

Rev 2:8-11 Letter to Smyrna

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR A PERSECUTED ECCLESIA

This is the shortest of the seven letters. It is a letter of encouragement from Christ to an ecclesia who is suffering. Both the introduction and the promise is directly relevant to their situation. Do we write spiritually uplifting messages to those who are suffering? This is what Christ does here.

v8 Smyrna: A name derived from *myrrh* meaning *bitter*. Myrrh is a symbol of suffering. It is resin from a plant used in the holy anointing oil in **Exod 30:23,30**. It was used to anoint the High Priest and his sons. Jesus Christ is our great High Priest, symbolically anointed by the faithful believers in Smyrna. The vision in **Rev 1:13-16** reminds us of the High Priest in the Holy Place preparing to enter the Most Holy Place in **Rev 4**. It would have been in Paul's first 2 years in Ephesus that the gospel spread to Smyrna: **Acts 19:10**.

All 3 references to *myrrh* in the NT relate to Christ (**Mt 2:11; Mk 15:23; Jn 19:39**). Of the 12 times we read of *myrrh* in the OT, 8 are in **Song of Songs (1:13; 3:6; 4:6,14; 5:1,5,5,13)**. Myrrh is found only once in the whole of **Psalms (45:8)** in context of the marriage of Christ to his bride!

The first and the last: A title of Jesus Christ: **1:4** "from him which is, and which was, and which is to come" and **1:8** "Alpha and Omega". The title is also taken from the vision in **1:17-18**.

This is also a title of Yahweh in **Isa 41:4; 44:6; 48:12**. Yahweh is revealed **firstly** in Jesus Christ, and **secondly** in the saints, in keeping with Revelation's key theme: **the revealing of Christ and the Saints**. **Isaiah 41** tells of Babylon's destruction by Cyrus the Persian. That event was a type of Christ's destruction of Babylon the Great in **Rev 17-19**. We also read of Babylon's demise and Israel's redemption in **Isa 44:21-28; 45:1-4**. Likewise Rome will also be destroyed: **Rev 14:7-12**. **Isaiah 48** tells of Israel's deliverance from Babylon.

The Romans were persecuting believers in Smyrna and the ecclesia is being encouraged by the fact that Rome would also fall one day. Yahweh had already destroyed Babylon on the Euphrates. Likewise He will destroy Babylon on the river Tiber. Rome persecuted believers for so many centuries. Smyrna typifies those believers who suffered after them. Persecutors of ecclesias in the dark ages were also religious and political:

1. Roman Catholic Church: The priests followed the example of Judaising blasphemers in Smyrna. Roman Catholicism came out of Judaism: **Zech 5:8-11**.

2. Roman Authorities: These were in alliance with the Catholic priests to throw them in prison and destroy them.

Key Verses: **Acts 26:23** "That Christ should suffer, and that he should be **the first** that should rise from the dead." **Rom 8:29** "that he might be **the firstborn** among many brethren." **Col 1:18** "the **firstborn** from the dead". The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of their resurrection. **1 Cor 15:22-23** "Christ the **firstfruits**; afterward they that are Christ's."

v9 Tribulation: means to be under pressure. See notes on **Rev 1:9**. These inherit eternal life: **Rom 5:3-4; Rev 7:13-17**.

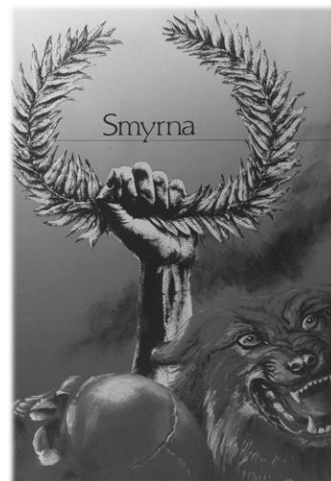
Revelation 2

8 And unto the angel of the church in ^sSmyrna write; **These things saith the first and the last, ^awhich was dead, and is alive;**

9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and ^dpoverty, (but thou art ^erich) and I know the blasphemy of ^fthem which say they are Jews, and are not, but are ^hthe synagogue of ⁱSatan.

10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ^mye shall have tribulation ⁿten days: ^obe thou ^pfaithful unto death, and I will give thee ^qa crown of life.

11 ^aHe that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches, **He that overcometh ^cshall not be hurt of ^dthe second death.**



Which was dead and is alive: He is the "lamb as it had been slain" who is now risen. Likewise, those in Smyrna who were to be killed would follow in the Lord's footsteps. The title is highly relevant to their situation. They are exhorted in **2:10** to be "faithful unto death". The basic theme of this letter is **victory over death**. Christ is saying, "They also killed me, but now I am alive!" The exhortation is to follow his example: **2 Tim 3:12**.

Poverty: Unlike Laodicea, they were materially poverty stricken. **Luke 12:15-21** tells of the snare of riches.

Blasphemy: Str. "to injure by speech" or "vilification". Same as in **Rev 13:1,6; 17:3**. Speaking evil against others is blasphemy: **Eph 4:31; Mt 15:19**. Their words caused injury to believers.

Of them which say they are Jews and are not: True believers are called "Israelites indeed" and the "Israel of God": **Jn 1:47; Gal 6:16**, cp. **Rom 2:28-29; 9:6**. True believers have the faith of Abraham and walk in his ways: **Jn 8:39; Rom 4:12,16**. In **Acts 14:1-19** there are Judaisers who said they were Jews but they were not. Historically, the Jews of Smyrna were very numerous and urged on the authorities to destroy believers.

Synagogue of Satan: Literally means "the assembly of the adversary" (as it is translated in the Diaglot). This group also caused trouble in Philadelphia: **Rev 3:9**. They are separate to the ecclesia because the specific word *synagogue* is used, meaning a congregation, a word often used in this way, eg. **Mt 6:2,5; 23:6,34; Lk 21:12**.

v10 The devil shall cast some of you into prison: Gr. *diabolos*. false accuser. Here it is those with control over prisons, the Roman authorities. In **Eph 6:11-12** Rome is called "the devil". Nero was "the devil" who was "as a roaring lion, walking about, seeking whom he may devour": **1 Pet 5:8**. Rome is described in **12:9** as "the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world".

Colour code: Blue (God and Jesus Christ); Red (sin/devil/judgment of wicked); Green (Kingdom); Orange (important words & phrases); Purple (return of Jews to the land); Yellow (practical exhortation). Prepared for Rathmines Bible School Teenagers.

Tried: means to be severely tested, eg. Jesus by the Pharisees: **Mt 16:1**. God tested Abraham: **Gen 22:1**. Israel was tested: **Ex 16:4**. Hezekiah also: **2 Chr 32:31**. **Tribulation Ten days:** An allusion to Daniel and his 3 friends who refused the meat and wine of Babylon: **Dan 1:8-15**. Those in Smyrna were in effect doing the same thing. They refused to offer incense to the Roman idols in that city. By the reference back to **Isaiah 41-44** God assures them that as Yahweh destroyed Babylon in Daniel's day, he will also destroy Rome.

PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE IN GOD'S KINGDOM

v10 Be thou faithful unto death: A comparison with the letter to Laodicea: **3:14-22**. Faithfulness to Christ is the key issue. Laodicea had been an unfaithful bride, and much of the letter to Laodicea is based on the unfaithful wife in **Hosea**. Consider Christ's words in **Mt 17:25** "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

I will give thee a crown of life: Gr. *Stephanos*, a wreath of victory given at the Olympic Games: **2 Tim 4:8; Jas 1:12**. Also promised to Philadelphia in **3:11**. This crown does not fade: **1 Pet 5:4**. To obtain the crown requires personal discipline: **1 Cor 9:25**. In **Rev 14:14-16** there is a vision of the Multitudinous Christ wearing this golden crown as Christ and the Saints bring judgment on the nations. The saints also wear this crown in **4:4,10**. A different crown in Scripture is the *diadem*, symbolising government rule: **Rev 12:3; 13:1; 19:12**.

v11 He that hath an ear let him hear: means to *give heed*, more than just hearing the words. This is stated to all 7 ecclesias. Faith comes by hearing God's Word: **Rom 10:17**. See notes on **2:7**.

He that overcometh: Stated to all 7 ecclesias. The clue is in **3:21** where Christ says "even as I also overcame". He overcame the world: **Jn 16:33**. We should follow his example: **1 Jn 5:4-5**. A main theme of Revelation is overcoming the world within the ecclesia.

Shall not be hurt of the second death: Described in **20:6**. This refers to those who die for the second time after being rejected at the judgment seat of Christ. **Rev 20:14** says that the second death is the lake of fire, in which is the beast, the false prophet and all who are evil: **19:20; 21:8**. The faithful in Smyrna will not die again. They will be given eternal life and will bring judgment on Rome.

"And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle." **Rev 14:14**

