits are against the rich promises that the Lord repeatedly gives us in Scripture if we strive to overcome and live faithfully and selflessly to Him and to His glory. I can't recall a single verse in the New Testament that uses assurance as the motive or the "Carrot on the stick" to incite obedience. Quite to the contrary, Scripture consistently gives us a far nobler motive for our faithful service. Consider just one simple admonition as an example of Scripture's consistent noble incentive to godliness.

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

*For ye are bought with a price: **therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*** (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; emphasis added)

As Paul explained both the duty and the motive for godly living, he didn't even hint at how much assurance he would give—or withhold—from the Corinthians. Assurance for Paul was a non-issue; it should be so with us as well. For Paul, **only one objective was worthy to motivate godly living, to glorify our risen and victorious Savior.**

At times in your Christian journey, you may struggle with the question of sin. The hymn writer captures this point beautifully. "**How can I, a lowly mortal**, Born an earthling, formed of clay, Seek to praise the Lord Jehovah, Who has turned my night to day?" And Jesus answers the question in our study verse; as you live the faith-walk and honor Him, as you "overcome," He gives you the white stone. Likewise, you will face various life experiences that remind you of one or the other of those five meanings for white stones in the first century. The Lord's use of the stone, and your need at that moment is not something that onlookers can know—or should know. It matters only that you and the Lord know the name written on the stone; 1) "acquitted and justified," 2) a citizen of the heavenly country, 3) a winner in the race (Hebrews 12:1-2), 4) a victorious warrior in the Christian warfare (Ephesians 6:10-19), or 5) a blessed worshipper whom the Lord has invited to sit with Him "...at my table in my kingdom." (Luke 22:29-30)

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor