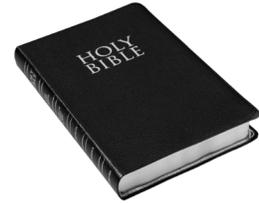


Publication of Kingdom Seekers Ministry  
P O Box 279, Pleasant View, CO 81331  
Phone 970-562-4874



Matthew 6:33

Issue 1211

## ISAIAH 46-51

As we continue to study the book of Isaiah, keep in mind that the primary reasons that Israel is going into the Assyrian captivity is idolatry and disobedience. With this in mind read Isa. 46:1-4. The first two verses are in direct contrast to the next two. The first depicts Israel trying to escape their enemy (Assyria) and having to carry their gods, Bel and Nebo. Their gods are a burden to them and cannot help them. They go into captivity. The next two verses depict Israel as they leave their captivity with God carrying them instead of them carrying their gods.

(Read Isa. 46:5-11) God tells Israel to recall how they used gold and silver to make gods that could not move, nor speak, nor do anything at all. Then remember that it is God that has declared the end from the beginning, that there is no other God. He is calling Cyrus a ravenous bird from the east as he tells Israel to remember that He has called him to deliver Israel from the Babylonian captivity so that when it happens, they will know for sure that He is God and there is none else. He has purposed it, He will do it.

(Read Isa. 46:12-13) He calls to the stubborn hearted people of Israel to listen—He says he will bring His righteousness or His justice near, it will not be far off. Also, His salvation or deliverance will not tarry—Everything will happen on schedule. He is going to place His salvation in Zion (the new Jerusalem) for Israel, God's glory.

(Read Isa. 47) Babylon is to be humiliated in defeat. God is going to take vengeance on Babylon, but not as a man would, rather as the redeemer of Israel, the LORD of Hosts, the Holy One of Israel. Keep in mind that Babylon has not even become a major power at the time Isaiah is writing this. The reason is given in verse 6. Though God was angry with Israel, Babylon showed them no mercy. (This would apply to both Israel and Judah) In verse 7 God says that Babylon has said, **“I shall be a lady for ever.”** Compare this to Rev. 18:7 speaking of “Mystery Babylon the Great”, **“How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.”** The system of world government that has been born of the Babylonian succession of empires is referred to as Mystery Babylon in Rev. 18. I think we can see how the attitude that God says is going to develop in the kingdom of Babylon, to cause her to be humiliated and destroyed, is carried over into Mystery Babylon at the end of the age. God says of Babylon in Isa. 47:9 that two things are going to come upon her in a moment in one day—the loss of children and widowhood, i.e. the loss of the kingdom (the people) and the loss of power. Babylon was to be known for her sorcerers, astrologers, stargazers, monthly prognosticators, etc., i.e. mysticisms. God tells Babylon to let these stand up and protect her in a way of mocking her.

(Read Isa. 48:1-8) Remember that not only Israel was taken into the Assyrian captivity, but a large part of Judah as well and their destiny is to

be the same as that of Israel. It is the people of Jerusalem and the surrounding area that have a separate destiny from that of Israel. Here in verse 1, God is addressing Israel and the portion of Judah that are in captivity with them. He says they swear by His name and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor righteousness. God is impressing on these people that it is He that has worked their release and He is telling them this long before the release so they will know that it is He that does it. It is not because of something that they have done right.

(Read Isa. 48:9-11) God makes it very clear that He is working their release for His own name's sake. This takes us back to the unconditional promises He made to Abraham. If He left the people in their captive state, or let them be destroyed, He would be breaking these unconditional promises, so to protect His name, His reputation, He has to proceed with His plan that will make this people His witnesses to the world that He is God and there is none else.

(Read Isa. 48:12-16) God re-emphasizes that what is going to happen, He will be the one doing it. He is the first and the last. It is He that created the heavens and all that is therein. So it is not going to be something that He can't do to send Cyrus against Babylon. God says Cyrus will have his arm on the Chaldeans because God has brought him to this purpose and will make his way prosperous. Isaiah is writing verse 16 referring to himself. He tells Israel to listen, he has not spoken anything in secret from the beginning. Now he says, the LORD God and His Spirit has sent him.

(Read Isa. 48:17-19) God continues to make it clear that He, the redeemer of Israel is the one talking. He looks back wishing that Israel would have obeyed to start with, then their life would have been much easier and they would be a great people instead of one in captivity.

(Read Isa. 48:20-22) God, looking into the future as if it were the present, and having sent Cyrus against Babylon and helped him conquer Babylon, it is time for the Israelites to be moving out of their captivity, so God gives them their marching orders. He tells them to flee with sing-

ing saying "**The LORD hath redeemed his servant Jacob.**" That redemption, of course, was in Jesus Christ, but though many had already moved into western Europe and the British Isles by the time of Christ, this became the theme of the missionaries that went to the "gentiles" following the day of Pentecost. Through that redemption, redemption for all of mankind from sin was also made possible.

Once the people have their orders to leave the land of their captivity, God promised to uphold and protect them as they made their march to the new lands that God had planned for them. But to the rebellious who stayed, God says "**there is no peace unto the wicked.**" These would have been the idol worshippers who did not believe nor obey God.

The 49<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah begins, "**Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far.**" This would appear to be referring to two different groups of people. Yet as we read further into the chapter, it is obvious that it is Israel that Isaiah is speaking to, or actually that Christ is speaking to. To understand why it appears to be two groups we need to let secular history help us out some. Several years ago, I had a business relationship with a gentleman from the Jersey Isle in Great Britain. We were needing to do a little investigation into the proposed hauling needs of some new uranium mines out in Utah that we hoped to furnish the equipment for, so this gentleman sent his son over to help with the investigation. As we were driving out to the mines (a half day drive) we were visiting and due to a curiosity I have about the royal house of England, I mentioned the story, as I understand it, about Jeremiah, who had custody of King Zedekiah's daughters following the captivity of Judah by King Nebuchadnezzar, his ultimately taking at least one of these daughters to the British Isles where she married a prince, apparently descended from Judah, and that today's royal family is descended from this union. When I had finished the story, he told me he had been taught the story in his school history class, but that Jeremiah was only called a seer and the back ground of the young woman was not

given, though considered a princess.

I believe there is sufficient evidence to prove the story reasonably true. But the question then arises as to how the prince got there and was apparently of the same race as the princess. Though we don't have Bible history to the effect, there is other historical evidence to indicate that at least as far back as the time Israel was in Egypt, and after, there were elements of Israel, and I believe in this case, specifically of the family of Zarah, son of Judah, who traveled as far as the British Isles and western Europe and often settled in some of the lands that they traveled to.

The point of this is that when Isaiah addressed the people of the Isles, I believe he was addressing a contingent of Israel that had settled in the Isles centuries before the captivity of Israel by the Assyrians. The people from far that he addresses then would be the people of the Assyrian, later to be considered Babylonian captivity, as these two groups of people were to come together in the Isles. Keep in mind that we are not talking about the Kingdom of Judah as they were not part of this scenario.

(Read Isa. 49:1-6) This is definitely Messianic prophecies—Isaiah is speaking as if he were Christ. Understanding these prophecies will help us understand more about Jesus Christ and His purpose when we study the New Testament. In verse 3, we're told, **“And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”** This is a little bit confusing. Christ is taking on the name “Israel” much like He often calls Himself, or is called, David and in Psa. 24:6 He is also referred to as Jacob. But if these prophecies are read with the understanding that the “me” is Christ, I think they will be that much more powerful in our understanding. Keep in mind that Israel means “God rules or ruling with God.” His purpose is to bring Israel to Himself again and though they are not gathered at the time of Christ, He says He will still be glorified in the eyes of the Father. We know now that this was certainly true. But the Father says it would be a light thing to just bring salvation to Israel, so He is going to give Christ for the salvation of all nations to the end of the earth.

(Read Isa. 49:7-12) He gives assurance that He will be with them as they migrate westward and inherit the desolate heritages of the earth. Again we see the command for them to go forth from their captivity and He will take care of them. I tried to find out what was meant by the land of Sinim, but was unable to find anything. Some think it referred to China, but most authors that I checked ruled this out, but did not have a positive identification. Most thought it referred to the tribe that was farthest away, though no definite identification.

(Read Isa. 49:13-23) The heaven and earth are commanded to sing joyfully because God has comforted Israel. However, Zion, which I believe at this point refers to Judah who would be in the Babylonian captivity, feels that they have been forsaken by God. Since these are prophecies, we have to think in time that this prophecy would be fulfilled. God assures her that it would be more possible for a mother of a sucking child to forget her child than for Him to forget Judah.

However, it appears to me that in assuring Zion that God has not forgotten them, the prophecy ends dealing with the time of Jesus Christ's second coming at which time Zion becomes the New Jerusalem, the ruling structure of God's kingdom here on the earth. In several of the prophecies that we will be studying, the prophet jumps from his present time to the time of the second coming with little or no mention of the time in between. Personally, I take this as a reminder from God that His plan will bring about His total restoration on the earth with Christ ruling. Sometimes we will see what appears to be a fulfillment, yet if we study the prophecy, we will see that it is speaking of a greater fulfillment. For example, in this prophecy, Judah was restored to their land following the Babylonian captivity and some take this as the fulfillment of this prophecy, yet in no way was all of the parts of this prophecy fulfilled, there has to be a greater fulfillment which I believe we are yet to see.

(Read Isa. 49:24-26) Again, while assuring Zion that He can take the captives from the mighty, God looks to the time when all flesh will

know that He is the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind.

(Read Isa. 50:1-3) This is one of two Scriptures where the word “divorcement” is used in reference to what God has done to Israel by putting them into captivity to the Assyrians. The terms of this divorce are found in Hosea 1. Again, referencing God’s laws of divorce in Deut. 24:1-4, if a man wants to divorce his wife, he must give her a written bill of divorcement, or dis-ownership, and then he is to put her out of his house. God gave the written bill through Hosea the prophet, and then put Israel out of their land through the Assyrians. Because Israel had married false gods, it was not lawful for God to allow Israel back into His house, or the land of Israel.

God also looks at the sending Israel into the Assyrian captivity in another sense, that of selling a debtor into slavery. This also is in accordance with His laws in Lev. 25. God sold Israel to Assyria because of their debt of sin that they had racked up. Keep in mind that according to God’s law, if a man damages another man he has created a debt to that man and he has also created a debt to God because of the promise of the people to obey God’s law (Ex. 19:8). With the exception of non-restorable crimes such as murder or rape, the remedy for the sin, or damage to the other person was to restore the damage in excess of the actual damage. But one cannot restore the debt owed to God. So the debt accumulates until forgiven by God. In the case of Israel, they had accumulated a considerable debt to God. God foreclosed and sold them to Assyria. So He also asks in verse 1, **“which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you?”** Then He points out that they had actually sold themselves by committing the sin in the first place and He had divorced Israel because of their transgressions.

God then asks the question in verse 2, **Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem?** In other words, is it not possible that God can buy back what He has divorced and put away or sold for their debt? He points out that He has the power to dry up the rivers and to clothe the heavens with blackness and make sackcloth their

covering, i.e. He is saying He has the power to redeem them. We know now that Jesus Christ has redeemed Israel and also through His death made it possible to re-marry Israel without being in violation to His divorce law. (See Rom. 7:1-3)

(Read Isa. 50:4-9) While this is probably Isaiah’s thoughts about himself, what he said is also prophetic about Jesus Christ. Prophets were not well liked in Isaiah’s day, so I think we can assume the same about Isaiah. Their message was seldom to the liking of most of the people just as good solid Bible teaching and preaching is not appreciated in our day and time. Tradition has it that Isaiah died when he was hiding in a hollow tree and was sawn in two when his pursuers realized where he was.

(Read Isa. 50:10-11) Dr. Bullinger, in a note in the Companion Bible on verse 10, says, “These are the words of the prophet in view of Messiah’s reception.” By this I assume he is referring to the people who believed God, but did not at first understand who Christ really was. Verse 11 is somewhat a mystery to me. Again Dr. Bullinger says it is a Divine irony. I assume he is referring to the people who ultimately refused to believe who Christ actually was or is in spite of the evidence before them of Christ’s life.

(Read Isa. 51:1-3) To those who believe Him, He is telling them to look to the promises that He made to Abraham. The end result of those promises will be the New Jerusalem, or the New Zion. He gives a partial description of what that will be like in verse 3. Regardless of what happens, if we keep our eye on those promises, understanding that it is God that will bring them to fruition, we know what the end result will be and should take comfort in that.

(Read Isa. 51:4-6) God exhibits enthusiasm at He looks to the future at the time that His people will look to His righteousness and justice. The heavens and the earth could disappear, but His righteousness would last.

(Read Isa. 51:7-8) God cautions the people who know righteousness and have His law in their heart to ignore the reviling of men. These men shall be “eaten up” but His righteousness and salvation shall be from generation to generation.

(Read Isa. 51:9-16) From this 9<sup>th</sup> verse through the first verse of chapter 52 the prophet gives three calls to “Awake.” This first call is to God to awake with the reminder that it is He that delivered Israel from Egypt (Rahab) and wounded the dragon. (Wounding the dragon may be reference to protecting Israel from the crocodile while coming out of Egypt.) Because God did this, Isaiah says that the redeemed of the LORD (Israel) shall return and come with singing unto Zion free from sorrow and mourning and filled with everlasting joy and gladness. God responds it is He that comforteth so why should they be afraid of a man that dies while forgetting their creator? God then confirms that He is with Israel and is protecting them that His plan will be completed.

We’ll continue with chapter 51 in our next lesson. JRL

*Everyone has an equal chance to become greater than he is.*

## A Study of the Book of REVELATION

In our last lesson, we had begun discussing Rev. 1:12-16 and were discussing the designation of Christ as the “Son of man.” We’ll pick up our discussion at that point.

The description of this “**Son of man**” is equally important. First we are told that He was clothed with a garment down to the foot, and wore a golden girdle about His breast. The garment would indicate a priestly garment as Jesus is our High Priest. The Greek word for “paps” is *mas-tos*. Strong’s Concordance says this means, “a (prop. female) breast.” The root word means, “to handle or squeeze or chew.” Thus the word primarily has to do with nursing a child. Gen. 1:27 says, “**So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him: male and female created he them.**” I think we can say that Adam was first created both male and female. Only later did God remove the female part of him to form a second person called Eve. But he was created in the image of God, who is complete within Himself. Thus we find that from Adam to Moses God revealed Himself to the patriarchs on-

ly in the feminine manifestation of El Shaddai, the breasted One. (*Shad* is Hebrew for a breast.) When Moses asked the name of the One who was sending him to deliver Israel and give them the law, God revealed Himself as Yahweh, the masculine side of God’s personality and being. El Shaddai is the nurturer and provider, Yahweh is the lawgiver, the disciplinarian, the tutor necessary to bring His children to maturity.

The golden girdle draws attention to His/Her breast and is meant to portray Christ’s feminine side as well as the masculine priesthood. Consider that the Passover Lamb was to be a male lamb and the red heifer, whose ashes were to be used to purify the people, was female. Christ fulfilled both of these prophetic laws.

Rev. 1:14 says, “**His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire.**” The wool reminds us that He was the Lamb of God. In Dan. 7:9, 10 we have a depiction of the Ancient of Days sitting at the Great White Throne of Judgment that is also depicted in Rev. 20:11. (Read Dan. 7:9, 10) Again His vesture is white like snow and His hair like pure wool. In Lev. 19:32, we’re told, “**You shall rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD.**” “Hoary” means gray headed. This is prophetic of when the Ancient of Days is seated upon the throne for the purpose of the final judgment, the dead rise up before His gray or white hair.

In our studies, we have seen that God very often manifests Himself as fire. In our depiction here, the eyes are pictured as a flame of fire, because God’s Word is truth. Because in Him is all the fullness of God, He is fully endowed with the seven spirits of God, which make up the Spirit of Truth.

Rev. 1:15 says, “**And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.**” Because Christ is depicted here as the Son of man, He is pictured as the judge of the whole earth. Bronze is the metal that symbolizes judgment, hence, the brazen altar in the tabernacle of Moses depicted the judgment for sin laid upon the sacri-

fices, which were types of Christ. Thus He is pictured here with His feet as **“fine brass.”**

The voice sounding like many waters conveys the idea that it is not merely the Head speaking, but also the many individual overcomers who make up the body of Christ. All are speaking as one—that is, in agreement with the head.

Rev. 1:16 says, **“And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.”** In discussing the seven stars in His right hand, we need to first read the rest of the chapter. We’re told in verse 20 that the seven stars represent the angels of the seven churches.

“The seven stars” is a reference to the star constellation known as the Pleiades, “the seven sisters.” In Psalms 147:4, speaking of the Lord, we’re told, **“He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.”** Gen. 1:14-19 tells us that God created the stars (constellations) not only to be for light at night, but also to be **“for signs, and for seasons.”** Thus they are prophetic signs of things to come. (Read Psalms 19:1-3) The constellations tell us the story of God’s Plan and Purpose. A brief summary of the twelve constellations and their depictions are as follows:

1. Virgo—the sufferings of Christ
7. Pisces—The blessings in abeyance
2. Libra—The Redeemer’s atoning work
8. Aries—The blessings consummated
3. Scorpio—The Redeemer’s conflict
9. Taurus—Messiah coming to rule
4. Sagittarius—The Redeemer’s triumph
10. Gemini—Messiah, Prince of Peace
5. Capricorn—The results of His sufferings
11. Cancer—Messiah’s possession
6. Aquarius—The blessings assured
12. Leo—Messiah’s final triumph

In Prof. E. Raymond Capt’s book, The Glory of the Stars, he writes on page 101,

“In the neck of Taurus is another cluster of stars called the ‘Pleiades’ (the Seven Sisters). The word means ‘the congregation of

the judges’ or ‘rulers’. The brightest star in this group is ‘Al Cyone’ (Arabic), which means ‘the center’. Some leading astronomers believe it is the center of the universe. Apparently that is what was implied when Job is asked of God, ‘Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades?’ (Job 38:31).”

Identifying the Seven Churches with the Pleiades, as John does, shows that the Church (ekklesia) is called as “the congregation of the judges.”

Eph. 6:17 tells us, **“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”** Heb. 4:12 says, **“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discern-er of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”** I believe these two verses explain the sharp twoedged sword that came from the mouth of the Son of man that John saw.

In seeing **“his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength”**, John is seeing Christ unveiled, i.e. he is seeing Him in His glory. John had seen this once before. Speaking of the event on the mount of transfiguration, Matt. 17:2 says, **“And (Jesus) was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.”** This is how the overcomers will see Christ at the first resurrection.

When John saw Christ, he says he fell at his feet as dead, but Christ laid His right hand on him and told him to fear not, He was the first and the last. That He says, **“I am he that liveth, and was dead: and behold, I am alive for evermore.”** signifies that one must die to live, i.e. one must die to self, that is one must submit to Jesus Christ and declare Him to be Lord. This is the meaning of baptism, where one identifies with Christ’s death and resurrection. **“Evermore”** means to the ages of the ages. Scripture tells us of

two more ages, the age in which the overcomers will rule with Christ and the age following the Great White Throne of Judgment in which all men will be redeemed through judgment by the laws of redemption and Jubilee.

Jesus says He has the **“keys of death and hell.”** “Hell” is from the Greek *hades* which literally means “the unseen world.” This usually refers to the grave. For example, Rev. 20:13 says, **“death and hell (*hades*) delivered up the dead which were in them.”** Jesus accomplished having the keys by His own life, death, and resurrection.

In verse 20, a distinction is made between the seven stars and the seven candlesticks. The stars are the angels (messengers) of the churches and the candlesticks are the churches, or congregations themselves. The angels would represent the ministers of the congregations at the time of John’s writing, or angels who support and empower the ministers through the church ages.

John is to write in a book what he sees and then send it to seven churches in Asia. The churches are at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. These were cities in Asia Minor which is now Turkey. While these churches actually existed, it has been pretty well agreed that these churches represent different ages, based on what happened to Christianity in general, during the church age. It is also generally agreed that this “church age” began about the time of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection and extends to our present day. Some scholars are more precise than others about the dates, but most are pretty close to each other. From my studies, I am going to say that the day of Pentecost following Christ’s ascension in 33A.D. is probably going to be the best start date from the standpoint that immediately following this date is when the disciples and apostles began to preach and teach the New Covenant.

There are a couple of types in the Old Testament that might help us understand these New Testament churches, or ages, better. The one that we might take note of is King Saul. If we look at his life, much of what he did is reflected in what Christianity has done. King Saul was crowned king on the day of Pentecost. He was a very fine

young man, **“there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he.”** (I Sam. 9:2) At first he was a good and righteous king. Gradually, however, he began to think more and more like man as his power over man increased. Eventually because of his refusal to repent and God’s refusal to speak to him, Saul consulted with the witch at Endor. I Sam. 15:23 says, **“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft.”** Saul became rebellious against God. While we might wonder why God did not remove Saul from his kingship, consider that God used Saul’s rebellion to train David and teach him obedience by the things which he would suffer at the hands of Saul. Saul reigned for 40 years.

Saul, his sons and grandsons were guilty of persecuting the Gibeonites whom Joshua and the children of Israel had sworn protection during the conquering the land of Canaan. Apparently two of his sons and five of his grandsons had participated in this and were the ones who paid the penalty for Saul’s sin in this. They were all hanged by the Gibeonites with David’s permission. These 7 might be likened to the 7 churches and the Gibeonites to the overcomers.

Letter to the church at Ephesus: Ephesus means “Desirable.” Jesus Christ is the author and identifies Himself as, **“he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.”**

(Read Rev. 2:1-7) This Ephesus age was relatively short, lasting from 33 A.D. to 64 A.D. This is the time of the apostles and other disciples all anxiously starting churches, or congregations in Judea, Asia Minor, Europe and beyond. In this they were like Saul at the beginning of his kingship. They had received the earnest of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost and had a great zeal for God and Jesus acknowledges their works, labor, patience, non-tolerance of false apostles, and their proving, or testing what they were taught. However, He says he has somewhat against them that they need to repent of. He says they have left their first love. If we reflect back on Paul’s writings along with other writers, we can understand what this is. While the new Christians are quite zealous when they are first converted, there

seemed to be a steady stream of Jews in particular that were either outright antagonistic toward Christianity, or were converted themselves but still wanted to retain Old Covenant rituals and requirements and worked very hard to instill these doctrines in the minds of the new Christians. We see Paul, in particular, fighting against this, but the volume of this rhetoric had its effect of placing man between the people and God. This is what is meant by the **“deeds of the Nicolaitanes.”** Nicolaitanism means “conquering the laity (common people). Under the Old Covenant the people relied on the priesthood as their intermediary between them and God with the result that the priesthood became very corrupt and oppressive. With Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection, He became our intercessor, no longer was a priest needed in that role.

When God came down on the mount Sinai in the fire and smoke to speak to the people as they traveled from Egypt, all that He spoke to them was the Ten Commandments before they fell back out of fear and told Moses that they wanted him to hear God and then tell them what He said. This is somewhat the same situation. The people found it easier to have someone else hear God and then tell them what He said than it was for them to hear Him themselves. The problem was that this opened the door for false apostles and false teachers. However, there were some who still were willing to listen to God, who had the capability through the Spirit to discern what was of God and what was not as they listened to the speaking of the apostles and others. These are those that **“overcometh”** in verse 7.

At the end of each letter to the various churches we find virtually the same words of verse 7 with a different reward each time. I would like for us to make a special note of what

each “church” had to overcome and what the reward is as the combination of what was to be overcome in each “church” is what we all need to overcome and the combination of the rewards listed for each “church” is the reward that all overcomers will receive.

**Ephesus church: Obstacle to overcome—refusing to hear God thus giving rise to Nicolaitism.**

**Reward—to eat of the tree of life (have age lasting life)**

Letter to the church at Smyrna: Smyrna means “Bitter” or “Myrrh”. Here, Jesus identifies Himself as, **“the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.”**

(Read Rev. 2:8-11) The Smyrna church represented the age from 64A.D. - 313A.D., from the beginning of Nero’s persecutions in 64 A.D. to the Edict of Milan, when Constantine ended the persecutions in 313 A.D. Myrrh is an anointing oil and spice which was used to prepare the dead for burial. The more one crushed it, the sweeter the fragrance.

This was the way it was with the martyrs of this time period. They were crushed by the full fury of the Roman Empire, but the more they were killed, the more fragrant the aroma before God and men. Men marveled at their great courage and converted to Christ faster than Rome could kill them. Christ says he knows their works, tribulation and poverty, but He says they are rich in faith. He says He knows the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not. Regardless of their genealogy, when they rejected Christ, they disqualified themselves as “true Jews.”

We’ll continue with the Smyrna church next lesson. JRL

*One today is worth two tomorrows.*

---