

"The Crown City: Smyrna"

(Rev 2:8-11)



Truth Matters Church, Inc.

The Seven Churches of Revelation



A brief look into the church in Smyrna



- ❧ The city of Smyrna is not directly mentioned apart from Revelation
 - ❧ Present day: The Turkish city of Izmir
- ❧ Smyrna is in ancient Asia Minor so what we can do is look for clues
- ❧ It's possible that this church was founded upon
 - ❧ a. The preaching of the apostle Peter
 - ❧ b. The preaching of the apostle Paul
 - ❧ c. Believers were scattered and settled there due to persecution
- ❧ Let's look at option a:

a. The preaching of the apostle Peter



✧ Jews from Smyrna were in Jerusalem and witnessed the manifestation of the Holy Spirit during Pentecost AD 30:

Acts 2:5-11 (after the Holy Spirit filled the disciples to speak with other languages)

5 Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and **Asia [Minor]**, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs – we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God."

✧ Smyrna is part of Asia Minor. It's possible that as a result of Peter's Great Sermon, Smyrnaeans returned home and brought the gospel to Smyrna

b. The preaching of the apostle Paul



- It's possible that this church was founded upon the preaching of the apostle Paul during his 2+year stay in Ephesus (3rd missionary journey)

Acts 19:10

10 This [reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus] took place for two years [in Ephesus], so that **all who lived in Asia [Minor] heard the word of the Lord**, both Jews and Greeks.

Acts 19:26 (during the riot in Ephesus)

26 You see and hear that **not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of *Asia [Minor], this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people**, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all.

- *Smyrna is approx. 35-40 miles north of Ephesus

- Similar distance from Lincoln, CA to Sacramento, CA

c. Believers scattered and settled there due to persecution



☞ Believers may have scattered and settled there as a result of persecution:

1 Peter 1:1-2 (the very opening of Peter's first epistle)

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who reside as aliens, **scattered** throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, **Asia**, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

☞ 1Peter is believed to have been written ~ 62-63AD during Nero's reign

☞ Roman Emperor Nero reigned from 54-68AD

☞ I'd like to discuss briefly Nero's persecution of Christians

Nero Persecution of Christians



- ❧ In the summer of 64AD, there was a great fire in Rome that burned for about a week and it devastated about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the city
 - ❧ Out their 14 regions; only 4 survived
- ❧ The people were in an uproar and blamed Nero (rumors swirled)
- ❧ Nero in turn deflected blame of the fire and blamed Christians
- ❧ Consequently, Nero gave an order resulting in great persecution against Christians who if found were arrested and convicted:
 - ❧ Tortured
 - ❧ Put to death
- ❧ Roman historian Tacitus wrote concerning this...



Nero Persecution of Christians



✧ Excerpt from Tacitus's book *Annals* (15.44):

But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called "Christians" by the populace.

Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.

Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.

Nero Persecution of Christians



- ❧ Not only did Nero charge Christians with the arson, but with hating mankind
- ❧ So consequently, Christians were arrested and if convicted:
 - ❧ Covered skins of wild beasts
 - ❧ Torn to death by dogs
 - ❧ Nailed to crosses
 - ❧ Set on fire as light for the city
- ❧ Needless to say, Roman Emperor Nero was pretty ruthless, in fact



c. Believers scattered and settled there due to persecution



- ❧ Because of the great fire and Nero blaming Christianity, it is widely held that both Peter and Paul were both executed
 - ❧ Paul was beheaded
 - ❧ Peter was crucified
 - ❧ Legend says upside down
- ❧ Thus, the believers and church in Smyrna could have been scattered and settled there as a result of the Nero persecution
- ❧ Now more about the city and characteristics of Smyrna...

A brief look into the church in Smyrna



- ❧ Smyrna was known as one of the finest seaports in its day
 - ❧ Closest seaport to Europe
 - ❧ Thus, Smyrna was an important city in its day
- ❧ Historians tells us Smyrna was known for its beauty and architecture
 - ❧ Gorgeous flowers, tropical climate
 - ❧ In fact, it's coin had the motto "The Flower of Asia"
 - ❧ Thus, had a reputation of being First in Size and Beauty



A brief look into the church in Smyrna



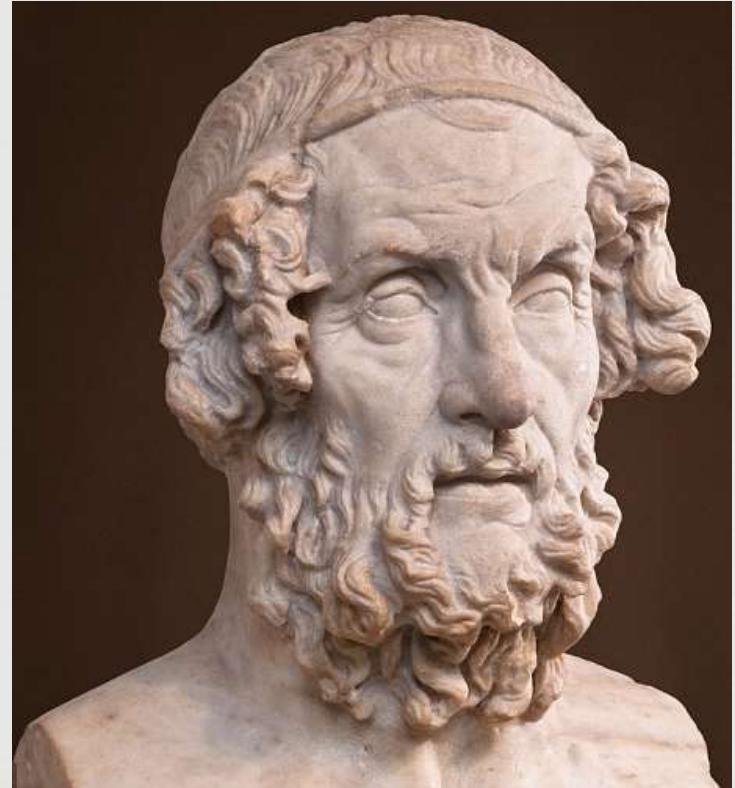
- ❧ It's population was around 100K and many Jews lived there
- ❧ This city had a nickname:
 - ❧ The Crown City
 - ❧ Hence title of our study
 - ❧ The Crown of Asia
 - ❧ During the Roman period, Smyrna had impressive architecture that circled Mount Pagus like a “crown”
- ❧ These are likely why Jesus made the “crown of life” promise in v. 10



A brief look into the church in Smyrna



- ❧ More interesting things concerning Smyrna's history
- ❧ It was home of famous Greek poet Homer (born around 850BC)



A brief look into the church in Smyrna



- ⌘ During the Roman period, several shrines were erected including ones to Homer and there were temples to:
 - ⌘ Zeus, Cybele, Aphrodite, Dionysius and Roman Emperors
- ⌘ It competed and won the honor to build a temple to Tiberius in 26AD becoming its temple warden;
 - ⌘ In 2nd century AD, it built another temple to Hadrian
- ⌘ More on its history...



A brief look into the church in Smyrna



- ✧ In 600BC (around the time of Babylonian Captivity), it was conquered by the Lydian King Attalus who devastated it
- ✧ Smyrna did not cease to exist, but Greek life and political unity were destroyed, and it was reorganized as a village



A brief look into the church in Smyrna



- ❧ During the 4th Century BC Alexander the Great conceived the idea of restoring Smyrna to its former glory
- ❧ According to historian Strabo, this was actually carried out after Alexander died under Antigonos, who lived from 316 to 301 BC and Lysimachus, who lived from 301 BC to 281 BC, who enlarged and fortified the city.



A brief look into the church in Smyrna



- ❧ The city quite literally was dead and raised to life historically speaking
 - ❧ Hence, why Jesus may have picked up on this theme and referred to Himself as the One who was dead and has come to life in the first verse of this letter
- ❧ But what Smyrna may be most known for was its commodity of myrrh
 - ❧ It its day it was the largest exporter and importer of myrrh
 - ❧ In fact, some history suggests this Smyrna derived its name from “myrrh”
 - ❧ Other legends attribute the name from a myth of an Amazon Queen named Smyrna
- ❧ Myrrh was not only valued for it’s fragrance, but for its use in burial
 - ❧ Myrrh was a key ingredient for the embalming process in burial
- ❧ Only 2 churches received commendation by our Lord Jesus and no condemnation
 - ❧ Smyrna (myrrh fragrance before the throne)
 - ❧ Philadelphia (city of brotherly love)

Scripture Reading



Revelation 2:8-11

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

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. 10 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. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.’

Exposit Rev 2:8a



8a “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

- ☞ “to the angel” or “aggelos” is to an angel not a human being
- ☞ There was an angel appointed over each of the 7 churches (and its city)
- ☞ This letter was not only written to the church, but the angel assigned over the church in Smyrna (and its city)



Exposit Rev 2:8b



8b The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

- ☞ “the first and the last” is *prōtos eschatos* which means the Chief Beginning and the Chief Ending
 - ☞ The Preeminent One
- ☞ We covered this phrase back in Rev 1:17 and in our past study the Glorified Son of Man, Pt 2
- ☞ Do you remember what it means in the OT?



“I am the first and the last”



- Some loose reading and study of this can take this at the surface and say this is just another fancy way of Jesus saying “I am the Alpha and the Omega” or something along those lines
- Do you agree? Any other guesses? [DON'T PEEK]

“I am the first and the last”



- ✧ Not surprisingly, this phrase is rooted in the OT
- ✧ In fact it's a very specific designation
- ✧ Allow me to show you

“I am the first and the last”



Isaiah 44:6-7

6 “Thus says the LORD, **the King of Israel and his Redeemer**, the LORD of hosts:

‘I am the first and I am the last [verbatim to Rev 1:17],

And there is no God besides Me.

7 ‘Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it;

Yes, let him recount it to Me in order,

From the time that I established the ancient nation.

And let them declare to them the things that are coming

And the events that are going to take place.

“I am the first and the last”



INTERPRETATION: When Jesus says “I am the first and the last”, it is not another fancy way to say “I am the Alpha and the Omega”, Jesus is declaring that He is the King and Redeemer of Israel spoken of in the Old Testament!

- ✧ Just like the Father is the God, King, and Redeemer of Israel so is
- ✧ Jesus bearing the same Names of His Father and is attributing this Great authority and honor of Lord over all creation to Himself

Exposit Rev 2:8b



- ❧ Last part of v. 8 Jesus says He “was dead, and has come to life, says this” is self-explanatory
- ❧ The very same Jesus who was crucified, died and was buried is the same Jesus who rose from the dead and came out of the tomb and the One speaking in this very vision
 - ❧ As mentioned in our intro, Smyrna’s reputation as a city was one that was dead (~600BC) and brought back to life (~4th century BC) could have played a part in Jesus identifying Himself in this way
- ❧ Let’s look at v.9...