

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION: VERSE BY VERSE

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## WEEK FOUR

### I. THE MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES (Revelation 2:1 - 3:22)

#### A. The Repeating Pattern Of The Messages

1. A description of the character of Christ.
2. A description of what Christ knows about each church, with a word of commendation for their strengths and a word of rebuke for their sins of commission and omission.
3. A call to repentance, with a warning of consequences if they don't repent.
4. A description of the reward promised for faithfulness and overcoming.

#### B. The Message To The Church In Smyrna (2:8-11)

1. The historical context of Smyrna:
  - a. It was a leading center of business and religious pluralism in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.
  - b. It was called "The Crown of Asia" and "The Flower of Asia."
  - c. It was 50 miles north of Ephesus, built at the head of a deep gulf, giving it an excellent harbour.
  - d. It competed with Ephesus to be seen as the "first" of the cities in Asia:
    - i. One of their coins reads, "First city of Asia in size and beauty."
  - e. It was rabidly loyal to all things Roman:
    - i. It was the first city to build a temple to the goddess of Rome, (195 BC).
    - ii. It built a temple to Caesar Augustus in 23 AD.
    - iii. It built a temple to Emperor Tiberius in 25 AD.
    - iv. It even built temples to Empress Lydia and the Roman Senate!
  - f. The church was most likely planted by Paul during his mission to Ephesus.
2. The specific message to the church in Smyrna:
  - a. Beginning with a description of the character of Christ:

***"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again." (v. 8)***

- i. Christ self-identifies borrowing from Yahweh's self-identification language in Isaiah 44:6.
- ii. Christ uses language a church in the midst of suffering needs to hear: power over death.

b. Then followed by a description of what Christ knows about the church:

i. First, He breaks the previous pattern and immediately addresses their challenge...

***"I know your affliction and your poverty – yet you are rich! I know about the slander and those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."*** (v. 9)

- 1.) ***"Affliction"***: the Greek word is *"thlipsis."* It means 'great difficulty' and 'trial'. It is used in the NT for what happens when the kingdom of God bumps up against the kingdom of darkness.
- 2.) ***"Poverty"***: their stores were being boycotted, their homes were being ransacked, and they were being blacklisted by employers.
- 3.) ***"Yet you are rich!"***: John is pulling back the veil – showing things as they TRULY are!
- 4.) ***"Slander and those who say they are Jews and are not... a synagogue of Satan"***: those who reject the Jewish Messiah are not truly Jews in John's thinking... These people were apparently turning Christians into the governmental authorities.

ii. Secondly, a word of rebuke...

- 1.) Again, Christ breaks the pattern. There is no word of rebuke. They were doing things right!

iii. Thirdly, a call to repentance...

- 1.) There is no call to repentance because there was no need for repentance.
- 2.) There is a lesson here: not every trial and difficulty is the product of disobedience; sometimes it is the product of obedience!

iv. Fourthly, the reward for faithfulness...

***"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death."*** (vv. 10-11)

- 1.) ***"What you are about to suffer"***: not entirely encouraging: they had more suffering on the way...
- 2.) ***"The devil will put some of you in prison"***: pulling back the veil, revealing the true nature of reality.
- 3.) ***"...to test you"***: the Greek word means "to prove" and "to improve"... God uses evil to strengthen us.
- 4.) ***"...for ten days"***: ten was symbolic of "completeness": a complete trial... Defining the time also shows that God is ultimately in control.
- 5.) Christ's advice for those facing persecution:
  - a.) What we should do: ***"Be faithful, even to the point of death"*** - don't waver if physical deliverance does not arrive, just as Christ did not waver under the same circumstances (2:8).
  - b.) What He will do: ***"I will give you life as your victor's crown... The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death."*** (See 20:6; 20:14; 21:8b).