



LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

July 2nd 2017 — Part 9
“The Letter to the Church of Smyrna”



The City of Smyrna

- Modern day Izmir, Turkey. In the 1st. century A.D. the city was quite large (c. 200,000 pop.). Apart from this letter we know nothing of the church in Smyrna, but from church history we know that in 156 A.D. it was the location of the martyrdom of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna and a disciple of the apostle John.

“Eighty-six years have I served Christ, and he has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” - Polycarp

The city was famous for: (1) _____

(2) Loyalty to the _____.

The Vision of Christ

Rev. 2:8—“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

“...the first and the last...” →

“...who died and came to life.” →

Jesus’ Knowledge of His Church

Rev. 2:9—“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Their Present Circumstances

1. _____ Persecution →

Jesus’ Perspective:

2. _____ Persecution →

“slander”—βλασφημία (blasphēmía)—Speech that denigrates or defames (reviling, denigration, disrespect, slander).

Jesus’ Perspective:

His Exhortation

Rev. 1:10—Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

⇒ Do not fear even though their persecution would become more severe.

Isa. 41:4, 10a—⁴Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he.
^{10a}fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God;

The true source of their affliction →

The ultimate purpose of their affliction →

“ten days”—This could refer to a literal, 10 day period of time or could refer to stages of persecution over the years. It is probably an allusion to Daniel 1:14 where Daniel and his friends refused to defile themselves and remained faithful to God during a 10 day period of testing.

“Be faithful unto death...”

- Throughout the NT, Christ is set forward as the example of how a believer is to conduct themselves in the world.

1 Cor. 1:11—*Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.*

1 John 2:6—*the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.*

→ Jesus' exhortation to the church at Smyrna is to imitate His _____ even unto death.

The Crown of Life

- On the hills outside the city there were a number of temples and government buildings referred to as the “crown of Smyrna.” Laurel wreath crowns are also common in the ancient world, associated with athletic victory and pagan religion (both Cybele and Bacchus are pictured wearing these crowns).

→ Just as the loyal citizens of Smyrna were faithful to Rome and to the gods, so Christ's people are to be faithful to Him who would give to them the crown of _____ !

James 1:11—*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.*

The Prophetic Call & Promise

Rev. 2:11—*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.'*

- This is the prophetic Word of the Lord given by the Spirit through Jesus, the Great Prophet of the church!

The Second Death

- This terminology refers to the eternal separation of unbelievers from God.

Rev. 20:14—*Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.*

Rev. 21:8—*But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”*

“The one who conquers” →

The Vision of the Son of Man for Smyrna

1. Jesus is the First and the Last who is sovereign over all that His people _____.
2. Jesus died but is alive forever. He is the living proof that death will not _____ His people.
3. In being conquered or overcome by the world and the earth dwellers, believers ironically conquer or overcome the world because they pass through _____ and into eternal life.

Questions for Reflection

In what ways have I experienced persecution from the world? How is this similar/different to what other believers at other times and in other places have experienced?

Which am I tempted more to fear: slander, economic persecution, or violent persecution?

Which verses have I memorized or do I need to memorize which call me not to fear?