

Lesson 5

The Church of Smyrna - the great commercial center/ the persecuted church

Day 1 **History of city of Smyrna, Geographic Position, Title of Christ used**

The present day city of Izmir is the same city in which the church of Smyrna resided. Today it is the third largest city in Turkey, after Istanbul, and Ankara. The population in 2014 was estimated at 2.848 million people and the province of Izmir at 4.1 million. The province of Izmir today also includes two other cities we are interested in in this study, the city of Ephesus and the city of Pergamum. The city was known as Smyrna (Greek name) until 1928 when it's name was changed to Izmir, to better reflect the Latin alphabet now used by the Turkish people. Today, Izmir is 99% Muslim, but there does reside a small group of 2500 Jewish people. The land of Smyrna was inhabited and influenced by the Asiatic Leleges some 3000 years BC, then the Hittites, and then the colonists from Cyme. According to Herodotus, the Ionians then conquered the area. This is the period of time when Homer was born and the city was at its finest. Three hundred years later, the Lydians attacked Smyrna and her greatness ended. For another three hundred years the city was devastated. During the time of Alexander the Great, one of his four generals improved the city so much that it was named the "most beautiful city in Ionia" or the "flower of Ionia," a truly great city. Smyrna came under Roman control in 27 B.C. and because of her faithfulness as an ally of Rome, Rome made her inhabitants materialistically wealthy. The city was almost completely wiped out by an earthquake in the reign of Tiberius and reduced to rubble in additional seismic activity that followed. Marcus Aurelius restored the city but once again the area was reduced to rubble in 378 BC with another earthquake. The people of Smyrna rebuilt again. The first wave of Turks came in 1082 and besieged Smyrna several times. Then in the second wave of the Turks in the 15th century, the Turks stayed. Remember that Constantine moved the church from Rome to Constantinople (Istanbul today) in early A.D.300's. Although Smyrna is quite a distance from Istanbul, you would think some Christian influence would prevail. For a time, the Muslims practiced their religion in the northern half of the city of Smyrna and the Christians practiced their religion in the southern half of the city of Smyrna. This is just FYI, in the past 33 years since 1983, ten major earthquakes have been recorded in this country of Turkey, claiming the lives of over 20,000 people. They have occurred in clusters, one in 1983, one in 1992 and one in 1995. Then six quakes hit Turkey again between the years of 1998 and 2003, and another in 2010. Most of us remember this last one. In August 1999, a 7.6 magnitude quake decimated the country, leaving over 17,000 dead and close to 45,000 injured. Izmir Turkey has had 20 earthquakes during the past year of 2015, the largest being 5.1.

Izmir was an important trading post throughout its long history as it has an excellent harbor. It is strategically located for trade with Europe and Asia. It is on the western coast of Asia Minor and today it exports tobacco, grapes, figs, cotton, olives, and olive oil. In antiquity, its largest export was a plant called Myrrha commifera shrub that produced a substance called myrrh, a costly substance, used in embalming dead bodies.

You will remember that the Magi from the East brought the baby Jesus, gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gold for a king, frankincense for a god, and myrrh to preserve a man's body for a little while after death.

Smyrna was known as the **Crown** of Smyrna or the Paris of Levant. Just a side note: The ISIL President Obama continues to call ISIS has something to do with this area of the Levant. See what you can find out about the Levant in extra Biblical sources. Smyrna had a double harbor so this made it excellent for trade. Smyrna was called the Crown of Smyrna because of its perfect and symmetrical buildings that encircled Mount Pagos. At the bottom of the mountain, stood the Temple to Zeus. Zeus was the father of all the gods in Greek mythology. He was the supreme ruler who reigned over the sky, rain, clouds, and thunder. In the same area surrounding Mt. Pagos, there were shrines to Apollos, (the sun-god), Aphrodite, (the goddess of love and beauty), and Aesculapius (the god of medicine). A shrine to Cybele (the mother of Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades) and statues dedicated to Poseidon (the sea-god) and Demeter (the corn god) were placed near the commercial and political areas of the city.¹ Those who were priests of the different deities wore **crowns** called "stephanos" (see Revelation 2:10) when they had finished their year of duty in the various temples. Cybele was the giver of wealth and the goddess of the settled life or walled cities (fortresses). I am wondering what kind of significance and influence these demonic gods have today over the peoples of the world and the Church, especially here in the United States. Do you ever think of how comfortable we really are? In addition to these pagan deities, the people of Smyrna also engaged in Caesar worship. The worship of Caesar was of course mandatory and primary before the people from Smyrna could worship their other gods. Those in the Church of Smyrna refused to worship Caesar and thus were subject to burning at the stake or being torn apart by wild beasts in the arenas for all others to watch. Polycarp was the Bishop to the church at Smyrna and he was burned at the stake on the Sabbath because he refused to recant and worship the emperor of Rome. (Tiberius? In 169 A.D.)

What is the title of Christ used for the Church at Smyrna?

"The First and the Last, which was dead, and is alive!"

Rishon Va-Acharon is the Hebrew transliteration of "the First and the Last."

What is at the first and last of the alphabet?

In the Greek, what are these two letters called? See Revelation 22:13.

In the Hebrew, what are these two letters called?

Now look at these two verses from Isaiah 44:6 and Isaiah 48:12. Write the verses below and memorize them this week.

¹ I crack myself up sometimes. I just corrected the spelling of 'corn dog,' in place of 'corn god.' NAS

When you pray to the Alpha and Omega, to whom do you pray? Remember, Moses and the burning bush, where he encountered God. What Name did God give to Moses to tell the Israelites in Egypt Who sent Moses to them?

If you know the meaning of YHWH or yode heh waw heh in the Scripture, write it down here. If you do not know, please turn in your Bible to John 1:1-5 or simply glean this from Revelation 1:4.

If Christ is the Beginning and the End in ENGLISH, the Aleph and the Tau in HEBREW, the Alpha and Omega in GREEK, then doesn't it follow that He is also all the letters in between and all the spaces, too?

What do you do with letters?

How did Jesus perfectly communicate the love of God?

How did Jesus perfectly communicate (reveal) who God is?

How did Jesus perfectly communicate what God's intentions are?

From the first chapter of the Gospel of John (written by the same John writing in Revelation), What was in the Beginning?

Who was in the Beginning with the Word?

Who was God?

How was everything made?

What was in Him from the beginning?

What was this Light in the beginning?

What cannot be hidden in darkness?

Read Romans 1:20 and write your thoughts down here.

Who was present at the world's beginning? Were you? How about anybody else you know? Were they present at the beginning? Were they privy to what God and Jesus were doing in the Creation work in the beginning?

Turn to Romans 1:18-27. I would like you to spend the rest of today's lesson meditating on these verses. Read them over and over again at least three times. After this is done, read these verses slowly taking in each word written. Do this two more times and then in the space below, tell me what happens to people today who say that God was not in the Beginning? That He alone had nothing to do with Creation?

Day 2 Continuing on with Jesus' Title and More of the Old Testament

Do you know what Smyrna means? See what you can find out from your references.

The name Smyrna comes from the bitter gum and costly perfume called myrrh. Myrrh was one of the exports from Smyrna. You will remember that the Christ child in Bethlehem was given gold for a king, frankincense for a god, and myrrh for embalming. The meaning of the name, Smyrna, tells us something about what's in store for this church. Read on in Revelation and record below what the connection is between the church of Smyrna and the name of the city, "Smyrna."

Read Isaiah 60:6 and record below what clue is included in this passage that says this is about Christ's second coming and not His first.

What you are going to find out about the church of Smyrna may not be to your liking. Everything about the church of Smyrna in this letter is about death. Death! Death! Death! But look at the way Jesus reveals Himself to the Church of Smyrna: Write this below:

What is He telling the Church of Smyrna up front?

What has He already done for them?

He has conquered death. He has defeated the grave. He was dead. And He is alive forever more. Reread Revelation 1:17-18 and write out the text here.

From this passage, why does Christ tell the church of Smyrna not to be afraid?

Have you ever been afraid? Of course you have. Do you ever wonder where He is when you hurt so badly? When that migraine has you so sick that you are throwing up. Or maybe you've lost a spouse or a loved one. Maybe you've had cancer and had to undergo radiation or chemotherapy that has made you sick for weeks. Have you ever felt so far away from Him as you did during that time period? Or what about that job you just got laid off from? God are you there? Does any body care ...out there? Do You care what happens to me? Can you see me?

I am going to give you several other names for God for you to ponder on.

The first name is ***YHWH Shammah*** and this means "the God Who is there." You all know this. You sense His presence with you at various times in your lives. What makes His presence so, so real for you in one moment of time and not in another?

I don't know the answer to that question, but I do think it must have something to do with where your head is at the moment.

What does He tell you in Hebrews 13:5-6?

God's second name to be considered here is ***El Chay*** or ***El Chai*** and it means Living God. Why would this name be so important to the church of Smyrna?

Why is this name important for you?

"Then Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said, 'O LORD, the God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your Eyes, O LORD, and see; and listen to the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God.'" 2 Kings 19:15-16

Why would Hezekiah use the name, "Living God" for God here? What were Hezekiah and the Jewish people facing? If you don't know, read Isaiah 37:33-37 and record your answer below.

There is one more description of Jesus in Revelation 1 that parallels His Title given to the Church at Smyrna. It is in Revelation 1: 5. Write it below:

Using your study tools on line (Biblehub.com) look up the Hebrew word used for “first-born.” Record what you find below

‘Bekor’ Strong’s concordance Hebrew 1060 “first born; hence chief, eldest son”

Usually, the eldest son received a double portion of inheritance. If there were 12 sons, then the eldest would get 2/12 inheritance and the others would only receive a total of 10 /12 divided amongst the other 11 sons.

In the Greek, first-born is the word “prototokos” In Jesus’ relationship with His Father, this expresses His priority to and preeminence over creation, not in the sense of being the “first” to be born.

Look up Colossians 1:15-18 and write down what you learn about the word “firstborn.”

His eternal relationship with the Father is in view, and the clause means both that He was the “Firstborn” before all creation and that He Himself produced Creation. Colossians 1:18 is in reference to His resurrection: “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.”

Another word for this similar idea is “first fruits.” The Feast of First Fruits required a wave offering of a sheaf in Lev 23:9-14. Christ has been raised the First Fruits – the promise of a harvest to come. Please record 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 below:

Because Jesus’ Father raised Him from the grave, He is the promise of more to be raised from the dead. We may physically die on this earth and our bodies may be laid in the dirt, but we will be raised from the dead by our LORD never to die again...we will live eternally with Him.

Why is this description of Jesus as the Living God so important to the Church of Smyrna?

The Church at Smyrna is promised a resurrection from the dead, another life. They will not die the second death written about in Revelation 20:14 after the 1000 year Millennial

reign on this earth. This was an encouragement from the LORD to the Believers in Smyrna not to fear suffering. And, they were suffering.

Day 3 The Commendation Christ uses for the Church at Smyrna

The commendation is found in Revelation 2:9. Write this below:

I know

I know

I know

These people who belonged to the church of Smyrna had a misconception about themselves. What was this misconception?

They saw themselves as poor, but Jesus said they were rich.

In contrast, move forward into Revelation 3:17 and see what misconception the church of Laodicea had about themselves?

They thought they were rich, but they were really poor.

There are two words for poverty in the **Greek**:

1. **Penia**: the state of having nothing superfluous
2. **Ptocheia**: the state of one who has nothing at all; would have to beg to stay alive

Look up in your concordance in the Greek New Testament section to see which definition goes with the Church of Smyrna? The number to go to is 4432.

It is implied in the Greek word used here in Revelation 2:9 “ptocheia” that the Church of Smyrna had nothing at all. They were indigent. Christ said they were really rich, not poor. Why did Christ call them rich?

What is Revelation 2:9 saying about the Great Tribulation? If this verse is not talking about the Great Tribulation, then what is this verse talking about?

This is not the Great Tribulation. We all undergo tribulation or trouble and persecution and distress. See John 16:33, 2 Timothy 3:12

The **Greek** word for “**tribulation**” is “**thlipsis**” and has the following meaning:²

- 1) pressure
- 2) afflicted, anguish, burdened, persecuted, tribulation, trouble

“I know your suffering.” Read these two verses and write your thoughts below:
John 16:33; 2 Timothy 3:12

How could the church at Smyrna have been released from the “suffering?” Answering this question may take some effort on your part. I will give you a hint: the church of Smyrna wouldn’t worship Caesar as a god before they worshiped Jehovah God. A pinch of incense offered first to Caesar sufficed or allowed them afterwards to worship any god of their choosing. So, what would the church of Smyrna not do?

Surprisingly, during this period of severe persecution, the church continued to grow. We would think just the opposite would happen, wouldn’t we?

The Complete Jewish Bible words Revelation 2:9 like this. “I know the insults of those who call themselves Jews but aren’t - on the contrary, they are a synagogue of the Adversary.” Some in the Messianic Jewish movement take offense at translating this verse as, “they are a synagogue of satan.” Their objection stems from the word used for synagogue being translated as “synagogue” in a derogatory context when it suits the writers and yet translated as “church” in a positive context when it suits them to do so. This word is “sunagoge” and means an assembly of people and is found in Strong’s 4864 in the Greek section. In addition to the above, there were some of the Christians saying that the Jewish Believers were causing division in the church in Smyrna through satanic influence. Those same Messianic Jewish Believers from above think this was the beginning of replacement theology. Other names for replacement theology are Spiritual Israel, British Israelism, the Ephraimite Movement, Armstrongism, or the Church-at-large.³ Chuck Missler’s thoughts on this are that the Jewish Christians were demanding that all New Christians become Jews first and therefore must undergo circumcision. These people were called the Judaizers. The gospel of grace rather than law was new to the Jewish people. The Old Covenant was not abolished, but rendered obsolete by the New Covenant and this was very different and very difficult for some of the Jewish people to successfully grasp this new way of life. A group called the Judaizers soon

² James Strong, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Greek Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2347 (Hendrickson Publishers), p. 36.

³ John Klein, Adam Spears, Michael Christopher, *Lost in Translation*, Volume 2, Covenant Research Institute, 2009), pp. 106-107.

sprang up and followed Paul from town to town teaching the necessity of keeping the law. They followed Paul to Galatia and the letter to the Galatian church was written in part to warn them of the Judaizers.

I would like you to read Acts 13 and Acts 14 as well as all six chapters of the Book of Galatians. As you read, write down in the space below, your thoughts concerning those who wanted to keep the Church under the yoke of the Law.

What had Paul and Peter been entrusted with according to Galatians 2:72?

Why does Paul speak twice about those preaching a gospel contrary to what they originally received in Galatians 1:8-9?

Whether or not the Messianic Believers above are correct in saying the negative translation of these words as “synagogue of satan” can be attributed to the beginning of replacement theology, Paul is probably talking about the Judaizers here. Calling them a “synagogue of satan” are very harsh words. I think the “church of satan” would be just as effective as “synagogue of satan.”

⁴However, Dr. Missler does say that he thinks it is a tragedy today to view that God is done with Israel and He has replaced the Jews with the Church. If you would like to look at what the Bible has to say on the subject of the Jews’ replacement with the church, read Romans 9,10, and 11. What you will find in these three chapters is that the promises made by God to the Nation of Israel have not been nullified. They continue as from the time they were given to them by God to this day. For a moment, there is a veil over the eyes of Israel until the fullness of the (count) of the Gentiles come in. And when that last Gentile soul steps over the mark, the Jewish people will take center stage once again in God’s timetable. (I believe we will not be here – I believe we will be raptured in that moment, at that time, in the blink of an eye. The Bridegroom’s Father is going to tell His Son to go get His Bride, and voile we will be in His Presence). Going back to this circumcision disagreement, there is probably fault on both sides here, and I don’t think any body knows for sure what this “synagogue of satan” is actually referring to, but the discussion of this does bring out that circumcision vs. uncircumcision was a big deal in the early church.

⁴ Chuck Missler, *Supplemental Notes: The Book of Revelation*, (Koinonia House Inc., 1995), p. 26

Day 4 **Rebuke for the Church at Smyrna**

There is no rebuke for the Church of Smyrna. The LORD is satisfied with them.

But what He does tell them is to not fear what they are about to suffer. Oh, boy! I told you that this church was all about suffering and death. And this is another cog of suffering in the wheel of death. Jesus is telling them they will suffer. What do you think is meant by the tribulation lasting 10 days in the following verse?

“ Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for 10 days.”

For any of you who have been schooled in all of Church history, can you tell when and what part of Church history Smyrna played? Remember, if the seven churches were in any other order, this would not ring true.

There are some commentators that believe that these 10 days of tribulation were those days that were lived by the church of Smyrna under 10 terrible rulers of Rome who persecuted them. Oddly enough, the church grew during this period of persecution of which we would think just the opposite would happen.

Those 10 rulers who persecuted the Suffering Church were:⁵

1. Nero (54-68 A.D.) Paul was beheaded; Peter was crucified upside down.
2. Domitian (95-96 A.D.); John was exiled
3. Trajan 104-117 A.D.); Ignatius burned at the stake
4. Marcus Aurelius (161-180 A.D.); Polycarp martyred
5. Septimus Severus (200-211 A.D.); killed Iraneus
6. Maximinus (235-237 A.D.) He killed Ursula and Hippolytus
7. Decius (249-251 A.D.)
8. Valerian (257-260 A.D.)
9. Aurelian (270-275 A.D.)
10. Diocletian (303-313 A.D.) The worst of all!

Who was next on the emperor scene and what did he do?

Constantine was the next emperor and he moved the church from Rome to Byzantium or Constantinople in Turkey.

⁵ J Vernon `McGee, *Thru the Bible, Revelation*, Volume 5 (Thomas Nelson, INC.), p. 906.

What happened to the Roman church after that?

Instructions and Warnings

How does Jesus exhort the Church of Smyrna?

Be faithful until death, ...”

They were faithful. They were martyrs for their faith in Jesus. Fox’s Book of Martyrs says there were five million Christians martyred during the reign of these 10 kings above.

“...and I will give you the crown of life.”

What does a “crown” have to do with the church of Smyrna? If you can’t remember, go back to the beginning of this church in this workbook and see what connection there is between the city of Smyrna and “crowns.”

Do you remember how the architecture of the city was laid out in a circle around Mt. Pagos making it appear as a crown from the sky? Who would have observed the “crown” effect back then?

You have heard of these crowns in Scripture before; I will give you a list of them here and their addresses in the Scripture so that you can check them out yourself if you would like. There are five of them:

- Crown of Life (James 1:12; and Revelation 2:10)
- Crown of Righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8)
- Crown of Glory (1 Peter 5:4)
- Crown Incorruptible (1 Corinthians 9:25)
- Crown of Exultation (Joy) (Thessalonians 2:19)

Promise to the Overcomer

What is the promise Jesus gives to the overcomer?

Does this include you and me? Whatever we are faced with in this life, if we are overcomers, we will not be hurt by the second death. But, you say, what if I can’t do it?

What if I chicken out? My flesh is so weak! Darling Child of the King, you will overcome because He who lives in you will overcome for you. Your job is to stay close to Him, to love Him, and to be obedient to Him. He will do the rest for His Beloved. You are not alone. He will go before you. He will never leave you. Check out the Hebrew Name for God is There, *Jehovah Shammah*.

Implied Message of the Spirit to the Churches

Write the following verses down below their addresses and thoughts you might have for each:

2 Timothy 3:12

Corinthians 3:15

1 Peter 2:20

1Peter 3:17

1 Peter 4:19

I think He was telling the Church of Smyrna to plan on it. They were to plan on what? Jesus was persecuted; you, too, will be persecuted. Suffer what is right. Trust in God.

Closure

Smyrna is one of two letters to the seven churches, which has no condemnation, no criticism. The other one that has no criticism is the church of Philadelphia. Jesus was pleased with the church of Smyrna. He was right there in the midst of them. He had suffered, too. He knew what they were going through and He was there with them giving out His peace and His care in the conflict, in their tribulation. They were not alone. They had hope. God was still in control, even when they suffered. Jesus had been dead, but His Father raised Him from the dead. The church of Smyrna would suffer persecution and death, but with Jesus' resurrection from the dead as the first fruits came the promise of the many more of the church of Smyrna that would also be raised from the dead. They would not face the second death. We will study the second death in more detail when we get to Revelation 20:6. There are two deaths mentioned in the structure of Revelation. There is the first death that separates the soul and the body and the second death that separates the soul and the spirit.

Day 5 What is in the Old Testament Concealed, is in the New Testament Revealed

Revelation 2:8 with Isaiah 44:6, Isaiah 48:12

These two referenced verses speak of God being the First and the Last, the *Risdon Va-acharon* that we looked at early on in this lesson. There are two more titles/names of God here in these references. The first one is Israel's Redeemer, and the second is King, Lord of Hosts. We are going to look at these two before we go on. Please find out what you can about these two names/titles before reading what I have written below.

The Redeemer, Ga'al

King Lord of Hosts, Melek YHWH Tsabaot

1. *The Redeemer* – in Hebrew this name is “*Ga-al*” in our pronunciation. Mark 10:45 says of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ: “for even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45). Jesus came the first time as the Suffering Servant, as Messiah ben Joseph, who would give of His life and blood to pay for the sins of Mankind. The second time He will come as Messiah ben David, the conquering King. There was even confusion in Christ's day, the Jewish priesthood wondering if there were two different Messiahs coming. Do you remember John the Baptist while in jail asking Jesus if He was the One for whom the Jews had been looking or were they to look for another? The *Ga-al* has its first mention in the Scripture in the four tiny chapters of the book of Ruth. Boaz was Ruth's “Kinsman Redeemer,” her *Ga-al*. In this small book, we see three people who decide in their hearts to walk uprightly and do what is right. The church at Smyrna was pleasing to God because they also had determined in their lives to walk uprightly no matter the cost. Those of the Church of Smyrna will die physically for their faith in Christ. But those of the Church of Smyrna will be redeemed. In the story of the Moabite Ruth, God had made provision in the Old Testament law, to take care of her because she was the widow of Naomi's son, an Israelite. Naomi had made such an impression on Ruth for her belief in the Hebrew God, *YHWH*, that Ruth followed Naomi back to Israel after her husband's death and she determined to worship *YHWH*. Boaz was a kinsman of Naomi's son and he took Ruth as his bride and thus provided for her for the rest of her life. Jesus Christ came to earth, as a man, making Him a kinsman. Jesus died for the sins of Mankind redeeming Mankind, buying them back for God. Ruth is found in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

2. *King Lord of Hosts* – in Hebrew this name is “*Melek YHWH Tsabaot*” in our pronunciation. This is a name of authority and it means *God is the King* and He is the also the *Lord of all Angelic Host*. We will look at this further in next weeks lesson. We will discuss the three different kinds of angels who were each created by the LORD God Himself. They were not pro-created, as we are; they were each created. For Mankind, only Adam and Eve were created, and Eve was created with a rib of Adam. Some, one

third of the angelic host, fell from heaven because they were convinced by ha-satan (the devil, Lucifer) to follow him in rebellion. The fallen angels still have to play by God's rules. Even ha-satan has to play by these rules. All the fallen angels (including Lucifer) are under sentence to spend eternity in the lake of fire. See their judgment carried out in Revelation 20. The lake of fire is the second death. All those whose names are not written in the book of life, will experience the second death. The fallen angels cannot be redeemed. They have life and have been given permission to do what they do for a time. But, their doom is certain and they know it. And ha-satan and his minions know their time is short. Check out Hebrews 1, Jesus is better than the angels and Hebrews 2, Jesus was made lower than the angels for a short time and write your thoughts in the space below before going on to the second set of cross-references. Do not skip this. You will know why later in the study.

Revelation 2:10 with Daniel 1:12,14

For what was Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego tested according to the cross reference in Daniel 1 and again in Daniel 3?

For what was the church of Smyrna tested in Revelation 2:10?

Has God ever tested you? Please elaborate.

Has Man ever tested you? Please tell your story.

Which is more important, God or Man's testing? This is not just a rhetorical question.

Which testing was more important to Daniel and his three friends?