

The Poor Rich Church

Revelation 2:8-11

Introduction

The book of Revelation falls into three categories: Chapter 1 is the vision of Christ; chapters 2 and 3 are the letters to the seven churches; and chapters 4 to 22 are a prophetic view of things that will come to pass. That is the outline of the book as expressed in Revelation 1:19: "Write the things which thou hast seen [the vision of Christ], and the things which are [the churches], and the things which shall be hereafter [the prophecy of the things to come]._" We are studying the second section regarding the letters to the churches--specifically the church at Smyrna for this lesson.

A. The Elements of Smyrna

The church at Smyrna represents the persecuted church. It was ...

1. AN HISTORICAL CHURCH

It was located thirty-five miles north of Ephesus in Asia Minor. It was also a persecuted church. The group of believers at that church were being persecuted in A.D. 95 at the time John wrote.

It was also ...

2. A SYMBOLIC CHURCH

The church at Smyrna represents every persecuted church from every age. It also represents every persecuted believer.

The church at Smyrna is historical because it really existed. It is symbolic because it represented all persecuted churches.

B. The Exception of Smyrna

Most of the seven letters have seven basic parts: the correspondent, the church, the city, the commendation, the condemnation, the command, and the counsel. There are some exceptions, and Smyrna is one because its letter has only six parts.

1. THE ABSENCE OF CONDEMNATION

The part that is missing is the condemnation. Nothing bad is said about the church at Smyrna.

2. THE ABSENCE OF HYPOCRISY

Since the church at Smyrna was undergoing a great deal of suffering, it would have been very easy for that to cause the people to dissipate quickly. They could have given up, and the church would have died under persecution. But persecution has a way of purifying the ranks. People who weren't actually living for Jesus Christ wouldn't claim to be Christians because it might cost them their lives. So the persecuted church had all of its dross and hypocrisy eliminated. All of the people remaining were pure, committed Christians. That was the case in Smyrna. There weren't many hypocrites in those days. People weren't ready to lose their lives for something they didn't believe in.

The persecuted church is the pure church. Consequently, there was no condemnation given to the church at Smyrna. The people did well just by existing. Let's look first at ...

I. THE CORRESPONDENT (v. 8)

"And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last, who was dead, and is alive."

John was told to write what was said by One who was "the first and the last, who was dead and is alive." Who was He? Jesus Christ.

A. Christ's Sole Authorship

John was not writing to Smyrna about his own ideas; he was relating direct information from the mouth of Christ. In the vision in Revelation 1:13, Christ is pictured as ministering to seven lampstands, each one representing a church. As He ministers to those lampstands, He is clothed like the Son of Man "with a garment down to His foot, and girded about ..." (v. 13). So Christ is writing the letters as He ministers to the churches. Christ is the author.

B. Christ's Self-Portrait

Jesus says that He was dead but came alive. You say, "Why does he designate Himself that way?" That is the way He is designated in Revelation 1:8: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, who is, and who was, and who is to come" That is the same basic title. Revelation 1:18 says, "I am He that liveth, and was dead" John is simply identifying Jesus Christ from a previous description. Jesus Christ is the writer to the church at Smyrna.

1. EXPRESSING SYMPATHY

The question can be raised: Why is Christ designated as the One who was dead and is alive? It is very obvious. He is writing to a suffering church saying, "I know what you're going through. I was once dead. You are worried about martyrdom--I've been there."

2. ENCOURAGING VICTORY

At the same time, there is tremendous encouragement in what He says. By designating Himself to the church at Smyrna as One who was dead but now alive, Christ is saying, "I can sympathize with you. But better than that, I can give you victory. You may die for My sake, but you're ultimately going to live." Christ has said, "... Because I live, ye shall live also" (Jn. 14:19).

Jesus described Himself in view of the situation that existed at Smyrna. The people were suffering; and they might die. So He reminds them that He suffered martyrdom--at least what men thought was martyrdom. But He also came out the other side of the grave, and is now alive. That promise exists for them also. Sympathy and victory are both expressed in the title that Christ uses for Himself: He is "the first and last, who was dead, and is alive." Jesus is the correspondent and John is the postman--Christ writes the letter and John delivers it.

Next, I want you to notice ...

II. THE CHURCH (v. 8)

"And unto the angel [or pastor] of the church in Smyrna write ..."

A. Its Pastor

Christ is writing to the pastor of Smyrna. According to history, the pastor of Smyrna was a man named Polycarp. He remained the pastor until his death around A.D. 155. Christ wants him to relate His message to the entire congregation.

B. Its Beginning

Based on history, we don't know how the church in Smyrna began. We also have no idea of its size or who started it. But it seems probable that it began as an offshoot of the church in Ephesus because it was only thirty-five miles away. The Apostle Paul spent three years in Ephesus founding a strong, dynamic church (Ac. 20:31). According to Acts 19:10, word about what was happening at the church in Ephesus had spread throughout all of Asia Minor (cf. Ac. 19:26).

It seems likely that the church in Smyrna began as a result of the spreading of God's word from Ephesus. A group of believers gathered together to talk and study about Christ. As they rallied around the person of Christ, a little body of believers grew in Smyrna. I believe it was an offshoot of the tremendous work that went on in Ephesus. The church in Ephesus had excellent teachers: Paul, Timothy, Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos. Their message possibly spread to Smyrna. However it started isn't the point; what's important is the fact that it did. It is not named in the book of Acts, and evidently Paul never went there on any of his missionary journeys.

The Meaning of Smyrna

Smyrna is a very interesting word because the Greek word smurna is translated as "myrrh." It is a substance taken from a thorny tree.

1. ITS USE IN HISTORY

Myrrh was used for many things:

a. Perfume

b. Holy Ointment

It was used to spread on people in pagan religious ceremonies.

2. ITS USE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Smyrna is used only three times in the New Testament. Each time it is translated "myrrh"--except when it appears as the name of the city.

a. At Christ's Birth

In Matthew 2:11, wise men came from the East and brought Christ gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

b. At Christ's Crucifixion

According to Mark 15:23, while Christ hung on the cross, He was offered wine mixed with myrrh. It served as an anesthetic. His crucifiers were trying to dull His senses so the pain wouldn't be so bad.

c. At Christ's Burial

According to John 19:39, "... a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight" was used to prepare the body of Jesus Christ for burial after He had died.

Myrrh was present at Christ's birth, death, and burial. Myrrh also refers to suffering. As Jesus suffered on the cross, He was offered myrrh. When He was dead, He was embalmed with myrrh.

C. Its Suffering

1. A FITTING NAME

Since myrrh can refer to suffering, it is fitting that the suffering church be located in Smyrna. Hundreds of years before God ever started a church in that city, He had it prepared with the appropriate name: Smyrna. It is said that the city received its name from the fact that it had a very profitable trade in myrrh. The fragrant spice came from a kind of balsam or herb tree. It was a very important commodity in ancient times. Smyrna was even called, "The Port of Fragrance."

2. A FITTING PICTURE

Myrrh provides a beautiful picture of suffering. When Christ came into this world as a little baby, He came to suffer. When He died on a cross, He was suffering. To show the end of His suffering, He was embalmed with myrrh.

a. **Releasing the Fragrance**

An interesting fact about myrrh is that it has to be crushed before it gives forth any fragrance. The more it is crushed, the more fragrant it becomes. The same thing was true of the church in Smyrna. The more the people were crushed, the sweeter the aroma. The more they were stomped on, the more the world caught the fragrance of their faith and love. The crushed church is the fragrant church. God permitted Satan to bruise that church; the harder he bruised it, the more he released the fragrance of its grace, and the more devastating its testimony became.

b. **Running to Jesus**

It is interesting to see what happens to a believer or a church in persecution. They are very much like a child. When a child is hurt or wounded, his normal response is to run to his mother and explain where he hurts. The church in persecution responds in much the same way. The more we are crushed, the more we run to Jesus. Instead of destroying the church, persecution drives the church to Jesus Christ.

The more the church is crushed, the sweeter it smells; the more it hurts, the more it runs to Jesus. Have you noticed that happening in your life? When do you find yourself leaning on the breast of Christ? When things are going badly? Of course! Perhaps that will help you to understand why God brings trouble into your life. He knows that's what you need to make you turn to Him.

The little church in Smyrna was being crushed for its love for Christ; the more they were crushed, the more they loved. Contrast that with the church in Ephesus. Those people had everything going their way--no particular problems from persecution. But what did they lose? Love. They left their first love. The church in Smyrna didn't. The more the world hated them, the more they loved Jesus; the more the world stomped on them, the more they leaned on Christ.

The Christ-loving saints in the little church in Smyrna were destitute, crushed, powerless, and poverty-stricken. However, they were comforted in the warm arms of Jesus Christ and exuded a fragrance that the world would notice.

III. THE CITY (v. 8)

What kind of city was Smyrna? It was perhaps the most beautiful city in all of Asia Minor. It was called "The Crown of Asia." But I'm quite sure that its magnificence must have seemed like poor compensation for the neglect of the architect who planned the city: Since there were no drains, all the sewage ran down the streets. That problem was especially serious in the rainy season.

A. Its Continuation

Smyrna was an old city. It had been around a long time under various names. Today, Smyrna is the largest city in Asia Minor, only now it is called "Izmir," which is the Turkish name for Smyrna. And still in existence today is a body of people who are in love with Jesus Christ. Remember what happened to Ephesus? Christ said, "If you don't get back to your first love, I'm going to put out your candle." Today there is no church in Ephesus. But thirty-five miles north there is a church in Smyrna. They never left their first love. They hung on to Jesus Christ. The more the church was crushed, the more it leaned on Him.

B. Its Characteristics

In Roman times, Smyrna was a great city. For example:

1. SMYRNA HAD A GREAT HARBOR

Smyrna was a natural landlocked harbor where whole fleets could be sheltered from outside attack.

2. SMYRNA WAS A BEAUTIFUL CITY

Aristides, an Athenian statesman and general of the fifth century B.C., said, "The wind blows through every part of the city, and makes it as fresh as a grove of trees." However, there was a problem with the west wind in Smyrna: When the sewage from the city ran down the streets to drain into the sea, the west wind blew it back. Nevertheless, in spite of the problems, the setting of the city was very beautiful. It began at the harbor and traversed the rolling hills leading from the harbor. Behind the city rose the pagos--the pinnacle of a hill that was the location for all the pagan temples and noble buildings that were built in those days.

3. SMYRNA WAS A FREE CITY

Smyrna was a patriotic city. In fact, at one time in history, six cities competed to see who would have the opportunity to erect a temple to Rome. Smyrna was picked over the others because of its patriotism. Every time there was a Roman civil war, they were fortunate enough to pick the right side. It was made a free city. No Roman garrison was stationed there. The people had the freedom to do basically what they wanted.

4. SMYRNA WAS A PAGAN WORSHIP CENTER

Temples to Cybele, Apollo, Asclepius, Aphrodite, and Zeus were located in Smyrna. There was a glorious monument to the great Homer, who was born in Smyrna. It was also a place of emperor worship. Caesar was worshiped there. His form was carved out and set before the city with burning incense.

Nestled in the middle of the city was a little band of people who were in love with Jesus Christ. They were being persecuted and killed. The more that were killed, the sweeter their testimony became and the more they grew.

We have seen the correspondent, the city, the church, and now let's look at...

IV. THE COMMENDATION (v. 9)

"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich); and I know the blasphemy of them who say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan."

A. Their Teacher

There are two important words in verse 9: "I know." I can hear the Lord saying, "I know--I've been there. I know it's rough." Jesus is a sympathetic Savior. He says, "I know your works. I know your tribulation. I know your poverty. Remember Me? I was persecuted, too." The Greek word for tribulation is thlipsis. Jesus says, "I know your pressure and agony unto death. I know your persecution. I know your poverty. I know all about the slander and hatred that many Jews have for you."

The Greek word for "know" is oida. It means, "I know by experience," not "I know by observation." Jesus is not observing them; He knows what is happening by experience. The writer of Hebrews said, "For we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Consequently, He is able to help those who are His.

Jesus is the sympathetic Savior. He says, "I know what you're going through because I've been there. I've been persecuted, poor, slandered, and slaughtered." Jesus once said, "... foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head" (Mt. 8:20). What a sweet, sympathetic Savior! Jesus Christ is not some distant deity; He's real and sympathetic.

B. Their Tests

1. TRIBULATION

The statement "I know thy works ..." is general. It is even excluded in some manuscripts. As Christ stands in the midst of the lampstands, ministering to the church, He says, "I know you, Smyrna. I know what's going on. I haven't forgotten you." The people in Smyrna might have wondered if the Lord was still with them.

a. The Result of their Persecution

Then Jesus says, "I know thy ... tribulation" The Greek word for "tribulation" is thlipsis, which means "constant aggressive persecution." In fact, the literal meaning of thlipsis was "to be crushed." Do you see the significance? The little church of myrrh was being crushed. The more it was crushed, the more it gave off its fragrance.

b. The Reasons for their Persecution

You say, "But I don't understand why they were persecuted." The church at Smyrna was opposed to three things:

1) Emperor Worship

Two hundred years before Christ was born, about 195 B.C., the "Dea Roma" (Rome personified as a goddess) had been built in Smyrna. The city became a center of emperor worship: The people began by worshiping Rome and then later by worshiping Caesar. Emperor worship became an offshoot of what was originally the worship of Rome.

The Christians in Smyrna lived in the midst of emperor worship: Caesar was a god to the people. Christians, however, were not going to sprinkle incense in a flame before a bust of Caesar. Consequently, they were accused of a lack of patriotism. The entire society boycotted them.

2) Pagan Worship

Christians also didn't fit into a society that was involved in pagan worship. There were temples, festivals, and supposed gods and goddesses by the thousands. Just as America has lampposts along the streets, Smyrna had pagan idols along their streets. They were everywhere. Idolatry of the grossest type existed in Smyrna. Of course the Christians didn't follow along, so they were ostracized from society.

But the real persecution didn't come from those who worshiped the emperor or idols, but from...

3) The Jews

Revelation 2:9 says, "... I know the blasphemy of them who say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan."

a) The Synagogue of Satan

Christ calls these particular Jews "the synagogue of Satan." You say, "What does He mean by that?" The Jews once went to the synagogue of God. But that same synagogue was no longer the synagogue of the Lord; it became the synagogue of Satan. Why? Most Jews rejected the Messiah of God. If you don't have Jesus Christ in your life, and God is not your God, then your master is Satan--whether you are Jew or Gentile. So Jesus says, "... I know the blasphemy of them who say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan" (v. 9). The same place that used to belong to the Lord now belonged to Satan.

b) The Blasphemy towards Christians

Jesus says, "... I know the blasphemy" You say, "What does He mean by 'blasphemy'?" That word is usually associated with someone blaspheming God. But in this case, certain Jews were literally slandering the Christians. They despised Christianity. In the early days of the church, many of the followers of Judaism hated Christians. For example, the Apostle Paul was a Jew,

and he despised Christians. Before he was saved, he spent most of his time trying to kill them. Since the Jewish system hated Christianity, Christians were often slandered by the Jews. When anyone has slandered Christians, then he has despised Christianity. When Christianity is despised, then Christ has been despised. Finally, if Christ is despised, then God has been blasphemed. Christians in Smyrna had been mercilessly slandered by certain Jews. They had joined with the heathen in putting Christians to death.

(1) INSIGHTS FROM ACTS

You say, "Are you sure this is true?" Absolutely. The book of Acts is full of incidents that reveal the hatred of certain Jews toward believers. In fact, when Christ came, the Jewish leaders hated Christ and everything that He stood for. That hatred continued in the book of Acts. For example:

(a) In Antioch

Acts 13:50 says, "But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their borders." Jews persecuted Christians in Antioch.

(b) In Iconium

Acts 14:2 says, "But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren." They created great havoc. According to verse 5, they were even planning to stone all the Christians.

(c) In Lystra

Acts 14:19 says, "And there came there certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead." The Jewish leaders never did it; they only did the talking and persuading: They usually got somebody else to do their dirty work for them.

(d) In Thessalonica

Acts 17:5 says, "But the Jews who believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain vile fellows of the baser sort" In this case, unbelieving Jews hired a bunch of thugs to persecute Christians.

Many Jews hated Christianity with a passion. They went about avidly trying to destroy Christians.

The Persecution of the Jews

Before you blame the Jews, remember that in general they were in the dark--the god of this world had blinded their minds (2 Cor. 4:4). And that was how the situation was when

Christianity began. But not too long after that, the situation was reversed. The Jews have been persecuted at the hands of so-called Christian nations. The land where the Reformation began with Martin Luther was the same land that destroyed six million Jews in attempted genocide. But it wasn't always that way. At the beginning, many Jews hated Christianity. They were the ones doing the persecuting.

(2) INSIGHT FROM HISTORY

During the time of the Roman Empire, there were some wealthy Jewish proselytes who had the ear of the authorities. Some of the more important people in the Roman Empire were Jewish proselytes--they had been converted to Judaism. And they hated Christianity. Reportedly, the first Roman emperor to kill Christians was Nero. Why did he do that? One reason might be this: Nero had two very dear friends, Alituris, and Nero's lover Poppaea (who later became his wife). Both of them were Jewish proselytes. They persuaded Nero against the Christians.

c) The Claim of the Jewish Population

There was a large Jewish population present in Smyrna who undoubtedly poisoned the minds of the people toward the Christians. Revelation 2:9 says that they slandered the Christians and claimed to be Jews. But they weren't. You say, "What do you mean?" A true Jew is one who has been circumcised in the heart (Rom. 2:28-29). In Romans 9:6 Paul says, "... they are not all Israel, who are of Israel." The true Jew is one inwardly, not outwardly. And God says, "They claim to be My people, but they aren't. They don't belong to the synagogue of the Lord, but to the synagogue of Satan because of their blasphemy against Me."

The Death of Polycarp

The Jews in Smyrna were blaspheming and persecuting the Christians. That is not mere speculation because history has left us with an account of the death of one of the Smyranean Christians: Polycarp, the pastor of the church in Smyrna. In a letter addressed by the church at Smyrna to the churches in the Christian world, it is related that Jews joined with pagans in clamoring that Polycarp should be cast to the lions or burned alive. The account follows:

"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 vision in which he saw the pillow under his head burning with fire, and he had awakened to tell his disciples: 'I must be burnt alive.'

"His whereabouts was betrayed by a slave who collapsed under torture. They came to arrest him Not even the police captain wished to see Polycarp die. On the brief journey to the city, he pled 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 ... [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 that 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 with faggots from the workshops and from the baths, and the Jews, even although they were breaking the Sabbath law by carrying such burdens, were foremost 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" (William Barclay, The Revelation of John, vol. 1 [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976], pp. 76- 77). Polycarp died for Christ. That was just one incident in the life of the Smyrnaean church.

2. POVERTY

In Revelation 2:9 Christ also says, "I know thy ... poverty" What kind of poverty was it?

a. The Words for Poor

There are two Greek words for poor. One is...

1) Penia

This term refers to someone who has very little--who has to work hard to get anything. But that is not the word used in verse 9. It is...

2) Ptocheia

That word means "absolute, complete destitution." The people couldn't get jobs. They were robbed and plundered of the things they did have. The Christians at Smyrna lived in a desperate situation. They had nothing.

b. The Worship of Christ

From a human standpoint, the Christians in the little church in Smyrna had every right to curse God and collapse, but they didn't. The harder it became, the more they leaned on Jesus Christ. That is why the only church God that will ever honor is one that is true to the Word of God and Jesus Christ. The purpose of the church is not to cajole the hypocrites; it is to eliminate them. The glory of the church is its purity. And if it takes a little persecution and suffering to refine it, then may God bring it and bring it fast!

What happens when you suffer? What did the Christians in Smyrna do? They leaned on Jesus. They got rid of the hypocrites. They started living on the essentials and didn't mingle with the world. That is the way Christianity ought to be. They were persecuted, and they were poor.

C. Their Treasure

You say, "Oh, what a poor little church." Verse 9 also adds, "... but thou art rich ..." How could they be called rich? What did they have? Laodicea claimed to be rich, but God said they were wretched (Rev. 3:17). Smyrna says, "We're poor," but God says, "You're rich." What made them rich? Love, joy, peace, grace, fellowship. Laodicea had none of that--they were poor. Smyrna had it all--they were rich. Being rich is having all that God can give. The Christians in Smyrna had nothing the world had to offer but everything that God has to offer. And that is being rich.

Let's look next at...

V. THE COMMAND (v. 10)

A. The Periods (v. 10a)

"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried, and ye shall have tribulation ten days ..."

Jesus is saying that there is no need to fear suffering. Peter said, "For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us ..." (1 Pet. 2:21). The believers in Smyrna were to be faithful because the devil would have them thrown into prison, and bring about severe tribulation ten times over.

B. The Promise (v. 10b)

"... be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

That is a promise to Christians. He is saying, "I'm going to reward you with a crown of life if you remain faithful, proclaim My name, and never fall to Satan." That is just one of the five crowns that the New Testament promises to Christians.

Finally, let's look at...

VI. THE COUNSEL (v. 11)

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."

The first death is physical death. The second death is eternal death in hell. Christ adds a word to the unbeliever at the end of the letter to Smyrna. He says, "If you don't overcome, you're going to spend eternity in death." You say, "How can I overcome that?" First John 5:5 says, "Who is he

that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" You can overcome by believing in Christ.

We have been studying a message for believers and the church. But perhaps Christ has spoken to your heart about your relation to Him. If you're in danger of the second death because you don't know Jesus Christ, then you had better overcome your sin and death by believing in Jesus Christ.

We have seen the poor little rich church--crushed, but exuding a fragrance. When the Christian faces tribulation and poverty, he can shine. Jesus says, "Don't worry about the tribulation; just be faithful. And if you are, I will reward you." Some day Christ is going to come. In Revelation 22:12 Jesus says, "... behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me" He will give that reward to the faithful believer. The crown of life is the martyr's crown for the one who dies for Christ. That's a very select group.

Here is the final word to the unsaved person: You are in danger of the second death: eternal death in hell without God. How are you going to overcome that death? How are you going to overcome sin, Satan, and the world? There is only one way: by believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. That's Christ's message to the unbeliever.

Focusing on the Facts

1. In what ways does the church in Smyrna represent the persecuted church?
2. How does persecution purify the church?
3. Why did Jesus describe Himself in Revelation 2:8 as "the first and the last, who was dead, and is alive ..."?
4. According to history, who was the pastor in Smyrna at the time the letters in Revelation were written?
5. Describe the probable beginning of the church in Smyrna.
6. What does the word smyrna mean? Describe its usage in the New Testament.
7. Why is Smyrna a fitting name for the city that contained the persecuted church?
8. What must happen to myrrh before it can give forth its fragrance? Why is that significant for understanding what happened to the church in Smyrna?
9. Why was Smyrna considered to be a great city in Roman times? Be specific.
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10. What is significant about Jesus saying, "I know" in Revelation 2:9?

11. Explain the meaning of the word tribulation. How does it relate to myrrh?
12. What three things was the church in Smyrna in opposition to? Why?
13. Why does Christ say that the Jews referred to in Revelation 2:9 "are the synagogue of Satan"?
14. Why did Christ accuse those Jews of "blasphemy"? (see Rev. 2:9)
15. Before he was saved, what was the Apostle Paul doing to Christians?
16. What does the slandering of Christians ultimately lead to?
17. Give some examples from the book of Acts that reveal the hatred of certain Jews for Christianity.
18. Why were the Jews that Christ referred to in Revelation 2:9 not true Jews?
19. Describe the poverty that the members of the church in Smyrna were enduring.
20. What is the glory of the church? How does God refine it?
21. How did the church in Smyrna respond to persecution?
22. How could the church in Smyrna be considered rich?
23. Why did Jesus tell the church in Smyrna not to fear suffering? (see Rev. 2:10)
24. What counsel does Christ give to the unbeliever in Revelation 2:11?

Pondering the Principles

1. When do you depend on Jesus the most--when things are going well, or when things are going badly? What is the purpose of trials in your life? Look up the following verses: Matthew 5:10-12; Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7. According to those verses, what attitude should you have in the midst of trials? Why? What does God want to happen in your life as a result of trials? Examine your life. What is your present attitude in the midst of trials? How are you responding to those trials? Begin today to see your trials from God's perspective. Have the proper attitude as you go through them.
2. Read Hebrews 4:15. In what ways have you been tempted like Jesus? Write down those temptations. How did Jesus handle those temptations? How have you handled those temptations? Certainly none of us have been as successful as Jesus in handling temptation, so what are we to do? Read Hebrews 4:16 and take this time to do what it says. Confess your sin to God, and then ask Him for His help during times of temptation. Memorize Hebrews 4:15-16.

3. Are you a rich Christian or a poor Christian? What made the Christians at the church in Smyrna rich? Which do you possess more of: what the world offers, or what God offers? Write down all that God has offered you. Read Ephesians 1:3-14. According to those verses, what things do you need to add to your list? As a Christian, you have been blessed with all God has. Take this time to thank Him for all that He has given you. Be sure to remember to avoid the uncertain riches that the world has to offer.