

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: *The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. 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.*" (Revelation 2:8-9)

### I. Smyrna at a Glance

- a. This second letter is addressed to the church in Smyrna (modern Izmir), the only one of the seven cities still in existence (Izmir).
- b. Smyrna was about thirty-five miles north of Ephesus on the east shore of the Aegean Sea.
- c. Historians report that Smyrna was a beautiful city. It had a famous stadium, library, and public theater (the largest in Asia).
- d. The city had temples to the mythical Zeus, to Roman emperors and a goddess of nature.
- e. The city's strong allegiance to Rome, and their gods, plus a large Jewish population that was actively hostile to the Christians, made it extremely difficult to live as a believer in Smyrna.
- f. We do not know exactly when the church was first founded at Smyrna, but it could have been during the time Paul lived in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. (Acts 19:26)
  1. Ignatius' letter to Smyrna, written in 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., we learn that the church was already well organized, with a bishop (Polycarp), elders, and deacons.
  2. Polycarp, the "twelfth martyr in Smyrna", was burned at the stake after refusing to acknowledge Caesar as Lord.

### II. The Church at Smyrna, The Poor Rich Church

- a. In each of the seven letters, Christ identifies Himself from the description outlined in Revelation 1:13–16.
- b. This is a letter of encouragement. Notice that Jesus had nothing *against* the Smyrna church as compared to the Ephesus church. Smyrna is the poor church that was called to conquer.
- c. The church's great enemy at Smyrna was the local community of Jews, who were God's people racially, but not morally. (Rom. 2:28) The local Jews persecuted the Lord's church.
- d. Perhaps it was economic pressure from these Jews that brought the church to poverty, and slanderous accusations by them that led to imprisonment and death.
- e. They were poor in material resources but rich in faith. Their faith is praised.
- f. In this text there are three lessons on suffering: *Do not fear what you are about to suffer.* (v.10)
  1. Suffering is certain for those who faithfully follow the teachings of Christ. (2 Cor 3:12; 1 Pet 3:14)
  2. Suffering is limited. For the believers, it would be for *ten days* some time in their near future.
  3. Jesus is aware of the current and future suffering of His people. All of which will be rewarded.

### III. Practical Application – Pain and Praise

- a. God's sovereignty does not mean that Satan is prevented from inflicting pain and hurt.
- b. Nowhere does the NT promise freedom from suffering in this life. Without the suffering there will be no crown. (v.10)
- c. Christ's message to Smyrna and to us today, "do not be fearful, but faithful." With the Lord's help, we can look beyond the suffering and see the sovereign power of God.
- d. Those people in society who praise the church today, will persecute the church tomorrow.
- e. Stay in fellowship and stay faithful.