① THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA

v.8 TO the angel of the Church of Smyrna...

- Smyrna, modern day Izmir
- the only one of the seven cities still in existence
- Very beautiful city w/ stadiums, libraries, and theaters
  - Birth place of Great Poet Homer
- This city was extremely allegiant to Rome
  - had a special relationship w/ the imperial cult
  - was the 1st city to make a temple in honor of Rome - Tacitus, annales, 4.55-56
  - made another temple in honor of Emperor Tiberius
  - also had a large Jewish population

★ ALL this made christian living and way of life very difficult!

- New religions were NOT allowed to form under the Roman Empire
  - Israel and Judaism were established already before Rome
- ★ FOR a while, Christianity was almost covered OR disguised as a form of Jewish Religion
- ★ However, as time went on, Christianity grew and became more distinct from Judaism
  - The Romans realized a new Religion ; King was being preached
  - AND the Jews were more than eager to seperate from and expose "Christians" the Romans

- w/ the Romans now on the hunt for Treason against Rome (calling someone else LORD/King)
- And the Jews exposing Christians life was exceptionally difficult and extremely hostile to christians
  - almost impossible to buy or sell land, food, or worship openly
  - Polycarp was a bishop/pastor during the end of the 1st cent and beginning of 2nd cent.
  - he refused to call Caesar "Lord" and the Jews would "slander" (Blaspheme) the Christians to Romans

★ Nero brought into the slander ; heavily persecuted the Christians (64-67)
- a lot of the Jews were upset of their "brethren" becoming Christian
- citizens were required to "sacrifice" to the Emperor for special occassions

★ Domition's reign (81-96 AD) even increased christian persecution
- anyone found disloyal would be imprisoned and then executed

- TO say the least ; the church of Smyrna suffered severe persecution

θλῖψις

② THE IDENTIFICATION TO THE VISION

v8 Write: The words of the First and The LAST, who died and came to life

- Just as the other letters, Jesus has each church focus on...
- one aspect of the Son of Men vision in Ch1

★ The aspect to focus on, or "identification" seems to correlate to what that particular church is going through OR struggling w/.

- Here, Jesus says to focus on these two aspects:

1) Jesus is the First ; the LAST
   - the α and Ω
   - emphasizing that He is in complete control of ALL things

★ Despite the severe persecution
- the christians in Smyrna must have been tempted to Doubt Jesus being in control of ALL things

- Remember that Christian persecution and Temptations are God's Testing of the Genuineness of our Faith
- Dying for Jesus is our ultimate display of faith ; Love (John 15) "Greater love has no one then this..."

2) Jesus wants them to focus on the Fact that He died too, yet He came back to life... as they will
- must likely, this will be the case for many of the Smyrna Christians
  - they too will die for their faith

③ THE STATE OF THE CHURCH

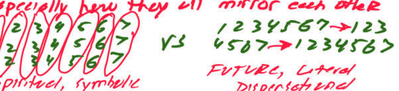
v.9 I know your (works), tribulation, ; your poverty, but you are rich...

- Tribulation θλῖψις ; poverty has not gone unnoticed to Jesus
- There seems to typically be a link between heavily persecuted areas AND Christian poverty
  - Hebrews 10:34 mentions: "have you joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, know you have better and more enduring possessions in heaven."

★ Also note the contrast w/ the Laodicean church: "You say you are rich and become wealthy and need nothing, but do not know that you are wretched, miserable, POOR, blind, ; naked" Rev. 3:17

★ James reminds us: "God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom..." Jms 2:5
- Again, almost impossible for "open" Christians to get jobs, loans, buy, sell

★ Some scholars believe the "visions" in-between the Church visions (1-3, 20-22) play out the events the Church experiences throughout time (seals, Trumpets, bowls... all having the world end at the end of each vision)
- especially how they all "mirror" each other



★ 3 of the 7 visions (2, 3, and 5)
1. 1-3
2. 4-7
3. 8-11
4. 12-14 (Dispensationalist: Church Age)
5. 15-16
6. 17-19 - Babylon
7. 20-22

v.9 and I know the blasphemy/slander of those who say that they are Jews & are not, but are a synagogue of Satan

βλασφημία: Blasphemy, slander, evil words, defame

- some Jews would "defame" Christians
- They "say" they are Jews, but are not
- As Paul said in Romans 2, just being Jewish in DNA, Does NOT make one a Jew in the ♡, "but only outwardly, but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart..." Rom 2:28-29
- These "outward" Jews would defame/slander Christians to the Romans
  - causing more persecution, arrest, and execution
- This group is actually an assembly OR "gathering" συναγωγή (synagogue) of Σατανᾶ: adversary, accuser
- Many times, scripture will use these words (Satan, Devil) to describe people NOT an actual Spiritual Being... as here

④ COMMAND NOT TO FEAR UNTO DEATH

v.10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer
- Jesus exhorts the church to not fear the inevitable if they continue to shine

"Do not fear those who can only kill the body but cannot kill the soul But rather, fear Him who is able to destroy both soul ; body in hell." Matt. 10:28

"All those who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." 2Tim 3:12

- Do not fear because as Christ rose, so too will His followers

v.10 Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison

διάβολος: adversary, slanderer wicked person
- notice the Jews were satanic
- and the Romans were demonic
- These names are descriptions of people and groups of times
  - calling someone Satan OR Satan has much Biblical support

★ Even Jesus said, "You (Jews) are of your father, the Devil (adversary) (adversarial to God's desires/plans) and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning... therefore, you do not hear because you are not of God" John 8:44-47
- Those not of God are "adversarial" to God's purposes ; plans

★ SADLY, sometimes even Believers can be adversarial and slanderous!

"Did I not chose you, the twelve, but one of you is a devil" John 6:70
- this was to an Apostle (Judas)!

"wives should not be slanderers (διάβολος)..." 1Tim. 3:11, Titus 2:3

"Jesus answered him and said, Get Behind Me Satan! For you (Peter) are not mindful of the things of God." Mark 8:33

★ Throwing Christians into prison is adversarial to the Kingdom...
- although God can use it to reach those in Prison (Philemon) Onesimus and even reach the Jailers as well (Philippian Jailer) Acts 16:32

★ Also, Being persecuted and suffering adversaries/slanders allows us to be "TESTED"

v.10 so that you may be Tested and you will have tribulation Ten days
- Remember, the "TESTING" of our faith is like unto Gold in a fire... 1 Peter 1:6-9

"though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it be tested as by fire may be found to praise, honor, and give glory at the Revelation of Jesus Christ"

★ Notice ολιο, both here and in Peter, there is a time mentioned
... "a little while" OR
... TEN Days
- The teaching is that our earthly trials will be short compared to our eternal reward

★ NOT Just John and Peter say so, but Paul as well:
- In 2 cor 4, Paul mentions several trials of life ; death

"Persecuted... always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus... for we are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake"
"But we speak, knowing that He who raised up Jesus will ALSO raise us up w/ Jesus..."
Therefore, we do not lose heart even though the outward man is perishing, the inward man is being renewed... For our momentary light affliction which is just for a moment is working for us a far more exceeding weight of glory..." 2 cor 4

- This teaching is clear and Biblical... our trials are "short"

★ However, why the mention of "TEN Days" specifically?
- most likely, this is a reference to Daniel (again)

"Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were tested for Ten days and only ate vegetables and water to drink... so they were tested for ten days. And after the ten days they appeared better (than the rest)... they had understanding and wisdom... at the end they were ten times better than the other magicians..." Dan. 1:11-20

★ Jesus is saying: You remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Yeah... it will be like that... DON'T BOW! painful, BUT SHORT!
- There is little doubt that the "ten days" in Revelation is to be understood as a short time of "TESTING"

⑤ CROWN OF LIFE... IMMUNITY FROM 2ND DEATH

v. 11 Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life
- Despite martyrdom, they must be faithful until the end... even if it is death
- In Matt 10, Jesus mentions persecutions unto death for believers
  - He says "Do not worry about how OR what you will speak"... v.19
"Brother will deliver brother to death, and father to his child, and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved." Matt 10:19-22
- The "crown of life" is simply eternal Life as their reward

★ This "crown" (eternal life) can be taken from the believer and is warned against to the church of Philadelphia:
"Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes (Temptation) I will make him a pillar in the Temple of My God I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city, the New Jerusalem, which comes down from heaven and I will write on him My new name" Rev. 3:11-12

(thats a lot of writing... OR very symbolic of "possession" and purpose)
- Again though, the mentioning of the crown is a reference to eternal life

★ The N.T. and Revelation mentions "crowns" many times
- crown of Righteousness 2 Tim. 4:8
- crown of Glory 1 Pt. 5:4
- crown of life Jms 1:12, Rev. 2:10
- crown of rejoicing 1 Thes. 2:19
- crown of martyrs Rev 6?
- imperishable crown 1 cor. 9:24-25
- Some believe these are literal and specific crowns... OR
- They are all metaphorical for eternal life
- most likely, they all have the same metaphorical meaning

- Because the next verse mentions the overcomers are NOT hurt by the "2nd Death" (spiritual Death)

v. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches
- Is. 6 reference... soft ♡ vs. hard ♡

v.11 He who overcomes νικάω shall NOT be hurt by the second death
- Ironically, dying for Jesus prevents one from spiritual death
- anyone who "overcomes" is rewarded w/ Life ζωή
  - and escapes death θάνατος
  - which will be mentioned again in the last vision in Rev. 20-21

"Those who are part of the first resurrection are blessed and holy, in which the second death has no power, those (in the first resurrection) shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign (as Kings) w/ Him..." Rev. 20:5-6
- 2nd Death is described as a Lake of fire (Rev. 20:14, 21:8)
- The 1st resurrection is either
  1. being born again OR
  2. when a believer dies and their spirit ascends to God OR
  3. when Jesus' returns and the believer receives the new body - Dispensational view

★ more to come on these 3 choices
- Either way, only the faithful overcomer to the end escapes the Lake of fire/2nd Death!