

Revelation 2:8–11 — Verse-by-Verse Bible Study

1. Smyrna = the suffering church

Reminder

- literal first-century churches
 - spiritually relevant for believers today
 - prophetic pictures of periods in church history
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7 Elements -

- Title (taken from the vision in chapter 1)
- All addressed to angel/messenger of the church
- Calls out their works
- Commendation, compliant or both
- Allusion of 2nd coming
- Reward
- Challenge (same)

Review -

- Every church will be surprised ... our assessment may not be Jesus' perspective.
 - Ephesus - good at doctrine, but lost their first love ... they were so busy doing the business of the church, they forgot to be the church, they forgot about the King himself ... Jesus wants devotion over doctrine.
 - Apostolic Age - starting at the formation of the church and continued through the end of the final apostle's death - John
 - Church was in growth mode ... but future lost without the apostles
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Smyrna (Revelation 2:8–11)

Main Theme: Faithfulness Through Suffering

If there was a main theme to this church it was faithfulness through suffering
Smyrna represents the persecuted church (about AD 100–312), when millions of Christians were killed for their faith under Roman persecution .

The city name relates to **myrrh**, which becomes fragrant only when crushed—a picture of suffering but it produces beauty.

Verse 8 “To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:”

Smyrna comes from the Greek word *Smurnaios* (smear a nose) which has a Hebrew root *mur* which **means death** and has an association of the word Myrrh.

Myrrh is a bitter gum which is extracted from a certain tree in Arabia and Ethiopia.

Uses:

- Purification of women Esther 2:12.
- Perfume Ps 45:8.
- Primary use: was embalming John 19:39

Myrrh gives off its scent by being crushed ... so very symbolic and described of the very church of Smyrna

Where have we heard about Myrrh before? What were the gifts of the Magi? Matt 2:11.

- Gold = royalty - King
- Frankincense = deity, priesthood - Priest
- Myrrh = suffering, death - Prophet (foretelling His death) Representation of Jesus being the **King, the Priest and the Prophet**

Interesting point: where we look ahead at the millennium (reign of Jesus on Earth) Isa 60:6.

- Gold and frankincense are offered, but no myrrh ... why because His death is behind Him.
- v6b *and all shall come bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.*

The City of Smyrna

- 42 miles North of Ephesus (true harbor town - with a double harbor) - well sheltered
- Today Smyrna is called Izmir and is the 3rd largest city in Turkey (~300k people, in the NT time about 100k)
- Today known for exports of tobacco, grapes, figs, cotton, olives, and olive oil
- Connection of Greece/Turkey to Asia
- Strabo -- famous geographer during the time of the Roman Republic was transitioning in the the Roman Empire (Rick Steves travel advisor of his day) Described it as the most beautiful city in the world - even today it has been termed the Paris of the Levant
- Historically this area was devastated by wars, and many earthquakes but continued to be rebuilt - because of the location and importance to the region.
- Known for pagan worship -- It had a temple of Zeus (the father of the gods) at the foot of the mountain on it's eastern side
- There was what was called the Golden street (from the harbor to the mountain) that was lined with shrines of all the major pagan gods of the day.
- Also became a place of Caesar Worship -- each year the citizens had to burn a pinch of incense on the altar and acknowledge publicly that Caesar was supreme lord - provided a formal document

Verse 8 (continued) "These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again."

Jesus' Title Jesus introduces Himself as:

- eternal person of Jesus ("First and Last") - how many times is First and Last referenced in the Bible (7 times: 3 in Isaiah and 4 in Rev)
- resurrected ("was dead and came to life") - two of those references added was dead and came to life

Do you know why this title was used by Jesus?

Because He is speaking to people facing death -- possible martyrdom and persecution

He is saying: **"I conquered the very thing you fear most."** This is the ultimate comfort for the suffering believer and something you and I need to remember **Christ is eternal, and death is not the end.**

Verse 9 "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)..."

Jesus is calling out their works and giving a commendation to the church ...

This tribulation is persecution and not the Great Tribulation.

They were:

- persecuted
- materially poor
- socially rejected

Because many Jewish believers in Christ were cut off from:

- family
- income
- business
- social standing

Yet Jesus says: **"You are rich."**

This is a complete opposite of what we will hear about the church of Laodicea who were rich but poor (3:17, 2 Cor 8:9)

Likely they were economically excluded for refusing emperor worship.

Faithfulness may cost earthly comfort, but Jesus reminds them that heaven measures wealth differently.

Verse 9 (continued) "...those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan"

Who are these people? Scholars call them **Judaizers**: people adding works to salvation. Read John 8:44 This faction of Jewish Christians felt that Gentile converts should follow Jewish laws, we see that around the topic of circumcision. This caused the Council of Jerusalem to be formed to address that very issue. Acts 15

Instead of: **faith in Jesus alone** they taught: **Jesus + works**

Jesus has harsh words about this, calling it:

- blasphemy
- even “a synagogue of Satan” – accuser, slanderer

Why is Jesus taking a firm stance on this topic? These people are very common in the culture, they live among opposing forces, and because anything that corrupts grace corrupts the Gospel.

Verse 10 “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death,”

Jesus does NOT promise escape, comfort or even protection.

He says:

- prison is coming
- suffering is coming
- testing is coming

But: “Be faithful until death...”

Christianity is not freedom from suffering— it is faithfulness through suffering.

The “10 days” may symbolize the ten worst Roman emperors who intensely persecuted Christians.

- Hebrew idiom for a short period of time (Gen 24:55, Job 19:3 and Dan 1:12)
- Another belief that there were 10 evil Roman emperors (Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Marcia Aurelia, Septimus Severus, Maximinus, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian and Diocletian)

According to Foxe's Book of Martyrs – 5 million believers died for Christ during this time period under these rulers. -- Sound bad? -- Keep in mind the 20th century had more Christian deaths than all the other centuries combined!

Verse 10 (continued) “I will give you the crown of life”

Reward...

This is one of five crowns mentioned in Scripture.

- Crown of Life - James 1:12: Rev 2:10 - for those that have suffered for His sake
- Crown of Righteousness - 2 Tim 4:8 - for those who have longed for His appearing
- Crown of Glory - 1 Peter 5:4 - for those who fed the flock
- Crown of Incorruptible - 1 Cor 9:25 - for those who press on steadfastly
- Crown of Rejoicing - 1 Thess 2:10 - for those who win souls

How many different types of crowns will be handed out?

Eventually we cast all crowns at Jesus' feet. **Why?** The reward is not the crown—the reward is Christ - we should always remember this

Verse 11 "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Point out ... this phrase

- we have talked about this common phrase for all 7 churches - and the message is that it is for all the **churches** and everyone **who has an ear**
- but we haven't talked about when this occurs -- we will -- but not now -- but note that in Ephesus and Smyrna (and I will say it again after Pergamum) -- it occurs before the reward in these three letters, but not the last 4 -- to be discussed later...

Verse 11 (continued) "The one who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death"

1 John 5:4-5 - for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

If you are born twice → you die once If you are born once → you die twice

Meaning: **Born twice:**

- physical birth
- spiritual rebirth in Christ → only 1 physical death

Born once:

- only physical birth → physical death + eternal judgment ("second death")

The second death is the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14).

What is a Christian's greatest comfort?

Why do Christians suffer?

- Glorify God
- Discipline for sin Heb 12, James 4:17, Rom 14:23, 1 John 1:9
- prevent us from falling into sin 1 Peter 4:1-2
- keep us from pride 2 Cor 12:7-10.
- to build faith 1 Peter 1:6-7.
- to cause growth (sandpaper) Rom 5:3-5.
- teach obedience Acts 9:15-16 Phil 4:11-13
- equip us to help others 2 Cor 1:3-4.
- prove the reality of Christ in us 2 Cor 4:7-11
- testimony to the angels Job 1:8, Eph 3:8-11; 1 Peter 1:12. all this leads to James 1:2-4. count it all joy

Prophetic Timeline

- Smyrna is the persecuted church that occurred during 100 AD and 312
 - But in 312 everything changes when Constantine converted to Christianity
 - Edict of Milan - ceasing Christian persecution
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This church was persecuted, how are you persecuted today?

Next week Pergamos...