

Revelation 2.8-11

“Born Twice, Die Once...”

INTEREST in Book of Revelation // Level of DESPERATION  
 If Cup is Filled by ALL THIS WORLD OFFERS > At Peace with this WORLD  
 Then... Why waste time thinking about THE NEXT WORLD?  
 But if THIS WORLD > is for YOU place of PAIN and PERSECUTION  
 Book of Revelation gives BOUNDLESS JOY and UNWAVERING HOPE

Theme: God rules history and is bringing it to His appointed end in Christ,  
 for the good of His Church, and the glory of His Name.

Chs 2 & 3 Letters to 7 Churches > 2000 yrs ago > Roman ‘Asia’ > modern Turkey  
 LETTERS from Lord Jesus Christ > ASCENDED, EXALTED, GLORIOUS

#### Structure of Seven Letters

1. Address: *“To the angel of the church in...write...”*
2. Identification of Christ (as revealed in chapter 1): *“These are the words of ...”*
3. Claim of Knowledge: *“I know...”* 4. Evaluation: Criticizes and/or Commends
5. Promise of Threat: *“I will...”* 6. Promise to *“him who overcomes...”*
7. *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

6 & 7 sometimes in REVERSE ORDER / 4 & 5 sometimes BLENDED Together

“John used this form to create prophetic proclamations issued by the King of kings and Lord of lords to his subjects. John has consciously employed the form of the royal or imperial edict as part of his strategy to emphasize the fact that Christ is the true king in contrast to the Roman emperor who is both a clone and tool of Satan.”

David E. Aune

Letter 2 > Recipients ESPECIALLY DESPERATE believers in SMYRNA  
 SMYRNA > one of 2 Churches, ONLY COMMENDATION, NO REBUKE

60 kms. North of Ephesus > BEAUTIFUL CITY called itself “The Pride of Asia”  
 Deep Harbor & well-protected Gulf > Major Center of Shipping on Aegean Sea  
 Pop. 200,000 “First of Asia in beauty and size” > GOOD ROAD into Interior  
 Known today at IZMIR > 2<sup>nd</sup> Largest city of Modern Turkey

CHURCH > founder Unknown > Possibly Paul or one of his Disciples  
 Paul spent 2 years preaching and teaching in Ephesus: “all the Jews and Greeks  
 who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” Acts 19.10

1. Crisis for the Faithful
2. Comfort from the Faithful One

## 1. Crisis for the Faithful

a. Problems v. 9 “I know your afflictions”

1) with Jews - 1<sup>st</sup> to FOLLOW Jesus and 1<sup>st</sup> to FIGHT AGAINST Him

v. 9 “those who say they are Jews and are not...a synagogue of Satan”

JEWs privileged position under ROMAN LAW > Freedom of Worship  
EXEMPT from Religious Devotion to Roman gods and Caesars  
Early Christians > Many former Jews > Sought that Freedom

Jews made it CLEAR to ROMANS - “*they’re not with us, they’re not for you*”

Hatred that nailed Jesus to Cross > Led to executions of Apostles Paul & Peter  
Continued to Rage against the Early Church

SYNAGOGUE MEMBERS > DEFINITELY REJECTED Truth of Jesus  
“They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when *anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me.*” John 16.2,3

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”  
2 Corinthians 4.4

“Though ethnically descended from Israel’s patriarchs, the opponents’ actions show that they are not God’s people but Satan’s synagogue. God shows covenant faithfulness to families through the generations, but in the last analysis the people of God are defined Christocentrically, not genealogically. The issue is not birth from the flesh but birth from the Spirit, just as the circumcision that marks God’s people is not a fleshly surgery but a cleansing of heart by the Spirit.”  
Dennis E. Johnson

STRONG LANGUAGE > Not POLITICALLY CORRECT to say to Jews

Words of Jesus > not 1<sup>st</sup> time > to Peter “Get behind me, Satan!” Matthew 16.23  
TRIED TO STAND AGAINST THE CROSS > Satanic > ENEMY OF CROSS

EQUALLY SATANIC > Killing Jews, or anyone, in the name of RELIGION

2) with Romans > Smyrna was Long-time LOYAL ALLY of Rome

195 B.C. Smyrna built temple “Dea Roma” > Rome personified as Goddess

25 A.D. chosen to build Temple to Roman Emperor TIBERIUS

All people in Smyrna > Expected to offer Incense on fire before Emperor’s Bust  
Worship of Emperor > more POLITICS than PASSION > Secured their Alliance  
Christians REFUSED > called UNGRATEFUL, UNPATRIOTIC, & DISLOYAL

Jews 1st to Point their Fingers in DAMNING BLAME of followers of Nazarene

Revelation probably WRITTEN between 81-96 > Roman Emperor Domitian  
Claimed Divinity > Must be addressed as “god and lord” > OR PERSECUTION

b. Poverty v. 9 “I know your... poverty”

OUT OF FAVOR > Political Leadership > ECONOMIC SUICIDE  
NO LEGAL RITES > NO POLICE PROTECTION > Sitting out in the Cold!

Early CHRISTIANS No ECONOMIC Legends > No Bill Gates or Donald Trump

“Not many of you were wise by human standards; *not many were influential*; not many were of noble birth.”  
1 Corinthians 1.26

“Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their *extreme poverty* welled up in *rich generosity*.”  
2 Corinthians 8.2

“You sympathized with those in prison and *joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property*, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.”  
Hebrews 10.34

“Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are *poor in the eyes of the world* to be *rich in faith* and to *inherit the kingdom* he promised those who love him?”  
James 2.5

Jesus’ DID NOT Preach message of PROSPERITY to Church in Smyrna

“Make no mistake: it does not always pay to be a Christian. Nor is honesty always the best policy, if material gain is your ambition. Poverty has often been part of the cost of Christian discipleship.”  
John Stott

c. Poison v. 9 “I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not”

Paul describes people without Christ: “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.” *“The poison of vipers is on their lips.”* Romans 3.13

Jewish tongues were WAGGING > Deadly Rumors SPEEDING thru all Smyrna  
Imitate SATAN = Slanderer Follow DEVIL = Accuser

Jews boasted they were sons of Abraham > but Jesus knows their true Paternity -  
“You belong to *your father, the devil*, and you want to carry out your father's  
desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is  
no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for *he is a liar and  
the father of lies.*” John 8.44

d. Prison v. 10 “I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you”

Roman Prison > held until your case was DECIDED > “in prison to test you”  
OFTEN > Tortured to Make Confession > Enough pain inflicted truth comes out  
RARELY > Prisoners Released > IF RELEASED Broken, Battered, Inside & Out  
Words of a SERVANT OF THE CROSS > who did his time in Prison  
“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he  
has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ  
from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade...though  
now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”  
1 Peter 1.3-6

Roman Prison Cells > from Jerusalem to Rome > were made Sanctuaries  
Praises of God's Saints > Light of God's Truth > Aroma of God's Son  
For MOST > Dark Miserable Cells were Gateway to God's City of Light and Bliss

e. Persecution v. 10 “you are about to suffer...you will suffer persecution  
for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death”

Jesus knew much about persecution and suffering –

*He talked it:* “Blessed are those who are *persecuted because of righteousness*, for  
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5.10

*He walked it:* “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him *endured the cross*, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who *endured such opposition from sinful men*”  
Hebrews 12.2,3

*And he warned about it:* “No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, *they will persecute you also*”  
John 15.20

German Pastor who was hung by the Nazis -  
“Suffering then is the badge of the true Christian. The disciple is not above his master...Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer” Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Do we DILLUTE the Gospel to make it more SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE?  
More POLITICALLY FAVORABLE? More RELIGIOUSLY TOLERABLE?

Be careful that our GOOD DESIRE to make the Gospel CLEAR > esp. to Muslims  
Does not COMPROMISE the CROSS for the sake of CLARITY > or False Peace

‘TENTMAKING’ in the NT > was means of ECONOMIC SUPPORT  
NT Tentmakers never hid Jesus in their Tents > World knew Message & Mission  
When Paul the tent-maker got to Thessalonica > a Riot started in that City Acts 17.6  
"These men who have *caused trouble all over the world* have now come here”

“From this letter we can gain some idea of the unbounded fortitude of these early Christians. John assumes that the people of Smyrna (as typical of faithful Christians everywhere) share his own attitude to physical suffering: he speaks lightly of it, as one speaks of familiar things. Words so brief, spoken to men who might at any time go to their death, have in them a heroism, which even now has power to stir the blood.”  
Martin Kiddle

Polycarp – Pastor of Church in Smyrna > Disciple of John the Apostle

On February 22, 156 when Polycarp was an old man a flurry of persecution broke out in Smyrna... Fourteen Christians were seized and dragged to the public arena where they were fed to wild beasts. The crowd was not placated and began to shout for more. Particularly, they began to shout for Polycarp whom they knew to be minister in the church.

The magistrate spoke, "Swear by the fortune of Caesar! Repent! Declare: Death to the atheists!.. Apostatize! Swear, and I will set you free at once! You have but to insult Christ." "I have served Him for eighty-six years and He has never done me any wrong. Why then should I blaspheme against my King and my Savior?"

"Swear by Caesar's fortune!" "You flatter yourself if you hope to persuade me. In all truth I solemnly declare to you: I am a Christian."

"I have the lions here, to use as I think fit." "Give your orders. As for us Christians, when we change it is not from good to bad: it is splendid to pass through evil into God's justice."

"If you do not repent I shall have you burned at the stake, since you are so contemptuous of the lions."

"You threaten me with a fire that burns for an hour and then dies down. But do you know the eternal fire of the justice that is to come? Do you know the punishment that is to devour the ungodly? Come, don't delay! Do what you want with me."

The condemnation was proclaimed; the mob rushed from the seats to gather sticks, with the Jews gleefully helping. Polycarp told the soldiers in charge of the execution that they need not fasten him to the stake, for he had no intention of fleeing. The flames leaped high, while from the flames could be heard this prayer from the lips of Christ's faithful servant:

Lord God Almighty, Father of Thy beloved and blessed Son, Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the grace of knowing Thee, God of angels and powers, and the whole creation, and of the whole race of the righteous who live in Thy presence; I bless Thee for deigning me worthy of this day and this hour that I may be among Thy martyrs and drink of the cup of my Lord Jesus Christ ...

From "The Epistle of the Church of Smyrna"

## 2. Comfort from the Faithful One

### a. Challenges our Fears

v. 10 "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer."

1986 to USA after 1st term serving in Uganda > Almost 4 yrs of War & Suffering  
Some Misguided Preacher on Radio > from Revelation

“Jesus is coming to take us away!! We are not going to suffer! No Tribulation!”  
 Don’t know WHAT PLANET he was Living ON?? > but here one EARTH  
 More Christians killed for Jesus in the 20<sup>th</sup> Cent than in previous 19 C Combined

21<sup>st</sup> C > Churches bombed in Pakistan and Iraq > Burned in Indonesia & Sudan  
 This month Children Killed in Russia > Missionary shot dead in Karaganda, KZ

NOT VERY PLEASING WORDS - **suffering, poverty, slander, being afraid, prison, tested, persecuted, facing death.**

HARDLY INDUCE SOMEONE TO FOLLOW CHRIST

“Hey, I’m in the WRONG PLACE > I just came to get a FREE T-SHIRT!!”

v. 10 “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life”  
 DEATH IS THEIR ULTIMATE BEGINNING > Cross will lead to the Crown  
 “CROWN of Life” > Laurel Wreath // Victors in Olympic Games Given

Smyrna loyal to Rome for 300 yrs. > FAITHFUL City > Faithful CITIZENS  
 Church in Smyrna > FAITHFUL SAVIOR > Called to Faithful SERVICE

Only Loyalty which ULTIMATELY MATTERS > Loyalty to JESUS

v. 11 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”  
 TIMELESS MESSAGE TO ALL CHURCHES > ALL GOD’S SERVANTS

“Faith and faithfulness are the same word in the Greek. This is understandable because it is from faith that faithfulness springs. Trust in Christ, and we shall ourselves be trustworthy. Rely on Christ, and we shall be reliable. Depend on Christ, and we shall be dependable. Have faith in Christ, and we shall be faithful – faithful if necessary even unto death. The way to lose fear is to gain faith.”

John Stott

b. Controls the Future v. 9 “I know your affliction....I know the slander”

SOMEBODY understands Us > More than Best Friend, Spouse, Ourselves

Song of Hope > American Slaves “Nobody knows the troubles I’ve seen,  
 Nobody knows but Jesus”

v. 10 “I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days.”

SOVEREIGN SAVIOR > Even the Devil SERVES God and His Eternal Purpose

20.2 “He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.”

TEN DAYS > Jesus knows just how long > REVELATION #'s are Significant  
 7 > Complete > God Rested on the Seventh Day > Creation Complete  
 10 > Completion > 10 Commandments > 10 Believers make a Synagogue  
 10 Righteous People > Sodom would have been Spared  
 God's Tabernacle had 10 curtains Enclosing It

10 DAYS > When their Suffering is Complete > His will for them Accomplished

10 Days > BLINK OF INSIGNIFICANCE from Viewpoint of God's Eternity

Paul > did his 10 Days > Finished the Race > Fought the Fight > Kept the Faith:  
 “I consider that our *present sufferings are not worth comparing* with the glory that  
 will be revealed in us.” Romans 8.18

“For our *light and momentary troubles* are achieving for us an *eternal glory* that  
 far outweighs them all.” 2 Corinthians 4.17

c. Conquered our Foes v. 8 “First and the Last, who died and came to life again”

“God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it  
 was *impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*” Acts 2.24

Before we were Born He was ALPHA > Long after we're GONE He'll be OMEGA

1.18 “I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold *I am alive for ever and ever!*  
 And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”

Special MEANING in SMYRNA

700 years BEFORE this Letter > Smyrna was Destroyed by the LYDIANS  
 for 300 yrs it lay in RUINS > NOW ALIVE > “was Dead is Alive Again!”  
 Risen Christ writes to Redeemed Believers who live in a Risen City  
 They'll RISE FAR beyond Smyrna to God's Eternally Beautiful City

v. 11 “He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death”

If you are BORN TWICE > by Grace through Faith > you will only DIE ONCE

20.14 “The lake of fire is the second death.” > You Don’t want to GO THERE!  
Jesus OVERCOMES > He took our Second Death > ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

Reject Jesus > Refuse New Birth > Only Born Once > YOU WILL Die TWICE

“Let the Christian take heart. For the Christ who unveils this dismaying prospect is the one who himself has been through a Smyrna-experience. Like their city, their Lord also ‘died and came to life’, and guarantees resurrection for them too.”

Michael Wilcock

20.6 “Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”

WW2 – Pacific Islands – Allied troops fought from one island to the next  
One night 3 young Christian soldiers visited the Chaplain  
Casualties would be Many the Next Day / Everyone Knew It

Chaplain “We want you to pray that if someone has to die tomorrow, it will be us. We know Jesus, we are ready to meet him – many of the men not ready – we want to take their place”

Prayers Answered – among list of casualties next day – their 3 names

Some Take THEIR LIFE in NAME of Religion > 100’s with THEM IN DEATH

Jesus GAVE HIS LIFE – That COUNTLESS MILLIONS OF DEAD WILL LIVE  
- and We’re Called to FOLLOW IN HIS STEPS - AMEN