

Revelation 2:11

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Jesus calls for the believers to pay close attention to what He is saying. If they are faithful witnesses, even to the point of death, if they overcome the world and live in obedience to God, they will not suffer loss at the judgement seat of Christ.

This letter to Smyrna ends with the same admonition as the other six letters: *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.* This connects with the admonition in Revelation 1:3 that applies to the entire letter, which is to read, hear, and heed/do the words in this prophecy in order to gain a great blessing. This letter to the believers in Smyrna asserts that those who hear this admonition and make a choice to faithfully endure suffering will gain a great blessing—the crown of life (Revelation 2:10). However, there is another blessing these saints will gain, which is to avoid being *hurt by the second death.*

There are a few different kinds of circumstances that must be endured in order to be one who *overcomes*. In the letter to Laodicea, the church there is exhorted to overcome a circumstance of plenty—the illusion that a circumstance of material plenty is true riches (Revelation 3:17-18). In this letter to the church in Smyrna, they must overcome a circumstance of want—they are being persecuted for doing what is right and good. There are few circumstances worse than getting thrown into prison and being persecuted for doing what is right, as they will be (Revelation 2:10).

But if what they should *overcome* is their lowly circumstance and the world's mockery (that will attend walking in obedience in their faith) what is the *second death* that they are promised to not be *hurt* by?

Revelation 21:6-8 describes the second death as the lake of fire:

“Then He said to me, ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.’”

The fire and brimstone of the lake of fire are the *second death*. The lake of fire is the permanent station of those whose name is not found in the Book of Life (Revelation 20:15). However, this application of “lake of fire” does not fit, since this letter is to the church at Smyrna, which is the collection of God's servants in Smyrna—those who have believed in Jesus and received the free gift of eternal life. ([For more, read our Tough Topics article on Eternal Life.](#))

The key seems to be that here the Spirit promises that *he who overcomes will not be hurt* by the fire and brimstone. Non-believers are said to be consumed by the fire of God's judgement

(Hebrews 10:27). Believers are not consumed, but rather are refined by God's judgment fire. That judgment fire hurts and heals, but it does not consume. Judgment cannot consume believers because they are in Christ, and therefore have been delivered from eternal judgment (Romans 8:1).

Hades is a place where unrighteous souls go upon their physical death on earth (Luke 16:23). But at the end of Revelation, Hades itself is consumed in the lake of fire: "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:14).

The lake of fire is powerful enough to consume both Death and Hades. We are not told what the lake of fire is, but it seems to fit best to consider it as being the fully unveiled presence of God. We are told that it is God who conquered death (1 Corinthians 15:54-55). We are also told that God Himself is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). God told Moses that no human could withstand seeing His unveiled face and live (Exodus 33:20).

There are several images throughout the Old Testament depicting God as a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29, Daniel 7:9-11, Deuteronomy 9:3, and 2 Kings 1:10-12). God often shows up in the form of fire, so it is possible that the lake of fire is not a place, but the unveiled presence of the holiness of God, as in Exodus 24:17 which says, "and to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the mountain top."

With this thought in mind, when Revelation 2:11 says that *he who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death*, which is the lake of fire, that means that overcomers will not be *hurt* by entering into God's presence in the judgement. 1 Corinthians 3:9-15 details the fire that will test each structure a person builds through the deeds of their lives saying:

"now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work."
(1 Corinthians 3:12-13)

Those whose work remains after God's judgment fire will have a reward, but those whose work is burned up will suffer loss, though they themselves will be saved through the fire. This suffering of loss seems to correlate with the idea of being *hurt* by the fire of judgment at the judgment seat of Christ, in the presence of the living God, who is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29).

Judgement day requires a refining process to see what stands firm when put to the test. Metals are forged in fire and come out stronger than before, but materials like wood, hay, and straw will burn up. A possible reason that the one who *overcomes* won't be *hurt* here is because their faith has already been refined and proven in this life (James 1:3-4; Malachi 3:2). It stands to reason that those who have endured the pain of suffering for doing what is right have already endured hurt, and therefore have been refined. They have been hurt by the world's judgment due to their faithfulness to God, and are promised a great reward as a result.

Revelation 2:10 says, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” So *he who overcomes* is instructed to be faithful in the midst of the trials that he will face, even to the point of being faithful until death. But it will be worth it because he won’t be *hurt* by the *second death*, which is the refining process by the consuming fire of God’s spirit at the judgment seat of Christ. Instead, the one who overcomes will be refined through the trials of this life, and as a result of faithfulness, be given the crown of life.

It could be that Isaiah’s visit to the throne room of God might provide a foretaste of what it might mean for a believer to be *hurt by the second death*. When the righteous prophet Isaiah visited the throne room of God, he said:

“Woe is me, for I am undone!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King,
The LORD of hosts.”
(Isaiah 6:5)

This in spite of the written narrative telling us that Isaiah spoke the truth to a crooked generation on earth. But when Isaiah visited heaven, he only became aware of his flaws. God gave Isaiah a burning coal with which to singe and clean his lips, like a doctor cauterizing a wound that it might heal. We can imagine that cauterizing lips would be quite painful. However, Isaiah seemed to be grateful, for in God’s presence his primary concern was to be clean.

Biblical Text

¹¹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.’