

“Smyrna: The Church of Suffering”  
Revelation 2:8-11

Two Sundays Ago: The Study of Ephesus, the Church of Faded Love

Today: The Study of Smyrna, the Church of Suffering

Five Parts to Each of These Seven Letters:

- Description: Christ’s self-description; helps to understand the commendation/rebuke (2:8)
- Commendation: What the church is doing right (2:9)
- Rebuke: What the church is doing wrong (???)
- Exhortation: Urging the church to take action (2:10a)
- Promise: If you overcome, you will receive this reward (2:10b-11).

Smyrna the City:

- The birthplace of Homer, greatest of the Greek poets
- Founded by Hittites, destroyed by Lydians, and then was rebuilt (brought back to life)
- The most beautiful of Asian cities: the “Flower of Asia”
- It received its name from its most famous product: a thorny shrub bush (myrrh). Its sap was used for perfume, anointing priests, embalming the dead, and used as a painkiller.

Smyrna the Church:

- Probably begun by Ephesian converts
- Noted for its suffering: 1) Tribulation, 2) Poverty, 3) Slander, 4) Prison, 5) Death

**2:8**/ “The First and the Last” – God is sovereign.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, “God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass, yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.”

Gen. 50:20, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.”

**2:9**/ “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander...”

1. Tribulation: θλίψις (thlipsis) – literally meaning, “Pressure”
2. Poverty: Brought about by tribulation or persecution
3. Slander:
  - a. Immoral
  - b. Cannibals
  - c. Home wreckers
  - d. Traitors

- e. Atheists
- f. Haters

**2:9/** “By those who say they are Jews and are not...”

- Rom. 2:28-29, “For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.”
- Increase Mather, *The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation Explained and Applied* (1669), “The Gospel is for Jewish people as much as any others ... and the church has long expected a great Jewish turning to Christ!” (Rom. 11)

**2:10/** “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison...”

- 4. Prison

**2:10/** “Be faithful unto death...”

- 5. Death

Whatever Happened to Smyrna, the Church of Suffering?

*The Martyrdom of Polycarp* (AD 155), “Eighty and six years I have been Christ’s servant and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”