

REVELATION
CHAPTER 2:8-11

⁸ “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘these things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: ⁹ “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw 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.¹¹ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”

Smyrna was 35 miles north of Ephesus on the Aegean Sea. There is evidence that there had been a city there for 3000 years though it had been rebuilt many times. The city at this time was 400 years old and had a population of 10000 people. It was called “The crown of Asia” and was the most beautiful place of the seven churches. It had an impressive natural harbour, one of the finest in the world, magnificent architecture, though the city was rather smelly. Unfortunately the architect responsible for the building of the city forgot the drains and when it rained the streets ran like open sewers. In Roman times it was the place to live. It had become the centre of science and medicine. The city is still there, but now known as Ismir. There are still Christians worshipping there as opposed to Ephesus.

We don't know how the church was founded, it's not mentioned in the book of Acts, probably founded during Paul's ministry in Ephesus. The church there was a dangerous place to worship for three main reasons

First, there was strong emperor worship and those who refused to take part were put to death. Historians tell us that there were mass executions of Christians who refused to bow the knee. Domitian was the Caesar at this time. He was a monster murdering dictator who hated the church and launched an attack on it which reached fever pitch in Smyrna. Each year every citizen had to burn incense on Caesar's altar and was then issued with a certificate without which your life was in danger.

Second, people of the city were engulfed in pagan worship of different kinds. There were Temples, festivals and gods and goddesses by the thousands. There was a temple to the worship of Zeus the god of the sky and thunder. There was a temple to the worship of Aphrodite goddess of law and beauty and raw sexuality.

Third, the Jews hated the Lord Jesus, rejected Him as their Lord and Messiah, and so in turn hated the church.

Fifty years after John wrote this letter Polycarp was the pastor of the church in Smyrna. He had a dream that his pillow was on fire and he awoke to tell his disciples that he must be burned with fire. His whereabouts were given away to his persecutors by a little slave girl who collapsed under torture. The soldier who came to arrest him found a humble old man of 86. The soldier did not want to see him die and said to him “what harm is it to say Caesar is lord and to sacrifice and save your life”. Polycarp was adamant that only Jesus Christ is Lord. He entered the arena and the proconsul gave him the choice, curse Christ and make sacrifice to Caesar. Polycarp replied **“eighty and six years I have served Him and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me”**? The proconsul threatened him with burning and Polycarp replied **“you threaten me with the fire that burns for a time and is quickly quenched for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting come do what you will”** The crowds came flocking with wood from their workshops. The Jews were foremost in bringing wood, even though it was the Sabbath and they broke their own law by carrying burdens. They began to bind the old man, Polycarp said **“leave me as I am for He who gives me power to endure the fire will grant me to remain in the flames unmoved even without the security you will give by binding”** So they left him loosely in the flames and there he died for Christ

To each of the churches Jesus identifies Himself in a particular way. To Smyrna He says **“”These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life”**. This is how John saw Jesus in the vision in chapter 1. In the Old Testament God refers to Himself in the same way. Here are some examples

1. **Isaiah 43:1 “You are My witnesses,” says the LORD, “And My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me.¹¹ I, even I, am the LORD,**
2. **Isaiah 48:12 “Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last”**

Jesus says again in Revelation 22 **“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last”**

To Smyrna Jesus reveals Himself as the eternal and infinite God, already existing when all things were created, and remaining after all things are destroyed. He transcends space and time. He is Jehovah, always was, and is, and is to come. This same one was dead and came to life. This truly is an amazing paradox to beat all

paradoxes that the eternal living God, beyond space and time DIED. He was incarnated for this very purpose, the timeless one entered time for you and me. Praise Him!!!

He is the living resurrected Christ who has passed through death writing to a people, a church, living in great sorrow in the shadow of death. Some of the members had already been martyred and others were to follow. I, says Jesus have been there and I know; I am the master of those dark places. I have unlocked death I HAVE THE KEYS. I have been through death but I am alive forevermore. Saints, it's only because he has died and lives forevermore that we can too. He is bringing comfort to men and women during severe persecution and so reminds them that should they be put to death, they cannot and will not be cut off from His eternal resurrection power

“I know your tribulation”. This is a strong word not often used. He did not say “trials” (these are common to us all) the word is much stronger it means “pressure of persecution”. It's suggestive of the pressure of stones that grind the wheat, or that force the juice out of the grapes. These people were under that kind of pressure and Jesus says I KNOW. Think of His pressure in the Garden of Gethsemane when He sweat great drops of blood. Smyrna means “Myrrh” a substance taken from crushing of a thorny tree and used as an embalming ointment. It's mentioned several times in the New Testament. In Matthew 2 when the wise men brought Myrrh, literally they brought Smyrna. In John 19 Nicodemus brought a mixture of Myrrh and Aloes to the tomb and they took the body of Jesus bound it in strips of lines with the spices. This church in Smyrna suffered and was crushed unto death but produced a wonderful perfume. God permitted Satan to crush them so this perfume could be released. Christians in Smyrna were like those the writer of Hebrews talks about in Chapter 11:35-38

“³⁵ Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in dens and caves of the earth.*”

I know, says Jesus I was crushed and poured out and died and rose again, I know. This church was nothing like the church at Ephesus. They loved Him and their faithfulness produced hatred and anger.

“I know your poverty” Here again a very strong word meaning “beggary”. There are two Greek words for poor, the first means you have nothing over what are basic needs, and the second here means you have nothing at all. Most of the people were probably slaves who had lost everything, their trade, social standing and their bare necessities. They were reduced to beggary for Christ, so much for those false teachers who teach a “prosperity gospel” which is no gospel at all. I know what it is to be poor says Jesus, I had nowhere to lay my head.

“And I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan”. In the Roman Empire there were many wealthy Jews who made their fortune by doing business with Rome. They slandered the Christians to the Roman authorities poisoning their minds against them. They had the ear of the authorities and sought to blot out the church. No doubt there was a synagogue in Smyrna but, says Jesus, it was the synagogue of Satan. Do you recall the words of Jesus in John 8:44 when he spoke to the Jewish leaders? **“Your father is not God and your father is not Abraham your father is the devil”** That poses a question, were they really Jews, sure from the outside from a physical standpoint. Inwardly they were not Jews as Paul says in Romans 2:28-29 **“²⁸ For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; ²⁹ but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God”** It is true that the Jews of the first century not only rejected their Messiah but also were the chief persecutors of the church.(see 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16) Jesus knew alright, the force that brought about His death was the blasphemy of the Jews, acting upon a pagan nation that stripped Him of everything. I know, says Jesus, I have experienced the pain, the slander, the vilification, the suffering, and the injustice and the poverty.

“But you are rich”. They had what really matters. This is a poor rich church as opposed to a rich poor church. Later we shall come to Laodicea where Jesus says you are rich but you are poor. Big buildings, huge churches mean nothing of themselves. These people had holiness, power, grace, love and a sympathetic Saviour. 2 Corinthians 8:9 **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor that you through His poverty might become rich”** I know says Jesus, I was rich but for your sakes I became poor, and you can enjoy my riches even in your poverty.

There are no words of comfort for the future, more trouble is coming but don't be afraid. **“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested,**

and you will have tribulation ten days” The devil is not a free agent God was going to allow him to do this. When John said that some would be thrown into prison, he knew that Roman imprisonment was frequently a prelude to execution. Ten days may be literal, or may indicate that the suffering had a beginning and an end. He encouraged them to be **“faithful unto death”**. That word “faithful” is from the root word “convinced”. They are to be convinced, assured of the faithfulness of Christ and His dependability. Now for us a word. When things are going badly God does not ask us to grit out teeth and engage the British stiff upper lip, but to trust Him and His faithfulness to bring us through.

I will give you the crown of life. This is the crown of victorious royalty, the crown that adorns the victor who comes laden with spoils. This is life eternal

He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.” Beyond death those who overcome will find life and the rest will find death. Only those who have put their trust in Christ alone will escape and find that second death abolished

Final scripture for this study 1 Corinthians 10:13 ¹³ **No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it”**