

The Letter to the Seven Churches of Asia: Smyrna

- I. Introduction:
 - a. **(Rev 2:8-11)** “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.”
 - b. The City of Smyrna
 - i. “Smyrna's superb natural harbor made the city an important commercial center. In spite of keen competition from the neighboring cities of Ephesus and Pergamum, Smyrna called itself "the first city of Asia."
 - ii. “As early as 195 B.C., Smyrna foresaw the rising power of Rome and built a temple for pagan Roman worship. In 23 B.C., Smyrna was given the honor of building a temple to the Emperor Tiberius because of its years of faithfulness to Rome. Thus, the city became a center for the cult of emperor worship—a fanatical "religion" that later, under such emperors as Nero (ruled A.D. 54-68) and Domitian (ruled A.D. 81-96), brought on severe persecution for the early church.” (Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary)
 - iii. Seat of Emperor Worship
 1. Emperor worship started – Was very strong in this city
 - a. “There were also temples to Cybele and Zeus, and in one of them an inscription honoring Nero as "the Saviour of the whole human race." In 26 A.D., they also erected a temple to the roman emperor Tiberius, and were clearly a center of that cult of emperor-worship which resulted in so much sorrow for the church.” (Coffman Commentary of the New Testament)
 2. Polycarp condemned and executed for being a Christian (tell story)
 - c. The Church of Christ at Smyrna
 - i. No record of it being founded – most probable during Paul's third missionary journey
 - ii. Paul going into Jewish Synagogues and preaching
 1. **(Acts 19:10)** “And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.”
- II. Christ Description

- a. **(Rev 2:8)** “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. **(Rev 1:17-18)** “Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that **liveth**, and was **dead**; and, behold, I am **alive for evermore**, Amen; and have the **keys of hell and of death**.”
 - 1. First and Last – He is God and has the power to protect his people
 - a. **(Isa 41:4)** “Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he.”
 - b. **(Isa 44:6)** “Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.”
 - c. **(Isa 48:12, 14)** “Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last... . . . All ye, assemble yourselves, and hear; which among them hath declared these things? The Lord hath loved him: he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans.”
 - ii. Jesus uses this description of himself to give comfort that Jesus has power over death.
 - 1. Though they would be threaten by death they need to continue on and endure
 - 2. Jesus has the keys of Hades and death. – Has power over them
 - iii. **(Matt 10:28)** “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”
 - 1. Kill the body – This body will rise again!
 - a. **(1 Cor 15:53-56)** “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.”
 - b. Death is a sad occurrence for we will miss those that die - But we do not have to fear physical death
 - 2. Must fear the one that can destroy both soul and body in hell (Second Death)
 - a. Must fear spiritual death – second death
 - b. **(Rev 20:10-15)** “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be

tormented day and night for ever and ever. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

iv. Jesus gives comfort to the church

1. **(Rev 2:8)** “...which was dead, and is alive”

- a. He is saying, “I’ve been through what you are experiencing. I was alive once with flesh and have been persecuted and put to death. Now I am alive! Because I live you can live also.”

III. Condition of the Church

a. **(Rev 2:9)** “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.”

b. Surrounded by – “Synagogue of Satan”

i. “...the whole multitude both of the heathen and Jews, who dwelt at Smyrna, cried out with uncontrollable fury, and in a loud voice, “This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, and the overthrower of our gods, he who has been teaching many not to sacrifice, or to worship the gods.”” “This, then, was carried into effect with greater speed than it was spoken, the multitudes immediately gathering together wood and bundles out of the shops and baths; the Jews especially, according to custom (as usual), eagerly assisting them in it.” (Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1)

1. This took place on the Jewish Sabbath - “Great Sabbath”
“Feast of Unleavened Bread”

ii. “They say they are Jews, and are not”

1. **(Rom 2:28-29)** “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”

2. A true Jew is a child of God; one in the kingdom of God

3. **(Luke 17:20-21)** “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”
 4. Like the physical Jew was born into the family of the Jews, a spiritual Jew is born into that family of God
 - a. **(John 1:12-13)** “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”
 - b. **(John 3:3-5)** “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”
- iii. The church’s greatest hindrance was the persecution of pseudo-Jews
- c. “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich)”
- i. “Know thy works”
 1. Jesus takes notice of what’s going on to his people
 - a. **(Heb 4:13)** “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”
 - b. **(Ps 139:11-12)** “If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.”
 2. He knows both the good and evil things done to us and against us.
 - a. **(Prov 15:3)** “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”
 3. He knows our works also
 - ii. “Tribulation”
 1. Tribulation – “θλιψις” “A pressing, pressing together, pressure – Greek metaphor, oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress, straits” (Thayer's Greek Lexicon)
 2. Tribulations and Persecutions Should be Expected
 - a. The prophets of God were persecuted
 - i. **(Matt 23:37)** “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I

have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!”

b. **(2 Tim 3:12)** “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

iii. “Poverty (But thou art rich)”

1. Two possible reasons for the church at Smyrna to be in poverty

a. They were poor to start with

i. **(James 2:5)** “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”

ii. **(Matt 19:20-24)** “All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

b. They were kicked out of their guilds because of their refusal to worship Caesar and sacrifice

i. Christians were looked at as being unpatriotic and atheists!

1. Failed to recognize Caesar as Lord
2. Failed to sacrifice – only an atheist would not sacrifice

ii. Being kicked out of these guilds they were unable to work in high paying jobs – had to resort to the lower paying jobs

1. Perhaps these people did what the rich young ruler would not do!

2. They understood what it cost a man to be a Christian

a. **(Matt 16:24)** “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

- b. **(Luke 14:33)** “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”
 - 3. Two types of riches
 - a. **(Matt 6:19-21)** “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”
 - i. Riches that the world sees
 - ii. Riches that God sees
 - b. Riches that the world sees – physical
 - i. They count ‘stuff’ and ‘cash’ = ‘wealth’
 - ii. Corruptible – will not last (**2 Peter 3:10-12**) “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?”
 - c. Riches that God sees – spiritual
 - i. They are everlasting
- IV. Encouragement to endure tribulations
 - a. **(Rev 2:10)** “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.”
 - i. **(Matt 5:11-12)** “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”
 - ii. **(1 Peter 3:14)** “But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.”
 - b. Jesus did not promise to take away the tribulations but gave them comfort and encouraged them – Same for us today – Why should we expect any different?

- i. Why do we feel that God has failed us when things go wrong?
 - ii. **(James 1:2-4)** “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”
 - c. Must have the attitude of Polycarp:
 - i. “I bless thee that thou hast thought me worthy of the present day and hour, to have a share in the number of the martyrs and in the cup of Christ...”
 - ii. **(1 Peter 4:16)** “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him **glorify God** on this behalf.”
 - d. “Ten days of tribulation”
 - i. Limited amount of time – One day the tribulations will finish and rewards will follow
 - ii. Foxes’ Book of Martyrs reports that there is ten distinct periods of persecutions in the Roman Empire
 - e. If we endure we will receive a crown of life
 - i. **(2 Tim 4:6-8)** “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”
- V. Divine Promises
 - a. **(Rev 2:11)** “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.”
 - i. Be saved from eternal separation from God in hell