

Chapter 1

Smyrna: Martyrdom (2:8–11)

1.1 Address opening the letter (2:8a)

Revelation 2:8a

And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write . . .

1. **Smyrna:** Smyrna is commercial, wealthy, beautiful city, and has harbour and trade route passing it. Smyrna is about 35-40 miles north of Ephesus. Smyrna is noted as a centre of learning, especially science and medicine. Homer was born and brought up in this city. City worshipped Greek goddess Cybele. City had good relationship with Rome and also worshipped the emperor. Domitian (81-96) made emperor worship compulsory for all citizens. Each year they had to burn incense before the emperor and a certificate is issued. The believers experienced severe persecution and all the hardships that accompany it. Polycarp was burned alive at the age of 86 in this city as the 12th martyr. The strong Jewish community also opposed Christians and often helped the Romans. Smyrna means bitter in Greek and its Hebrew equivalent means myrrh used for embalming. Application: Many Christian's life is characterised by bitterness to God, others, or their circumstances.

1.2 Attributes of the speaker (2:8b)

Revelation 2:8b

... These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:

1. **The first and the Last:** A title used by Isaiah for the God of Israel and points to eternity of Jesus . It

encourages the church which is going through persecution.

Isa 41:4,6. Who has performed and done it, Calling the generations from the beginning? 'I, the Lord, am the first; And with the last I am He.

Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last.

Isa 48:12. Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last.

Rev 22:13. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the [a]Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."

2. **Was dead, but came to life:** the eternal one became a part of time and human history. But it was a single occurrence in history (death) and a continuous state of existence in life. Just as He experienced death and rose in triumph over it, so the martyrs also will have eternal life.

1.3 Knowledge about the people of the Church (2:9)

Revelation 2:9

I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

1. **Tribulation:** church was undergoing great tribulation and is commended for its endurance of this suffering.
2. **Poverty:** more than the material poverty, the poverty resulted from confiscation of goods and imprisonment because of the faith. Note that this city was rich to the point that one historian commented that “To some this was the ideal city on earth”. The poverty was only to persecuted believers.
3. **Rich:** poor materially, but rich spiritually before God; unlike Laodicea. Application: Material prosperity is not of ultimate value, however, spiritual resources are far more lasting and important from the perspective of Christ.
4. **Blasphemy:** It could be against God directly or by false charges laid before the magistrates about Christian resulting in their imprisonment. Early church as accused of (1) cannibalism - eat the body and blood of

Christ, (2) lust, (3) immorality, (4) breaking up homes, (5) atheism since there are no idols, (6) political disloyalty since they are citizens of the KoG, and (7) incendiarism, that is riot and agitation.

5. **Jews:** three groups persecuted the church, namely the pagans, the heretics, and the Jews. In many cases, ironically, Jews surpassed the heathen in their hostility

Acts 13:50. But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region

Acts 14:2,5,19. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

Acts 17:5. But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

Acts 26:2. "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews,

1 Thes 2:14-15. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are [a]contrary to all men,

6. **They are not:** They are not Jews not because they not the physical descendants of Abraham, but because they have not met the inward condition to be a true Jew

Rom 2:28-29. For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose [a]praise is not from men but from God

7. **Synagogue of Satan:** not referring to any building, but they assembled and planned their assault on the church, putting themselves at the disposal of the devil to carry out his will.

1.4 State of the Church (10)

Revelation 2:10

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

1. **Do not fear:** even in the midst of trials, Jesus doesn't want the church to be concerned. However, to relieve their fear, Lord is not promising deliverance or his imminent return.
2. **Behold:** Call for special attention to this announcement.
3. **Devil is about to throw:** the advance knowledge of the persecution shows His sovereign wisdom in allowing it to happen, but the real author is Satan who effectively use Jews and Romans. Devils purpose to force the church to reject the faith in the wake of persecutions.
4. **That you may be tested:** the passive form of the word indicate God is not the author, but Satan and the objective is test or try or tempt them so that they may reject the faith whereas when God test, it is to approve.

God permits testing and He is involved indirectly, however, note the declared role of Satan in enticing believer to renounce the faith.

Jas 1:2-3. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

1 Pet 1:6-7. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

5. **Ten days:** points to an intensification of the persecution and refers to a definite period time to which the church will be subjected. Such limited period of persecution is well known in Biblical history. One illustration, not the fulfillment, is the persecution of Polycarp in this city in the mid-second century.

Num 14:33. And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness.

Est 3:13. And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions.

Ezek 4:6. And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have laid on you a day for each year.

Mat 12:40. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

6. **Be faithful until death:** keep on proving yourselves faithful, and the extent to which the faithfulness should go is unto death even if it is violent, complete and absolute. It is not that everyone will have to go through, but everyone must be willing. One's willingness to give his life the ultimate proof of his loyalty as a Christian disciple.
7. **Crown of life:** it is a garland of victory awarded to victorious athletes. The struggle and victory leads naturally to the promise of an eschatological victory over evil both here and in 3:11. Note that faithfulness is means of earning eternal life, but that such perseverance through suffering furnishes tangible assurance that they will receive eternal life through their faith in Christ. Again, the only incentive for faithfulness given to Smyrna is

life after death, whether that death comes my martyrdom or otherwise. It is appropriate that this promise came from the lips of him who died and came back to life

1 Cor 9:24-25. Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

Gal 2:2. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.

Phil 3:14. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

2 Tim 2:5. And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

1 Pet 5:4. and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

2 Tim 4:8. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Jas 1:12. Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

1.5 Promise of the Lords return

1. Absent for this church

1.6 Command to hear and obey (2:11a)

Revelation 2:11a

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches ...”

1. Same as that of the earlier church

1.7 Promise to the over comer (2:11b)

Revelation 2:11b

... He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”’

1. **Not hurt by the second death:** Strongest negative assertion about the future which the Greek language is capable. Unbelievers are given over to second death, but the over comers are exempted. It is not annihilation, but conscious unending punishment. The promise can be traced back to Genesis

Dan 12:2. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.

John 5:29. and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Rev 20:14. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Rev 21:8. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Gen 2:17. but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you[a] shall surely die.”

Gen 3:22. Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”

Rev 20:6. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years

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