



Overview

Author: John

Date: c 95 AD

Purpose: John writes these letters to continue the pastoral care to the congregations established by St. Paul. He writes to bring the words of His vision of the exalted Jesus Christ to the churches.

Outline:
A. Vision of the Exalted Christ (Revelation 1:9-20)

- B. Letters to the Seven Churches
 - Letter to Ephesus (2:1-7)
 - Letter to Smyrna (2:8-11)**
 - Letter to Pergamum (2:12-17)
 - Letter to Thyatira (2:18-28)
 - Letter to Sardis (3:1-6)
 - Letter to Philadelphia (3:7-13)
 - Letter to Laodicea (3:14-22)

Key Terms: the exalted Christ, epistle, one literal sense, 'One like a Son of Man', first love, Nicolaitan heresy, libertine, legalist, antinomian, syncretism

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Around the Word Bible Study Trinity, 2015

The 7 Churches of the Revelation Revelation 2:8–11

Opening: Psalm 146

¹Praise | the LORD!*

Praise the LORD, | O my soul!

²**I will praise the LORD as long | as I live;***

I will sing praises to my God while I have my | being.

³Put not your trust in | princes,*

in a son of man, in whom there is no sal- | vation.

⁴**When his breath departs he returns | to the earth;***
on that very day his plans | perish.

⁵Blessed is he whose help is the God of | Jacob,*

whose hope is in the | LORD his God,

⁶**who made heaven and earth,**
the sea, and all that is | in them,*
who keeps faith for- | ever;

⁷who executes justice for | the oppressed,*

who gives food to the | hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;

⁸**the LORD opens the eyes | of the blind.***

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;

the LORD loves the | righteous.

⁹**The LORD watches over the sojourners;**
he upholds the widow and the | fatherless,*
but the way of the wicked he brings to | ruin.

¹⁰The LORD will reign for- | ever,*

your God, O Zion, to all generations. |

Praise the LORD!

Glory be to the Father and | to the Son*

and to the Holy | Spirit;

as it was in the be- | ginning,*

is now, and will be forever. | Amen.

Letter Two: To the Church in Smyrna

"The Lord Prepares His Church for Persecution"

Read Revelation 2:8–11

2:8 Smyrna

+ Smyrna is modern day Izmir, Turkey. The ancient city was (35 miles northwest of Ephesus) in John's day was 'a paradise of municipal vanity' (Hemer, 57). Smyrna was the birthplace of Homer. It was founded by Alexander the Great. Smyrna was a city that had suffered. The word "Smyrna" itself means "myrrh" and is the same word used in the New Testament. The locals were not unaware that their city was named for a fragrance used in burial customs. The city was also known for its beauty. Old Smyrna enjoyed early prosperity and later was destroyed. In John's day, the city was on the rise. It had a stadium, library and public theater (Brighton, 70). Smyrna was known for its loyalty to Rome and its imperial cult.

2:8 "The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life"

+ Jesus is the first and the last. These are His words. He is "before all things" (Colossians 1:17). He has been God from eternity. He was begotten of the Father from eternity. He saw every city come into being and knows the days of their passing away. He will be Judge at the last day, coming on the clouds of His glory. More than that, He has died and came to life. He has conquered death and destruction. He Himself rules over life and imparts new life to those who believe in Him.

2:9 "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)..."

+ The church endured tribulation and was poor because of it. Spiritual poverty is a blessed state according to Jesus: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). Being brought low because of the confession is a mark of God's favor and something a church may rejoice in.

+ What kinds of things does your congregation rejoice in? Do congregations rejoice in suffering for the confession of Christ?

2:9 "Slander"

+ The Christians at Smyrna had to endure slander from the local Jewish population. Since the Jews had safe status under imperial law, it is likely that they persecuted the local Christian population. The Christians were made to suffer, despite the reality: the Christians at Smyrna were the true Jews. They were the "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16; cf. Romans 2:28–29; Galatians 6:15; Philippians 3:2–11). The Christians believed that Jesus Christ was the fulfilled of the Old Testament. The Jews who rejected Jesus were not true Jews. Their synagogue was thus a "synagogue of Satan," and a false, demonically-driven assembly.

2:10 "Do not fear what you are about to suffer."

+ The Church of Smyrna has some who are going to suffer. Jesus reminds them not to fear. "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). Fear is an emotional reaction to uncontrollable events. Faith believes that God is in charge of the events of the future. Thus there is no need for fear or anxiety (see Matthew 6:24–34; 10:29–31). Still, the flesh is weak. Sinners worry and fear. The God who has died and risen from the dead for the sins of mankind exhorts his Christians not to fear in the face of persecution.

2:10 "tested for ten days"

+ The Smyrnan Church will suffer testing of the faith

"for ten days." Some have suggested in this the language of the Roman arena. God allows a limited, intermediate period of suffering. He who is "the first and the last" will limit even this suffering and see to its end. The possibility of martyrdom was for the Christian victory and life, made sure by Jesus' death and resurrection for us.

+ How does Jesus' death and resurrection prepare a believer for the possibility of martyrdom? How does Christian martyrdom differ from the senseless deaths of Muslim terrorists?

2:10 "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."

+ "To be faithful" is to have faith and confess it all the way to the end. Jesus promises the "crown of life" to the Smyrnans who face persecution. Crowns were granted on successes in athletic games. The crown was "the award given to a victor as he entered eternal life" (Hemer, 75). The imagery of the crown focuses the minds of the soon-to-be-suffering Christians away from the possibility of pain and to the final goal of heavenly joy with the Triune God (cf. 2 Timothy 4:8).

7:11a "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

+ The Spirit of Christ speaks to the Churches. He who has been given an ear by the Word creating faith will hearken and prepare for the persecution Jesus warns the Smyrnans.

7:11b "The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death."

+ The "second death" is the big death. It is eternal death of the unrepentant and unbelievers in the lake of fire. The one who conquers by confessing Jesus Christ will be awarded the eternal reward of the crown of life with Him.

+ The congregation at Smyrna may have included a famous member in his younger years. St. Polycarp of Smyrna (AD 69–155) was a famous early bishop in this church. He is commemorated as a pastor and martyr by the Lutheran Church on February 23 (see center image). John's letter actually prepared Polycarp for martyrdom. Consider this summary of Polycarp's final earthly day:

"He was escorted to the local proconsul, Statius Quadratus, who interrogated him in front of a crowd of curious onlookers. Polycarp seemed unfazed by the interrogation; he carried on a witty dialogue with Quadratus until Quadratus lost his temper and threatened Polycarp: he'd be thrown to wild beasts, he'd be burned at the stake, and so on. Polycarp just told Quadratus that while the proconsul's fire lasts but a little while, the fires of judgment ("reserved for the ungodly," he slyly added) cannot be quenched. Polycarp concluded, "But why do you delay? Come, do what you will."

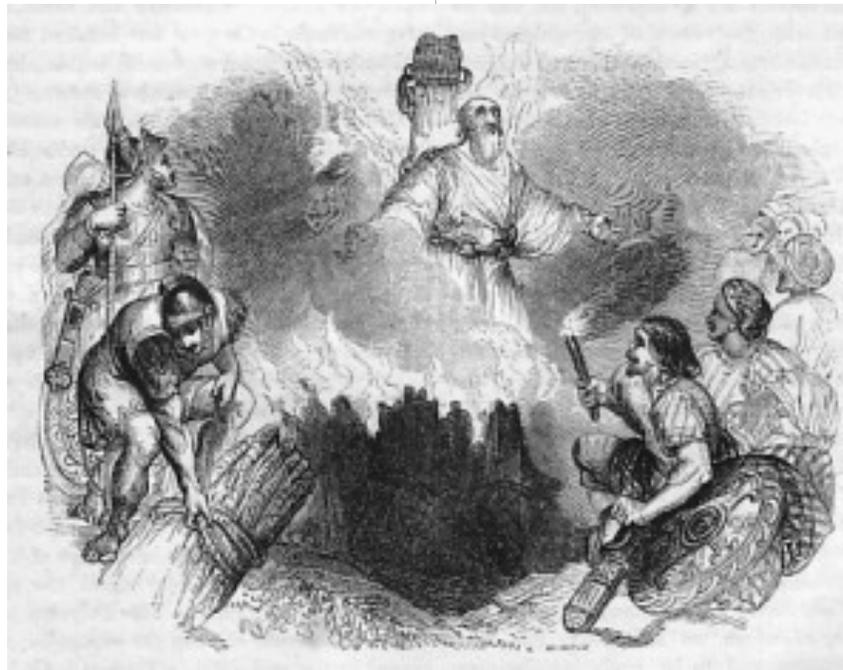
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Soldiers then grabbed him to nail him to a stake, but Polycarp stopped them: "Leave me as I am. For he who grants me to endure the fire will enable me also to remain on the pyre unmoved, without the security you desire from nails." He prayed aloud, the fire was lit, and his flesh was consumed. The chronicler of this martyrdom said it was "not as burning flesh but as bread baking or as gold and silver refined in a furnace."

The account concluded by saying that Polycarp's death was remembered by "everyone"—"he is even spoken of by the heathen in every place." (Mark Galli, "131 Christians Every Christian Should Know," (B&H Books, 2000), 360).

+ How does Polycarp's martyrdom encourage you in the faith and confession of Jesus Christ?



+ Where are the most intense persecutions facing the Church? What kinds of persecution show up in your work place or local community? How can we be faithful in the face of persecutions?

+ Our Lord Jesus Christ came as the One persecuted for being the very truth of God. His innocence earned Him scorn from the world. His claim to be the eternal Son of God landed Him ultimately in the hands of Pontius Pilate and the leaders of the Jews. He sets the example of being faithful unto death. He dies for the sins of His persecutors, indeed, for all men. He wore the crown of thorns so you could have the crown of life. He confessed perfectly and

fully so our confessions would have perfect content of His life, death, and resurrection. He rose to conquer the vicious persecutor behind it all – Satan and his demonic hoard.

+ The world seems chaotic. Senseless attacks are frequently leveled against Christians. Yet Jesus is the first and the last. He has seen the future and it is secure with Him. In His blood, your sin is forgiven. Your confession is emboldened by His Word and Spirit. You will be able to stand firm in the truth, come what may.

Come, Lord Jesus!

Closing Hymn: Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word (LSB, 655)

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