



## Review of the Rewards Promised to Those Who Overcome: Ephesus to Sardis (REV38-40)

### Ephesus

**Revelation 2:7:** “To the person who gains the victory, I will give to him [the right] to eat of the tree of the life which is in the paradise of God.”

Compare **Genesis 2:9, 2:15-17, 3:1-7, 3:22-24** with **Revelation 22:2-5, 12-14, 18-19.**

### Smyrna

**Revelation 2:10-11:** “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the (1) crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes (2) shall not be hurt by the second death.”

#### 1) The Crown of Life:

- a) In their suffering the believers at Smyrna were exhorted to be faithful, even to the point of death. While their persecutors could take their physical lives, it would only result in their receiving the crown of life.
- b) “The crown of life” is one of several crowns promised to Christians (cf. **1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; 1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 4:4**).
- c) Etymology and history:<sup>1</sup>

The Greek word **στέφανος** (stephanos) means *wreath* or *crown*.

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the historical background presented here is drawn from the preaching and writing of R. B. Thieme Jr.

The **στέφανος** was the reward for winning in battle and in athletic games.

**1 Corinthians 9:24-25:** “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.”

See also **Daniel 7:7-8** and **Revelation 13:3; 17:3, 7**).

The Roman *corona* (Latin) was the highest decoration in the army and is the exact equivalent of the Greek **στέφανος**.

Greek athletic awards:

**2 Timothy 2:4-5:** “No soldier on active duty entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life [a person on active duty does not live a normal life], so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. Furthermore, if anyone competes in the athletic games, he does not receive a winner's crown [**στέφανος**] unless he trains according to the rules.”

Every athlete went through identical training no matter what his event, just as every believer receives the opportunity to mature as believers and please the Lord.

The Athlete:

Believers are compared to Greek athletes in **2 Timothy 2:5:**

“And also if anyone competes as an athlete [from **ἀθλέω** (athleo), *to compete or wrestle*], he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.”

The **ἀθληταί** (athletai) were those who trained under the rules of the national gymnasium for ten months.

They were not allowed to leave the large walled area of the gymnasium for ten months.

They had to exercise under the authority of the **γυμνασίαρχος** (gumnasiarkhos), or the ruler of the gym.

The rules were very strict:

They could not leave for any reason (eternal security).

They were all put on an identical, strict diet – other foods were seen as a distraction (avoidance of worldly distractions).

Everyone participated in group exercise naked outdoors, regardless of the weather (in season and out of season the body is to work together; we are all transparent before the eyes of God).

Daily trumpet calls had to be met each day at various times; if they missed one they were disqualified (our daily responsibility to meet the Lord in His Word and in prayer).

Everyone had the same opportunity to compete (every believer has an equal opportunity to glorify God).

#### Winners in the athletic games:

Each winner in the national games received many rewards and privileges.

He received a crown of ivy leaves, which represented the rewards he would receive when he returned home.

He had a special entrance cut into the wall of his hometown city which he passed through when he returned home. Then a plaque was put up after the wall was sealed up again.

He rode in the best chariot through the city in a parade.

He received a lifetime pass to all future games.

He received a great amount of money.  
An ode was written to him by a poet.

A statue of him was put up in the public square.

His children were fed and educated at public expense.

He was exempt from all income taxes for life.

Therefore, **1 Corinthians 9:24-26a** says: “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath [στέφανος], but we an imperishable. Therefore, I run in such a way, as not without aim ...”

#### Roman Crowns:

The Romans had many different crowns as decorations in the military; they also gave crowns to the winners of athletic contests.

The *corona obsidionalis* or *corona grammania*, a wreath of golden strands, was the highest decoration. This was given for breaking a blockade or raising a siege.

The *corona civica* was a crown made of golden oak leaves. This was awarded to a soldier who saved the life of another citizen in battle and held the ground where this deed occurred for the rest of the day.

The *corona navalis* was the highest decoration in the navy for destroying an enemy fleet or for being the first to board an enemy ship.

The *corona muralis* was awarded to the first soldier who scaled the wall of a besieged city.

The *corona vallaris* was awarded to the first soldier to reach the enemy lines in battle.

The *corona aurea* was a golden crown for gallantry in battle or any heroic act in battle.

The *corona triumphalis* was awarded to a victorious commander.

The awarding of each of these crowns included:

A monetary reward,

Freedom from taxes,

Free education for the hero's children at the public's expense,

A statue of the person erected in the public square, and

A home wherever the hero wanted it built.

The Romans had other awards as well:

There were decorations worn around the neck.

There were decorations on a baldric worn over the chest (a baldric is a wide ornamented belt worn over the right shoulder to support a sword or bugle by the left hip).

There were also various spears that were given.

The **στέφανος** or *corona*, then, is used by analogy for the greatest honors God can give to believers.

It represents the *victor's crown* or *overcomer's crown* and is therefore a fitting symbol of heavenly reward (cf. **2 Clement 7:3?**).

Jesus:

Jesus wore a **στέφανον ἐξ ακανθῶν**, a ‘crown of thorns’ (or prickly plants) (**Matthew 27:29, Mark 15:17, John 19:2, 5**).

Jesus, the “one like a son of man”, is seen wearing a golden **στέφανος** in **Revelation 14:14**: “And I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud *was* one like a son of man, having a golden crown [**στέφανος**] on His head, and a sharp sickle in His hand.”

Believers will wear the **στέφανος** as a reward in eternity as a symbol of our association the Lord’s victory.

This crown is worn by the 24 elders in heaven (**Revelation 4:4, 10**) which is a symbol of the universal priesthood of the Church.

The **στέφανος** is also a picture of that which serves as someone’s *adornment* or *pride*: “Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long *to see*, my joy and crown [**στέφανος**], so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.” (**Philippians 4:1**)

The Greek word **διάδημα** refers to the crown of *kingship* or *rulership*.

It was “properly the sign of royalty among the Persians, a blue band trimmed with white, on the tiara, hence a symbol of royalty.”<sup>2</sup>

Satan:

The devil is depicted as “a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems [**διάδημα**].” (**Revelation 12:3**)

This represents Satan’s control over world empires in the Great Tribulation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Bauer, Walter, Gingrich, F. Wilbur, and Danker, Frederick W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), *ad loc.*

In **Revelation 13:1** (and later in **17**), the “beast coming out of the sea” is introduced.

The beast is the infamous antichrist, the coming world ruler, seen in Daniel 7 as the “little horn” on the beast which represents the Roman Empire.

The **Revelation 13:1** beast has “10 horns and 7 heads, with 10 crowns on his horns,” which depicts the revived Roman Empire (this was also represented by the fourth beast of Daniel, which also had 10 horns – **Daniel 7:7-8**; cf. **Revelation 13:3; 17:3, 7**).

Jesus returns to earth in His Second coming wearing many diadems:

**Revelation 19:11-16:** “And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it *is* called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war. And His eyes *are* a flame of fire, and upon His head *are* many diadems; and He has a name written *upon Him* which no one knows except Himself. And *He is* clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white *and* clean, were following Him on white horses. And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”

The Crown of Life:

The crown of life is rewarded to all those who perseveres under trial, thus manifesting their true love for the Lord.

**Revelation 2:10:** “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

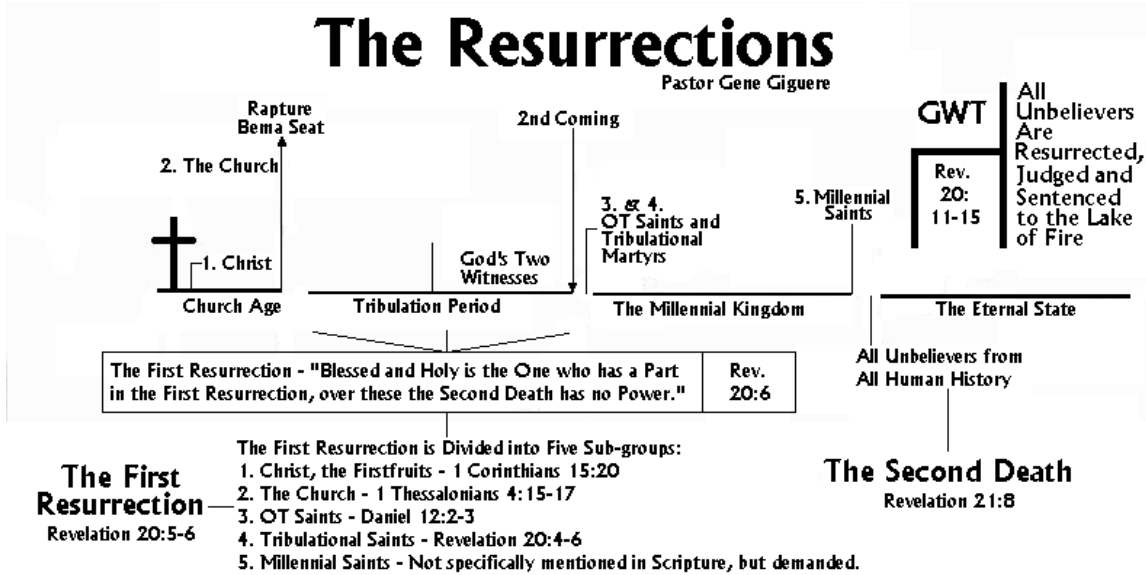
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<sup>3</sup> Cf., Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985, on Revelation 12:3.

**James 1:12:** “Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.”

2) Second Death:

The first resurrection consists of believers, while the second death is the resurrection of all unbelievers to stand before the Great White Throne.



**Pergamum**

**Revelation 2:17:** “To him who overcomes, to him I will give *some* of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.”

1) **Hidden manna:**

The “hidden manna” may refer to Christ as the Bread from heaven, the unseen source of the believer’s nourishment and strength.

Whereas Israel received physical food, manna, the church receives spiritual food (**John 6:48-51**).

Manna is a type of the spiritual food that the believer needs daily.

**Exodus 16:2-4:** “And the whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the sons of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the LORD’S HAND in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. And it will come about on the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.”

I believe that “hidden” manna is daily devotionals that believers will receive in heaven in which secret things will be revealed.

“Manna” is representative of the believer’s daily need for spiritual food.

## 2) **A white stone with a new name written on it:**

According to Fruchtenbaum, a person could get a white stone in the ancient world for one of two reasons:

Being acquitted at a trial; or

Being received into the membership of a private club.

## 3) **A New Name:**

Like “Israel” for “Jacob.”

Like “Peter” for “Simon.”

Like “Abraham” for “Abram.”

Henry Alford says that the important point is the stone’s inscription which gives the believer “a new name,” indicating acceptance by God and his title to glory.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Alford, Henry, *Alford’s Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian Press, 1976), 4:572.

## **Thyatira**

**Revelation 2:26-28:** “And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received *authority* from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.”

### 1) “I will give authority over the nations . . .”:

The one overcoming will have a part in the messianic kingdom.

The Church, as Christ’s Bride will co-rule with Christ in the millennial kingdom.

**Revelation 5:9-10:** “And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hast made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”

It is *Christ Himself* who will “rule them with a rod of iron.”

**Revelation 12:5:** “And she gave birth to a son, a male *child*, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.”

**Revelation 19:13-15:** “And *He is* clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white *and* clean, were following Him on white horses. And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.”

### 2) “I will give him the morning star”:

This is another symbol used in the book of Revelation of which no speculation is needed to interpret.

In **Revelation 22:16**, Christ Himself is declared to be the Morning Star. “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star [ὁ ἀστήρ ὁ λαμπρὸς ὁ πρωϊνός]”

**2 Peter 1:16-19**: “For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”— and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And *so* we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star [the hapax legomenon φωσφόρος means *a light bringer* or *light-giver*] arises in your hearts.”

Dr. Kenneth O. Gangel:

“God’s prophetic Word is a Light (lychnō, “an oil-burning lamp”; cf. Ps. 119:105) shining in a dark place. Though the world is darkened by sin, God’s Word, pointing to the future, enlightens believers about His ways. But the day (Christ’s return, Romans 13:12) is coming. In the daytime, lamps are no longer needed. And a lamp is nothing compared with the Morning Star . . . Much as a lamp at night anticipates and is outshined by the bright morning star, so Old Testament prophecy looks ahead to the coming of Christ, “the bright Morning Star” (astēr; Rev. 22:16). Until He comes, believers are to let the Scriptures illumine their hearts (though the light which it brings on that great day will be greatly exceeded by the understanding which will be in their hearts).”<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, they will possess Christ Himself. The possession of the true faith presupposes a possession of the person of Christ.

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<sup>5</sup> Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc., 1983, 1985), *ad loc.*

## **Sardis**

**Revelation 3:4-5:** “But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.”

### 1) **They will have white garments:**

The symbol used here is explained in a different part of the Revelation. **Revelation 7:14** states “...and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Thus, the white garments are a symbol of the future glory of the saved. The first promise to those escaping is that of future glory, because for them the sound doctrine (of the Reformation period) is not dead, but alive in Christ (cf. **Colossians 1:27b**).

The white robes of purity mentioned here by Christ are mentioned throughout Revelation:

**Revelation 6:11** – the Tribulational martyrs.

**Revelation 7:9, 13** – the Tribulational saints.

**Revelation 19:8, 14** – the Church (Bride) in heaven.

Christ is often portrayed in a white robe:

**Matthew 17:2:** “And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.”

**Mark 9:3:** “And His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them.”

The angels also appear in a uniform of glory:

**Matthew 28:1-3:** “Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his garment as white as snow; and the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.

**Mark 16:1-8:** “when the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome, bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. And very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, *here is* the place where they laid Him. “But go, tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He said to you.’” And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

**Acts 1:10:** “And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

Principle: “Those who have a measure of holiness and purity now will be given perfect holiness and purity in the future.”<sup>6</sup>

**Revelation 19:7-8:** “Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made

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<sup>6</sup>John Jr MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11 : The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), *ad loc.*

herself ready.” And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright *and* clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints [i.e., that they glorified God in time – **John 15:8**].”

## 2) **Their names will not be blotted out of the Book of Life.**

The Book of Life contained the name of every sinner who has ever lived.

When a person dies *without Christ*, his or her name is removed from the Book of Life.

When a believer dies, his or her name is *not* removed from the Book of Life.

When a sinner believes in Jesus Christ, his or her name is written into another book, the *Lamb’s Book of Life*.

The unbeliever’s name is never written into the *Lamb’s Book of Life*. In **Revelation 20:12**, “books” (plural) are opened. At the Great White Throne judgment, the unbeliever’s name will not be found in either the Book of Life or the Lamb’s Book of Life.

The Book of Life is mentioned in several Bible verses:

**Psalm 69:28**: “May they be blotted out of the book of life, and may they not be recorded with the righteous.”

**Philippians 4:3**: “Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”

**Revelation 3:5**: “He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.”

**Revelation 17:8**: “The beast that you saw was and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in

the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.”

**Revelation 20:12:** “And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.”

**Revelation 20:15:** “And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

The Lamb’s Book of Life is mentioned in two Bible verses:

**Revelation 13:8:** “And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.”

**Revelation 21:27:** “And nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

But this promise also involves their salvation which will be eternally secure, because their names will not be blotted out.

It is a promise of eternal security.

### 3) **Jesus will confess their name before the angels:**

The Lord will do this for every believer.

**Matthew 10:32-33:** “Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.”

A.T. Robertson:

“**Shall confess me** (ὁμολογήσει ἐν ἐμοί [*homologēsei en emoi*]). An Aramaic idiom, not Hebrew . . . So also here, “him will I also confess”

(ὁμολογησῶ κ'αὐτῷ ἐν αὐτῷ [homologēsō k'agō en autōi]). Literally this Aramaic idiom reproduced in the Greek means “confess in me,” indicating a sense of unity with Christ and of Christ with the man who takes the open stand for him. **Shall deny me** (ἀρνησῆται με [arnēsētai me]). Aorist subjunctive here with ὅστις [hostis], though future indicative ὁμολογήσει [homologēsei] above. Note accusative here (case of extension), saying “no” to Christ, complete breach. This is a solemn law, not a mere social breach, this cleavage by Christ of the man who repudiates him, public and final.<sup>7</sup>

**Luke 12:8-9:** “And I say to you, everyone who confesses [*aorist active subjunctive – point in time, indicating a real salvation*] Me before men, the Son of Man shall confess [*future active indicative – there’s no subjunctive here*] him also before the angels of God; but he who denies [*aorist middle participle*] Me before men shall be denied [*future passive indicative- he will receive the action of being denied in the future*] before the angels of God.”

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<sup>7</sup> Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1998, c1933), *ad loc.*