God has never, in the history of mankind, allowed his name to go long offended.
David Wilkerson

REVELATION CHAPTER TWO Verses 8-11
THE SEVEN CHURCHES-Part Two
A Look at the Church of Smyrna: The Church Being Persecuted
Handout Four
Prayer Study #403
First Love Ministries of Perry, Georgia USA

(much of the following was based on Rick Renner's book:
A Light in Darkness: Seven Messages, Seven Churches)

SMYRNA

Smyrna was a rich commercial metropolis. The claim to fame for Smyrna, however, was the high level of debauchery in pagan worship. Smyrna's streets were lined with idols, and the city was full of temples to Zeus, Aphrodite, Poseidon, Hades, and others. This was the first city to accept and promote Caesar worship. Very vulgar plays were performed in the theaters for the masses. Large public bathhouses allowed all kinds of sexual perversions, and Smyrna hosted one of the world's most foul and vile religions, the worship of the goddess Cybele, which I will discuss in the following paragraph. Smyrnans were so devoted to pagan worship that they initiated horrible persecution against Christians, blaming them for every misfortune or calamity. The Smyrnans martyred many nameless Christians. Smyrna was located between Ephesus (35 miles to the south) and Pergamum (60 miles to the southeast). The proconsul of Rome lived in Ephesus, but his official headquarter was in Pergamum. Smyrna had a large seaport and many travelers in and out and was known for the large number of prostitutes in the city. One of Smyrna's most famous citizens was Homer who wrote the Iliad and the Odyssey. Many in that day considered Smyrna as the most beautiful city of the world.

Cybele worship always included the shedding of blood, wild sexual celebrations, castration, and self-mutilation. The male priests castrated themselves and dressed as females, calling themselves priestess. They were considered neither male nor female. They functioned as mediums or oracles or channelers, what we would call psychics today. They got drunk and did drugs to open themselves up to the spirit world so that they could speak to those who came for supernatural direction.

The most famous of the Christian martyrs in Smyrna was Polycarp. A tradition says that a wealthy Christian woman, Callistro, bought Polycarp when he was a young slave boy in Smyrna. She adopted him and taught him about Jesus. Polycarp, who served as the bishop of the church at Smyrna, was born about the time that Peter and Paul were martyred. Polycarp became close to John and thus was one of the last close contacts of

John, who mostly likely mentored the young Polycarp. Polycarp first served as a deacon, but when the pastor of the Smyrna died, Polycarp was promoted to Pastor and became the Bishop of all the churches in the Smyrna area. Polycarp's writings were among the earliest Christian writings to survive.

Sadly, the group that stirred up Smyrna the most against Christians were the Jews who resent Christianity and made up all kinds of things against the Christians. The Jewish community caused Rome to regularly root out believers and viciously kill them.

The Jews of Smyrna especially hated Polycarp, who was well-respected by many nonbelievers in the community, and they demanded his death in the Great Stadium where wild animals (lions, tigers, leopards, rhinoceroses, bears, bulls, wild dogs, and crocodiles), who had been detained for long periods without any food, tore humans alive until they died. After brutal treatment, Polycarp was put to death in 166 AD. He was 86 years old. Among his last words before being burned at the stake on the Sabbath Day by the Jews were, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me wrong. How can I now blaspheme my King who has loved me so?"

When we speak of Smyrna today, we feel awed by the city where followers of Jesus received no correction from the Lord, but we must separate this small group of true believers from the city, which was one of great wickedness.

8 And to the angel (messenger) of the assembly (church) in Smyrna write: These are the words of the First and the Last, Who died and came to life again:

Verse 8: Jesus is assuring the Christians of Smyrna that He is the beginning and the end and knows the past, present and future. Nothing was happening to them that He was not aware of. Notice the title of Himself that Jesus gives. This was a church where Christians were frequently murdered for their faith, so they knew death was always looking them in the face. What comfort to know that the *First and Last* had overcome death by His own death for you and me.

9 I know your affliction and distress and pressing trouble and your poverty—but you are rich! And how you are abused and reviled and slandered by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Verse 9: Although the Smyrna Christians did not physically see Jesus, He assures them that He knows exactly what they are going through and is in their midst. The Greek word that is translated *affliction and distress and pressing trouble* here and translated as *tribulation* in the King James was first used to describe the specific act of tying a man up with a rope, laying him on his back, and then placing a huge boulder on top of him until his body was crushed. Yet Jesus says they are nevertheless extremely wealthy spiritually. The large Jewish population in Smyrna was especially hostile to the Gospel. Yet the

Torah taught that Jews were to treat non-Jews or Gentiles with respect (Leviticus 19:34). They were prohibited from speaking ill of someone with the intention of negatively affecting their reputation, from making false accusations against someone that stains his reputation, and from publicly humiliating another person. Thus, Jesus is probably saying here that though these Jews were born Jews, their behavior did not coincide with the teachings of the Torah.

Some believe that those *who say they are Jews and are not* are in modern times those who believe in replacement theology. Basically, those who believe in this theology believe that Israel has no part in the prophetic timetable of the Last Days and has been replaced by the Christian Church. Thus, Israel has no significance in the Last Days. I believe that that position is very wrong and unbiblical, and that Israel is still very dear to the heart of God.

Poverty in this verse implies that these people were not just poor but were beggars. They were the lowest of the low on the social scale and were treated like trash.

10 Fear nothing that you are about to suffer. [Dismiss your dread and your fears!] Behold, the devil is indeed about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested and proved and critically appraised, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be loyally faithful unto death [even if you must die for it], and I will give you the crown of life.

Verse 10: While John was on Patmos, the Smyrna Christians were going through some of the most horrifying persecutions of that time. When Jesus tells them to fear not, He uses the word *meden*, which means *to the immediately halt of something already in progress*. Yet Jesus does not try to sugarcoat what they are and will be going through. Their suffering is inescapable, and He did not want them caught by surprise, and He lets them know that this is an attack from Satan himself. To be cast into prison in those days was a horrible experience. Most wealthy people could be put on house arrest, but poor people were thrown into a room dug about 12 feet into the ground. There was no light and little food. The prisoners were kept in this hole until they either died of torture or starvation or were executed.

The *ten days* in this verse is an enigma to theologians. It is thought that this is a symbolic number and might refer to the ten persecutions of Roman Emperors, starting with Nero in 67 AD and ending with Diocletian in 303 AD, during which great numbers of Christians were imprisoned and slain.

Others point out that *ten days* was an idiomatic expression in Hebrew for a short amount of time as used in Genesis 24:55, Job 19:3, and Daniel 1:12. (Examples of English idioms would be *a drop in the bucket, a slap on the wrist, an arm and a leg, down to the wire,* etc.)

Jesus should give us all great comfort in the fact that He said He Himself would

give those, who were and are loyally faithful unto death, a crown of life. The word for crown is not for a royal diadem but the word *stephanos,* which describes the crown given to athletes after they had run their race or finished their contest victoriously.

There are five different types of crowns in the New Testament:

a. The Crown of Incorruption (1st Corinthians 9:25), given to believers who practice physical self-governance.

b. The Crown of Rejoicing (1st Thessalonians 2:19), the soul winner's crown.

c. The Crown of Righteousness (2nd Timothy 4:8), given to those who long for Jesus' appearing and live holy lives in anticipation of His return.

d. The Crown of Glory (1st Peter 5:4), the pastor's crown given to shepherds who faithfully pastor and teach God's people.

e. The Crown of Life (James 1:12 and Revelation 2:10), the martyr's crown given to those who suffer for their faith, those who die for Christ, and those who faithfully finish their race, regardless of great difficulties.

Notice that this verse starts out with "*fear nothing."* This is also an admonition to us today. We must not walk in fear but in faith. Times are going to get difficult, and it will be our greatest hour in the Church to shine for Jesus. Fear is a great tool of the enemy, and it is a big deal to the Lord. In fact, He separated Gideon's Army based on who was in fear and who wasn't. Surprisingly, the first group named to be thrown into the Lake of Fire are the fearful: *"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"* (Revelation 21:8).

11 He who is able to hear, let him listen to and heed what the Spirit says to the assemblies (churches). He who overcomes (is victorious) shall in no way be injured by the second death.

Chuck Missler says if you are born once, you die twice, but if you are born twice, you die once. Revelation refers to the *second death* four times: This verse in Revelation 2:11; also, Revelation 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 priest of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years;* 20:14-*Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death;* and 21:8-*which was covered in verse 10 above.*

In Smyrna, we see:

- **Name of Church:** Smyrna, which means *Myrrh:* Myrrh is a bitter tasting herb that was used in embalming and for pain relief. It gives off a pleasant scent when it is crushed. Myrrh is a symbol of *suffering unto death*. The Magi bought baby Jesus myrrh, frankincense, and gold representing Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King.

Myrrh also represents death. Jesus had to die that we might live. He was a Man of sorrows acquainted with grief. Smyrna today has 300,000 people and is in Turkey and called Izmir. In the New Testament times, it had 100,000 people.

- **Title of Jesus Christ:** The First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life (Revelation 2:8). This very title of Jesus refutes the Jehovah Witness doctrine. Jehovah Witnesses believe Jesus was the created being Michael, the Archangel, and they deny that He had a bodily resurrection. We find this phrase *first and last,* when speaking of the Lord,
    - Throughout Scripture: see Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, 48:12; Revelation 1:11, Revelation 1:17-18; Revelation 2:8; Revelation 22:13.
- **Encouragement:** The Lord says that the Church of Smyrna is spiritually rich and that they are to fear nothing. He also says that He sees their suffering for being Christians in a pagan society.
- **Correction & Consequences for not repenting:** This is the only one of the seven churches that receives *no* correction from the Lord. Therefore, there is no consequence for not repenting.
- **Rewards:** A Crown of Life: This crown is not like a king's crown. It is the crown of someone who is a victor or the winner of a contest.
- **Conclusion:** ***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches…*** (Revelation 2:11a).

Will You Be Poured Out

Will you be poured out like wine upon the altar for Me?
Will you be broken like bread to feed the hungry for Me?
Will you be so one with Me that I may do just as I please?
Be My life, My light, My love, My Word fulfilled.

Yes, I'll be poured out like wine upon the altar for You.
Yes, I'll be broken like bread to feed the hungry for You.
Yes, I'll be one with You that You may do just as You please.
I'll be Your life, Your light, Your love, Your word fulfilled.