

Letter to the Church At Smyrna
(Rev 2:8-11)

(Lesson 4)

I. What we know about the city of Smyrna.

- A. Smyrna was located about 35 miles north of Ephesus.
 - 1. It was a wealthy city second only to Ephesus in that region.
 - 2. It also was a seaport city, and unlike Ephesus, it still exists today.
 - 3. It also enjoyed a certain amount of freedom to self-rule.
- B. It was a city of great wealth and beauty.
 - 1. It also had a stadium, library, and the largest public theater in Asia Minor.
 - 2. It had it's share of temples to pagan gods and shrines to the roman emperor.
- C. This is the only place in scripture where Smyrna is listed.
 - 1. Other literary writings clearly picture it as a city of great wickedness and immorality.
 - 2. It was also strongly opposed the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - 3. Persecution ran rampant from both gentile and Jewish opposition.

II. The Letter is once again directed to the angel or messenger of the church. (v8)

- A. As pastor he is the under shepherd of the church of God.
 - 1. He was responsible to feed the flock.
 - 2. Guide the flock in their spiritual journey.
 - 3. Protect the flock from the enemy that sought their destruction.
- B. Jesus is portrayed as the eternal one.
 - 1. Again, He was before all things, He will always continue to exist.
 - 2. He is the one who paid the penalty for our sins on the cross of Calvary.
 - 3. The third day He arose victorious over death, hell and the grave.

III. Jesus commends them for their faithfulness in enduring persecution and poverty. (9)

- A. The words "thy works" are not in many of the earliest and best manuscripts.
 - 1. It should literally read "I know thy tribulation and poverty."
 - 2. This actually makes the address more personal and specific.
- B. Because they faithfully stood for the cross of Jesus Christ, they paid a large price.
 - 1. They found themselves suffering at the hands of roman sympathizers.
 - 2. Because they refused to call Caesar lord, they were targets of the masses.
 - 3. Some lost their homes and their businesses and as a result, they suffered poverty.
 - 4. Even though they were living in poverty physically, they were rich spiritually.
- C. Many Jews voiced complaints toward them and sought to stop the gospel message.
 - 1. The Jews claimed to be the children of God physically.
 - 2. Their actions showed they did not know Him spiritually.
 - 3. The term synagogue of Satan indicates they were in essence opposing the work of God.
 - 4. They were being used as pawns to help hinder the work of God.

IV. The church is encouraged to keep the faith. (v10)

- A. They were instructed to stop being afraid of those things they would suffer. (Matt10:28)
1. They needed to remember that Jesus also suffered unjustly.
 2. He knew what they were facing, He also knew they would be victorious in the end.
 3. While it appeared, the opposition was human, the real enemy was Satan. (Eph. 6:12)
 4. Some would be arrested and thrown in prison, and some would even die.
 5. Polycarp is an example of this severe persecution, which included both roman officials and Jewish influencers.

Note: Before his death, Polycarp famously told the Roman proconsul, "For eighty-six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

- B. The duration of their persecution would last 10 days. (Four basic interpretations)
1. Some take it literally that it would be 10 literal days, it would be intense but short.
 2. Some hold to a one day equals one year, thus a ten-year period of intense persecution.
 3. Some believe it is ten distinct persecutions under the Roman emperors who preceded Constantine; or to the ten years of persecution under Diocletian. (303-313 A.D.)
 4. Many bible scholars believe it simply implies a short time of persecution compared to spending eternity in the presence of almighty God.
- C. Jesus encourages the church at Smyrna to be faithful even to death.
1. Paul said that the suffering he endured in ministry did not compare to the glory he would experience in eternity. (Rom 8:18)
 2. Those that are faithful to death will receive a crown of life.
 3. Some believe this will be a literal crown that can be laid at Jesus' feet.
 4. Others believe it is speaking of eternal life itself.
 5. Being faithful to death speaks of displaying a genuine life changing faith.

V. Jesus again speaks to those that have ears to hear. (v11)

- A. He once again mentions the overcomers.
1. According to (1 John 5:5), an overcomer is one who believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and puts faith in Him as their Lord and Savior.
 2. Their faith enables them to overcome the world with all its temptations, and helps them stay strong when facing trials and tribulations.
- B. The second death is clearly defined in (Rev 20:6, 14, 21:8)
1. It is the lake of fire. A place prepared for the devil and his angels. (Matt 25:41)
 2. According to Jesus it is a place of eternal fire. (Mark 9:44, 46, 48)
 3. It is a place of punishment for those who reject the Lord Jesus Christ.