

**The Seven Letters from Jesus**  
**Letter #2 – Sent to the Church of Smyrna**  
**Revelation 2:8-11 (4/26/09 AM)**

The entire Book of Revelation is written to seven churches. (1:11) “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,” and, “What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia:”

These letters contain the last audible message of the risen Jesus to His church. These are seven literal local churches that existed in John’s day as well as seven types of local churches that exist today.

The city of Smyrna was a large and wealthy city about 35 miles north of Ephesus. It had a harbor and was a free Roman city. Unlike Ephesus the city has survived to this day. It is the modern city of Ismir, Turkey with a population of about 300,000. In John’s day the topography and the geography made it one of the most beautiful cities in the Roman province of Asia. Smyrna was a center of science, medicine and religion. Behind the city was a large mountain called the Pagos, which was covered with temples and shrines.

The only biblical record of the church of Smyrna is in these verses. It is not mentioned in Acts or the Epistles. It must certainly have been impacted by the church at Ephesus. Acts 19:10, “And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.”

Smyrna means myrrh. It was used in the mixture of anointing oil in the Tabernacle, Exodus 30:23. Myrrh was a perfume used in the New Testament to anoint bodies for burial. The Magi brought the baby Jesus a gift of myrrh. On the cross Jesus was offered a drink of wine mixed with myrrh. Myrrh was one of the spices used to anoint the body of Jesus in John 19:39. Many of the Christians in this church suffered to point of death.

**The Church of Smyrna Is Symbolic of the Suffering Church**

We saw last week that the seven letters all follow a basic pattern. They all begin with a vision of the risen Christ.

**1. The Vision of the Lord Jesus (8)**

*A Part of the Vision of Chapter 1 Applied to Each Church*

(8) “These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life”

• **A declaration of His deity**

“The First and the Last” is an Old Testament title for God.

Isaiah 44:6, “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God.’”

Twice in chapter 1 Jesus identified Himself by this title, 1:11 & 17.

Jesus Christ is before and after all other gods. He alone is the one true God. He alone transcends time.

**Jesus Christ Is the Eternal One**

• **A declaration of His identity**

“Who was dead, and came to life”

The paradox of all time is that the Eternal One died. In His incarnation Jesus took on humanity. He died as the Godman for the sins of the world. In chapter 1 Jesus had told John

(17-18) “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.”

### **Jesus Identified Himself This Way to This Church Because of Their Coming Persecution**

#### 2. The Commendation from the Lord Jesus (9)

*Only Jesus Knows the True Condition of Each Church*

“I know your works”. Every letter contains this statement.

- **They endured great persecution**

The word “tribulation” has the idea of being crushed, under pressure.

This tribulation was primarily the result of persecution. Smyrna was a center for Emperor Worship in the Empire. Each year every citizen was required to burn incense on Caesar’s altar in order to receive a certificate. The true believers refused to worship Caesar. To be without the certificate would be to risk imprisonment, torture, and even death. The Roman Emperor at this time was Domitian who persecuted Christians mercilessly. History records mass executions of Christians at Smyrna.

### **There Is No Message of Rebuke for Persecution Purges and Purifies the Church**

- **They endured severe poverty**

The word for “poverty” means absolute destitution. Very likely many of them were enslaved. In a city of great wealth and affluence they literally had nothing (“but you are rich”). Paul had written earlier 2 Corinthians 6:10, “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things”. They were materially poor but spiritually rich. Jesus declared that they had true riches. Very often the more we have the less we have of what really matters.

James 2:5, “Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?”

### **The Church of Smyrna was a Poor Rich Church while the Church in America is a Rich Poor Church**

- **They endured slanderous oppression**

“I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”

These Jews were physically descended from Abraham but not spiritually Abraham’s children. What began in the book of Acts continued as the Jewish community slandered the Christians. They accused them of cannibalism because of communion. They said they drank blood and ate flesh. They spread rumors that Christians were immoral holding love feasts and meeting at night. They accused them of atheism because they would not worship the Roman gods. Jesus repeats His charge against them. John 8:44, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”

Satan is the mind behind all of false religion.

### **False Religion has Always Taken the Lead in Persecuting True Christians**

#### 3. The Command from the Lord Jesus (10)

*Jesus Gives Them Two Commands*

- **Do not be afraid of persecution**

“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days.”

God gives special grace for special times. Not all of them would suffer the same persecution. The persecution would be limited to ten days. The purpose was to test their faith. As these suffering destitute Christians were being crushed their lives were giving off a sweet fragrance to God.

James 1:2-4, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

### **For Those Who Survived Their Faith Would Be Strengthened**

- **Be faithful even to the point of death**

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

Some would be called upon to physically die for Christ. The crown of life represents eternal life. Because Jesus died and rose again He can promise them eternal life. What began with Stephen and the Apostles has continued throughout the Church Age. The catacombs in Rome stand as an example of Satan’s attempt to destroy Christians.

### **The Testing would Reveal that Saving Faith is Indestructible**

#### 4. The Promise of the Lord Jesus (11)

##### *Every Letter Includes this Exhortation*

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

These messages are for every church and every Christian.

“He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”

The one who overcomes is the true Christian.

- **The second death is spiritual death**

Revelation 20:14-15, “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

The Book of Life is the record of the redeemed, those who are truly saved. According to Revelation 21:27, “only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life” will be allowed to enter the New Jerusalem in the Eternal Kingdom. When a Christian dies all pain and suffering is over forever. When a person dies without Christ, pain and suffering will continue for eternity. The second death is eternal dying.

### **Nothing Can Harm the Person Who Dies In Christ**

About 50 years after the writing of this letter a man named Polycarp was the pastor at Smyrna. He was one of the last of the Church Fathers, men who knew the Apostles. Polycarp was a pupil of the Apostle John. He lived between 70 and 155 AD. He was 86 years of age when he was burned alive for his faith in Jesus Christ. The Roman captain who was escorting him to his death tried to persuade him to simply say “Caesar is Lord” and so save his life. Polycarp was adamant only Jesus Christ is Lord. When he entered the arena the pro-consul gave him the choice of cursing Christ and making a sacrifice to Caesar or

death. Polycarp answered “Eighty and six years have I served Him and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”  
Polycarp represents millions of believers who have given their lives for the name of Jesus Christ.