



THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 07

Text: Rev. 2:8-11

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QUICK LINKS

1. What the text meant.
 Historical Aspects:
 External History
 Internal History
 Literary Aspects:
 Genre
 Literary Setting
 Literary Structure

Exegesis of the Text:
 A. Command to write, v. 8a
 B. Situation of the church, vv. 8b-10
 C. Admonition and promise, v. 11

2. What the text means.

Message to Smyrna

Greek NT
 8 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν·
 9 οἶδά σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ, καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανᾶ.
 10 μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν. ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα. γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοὶ τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς.
 11 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἕκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου.

La Biblia de las Américas
 8 Y escribe al ángel de la iglesia en Esmirna: “El primero y el último, el que estuvo muerto y ha vuelto a la vida, dice esto:
 9 ‘Yo conozco tu tribulación y tu pobreza (pero tú eres rico), y la blasfemia de los que se dicen ser judíos y no lo son, sino que son sinagoga de Satanás. 10 ‘No temas lo que estás por sufrir. He aquí, el diablo echará a algunos de vosotros en la cárcel para que seáis probados, y tendréis tribulación por diez días. Sé fiel hasta la muerte, y yo te daré la corona de la vida.
 11 ‘El que tiene oído, oiga lo que el Espíritu dice a las iglesias. El vencedor no sufrirá daño de la muerte segunda.’

NRSV
 8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life:
 9 I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.
 10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.
 11 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death.

NLT
 8 Write this letter to the angel of the church in Smyrna. This is the message from the one who is the First and the Last, who died and is alive:
 9 I know about your suffering and your poverty -- but you are rich! I know the slander of those opposing you. They say they are Jews, but they really aren't because theirs is a synagogue of Satan.
 10 Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The Devil will throw some of you into prison and put you to the test. You will be persecuted for 'ten days.' Remain faithful even when facing death, and I will give you the crown of life.
 11 Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever is victorious will not be hurt by the second death.

INTRODUCTION

In this second message, the pattern established in the first message to Ephesus is continued. The genre elements are reproduced in exactly the same way and in the same position inside the message. Thus the

structure of the message remains the same, but the content of the message is distinctive to the situation of the Christian community at Smyrna. This city of about 100,000 residents was located north of Ephesus about 35 miles, also it was on the coast. It functioned as a



port city at the mouth of the Hermus / Melas river on the south shore of the Gulf of Izmir and is now named Izmir in modern times. With unusually great wealth and cultural diversity, the city enjoyed a rich history in Greek tradition, initially beginning around 1,000 BCE in the Aeolian Greek heritage but for several centuries at the time of Revelation in the Ionian Greek heritage. The city had 'died' in the sixth century BCE when Alyattes, king of Lydia, destroyed it in battle. Although it languished as a small backwater village for several centuries, it was 'brought back to life' in a massive rebuilding program sponsored by Alexander the Great but actually implemented many years later by Lysimachus, the general who took over control of Asia at Alexander's death in 323 BCE. The new city grew rapidly and prospered greatly. Numerous famous people came from Smyrna, including Homer. In modern times, the Turkish government completely purged the city of its Greek residents in 1923.

A strong but persecuted church in a large, wealthy city -- this is the situation at Smyrna. The risen Christ had a message for the believing community in the city that contained encouragement and warning. A message that still needs to be heard in the twenty-first century.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Again both historical and literary aspects will be

considered. The literary genre features remain the same as for the first message to the Ephesians in 2:1-7, and so these aspects will be summarized rather than analyzed in detail. See the previous study on 2:1-7 for the detailed analysis.

Historical Aspects:

As per the standard procedure, the external history will focus on the history of the hand copying of this passage during the second through the eighth centuries. The internal history centers on time and place markers inside the passage.

External History.

As for the hand copying of 2:8-11, the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed.) did not feel that any of the existing variations in wording were significant enough to impact the translation of this scripture passage. Thus no variant readings are listed in their text apparatus.

But the text apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (UBS 27th rev. ed.) lists some thirteen places where different wording exists in the known manuscripts of this passage.¹

¹Offenbarung 2,8

* τω Α ρε (τῷ is added before τῆς in some mss)

* πρωτοτοκος Α (πρωτότοκος replaces πρώτος)

* 1006. 1841 *M*^K (the relative pronoun ὃς is omitted)

Offenbarung 2,9

* (2,2) τα εργα και κ *M* sy^{h**} (τὰ ἔργα και inserted between σου and τὴν)

| txt A C P 1611. 1854. 2053. 2329 ρε latt sy^{ph} co

* τὴν κ (1611) (τὴν inserted after βλασφημίαν)

* 1854. 2053. 2329*. 2351 *M*^A (ἐκ is omitted)

*¹ 2329 (συναγωγή is omitted)

Offenbarung 2,10

* †μη Α C 046. 2050 ρε (μηδὲν is replaced with μη)

| txt κ *M* sy

* παθεῖν 1006. 1841. 1854. 2050. 2329. 2351 *M*^K (πάσχειν is replaced with παθεῖν)

| txt κ Α C 1611. 2053 *M*^A

* δη 2351 *M*^K (either δὴ or γάρ is inserted before μέλλει)

| γαρ 2050

*¹ λαβεῖν 2351 (βάλλειν is either omitted or replaced with βαλεῖν or λαβεῖν)

| βαλεῖν 1006. 1611. 1841. 2050. (°2329) *M*^K

| – 1854

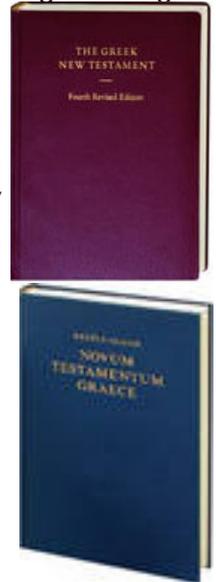
| txt κ(*) Α C 2053 *M*^A co

*² εχητε Α P 1854. 2344 ρε; Prim (ἔχετε is replaced either with ἔχητε or ἔχετε)

| εχετε C (2053) *M*^A sa

*³ –ρας 1006. 1611. 1841. 2351 *M*^K (ἡμερῶν is replaced with ἡμέρας)

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibel-Page 2



Careful examination of each of these instances clearly confirms the position of the UBS 4th ed. editors, for each of these reflects either obvious careless copying errors or attempts at stylistic improvements on the original text. No real meaning change is found.

Thus we can exegete the adopted reading of this passage in the original Greek with full confidence that it represents the original wording of the text.

Internal History. Quite a number of place markers surface in this passage: 'synagogue of Satan,' 'prison,' 'crown,' and a few others. Time markers include 'ten days,' 'about to suffer / throw.' But most of these focus more on exegetical issues rather than background concerns.

Two of the place markers lend themselves to the background matters that can help increase understanding of the text, and thus some treatment of them will be given here: synagogue (συναγωγή) and prison (φυλακή).

The term συναγωγή can be either a people designation or a place designation. That is, it will refer either to people gathered in religious meeting or will specify the building where such meetings take place. Inside the New Testament in the 56 uses of the term all but one (Jas. 2:2) refer to a Jewish gathering or place of gathering. The majority of the 55 NT references seem to refer to the place of gathering, more than to the gathering of Jewish people (cf. Acts 6:9; 9:2; 13:43). But distinguishing between 'gathering of people' and 'place of gathering' is not always easy to do. The etymology of the term συναγωγή is an important starting point: συν + ἄγω + γῆ. συν is the preposition meaning 'together.' ἄγω is the verb that means to lead, or to bring. The frequently used compound verb συνάγω, **gather together**, is in the background here. The -γῆ comes off the spelling of a perfect tense participle form of ἄγω with the idea of 'having been brought together' or 'gathered together.'

In ancient Greek outside the Jewish and Christian traditions, συναγωγή could refer to a collection of books, an assembly of people, or a wide variety of references. But the noun also played an important role in referencing the meetings of various Greek and Roman social groups, and especially was this so in the Doric isles, Asia, and Egypt.² All kinds of social groups *funcstiftung*, 1993), 635.]

²“In view of the gt. importance of συνάγω in Gk. societies it is not surprising that the verbal noun is also common in this sphere, esp. in many inscr.,⁴ rarely in relation to the founding or naming of a society,⁵ more commonly in the sense of the gathering or periodic meeting, esp. in the Doric isles, Asia Minor and Egypt, e.g., the well-known Testament of Epicteta from Thera in Crete (between 210 and 195 B.C.) ὥστε γίνεσθαι τὴν συναγωγὴν ἐπ’ ἡμέρας τρεῖς ἐν τῷ Μουσεῖῳ, IG, 12, 3, No. 330, 118 f., cf. also line 22, 115, 127 f., 131f. The society itself, which meets to worship he-

tions ranging from religious to sports to political and

roes, is called τὸ κοινὸν τοῦ ἀνδρείου τῶν συγγενῶν and has 25 members; women and children are admitted to the συναγωγή (also σύνοδος, σύλλογος). From there we also have the inscr. which mentions a συναγωγή of the κοινὸν τοῦ Ἀνθι[τῆ]ρος, IG, 12, 3, No. 329, 15 f. We find [ς]υνλόγους καὶ συναγωγὰς in the draft of statutes for a cultic guild of Zeus Hypsistos of οἱ ἐκ τῆς τοῦ Διὸς Ὑψίστου συνόδου (between 69 and 57 B.C.? from Philadelphia in Fayyum?), *Preisigke Sammelb.*, V, 7835, 12.⁶

The use is similar in a clan society of Diomedes in Cos in Asia Minor, Ditt. Syll.3, III, 1106, 93 f. (c. 300 B.C.), which meets to worship Heracles and the hero who founded the family, though sacrifices are also made to Aphrodite and the Μοῖραι. All members of the family take part in the συναγωγή. Use of the τέμενος for other purposes is explicitly forbidden. Another example is found among the Neoi of Cyzicus, Ditt. Or., II, 748, 15 (3rd cent. B.C.). On a Ptolemaic decree in honour of the πολίτευμα of the Idumeans in Memphis we find the expression ἐπὶ συναγωγῆς τῆς γενηθείσης ἐν τῷ ἄνω Ἀπολλ[ω]νιεῖσι, Ditt. Or., II, 737, 1 f. (2nd cent. B.C.).⁷ In BGU, IV, 1137, 1 ff. (6 B.C.) συναγωγή is used with ref. to the imperial cult and denotes a gathering of the Alexandrian σύνοδος Σεβαστῆ τοῦ θεοῦ Ἀυτοκράτορος Καίσαρος which took place ἐν τῷ Παρατόμῳ. As on the two previous inscr., the place of meeting is mentioned on one in honour of the board of a guild, ἐπὶ τῆς γενηθείσης συναγωγῆς ἐν τῷ Ἀριστίωνος Κλεοπατρείῳ, *Preisigke Sammelb.*, V, 8267, 3 (5 B.C.) from Kôm Truga in the Nile delta, cf. also the resolution from Kôm Tukala, *ibid.*, IV, 7457, 2 f.; also the resolution (104 B.C.) of a union which calls itself: κοινὸν (sc. ἐκ τοῦ γυμνασίου),⁸ where we find the phrase ἐπὶ τῆς γενηθείσης συναγωγῆς, *ibid.*, V, 8031, 16. Whether συναγωγή has this sense among the thiasites of Nicaea in Bithynia too is contested. The ref. is to a Cybele inscr. acc. to which the priestesses of Cybele and Apollo are to be crowned ἐν τῇ τοῦ Διὸς συναγωγῇ, *ibid.*, I, 4981, 6 (2nd cent. B.C.). If συναγωγή is used metonymically here for the place or site of assembly⁹ this is an exception in the non-Jewish and non-Chr. sphere, though it is not impossible (cf. ἀγορά, ἐκκλησία, προσευχή, → II, 808, 10 ff.). συναγωγή is also used for a pagan cultic gathering in Ps.-Philo, *Eus. Praep. Ev.*, I, 10, 52 (GCS, 43, 1 [1954], 53): Ζωροάστρης δὲ ὁ μάγος ἐν τῇ Ἰερᾷ Συναγωγῇ τῶν Περσικῶν φησι. On the burial inscr. in Cos which King Antiochus I of Commagene set up for himself (1st cent. B.C.) συναγωγαί, πανηγύρεις 'festal gatherings' and θυσίαι are mentioned together in annual celebration of his birthday and accession, Ditt. Or., I, 383, 94 f. In gen. συναγωγή is used predominantly for the festive assembly or meeting, whether cultic or not; this is esp. so outside Egypt. συναγωγή is close here to συναγωγήιον 'picnic,' 'feast,' cf. *Athen.*, 8, 68 (365c). In *Diog. L.*, II, 129 it is used (par. ἑορτή) for a feast in the court of Nicocreon.¹⁰ Acc. to the statutes of the guild of Zeus Hypsistos (→ 800, 11 ff.) the ἡγούμενος was to arrange a πόσις for the members monthly ἐν τῷ τοῦ Διὸς ἱερῷ ἐν αἷς ἐν ἀνδ[ρῶν] κοινῷ σπένδοντες εὐχέσθωισαν, *Preisigke Sammelb.*, V, 7835, 8 f. and cf. the regulations for the feast of the κοινόν in the Testament of Epicteta: The συναγωγή includes the banquet δεῖπνον, drinking, crowns, perfumes μύρον, sacrifices. The same applies to the societies of Anthister, Diomedon, and the Neoi.¹¹ Cf. also *Cl. Al. Paed.*, II, 4, 4: ταῖς μὲν γὰρ ἐπὶ τῇ εὐφορσίῃ συναγωγαῖς ἐγκαταλέγομεν ἄν' καὶ αὐτοὶ δειπνάρια τε καὶ ἄριστα καὶ δοχὰς εἰκότως ἂν καλοῖμεν τὴν συνήλυσιν ταύτην.”

[*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 7:800-01.]

well beyond. The collective oriented society fostered and nourished powerfully the need to ‘belong’ to organized groups. Additionally, the extreme status consciousness of this world made ‘networking’ absolutely essential and the only way this could be done was through belonging to different ‘social groups’ that would foster advancement. Add to this the deeply held Greek philosophy that one’s identity and worth depended solely on the group connections he or she possessed. Then layer on top of all this the very complex but profoundly important system of patronage in the Roman world.

One should note that the use of συναγωγή for an overtly religious group was not common in the ancient world, although it could be so used as Ps.-Philo indicates as quoted by Eusebius in *Praeparatio Evangelica* 1.10.52.³ Neither is συναγωγή commonly used to refer to a trade union guild. The instances of such meaning are rare in the ancient world but do occur, e.g., συναγωγ[γ]ή [κ]ωποπωλῶν, a *rower’s union*, in an inscription on a temple altar in Perinthus.⁴

The Greek label συναγωγή functioned as a significant label for designating these organized groups of people (= Latin *synagogæ*). And thus focused mostly on the ‘gathering of people’ level of meaning and with little reference to the physical place of meeting, which often was a temple of some god or goddess serving as the patron deities of the group.

The gathering of Jewish people for religious purposes outside of the Jerusalem temple came to be designated a συναγωγή.⁵ The specific origins of the Jewish

³Also, one should note that the term ἐκκλησία in secular Greek designated an assembly of ‘free citizens’ of a city in meeting to take some kind of governmental action. Thus ἐκκλησία is virtually never used in ancient Greek to designate any of these social societies or trade unions guilds, since non citizens were sometimes members of these groups.

⁴*Jahreshefte d. Österreichischen Archäol. Instituts in Wien*, 23 (1926), Beibatt, 172.

⁵“By the 1st century C.E. the synagogue had become so important and central an institution to Jewish life in Palestine that the Talmud of Palestine refers to 480 of them existing in Jerusalem in the time of Vespasian (Kloner 1981:12). One scholar has recently proposed that in Jerusalem alone there were 365 synagogues in the late Second Temple period (Wilkinson 1976:76–77). A Greek inscription from Jerusalem dating to the 1st century C.E., found in the excavations of 1913–14, describes the varied function of the synagogue at that time (quoted in Levine 1987:17):

Theodotus, son of Vettenos, the priest and archisynagogos, son of a archisynagogos and grandson of a archisynagogos, who built the synagogue for purposes of reciting the Law and studying the commandments, and as a hotel with chambers and water installations to provide for the needs of itinerants from abroad, which his fathers, the elders and Simonides founded.

“Josephus also emphasizes the centrality of the reading of Scripture and the importance of study found in the Second Temple synagogue (AgAp 2.175). The NT corroborates such a picture

synagogue lie mostly hidden in the mist of intertestamental Judaism.⁶ But the loss of Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem with the Babylonian invasions of the early 500s played a central role in the emergence of the synagogue, especially in the Exile of the Jews in Babylonia.

The place of meeting is the more interesting aspect of this topic. Increasingly modern Jewish and Christian scholarship are concluding from growing data out of archaeology and literary discoveries that private homes were the main location of meeting until well after the destruction of Herod’s temple in Jerusalem in the early 70s. Only a small number of ‘synagogue’ buildings dating earlier than the second century AD have been uncovered by archaeologists, while large numbers with origins in the late second through fifth centuries have been unearthed not just in Palestine but also in the northeastern Mediterranean world.⁷ The very oldest synagogue building, known to have existed, is located on the Aegean island of Delos and is dated in the second century BCE. But then one jumps to the second to the fourth centuries AD for the next oldest buildings located at Priene in Asia Minor and elsewhere in this Roman province. Clearly, the largest Jewish syn-

in reporting Jesus’ and Paul’s frequent visitations to synagogues. During those times they would invariably read or expound Scripture, either the Pentateuch or Prophets (e.g., Luke 4:16–22; Acts 13:13–16).”

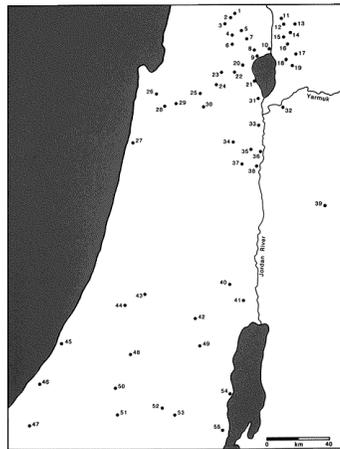
[Eric M. Meyers, “Synagogue: Introductory Survey” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 252.]

⁶“The terms employed to designate the synagogue reflect the variety of its functions. The earliest terms come from the Second Temple period and are Greek: *synagogue* and *proseuche* (Hengel 1975:39–41; Levine 1987:20–23), the former meaning ‘house of assembly,’ the latter ‘house of prayer.’ Despite the fact that the status and full extent of the development of private prayer in the Second Temple period is much debated and in doubt, some scholars feel that *proseuche* is the older term, popular since the 3d century B.C.E. In any case, *synagogue* was in use by the turn of the era and came to replace *proseuche* by the 2d century C.E. Hengel has suggested that *proseuche* carries with it the special connotation of Diaspora synagogue, while *synagogue* carries with it the nuance of ‘Palestinian’ in the NT, Josephus, and rabbinic sources (Hengel 1975:41–54). Others have suggested a distinction in meaning between the terms that derives from a difference in architecture and ornamentation, but there seems to be little merit to such a view.” [Eric M. Meyers, “Synagogue: Introductory Survey” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 252–53.]

⁷“If one of the surprising aspects of recent research has been that more synagogues have been identified as being ‘late,’ another is that few have been found that are ‘early.’ Thus far only three synagogue buildings within Israel/Palestine have been securely dated to the Second Temple period: Gamla, Masada, and Herodium.” [Eric M. Meyers, “Synagogue: Introductory Survey” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 255.]



Jewish synagogue at Sardis



agogue building known to have existed in the ancient world is located at Sardis and it dates back to either the second or third century AD.⁸ Extensive analysis of the remains have been conducted over the past century of archaeological investigation. Some 100 meters long and 10 meters wide, the central hall of the building could hold several hundred people.⁹

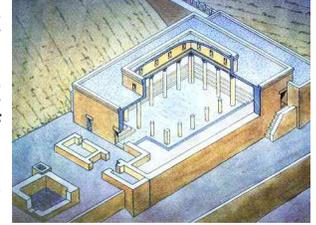
⁸“The Sardis (Turkey) synagogue was built as part of the Roman gymnasium-bath complex. It might have been a public building, later turned over to the Jewish community and then sealed off from the rest of the complex. The synagogue was in use from the 3d century on and was remodeled several times (Seager and Kraabel 1981). The later synagogue (now reconstructed) from the 4th century is the largest Diaspora synagogue found to date. It consists of an atrium forecourt with 3 entrances and a main hall ending in an apse with benches on the W. On the E wall of the hall two Torah shrines flank the central entrance. Six piers are built on the N and S walls. In the center of the hall, a platform was built, and close to the apse an ‘eagle table’ stood flanked by two stone Lydian lions in second use.

“Mosaic floors with geometric and floral designs decorated the hall and court. Inscriptions were incorporated into various sections of the mosaic. The walls were decorated with marble pieces and the ceiling was painted. Many inscriptions were found, mainly donations inscribed in Greek. The synagogue had several stages of building alterations between the 3d and 4th centuries, and the last synagogue was abandoned and destroyed with the rest of the town in 616 C.E. (Seager and Kraabel 1981:172–74).”

[Rachel Hachlili, “Synagogue: Diaspora Synagogues” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 260-61.]

⁹“An extensive literature exists on this synagogue site and its excavations. The distance from apse to front steps is 100 m, and its width is 10 m. Over eighty inscriptions have been recovered from

One should note that no universal architectural plan for building a synagogue existed in the ancient world. From the 1967 beginning of extensive Israeli documentation of known ancient synagogue sites, large numbers of building sites have emerged dating from the second century onward, as the figure charts out. Diaspora synagogue buildings are themselves very diverse in style and design, and bear almost no similarity to those in Palestine.¹⁰ This in part grew out of the multi-functional use of the building. It served as the place of meeting for the Friday evening study of the Torah, but



the building (Kraabel 1987; Meyers and Kraabel 1986:191–92).” [Eric M. Meyers, “Synagogue: Introductory Survey” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 253.]

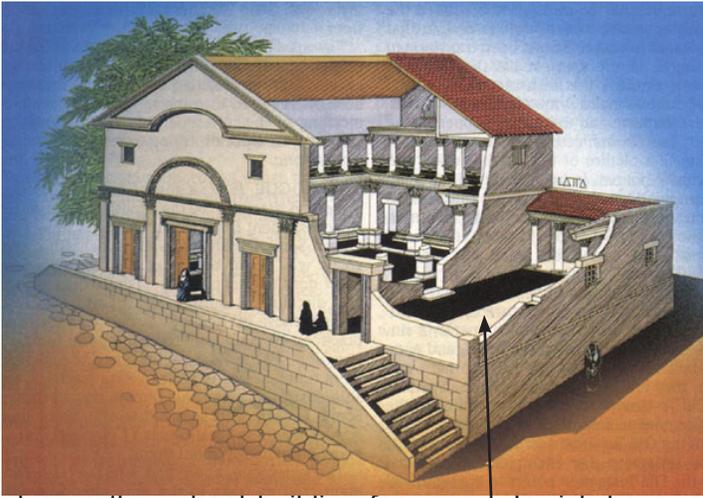
¹⁰“The most important feature of the research of Diaspora art and architecture have been the archaeological discoveries of synagogue buildings surveyed or excavated in Syria, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, N Africa, Bulgaria, and Spain. These synagogues do not have much in common architecturally; in fact, they rarely have similar features either with one another or with synagogues in Palestine.

“The plans seem to be local and not part of established types. However, there were two factors that determined the architectural plan of each of the Diaspora synagogues. The first was the local artistic and architectural traditions and fashions. But secondly, several circumstances peculiar to the Diaspora synagogues seem to have exerted some influences that ultimately determined their plans. For example, some synagogues were regular houses which were subsequently converted into assembly halls (e.g., Dura Europos). Some synagogues were built as part of a public complex in a prominent site in the city (e.g., the Sardis synagogue, which was part of the monumental Roman bath and gymnasium complex). A very important fact in the fragmentary architectural survival of some Diaspora synagogues was the intentional converting of the synagogue into a church (probably in the 4th–5th century C.E.; e.g., Apamea). Also, many of the Diaspora synagogues had two phases of buildings.

“However there do appear to have been some characteristic features of the Diaspora synagogue. Some of them had a forecourt. Their facades were not usually decorated and had either triple entrances (Sardis, Ostia) or a single entrance (Priene). Dura Europos had two entrances leading from the courtyard to the assembly hall. A unique feature was the main hall, which was not divided by columns; it was usually a hall with a Torah shrine, elders’ seat, and sometimes benches. In the Sardis synagogue the pillars were built so close to the walls that the hall was not divided into a main and side aisles (as was customary in many synagogues in Palestine).

“The main feature and focal point of the Diaspora synagogues was the Torah shrine (see Hachlili 1988: chap. 8), which consisted of three forms: (1) an aedicula (Sardis, Ostia); (2) a niche (Apamea and Priene); or (3) an apse (Aegina). The Torah shrine was built on whichever wall happened to be oriented towards Jerusalem.”

[Rachel Hachlili, “Synagogue: Diaspora Synagogues” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 261-62.]



also as the school building for young Jewish boys, a social gathering place for Jews especially important in Diaspora Judaism, as well as other uses.

Of course, the Friday evening gathering of the Jewish men was central because it centered on the reading of the Torah, a discussion of its meaning and application, along with the offering of prescribed prayers at the beginning and ending of the meeting. As becomes clear from Luke's Acts narrative accounts of Paul's appearance in the Jewish synagogues in several cities, non-Jews, even including women, were permitted to attend but not in the central hall where only Jewish men were allowed. The non-Jewish individuals along with the Jewish women, seated in a side room, could only listen to the discussions about interpretation of the Torah, but from this limited access they could learn the content of the Torah and the 'proper' interpretation of it. A very loose organizational structure of leaders provided guidance over the activities of the synagogue.¹¹

¹¹“**RULERS OF THE SYNAGOGUE** [Gk *archisynagōgos* (*ἀρχισυναγωγός*)]. A title of honor for one of several synagogue officials attested in ancient Jewish, Christian, and pagan literary sources and in inscriptions. ‘Ruler of the synagogue’ is the most common Jewish title associated with the synagogue in antiquity. Other titles include ‘ruler’ (*archōn*), ‘elder’ (*presbyteros*), ‘mother of the synagogue’ (*mater synagogae*), and ‘father of the synagogue’ (*pater synagogae*).

“Although we have no catalogue of the functions of the ‘ruler of the synagogue,’ his or her duties seem to have spanned a range of practical and spiritual leadership roles. The ‘ruler of the synagogue’ chose Torah readers and prayer leaders, invited others to preach, contributed to the building and restoration of the synagogue, and represented the congregation to the outside world. Several inscriptions cite women as ‘rulers of the synagogue.’ Children are occasionally called ‘rulers of the synagogue,’ which may mean the title was sometimes hereditary.

“The sources show no consensus on the practice of selecting an *archisynagōgos*. Some ‘rulers of the synagogue’ were appointed, some elected, and some inherited the office. Some served for one or more terms, while some held the office for life. Certain synagogues had more than one ruler.”

[Claudia J. Setzer, “Rulers of the Synagogue” In vol. 5, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New

When John labeled the Jewish synagogue in Smyrna as συναγωγή τοῦ σατανᾶ, the *synagogue of Satan*, the most intense insult possible was thrown at the Jewish community in the city. The Jewish people who met at the facility no longer were serving God, as their public objectives claimed, but instead it had become a vehicle for the Devil himself to oppose the true people of God in the city located in the ἐκκλησία, the Christian assembly of believers.

The second place marker of background importance is the reference in v. 10: ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν, *Indeed, the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison*.¹² The term φυλακή has a wide variety of meanings connected to the act of ‘watching.’ This core idea generates a wide range of derivative ideas: the person doing the watching, a ‘guard’; the time of the watching, guard duty time slots; the place of the watching, a prison etc. In the NT with 47 uses of this term, all but about six or so uses carry the meaning of prison, either literally or figuratively.¹³ From a western cultural perspective, the modern difference between ‘jail’ and ‘prison’ did not exist in the ancient

York: Doubleday, 1992), 841-42.]

¹²“7.24 δεσμοτήριον, ου n; φυλακήα, ἥς f; τήρησις^b, εως f: *a place of detention—‘jail, prison.’*”

“δεσμοτήριον: τὸ δεσμοτήριον εὔρομεν κεκλεισμένον ἐν πάσῃ ἀσφαλείᾳ ‘we found the prison locked most securely’ Ac 5:23.

“φυλακή^a: ἀπεκεφάλισεν τὸν Ἰωάννην ἐν τῇ φυλακῇ ‘he had John beheaded in prison’ Mt 14:10. τήρησις^b: ἔθεντο αὐτοὺς ἐν τηρήσει δημοσίᾳ ‘they placed them in the common prison’ Ac 5:18.

“Practically all languages have terms for a jail or a prison, though in some instances a descriptive phrase is employed, ‘a place where people are tied up’ or ‘a place to be chained.’ In some instances, highly idiomatic expressions are used, ‘a place for eating iron’ or ‘a room with rats.’” [Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 84.]

¹³“The word has this common meaning [of prison] in relation to the rebel and murderer Barabbas in Lk. 23:19, 25. Acc. to Mk. 6:17 and par., cf. v. 27 and par., John the Baptist was cast into prison. The apostles in Ac. 5:18–25, Peter in Ac. 12:4–17, and Paul in Ac. 16:23–40 experience a miraculous deliverance when in prison, → III, 175, 4 ff. Several unnamed Christians are also put in ‘prison’ by Paul acc. to Ac. 8:3, cf. 22:4; 26:10, also φυλακίζω in 22:19. Suffering imprisonment is a common fate of the righteous of the OT (Hb. 11:36 ff.) as well as the disciples of Jesus, Rev. 2:10.15, 16 Peter is ready to accept it, Lk. 22:33, and Jesus predicts it for His followers, Lk. 21:12. It is part of the suffering experienced by Paul acc. to what is almost a formula in 2 C. 6:5; 11:23. In these circumstances it is a duty for Christians to visit those imprisoned ‘in gaol,’ Mt. 25:36–44.” [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 9:244.]



The Jail at Philippi: outside - top; interior - bottom world.¹⁴ The Roman φυλακή primarily served as a holding place while the prisoner waited for an appearance between the governmental magistrate or higher official. Sentences for law violations did not contain required confinement for long periods of time in a 'prison,' since neither the Jews nor the Romans had such places. There were hard labor camps such as Patmos where banishment was the sentence handed down, primarily the so-called 'debtor prisons.' Most of the time, however, prisoners simply faced execution if placed under arrest by the Roman authorities. But awaiting one's trial before a magistrate or provincial governor could take a lengthy period of time, as Paul discovered with his two year plus confinement at Caesarea (cf. Acts 24:27).

¹⁴"In ancient Israel, mere imprisonment was not recognized as a formal punishment. When a convict was sentenced to prison (Ezra 7:26), he was to make good his offense by carrying out dull and heavy labor. The modern idea of a prison as a penitentiary, where criminals are to be reformed into decent citizens, was foreign to ANE conceptions. For various other reasons, however, prisons played an important role in the penal system of the ancients." [Karel van der Toorn, "Prison" In vol. 5, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 468.]

Normally, conditions in such prisons were very harsh.¹⁵ Thus for one to be placed in one of the φυλακή, even for a short period of time, presented severe hardships and dangers to the individual.

The statement in v. 10, ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα, indeed, the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction, possesses all kinds of interesting implications that we will examine in the exegesis section below.

Literary Aspects:

As always the literary aspects are essential for proper interpretation.



feet might be shackled, their hands manacled or even attached to their neck by another chain, and their movements further restricted by a chain fastened to a post. The existence of laws prohibiting chains that were too short or too restrictive indicates that jailers sometimes employed such practices. The very word 'chains' became a synonym for imprisonment. Some prisoners were also kept in wooden stocks, devices to restrain the feet, hands, or even the neck of an individual (see Acts 16:24). Prisons often were very dark (see Isa. 42:7); the inner area of the prison mentioned in Acts 16:24 was probably without windows. Although solitary confinement was known, prisoners generally were kept grouped together, accused and condemned, men and women alike. Overcrowding was not infrequent (Isa. 24:22). Prisons often had poor air circulation, a lack of hygienic facilities, rats and vermin, and food of poor quality. Unscrupulous guards might at times use the withholding of food or even outright torture to extort money from prisoners or their relatives. Although various rulers, especially in Roman Imperial times, struggled to prevent such abuses, the quality of prison life largely remained the responsibility of local officials, and conditions undoubtedly varied considerably from place to place." [Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 824.]

statement 54 and is followed by the victory formula in statement 55.

Exegesis of the Text:

The natural arrangement of the exegesis should be determined by the internal structure of the scripture text. The threefold grouping of those elements is repeated here as was the case in 2:1-7, since they remain exactly the same structurally.

A. Command to write, v. 8a

8 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·
8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

As we noted in the first message in 2:1-7, the same pattern holds true here as well. Although the message is addressed to the τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας, the message contained in the *narratio* and *dispositio* sections is uniformly in the second person singular going back to τῷ ἀγγέλῳ but it describes the situation of the church generally. This argues strongly that τῷ ἀγγέλῳ actually is the ἐκκλησία at Smyrna.



The city of Smyrna (Ancient Greek: Σμύρνη or Σμύρνα),¹⁶ with an estimated population of about 100,000 people at this point in time, enjoyed some of the greatest wealth and affluence of any of the larger cities in the province of Asia.¹⁷ Economically and politically Smyrna and Ephesus (about 35 miles to the south) were intense rivals competing sometimes bitterly for dominance in the region.¹⁸ From the available data out of this period, Smyrna seems to have dominated economically

¹⁶Of the two spellings found in ancient Greek literature, Σμύρνη or Σμύρνα, the later form is what is used in the NT. Additionally, a resident of the city was called a Smyrnian, derived from the adjective Σμυρναῖος, -α, -ον in a substantial usage. Another alternative spelling, often preferred in the secular Greek literature, is Ζμύρνα. One should also note that the same noun, σμύρνα can also mean ‘myrrh,’ although no connection between the city and the fragrance is known to have existed. Likewise the verb σμυρνίζω means ‘to mix with myrrh’ (cf. Mk. 15:23).

¹⁷“The area in which the city is located was one of the most ancient places of Greek settlement in Asia Minor, and remained so from the first establishment of the community in the 10th century B.C. until the destruction of the Greek population by the Turkish government in 1923.” [D. S. Potter, “Smyrna (Place)” In , vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 73.]

¹⁸“Under the Roman empire, Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamon were the three greatest cities in the Roman province of Asia. Two of the three, Ephesus and Smyrna, were bitter rivals (Dio Chrysostom Or 34.48). Though Ephesus was a great harbor city, she was of much greater importance administratively than commercially (Rougé, *Recherches*, 85–93, 126–33).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 136.]

while Ephesus was dominate administratively and politically. The Gulf of Izmir provided a safe environment for the port city to develop commercially; major trade routes from the interior converged at Smyrna -- these and other factors contributed to the economic success and growth of the city. “The geographer Strabo, writing at the end of Augustus’ reign (31 B.C.–A.D. 14) and early in the reign of Tiberius (A.D. 14–37) called it the ‘most beautiful city of all’ (14.1.37).”¹⁹

The establishment of the Christian community most likely dates back to the mid 50s during the lengthy three year plus ministry of the apostle Paul in Ephesus described in Acts 19. The city is mentioned by name only twice in the NT at Rev. 1:11 and 2:8, and implies an existing Christian community in the city at the time of the writing of Revelation. Not much information from the founding until into the second century surfaces. But from the second century onward substantial records of the Christian movement in the city exist.²⁰ Numerous Christian leaders either called Smyrna their home town or else spent time serving the Christian community in the city, e.g., Polycarp, and Ignatius of Antioch.²¹ Thus by the middle of the second Christian century it had become a major center of Christian activity in Asia.

B. Situation of the church, vv. 8b-10

Τάδε λέγει ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν·

¹⁹D. S. Potter, “Smyrna (Place)” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 74.

²⁰“Other texts from Smyrna illustrate conflict in a very different context. Two of the most important early martyrologies, the *Acts of Polycarp* and the *Acts of Pionius and his Companions*, illustrate the tension between the growing Christian community (founded in the mid-1st century) and its neighbors, especially the very powerful local Jewish community. Polycarp was executed in 155, Pionius in 250; the former in a bitter local persecution in which the members of the synagogue played a prominent role, the latter after the edict of the emperor Decius (249–251) ordering all inhabitants of the empire to sacrifice. Both works appear to be authentic transcriptions of the trials and therefore cast essential light on conflicts within the city, not only between Christian and non-Christian, but also between rich and poor, and between local and imperial authorities (Delehaye 1921:11–59; Cadoux 1938:343–400; Lane Fox 1987:462–92).” [D. S. Potter, “Smyrna (Place)” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 75.]

²¹Evidently the apocryphal *Acts of Paul* contined an account of a visit by Paul to Smyrna in the original document, but the section containing this is lost. But the *Acts of John* contains numerous fictional accounts of the activity of the apostle John at Ephesus, Smyrna and other cities in the province of Asia. Allusions to a visit to Smyrna by John are found in paragraphs 37 and 45.

Although coming later in history at the middle of the third century, the Acts of Pionius and His Companions throws additional light on the persecution that Christians often faced at Smyrna.

9 οἶδά σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ, καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανᾶ. 10 μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν. ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα. γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς.

These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life:

9 I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

First comes **the Τάδε λέγει pronouncement** from ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν, **the first and the last, who became dead and came back to life.**

The beginning title, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, occurs three times in Revelation: 1:17; 2:8; 22:13. It is uniformly a reference to Christ, and is drawn from the divine title found in the LXX of Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12.²² There seems to be a deliberate play off of the death and resurrection of Christ and the early history of the city that literally ‘died’ as a result of wars with the Lydians in 600 BCE and then ‘was reborn’ in 290 BCE on a new location just two miles south of the old city under the support of Antigonus and Lysimachus. This was regularly celebrated in the city.²³ If this is accurate, then the Christians in Smyrna lived in a city that ‘came back to life,’ but far more importantly they worshiped Christ

²²Isa. 41:4. I, the Lord, am first, and will be with the last. ἐγὼ θεὸς πρῶτος, καὶ εἰς τὰ ἐπερχόμενα ἐγὼ εἰμι.

Isa. 44:6. Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: **I am the first and I am the last;** besides me there is no god.

Οὕτως λέγει ὁ θεὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ὁ ῥυσάμενος αὐτὸν θεὸς σαβαωθ **Ἐγὼ πρῶτος καὶ ἐγὼ μετὰ ταῦτα**, πλὴν ἐμοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν θεός.

Isa. 48:12. Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called: **I am He; I am the first, and I am the last.**

Ἄκουέ μου, Ἰακωβ καὶ Ἰσραὴλ ὃν ἐγὼ καλῶ· **ἐγὼ εἰμι πρῶτος, καὶ ἐγὼ εἰμι εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα,**

²³Ramsay (Letters, 269–70), followed more cautiously by Hemer (Letters, 61–64), speculated that the Smyrnaeans would recognize a striking analogy between the physical renewal of their city and the phrase ‘the one who died and came to life,’ because of the destruction of Smyrna by the Lydians in 600 B.C., followed by three centuries of relative desolation concluded by the refounding of Smyrna as a polis two miles south of the ancient site in 290 B.C. (at the modern site of Izmir) by Antigonus and Lysimachus (cf. Strabo 14.1.37; Pausanias 7.5.1–3). Aelius Aristides (Or 21) celebrated the second restoration of Smyrna by Marcus Aurelius and Commodus after the earthquake of A.D. 178 and compares Smyrna with the legendary phoenix. It is striking that the usual verbs used in connection with statements about the resurrection of Jesus (ἐγείρειν, ἀνίστημι) never occur in Revelation.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 161.]

who was raised from the dead and continues to live in Heaven. The ‘resurrection’ of the city fails to compare with the resurrection of Christ.

The second qualifier, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν, stands as an adjectival relative clause linked to these first two terms. The role here is to define more precisely the significance of the divine title, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, in specific reference to Christ Himself, rather than to God as is found in the prophets of the Old Testament. There this title affirms the eternal existence of God. At creation, God already is; after everything is gone, God remains. But in regard to the meaning of this title concerning Christ, its meaning is defined in terms of His death and resurrection.

The use of the verb ζᾶν with the sense of ‘to live again’ is not the common NT reference for the resurrection of Christ: ἐγείρειν and ἀνίστημι. But on some occasions it does take on this meaning as in 1:18, on which this reference depends, as well as Mark 16:11; Luke 24:5, 23; Acts 1:3; Rom 14:9a; 2 Cor 13:4a. Note also Rev. 20:4 in reference to the believers coming back to life.

The narratio section in v. 9 is introduced by the formula expression οἶδά with the two direct objects σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν: **I know your affliction and your poverty.**²⁴ The first term, τὴν θλίψιν from θλίψις,²⁵

²⁴Actually οἶδά contains three direct objects: τὴν θλίψιν, τὴν πτωχείαν, and τὴν βλασφημίαν. The combination of σου with the definite article τὴν linked to each of the three nouns highlights the personal experiencing of these three things by the church at Smyrna.

²⁵Θλίψις, εὖς, ἦ (s. θλίβω; on the accent s. B-D-F §13; W-S. §6, 3c; Mlt-H. 57.—KLipsius, Grammat. Untersuchungen über d. bibl. Gräz. 1863, 34f, prefers to write θλίψις; so also W-H.) rare in extra-Biblical Gk., and there lit., ‘pressing, pressure’ (Aristot., Meteorol. 4, 4, 383a, 13; Epicurus p. 45, 9 Us.; Ps.-Aristot., De Mundo 4, 394a, 29; Strabo, Galen).

1. in our lit. (as in LXX, En, Test12Patr, JosAs cod. A; Just., D. 116, 2; Mel.) freq. and in the metaph. sense **trouble that inflicts distress, oppression, affliction, tribulation** (so Vett. Val. 71, 16; Cat. Cod. Astr. VIII/3 p. 175, 5; 178, 8; pl. 169, 2 [s. Boll 134f]; OGI 444, 15 [II or I B.C.] διὰ τὰς τ. πόλεων θλίψεις; BGU 1139, 4 [I B.C.]; POxy 939, 13; PAmh 144, 18). Of distress that is brought about by outward circumstances (Jos., Ant. 4, 108; En, PsSol, Mel.; Did., Gen. 116, 10), in sg. and pl. **Ac 11:19; Ro 5:3b; 12:12; 2 Cor 1:8; 6:4; 8:2; Rv 1:9; 2:9, 22; 1 Cl 22:7 (Ps 33:18); 59:4; 2 Cl 11:4 (quot. of unknown orig.); Hs 7:4ff. ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ θ. ἡμῶν 2 Cor 1:4a; 7:4; 1 Th 3:7; ἐν πάσῃ θ. (TestGad 4:4) 2 Cor 1:4b; ἐν (τ.) θ. Ro 5:3a; Eph 3:13; 1 Th 1:6; 3:3. ἐν πολλαῖς θ. καὶ ποικίλαις Hs 7, 4. θ. μεγάλη great tribulation (SibOr 3, 186) Mt 24:21 (1 Macc 9:27); Ac 7:11; Hv 4, 2, 4. Plural Hv 3, 2, 1. ἡ θ. ἡ μεγάλη the great tribulation Rv 7:14; τὸ ἐλαφρὸν τῆς θ. slight affliction 2 Cor 4:17. ἀνταποδοῦναι τι τὴν θλίψιν repay someone w. affliction 2 Th 1:6. W. ἀνάγκη (q.v. 2) 1 Th 3:7. W. διωγμός Mt 13:21; Mk 4:17; Ac 8:1 D; 13:50 D; pl. 2 Th 1:4. W. δεσμά (TestJos 2:4) Ac 20:23. W. ὄνειδος Hb 10:33. W. στενοχωρία (q.v.) Ro 2:9. W. στενοχωρία and διωγμός 8:35 (w. λιμός and στενοχωρία Hippol., Ref. 5, 26, 12).—On the catalogue of hardships (peristasis) cp. 1 Cor 4:9–**

clearly alludes to religious persecution of the Christians, while the second term, τὴν πτωχείαν from πτωχεῖα²⁶ alludes to deep material poverty. Closely related to the noun πτωχεῖα are the verb, πτωχεύω (*I become a beggar*), and the adjective, πτωχός, ἢ, ὄν, forms which are much more commonly used in the New Testament.²⁷ The third object, καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν, highlights slandering of the church from the Jewish synagogue.

The first object τὴν θλίψιν, *affliction*, clearly references hardship and suffering due to persecution, and is addressed with greater detail in the *dispositio* section in verse ten.

The second and third objects are expanded with

13; 2 Cor 4:8f; 6:4–10; 11:23–28; 12:10; Phil 4:11; s. FDanker, Augsburg Comm. 2 Cor '89, 89–91; 180f; idem, The Endangered Benefactor in Luke-Acts: SBLSP '81, 39–48; JFitzgerald, Cracks in an Earthen Vessel '88; MFerrari, Die Sprache des Leids in den paulinischen Persistenzen-katalogen '91; MEBner, Leidenslisten u. Apostelbrief '91.—ἡμέρα θλίψεως day of affliction (Gen 35:3; 2 Km 22:19; cp. En 103:9; TestLevi 5:5) 1 Cl 52:3 (Ps 49:15).—Of the tribulations of the last days (as Da 12:1) **Mt 24:21, 29; Mk 13:19, 24.** ἡ θ. ἡ ἐρχομένη ἡ μεγάλη the great tribulation to come Hv 2, 2, 7; cp. 2, 3, 4; 4, 1, 1; 4, 2, 5; 4, 3, 6.—Distress caused by war 1 Cl 57:4 (Pr 1:27). θ. θανάτου affliction of death B 12:5. Difficult circumstances **2 Cor 8:13; Js 1:27;** συγκοινωνεῖν τῇ θ. show an interest in (someone's) distress **Phil 4:14.** Of a woman's birth-pangs **J 16:21.**—ὅταν γένηται θ. when persecution comes Hv 3, 6, 5. θλίψιν ἀκούειν hear of persecution Hs 9, 21, 3. θλίψιν ἔχειν **J 16:33; 1 Cor 7:28; Rv 2:10;** Hv 2, 3, 1; Hs 7:3. εἰν ὑπενέγκη τὰς θλίψεις τὰς ἐπερχομένας αὐτῷ Hs 7:4; cp. 7:6. ἐξείλατο αὐτὸν ἐκ πασῶν τῶν θλίψεων αὐτοῦ **Ac 7:10.** διὰ πολλῶν θ. εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τ. βασιλείαν **14:22.** τότε παραδώσουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς θλίψιν **Mt 24:9;** cp. B 12:5. ἀποστήσεται πᾶσα θ. ἀπὸ σοῦ ... ἀπὸ πάντων ἀποστήσεται ἡ θ. Hs 7, 7.—Of the sufferings of Christ θλίψεις τοῦ Χριστοῦ **Col 1:24** (s. ὁ ἀνταναπληρῶω and πάθημα 1).

2. inward experience of distress, affliction, trouble (Gen 35:3; 42:21 θ. τῆς ψυχῆς) θ. καὶ συνοχή καρδίας trouble and anguish of heart **2 Cor 2:4.** θλίψιν ἐγείρειν τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου cause trouble for me in my imprisonment **Phil 1:17.** Ἄννα ... περιελάτο πᾶσαν θλίψιν ἀπ' αὐτῆς GJs 2:4 (cod. A, not pap; s. περιαιρέω 1).—DELG s.v. θλίβω. M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 457.]

²⁶**πτωχεῖα, ας, ἡ** (πτωχεύω; Hdt., Aristoph. et al.; PGen 14, 23; LXX, Test12Patr; prim.: 'beggarliness') **state of being deficient in means of support, poverty**, lit., w. θλίψις **Rv 2:9.** ἡ κατὰ βάθους πτ. (βάθος 2) extreme poverty **2 Cor 8:2.** Paradoxically τῇ πτ. τινὸς πλουτῆσαι become rich through someone's poverty vs. **9.** In Ox 1 recto, 1 the word πτωχεῖα occurs, but the context is lost.—DELG s.v. πτήσσω III. M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 896.]

²⁷πτωχεῖα is more an abstract noun, while πτωχεύω and πτωχός, ἡ, ὄν focus more on the harsh reality of hunger and starvation due to lack of means.

qualifying comments added. The Son of Man indicates that He is fully aware of their τὴν πτωχείαν, but He adds ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ, *but you are rich*. The contrastive play on poor / rich with shifts between the literal and figurative meanings of both terms was commonplace in the ancient world.²⁸ Here it moves from literal material poverty to spiritual riches (figurative meaning).²⁹ In the midst of exceptionally high material affluence, the Christian community was struggling with material poverty. Living in poverty is a huge challenge within itself, but the difficulties are compounded when that poverty is surrounded by extreme wealth, and you are cut off from access to it, except by renouncing your religious values and commitments.³⁰ The temptation to deny

²⁸“This is an obvious example of paradox. The situation of this community and their eventual triumph (v 10) is paralleled in 4QpPsa 1–10 ii 10–11: ‘the congregation of the poor ones, who will accept the appointed time of affliction, and they will be delivered from all the traps of Belial’ (tr. Horgan, Pesharim, 196). The ‘poverty’ of the Smyrnaean Christians is apparently literal poverty (TDNT 6:911; EDNT 3:195), but it is used in opposition to πλούσιος, ‘rich,’ understood figuratively, probably in terms of eschatological wealth (Luke 6:20 = Matt 5:3; Matt 6:19–21 = Luke 12:33–34; Luke 12:21; 2 Cor 6:10; Jas 2:5). The Stoics also used the Greek and Latin terms for ‘wealth’ figuratively (Seneca Ep. 62.3). Philo was dependent on the Stoic paradox that only the wise and virtuous person was really ‘rich’ (Philo, Praem. 104; Som. 1.179; Plant. 69 [here he uses παραδοξολογεῖν, ‘paradox’]; Sob. 56; Fuga. 17; Quod Omn. Prob. 8, ‘You call those rich [πλουσίους] who are utterly destitute’; Arim, SVF 1, § 220; 3, § 589–603). The term πτωχοί, ‘poor,’ is used literally in 13:16 (in opposition to πλουσίοι, ‘rich’) but figuratively in 3:17. The fact that no mention is made of the economic poverty of the other six Christian communities suggests that the situation of this congregation is unusual. Their ‘poverty’ can be construed in several ways (Hemer, *Letters*, 68): (1) They represent the lowest classes of society (1 Cor 1:26; Jas 2:5). (2) They had their property confiscated or stolen by their hostile pagan neighbors. (3) They had been reduced to penury, through the liberality of their giving (2 Cor 2:8). (4) Uncompromising Christians found it difficult to make a living in a pagan environment (Bousset [1906] 242–43; Charles, 1:56; Caird, 35; Roloff, *Revelation*, 48). The first suggestion is problematic since it is now recognized that early Christianity was not a movement restricted to the lower classes; it encompassed the social spectrum (Grant, *Society*, 79–95; Malherbe, *Social*, 29–59; Holmberg, *Sociology*, 21–76), though no generalization can reveal the social and economic status of the Christians in Smyrna. The second and third suggestions are improbable, while the last is regarded by many commentators as the basis for Smyrnaean poverty.”

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 161–62.]

²⁹Elsewhere in Revelation the meaning patterns shift: In 13:16 both πτωχεῖα and πλούσιος are literal while standing in contrast with one another. But in 3:17 the shift between literal and figurative is reversed: literal πλούσιος but spiritual (figurative) πτωχεῖα.

³⁰The older I have become (now at 71 years of age) -- and hopefully the wiser and more sensitive to the situations of people around me I have become, -- the more I have come to appreciate the enormous challenges of extreme poverty. Having grown up in

your Christianity becomes very strong in such a situation. Raising children in this kind of atmosphere becomes even more daunting.

Thirdly, the Son of Man knows about τὴν βλασφημίαν, **the slander**, that the believers are receiving in Smyrna. The noun βλασφημία used here, along with the verb βλασφημέω, center on demeaning and denigrating speech uttered either against deity or other people. Note that in English such language is labeled blaspheming God but slandering people; most other modern western languages do not make such distinctions and thus can translate these Greek words with the same translation patterns whether they target God or other people.³¹

The seriousness of such actions is heightened when religious commitment to God enters the picture. James (3:9-10) makes this dramatically clear:

9 With it [the tongue] we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.

9 ἐν αὐτῇ εὐλογοῦμεν τὸν κύριον καὶ πατέρα καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ καταρώμεθα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοὺς καθ' ὁμοίωσιν θεοῦ γεγονότας, 10 ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ στόματος ἐξέρχεται εὐλογία καὶ κατάρᾳ. οὐ χρή, ἀδελφοί μου, ταῦτα οὕτως γίνεσθαι.

Such actions reflect religious hypocrisy signaling the worthlessness of any claimed commitment to God. The slandering of the Christians in Smyrna came from the Jewish synagogue, made up of people claiming commitment to God. This Jewish religious community John instead labels as the συναγωγή τοῦ σατανᾶ, **the synagogue of Satan**. The Jewish leaders and others in this

moderate poverty, I had some feel for it as a child and teenager. But most of my adult life has been lived in a comfortable middle class economic level that can dull one's senses to the destructive forces at work in the lives of those on the bottom of the economic scale. Having done extensive reading about global poverty in both the modern and ancient worlds, and especially more recently having been pastor to many non-European immigrants living in very deep poverty at the English language church in Cologne Germany, has served to sharpen my sensitivities into the struggles that life at this level of existence presents. Sadly I have also observed that very few middle and upper class individuals have any understanding of poverty at all. Most content themselves by writing off poverty as a sign of laziness and lack of diligence. But this phantasy world that such people live in will come crashing down in devastating destruction on the Day of Judgment with the discovery of God's exceptional care and concern for the poor in this world and His stern demand that those claiming to be His people share that same compassion and concern in both action and word. Only a causal reading of Matthew 25 underscores this dramatically, not to speak of a careful study of Jesus' public ministry in the gospels.

³¹For example, the NRSV translates βλασφημία as blasphemy / blasphemous in Rev. 13:1, 5, 6, 17:3 because the target is God, but as slander in 2:9 where people are being targeted.

religious community were serving the Devil rather than God.

This opposition to Christianity was most likely made worse because of the large numbers of Jews living in the city and the surrounding region. Records indicate that early Jewish migration into nearby Sardis began in 586 BCE. Substantial documentation strongly suggests huge numbers of Jewish people living in the region by the end of the first Christian century.³² If the modern estimate is even only reasonably close to correct, the count of one million Jews in Asia and Phrygia at this point in time is a large influence. An inscription discovered in Smyrna suggests that Jewish migration into this region continued well into the second century AD.³³

³²“Among the first Jewish expatriates to Asia Minor were those who fled to Sardis after the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., for Obad 20 mentions exiles from Jerusalem in Sepharad, an Aramaic name for Sardis, as a bilingual Lydian-Aramaic inscription indicates (S. A. Cook, “A Lydian-Aramaic Bilingual,” JHS 37 [1917] 77–87). Josephus has preserved a letter from Antiochus III to Zeuxis, governor of Lydia, containing instructions concerning the settlement of two thousand Jewish families who had been moved from Mesopotamia and resettled in Phrygia (Jos., Ant. 148–53). Philo observed that the Jews were numerous in both Asia Minor and Syria (Leg. 245).

By the first century A.D., the Jewish communities in Asia Minor had become large and influential (Jos., Ant. 14.259–61; 16.171, 235), and there is evidence for several dozen flourishing synagogues in the Roman province of Asia. There is inscriptional evidence for organized Jewish communities in Caria, at Myndus (CIJ 756), Hyllarima (A. Laumonier, BCH 58 [1934] 379, 516–17), and Aphrodisias; in Phrygia at Acmonia (MAMA 6:264 = CIJ 766; this Julia Severa inscription dates to the late first century A.D., so this location is the earliest synagogue in Asia Minor attested by an inscription), Apamea (CIJ 774), Synnada (MAMA 4:90), and Hierapolis (CIJ 775 = IGRom 4:834), in Lydia at Hypaepa (CIJ 755), Philadelphia (CIJ 754), and Sardis (Robert, Sardes, passim), and on the coast at Smyrna (CIJ 741), Miletus (CIJ 748; Jos., Ant. 14.244–46), Teos (CIJ 744), Phocaea (CIJ 738), and Ephesus (IBM 3:676–677; Acts 18:19, 26; 19:8). Acts refers to four specific synagogues in Pisidian Antioch (13:14), Iconium (14:1), Philippi (16:13), and Ephesus (18:19, 26; 19:8). John refers to “synagogues of Satan” at Smyrna (Rev 2:9) and Philadelphia (Rev 3:9). The discovery and excavation of the synagogue at Sardis — the largest ancient synagogue yet discovered — indicates the presence in Sardis of a very large, wealthy, and influential Jewish synagogue (Kraabel, “Impact,” 178–90). Though it is difficult to give an accurate estimate of the number of Jews who resided in the cities of Asia Minor, P. W. van der Horst has suggested that it may have been as high as one million by the first century A.D. (NedTTs 43 [1989] 106–7).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 169–70.]

³³“A second-century A.D. inscription from Smyrna (IG-Rom4:1431.29; CIJ2:742.29) lists a group of people designated as οἱ ποτὲ Ἰουδαῖοι, which some have understood to mean ‘former Jews,’ who had donated the sum of 10,000 drachmas to the city and received citizenship by abandoning their ancestral religion. Yet A. T. Kraabel has convincingly argued that the phrase should be

The Jewish historian Josephus asserts that the Roman government in this region gave the Jews legal authority to live strictly by their own religious traditions. Even though some Roman emperors cracked down heavily on various associations (Greek, *συναγωγαί*; Latin, *collegia*) in Asia, the Jewish synagogues were exempted from this and continued to operate as *collegia licita* (legal associations), rather than being declared *collegia illicita* (illegal associations). But this special privilege granted to the Jews came with a price. The Roman, and especially the Greek, views were that if someone was granted citizenship in the local city they should adopt the gods and goddesses officially worshiped in the city. Of course, the Jews resisted this vigorously and generally were exempted from this requirement. But this created ongoing tensions between the Jews and their Gentile neighbors that frequently flared up into violent conflict on various occasions.³⁴

Another interesting irritation in this pot was the Roman legislation requiring Jews throughout the empire to pay annually a poll tax of two denarii³⁵ for each Jew-

translated ‘people formerly of Judaea,’ i.e., immigrants from Palestine, since a record of public works, he argues, would be an inappropriate place to record one’s apostasy (“The Roman Diaspora: Six Questionable Assumptions,” JJS 33 [1982] 455). Understood in this way, the inscription provides important evidence that Jewish immigration from Palestine continued into the second century A.D. Similarly, an inscription from Miletus (CIJ 2:748) reveals that Jews had their own reserved seats in the theater in spite of the pagan religious character of the setting. In an inscription from Hypaepa south of Sardis, the phrase *Ἰουδαίων νεωτέρων*, ‘junior Jews,’ occurs, i.e., a group of young Jewish boys belonging to the ephobic system of athletic education (CIJ2:755). It is perhaps more likely, however, that the author of Revelation is referring not to apostate Jews but rather to Jews who are opposed to Christianity; see A. Yarbro Collins, “Vilification and Self-Definition in the Book of Revelation,” HTR 79 (1986) 308–20.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 164.]

³⁴“Citizenship in the Roman province of Asia had two levels: residents of the Greek cities could be citizens of their own cities as well as citizens of the Roman empire. However, since citizenship in the local Greek cities of Asia involved participation in city cults, it was problematic for observant Jews. The failure of enfranchised Jews to worship the gods of the cities in which they lived caused friction with local Gentiles (see Jos., Ant. 12.125–25, where the Ionians complained to Marcus Agrippa in 14 B.C. that, if the Jews were to be their equals [*συγγενεῖς*], they should worship the gods of the Ionians). Though Josephus claims that the Hellenistic kings granted citizenship (*πολιτεία*) to the Jews in certain cities in Asia Minor, Lower Syria, and Antioch (Ant. 12.119; 16.160; Ag.Ap. 2.39), there are weighty arguments against accepting this claim (Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 329–30; Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 167–72). Jews could be citizens of the Greek cities within which they lived as well as Roman citizens.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 170.]

³⁵Although very difficult to calculate with high certainty, two

ish male between three and sixty years of age.³⁶ Add to this was the annual temple tax (equal to two denarii) collected from every Jewish male ages twenty to fifty that was to be transported yearly back to Jerusalem. This amount was so great that special permission had to be granted to Jewish leaders before the money could be transported out of the province to Jerusalem.³⁷ The non-Jews did not care for this massive exit of funds out of their province.

John also saw a similar situation to Smyrna at Philadelphia and the Son of Man in the *dispositio* section at 3:9 makes this rather astounding promise to the believers at Philadelphia:

I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who Roman denarii was about the equivalent of \$40 US dollars, using 2005 currency values, according to *answers.yahoo.com*. One denarius was typically a day’s wage for an unskilled laborer and a common soldier in the Roman empire. .

³⁶“Like Jews throughout the Roman empire, those in the Roman province of Asia were required to pay a poll tax of two denarii for each Jewish male from three to sixty years of age, deposited in the *fiscus Iudaicus* in Rome, a central treasury for these revenues (see the documents in CPJ, nos. 160–229, and the essays in CPJ1:80–82; 3:111–16; Goodman, JRS 79 [1989] 40–44). The poll tax applied not only to professing Jews but also to Jews who tried to keep their origins secret, apostate Jews, and Jews who converted to other religions, including Christianity (Suetonius Dom. 12.2; cf. Smallwood, *Jews*, 371–76; sixty nine ostraca from Edfu, Egypt, contain receipts for Jews who paid this tax during the *principates* of Vespasian to Domitian [CPJ 2:119–36]). This tax was strictly imposed under Domitian (Pliny Pan. 42; Suetonius Dom. 12.2; Dio Cassius 67.4.6), so that two types of *sestertius* minted in A.D. 96 under Nerva had the inscription *FISCHVDAICI CALVMNIA SUBLATA*, ‘The malicious proceedings with regard to the *fiscus Iudaicus* are abolished’ (CAH 11:191; Cayón, CMIR 1:299). A self-imposed temple tax in the amount of a halfshekel, then two denarii, was collected from every male Jew (including freedmen and proselytes) between the ages of twenty and fifty and transported to Jerusalem where it defrayed the expense of public sacrifices and municipal needs (Exod 20:11–16; Jos., Ant. 14.110–13; 18.312–13; J. W. 7.218; Philo, Spec. Leg. 1.77–78; Leg. 1.77–78; Leg. 156; Matt 17:24; see Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 13–16). During the reign of Augustus, a number of Jewish communities in Asia Minor (including Ephesus, Sardis, and the Roman province of Asia) petitioned the emperor and other high officials for permission from Rome to send the temple tax to Jerusalem (Philo, *Legat.* 315–15; Jos., Ant. 16.162–68, 171–73; Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 15–16).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 171.]

³⁷“CAIUS NORBANUS FLACCUS, PROCONSUL, TO THE GOVERNORS OF THE EPHESIANS, GREETING.

‘Caesar has written word to me, that the Jews, wherever they are, are accustomed to assemble together, in compliance with a peculiar ancient custom of their nation, to contribute money which they send to Jerusalem; and he does not choose that they should have any hindrance offered to them, to prevent them from doing this; therefore I have written to you, that you may know that I command that they shall be allowed to do these things.’ “ [Philo of Alexandria and Charles Duke Yonge, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 785.]

say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.

ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται. ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γνώσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε.

Eschatological judgment day will bring some rather publicly embarrassing moments for these Jews at Philadelphia!

Given patterns in the interpretive history of statements like these regarding Jews at both Smyrna and Philadelphia, it should be noted that to be authentically a Jew is a positive matter for John. What he condemns here is not the Jewish people generally but those Jews, especially those in religious leadership roles, who were slandering Christians.³⁸ Such action betrayed the reality that although they were claiming to be Jews, this action revealed that they were not: ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν, *from those claiming themselves to be Jews but are not*. In 3:9 the additional assertion of being liars is added: τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται, *of those claiming to be Jews themselves but are not, instead they are lying*. To be a Jew authentically means to be committed to doing the will of God, which these individuals clearly were not.³⁹

Exactly what were these Jews saying about the Christians at Smyrna? No specifics are given and one is left with the conclusion that their actions probably

³⁸“Here it is important to realize that the term ‘Jews’ is used positively (i.e., of those who are committed to do the will of God) but that, according to John, those who call themselves Ἰουδαῖοι do not live up to the standard implied in that designation (see Gutbrod, TDNT 3:382); i.e., here and in 3:9 (where a close parallel occurs) the author is not condemning Jews generally but only those associated with synagogues in Smyrna and Philadelphia. This is analogous to Paul’s claim that to be a Jew means to be circumcised in heart, which can even apply to those who are not physically circumcised, i.e., non-Jews (Rom 2:28–3:1; cf. his figurative use of “Israel” in Gal 6:16; cf. 1 Cor 10:18). It is even possible that the author is implying that none but his own community are true Jews (Tomson, Bijdragen 47 [1986] 286).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 162.]

³⁹In Ephesus during the early to mid 50s, Paul had initially experienced a positive reception to the Gospel in the Jewish synagogue there. But after three months the leadership and others turned against the Gospel and Paul’s preaching of it. It forced him to abandon the synagogue in favor of the lecture hall of Tyrannus (cf. Acts 19:8–10). This kind of attitude was typical of Paul’s experience in the Jewish synagogues during his missionary travels, although more often than not the attitude turned sour against the Gospel much quicker than it did at the synagogue in Ephesus.

Having about half a century of both Christians and Jews residing in Smyrna, the synagogue had indeed turned bitterly sour against Christians in the city.

moved along similar patterns of Jewish synagogue hostility to the preaching of the Gospel as illustrated earlier in the missionary ministry of the apostle Paul: Acts 13:45; 14:2; 18:6.⁴⁰ When the silversmith Demetrius created a riot in the city of Ephesus against Paul, the Jewish leaders of the synagogue tried to publicly distance themselves from the Christians to the crowds in the theater, but it backfired on them.⁴¹ At Pisidian Antioch the Jewish leadership had incited the Gentile leaders of the city to banish Paul and Barnabas from the region.⁴² A similar pattern erupted at Iconium after these two missionaries left Pisidian Antioch (cf. 14:1–2), and eventually they fled the city when the Jewish leaders joined with city rulers in a plot to stone them to death.⁴³ Then in Lystra it was the Jews from An-

⁴⁰Acts 13:45. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy; and blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul.

ιδόντες δὲ οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τοὺς ὄχλους ἐπλήσθησαν ζήλου καὶ ἀντέλεγον τοῖς ὑπὸ Παύλου λαλουμένοις βλασφημοῦντες.

Acts 14:2. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

οἱ δὲ ἀπειθήσαντες Ἰουδαῖοι ἐπήγειραν καὶ ἐκάκωσαν τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐθνῶν κατὰ τῶν ἀδελφῶν.

Acts 18:6. When they [the Jews] opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

ἀντιτασσομένων δὲ αὐτῶν καὶ βλασφημούντων ἐκτιναξάμενος τὰ ἱμάτια εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς· τὸ αἷμα ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ὑμῶν· καθαρὸς ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν εἰς τὰ ἔθνη πορεύσομαι.

⁴¹Acts 19:33–34. 33 Some of the crowd gave instructions to Alexander, whom the Jews had pushed forward. And Alexander motioned for silence and tried to make a defense before the people. 34 But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours all of them shouted in unison, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

33 ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ὄχλου συνεβίβασαν Ἀλέξανδρον, προβαλόντων αὐτὸν τῶν Ἰουδαίων· ὁ δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος κατασεισας τὴν χεῖρα ἠθέλεν ἀπολογεῖσθαι τῷ δήμῳ. 34 ἐπιγνόντες δὲ ὅτι Ἰουδαῖός ἐστιν, φωνὴ ἐγένετο μία ἐκ πάντων ὡς ἐπὶ ὥρας δύο κραζόντων· μεγάλη ἡ Ἄρτεμις Ἐφεσίων.

⁴²Acts 13:50. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their region.

οἱ δὲ Ἰουδαῖοι παρώτρυναν τὰς σεβομένας γυναῖκας καὶ τοὺς εὐσχήμονας καὶ τοὺς πρώτους τῆς πόλεως καὶ ἐπήγειραν διωγμὸν ἐπὶ τὸν Παῦλον καὶ Βαρναβᾶν καὶ ἐξέβαλον αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν ὀρίων αὐτῶν.

⁴³Acts 14:4–6. 4 But the residents of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. 5 And when an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, 6 the apostles learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country;

4 ἐσχίσθη δὲ τὸ πλῆθος τῆς πόλεως, καὶ οἱ μὲν ἦσαν σὺν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις, οἱ δὲ σὺν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις. 5 ὡς δὲ ἐγένετο ὁρμὴ τῶν ἐθνῶν τε καὶ Ἰουδαίων σὺν τοῖς ἄρχουσιν αὐτῶν ὑβρίσαι καὶ λιθοβολῆσαι αὐτούς, 6 συνιδόντες κατέφυγον εἰς τὰς πόλεις τῆς

tioch and Iconium who incited the Gentile residents of Lystra to stone Paul into unconsciousness and to dump his body outside the city.⁴⁴ Later at Thessalonica in Macedonia, the Jewish synagogue leaders incited a riot against Paul and Silas forcing them to flee the city.⁴⁵ These same Jewish leaders in Thessalonica created problems for Paul at Berea as well.⁴⁶ The pattern continued against Paul at Corinth, where the Jewish leadership unsuccessfully brought charges against Paul before the Roman authorities.⁴⁷ A few years later at Corinth these Jewish leaders plotted to kill the apostle, thus forcing him to take an alternative route from Corinth back to Judea.⁴⁸

The uniform pattern of Diaspora Jewish opposition to Paul's preaching of the Gospel establishes inside the New Testament a backdrop against which better understanding of what was going on at Smyrna can take place.⁴⁹ In many of these references Luke uses ei-

Λυκαονίας Λύστραν καὶ Δέρβην καὶ τὴν περίχωρον,

⁴⁴**Acts 14:19.** But Jews came there from Antioch and Iconium and won over the crowds. Then they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

Ἐπῆλθαν δὲ ἀπὸ Ἀντιοχείας καὶ Ἰκονίου Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ πείσαντες τοὺς ὄχλους καὶ λιθάσαντες τὸν Παῦλον ἔσυρον ἔξω τῆς πόλεως νομίζοντες αὐτὸν τεθνηκέναι.

⁴⁵**Acts 17:4-5.** 4 Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. 5 But the Jews became jealous, and with the help of some ruffians in the marketplaces they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. While they were searching for Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly, they attacked Jason's house.

4 καὶ τινες ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐπεισθήσαν καὶ προσεκληρώθησαν τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Σιλᾷ, τῶν τε σεβομένων Ἑλλήνων πλῆθος πολὺ, γυναικῶν τε τῶν πρώτων οὐκ ὀλίγαι. 5 Ζηλώσαντες δὲ οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ προσλαβόμενοι τῶν ἀγοραίων ἄνδρας τινὰς πονηροὺς καὶ ὄγλοποιήσαντες ἐθορύβουν τὴν πόλιν καὶ ἐπιστάντες τῇ οἰκίᾳ Ἰάσονος ἐζήτουν αὐτοὺς προαγαγεῖν εἰς τὸν δῆμον.

⁴⁶**Acts 17:13.** But when the Jews of Thessalonica learned that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea as well, they came there too, to stir up and incite the crowds.

Ὅς δὲ ἔγνωσαν οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης Ἰουδαῖοι ὅτι καὶ ἐν τῇ Βερούια κατηγγέλη ὑπὸ τοῦ Παύλου ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, ἦλθον κάκεῖ σαλεύοντες καὶ ταρασσόντες τοὺς ὄχλους.

⁴⁷**Acts 18:12-13.** 12 But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal. 13 They said, "This man is persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law."

12 Γαλλίωνος δὲ ἀνθυπάτου ὄντος τῆς Ἀχαΐας κατεπέστησαν ὁμοθυμαδὸν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ ἤγαγον αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸ βῆμα 13 λέγοντες ὅτι παρὰ τὸν νόμον ἀναπειθεῖ οὗτος τοὺς ἀνθρώπους σέβεσθαι τὸν θεόν.

⁴⁸**Acts 20:3b.** He was about to set sail for Syria when a plot was made against him by the Jews, and so he decided to return through Macedonia.

γενομένης ἐπιβουλῆς αὐτῷ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων μέλλοντι ἀνάγεσθαι εἰς τὴν Συρίαν, ἐγένετο γνώμης τοῦ ὑποστρέφειν διὰ Μακεδονίας.

⁴⁹Another perspective is the later 'looking back' view of many of the church fathers who unfortunately mix into their recollections

ther βλασφημέω or βλασφημία in describing the verbal abuse directed against the Gospel or Paul.

Important to understanding the situation at Smyrna at the end of the first century is the inner connection between these three direct objects: τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν,..., καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν. If their affliction, poverty and being slandered are understood as closely connected to one another, then a scenario emerges of physical persecution with an economic focus growing out of the Jewish slandering of the church there. The weight of evidence favors such an understanding, although one cannot dogmatically conclude this. In view of the consistent patterns painted by Luke in Acts, such a conclusion is clearly reasonable and not far fetched.⁵⁰

a heavy dose of anti-Semitism:

Verbal slander is a less specific understanding of βλασφημία and could involve the spreading of false rumors about Christians by Jews (Justin Dial. 17.1; 108.2; 117.3; Tertullian Ad nat.M 1.14; Origen Contra Celsum 6.27). Christians were accused of various types of criminal or antisocial behavior (Justin I Apol. 26.7; 2 Apol 12; Athenagoras Leg. 3.31; Theophilus Ad Autolyicum 3.4; Tertullian Apol. 4.11). Some Jews were also vulnerable to denunciation, for some apparently avoided the head tax of two drachmas imposed by Titus (Jos. J. W. 7.218; Dio Cassius 65.2) by practicing Judaism privately or by concealing their nationality (Suetonius Dom. 12.2). According to a tradition stemming from the last days of Jesus in Jerusalem, the Jews urged Pilate to execute Jesus (Mark 15:12–14; Matt 27:22–23; Luke 23:20–23; John 19:6–7, 14–15). This tradition has influenced the depiction of Jews in *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* (ca. A.D. 155), in which they angrily denounce Polycarp publicly (12:2–3), actively call for his execution (13:1), and try to prevent Christians from retrieving his body (17:2; 18:1). This account, however, is historically tendentious as well as strikingly anti-Jewish, consciously formulated in an attempt to replicate the Gospel narratives of the passion of Jesus (Abrahams, *Studies*, 67–68; Musurillo, *Acts*, xiv; Dehandschutter, *Martyrium*, 251 n. 646). Buschmann (*Martyrium*, 156–57) argues that the anti-Judaism in *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* functioned as a weapon against Judaizing Christians. Justin Martyr, who moved from Asia Minor to Rome, mentioned that Jews persecuted Christians (Dial. 16.4: 95.4:110.5; 131.2; 133.6; I Apol. 31.5) and also that they cursed Christians in their synagogues (Dial. 16.4; 47.4; 93.4; 95.4; 96.2; 108.3; 133.6; 137.2; cf. Epiphanius Haer. 29.2; see W. Schrage, TDNT 7:838–39), perhaps referring to the so-called *Birkat ha-Minim*, or curse against the heretics, which was primarily directed against Jewish Christians (see Kimelman, "Birkat Ha-Minim," 226–44). Justin is also of the opinion that Jews have spread false rumors about Christians (Dial. 17.1; 108.2; 117.3). According to Acts 26:11, when Paul persecuted Jewish Christians, he attempted to force them to blaspheme, i.e., probably to curse Christ (see Justin I Apol. 31). Eusebius (Hist. Eccl. 5.16.12) quotes Apollinarius (latter half of second century A.D.), who affirms the Jewish persecution of Christians in Asia Minor.

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 162-63.]

⁵⁰This is the working hypothesis that I conclude as a basis for understanding what was happening at Smyrna. Further signaling of this comes indirectly from seeing a triplicate, inner connected situation at Smyrna in the *narratio* that is the single focus of admonitions given in the *dispositio* section that follows.

The following dispositio section in verse ten grows out of this scenario painted in verse nine: μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν. ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα. γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς.

Two foundational admonitions are given here: μηδὲν φοβοῦ, *fear nothing*, and γίνου πιστὸς, *be faithful*. Both imperative verbs are present imperatives, which stress not being afraid and being faithful as continuing responsibilities, rather than a momentary duty. It is important to note that the risen Christ has no ‘bone to pick’ with the church at Smyrna, as He did with those at Ephesus. Also, both of these admonitions are closely tied to one another in addressing a common issue defined in the preceding *narratio*.

μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν, *don't fear anything that you are going to suffer*. In today's world, the expectation would be for the Lord to find a way to eliminate the suffering. In the ancient world, the reality of suffering was assumed. The question was not how to avoid it, but rather how to survive it. The admonition to not fear is a continuous responsibility. The believers at Smyrna are literally not to ever fear any of the things they are about to suffer. The idea of μέλλεις πάσχειν is physically suffering in the near future and these are certain to happen. Certain reality rather than possibly is being addressed here. The infinitive πάσχειν references the gamut of physical suffering all the way to martyrdom, which is mentioned as the ultimate suffering.

This initial admonition to not fear is followed up with a warning of things to come: ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα, *Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction*. The interjection ἰδοὺ stresses the importance of this warning. The core of the warning is μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν, *the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison*. John cleverly links the Devil (ὁ διάβολος) who is about to press legal charges against Christians before Roman authorities with Satan (τοῦ σατανᾶ) who runs the Jewish synagogue. At nearby Pergamum the Devil had already managed to have a believer named Antipas executed (2:13). John anticipates that some will likely be executed at Smyrna (v. 10b). As the above background study on Roman prisons illustrates, being thrown into φυλακὴν was mainly being taken into custody to await trial which would likely lead to either coercion or more likely execution.⁵¹

⁵¹“Under the Roman legal system, imprisonment was usually not a punishment in itself; rather it was used either as a means of coercion to compel obedience to an order issued by a magistrate or else as a place to temporarily restrain the prisoner before execution

One should recognize the basic NT terms for the devil: σατάν (indeclinable word from Hebrew שָׂטָן), σατανᾶς (from Aramaic ܫܝܬܢܐ), and διάβολος. The latter term διάβολος is often used to translate the two Semantically derived terms σατάν and σατανᾶς, even though these terms are occasionally used in the NT as well. All three terms are interchangeable in reference.⁵² Inside

(Berger, Roman Law, 381, 633; Mommsen, Strafrecht, 960–80; for some exceptions, see Jos. J. W. 6.434; Eisenhut, ANRW II, 1/2:268–82). Here it appears that imprisonment, viewed as a period of testing, is primarily for the purpose of coercion. According to Gaius (Digest 48.19.29; tr. Watson, Justinian), ‘Those condemned to the extreme penalty immediately lose their citizenship and their freedom. This fate therefore anticipates their death, sometimes by a long period, as happens in the case of those who are condemned to the beasts. Again, it is often the custom for them to be kept [alive] after their condemnation, so that they may be interrogated under torture against others.’ According to Callistratus (Digest 48.19.35; tr. Watson, Justinian), ‘In the mandates given by the emperors to provincial governors, it is provided that no one is to be condemned to permanent imprisonment; and the deified Hadrian also wrote a rescript to this effect.’ There were, of course, exceptions (Digest 48.19.8.9; tr. Watson, Justinian): ‘Governors are in the habit of condemning men to be kept in prison or in chains, but they ought not to do this; for punishments of this type are forbidden. Prison indeed ought to be employed for confining men, not for punishing them.’ [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 166.]

⁵²“**DEVIL** [Gk *diabolos* (διάβολος)]. The LXX and NT translation of the OT **sātan**. **Sātan** is a judicial term referring to an ‘accuser,’ ‘slanderer,’ ‘calumniator,’ or ‘adversary’ in court (cf. Ps 109:6). The NT also uses the transliteration **satanos**, which is synonymous with **diabolos** (cf. Rev 12:9). **Diabolos** is rare outside the LXX and the NT. It is found in Wis 2:23–24, which identifies the serpent of Genesis 3 with the Devil (see TDNT 2:71–81).

“SATAN as a supernatural accuser of humankind in the heavenly court and working for God occurs three times in the OT. In Zech 3:1–10 Satan stands at God’s right hand to accuse Joshua the High Priest, only to have his accusation spurned. In Job 1–2 Satan questions the sincerity of Job’s righteousness before God in the midst of the heavenly council. Here his office is expanded beyond accuser, for he is given control over sickness, death, and nature in the testing of Job. In 1 Chr 21:1 Satan incites David to sin by taking a census. Here the anarthrous form of Sātan becomes a proper name. Also apparent here is the tendency to divorce temptation from God and assign it to Satan, for in the earlier version of the census of David, God, not Satan, is the agent of the temptation (2 Sam 24:1; cf. Jas 1:13).

“The notion of the Devil as an independent evil power no longer in heaven but ruling a demonic kingdom and headed for judgment is absent in the OT. This move from a subordinate accuser to an independent tempter was a development of the intertestamental period and has been attributed to a number of factors. In limited favor in current scholarship is the proposal that the Hebrew notion of Satan was borrowed or heavily influenced by the dualism of Persian Avestan Zoroastrianism, in which Angra Mainyu, the evil god, opposes Ahura Mazda, the good god. However, in Hebrew thought Satan is always subordinate to God and Angra Mainyu does not function as an accuser in Zoroastrianism. Still, a development of Zoroastrian concepts cannot be ruled out.”

Revelation, διάβολος is used at 2:10, 12:9,⁵³ 20:2,⁵⁴ 20:10; σατανᾶς is used at 2:9; 2:13 (2x); 2:24; 3:9; 12:9; 20:2; 20:7. The indeclinable Hebrew based σατάν is not used in Revelation.

Other terms used in reference to the devil include Βεεξεβούλ, Βεελξεβούλ, Βεελξεβούβ, Βελιάρ, Βελιάλ. The first three are usually translated as Beelzeboul or Beelzeboub, while the last two are Beliar and Belial.⁵⁵

In Revelation, the devil surfaces often throughout the document as the arch enemy of God and the people of God. Although powerful far above that of humans, he has no choice but to submit to the superior power of God that will ultimately banish him into Hell where his power will be limited only to that place. Here at Smyrna, and also at Pergamum and Philadelphia he plays a central role in opposing God's people by working through the Jewish synagogue.

At Smyrna, the devil is going to cause some of the believers to be taken into custody. The stated objective from the view of the Son of Man is ἵνα πειρασθῆτε, *that you may be tested*. Most likely this plays off the often objective of Roman officials for taking individuals into custody: to coerce them into obedience to the demands of the magistrate. After a period of custody, these believers would be given the opportunity to renounce their Christian commitment in order to avoid execution. From Christ's viewpoint, however, this was an examination to determine whether they would be faithful to Him even to the point of dying. This would establish whether they were true Christians or not.

[Duane F. Watson, "Devil" In vol. 2, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 183.]

⁵³**Rev. 12:9.** The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, *who is called the Devil and Satan*, the deceiver of the whole world — he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him

9 καὶ ἐβλήθη ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην, ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ μετ' αὐτοῦ ἐβλήθησαν.

⁵⁴**Rev. 20:2.** He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, *who is the Devil and Satan*, and bound him for a thousand years,

2 καὶ ἐκράτησεν τὸν δράκοντα, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὃς ἐστὶν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, καὶ ἔδησεν αὐτὸν χίλια ἔτη

⁵⁵"In the NT *diabolos* occurs 37 times, *Satanas* 36 times, *Bee(l)zeboul* 7 times. In addition there are the following names: the → enemy, *echthros*; the evil one, *ho ponēros*; the prince of this world, *ho archōn tou kosmou toutou* (see → Beginning); the adversary, *antidikos*, which is a literal translation of the OT *śāṭān* (1 Pet. 5:8). Mk. uses *satanas* exclusively. Lk. prefers this word in his special material, but no basic difference in meaning from *diabolos* can be established. The latter is never used as a form of address (cf. Matt. 4:10 with 4:1, 5, 8, 11)." [H. Bietenhard and C. Brown, "Satan, Beelzebul, Devil, Exorcism" In vol. 3, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther and Hans Bietenhard (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 469.]

This warning is extended to affirm καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα, *and you will have affliction for ten days*.⁵⁶ Thus these believers will have a period of time in custody in order to decide how to respond to the magistrate in court. The term ἡμερῶν δέκα, *ten days*, specifies a short period of time in which these imprisoned believers experience affliction.⁵⁷ Given the horrible conditions normally experienced in such Roman custody, the pain and suffering endured would be intended to induce coercion, once the day of trial before the magistrate came around. Jesus saw it, however, as opportunity to fortify oneself with deeper resolve to remain true to Him no matter what the outcome of the trial might be.

Thus comes *the second admonition* in the *dispositio*: γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς, *be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown, which is life*. Again the present tense imperative form γίνου admonishes consistent faithfulness (πιστὸς). The limits of such faithfulness are defined as ἄχρι θανάτου, *unto death*. These believers must be prepared to die for their Christian faith! And they must not waver in this commitment.

In the typical Jewish style of command / promise, the admonition is re-enforced with the divine promise of a crown by willingness to die for one's faith. The crown is a metaphor drawn from the ancient athletic games *defining the wreath* given to the winners of the games.⁵⁸

⁵⁶A few manuscripts (A P 1854. 2344 pc; Prim) insert ἔχητε in place of ἔξετε. The implication of the substitution of the Aorist subjunctive for the future indicative is to make this a second purpose statement in the ἵνα clause: *so that you might have testing and might have affliction for ten days*. But the evidence overwhelmingly favors the future indicative for the second statement implying that this 'ten day' affliction is going to happen as a consequence of the devil throwing the believers into prison. Alternatively a few manuscripts (C (2053) M^A sa) replace the future tense ἔξετε with the present tense (futuristic function) ἔχετε to heighten the certainty of the coming affliction.

⁵⁷"The phrase 'ten days' is used for an undefined but relatively short period of time, perhaps because it is the sum of the fingers of both hands (Gen 24:55; Num 11:19; Neh 5:18; Jer 42:7; Dan 1:12–15); m. Abot 5:1–6 contains a list of ten things of various kinds. Ten can also function as a number signifying completeness; see Brongers, "Zehnzahl," 30–45." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 166.]

⁵⁸"Suffering and dying for one's beliefs is frequently described using metaphors drawn from athletic contexts (2 Macc 6:10; 9:8; 11:20; 14:4; 17:11–16; T. Job 4:10; 27:3–5; Phil 2:16; 3:14; 2 Tim 2:5; 4:7–8; Heb 12:1–2; 1 Clem 5:1–7 [note the use of the metaphors ἀθληταὶ, ἀθλεῖν βραβεῖον, ὑπομονή]; 6:2; Ign. Pol. 2:3; 3:1; Pol. Phil. 9:2; Mart. Pol. 17:1; 18:3; 19:2; Hermas Man. 12.5.2; Sim. 8.3.6). Similarly, the metaphor of the victory wreath is often used as a metaphor for the heavenly reward awaiting the Christian who suffers and perhaps even dies for his or her faith (Pass. Mont. 14:5; Mart. Lyons 42)." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 167.]

The phrase τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς only shows up this same way in James 1:12, and both instances the idea is the crown which is life (the Genitive case ζωῆς is the appositional function).⁵⁹ Thus Christ promises to personally give eternal life to every one who dies in commitment to Him. What a wonderful promise!

Another aspect of this is the posthumous awarding of the crown. As Aune insightfully points out,⁶⁰ this was not something done for athletes in the ancient world. But the awarding of a ceremonial wreath to honored citizens after their death was relatively common place. It would be granted to family members or inscribed on a sepulchral monument in honor of the deceased individual. To the non-believers in Smyrna all they could

⁵⁹“Analogous expressions occur elsewhere in the NT, where ‘crown’ or ‘wreath’ is a metaphor for the eschatological reward of eternal life: ‘imperishable wreath’ (1 Cor 9:25), ‘crown of righteousness’ (2 Tim 4:8), an ‘unfading crown of glory’ (1 Pet 5:4; Asc. Isa. 9:10–11; T. Benj. 4:1; derived from Judaism, see LXX Jer 13:18; LXX Lam 2:15; 1QH 9:25; 1QS 4:7), the ‘crown of immortality’ (Mart. Pot. 17:1; Mart. Lyons 36, 38, 42), or simply ‘crown’ (Rev 3:11; 2 Clem 7:3; Gk Ap. Ezra 6.17; Apoc. Elij. 1:8; 5 Ezra 2:4; Asc. Isa. 9:25). In all these passages, the wreath or crown is a metaphor for the future reward of the righteous, which occurs in early Judaism (see Wis 5:16; 2 Apoc. Bar. 15:8; a ‘crown of glory’ is mentioned in 1QH 9:25 and 1QS 4:7). Aelius Aristides (Or 27.36; see P. W. van der Horst, *Aelius Aristides and the New Testament*, SCHNT 6 [Leiden: Brill, 1980] 82) has a relatively close parallel: ‘These are adorned with the wreath of the immortals [τῶ τῶν ἀθανάτων στεφάνῳ],’ i.e., they share the immortality of the gods. The ‘wreath’ image appears to be derived from athletic language (2 Tim 2:5) and is closely associated with martyrdom. Yet in 4 Maccabees (composed ca. A.D. 50), the imagery of victorious athletes is used of Jewish martyrs (6:10; 11:20; 13:15; 15:29; 16:16; 17:11–16).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 167.]

⁶⁰“There are, it should be noted, several examples of citizens awarded the honor of a wreath posthumously by the demos or a city, frequently with a representation of the wreath on the sepulchral monument encircling the name of the awarding body, usually δήμος (see MAMA 8 [1962] 408.13–14, from Aphrodisias; Horsley. *NewDocs* 2:50), or, particularly in Rhodes, by the particular secular or, cult society (α κοινόν or θιάσος) to which the deceased had belonged (Fraser. *Funerary Monuments*, 68). One example is found in the following honorific inscription in honor of Dionysodoros (IG 155; Fraser, *Funerary Monuments*, 62 n. 357): ‘To the account of Dionysodoros, the Benefactor, who was crowned with a golden crown for ever [στεφανωθέντος χρσέωι στεφάνωι εις τὸν ἀει χρόνον] (the cost of) the crown that was bought,’ meaning that Dionysodoros would remain a permanent benefactor and would be honored annually with the coronation of the funerary monument. Ramsay (Letters, 256–59) and Hemer (Letters, 59–60) have suggested that the phrase ‘crown of life’ is an allusion to the ‘crown’ metaphor that was frequently applied to Smyrna on coins and inscriptions and by rhetoricians (Philostratus Vita. Apoll. 4.7, though this is not at all persuasive given the ubiquitous nature of the crown metaphor.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 167–68.]

hope for was a tombstone with the drawing of a crown on it in recognition of honor. But to the faithful believer in Smyrna, death brings the crown that is nothing less than eternal life with Christ in Heaven! Not much comparison!

Martyrdom in the perspective of the New Testament is not the same as is often understood in the modern world.⁶¹ Biblically to die for one’s faith is indeed a

⁶¹“Seeley has related these martyrdom tales to the wider Greco-Roman concept of the ‘Noble Death,’ and shown how the NT materials build in various ways upon such an understanding (Seeley 1990: 84–112). What they lack is the kind of extended polemical defense and praise of voluntary death that one finds in these Jewish materials from Maccabean times. The early Christians simply begin with the presupposition that to die for the faith is thoroughly noble and good. The deaths of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14–29 = Matt 14:1–12; Luke 9:7–9), Stephen (Acts 7); and James (Acts 12:1–2) are all reported with this presupposition. The book of Acts reports numerous occasions when either mobs or authorities try to kill Paul (10:23–25; 14:5, 19; 17:6–10; 21:30–31; 22:22–23; 23:21) as well as Paul’s own preconversion efforts to imprison and slaughter early Christian believers (8:3; 9:1). Paul confirms the essential points of Luke’s account in his own letters (2 Cor 11:23–33; 1 Cor 15:9; cf. 1 Tim 1:12–15).

“Of course Jesus himself is the preeminent model of the faithful martyr in the NT. He is directly called such twice in Revelation (1:5; 3:14). All four gospels stress that his death was voluntary. ‘No one takes it [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord’ declares the Jesus of the gospel of John (10:18). Mark places both the necessity of Jesus’ death and his willingness on the lips of Jesus himself (Mark 8:31–33; 9:30–32; 10:33–34, 45; 14:36). Both Matthew and Luke follow Mark closely in this regard (e.g., Matt 16:21–23; Luke 9:51), while John makes the same point independently (12:27). Matthew and John place particular stress on Jesus’ freedom to escape, and his willingness to die, at the time of his arrest (Matt 26:53–54; John 14:30; 18:4–8). This emphasis comes up repeatedly in various other ways in all four gospels (Droge and Tabor 1992). Paul’s own understanding of Jesus’ death appears to have close ties with the Maccabean materials surveyed above (Seeley 1990).

“This willingness to choose death in the face of opposition is presented as a necessary and model behavior for the followers of Jesus as well (Mark 8:34–35 = Matt 16:24–25; Luke 9:23–24; John 15:18–20). Predictions that followers will be delivered up and killed, which may reflect social conditions of the post–70 C.E. period, run through all layers of the gospel materials (Mark 13:12–13 = Matt 24:9–10; Luke 21:12–17; Q Luke 12:4–5 = Matt 10:28; John 16:2).

“Paul asserts not only his willingness to die, but even his preference for death over life (Phil 1:19–26). The way he poses his dilemma, and even the language he uses, reflects Greco-Roman philosophical disputes over the appropriateness of suicide (Droge 1988; Daube 1962; Palmer 1975). Such discussions are rooted in a long tradition of evaluations of the death of Socrates (Droge and Tabor 1992). How Paul actually died, whether by execution or by his own hand, or some combination of both, is unknown.

“The book of Revelation refers to martyrs several times (5:9–11; 16:6; 17:6). They are singled out for special reward during the millennial reign of Christ (20:4–6). A specific individual at Pergamum, one Antipas, otherwise unknown, was apparently slain by

noble act and a commendable one. But it does not gain for the individual any special status in Heaven above believers who die a natural death or who are living at the return of Christ. Christ set the example on the cross of a commitment to doing the will of God that He was willing to die for. This is the expectation -- if not divine demand -- of every person who claims to be a follower of Christ.

C. Admonition and promise, v. 11

11 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἕκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου.

11 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death.

The admonition to hear repeats verbatim what was uttered at the end of the first message and will also be repeated in the same form in the subsequent five messages.

It comes naturally as a prophetic call to pay attention to the preceding words, especially in the *narratio* and *expositio* sections (vv. 9-10), of this message. These words spoken by the Son of Man are now the words of the Holy Spirit who takes them and applies them not just to believing community at Smyrna, but to all seven congregations, since they have relevancy to more than just those in Smyrna.

The victory formula that follows promises eternal life to the one remaining consistent in commitment to Christ. The thrust of the promise is the same as in the first message, although the grammar construction varies slightly. The dative of indirect object present tense participle τῷ νικῶντι from νικάω now becomes the present tense participle subject, Ὁ νικῶν, to the Aorist passive voice verb ἀδικηθῆ from ἀδικέω that references physical and mental harm from something.⁶² What cannot do harm to the one overcoming is τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου, the second death. This phrase is also found in 20:6 (ὁ δεύτερο θάνατος) and 20:14; 28:8 (ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερος). It has the same meaning

authorities and is called ‘my witness [Gk martys] my faithful one’ (3:13). Revelation also mentions the ‘two witnesses’ or martyrs who are to appear at the very end of history, be slain, but then be resurrected from the dead after three days (11:4–13). The book of Hebrews exhorts its readers to be willing to die for the faith, like heroes of old, but the writer admits few if any have actually been faced with such choices (11:32–40; 12:3–4).”

[James D. Tabor, “Martyr, Martyrdom” In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 577.]

⁶²In Revelation, ἀδικέω is used with several senses as is reflected in the NRSV translation: harm - 2:11; 9:10, 19; 11:5; damage - 6:6; 7:2, 3; 9:4; evildoer - 22:11; evil - 22:11.

uniformly in the book of Revelation. The expression is distinctive since it exists nowhere else in the NT, second century Christian literature, or pre-Christian Greek literature.⁶³ But the idea of two kinds of dying, usually

⁶³“The concept does not occur in the rest of the NT, in second-century Christian literature, or in pre-Christian Greek literature. The notion appears twice in nearly contemporary Greek literature. First, in Plutarch *De facie* 942F (who is very familiar with Egyptian myth and ritual; see J. Hani, *La religion Égyptienne dans la pensée de Plutarque* [Paris: Société d’Édition “Les belles lettres,” 1976]), the phrase ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος occurs in a positive sense for the death of the ψυχή, ‘soul,’ on the moon (preceded by the death of the σῶμα, ‘body,’ on earth), which frees the νοῦς, ‘mind,’ to ascend to a blissful existence on the sun (see G. Soury, *La démonologie de Plutarque* [Paris: Société d’Édition “Les belles lettres,” 1942] 196–203). Second, the conception of two deaths was promulgated by various philosophical traditions; see Macrobius in *Comm. in Somn. Scip.* 1.11.1 (Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, tr. W. H. Stahl [New York: Columbia UP, 1990]):

[T]he followers of Pythagoras and later those of Plato declared that there are two deaths, one of the soul, the other of the creature, affirming that the creature dies when the soul leaves the body, but that the soul itself dies when it leaves the single and individual source of its origin and is allotted to a mortal body.

“This doctrine of the *commentatio mortis*, i.e., ‘the practice of dying,’ is also referred to in *Macrobius Comm. in Somn. Scip.* 1.11.12; 1.13.5–6; see P. W. van der Horst, “Macrobius and the New Testament,” *NovT* 15 (1973) 220–32. For a more extensive discussion of the theme of *commentatio mortis* or μελέτη θανάτου, see D. E. Aune, “Human Nature and Ethics in Hellenistic Philosophical Traditions and Paul,” in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, ed. T. Engberg-Pedersen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 305–12.

“In Epictetus 1.5.4, it is said that while most people fear the deadening of the body, few care about ‘the deadening of the soul [τῆς ψυχῆς δὲ ἀπονεκρουμένης].’ While the ‘deadening of the soul’ might be construed as a sort of second death (the first being the death of the body), in actuality the ‘deadening of the soul’ is a metaphor for the person who avoids acknowledging the truth. In *Odyssey* 12.22 the term δισθανής, ‘twice dead,’ is used to refer to Odysseus’ trip to Hades (the so-called Nekuia in *Odyssey* 11) along with his future physical death. In *Achilles Tatius* 7.5.3, the hero Clitophon says of his love Leucippe (tr. J. J. Winkler, in *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, ed. B. P. Reardon [Berkeley: University of California, 1989]), ‘But now you have died twice over [τέθνηκας θάνατον διπλοῦν]—soul and body [ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος] both are gone.’ In *Lucian De mort.* 7.2, Menippus, speaking to the ψυχή, ‘soul,’ of Tantalus in Hades, contests the notion of a second Hades or a second death (θάνατος ἐντεῦθεν). In *Bib Ant.* 51:5 (which probably originated during the first century A.D. in Palestine), the first line of the following antithetical couplet might be construed to imply a second death:

And when the wicked have died, then they will perish.

And when the just go to sleep, then they will be freed.

The source of this notion in the Hellenistic world, even though the means of transmission is not known, is the Egyptian conception of the second death (Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 254; Bergman, *Ich bin Isis*, 57). The phrase ‘to die the second death’ (*mt m whm*) occurs frequently in the Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead (Zandee, *Death*, 186–88; Faulkner, *Coffin Texts* 1:88 [spell 83]; 1:134 [spell 156]; 1:267 [spell 203]; 2:69 [spell 423]; 2:76 [spell

one of the body and the other of the soul, did exist in the pre-Christian ancient world, largely due to Egyptian religious teaching that was influential elsewhere in the Roman empire. This thinking had found its way into Jewish thinking as is reflected in the first century BCE writings of the Jewish philosopher Philo. The concept becomes more prominent in Judaism after the second century AD and shows up often in the rabbinical Targums, which are applicational commentaries on the Hebrew Bible written in Aramaic.

Although in the developing thought on the second death (מִיתָא תַּיְיָנָא, *mītā. tīnyaynā.*) in Judaism it could refer to the destruction of the soul at physical death, more common was the idea of eternal torments of the soul. Clearly in Revelation with ὁ δεύτερο θάνατος linked to the lake of fire etc. in chapter twenty, this latter idea is unquestionably the meaning for John.

What the Son of Man promises to the one overcoming is that the fires of eternal damnation will not be able to harm him in the least. The overcomer is fully 438]; 2:88 [spell 458]; 2:308 [spell 787]), referring to the total destruction of the *ba*, ‘soul,’ after bodily death (Zandee, *Death*, 14; Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 207), a fate to be avoided at all costs. The ultimate Egyptian origin of this concept in Greek, Christian, and Jewish literature is supported by the pairing of the notions of the second death and the lake of fire in Rev 20:14 and 21:8, which also occurs in Egyptian texts (e.g., Book of the Dead 175.1, 15, 20; Budge, *Book of the Dead*, 184, 186–87) and once in the relatively late Tg. Isa. 65.6.

“Philo (Praem. 70) speaks of two kinds of death, death itself and existence in a continued state of dying. The Hebrew expression for second death is מוֹת שֵׁנִי *māwet šēnī*, first occurring in the ninth-century A.D. work *Pirqe R. El.* 34, while the Aramaic expression מִיתָא תַּיְיָנָא, *mītā. tīnyaynā.*, ‘second death,’ occurs only in the targums, from which six texts are discussed by McNamara (*Targum*, 118–24; Tg. Jer. 51:39; 51:57; Tg. Deut. 33:6; Tg. Isa. 22:14; 65:6, 15). Tg. Jer. 51:39 and 57 are phrased identically (tr. Hayward, *Targum of Jeremiah*): ‘and they shall die the second death, and shall not live for the world to come, says the Lord.’ McNamara, who does not mention the parallels in Lucian and in Egyptian sources, thinks that ‘the expression must have come from Judaism, unless it was coined by Christianity’ (McNamara, *Targum*, 118), and Bogaert (“La ‘seconde mort,’” 199–207) makes the same assumption. There are two possible meanings for ‘second death’ in Judaism: (1) exclusion from the resurrection, i.e., remaining in the grave, or (2) assignment to eternal damnation (Str-B, 3:830). The Egyptian significance of second death and the lake of fire, i.e., complete and total destruction, cannot be meant in Revelation, as Rev 14:9–11 and 20:10 make clear. Rather, as in Philo and Tg. Isa. 65:6, eternal torment is signified, so that what we have is an adaptation of Egyptian underworld mythology to Judeo-Christian tradition.”

“On the general links between Egyptian religion and Asia Minor, see R. Salditt-Trappmann, *Tempel der ägyptischen Götter in Griechenland und an der Westküste Kleinasiens*, EPRO 15 (Leiden: Brill, 1970), and G. Höbl, *Zeugnisse ägyptischer Religionsvorstellungen für Ephesus*, EPRO 73 (Leiden: Brill, 1978).”

[David E. Aune, vol. 52C, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1091-93.]

protected by God from such injury. This is heightened by the double negative construction οὐ μὴ, *by no possible means*, linked to the Aorist verb ἀδικηθῆναι, which here stresses the utter impossibility of one single injury.

Thus far the one overcoming is promised φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ, *to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God* (2:7) and οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆναι ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου, *absolutely will not be harmed by the second death* (2:11).

2. What does the text mean to us today?

Does the situation at Smyrna have relevance to modern Christianity? Absolutely! At several points!

First, these words are spoken by the eternal Christ whose existence knows no beginning or ending. This is affirmed by His resurrection from physical death. Therefore His message is critically important to be heard. We must pay close attention to how the Holy Spirit takes these words and applies them to our world.

Second, Christianity will inevitably pay a price for consistent, unflinching commitment to Christ. The church at Smyrna experienced affliction, poverty, and slander bundled into a single package because of their faith commitment. This entailed for some of them imprisonment and possible execution. Whoever thinks that genuinely following Christ will not produce hostility and opposition has not read his Bible at all.

Third, religion gone sour becomes a tool in the hands of the devil himself. The Jewish synagogue became the instrument of persecution of God’s people at Smyrna, thinking all the while that it represented the true people of God and that persecuting the Christians was the will of God. When religious folks take their eyes off God and become enslaved to a rigid traditionalism steeped in cultural based religion rather than biblically defined commitment to God through Christ, it serves the purposes of Satan rather than of God. Their religion then becomes an evil force in this world.

Fourth, a Christian commitment true to Christ no matter what the circumstance will bring the promised blessing of eternal life from the Lord. Even if that commitment produces martyrdom the divine promise holds true. Earthly forces may severely harm the physical body in execution, but they cannot touch the spiritual life of the believer, for his/her life is untouchable by the second death.

These are just some of the possible applications of 2:8-11 to our lives in the modern world. Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit many more can be brought to mind. This text is vitally relevant to our day!