

EP29: Revelation 2:8-11 (part 1)

The Church at Smyrna

Overall Theme: I Will Perfect You!

Revelation 2:8-11

And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who had chosen to be dead, and has come to life, now says this: 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are now rich), and the blasphemy by those who are now saying they are now Jews and are now not, but now are a synagogue of Satan. Do not now be caused to fear what you are now about to now suffer. Behold, the devil is now about to now cast some of you into prison, so that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Now choose to be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who is now having an ear, let him hear what the Spirit now says to the churches. He who is now overcoming will not be hurt by the second death.'

We come to the smallest letter which is addressed to the church at Smyrna. I like the fact that it is small because the message of this letter is all about suffering. Have you noticed when you talk to someone who is going through intense suffering, they do not want a lot of words or explanations? They tend to be good with just a few words of consolation and hope or with the comfort of someone's presence. So here Jesus gives them a few words—7 sentences—intended to be a complete expression of what these believers need to adequately prepare for their dark-days and dark-nights of suffering.

The name Smyrna comes from the word “myrrh,” which means “death.” Myrrh was an ordinary perfume used to make the **anointing oil** in the tabernacle, and it was also used for embalming dead bodies.¹ The interesting thing about myrrh is that in its normal state it has no smell; but when it is crushed, it releases a fragrance that is beautiful and sweet. But it must first be crushed. And that is exactly what God had in mind for this church. They were going to be crushed, and some even martyred, for their faith in Jesus. But no matter how difficult it was going to be, the result would be a sweet fragrance.

Historical Setting

Smyrna, situated 35 miles north of Ephesus, was established by Alexander the Great in 333 B.C., so even by the time this letter was written, it was one of the oldest cities in the region. In fact, it is still around today and goes by the name of Izmir.

Smyrna was known as the crown of Asia. It was one of the loveliest and wealthiest cities in the whole area, with a population of close to 100,000 people. The Smyrna marketplace (the Agora) was the largest of its kind in the world.

The city had a large and prosperous Jewish population which gave large amounts of money towards the beautification of the city. And because of their generosity, the Jews were well accepted within the

¹ **Exodus 30:22-33**

community even though they did not participate in the worship of the local gods. Accordingly, they were given a lot of latitude when they aggressively targeted Christians for persecution.

Smyrna was also a port city whose harbor was very safe for travelers. The city had a constant west wind blowing off the water keeping the temperature wonderfully comfortable. While that was great for comfort, it also created a significant problem because it often brought the noxious stench of the sewage that drained into the sea wafting back into the city. Jesus plays off this in a sort of ironic way knowing that the crushing of the believers in that city will bring about a beautiful, sweet fragrance which would overpower the stench of spiritual refuse.

The setting of the city was beautiful. It started from the harbor and went up through some narrow foothills and then behind the city there rose the Pagos—a hill covered with temples and large buildings which were spoken of as the crown of Smyrna. In fact, Smyrna had many temples including temples to Zeus, Cybele, Apollo, Nemesis, Aphrodite, Asclepius, an imperial temple to the Godhead of Tiberius, and a temple to their signature god, Dionysus (Dionysus was to Smyrna what Artemis was to Ephesus). I want to give you a little understanding of Dionysus, as the history of this Greek god gives us insight into Jesus' introduction.

Dionysus was the Greek god of fertility, wine, and ecstasy and his legend carries a couple of major themes. The first theme centers on the **hostility** and **persecution** that Dionysus and his cult faced both from Hera (another Greek god) and from the inhabitants of the places he visited. Legend goes that he visited Thebes and the king became furious at the way the women followed Dionysus in his drunken revelries, so he had Dionysus thrown in prison (this is similar to the hostile way believers were being persecuted in Smyrna and were threatened with prison).

Another theme is that of **death** and **rebirth**. Being the god of harvest and fertility, Dionysus was a symbol of death and resurrection, because crops die in winter and return in spring. And then of course there is a crazy story about his birth, death, and rebirth. Dionysus was the son of Zeus and Demeter, the goddess of crops and vegetation. Hera was jealous of the child and convinced the Titans to destroy him. Although Dionysus was disguised as a baby goat, the Titans found him and tore him to pieces. They ate all his body except his heart, which was rescued by Athena. She gave the heart to Zeus who gave it to Semele to eat. Semele later gave birth to Dionysus again. Hence, Jesus' introduction is targeted at this myth. Jesus, however, is not some legend or fairy tale; He is the one who died and came to life.

Smyrna was also sold out to the Roman Empire. In 196 B.C. (before Rome ruled the area), Smyrna was so enchanted with the emerging Roman Empire that they built the first temple to "Dea Roma," the goddess of Rome, the spiritual symbol of the Empire. This infatuation eventually led to emperor worship of not just of live emperors, but also the dead ones. To those in Smyrna, emperor worship was a display of political allegiance and civic pride. Therefore, to not worship was to be labeled a traitor and a political insurrectionist, which barred your participation in the trade guilds; hence, the unemployment and poverty for believers who would not compromise their faith.

Revelation 2:8-9

And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who had chosen to be dead, and has come to life, **now** says this: 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are **now** rich), and

the blasphemy by those who are now saying they are now Jews and are now not, but **now** are now a synagogue of Satan.'

Yahweh's Plan

Drawing once again from the image of the glorified Son of Man (**1:10-11**), Jesus introduces Himself as the **first and the last**, the one whose words are prophetically authoritative (pre-determined to come to be, it's always just a matter of time). Jesus wants these believers to know that what they were about to endure was not random, arbitrary, capricious, or some sort of punishment, but was part of the plan of God for their lives. And therefore, it was safe and would accomplish His beautiful purposes.

Thus, even though the devil would be the instrument **Yahweh** chose through which they would experience some very dark-days and dark-nights of suffering, Jesus—the one who is now loving them and has been loosening their sin by His blood—has deemed it all necessary.²

This is an important lesson for all of us. We must remember that Jesus Christ, the creator of the universe, is the sovereign **Yahweh Adonai**. We belong to Him; thus, He does not want us to get all freaked out when things of this world come against us in **hostility** and with **persecution** because it all comes from His hands (remember, all things are from Him, through Him, and to Him³). The people, institutions, and even the spiritual beings behind these hostile actions are just the instruments that He is using. Everything He does is intentional, under control, purposeful, necessary, and an expression of His great love for us.⁴

He Knows and Understands our Suffering

Jesus now says⁵ that He knows their tribulation, poverty, and the blaspheme of those who are now saying that they are Jews and are not but are now a synagogue of Satan. I am sure that they were hoping that He would say He was going to deliver them from their tribulation, poverty, and slander. Instead, He extends empathy and communicates that nothing they are going through is lost on Him.

Although it was not communicated to most people when they were first invited to receive Jesus in their heart (when they took **Step 1**), a true child of God must suffer many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.⁶ It is a critical aspect of a believer's relationship with God. It is **Step 2** and it is the pathway by which they learn to bet their lives on His name and come to trust Him for who He says He is. This pathway provides them the opportunity to surrender their pride and power and choose to become that little child.⁷

In that vein, tribulation, poverty, and slander, etc., are necessary not just to our faith but also for all those in our lives. What it accomplishes in the spiritual realms is largely lost on us, but from this idiom of the myrrh, we can understand that when we are crushed under persecution, it produces a beautiful

² See **Revelation 1:5**. Note: "loves" is rendered in the *present active participle*; "released" is rendered in the *aorist active participle*

³ **Romans 11:36**

⁴ In talking about Paul's calling, Jesus said He would show Paul "*how much*" he must suffer for His name's sake (**Acts 9:16**). In the Greek, this refers to a set amount, as in an accounting, a specified number. So, his days and amount of suffering had a pre-determined limit.

⁵ "says" is rendered in the *present tense*; thus, it is even speaking to us now in our appointed times of suffering.

⁶ **Acts 14:22**

⁷ See also **Jeremiah 4:4** and His plea for His people to give up their pride and power

fragrance that is pleasing to God, and which likely impacts, in the spiritual realms, all those around us.

Clearly, Jesus wanted there to be in Smyrna a wonderful fragrance left by those who supernaturally, through Him, endured extreme circumstances and did not compromise their faith. This beautiful fragrance would overcome the gross stench of that city which resulted from the refuse of idolatry and demonic worship.

If you think about it, this kind of hostility and persecution is the antidote for the tendency within us to cling to religion, for if we even try to let our religion empower us through this kind of persecution and hostility, the futility and powerlessness of it all is immediately understood.

In the **Codex**, **Yahweh** once said, *"My people are foolish and do not know me, says **Yahweh**. They are stupid children who have no understanding. They are clever enough for doing wrong, but they have no idea how to do right."*⁸ Thus, this pathway of persecution and hostility is the classroom, so to speak, where we are given the opportunity to choose to know Him, and to put our entire trust in who He says He is. Again, it is our opportunity to choose to be a little child dependent upon **Yahweh** for all things, all the time.

Perspective is Everything

Ironically, all of this is contrary to how we, as believers, would normally think. Being in a situation surrounded by such gross idolatry, we would want God to bless us and prosper us and lift us up as a sign to all those who follow false gods that we know the one true God and they got it all wrong. Unfortunately, God does not think like we think, and the spiritual realms do not operate in the same dynamic as the physical realms.

Jesus will lift these believers up and prosper them and bless them, but that would all be realized in the spiritual realms where all the weapons of suffering that are formed against them would not prosper.⁹ These believers will be broken, but they will not be crushed under the weight of suffering; and that will be a nothing short of a miracle.

By saying that He is the one who died and came to life, playing off the Dionysus mythology of **death** and **rebirth**, Jesus communicates that many of them will walk the same path He walked. And they do not have to fear, for if they remain faithful, they will also rise from the dead and be *living ones*. This is not mythology; rather, these are the prophetic words of the first and the last, the One who is called the "Amen." This is a very personal message. They will not only get to share in His death (death to their *flesh*—their Old Sinful Nature—and for some actual physical death because of persecution), but also in the power and glory of His resurrection, both in this life and in the life to come.

The Spiritual View

One thing for sure is that how Jesus sees things is far different than how we see things. He says they are **now** rich, even though they had next to nothing. In fact, many had their property seized because they would not recant their faith. And others lost their property due to the rule which allowed those who turned in "traitors" to the Imperial cult to retain 10% of the confiscated property (which is a job which the Jews gladly accepted). But given the perspective of eternity, these believers were not only wealthy they

⁸ **Jeremiah 4:22**

⁹ See **Isaiah 54:17**

were to Jesus the beautiful crown of Asia.

Synagogue of Satan

As far as the blasphemy of those who are **now** saying¹⁰ that they are **now** Jews and are **now** not,¹¹ but are **now** a synagogue of Satan, this statement could be taken a couple of ways. It could be taken that certain gentiles converted to Judaism, and they were the ones who were persecuting the Christians. Thus, they say they are Jews, but are not really Jews by birth. This interpretation may be useful to keep unintelligent people from developing anti-Semitic attitudes; however, this interpretation does not track what we know about the history between the Jews and Christians during the first century.

In the first century, the primary persecution against believers came at the hands of Jews who considered Christianity to be an apostasy of the Hebrew faith. Having been birthed out of Judaism, the Romans saw Christianity as just a sect of Judaism and not as a separate religion. This infuriated the Jews. They had struck a deal with Rome which exempted them from Imperial worship, and they did not want this exemption to be extended to the Christian heretics. As a result, the Jews led the first Christian persecution in many Asian cities, and they used the Imperial cult as their lever against the believers.

Not Jews

If Jews by genetic lineage were leading the persecution, why would Jesus say that they are **now** not Jews but are **now** of the synagogue of Satan? Once again, it comes down to a **Spiritual Perspective**. Jesus sees things and makes His judgments through the lens of the spiritual, and not so much the lens of the physical. **Despite their birthright, spiritually speaking, they were not Jews.**

Galatians 3:7-9

The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God. What's more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would declare the Gentiles to be righteous because of their faith. God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, "All nations will be blessed through you." So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.

Galatians 3:29

And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

Romans 9:6-9

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God,

¹⁰ "saying: is rendered in the *present active participle*, this is an ongoing reality even today.

¹¹ "are Jews" is rendered in the *present active infinitive* and "are not" is rendered in the *present active indicative*.

but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

Galatians 6:15-16

For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

Philippians 3:2-4

Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

Yahweh has always identified as His own those who choose to live by faith. Those who are circumcised of heart, and not of the body, are the true Israel of God. In fact, the true Israel of God is, and has always been, those who, like Abraham, come to God by faith and are established in God solely because of the grace He extends to them. Thus, their relationship with God is not based on law or any other work of the *flesh* (or **work of their hands**).¹²

True Jews, as seen through the lens of the spiritual reality, would not blaspheme and vilify the children of God, rather, their hearts would be aligned with the heart of God. Therefore, Jesus identifies them by their true spiritual genetic lineage, much like He did the “so-called” spiritual leaders of His day.

John 8:39-47

"Our father is Abraham!" they declared. "No," Jesus replied, "for if you were really the children of Abraham, you would follow his example. Instead, you are trying to kill me because I told you the truth, which I heard from God. Abraham never did such a thing. **No, you are imitating your real father.**" They replied, "We aren't illegitimate children! God himself is our true Father." Jesus told them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, because I have come to you from God. I am not here on my own, but he sent me.

Why can't you understand what I am saying? It's because you can't even hear me! **For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning.** He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies. **So, when I tell the truth, you just naturally don't believe me!** Which of you can truthfully accuse me of sin? And since I am telling you the truth, why don't you believe me? Anyone who belongs to God listens gladly to the words of God. But you don't listen because you don't belong to God."

This is a powerful indictment not just against Judaism, but against everyone who comes to God based

¹² *Psalm 40:6-8, 51:16-17; 1 Samuel 15:22*

on their own goodness and believes themselves to be right with God because they gather in their churches, worship the Lord, and do all manner of “good” Christian works. But there is **NO MIDDLE GROUND** when it comes to spiritual genetics. One either belongs to **Yahweh** or they belong to their father the devil. And those who are now abiding in the **delusion of the middle ground of goodness** are held captive by Satan to do his will.

WHO IS YOUR FATHER?

Do you remember the **Prelude** from **1 John 5:19**? The Spirit made a hard demarcation between those who are children of God and everyone else who has chosen to give themselves to the rule of the evil one (whether they know it or not). Thus, collectively, those who love their religion (even the religion of Christianity) are now of a synagogue of Satan, and being rendered in the *present active indicative*, that is a statement of fact even now.¹³

Can you imagine how many houses of worship within the religion of Christianity are a home for the demonic?

WARNING. WE MUST LET THE SPIRIT TRAIN AND PREPARE US TO HAVE THE EARS TO HEAR SUCH THAT WE CAN SEE INTO THE SPIRITUAL REALITY AND DISCERN THE TRUTH.

We must **NEVER** be deceived by a church’s, or an individual’s, “ministry” accomplishments. And we must be fully aware that much of the persecution in the **End Times** will come, not at the hand of Jews or unbelievers, but at the hand of “Christians”—those who have gone apostate and bear the genetic code of Satan, although, fully convinced they are doing a service for God.¹⁴ In this way, the future will mimic the past in that the persecution and hate will come from within the Household of God.

The Purpose of Suffering

Often, we think that a person who is suffering is just reaping what they had sown, getting the punishment they deserve for the sin in their lives. **But Jesus had no correction for this church—none!** The crushing that they were about to endure will provide a cleansing of the stench in that city. In effect, they are privileged to function as priests of **Yahweh**, in that they will be sacrificing on behalf of others, it just happens that they are the sacrifice. In this they identify themselves with the sufferings of Jesus: with His death, and ultimately His resurrection.

Romans 8:16-17

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **if indeed we suffer with Him** so that we may also be glorified with

¹³ “are a synagogue of Satan” is rendered in the *present active indicative*

¹⁴ ***John 16:1-3***

Him.

1 Peter 4:12-15

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

This idea that our lives are laid out as a pleasing sacrifice to God on behalf of others will be a major theme throughout **Revelation**.¹⁵ This reality is rarely communicated to those who said the “sinner’s prayer;” thus, far too many within the religion of Christianity are not prepared to suffer persecution and hostility and die as a living and willing sacrifice. Like **Balaam**, they are looking to God for the blessings this life can provide. But suffering is the counter measure, so to speak, to the **apostasy of Balaam**, for suffering brings into our life a maturity that few can understand, and it results in the Spirit of glory and of God resting upon us. It is also how we develop ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

**MYRRH DOES NOT ACCOMPLISH ITS PURPOSE UNLESS IT IS CRUSHED.
WE CANNOT ACCOMPLISH OUR PURPOSE UNLESS WE ARE CRUSHED!**

Revelation 2:10

Do not now be caused to fear what you are now about to now suffer. Behold, the devil is now about to now cast some of you into prison, so that you will cause to be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days.

Most of this statement is rendered in the *present* tense; thus, we know that it is speaking to those in Smyrna and those in proverbial “Smyrna,” as this church exists even today.

This first command, “*Do not fear*” is rendered in the *present passive imperative*; the *passive* indicating that they are to be acted upon by an outside force. Thus, on-the-one-hand, it is a command to not let anything cause their hearts to fear. But in humanity, that is pretty much an impossible task, since fear is the foundation for practically everything in our lives that is not built on faith (in fact, fear is the antonym to faith). And we just do not have that much control over the deep parts of our soul where fear has taken root. On-the-other-hand, it is a command with an invitation to let God now calm our fears. With our eyes on Him, He will bring peace in the midst of the storm, if we are **willing** to let Him still our soul.¹⁶

For example, when Jesus came to the disciples walking on water, they were terrified, and He said, “*Don’t be afraid...take courage, I am here!*” His presence in our lives is how we conquer fear. Peter, taking

¹⁵ **Revelation 11:7-10, 13:7-10.** See also **2 Corinthians 1:5, 4:10; Philippians 3:10**

¹⁶ **Psalm 131**

Him at His word, went out to Him on the water and, in the midst of that storm, walked on water. So long as he kept his eyes fixed on Jesus, Peter was safe and living in the supernatural. However, as soon as Peter took his eyes off Jesus and fixated on the scary wind and the waves, he began to sink. But immediately Jesus grabbed him, and said, “*why did you doubt me.*”¹⁷

Yes, we can supernaturally walk on the waves of persecution and suffering when our eyes are fixed on Jesus and not on the wind and the waves that threaten our lives. We simply must not doubt that He is our only safety, both in-and-out of the water. And if we let Him, if we are **willing**, He will still our soul and we will not fear.

They are commanded to not fear what they “*are now about to suffer.*” Those must have been hard words to hear. Their time of suffering has been determined by the one who speaks prophetically, the **first and the last**; therefore, it is going to happen, and soon, it is just a matter of time.

The word “devil” means one who slanders or accuses. This gives us some insight as to what they can expect. Their imprisonment will come because of the slanderous accusations by the people (those who are now saying they are Jews but are now not) who are ruled by the demonic powers in this city—those who take their lead from Satan himself.

The Test of Time

The key verbs, “*fear,*” “*are now about,*” “*to now suffer,*” “*devil is now,*” and “*to now cast,*” are all rendered in the *present* tense. But with “*so that you may be tested*” the **Code** switches, as it is rendered in the *aorist passive subjunctive*.¹⁸ What this implies is that **their coming imprisonment (which is all spoken about in the present tense) is not actually the test, but time (the proverbial 10-days) is the test.**

When we are in the throes of suffering, time always has a way of testing our resolve to the point of breaking. In the early stages, especially if we have been warned or prepared, we tend to be able to handle suffering, even unjust suffering resulting from hateful accusations and misrepresentations. But as time goes on and on and on and on and on and on, and there seems to be no end in sight, we are tested in terms of our faithfulness. **And time is crushing!** Time seems to suck all life out of our HOPE and HOPE is necessary for our endurance.

Jesus is clear that they will have tribulation **for 10-days**, which is a **Code** to be discerned. They have an appointment that is intended to crush everything within them that is not of God, so that the sweet fragrance of the Spirit would be manifested from their lives.

God Limits our Suffering

The word we have translated as “*tribulation*” is the Greek word for pressure. They will be pressured, tested, for **10-days**. In other words, a fixed time has been determined for their suffering. Now, as far as prison, it is not clear whether this is to be understood literally (which it might be), or whether it is a metaphor for a prison of the soul where they will feel emotionally, spiritually, and even physically trapped, unable to escape due to the intense slander and accusation against them. Either way, the notion of imprisonment is terrible, and it always comes with intense emotional, spiritual, and mental torment.

¹⁷ **Matthew 14:25-31**

¹⁸ *Note:* normally the *subjunctive* connotes uncertainty in the action, but when used in a purpose clause, it should be understood as definite though dependent upon another action, in this case, being cast in prison.

Looking through the **Codex**, this idea of being tested for **10-days** might be an allusion to the 10 days of testing which Daniel and his friends experienced when they were taken to the royal court in Babylon. According to the **Codex**, **Daniel** is the only other place where we find another reference to "*10-days of testing*."¹⁹

Daniel and his 3-friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were taken from Jerusalem and were chosen to serve in the Babylonian court. The custodian who was given charge over them was to ensure that they were healthy and educated. However, Daniel had made up his mind not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the King. Therefore, he asked permission to eat only vegetables. But his custodian was alarmed by this request, concerned that if they became pale and thin compared to the other youths their age, the King would have his head for neglecting his duties.

But Daniel asked the custodian to test them for 10-days on a diet of only vegetables and water. And to no surprise, at the end of this time of testing, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier and better nourished than the other young men who were eating the food assigned by the King.

This is not a plug for vegetarianism; rather this story speaks to us of the supernatural enabling which God provides when we are willing to stand against the compromises that are forced upon us by the world. It was their version of walking on the waves in the midst of a storm.

Thus, it could be possible that this "**10-days of testing**" was something similar in that the devil was mobilizing those in the community to force them to join in their idolatry, and if they did not join, they would suffer all manner of practical troubles and suffering, including death.

As far as the "**10-days**," this is spoken in **Code**. Daniel was tested for a literal 10-day period in terms of his diet, but given the letter and this warning, it is likely not to be understood literally, for most anyone could survive 10-literal days of trouble, whether they had previously received a warning or not. And what is being tested here is their faithfulness, and that requires **time** and **endurance**, something far beyond a literal 10-day period.

According to the **Code**, the number 10 refers to a divine order of things and "days" refers to a set period of time, hence, "**10-days**" likely just means the perfect amount of tribulation which had been assigned or prescribed by the infinite wisdom of **Yahweh** and was needed to bring forth this amazing fragrance of life.

But make no mistake, when it is finished, like Daniel, they will undeniably "*look healthier and better nourished*," in that the spiritual forces of wickedness will see a beautiful fragrance emitting from their lives which will overpower the stench of evil.

Fiction Alert

FICTION ALERT

Some have speculated that the **10-days** refers to 10-periods of Roman persecution which occurred

¹⁹ **Daniel 1:12**

from Nero to Diocletian. This is proffered in support of the dispensational theory that each church represents a serial epoch of church history. However, those Roman persecutions washed over the entire church and not just the church at Smyrna. Jesus did not promise “**10-days**” of tribulation to any of the other churches who would have been equally hit with these persecutions, and probably far less likely to survive the time of testing.

In addition, Nero’s persecution (and most of Domitian’s) happened prior to the time this letter was revealed to John. And the phrase “*you shall have tribulation*” is the only time (other than the Lord’s promise to give them a crown) the *future* tense is used in this passage.

So, the “coming” tribulations were ahead of them and not mostly behind them. In addition, the persecutions did not technically end after Emperor Diocletian’s reign, as the persecutions continued under Pontifex Maximus, his successor. It was only after Maximus died at the hand of Constantine that the persecutions of the church finally ended. Accordingly, I am not convinced this statement referred to the 10-periods of Roman persecution of the church by the Roman authorities.

Let Fear Be Removed

Knowing that this letter applies to the proverbial “Smyrna” of our day, the key, to surviving this time of testing is, in obedience to God’s command, to be **willing** to let Him remove our fear. As we have learned, **it is our choice to be willing to allow God to act, and it is God’s responsibility to act**. He is the only one who can transform us, we simply do not have that power.²⁰ But take note, even our ability to choose to let God act in our lives comes from Him. “*For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey Him and the power to do what pleases Him.*”²¹

With that said, God is always purposed to act and to remove our fear, but the reality is that we are **NOT** always willing to let Him into the deepest recesses of our soul to do such foundational reconstruction of our lives. After all, most of us hate suffering and we hate hostile persecution. We do not understand why it is necessary (we can read the words, but our heart disagrees), and we simply do not trust **Yahweh**. He has hurt us enough in the past, and we do not want to be hurt again in the future.

Yet, it is our choice to trust Him or not. It is our choice to be **willing**. He never takes that choice away from us. And it is for this reason (our unwillingness to trust Him), that the **Substitution Principle** is so often ignored and exchanged for good old-fashioned religion and the “**work of our hands**”. After all, the **Design Point** is great in theory, but who really wants to let God crucify their *flesh* and slowly bleed from their lives everything that He does not like?

Who really wants to exchange all that they are for all that He is? Again, the theory is nice, but few are fans of the process whose means is tribulation. Just the thought of it brings up the fear of pain and prolonged times of intense suffering. Ugh! Haven’t we suffered enough already?

That is a question most of us have asked, but let’s stop here and pick up in our next podcast with an understanding of the beauty of suffering.

²⁰ See **Romans 12:2** where “be transformed” is rendered in the *passive* voice: it is something which God must do.

²¹ **Philippians 2:13**