

LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA

Introduction:

1. Smyrna was located on the western coast of Asia Minor about 40 miles north of Ephesus.
2. It was a beautiful and prosperous city with two harbors on the Aegean Sea (known as the “crown of Asia”).
3. Mount Pagos was prominent in the city of Smyrna.
 - a. It was a chief geologic feature.
 - b. It was also home to numerous temples dedicated to the pagan gods.
 - c. The “street of gold” began at the temple of Zeus and encircled the hill, ending at the temple of Cybele.
- d. According to Barclay, this caused the hill to resemble a reclining giant with a necklace of gold and a crown of pagan temples.
4. Smyrna was a host city for the Olympic Games and claimed to be the birthplace of the poet Homer.
5. Smyrna was the center for the worship of Dionysus, the god of wine.
6. They were pleased to wear a physical crown, but Jesus wrote to them of the crown of life...

I. Salutation

Revelation 2:8 a

- A. It is not known when or by whom the church at Smyrna was founded.
 1. It is likely that the evangelism of the Ephesians was responsible for establishing the church in Smyrna (cf. Acts 19:10, 26).
 2. However, the Bible does not give specific information.
- B. Nevertheless, the church existed in this city as a light in the darkness of paganism and materialism.

II. Description of Jesus

Revelation 2:8 b

- A. Jesus is described as “the first and the last.”
 1. This reminds us of His eternal nature (cf. John 1:1-4; Rev. 1:8).
 2. It also reminds us of His absolute authority (cf. Matthew 28:18).
- B. Jesus is described as He “which was dead and is alive.”

III. Commendation

Revelation 2:9

- A. The Lord knows His people (cf. 2 Timothy 2:19).
- B. The church at Smyrna was commended for her works.
 1. Clearly, this congregation was not engaged in evil works, but those that served and glorified God.
 2. The Lord’s church must work (cf. John 9:4; Col. 1:9-10; 1 Cor. 15:58).
- C. The church at Smyrna was commended for its faithfulness in spite of poverty.
 1. No doubt their poverty added to their tribulation and suffering.
 2. However, Jesus reminded them that in spite of their poverty in material things they were wealthy in the most important areas.
 - a. Though they had no treasures upon the earth, they possessed treasure in Heaven (cf. Matthew 6:19-20; 1 Timothy 6:19).

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Lesson Five

Revelation 2:8-11

- b. They were the exact opposite of the rich fool (Luke 12:15-34).
 3. A lack of money must not keep one from serving God (cf. 2 Cor. 8:2).
 4. When Jesus says, "Thou art," man must pay attention.
 - D. The church at Smyrna was commended for its endurance in spite of tribulation.
 1. The word "tribulation" means, "oppression, affliction or distress."
 2. Those at Smyrna were being persecuted for their faith.
 - a. First, they suffered at the hand of the Jews.
 - i. They claimed to be Jews but were not (cf. Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-8; Galatians 3:6-9; etc.).
 - ii. They are called the "synagogue of Satan" because they were doing his work – lying and murdering (cf. Jn. 8:44).
 - b. Also, they suffered at the hand of the Gentiles (pagans).
 3. The Roman government persecuted the church at Smyrna.
 - a. History tells of a man named Polycarp (AD 69 – 156) who was a student of the apostle John.
 - b. He is sometimes called the bishop of Smyrna.
 - c. In AD 156, he was brought before the Governor and promised his freedom if he would renounce Christ.
 - d. Polycarp replied, "Eighty and six years have I served Christ, and he has done me nothing but good; how then could I curse Him, my Lord and Savior?"
 - e. Thus, Polycarp was burned alive.
 - f. Ten other Christians (including some from the city of Philadelphia) were also martyred in Smyrna's stadium.
 - g. Interestingly, sources say that the Jews in the city gathered the wood for the fire that ended the life of Polycarp.
 4. The Lord Himself was aware of the suffering of His people.
- IV. Condemnation
 - A. Jesus issued no condemnation for this faithful congregation.
 - B. What if Jesus wrote a letter to us or to you?
- V. Warnings
 - A. Because there was no condemnation, there was no warning to repent.
 - B. What peace these Christians must have possessed because they knew that they were living a faithful life for the Lord.
- VI. Exhortations
 - A. "Fear nothing."
 1. Naturally, with severe persecution comes great fear.
 2. But the church at Smyrna was told to fear nothing – not even prison or death.
 3. Trials had come in the past and more would come in the future.
 4. Even if they were of a short duration, they would still serve to test the faith of God's children.
 5. Yet, they were to have no fear...

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Lesson Five

Revelation 2:8-11

- a. Because of their Lord (Matt. 8:26; 10:28; John 14:27; Rom. 8:15; Heb. 13:6)
- b. Because of their sword (2 Tim. 1:7; Heb. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:14-15)
- c. Because of their reward (John 14:1; James 1:12; 2 Tim. 4:6-8)

B. "Be faithful."

1. In spite of persecution...
2. In spite of prison...
3. "Unto death" – not *extensive*, but *intensive*.

VII. Blessings

- A. "Crown of life" – *Victory crown of eternal life!*
- B. "Not hurt of the second death"
 1. Death is a separation of the spirit from the body.
 2. The second death is eternal separation of the spirit from God.
 3. Hell will not hurt the one who overcomes!