

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA (Rev. 2:8-11)

### Read Revelation 2:8-11 (NIV)

#### **\*\*What Scholars Say\*\***

#### **DESTINATION**

**Rev. 2:8.** The second letter was addressed to Smyrna, a large and wealthy city 35 miles north of Ephesus. Like Ephesus, it was a seaport. In contrast to Ephesus, which today is a deserted ruin, Smyrna is still a large seaport with a present population of about 200,000. Christ described Himself as the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. Christ is portrayed as the eternal One (cf. 1:8,17; 21:6; 22:13) who suffered death at the hands of His persecutors and then was resurrected from the grave (cf. 1:5). These aspects of Christ were especially relevant to the Christians at Smyrna who, like Christ in His death, were experiencing severe persecution.

The name of the city, Smyrna, means "myrrh," an ordinary perfume. It was also used in the anointing oil of the tabernacle, and in embalming dead bodies (cf. Ex 30:23; Ps 45:8; Song 3:6; Matt 2:11; Mark 15:23; John 19:39). While the Christians of the church at Smyrna were experiencing the bitterness of suffering, their faithful testimony was like myrrh or sweet perfume to God.

#### **COMMENDATION**

**Rev. 2:9.** What a comfort it was to the Christians in Smyrna to know that Christ knew all about their sufferings: I know your afflictions and your poverty - yet you are rich! Besides suffering persecution, they were also enduring extreme poverty (*ptocheian* in contrast with *penia* the ordinary word for "poverty"). Though extremely poor, they were rich in the wonderful promises Christ had given them (cf. 2 Cor 6:10; James 2:5). They were being persecuted not only by pagan Gentiles but also by hostile Jews and by Satan himself. Apparently the local Jewish synagogue was called the synagogue of Satan (Cf. Rev 3:9). (Satan is mentioned in four of the seven letters: 2:9,13,24; 3:9.) In the history of the church the most severe persecution has come from religionists.

#### **REBUKE**

Notable is the fact that there was no rebuke whatever for these faithful, suffering Christians. This is in striking contrast with Christ's evaluations of five of the other six churches, which He rebuked.

#### **EXHORTATION**

**Rev. 2:10 a.** The word of Christ to these suffering Christians was an exhortation to have courage: Do not be afraid (lit., stop being afraid) of what you are about to suffer. Their severe trials were to continue. They would receive further persecution by imprisonment and additional suffering for 10 days. Some have taken these words "for 10 days" as a symbolic representation of the entire persecution of the church; others think it refers to 10 persecutions under Roman rulers. The most probable meaning is that it anticipated a limited period of time for suffering (cf. Walvoord, Revelation, pp. 61-2). The problem of

human suffering, even for a limited time, has always perplexed faithful Christians. Suffering can be expected for the ungodly, but why should the godly suffer? The Scriptures give a number of reasons. Suffering may be (1) disciplinary (1 Cor 11:30-32; Heb 12:3-13), (2) preventive (as Paul's thorn in the flesh, 2 Cor 12:7), (3) the learning of obedience (as Christ's suffering, Heb 5:8; cf. Rom 5:3-5), or (4) the providing of a better testimony for Christ (as in Acts 9:16).

## **PROMISE**

**Rev. 2:10 b-11.** In their suffering the believers at Smyrna were exhorted, 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. Apparently up to this time none had died, but this could be expected. Later Polycarp, having become the bishop of the church in Smyrna, was martyred, and undoubtedly others were also killed (cf. Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, A Commentary Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1945. 6:662). "The crown of life" is one of several crowns promised to Christians (cf. 1 Cor 9:25; 1 Thess 2:19; 2 Tim 4:6-8; 1 Peter 5:4; Rev 4:4). The crown of life is also mentioned in James 1:12. Believers are encouraged to be faithful by contemplating what awaits them after death, namely, eternal life.

As in all the letters, an exhortation is given to the individuals who will listen. The promise is given to overcomers, assuring them that they will not be hurt at all by the second death (cf. Rev 20:15).

The reassuring word of Christ to Smyrna is the word to all suffering and persecuted Christians. As stated in Peter's epistles, *"So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen."* (1 Pet. 4:19; 5:10-11).

## **\*\*My Thoughts\*\***

**1. There were three things that Jesus commended the church of Smyrna for:**

**(a) Their works (v. 9 KJV).**

**(b) Their tribulation or afflictions. (The Greek word conveys the idea of pressing grapes until the juice comes forth).**

**(c) Their poverty (which means "beggarly, destitute" and describes one who is not able to even put food on the table). The believers of Smyrna were undergoing persecution that had reduced them to poverty. Probably because they had rejected Rome's emperor worship and of the Jews because they proclaimed Jesus as Messiah.**

**2. Jesus said the source of hostility and persecution was the Devil himself. The Jews blasphemed Jesus as the Messiah and became a synagogue of Satan in**

contrast to the congregation of the Lord. This is how the Last Days Bible translation states this:

***<sup>9</sup>"I am well aware of all you've been doing (i.e. your good works), and of the persecutions and poverty you've endured. But the truth is, you are rich! And I know all about the harsh charges being made against you by some who say they are God's people. But they are not God's people; they belong to the church of Satan.***

***<sup>10</sup>"Don't in any way be afraid of the things you are about to suffer. Yes, the devil is about to throw some of you into jail so you may be tested. You will suffer persecution for ten days. But you must continue to be faithful to Me, even if you must die because of your stand for Me and the truth. Then I will give you the crown of life." (Rev. 2:9-10)***

**2 Tim. 3:12 says, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." It' going to happen! Persecution should be a part of the Christian life! (Mt. 11:12) (The story of Jane; Man who got in my face; Man in park Acts 24:24-25 KJV)**

**3. To this persecuted church Christ's gives two commands: *Do not fear and be faithful to Me unto the end.***

**4. Those who overcome and will not deny Me will receive a crown of life and will not be hurt by the second death. (Heads & Tails: crown of life – second death).**

### **THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA (Rev. 2:8-11)**

**REV 2:8 "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: (NIV)**

**These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.**

1. Who was addressing John? (2:8)
2. What church was the subject of this letter from Jesus? (2:8)
3. How did the speaker in this passage identify Himself? (2:8)

**[9] I know your afflictions and your poverty--yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.**

1. What kind of contrast did Jesus draw? (2:9)
2. What did Christ say about some so-called Jews in Smyrna? (2:9)

**[10] Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.**

1. What did Jesus say to comfort the Christians in Smyrna? (2:10)
2. What prophetic warning did Christ give to the church in Smyrna? (2:10)
3. How long would the church in Smyrna suffer? (2:10)
4. What challenge did Christ give His audience? (2:10)
5. What reward was promised the Christians at Smyrna if they hung on? (2:10)

**REV 2:11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.**

1. Who else did Jesus say could benefit from the message to the church at Smyrna? (2:11)
2. What final promise was made to "him who overcomes"? (2:11)

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