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NT377 The Revelation: 'Heavy Revy'

Spring 2014

Class #4-March 13 chapter 2

Approach and Characteristics of the Seven Letters

- 1-Written to the 'The Messenger' at each church in each of the cities named. The dominance of the singular pronoun 'you' and 'yours' indicates that these letters are primarily to individuals who are titled: 'The Messenger'
 - Each letter is addressed 'to the messenger' of the local visible church. The phrase 'of the church' means that the messenger is a part of the local church, and probably the senior pastor, not an angelic creature here. Angels are not called upon to repent, nor are they part of the local church.
- 2-Written to the visible church versus the invisible church of Christ; therefore 7 complete representative churches of then and throughout church history, and now.
 - How many invisible churches of Jesus Christ are there? See Rom. 12:5, see 1Cor. 12:12-13
 - The invisible church is composed of only true believers in Jesus Christ.
 - While the visible church is composed of a mix of people. See Matt. 13:18-23; then read parable of tares and wheat (24-30); then the Mustard Seed that becomes a tree and birds lodge in it (vs. 31-32); then the woman putting leaven (*always evil!*) in three measures of meal (v.33)
- 3-At the time of writing they are second generation churches, at the end of the Apostolic era, John being the last Apostle alive on earth.
 - Deuteronomy was also written to the second generation. Any parallels?
- 4-A part of the Description of Christ from chapter 1:12-16, 20 is given to each church and that description relates to that church's situation.
- 5-'I know your works' is a common phrase used by Jesus to all 7 churches. Is He judging their works, both good and bad?
- 6-'He that overcomes' is followed by a promise to all seven churches for those who overcome.
- 7-'He that has an ear let him hear' indicates that these letters are written for all to take heed and not just 'The Messenger'
- 8-These are 7 literal, Historical churches and 7 typical, prophetic churches. One type of Church of the seven tends to dominate periods of church history, and they seem to be in order as listed in chapters 2 and 3.
 - All seven are found throughout church history at any one time, and even today.
 - Justification for this historical, prophetic view of the 7 churches is three fold:
 - 1-Verse 1:3 says 'the words of this prophesy'. All of it is prophetic to varying degrees and varying times time of fulfillment besides the seven year period in chapters 6-19; including chapters 2 & 3.
 - 2-There are events written of in the letters to the seven churches which cannot be local and at that time. See Rev. 2:22 (Great tribulation always refers to the 7 year

tribulation, Matt. 24:21, Rev. 7:14) Other examples see Rev. 3:10, see Rev. 2:25

3-The duration of 'what is', the churches, lasts until 4:1, 'after these things....'Which has already gone way beyond the time of the original 7 churches.

9-Each letter is also addressed to each member of the local church and to each member of the other churches, by the phrase at the end of each letter which reads: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches'. That includes you and I.

10-'to the churches' appears to be secondary (*Secondary but essential*) when compared 'to the messenger' when it comes to the responsibility for executing what is commanded 'to the messenger'.

11-Chapter 1 v. 3 tells us how this prophecy was communicated to the congregations. The Blessing of the reading by 'he' and 'those' hearing the reading of the words of this prophecy and keeping or watching for the things written it are for each of the seven church messengers and the members of the local church who hear it.

12-The dominant pronoun in each of the letters is 'you', 'yours' which are predominantly second person singular and masculine. Meaning that the primary burden of the letter's execution lies with the messenger.

-But the entire church has a responsibility as it is also at the end of each letter addressed to each member of each church and each churches letter is to be 'taken-heed-to' by each of the other churches, 'he that has ears to hear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

13-The author is Jesus Christ and the teacher is the Spirit of God (note the end of each letter). This combination Jesus and the Holy Spirit is not new. see John 14:26, See John 16:13-15.

14-Each church is in a named city and the meaning of the name of the city and what that city is like will have relevancy to that specific messenger and church and what is going on there.

15-Comendation, condemnation, promises to overcomers are to varying decrees in each of the 7 letters.

16-The Lord is not concerned with controlling the external environment but the internals of each church. When the church is right she will be the glory and light of the Lord to the world.

The Judgment of the Body of Christ

-Our Judgment as Christians will come. **See** 2 Cor. 5:8-11 with **see** 1Cor. 3:10-17

-Is there a checklist of sorts that we could use to evaluate how we are doing before that day of judgment?

-Yes there is. It is Jesus Christ's evaluation of the visible church on earth as seen in the seven churches of Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

2:1 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus"

Ephesus means: 'desired' or 'desirable'

Church age covered: 30-100 AD

Walvoord:

Ephesus, the most prominent city in the Roman province of Asia, had already had a long history of Christian witness. Paul had ministered there for three years as recorded in Acts 19. The effectiveness of his ministry is stated in Acts 19:10: "All they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." The preaching of the gospel had affected the worship of Diana, in whose honor the temple of Diana had been built in Ephesus, a structure considered one of the seven wonders of the world. The reduction in the sale of idols of Diana and the Christian teaching that these idols were not worthy of worship resulted in the riot recorded in Acts 19:23-41..... The resulting riot forced Paul's departure from Ephesus, but the incident is a remarkable testimony to the power and effectiveness of early Christian witness in this important city.

Barclay on Ephesus: "Pergamos was the official capital of the province of Asia, but Ephesus was by far

its greatest city. It claimed as its proud title 'The first and the greatest metropolis of Asia'. A Roman writer called it *Lumen Asiae*, the Light of Asia. Let us look at the factors which gave it its pre-eminent greatness. (1) In the time of John, Ephesus was the greatest harbor in Asia. All the roads of the Cayster Valley—the Cayster was the river on which it stood—converged upon it. But the roads came from further afield than that. It was at Ephesus that the road from the far-off Euphrates and Mesopotamia reached the Mediterranean, having come by way of Colossae and Laodicea. It was at Ephesus that the road from Galatia reached the sea, having come by way of Sardis. And from the south came the road from the rich Maeander Valley. Strabo, the ancient geographer, called Ephesus 'the Market of Asia'.

Ephesus was the gateway of Asia. One of its distinctions, laid down by statute, was that when the Roman proconsul came to take up office as governor of Asia, he must disembark at Ephesus and enter his province there. For all the travelers and the trade, from the Cayster and the Maeander Valleys, from Galatia, from the Euphrates and from Mesopotamia, Ephesus was the highway to Rome. In later times, when the Christians were brought from Asia to be flung to the lions in the arena in Rome, Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, called Ephesus the Highway of the Martyrs.

Its position made Ephesus the wealthiest and the greatest city in all Asia—and, because it resembled so well John Bunyan's picture in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, it has been aptly called the Vanity Fair of the ancient world.

(2) Ephesus had certain important political distinctions. It was a *free city*. In the Roman Empire, certain cities were free cities; they had had that honor conferred upon them because of their services to the empire. A free city was within its own limits self-governing, and it was exempted from ever having Roman troops garrisoned there. It was an *assize town*. The Roman governors made periodic tours of their provinces; and, at certain specially chosen cities and towns, courts were held where the governor tried the most important cases. Further, each year, Ephesus held the most famous games in Asia, which attracted people from all over the province.

(3) Ephesus was the centre of the worship of Artemis or, as the Authorized Version calls her, Diana of the Ephesians. The Temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was 425 feet long by 220 feet wide; it had 120 columns, each sixty feet high and the gift of a king; and thirty-six of them were richly gilded and inlaid. Ancient temples consisted mostly of colonnades with only the centre portion roofed over. The centre portion of the Temple of Artemis was roofed over with cypress wood.

The image of Artemis was one of the most sacred images in the ancient world. It was by no means beautiful but a squat, black, many-breasted figure, so ancient that no one knew where it had come from. We have only to read Acts 19 to see how precious Artemis and her temple were to Ephesus. Ephesus also had famous temples to the godhead of the Roman emperors Claudius and Nero, and in future years it was to add temples to Hadrian and Severus. In Ephesus, the ancient religion was at its strongest.

(4) Ephesus was a notorious centre of superstition. It was famous for the *Ephesian Letters*, small objects and charms which were supposed to be infallible remedies for sickness, to bring children to those who were childless and to ensure success in any undertaking; and people came from all over the world to buy them.

(5) The population of Ephesus was very mixed. Its citizens were divided into six tribes. One consisted of those who were descendants of the original natives of the country; one consisted of those who were direct descendants of the original colonists from Athens; three consisted of other Greeks; and one, most probably, consisted of Jews. Besides being a centre of religion, the Temple of Artemis was also a centre of crime and immorality. The temple area was a recognized place offering asylum; criminals were safe if they could reach it. The temple possessed hundreds of priestesses who were sacred prostitutes. All this combined to make Ephesus a notoriously evil place. Heraclitus, one of the most famous of ancient philosophers, was known as 'the weeping philosopher'. His explanation of his tears was that no one could live in Ephesus without weeping at its immorality.

Such was Ephesus; a more unlikely soil for the sowing of the seed of Christianity can scarcely be

imagined; and yet it was there that Christianity had some of its greatest triumphs. R. C. Trench, the nineteenth-century Archbishop of Dublin, writes: 'Nowhere did the word of God find a kindlier soil, strike root more deeply or bear fairer fruits of faith and love.'

Paul stayed longer in Ephesus than in any other city (Acts 20:31). It was with Ephesus that Timothy had a connection, so that he is called its first bishop (1 Timothy 1:3). It is in Ephesus that we find Aquila, Priscilla and Apollos (Acts 18:19, 18:24, 18:26). Surely Paul was closer to no one than to the Ephesian elders, as his farewell address so beautifully shows (Acts 20:17–38). Later on, John was the leading figure of Ephesus. Legend has it that he brought Mary the mother of Jesus to Ephesus and that she was buried there. When Ignatius of Antioch wrote to Ephesus, on his way to being martyred in Rome, he could write: 'You were ever of one mind with the apostles in the power of Jesus Christ.' There can be few places which better prove the conquering power of the Christian faith.

We may note one more thing. We have spoken of Ephesus as the greatest harbor of Asia. Today there is little left of Ephesus but ruins, and it is now at least six miles from the sea. The coast is now a harborless line of sandy beach, unapproachable by a ship. What was once the Gulf of Ephesus and the harbor is a marsh dense with reeds. It was always a battle to keep the harbor of Ephesus open because of the silt which the Cayster brings down. The battle was lost, and Ephesus vanished from the scene."

Ephesus is first spiritually of the seven for it was out of Ephesus that all of Asia heard the Gospel, **see** Acts 19:1, 10.

MacArthur:

Though Christ may have addressed the Ephesian church first because it was first on the postal route, it was also the most prominent church of the seven. It was the mother church out of whose ministry the other six were founded (Acts 19:10) and gave its name to the inspired letter of Ephesians penned four decades earlier by the apostle Paul. The contents of this first letter form the pattern for the other six. It contains seven features: the correspondent, the church, the city, the commendation, the concern, the command, and the counsel.

write, 'These things says He (followed by a description of the speaker from chapter 1:13, 16) who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

-from chapter 1:12-13, 16, 20

-**Walvoord:** Christ is introduced in the message to Ephesus as the One who "holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." This portrayal of Christ corresponding to that given early in the first chapter of Revelation is a symbolic presentation of the fact that Christ holds the messengers of these churches in His right hand, a place of sovereign protection as well as divine authority over them. The word for "hold" (Gr., *kraton*) means "to hold authoritatively." The messengers, therefore, are held in divine protection and under divine control. Earlier, John had written of the security of the believer in the hands of an Almighty God in John 10:28–29.

Vs. 2-6 Commendation (2-3, 6) Rebuke (4-5)

2 "I know...."

-*Oida* (**know**) indicates the Lord's knowledge in each of the seven letters ('I know' is repeated for each of the seven messengers 2:9; 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15). In contrast to *ginōskō*, which refers to a progressive acquisition of knowledge, *oida* refers to complete and full knowledge.

-The Lord of the church knows everything there is to know about the church—both good and bad. Such perfect knowledge is evident in each letter as the Lord condemns and commends the churches.

....your the (each specific one, see Heb.6:10) works, your labor (toil), your patience (in trying circumstances),

- Hupomonē* does not denote a grim, fatalistic resignation, but a courageous acceptance of hardship, suffering, and loss, always looking for the to work out of these trials. This commendation indicates that, despite their difficult circumstances, the Ephesian believers remained faithful to their Lord.
- In contrast, its synonym, *makrothumia*, generally emphasizes patience with people.

and that you cannot bear (*to take up and carry, bear along*) **those who are evil.**

Four decades earlier Paul had commanded them not to “give the devil an opportunity” (see Eph. 4:27), and they were still reluctant to do so. Also see 1Cor. 5:1-8.

And you have tested those who say they are apostles (*sent by God to you!*) **and are not, and have found them liars;**

-see Acts 20:28-31

- False teachers pose a constant danger to the church. Jesus warned of “false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15). In his second epistle, John warned of the “many deceivers [who] have gone out into the world” (2 John 7) and cautioned believers, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring [true biblical] teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting” (2 John 10). Paul confronted false “apostles” in Corinth and unmasked them with this description: “Such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds” (2 Cor. 11:13–15). See 1 John 2:18-23

3 and you have persevered (*same word as bear in v.2, see Gal. 6:1-5*) **and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary** (*see Gal. 6:6-10*).

- These remarkable characteristics establish the fact that the church had served the Lord well, and few modern churches could qualify for such commendation.
- These remarkable characteristics are sorely needed in the church today where too often there is failure to serve the Lord patiently, and the tendency is to compromise both with moral and theological evil. The Ephesian church is therefore commended for abhorring that which is morally bad as well as that which is theologically in error.

Rebuke

4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left (*not lost*) **your first love.**

‘Successful ministry without personal devotion is not successful’

-literally reads: ‘your first love you have left’

-For a picture of ‘left’ see John 4:28. She left, not lost her.....

-What is the first and foremost characteristic of a Christian? See Mt. 22:37-38, see John 8:42, see 2Cor. 5:14.

-**Walvoord:** The church at Ephesus was now in its second generation of Christians, those who had come into the church in the thirty years since Paul had ministered in their midst. Though they continued to labor faithfully as those who had preceded them, the love of God which characterized the first generation was missing.

-some root causes besides being 2nd generation: see 1Tim. 6:10, see 1John 2:15,

-The danger of substituting ‘love for idols’ for ‘love for God’ is stated in the closing verse of the same epistle: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). Even loved ones can stand between the child of God and his love for his or her heavenly Father.

5 Remember keep on doing so therefore from where you have fallen;

-do not mistake successful ministry for being upright. Without a fervent love for Christ we are fallen

though being used.

repent *aorist and do (not feel) the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.*

-**Walvoord:** The meaning seems to be that He would remove the church as a testimony for Christ. This, of course, was tragically fulfilled ultimately. The church retained its vigor for several centuries and was not only the seat of Eastern bishops but also the meeting place of the third General Council which took place in a.d. 431 and was held in the Church of Saint Mary, whose ruins are still extant today.

6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

-no other record of this false group other than here and chapter **see 2:15)**

-We only have in Scripture the meaning of the word to go by to understand what Jesus meant by 'the deeds of the Nicolaitans'. At Pergamos it was holding to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans

-There are two views of the Nicolaitans:

Walvoord:

1-The Nicolaitans apparently were a sect, and some have interpreted their name as meaning "conquering of the people" from *nikaō*, meaning "to conquer" and *laos*, meaning "the people." This view considers the Nicolaitans as the forerunners of the clerical hierarchy superimposed upon the laity and robbing them of spiritual freedom.

2-Others have considered them as a licentious sect advocating complete freedom in Christian conduct including participation in heathen feasts and free love. Alford states, "The prevailing opinion among the fathers was, that they were a sect founded by Nicolaus the proselyte of Antioch, one of the seven deacons." Alford believes that this is substantially correct, and that it is supported by the statement "which I also hate" (v. 6) concerning which Alford states, "This strong expression in the mouth of our Lord unquestionably points at deeds of abomination and impurity: cf. Isa. 61:8; Jer. 44:4; Amos 5:21; Zech. 8:17." That which was hated by the Ephesians was embraced by the church at Pergamos according to Revelation 2:15.

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

-the Spirit of God is the primary speaker to all in the church. Thru the Word of God, thru the Word of God as taught by the messenger(s) of God.

-'churches': The use of the plural noun churches signifies the universal nature of this invitation each time that it appears. This call cannot be limited just to a group of overcomers in a single church; it must apply to all churches. Every church needs to hear every message. Each of us needs to hear every message.

To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

-how do we overcome? (let's all turn here) **See John 2:14, see 4:4, see 5:4-5**

8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna

Smyrna means: 'myrrh'

Church age covered: 100 to 313 AD, Church of the Roman Persecution

-Presumably, a church was planted in Smyrna during Paul's Ephesian ministry (Acts 19:10), either by Paul himself, or by his converts.

-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 (**see Matt. 2:11**) and the dead (**see 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.

Barclay on Smyrna:

If it was inevitable that Ephesus should come first in the list of the seven churches, it was only natural that Smyrna, its great rival, should come second. Of all the cities of Asia, Smyrna was the loveliest. It was known as the ornament of Asia, the crown of Asia and the flower of Asia. The Greek satirist Lucian said that it was 'the fairest of the cities of Ionia'. Aristides, the Greek Christian writer, who sang the praise of Smyrna with such splendor, spoke of 'the grace which extends over every part like a rainbow ... the brightness which pervades every part, and reaches up to the heavens, like the glitter of the bronze of armor in Homer'. It added to the charm of Smyrna that the west wind, the gentle zephyr, constantly blew through its streets. 'The wind', said Aristides, 'blows through every part of the city, and makes it as fresh as a grove of trees.' The constant west wind had only one disadvantage. The sewage of the city drained into the gulf on which the city stood, and the west wind tended to blow the smell back upon the city rather than out to sea.

Smyrna was magnificently situated. It stood at the end of the road which crossed Lydia and Phrygia and travelled out to the far east, and it commanded the trade of the rich Hermus valley. Inevitably, it was a great trading city. The city itself stood at the end of a long arm of the sea, which ended in a small land-locked harbor in the heart of the city. It was the safest of all harbors and the most convenient; and it had the added advantage that in time of war it could be easily closed by a chain across its mouth. It was fitting that on the coins of Smyrna there should be the image of a merchant ship ready for sea.

The setting of the city was equally beautiful. It began at the harbor; it crossed the narrow foothills; and then behind the city there rose the Pagos, a hill covered with temples and noble buildings which were spoken of as 'the Crown of Smyrna'. One traveler has described it as 'a queenly city crowned with towers'. Aristides likened Smyrna to a great statue with the feet in the sea, the middle parts in the plain and the foothills, and the head, crowned with great buildings, on the Pagos behind. He called it 'a flower of beauty such as earth and sun had never shown to mankind'.

Smyrna's history was very much connected to its beauty, for it was one of the very few planned cities in the world. It had been founded as a Greek colony as far back as 1000 BC. Round about 600 BC, disaster had befallen it, for then the Lydians had broken in from the east and destroyed it. For 400 years, Smyrna had been no city but merely a collection of little villages; then the Macedonian general Lysimachus had rebuilt it as a planned whole. It was built with great, straight, broad streets. Strabo, the Greek geographer, speaks of the handsomeness of the streets, the excellence of the paving and the great rectangular blocks in which it was built. Most famous of all the streets was the Street of Gold, which began with the Temple of Zeus and ended with the Temple of Cybele. It ran across the foothills of the Pagos at an angle; and, if the buildings which encircled the Pagos were the crown of Smyrna, the Street of Gold was the necklace round the hill.

Here we have an interesting and a significant thing which shows the care and knowledge with which John set down his letters from the risen Christ. The risen Christ is called 'the one who died and came to life'. That was an echo of the experience of Smyrna itself.

Smyrna had other claims to greatness. It was a free city, and it knew what loyalty was. Long before Rome was undisputed ruler of the world, Smyrna had thrown in its lot with Rome, never to waver in its faithfulness. The Roman statesman Cicero called Smyrna 'one of our most faithful and our most ancient allies'. In the campaign against Mithridates in the east, things had gone badly with Rome. And when the soldiers of Rome were suffering from hunger and cold, the people of Smyrna stripped off their own

clothes to send to them.

Such was the reverence of Smyrna for Rome that, as far back as 195 BC, it was the first city in the world to build a temple to the goddess Roma. And in AD 26, when the cities of Asia Minor were competing for the privilege of erecting a temple to the godhead of Tiberius, Smyrna was picked out for that honor, overcoming even Ephesus.

Not only was Smyrna great in trade, beauty and political and religious status; it was also a city where culture flourished. Apollonius of Tyana had urged upon Smyrna the truth that only the people can make a city great. He said: 'Though Smyrna is the most beautiful of all cities under the sun, and makes the sea its own, and holds the fountains of the zephyr, yet it is a greater charm to wear a crown of men than a crown of porticoes and pictures and gold beyond the standard of mankind: for buildings are seen only in their own place, but men are seen everywhere and spoken about everywhere and make their city as vast as the range of countries which they can visit.' So Smyrna had a stadium in which famous games were held each year, a magnificent public library, an Odeion, which was the home of music, and a theatre which was one of the largest in Asia Minor. In particular, Smyrna was one of the cities which laid claim to being the birthplace of the Greek poet Homer; it had a memorial building called the Homereion, and put Homer's head on its coinage. This was a disputed claim. Thomas Heywood, the seventeenth-century poet, wrote the famous epigram:

Seven cities warr'd for Homer, being dead,
Who, living, had no roof to shroud his head.

In such a city, we would expect magnificent architecture; and in Smyrna there was a host of temples to Cybele, to Zeus, to Apollo, to Nemesis, to Aphrodite and to Asclepius.

Smyrna had rather more than its share of a characteristic which was common to all Greek cities. The German historian Theodor Mommsen said that Asia Minor was 'a paradise of municipal vanity', and Smyrna of all cities was noted for 'its municipal rivalry and its local pride'. Everyone in it wanted to exalt Smyrna and had a personal desire to climb to the top of the municipal tree. It is not without significance that in the address of the letter the risen Christ is called 'the first and the last'. In comparison with his glory, all earthly distinctions are worthless.

There remains one feature of Smyrna which stands out in the letter and which had serious consequences for the Christians there. The Jews were especially numerous and influential (verse 9). We find them, for instance, contributing 10,000 denarii to make the city beautiful. It is clear that in Smyrna they were particularly hostile to the Christian Church, no doubt because it was from them and from those interested in Judaism that Christianity drew many of its converts. So, we may well end this study of Smyrna with the story of the most famous Christian martyrdom which happened there.

Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was martyred on Saturday, 23rd February, AD 155. It was the time of the public games; the city was crowded, and the crowds were excited. Suddenly the shout went up: 'Away with the atheists; let Polycarp be searched for.' No doubt Polycarp could have escaped; but already he had had a dream in which he saw the pillow under his head burning with fire; and, when he woke, he told his disciples: 'I must be burnt alive.' His whereabouts were betrayed by a slave who collapsed under torture. They came to arrest him. He ordered that they should be given a meal and provided with all they required, while he asked for himself the privilege of one last hour in prayer. Not even the police captain wanted to see Polycarp die. On the brief journey to the city, he pleaded with the old man: 'What harm is it to say: "Caesar is Lord" and to offer sacrifice and be saved?' But Polycarp was adamant that for him only Jesus Christ was Lord. When he entered the arena, there came a voice from heaven saying: 'Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man.' The proconsul gave him the choice of cursing the name of Christ and making

sacrifice to Caesar—or death. ‘Eighty and six years have I served him,’ said Polycarp, ‘and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?’ The proconsul threatened him with burning, and Polycarp replied: ‘You threaten me with the fire that burns for a time, and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting? Come, do what you will.’

So the crowds came flocking from the workshops and from the baths with bundles of wood—and the Jews, even though they were breaking the Sabbath law by carrying such burdens, were ahead of everyone in bringing wood for the fire. They were going to bind him to the stake. ‘Leave me as I am,’ he said, ‘for he who gives me power to endure the fire will grant me to remain in the flames unmoved even without the security you will give by the nails.’ So they left him loosely bound in the flames, and Polycarp prayed his great prayer:

O Lord God Almighty, Father of thy beloved and blessed Child, Jesus Christ, through whom we have received full knowledge of thee, God of angels and powers, and of all creation, and of the whole family of the righteous, who live before thee, I bless thee that thou hast granted unto me this day and hour, that I may share, among the number of the martyrs, in the cup of thy Christ, for the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. And may I today be received among them before thee, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as thou, the God without falsehood and of truth, hast prepared beforehand and shown forth and fulfilled. For this reason I also praise thee for all things. I bless thee, I glorify thee through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, thy beloved Child, through whom be glory to thee with him and the Holy Spirit, both now and for the ages that are to come. Amen.

So much is plain fact; but then the story drifts into legend, for it goes on to tell that the flames made a kind of tent around Polycarp and left him untouched. At length, the executioner stabbed him to death to achieve what the flames could not do. ‘And when he did this there came out a dove, and much blood, so that the fire was quenched, and all the crowd marveled that there was such a difference between the unbelievers and the elect.’ What is certain is that Polycarp died a martyr for the faith.

It cannot have been easy to be a Christian at Smyrna—and yet the letter to Smyrna is one of the two in which there is undiluted praise.

MacArthur: 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.

write, ‘These things says (followed by a description of the speaker from chapter 1:18) **the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:**

-why is this description important to the Messenger of the church at Smyrna and to the church itself?
-**The first and the last** is an Old Testament title for God (Isa. 44:6; 48:12; cf. 41:4), and its application here (and in 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.

9 "I know (*again fully know, not progressive knowledge*) your works, tribulation (*pressures*), -came about because: Not surprisingly, the city was a leading center for the cult of emperor worship. The citizens of Smyrna willingly offered the worship that Emperor Domitian was now demanding of his subjects everywhere. Though the Christians willingly submitted to the emperor's civil authority (cf. Rom. 13:1-7.), they refused to offer sacrifices to him and worship him. For that refusal they were branded rebels and faced the wrath of the Roman government.

and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

-Unbelieving Jews commonly accused Christians of cannibalism (based on a misunderstanding of the Lord's Supper), immorality (based on a perversion of the holy kiss with which believers greeted each other; cf. Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26), breaking up homes (when one spouse became a Christian and the other did not, it often caused conflict; cf. Luke 12:51-53), atheism (because, as already noted, Christians rejected the pagan pantheon of deities), and political disloyalty and rebellion.

-These haters of the gospel were a 'synagogue of Satan', meaning they assembled to plan their attack on the church, thus doing Satan's will. They may have claimed to be a synagogue of God, but they were just the opposite. **see John 8:44**

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

-ten literal days locally, but Historically, 10 Roman Emperors who officially persecuted the Church.

-locally, 10 intense days perhaps.

-96-313 AD more than 10 roman emperors, but only 10 persecuted the church.

1-Domitian 96 AD

2-Trajan 98-116 AD

3-Hadrain 117-138 AD

4-Antonius Pius 139-161 AD

5-Marcus Aurelius 162-180 AD

6-Severus 193-211 AD

7-Maximus 235-238 AD

8-Decius 249-251 AD

9-Valerian 253-260 AD

10-Diocletian 285-305 AD

Be faithful (sing.) until death, and I will give you (sing.) the crown of life.

-5 crowns, this one for suffering for the faith

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