

Church At Smyrna

REV 2:8 "And to the angel [messenger] of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

1. "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write" - See explanation of "angel" in notes found in Revelation 2:1.
 - a. Smyrna was located about 40 miles north of Ephesus.
 - b. It was a beautiful city known as "the ornament of Asia," and had a fine harbor on the Aegean Sea.
 - c. The city still exists as the Turkish city of Izmir and is of great historical interest.
 - d. We have no information about the circumstances of the establishment of the church in Smyrna.
 - e. The first reference to it anywhere in literature available to us today is in the Apocalypse.
 - f. It was likely established when Paul was preaching at Ephesus though we cannot be sure. (Acts 19:10).

ACT 19:10 And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

- g. Smyrna had built a temple to the emperor Tiberius in about 23 B.C..
- h. Later, when Domitian began pressing the matter of emperor worship, Smyrna was quick to obey.
- i This put the church in Smyrna in great jeopardy since its loyalty to Christ would prohibit such.
- j. Jesus did not have any words of criticism or condemnation for this church or the church at Philadelphia.
- k. This letter is the shortest of the seven letters Jesus wrote to the churches of Asia (127 words and 4 verses).
See NASB
- l. This was a very poor church materially, but was rich spiritually.
- m. The city of Smyrna was a very idolatrous city and this idolatry led to all kinds of abominations.
- n. A large number of Jews lived in Smyrna and it was the home of a Synagogue.
- o. These Jews were very antagonistic to the church as this letter reveals.

Description Of Jesus

2. "The first and the last" - This description is used two other times in the book of Revelation.

REV 1:17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last,

REV 22:13 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

a. These words all seem to have the same meaning as Revelation 1:8.

REV 1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

b. "Alpha" [the letter a] was the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and "Omega" [a long o] was the last letter.

c. The world came into existence through Jesus and He will end the world. (Jn. 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; 2 Pet. 3:10-13).

d. Jesus was "the author and finisher" of their faith. (Heb. 12:2).

3. "who was dead, and has come to life" - Jesus had died on the cross, but the grave was not able to hold Him.

a. He was raised on the 3rd day. (Jn. 2:19-21).

b. He was "the firstborn from the dead." (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5).

COL 1:18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, **the first-born from the dead**; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything.

REV 1:5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, **the first-born of the dead**, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood,

1) Jesus was not the first to be raised from the dead. Others such as Lazarus, Dorcas were raised from the dead, but all had to die physically again.

2) He was the first to be raised from the dead who would not die again.

c. As "the first-born of the dead," He is the assurance of our resurrection. (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

1CO 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

1CO 15:21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.

1CO 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.

1CO 15:23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,

1) All die physically because of Adam's transgression. (1 Cor. 15:22).

2) All will be raised from the dead with a new spiritual body because of Christ's death and resurrection. (Jn. 5:28, 29).

JOH 5:28 "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice,

JOH 5:29 and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.

4. "says this" - The Lord is about to give what was right with this church, but has no words of condemnation.

Praise

REV 2:9 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

1. “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)” - Jesus was fully aware of the “tribulations” they had experienced and was fully aware of their poverty materially.

a. The Greek word “tribulation” [**thilpsis**] refers to troubles that were particularly trying and harsh in nature.

b. These “tribulations” may have come in many different forms.

1) Persecution came from the Romans.

2) The Jews were also very hostile to them, and this hostility most often led to persecution. See Acts 8:1-4.

ACT 8:1 And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

ACT 8:2 And some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him.

ACT 8:3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

ACT 8:4 Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

c. This congregation was poor materially, but it was very rich spiritually.

d. What a compliment, especially coming from the Lord, to say “but you are rich.”

e. Christians had the largest following among the poor and outcast. (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

1CO 1:26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;

1CO 1:27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

1CO 1:28 and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are,

1CO 1:29 that no man should boast before God.

f. Some of their poverty probably pre-existed their coming to the Lord and illustrates the poor were more attracted and receptive to the Lord and Christianity.

1) They were looking for something better than this world.

2) See Lk. 6:20; Jas. 2:5

g. Some of the poverty as Smyrna might be traced to the government confiscating their property, to the boycotting of businesses, and other economic reprisals for their allegiance to Jesus.

h. The hostility of the idolaters and the synagogue of the Jews would lead to poverty.

2. “and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan”

a. They were receiving opposition from the Jews who had become so vile and evil that Jesus calls them “a synagogue of Satan.”

b. “who say they are Jews” means they were not true Jews. (Rom. 2:28, 29; Gal. 6:15, 16).

ROM 2:28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.

ROM 2:29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

GAL 6:15 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

GAL 6:16 And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

c. They were really members of “a synagogue of Satan,” and delighted in blaspheming the Son of God and His followers.

1) They are called “a synagogue of Satan” because of their opposition and persecution of the church.

2) Persecution historically has often come from those claiming to be religious.

Exhorts Them Not To Fear And To be Faithful Until Death

REV 2:10 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast 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 what you are about to suffer” - Jesus prepared them for persecution and suffering.

a. He had done this in His ministry. (Matt. 5:10-12; Jn. 15:20-23).

b. Here these Christians are warned that suffering was very near.

2. “Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison” - The devil would do this through those serving him.

a. The words “about to cast some of you” set forth not all of them would be cast into prison.

b. “Prison” seems to be literal. Some early Christian and others through the centuries have been literally imprisoned because of their faith in Jesus.

3. “that you may be tested” - Being in prison especially for doing right would be a great test to anyone.

a. It would be a test for the person, his family, the church, the whole brotherhood.

b. It would cause some to withdraw from Christ and the church out of fear of persecution.

c. Others despite fear would continue to be faithful.

4. “and you will have tribulation ten days” - Some or many of these Christians would be imprisoned or die.

a. “Ten days” is not likely literal, but no one knows the exact duration of the tribulation.

b. It represents a persecution that would be short in duration, but would be very severe for most of them.

c. No details are given about this persecution other than it might mean imprisonment and death.

5. “Be faithful until death” - “until” is from “achri” [**ahk** ree].

a. Jesus assures them that they will be rewarded for their faithfulness.

- b. We do not need to fear those who can “kill the body,” but cannot harm “the soul.” (Matt. 10:28).

MAT 10:28 "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. .

- c. Those who suffer for righteousness will be greatly blessed in heaven. (Matt. 5:12).
6. “and I will give you the crown of life” - The Lord, not man, is the given of “the crown of life.”
- a. Those who are “faithful until death” [speaking of physical death] would be given “the crown of life.”
 - b. The principle is true of those who remain faithful to death whether they suffer physical persecution or not.
 - c. Many a Christian has faced great hardships as a Christian without being put to death.
 - d. It is not easy living a daily Christian life in an evil world day after day for the duration of life.

REV 2:11 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.'

- 1. “He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”
 - a. Everyone who can hear [hear, read, etc] let him listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to Smyrna and all the churches.
 - b. Much emphasis is made in the word of God on being a receptive hearer of the word of God.
- 2. “He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death” - The first death is natural death.
 - a. All men must die once. (Eccles. 3:2; Heb. 9:27).
 - b. The only way we can escape this death is if Jesus comes first.
 - 1) Some will be alive when Jesus comes again. (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

1TH 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope.

1TH 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

1TH 4:15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.

1TH 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.

1TH 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.

1TH 4:18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

- 2) Whether dead or alive when Christ comes, the faithful will ascend “to meet the Lord in the air” and “shall always be with the Lord.”
- c. “The second death” is hell. (Rev. 20:6, 14; 21:8).

REV 20:6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

REV 20:14 And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. **This is the second death, the lake of fire.**

REV 21:8 "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, **which is the second death.**"

1) Hell is not a state of annihilation. Non-existence does not need to be feared.

2) Hell is a state of eternal suffering. (Matt. 25:41, 46).

MAT 25:41 "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the **eternal fire** which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

MAT 25:46 "And these will go away into **eternal punishment**, but the righteous into eternal life."

a) The word "punishment" comes from the Greek "kolasis" [**kah** lah sis] meaning "punishment, torment."

b) It is called "eternal punishment" because it is unending.

c) The words "weeping and gnashing of teeth" also reveal hell is **a place of conscious punishment**. (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk. 13:28).

MAT 8:12 but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "

MAT 13:42 and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

MAT 13:50 and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

MAT 22:13 "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

MAT 24:51 and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth.

MAT 25:30 "And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

LUK 13:28 "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being cast out.

3) Jesus taught men to greatly fear hell. (Matt. 10:28).

MAT 10:28 "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

4) The Hebrew writer indicated it is fearful to be subjected to the wrath of God. (Heb. 10:29-31).

HEB 10:29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

HEB 10:30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His

people."

HEB 10:31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

- 5) Those living faithfully in Christ do not need to fear God's wrath.
 - 6) The word "destroy" does not mean annihilation, but it means to be devoted to eternal misery.
- d. Those who are faithful to the Lord will not be "be hurt by the second death."
- 1) They will not be cast into hell.
 - 2) They will be "given the crown of life." (Rev. 2:10).
 - a) "Crown" is from "stephanos" [**stef** ah nahs] meaning "wreath, crown, prize, reward."
 - b) Victorious athletes often received a temporal wreath of victory as an honor for their accomplishments.
 - c) These wreaths faded away, but the "crown" or "wreath" promised to Christians will last forever.
 - d) Normally only one athlete would receive a wreath, but all those who serve Christ faithfully will receive "the crown of life."

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