**Letters to the 7 Churches: Smyrna**

*Revelation 2:8-11*

Background

Revelation (by definition) means to uncover or to reveal. John identifies at the start that this is the “Revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:1). The intent is that Jesus become clearly visible—in His full exaltation (Rev 1:7-20).

Although difficult to understand at times, the book comes with a blessing in hearing and responding in obedience (1:3 and 22:7, 14). After an initial greeting to the seven churches, John sees a vision of the Son of Man (1:9-20). He sees seven golden lampstands (representing churches) and seven stars (that were in the Son of Man’s hands that represent messengers from the churches, v. 20).

Although these seven churches were actual, historical churches in Asia Minor, they represent the types of churches that perennially exist throughout the church age. What Christ says to these churches is relevant in all times.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Apostle John is writing this in 95-96 BC and is exiled to the island of Patmos. The reason for John’s imprisonment: **Revelation 1:9**—*I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*

It is Christ who is building His church: **Matthew 16:18b**—*I [Jesus] will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.*

*The* ***context of the Smyrna church is suffering****. But that isn’t a surprise:
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* ***John 16:33****—These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.*
* ***2 Timothy 3:12****—Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*
* ***1 Peter 5:10****—After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.*

Persecution does not destroy a true church; it makes it stronger!

7 noted points for each of the 7 churches

1. **Identification of “The One”**

**Revelation 2:8**—*“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:*

**Revelation 1:17**—*When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last*

1. The first and the last

**Isaiah 41:4**—*“Who has performed and accomplished it, Calling forth the generations from the beginning? ‘I, the Lord, am the first, and with the last. I am He.’”*

**Isaiah 44:6**—*Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me.*

**Isaiah 48:12**—*“Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last.*

**Revelation 22:*13****—I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”*

1. Who was dead, and has now come to life
(AKA, the eternality of God and the death of Christ)

**Romans 4:25—***He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.*

**Hebrews 7:16**—*who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.*

1. **Identification of the church**

**Revelation 2:8a**—*“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write*

* Angel (Aggelos)—messenger. This is a representative from the church who will take the letter back to the church. Likely an elder or pastor.
* They were poor physically, but rich spiritually (v.9)
* They were powerless, destitute, persecuted, but finding hope and comfort in the Savior.
* There are no other biblical references to this church
* **Acts 19:10**—*This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.*
1. **Identification of the city**

**Revelation 2:8a**—*“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write*

* 35-40 miles or so north of Ephesus; harbor town
* It was called “the crown of Asia” for its beauty
* It is an ancient city; modern day Izmir
* Smyrna means “Myrrh” (an ointment coming from a thorny tree)
	+ **Matthew 2:11**—wise men brought myrrh at Jesus birth
	+ **Mark 15:23**—They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it
	+ **John 19:39**—Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes for the burial of Jesus
* Myrrh is then well characteristic of this church as it faced intense persecution and pending death. They would be a crushing sweet aroma to heaven as God allowed Satan to test their faith.
* There was a great alter to Caesar in the city. Yearly, people would have to burn incense (identifying “Caesar as Lord”) and receive a certificate. Without a certificate would be paramount to treason and punishable by death.
* Christians identify Jesus alone as Lord and do not bow the knee to Caesar. This discovery and refusal cost believers their life.
* Romans hated Christians. Jews hated Christians. Both were happy to see them persecuted and killed.
* Additionally, there was worship of hundreds of gods. Pagan worship was rampant.
1. **Identification of what they did well**

***Revelation 2:9—****‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan*

* You think you’re poor when in fact you are rich. **Contrast that** with the church in Laodicea that thought they were rich, when they were in fact poor (**Rev 3:17**).
* **Blasphemy—**words spoken against God, slandering God
* The Jewish people historically would say they worship the One true living God (**Deut 6:4**). Their rejection of God incarnate (Jesus) would demonstrate that they became just a pagan and Satanic as Emperor worship.

**John 8:44**—*You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*

***Romans 2:28-29—****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 which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.*

1. **Identification of what they did not do well**

There is no reference to wrong doing. There are only 2 of the 7 churches that do not have issues to address: Smyrna and Philadelphia.

1. **Identification of how to change**

**Revelation 2:10**—*Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

* *Illustrated historically by the death of one of the Pastor/Elders at Smyrna by the name of Polycarp. He died as a martyr in 155 AD at the age of 86.*

***Matthew 24:13****—But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.*

***Matthew 10:22****—You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.*

1. **Identification of exhortation and promise**

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

* Each of the 7 letters ends with “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” **Pay attention! Listen up!**
* Promises are connected to “*him who overcomes*”
* *The second death*

 **Revelation 20:12-14**—*And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.****13****And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.****14****Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.*

1. The MacArthur Study Bible, p. 1993 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)