

THE REVELATION

MARCH 3, 2024

Chapter 2:1-11

Rev 2:1a "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

2. The LORD's Oracle to Ephesus

- a) **The LORD's Acknowledgment (2:2-3)** *Rev 2:2 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; ³ and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.*

The LORD began this oracle to Ephesus by acknowledging the good things He found in that Church. "I know your deeds," and they met His approval. The LORD sees all things. Nothing done in this world occurs outside His view. We are all naked before Him in our works and the intent of our hearts in those works. The Church in Ephesus did what they did for all the right reasons in the sight of the LORD. Moreover, the LORD said, "I know ... your toil." We do not use the word *toil* very often these days, but in John's Day, it meant your *labor*. The Church was a faithful Church in carrying out the daily efforts of living in the faith of Christ. Additionally, the LORD said, "I know your ... perseverance." Today, it would be better if we translated this phrase as *I know how you are patiently enduring*. Ephesus was already in trouble when this letter was being dictated to John. Living in Ephesus was a group of men who were heretics. The LORD said, "and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be false*." Ever since the days following Pentecost, when the Church of Jesus Christ was officially revealed by the LORD, heretics sought to take it over and turn it into their brand of religion. In this case, these heretics took upon themselves the title of "apostles." No one should ever take the name *apostle* as a title in the Church save those selected by Jesus Christ at the Sermon on the Mount with the addition of Paul when Jesus selected him on the road to Damascus. John was the last Apostle and the only living one worthy of that title. Not one of the evil men in Ephesus was worthy of that title. As false apostles, these men were trying to re-direct the theology of the Church. As best it could, the Church thwarted their attempts. Therefore, the LORD said about Ephesus, "and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary." It is quite evident that those evil apostles had side-tracked the work in Ephesus and as we will see, the members of the Church of Ephesus could not overcome them and their evil works.

- a) **The LORD's Complaint – Left First Love (2:4-5)** *Rev 2:4 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.*

Here is the LORD's complaint. "But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love." Oh, so many Churches are guilty of this today! The evil men in Ephesus wanted to be *apostles*! They wanted to make the church into what they wanted it to be. They were not concerned with the first

and primary purpose of the Church, to reach the lost and bring them to salvation in the LORD. In every Church, in every location across the world, each Sunday should be flooded with visitors seeking the LORD with every baptistry teeming with proclamations of Christ being their LORD and Savior and every altar filled with prayers for those who have not accepted Him as LORD. That is the first purpose of every church and should be the priority of every congregation. Churches should not be stagnant in number. *Calvinists* are not concerned with salvation; they are concerned with the depth of the spiritual walk. They say, “We should not be concerned with numbers, we are concerned with spiritual growth.” That position should never be the first love of a Church, it leads to an ineffective Church that the LORD will have a complaint against! That was the problem in Ephesus. The Church was so focused on defending the faith that they were not able “to add to the Church daily” through new converts to our LORD and Savior. They were side-tracked. They needed to repent and return to the first love that established the Church about 60 years before this letter was written. Try as they might, they failed.

- b) **The LORD's Salute (2:6)** ^{Rev 2:6} *'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

But the LORD was not so harsh that He did not salute Ephesus for its hatred of the “deeds of the Nicolaitans.” The LORD hated them too. According to the writings of some of our early pastors, the Nicolaitans taught that wives could be shared among the men of the church communally and that adultery and fornication needed not to be thought of as sin. Furthermore, they taught that it was quite lawful to eat food offered to idols and that pagan rituals were acceptable practices in the Church. The second-century pastors, who identified these traits of the Nicolaitans were Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, and Augustine.

- c) **The LORD's Charge (2:7a)** ^{Rev 2:7a} *'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

This same charge is offered to all seven Churches. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” This sentence indicates that all the LORD's acknowledgments, warnings, complaints as well as charges and gifts apply to all the seven Churches and can be extrapolated to apply to all local Churches that have ever been formed anywhere. “He who has an ear, let him hear,” is not an unfamiliar statement from the LORD. He used it in Matthew 11:15 when He explained that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Elijah's return. Therefore, all Christians must understand that this warning to Ephesus, as well as all the other seven Churches, applies to all Churches of every generation in every century until the Second Coming of the LORD.

- d) **The LORD's Gift – Tree of Life (2:7b)** ^{Rev 2:7b} *To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'*

Regardless of the evil found in the Church of Ephesus, it still had members who were faithful to the end. For them, a gift awaits, promised from the LORD. When they arrive in the “Paradise of God,” they will be allowed “to eat of the tree of life.” The *seed* of this theology was planted as a full-grown tree in Genesis 2:9. As long as Adam and Eve ate from its fruit, they were promised eternal life. But when they sinned because of the encouragement of the old serpent, Satan, the LORD had them removed from the garden, so they would not have eternal mortal life on earth as sinners (Genesis 3). That tree has been protected by the LORD in the location in which it was planted, guarded all these years by cherubim with flaming swords. Not to get too far ahead of the story at this point, let it just be said here, when the New Jerusalem comes to earth at the end of the REVELATION, the tree of life will be exposed again to all the saints for eternal enjoyment (22:22).

B. Smyrna – The Poverty Church (2:8a) ^{Rev 2:8a} *"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:*

Smyrna was a poor Church. But, as in the case of many Churches even today, the poorest of the local Churches in the world are the richest in the purity of their faith in Christ. Although Smyrna was destroyed by an earthquake in 178 AD, it was quickly rebuilt under Emperor Marcus Aurelius. This poor Church was able to continue uninterrupted until 1921, according to Catholic records. World War I (WWI) had been over for about three years by that time. In the war (WWI), the Muslim Turks joined the side of the Germans and, once defeated by the Allied Forces, lost much of their land and influence in Europe. According to Islamic records, Muslims were well on their way to a 50% control of Europe before the war. The Church was officially removed from Smyrna in 1921 AD, although some of its members may have remained in the town until the full-blown insurgence of Muslim citizens on September 9, 1922, as they attempted to reclaim lost territory. Nevertheless, it was the next to the last Church to cease to exist and that might have been because the LORD offered no complaint against it in this letter.

1. The LORD's Identification (2:8b) ^{Rev 2:8b} *The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:*

In the letter to Smyrna, the poor Church, the LORD identified Himself as the first and last Who had died at Calvary and rose from the grave. To the Church in Smyrna, this language was undeniable and indicative of His love for it. This same language was included in John's description of Jesus when he turned to see Who was speaking to him in chapter one. When the LORD said, "The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life" those words were in direct opposition to the practicing theology of the Jewish members in the synagogue located in Smyrna. They did not believe that Jesus was "The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life." They had rejected Him completely! They did not believe He was eternal. They did not believe that He had risen from the dead. They did not believe that He was alive. They did not believe that He was the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, the Savior of all the people of the world who would believe in Him. He did not belong to them and they did not belong to Him.

2. The LORD's Oracle to Smyrna

a) The LORD's Acknowledgment (2:9) ^{Rev 2:9} *'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.*

The Church in Smyrna was plagued by the synagogue in the community that contained Jews who were not really Jews. For explanation, we must look back in history. These so-called Jews had not only rejected the Messiah, they were worshiping in a Judaism that was different from the Judaism of Jesus' day and before. Twenty-five years before the Lord revealed this REVELATION to John, the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the son of the Roman Emperor. This happened on Sunday, August 5th, 70 AD. Because the sacrifices and Jewish routines were interrupted and forbidden under Roman law, the Jewish leadership created what is now called "Rabbinic Judaism." This new fabricated way of worship did not lift the veil to the Messiah but restricted it even more for Jews. These Jews were used by Satan to torment and bring suffering to as many Christians as possible.

b) The LORD's Warning – About to Suffer (2:10a) ^{Rev 2:10a} *'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.*

The LORD then warned the Church at Smyrna of the suffering which would be coming upon them. It would be "so that you will be tested," and tested they would be. We do not have an absolute record of the Church members being imprisoned, but it can be inferred from the church history

concerning ten of its pastors. This verse warned that the trouble would come to the Church in the form of “tribulation for ten days.” While some dare not to try to discover the meaning of the 10 days, others associate it with the 10 rulers who would control Smyrna over the next centuries. This, however, is somewhat troubling when we look at the history because Smyrna flourished under Marcus Aurelius when he rebuilt the city, and the same is true under some of the other Caesars. In like manner, when the people in Smyrna suffered under a Caesar, all the other six churches, as well as in Asia Minor, suffered also. So why would this suffering be presented only in the letter to Smyrna? The Lord was not writing to the city but to the Church. Our church history contains the record of only ten pastors who led the Church in Smyrna. Just as we have spoken of the Jewish revolt in Jesus’ day, while He was alive, it is possible that this phrase means that this persecution would happen in the days of the lives of some of its members during the existence. Strataes was the pastor of the Church when John sent the letter. He would soon die as a martyr in Smyrna. Ten pastors in succession would die for their faith, eight while they were pastoring in Smyrna and two after they left Smyrna for another assignment. Even the two killings elsewhere would be devastating to the Smyrna Church. Here is the list of the first ten pastors following the delivery of this letter to the Church.

Strataes, martyred in Smyrna—disciple of John

Bucolus, martyred in Smyrna—disciple of John

Polycarp, martyred in Smyrna—disciple of John

Papirius, martyred in another church after being a pastor in Smyrna

Camerius, martyred in Smyrna

Eudaemon, martyred in Smyrna

Thrasedas of Eumenia, martyred in Smyrna

Noctos, martyred in another church after being a pastor in Smyrna

Pothinus, martyred in Smyrna

Irenaeus of Lyons, martyred in Smyrna

c) The LORD’s Encouragement (2:10b) ^{Rev 2:10b} *Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

It seems that the Lord was correct when He said that Satan was about to test some of them. These pastors died for their faith. What did the Lord promise to those who died in the faith? The Crown of Life! The Crown of Life was to be the first prize that all believers receive simply because they have placed their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus as Savior. It is for those who have passed from this life through physical death to a new life in Christ. The ten pastors received this gift and so did all the faithful members of Smyrna. In fact, everyone who belongs to the LORD will receive a Crown of Life when it is time to enter eternity with the LORD.

d) The LORD’s Charge (2:11a) ^{Rev 2:11a} *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

With Smyrna, as well as Ephesus, the promise to both applied to all Churches. With the first two Churches, believers are granted access to the Tree of Life for eternal life and the Crown of Life. What does that guarantee?

e) The LORD’s Gift – No Second Death (2:11b) ^{Rev 2:11b} *He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'*

The gift of the Tree of Eternal Life and the Crown of Life guarantees that the “second death” will not affect a believer in any way. The first death is the passing from this earthly life to eternal life with the LORD. The “second death” occurs when a person stands before the Great White Throne Judgment, is found guilty of never accepting Him as LORD, and is cast into the Lake of Fire and Brimstone forever, totally out of the presence of the LORD for all eternity (20:14).