

## Revelation of Jesus Christ Study 12

*Rev 2:8-11*

*8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:*

*9 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*

*10 ~'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

*11 ~' He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'*

Throughout its history, the seemingly paradoxical truth has been that the more the church has been persecuted, the greater has been its purity and strength

For decades, churches in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were oppressed by their atheistic communist governments.

Believers continue to be persecuted in Muslim countries and elsewhere to this day.

They are forbidden to openly proclaim their faith.

Many are imprisoned and some martyred.

In the Soviet Union books, even bibles, were scarce.

Yet not only did those churches survive, they prospered.

The lifting of the Iron Curtain revealed a powerful, pure church, one characterized by genuine faith, deep spirituality, humility, zeal, love of the truth, and single-minded devotion to the Lord.

Scripture links persecution and spiritual strength:

*James 1:2-4*

*2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,*

*3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.*

*4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Peter encouraged suffering Christians with the truth that :

*1 Pet 5:10*

*10 After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.*

The purest Christian graces are those forged in the furnace of adversity.

The Church at Smyrna displayed the power and purity that comes from successfully enduring persecution.

Persecution had purified and purged it from sin and affirmed the reality of its members' faith.

Hypocrites do not stay to face persecutions, because false believers do not want to endure the pain.

Trials and persecution strengthen and refine genuine saving faith, but uncover and destroy false faith.

Though they suffered physical privation and poverty, the Christians at Smyrna clung to their immeasurable spiritual riches.

**Fittingly, the Church at Smyrna is one of the two churches (along with Philadelphia) that received no rebuke in its letter from the Lord Jesus Christ.**

## THE CORRESPONDENT

As scripture make clear, persecution and trials are in inevitable and essential part of the Christian life;

*Acts 14:22; 2 Tim 3:12*

*22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."*

*12 Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

The example of the Church at Smyrna instructs all churches on how to properly respond when they come. Christ's letter of commendation unfolds in six successive stages:

**The correspondent**

**The Church**

**The City**

**The commendation**

**The command**

**The counsel**

*Rev 2:8c*

*The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life,*

As was customary in ancient letters, the writer identifies Himself at the beginning of the letter, instead of signing His name at the end.

The depiction of the writer as **the first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life** identifies Him as the glorified, exalted Lord Jesus Christ described by that phrase in the vision of *(V-1:12-20)*

**The first and the last** is an Old Testament title for God:

*Isa 44:6; 48:12; 41:4*

*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, And there is no God besides Me.*

*12 "Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last.*

*4 " Who has performed and accomplished it, Calling forth the generations from the beginning? ' I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. I am He.'"*

And its application here and in [chp 22:13](#), to Christ affirms His equality of nature with God.

He is the eternal, infinite God, who already existed when all things were created, and who will continue to exist after they are destroyed.

Jesus Christ transcends time, space, and the creation.

Yet, amazingly, the eternal God became man and **was dead, and has come to life.**

Here is a profound mystery: How can the ever-living One who transcends time, space, and history die?

Peter reveals the answer in:

*1 Pet 3:18*

*18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;*

He died in His incarnate humanness as the perfect sacrifice for sin, but now **has come to life** (by His resurrection and lives forever "*according to the power of an indestructible life*" ([Heb 7:16](#); [Rom 6:9](#)))

This designation of Christ was to bring comfort to the persecuted believers at Smyrna.

Knowing that they were undergoing difficult times, Christ was reminding them that He transcends temporal matters, and, through their union with him, so should they.

And should they face death at the hands of their persecutors, beside them is the One who conquered death.

*Heb 2:14*

*14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,*

And who promised:

*John 11:25-26*

*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,*

*and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

Jesus also endured the most unjust and severe persecution anyone ever suffered:

*Heb 12:3-4;*

*3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

*4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;*

So that He can serve as a compassionate and understanding source of power

*Heb 2:17-18; 4:15*

*17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

*18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.*

*15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.*

He is the One who addressed this letter of comfort and encouragement to the church at Smyrna.

## THE CHURCH

*Rev 2:8a*

*“the Church in Smyrna”*

Scripture does not record the founding of the church at Smyrna, nor is the city mentioned in the book of Acts.

All that is revealed about this congregation is contained in this letter.

Presumably, a church was planted in Smyrna during Paul’s Ephesian ministry, either by Paul himself, or by his converts.

At the end of the first century, life was difficult and dangerous for the church at Smyrna.

The city, long an ally of Rome, was a hotbed of emperor worship.

Under Emperor Domitian, it became a capital offense to refuse to offer the yearly sacrifice to the emperor.

Not surprisingly, many Christians faced execution. The most famous of Smyrna’s martyrs was Polycarp, executed half a century after John’s time.

The Greek word translated “**Smyrna**” was used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for myrrh, a resinous substance used as a perfume for the living (*Matt 2:11*) and the dead (*John 19:39*).

Its association with death perfectly pictures the suffering church at Smyrna.

Like myrrh, produced by crushing a fragrant plant, the church at Smyrna, crushed by persecution, gave off a fragrant aroma of faithfulness to God.

At Smyrna, unlike Ephesus, there was no waning of love for Jesus Christ.

Because the believers at Smyrna loved Him, they remained faithful to Him; because of that faithfulness, they were hated; because they were hated, they were persecuted; that persecution in turn incited them to love Christ more.

## THE CITY

### *Rev 2:8b* *“Smyrna”*

Smyrna was an ancient city whose origins are lost in antiquity.

It may have been settled as early as 3000 B.C., but the first Greek settlement dates from about 1000 B.C.. About 600 B.C. Smyrna was destroyed by the Lydians and lay in ruins for more than three centuries until two of Alexander the Great’s successors rebuilt the city in 290 B.C..

It was that rebuilt city that was the Smyrna of John’s day.

As I said earlier, Smyrna was long a staunch ally of Rome. In fact, its citizens were so infatuated with Rome that in 195 B.C. they built a temple in which Rome was worshiped.

A century later the Roman general Sulla’s ill-clad army faced bitter winter weather.

When the Roman’s soldiers plight was announced in a general assembly of Smyrna’s citizens, they reportedly took off their own clothes to send to them.

Rome rewarded Smyrna’s loyalty by choosing it above all other applicants as the site of a new temple dedicated to the Emperor Tiberius (A.D. 26).

And when an earthquake destroyed the city late in the second century, the Emperor Marcus Aurelius rebuilt it.

Although Ephesus and Pergamum equaled or surpassed it in political and economic importance, Smyrna was said to be the most beautiful city in Asia.

It was located on a gulf of the Aegean Sea and, unlike Ephesus was blessed with an excellent harbor.

Smyrna also profited from its location at the western end of the road that ran through the rich Hermus River valley.

In addition to the natural beauty of its surroundings, the city itself was well designed.

It stretched from the bay up the slopes of the Pagos, a large hill covered with temples and other public buildings.

The streets were well laid out, with the outlying ones lined with groves of trees. Smyrna’s most famous street, the **“Street of Gold,”** curved around the slopes of the Pagos, at one end was the temple of Cybele, and at the other the temple of Zeus.

In between were the temples of Apollo, Asklepios, and Aphrodite.

Smyrna was a noted center of science and medicine. Like Ephesus, it was granted the privilege of being self-governing.

It was also one of several cities that claimed to be the birthplace of the poet Homer.

As noted in the previous chapter, Ephesus's harbor eventually silted up and the city went out of existence. Smyrna, however, survived numerous earthquakes and fires and exists today as the Turkish city of Izmir.