

- C) Jesus further recognizes another aspect of their persecution, "tribulation resulting from blasphemy" (slander/NIV). But, these blasphemers (who claim to be of God) are from "Satan's church," literally loyal to purposes of the adversary/enemy (Revelation 2:9b).

4) Don't Give In, Victory Will Be Yours!

- A) With an almost sickening sense of foreboding Jesus tells the church "do not fear" the suffering which is about to come (Revelation 2:10). The force of Jesus' statement is emphatic, "Don't be afraid of anyone!"
- B) This fierce attitude of faith will be necessary because the devil (the source of this persecution) is going to imprison and kill many of the Smyrnan Christians (Revelation 2:10).
- C) The period of the persecution is for "10 days," possibly an exact period of time for Smyrna, or a symbolic time period (most probable). The persecution would be intense and result in death for some, but it would be for a short time.
- D) The reward for "overcoming" (Revelation 2:11) will be a "crown of life" (Revelation 2:10), with no further pain from the "second death," a clear reference to eternal death in Hell, the lake of fire (cf. Revelation 20:14, 20:6, 21:8).
- E) In the midst of persecution, Jesus teaches us that we must overcome hostility from others by laying down our lives in the confidence that God will vindicate us.

Redolence

Long Beach Alliance Church • December 11th, 2005 • Pastor Chris Lankford

**DO NOT FEAR WHAT YOU
ARE ABOUT TO SUFFER.
BEHOLD, THE DEVIL IS ABOUT
TO CAST SOME OF YOU INTO
PRISON, SO THAT YOU WILL
BE TESTED, AND YOU WILL
HAVE TRIBULATION FOR TEN
DAYS. BE FAITHFUL UNTIL
DEATH, AND I WILL GIVE
YOU THE CROWN OF LIFE.
~REVELATION 2:10 (NASB)**

1) Smyrna -- The Rock

- A) The city of Smyrna was passionately devoted to worshipping the emperor (Rome's Caesar). Believing they were the most devoted city in all of Asia to Caesar, they proudly labeled their city "first in all of Asia."
- B) The citizens of Smyrna were highly zealous in their commitment to the 'emperor cult,' so much so that more than one temple was constructed in the city for emperor worship.

- C) The primary form of worship to the emperor was paying the cult tax and making sacrifices (incense burning, drinking wine, etc.) in worship to Caesar.
- D) The Jews in Smyrna, however, were exempt from having to pay the cult tax or participate in cult worship. Since Judaism was a recognized pre-existent ancient monotheistic religion, the Roman Senate exempted Jews from emperor worship.

2) The Jews In Smyrna -- A Hard Place

- A) For the most part, Christianity was officially recognized as being a "sect" (division) within Judaism (since Christians claimed that Jesus fulfilled the "Messiah" prophecies of Scripture).
- B) This was hugely advantageous to Christians because it allowed them protection from cult taxation (financial advantage), cult/idol worship (religious purity advantage), and relationships with Jewish friends (social/financial/religious advantage)*.
- C) Unfortunately for Christians, there was an increasing distinction which was being emphasized by Jewish leaders throughout Asia Minor distinguishing Judaism from Christianity. This removed Christians from protection:

* This situation placed the Jewish communities in a position of peculiar power. By disowning a Christian and informing against him, they might deprive him of his possible recourse to toleration at a price, and render him liable to the emperor cult... Individual Jews may have informed against individual Christians, or the synagogue may have provided on occasion lists of bona fide members of their congregations. The authorities, primarily concerned with tax avoidance, may thus have had forced on their attention a powerful movement which appeared to defy the emperor under the guise of a Judaism which the official Jews repudiated. A systematic investigation would naturally follow. (quoted from C. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches in their Local Setting* in David deSilva's, *The Social Setting of the Revelation to John: Conflicts Within, Fears Without*, Westminster Theological Journal, Fall, 1992).

- i. From the cult taxation and protection from emperor worship in pagan temples.
 - ii. From social and business rejection from Jewish associates, friends, and relatives.
- D) This change of events, which would have been particularly pronounced in a politically loyal city such as Smyrna, resulted in intense persecution of Christians†.

3) The Church -- Caught In-Between

- A) Jesus, affirming His supremacy over all things (including Smyrna), and particularly emphasizing his victory over death, writes a short letter to the church in Smyrna (Revelation 2:8).
- B) Jesus recognizes their "tribulation and poverty," a textually connected thought of "tribulation resulting in your poverty," but affirms their riches in Jesus Christ (Revelation 2:9a), a counter culture perspective (cf. Philippians 3:8-11; Hebrews 12:11).

† Pliny (a governor from the local area near Smyrna around 100 AD) writes this in a letter to Emperor Trajan: "Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome. Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ--none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do--these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ... (quoted from Alister E. McGrath, *Apologetics to the Romans from Pliny's letter to Trajan*, Bibliotheca Sacra Journal, October, 1998).