

Smyrna Church

Smyrna was a large, beautiful, and proud city. It was a center of learning and culture. It was a great trade city . . . Smyrna stood at the end of the road which served the valley of the river Hermus, and all the trade of that valley flowed into its markets and found an outlet through its harbor. It had a specially rich trade in wines. Smyrna, like Ephesus, was a city of wealth and commercial greatness. (Barclay)

We also know from history that it was a city deeply committed to idolatry and the worship of the Roman Emperor. But the worship of those pagan gods was dying out. The real focus was on the worship of the Roman Emperor. (Guzik)

They first worshipped their dead emperors. Then in time, they began to worship the living Emperors. Finally, the government demanded such worship as a evidence of political allegiance and civic pride.

So, Smyrna became a leading city in the Roman cult of Emperor worship.

The Roman Emperor Domitian (81-96 A.D.) was the first to *demand* worship under the title “Lord” from the people of the Roman Empire as a test of political loyalty. According to ancient church history, under the reign of Domitian that John was banished to the Island of Patmos where he received this vision.

All that the Christians had to do was to burn that pinch of incense, say, ‘Caesar is Lord,’ receive their certificate, and go away and worship as they pleased. But that is precisely what the Christians would not do. They would give no man the name of Lord; that name they would keep for Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. ” (Barclay)

BTW: The city remains a functioning community today called Izmir.

(Revelation 2:8 NKJV) "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: (A repeat of Rev 1:17-18 with some modification).

The emphasis of this revelation is that the Eternal God came to His creation, born of a women, to save it from itself. He did that by dying on the cross. He was dead and came to life...this is exactly what's going to happen to **all believers**. We will all die and at that very moment we will awaken to new life with Him.

The name Smyrna comes from the word myrrh, a sweet-smelling perfume used in embalming dead bodies.

(Revelation 2:9 NKJV) "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan.

Since everyone had to acknowledge that Caesar was Lord, refusal would lead to exclusion from the guilds. This would mean unemployment and poverty. The word used here for poverty means “abject poverty, possessing absolutely nothing.”

The Jews, of course, did not have to patronize the imperial cult since their religion was accepted by Rome, but they certainly did not cooperate with the Christian faith. So, from both Jews and Gentiles, the Christians in Smyrna received slander and suffering.

But they were rich! They lived for eternal values that would never change, riches that could

never be taken away.

Paul, describing his ministry in 2 Corinthians 6:4-10 concludes: (9) as unknown, and *yet* well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and *yet* not killed; (10) as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and *yet* possessing all things.

The tribulation mentioned here is a direct result of being a professing Christian.”

Matthew 5:10-12 NKJV Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11) "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. (12) Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

And listen to what's written in the Book of Hebrews (10:34) “for you had compassion on me in my chains, **and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.**”

(Revelation 2:10 NKJV) Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, **that you may be tested**, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Being thrown **into prison** was severe persecution. In that day, **prison** was never used to rehabilitate someone, and rarely used to punish someone. Normally, you were thrown **into prison** as you awaited trial and **execution**.

THAT YOU MAY BE TESTED:

The only REAL test is “Is Jesus your LORD, your King, your GOD and Savior?”.

This test was exactly happened to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; When threatened with a fiery furnace, they declared,

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. (17) If that *is the case*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver *us* from your hand, O king. (18) But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up." Daniel 3:16-18 (16) ,

James 1:12 NKJV Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

They were not promised deliverance from tribulation, poverty and reviling. In fact, the worst was yet to come. Through their suffering, God would display the true riches of the church in Smyrna to everyone, including themselves - even though *He* knew they were rich already.

That you may be tested: This was also under the control of God! And, implied herein is that God is in the testing business.

We may not have the same opportunity to suffer for Jesus that the Christians in Smyrna had, but we can have their same heart. We may never be in a place to die a martyr's death, but we can all live a martyr's life. But many Christians avoid persecution of any kind by conforming so much to the world that they are no longer *distinctively* Christians. This wasn't the case with the Christians in Smyrna. They were **tested** and they passed the test. (Guzik)

For Ten Days:

Commentators on the Book of Revelation have long debated the meaning of these **ten days**.

1. Some think that John really means **ten years** of persecution. "As the *days* in this book are what is commonly called *prophetic days*, each answering to a *year*, the *ten years* of tribulation may denote *ten years of persecution*; and this was precisely the duration of the persecution under *Diocletian*
2. Others think that John really means persecution over the reign of **ten Roman Emperors**. (I'm not going to list them)
3. Still others have taken weirdness to a new level: "that in ten days are two hundred and forty hours, which make up the number of years from 85, when the second persecution began, (under which John at this time was) to 325, when all the persecutions ceased." (Poole)
4. Others say that **ten days** is simply an expression of speech: "The expression *ten days* is not to be taken literally; it is the normal Greek expression for a short time." (Barclay) It is used that way in Scripture. Here it refers to God's control over the matter. Satan wanted more time, God said "No".

(Revelation 2:11 NKJV) "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the **churches**. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." '

To all of the churches:

Jesus mentions **Overcomers**:

John 16:33 NKJV These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, **I have overcome the world.**"

Romans 8:37 NKJV Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

2 Corinthians 2:14-16 NKJV (14) Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. (15) For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. (16) To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. And who *is* sufficient for these things?

1 John 4:4 NKJV You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

1 John 5:4-5 NKJV For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. (5) Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

There are, of course, different opinions on the “overcomers” and what this verse means:

(1) The loss of salvation view: According to this interpretation, the promises are written to believers to encourage them to overcome lest they lose their salvation. To fail to overcome is to lose salvation.

But Jesus Said:

John 10:27-29 NKJV My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. (28) And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. (29) My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand.

(2) The perseverance or ultimate triumph of the saints view: According to this view all genuine believers persevere and overcome the world by living godly and obedient lives. Overcoming is equivalent to faithfulness or obedience which proves the genuineness of salvation. MacArthur is a proponent of this view. MacArthur is interpreting these passages according to what has come to be called the ‘Reformed Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints’ which states that all **true** believers will **persevere in a life of godly obedience**. They admit that there may be temporary setbacks and bouts with sin, **but that ultimately, true believers live victorious, holy lives to the end.**

There is a major problem with this interpretation. The Bible does *not* promise that all true believers will live victorious, holy lives. Believers may have more than temporary setbacks and bouts with sin. It is sadly possible for believers to backslide terribly and to remain in that backslidden state until death. Certainly the church at Corinth was not a perfect picture of victorious believers.

I’m not saying that eternal security is not true... What I *am* saying is that there is no guarantee in Scripture that eternally secure people will live overcoming, victorious lives here and now. Believers can fail.

It should be noted that some of the Christians at Corinth had died in a state of carnality as a direct result of God’s judgment which Paul carefully defined as God’s disciplinary action. This shows God was dealing with them as His children.

Wiersbe:

Note that a special word is spoken to the “overcomers” in each church (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). These “overcomers” are not the “super-saints” in each church, a special group that will receive special privileges from Christ, but the true believers in each of these churches. We dare not assume that every member of every local church in every period of history is a true child of God. Those who truly belong to Christ are “overcomers” (1 John 5:4-5). In every period of history, there have been true saints in the professing church (often called “the invisible

church”). Christ speaks a special word of encouragement to them, and certainly we may apply these words to ourselves today

These men, along with others, would heartily agree that all believers are overcomers in one sense, in the sense they have become children of God, have been translated out of darkness into the glorious light of Christ. We have been placed into Christ:

Ephesians 1:3-6 NKJV Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, (4) just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, (5) having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, (6) to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

Every believer is an overcomer in that sense of having Faith in Jesus. But these expositors would also insist that **all believers do not overcome absolutely**. Christians can fail to live for the Lord and overcome the desires of the flesh. Furthermore, while the failure to overcome may be an indication of false profession, **the fact a believer does not overcome the struggles of life, does not automatically prove they are not true Christians**. If they have truly believed in Christ, they cannot lose their salvation, but they will lose rewards as the Apostle Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 NKJV (11) For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (12) Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, (13) each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. (14) If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. (15) If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

1 Corinthians 5:1-5 NKJV (1) It is actually reported *that there is* sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! (2) And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. (3) For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. (4) In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, (5) deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Those holding to the rewards view would say the overcomer passages are promises given to believers to encourage and kindle love and obedience in view of who they are in Christ and what they possess in Him. **These are not warnings against the loss of salvation, nor necessarily warnings against false profession, though that could be one application of these promises**. Furthermore, they are not statements affirming the preservation of the saints. **Instead, they are guarantees of special blessings or rewards for faithful service and lives of faith.**

The context of the letters restricts the meaning of the overcomer from all believers to **rewards to faithful** believers who overcome in the specific conflicts of their lives.

Hebrews 12:1-2 NKJV Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the drace that is set before us, (2) **looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cros's, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

Hebrews 10:35-39 (35) Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. (36) For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: (37) "FOR YET A LITTLE WHILE, AND HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME AND WILL NOT TARRY. (38) NOW THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; BUT IF ANYONE DRAWS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM." (39) **But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.**

So, what is the Second Death?

Revelation 20:14-15 NKJV (14) Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (15) And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:5-8 NKJV Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." (6) And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. (7) He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. (8) **But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.**"