

The Crown of Life

And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and *I know* the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but *are* the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. (Revelation 2:8-10)

I will give you the crown of life: the Greek word translated **crown** means in a context like this the wreath made of laurel leaves that was given to the winner in an athletic contest (see 1 Cor 9.25; 2 Tim 2.5). The phrase **the crown of life** appears also in James 1.12; see also “the crown of righteousness” in 2 Timothy 4.8, and “the crown of glory” in 1 Peter 5.4. The genitive construction **the crown of life** means life as the crown, life as the prize, which Christ will give to those who are faithful. This is eternal life, life in the coming Kingdom. Thus Brc “I will give you life as your victor’s crown,” and SPCL “I will give you life as the prize.”

[Brc = Barclay; SPCL = Spanish common language version.]

The second and third sentences in this verse are both fairly complex, with various subordinate clauses. In the second sentence a translation must maintain a natural and easily-followed relation between the act of being thrown into prison, the purpose of the act (“to be tested”), the extent of time involved, and the fact that only some of the believers will be jailed, although this will be a test for all of them.

And in the third sentence it is especially the meaning of “until death” that must be faithfully expressed, so that it means martyrdom, being put to death for being a faithful Christian. The genitive construction “the crown of life” should not appear as “the crown that belongs to life” or “the crown that life gives.” Life, eternal life, is the victory prize awarded by Christ.

Alternative translation models for this verse are:

Don't be afraid of the suffering you will most certainly undergo. Listen! The Devil is about to cause (have) your enemies to arrest some of you and put you in prison in order that they may test you. You will experience big troubles for ten days. But don't ever give up believing in me even if you are killed (must die), because I will give you eternal life as your victory prize just like a crown (garland).

Don't let your heart (liver) fall as you think of the things you are about to suffer. Beware! The Devil will have people arrest some of you in the near future and put you in prison. And God will test you. You will experience suffering ten days. You must always be loyal to me even if it means that people kill you. I will give you real life as the prize of victory.

(Robert G. Bratcher and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, New York, United Bible Societies, 1993, 49-50; Included KJV scriptural reference at the beginning and paragraph structure is slightly modified)