

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Chapters 2-3 – Church History – Seven Letters to Seven Churches

THE SMYRNA LETTER – REVELATION 2:8-11

Today's study reveals the second and _____ of the seven letters written to the seven churches in Asia Minor by the apostle John—the letter to the church at Smyrna. Here in this prophetic period of history (200-325 AD) we learn of the ruthless _____ against believers from the Pagan Roman Empire. This is an age that is marked by horrific torture and _____ for all those that have a love for the words of God and the saving testimony of Jesus Christ alone, plus nothing, minus nothing.

The name Smyrna means:

- Myrrh, bitterness, and _____

Myrrh by contrast it is associated with *beauty* and *bitterness with death* - Although *myrrh* is a costly perfume made from the bitter gum of a middle eastern tree, it was also associated with death as it was used for embalming purposes. Therefore, Smyrna is connected with *beauty*, *bitterness* and *death*.

There are positive commendations given:

1. It was hard working – verse 9a
2. It looked forward to a _____ for persevering through persecutions – verse 9-10

- a. Their persecution – They were suffering bodily, emotionally, and economically

- According to reliable historians:

The city was teeming with false religions, idol worship, mother goddess worship, Caesar worship and all kinds of immoral, unrighteous activity. Its citizens were intolerant of true Bible Christianity; they bitterly persecuted and put to death all born again saints whose lives were in direct opposition to the vile religious culture.

There was a large Jewish population in Smyrna that bitterly blasphemed Christ as “the hanged one” and vehemently opposed true Bible Christianity. Believers were turned over to local Roman magistrates for severe punishment – they were betrayed by local “delators” (informers), most of whom were Jews. (Polycarp would later be turned over and martyred in Smyrna circa 155 AD).

The believers in Smyrna were not able to prosper financially – for them gainful employment was scarce; this was due to their love for Christ and open opposition to the city's mainstream religions and the decadent behavior of its populace.

Smyrna was a dangerous place for all faithful born again believers...the letter from John would have encouraged them to persevere for Jesus Christ.

The New Unger's Bible Handbook – revised by Gary Larsen; The IVP Bible Background Commentary – by Craig S. Keener



b. Their reward – a crown of life – James 1:12; Rev. 2:10

- Jesus Christ values this type of dedication to him. He encourages this church by reminding them that he is *“the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive”* – verse 8
- There are five crowns or rewards revealed in the Bible that can be earned by the faithful servants of Jesus Christ:
 - 1) Crown of Righteousness – 2 Timothy 4:8 – Given to those who love the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ
 - 2) Incorruptible Crown – 1 Corinthians 9:25 – Given for temperance or moderation in all things of life
 - 3) Crown of Rejoicing – 1 Thessalonians 2:19 – The soul winner’s or evangelist’s crown
 - 4) Crown of Glory – 1 Peter 5:4 – The shepherd’s crown given to those who pastor people in the word of God. This certainly could be given to faithful teachers and disciplers
 - 5) Crown of Life – Revelation 2:10; James 1:12 – The martyr’s crown. This includes those who endure temptation by dying to self

There is no negative condemnation given:

1. However, there is a condemnation given to the unsaved citizenry imposters in Smyrna – verse 9b

- Those that say they are Jews and are _____

2. This act is condemned for:

a. Blasphemy

- An indignity offered to God by words or writing; reproachful, contemptuous or irreverent words uttered impiously against Jehovah. An injury offered to God by denying that which is due and belonging to him or attributing to him that which is not agreeable to his character.

Websters 1828 dictionary

- It is blasphemous to believe, teach, and preach that the church has _____ the nation of Israel and the Jewish people. To believe that God is finished with Israel and will not restore them, as clearly prophesied in scripture, is called *blasphemy* by Jesus Christ himself.

b. The Synagogue of Satan

- The synagogue is an assembly or _____ place of Jews that meet for the express purpose of prayer, scripture reading, doctrinal studies, worship, fellowship, and various social events.

- Defining the *synagogue of Satan* has been elusive since it was penned and preserved in scripture... But if we go by the definition of a real synagogue and pair it with Satan, we have an assembly of people that gather for _____ spiritual purposes...
- This is an assembly or gathering of people that steal and then _____ to themselves (knowingly or unknowingly) the oracles of God, the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the services of God, and the promises which were given solely to Israel (Ro. 3:1-2; 9:3).

They spearhead and instigate persecution of believers who oppose them with the scriptures

Three basic applications of the Smyrna letter:

1. Historically – 90 AD – 96 AD

- Smyrna was known as the most beautiful city in Asia. It was also the name of an herb that gave off a sweet-smelling aroma when _____.
- The church in Smyrna was *crushed* by its persecutors—pagan and counterfeit religionists. This letter from Jesus encouraged them to persevere and reminded them that it shall pass, with a reward on the other side (... *and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life* – vs. 10b).

2. Doctrinally – 200 AD – 325 AD (Church History)

- The Smyrna period of church history is commonly referred to by church historians as the Ante-Nicene Period or the time of the Ante-Nicene Church *Fathers*. (Remember, the word of God prohibits believers from calling any man _____ – Mt. 23:1-12). Some of the key players are Origen, Cyprian, Hippolytus, Clement, Athanasius, and Didymus. Because the leaders began to deviate from sound words during the previous Ephesus period, *these men during the Smyrna period* make additional critical errors:

God is finished with Israel because the church has now replaced them

Doctrinal errors concerning the millennial reign of Christ – A-millennialism, post-millennialism

Baptismal regeneration – you must be baptized for salvation and or to complete salvation

Apostolic sign gifts – exorcisms, laying on of hands for healing, prophecy, etc.

Losing salvation thru sinful behaviour or unfaithfulness – no saints preserved, no eternal security

All these heretical things and more began to surge, due to losing sight of Israel and the promises given to the Jewish people. When you lose sight of the Jew, you end up in doctrinal _____.

b. The Smyrna Church period takes place during the time of pagan Rome; it is the time of the _____ official Roman persecutions directed toward anyone and everyone called Christian. (notice how God refers to *Rome* at this time in history—the _____):

- 1) Under Nero - 67 AD
- 2) Under Domitian - 81 AD
- 3) Under Trajan - 108 AD
- 4) Under Marcus Aurelius Antoninus - 162 AD
- 5) Under Severus - 192 AD
- 6) Under Maximus - 235 AD
- 7) Under Decius - 249 AD
- 8) Under Valerian - 257 AD
- 9) Under Aurelian - 274 AD
- 10) Under Diocletian - 303 AD

c. The following is a partial list of the horrendous atrocities committed against born-again Christians by these _____ Roman Emperors and their magistrates during this time period:

- Boiling pitch poured on the head, then set on fire
- Babies thrown in the air and caught on spears: parents forced to watch
- Red hot plates of brass placed on the genitals
- Impaled on a stake and left for animals to eat
- Scourged and made to pass over thorns and nails barefoot
- Sewed up in skins of wild animals and eaten alive by savage dogs
- Made to run a gauntlet between two rows of people with whips
- Stripped and gored to death by wild beasts
- Stripped and placed in boiling water then heads cut off
- Tied to wild horses and dragged to death
- Sown into leather bags with snakes and scorpions; thrown into the river
- Stretched on a rack until every joint dislocated and bones broken
- Beaten with clubs, flesh torn with iron hooks, then burnt alive
- Dragged through the streets, scourged, scorched with torches, then beheaded
- Scourged and laid naked on live coals mingled with broken glass
- Thrown into caves and left to starve to death
- Boiling oil poured on naked body; lit torches applied to sides and armpits
- Stones tied around neck and driven like cattle into the sea to drown
- Laid on a gridiron and slow roasted over an open flame until dead
- Stomach cut open; corn put inside for wild pigs to eat with the intestines

Church History by Greg Axe – page 168

- d. The Smyrna time was by contrast a beautiful church period full of growth and gospel propagation, yet a time of horrific persecution, bitterness, and death...

But, though persecuting malice raged, yet the gospel shone with resplendent brightness; and firm as an impregnable rock, withstood the attacks of its boisterous enemies with success. Tertullian, who lived in this age, informs us that if the Christians had collectively withdrawn themselves from the Roman territories, the empire would have been greatly depopulated.

Foxe's Book of Martyrs, 12

3. Devotionally – 2025 AD

- Although our persecutions today in 2025 are nothing compared to the believers in Smyrna and to those during the corresponding time in church history, we still suffer harassment, maltreatment, discrimination, and sufferings of various kinds... The best thing we can do is work hard serving God, stay focused of Jesus Christ our Saviour, and believe the words of God, with the overarching knowledge that this too shall pass.

NEXT WEEK: The Pergamos Letter – Rev. 2:12-17