

The Unveiling of Jesus Christ



The Letter to the
Church in Smyrna
Revelation 2:8-11

Seven-headed Beast from the Luther Bible

The Letter to the Church in Smyrna

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Introduction

The Letter to the Church in Smyrna

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Introduction

- Author: Apostle John
- Recipients: Churches in the Roman Province of Asia
- Place: Patmos, a Greek Island
- Year: ~ 96 AD

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About the Letters

A Fourfold Reference:

1. Originally to Local Churches
2. To All Churches in All Times (like other NT letters)
3. Personal – to the people who comprise the church.
4. Prophetic
 - a) A Repeated Pattern through the Centuries
 - b) A General Pattern of the Church Age

The Letter to the Church in Smyrna

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About the Letters

A Summary for Us:

- Seven real churches with real people and real problems in John's time.
- These churches, people and problems are just like those we have today.

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About the Letters

A Summary for Us:

- Together, they make a quick course on what it takes to have a healthy church.
- They also show us how to identify a church when it is unhealthy.

The Letter to the Church in Smyrna

Revelation 2:1-7

Introduction







The Letter to the Church in Smyrna

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About Smyrna

- The name **Smyrna** relates to both “**bitter**” and “**myrrh**.”
- This is a thorny bush that is cut to bring out a bitter gum which dries into a very fragrant resin.
- It was then used in making perfumes.

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About Smyrna

- It was used in the anointing oil first prepared by **Moses** for the tabernacle and later temple.
- **The Magi** presented it to Christ as one of their gifts.
- **Nicodemus** used it to embalm the body of Jesus.

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About Smyrna

- A prosperous city and one that was very loyal to Rome and the emperor.
- A center for emperor worship.
 - This had been done in older empires like Babylon or Persia.
 - It was newer in Rome, but Smyrna was a city that promoted this practice.

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About Smyrna

- The present emperor **Domitian** completed many huge building projects in Rome.
- He ruled as a complete dictator rather than through the Roman senate.
- Then he would talk about himself as “**the Lord and God Domitian.**”

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About Smyrna

- The city had an influential Jewish population.
- They had special protection in the empire to practice their religion and worship only their one God.
- This protection was not consistent for Christians.

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About Smyrna

- If the Romans in one area thought of Christians as a Jewish sect, they were safe.
- If not, then it meant the Christians had to show their loyalty by honoring Caesar as a god.

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About Smyrna

- This was more of a political act than a religious one.
- In theory, Rome allowed all religions.
- Loyalty to Caesar and loyalty to Rome were part of being an obedient citizen.

Smyrna



Photos from Wikipedia

Smyrna



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Smyrna



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Smyrna

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Smyrna

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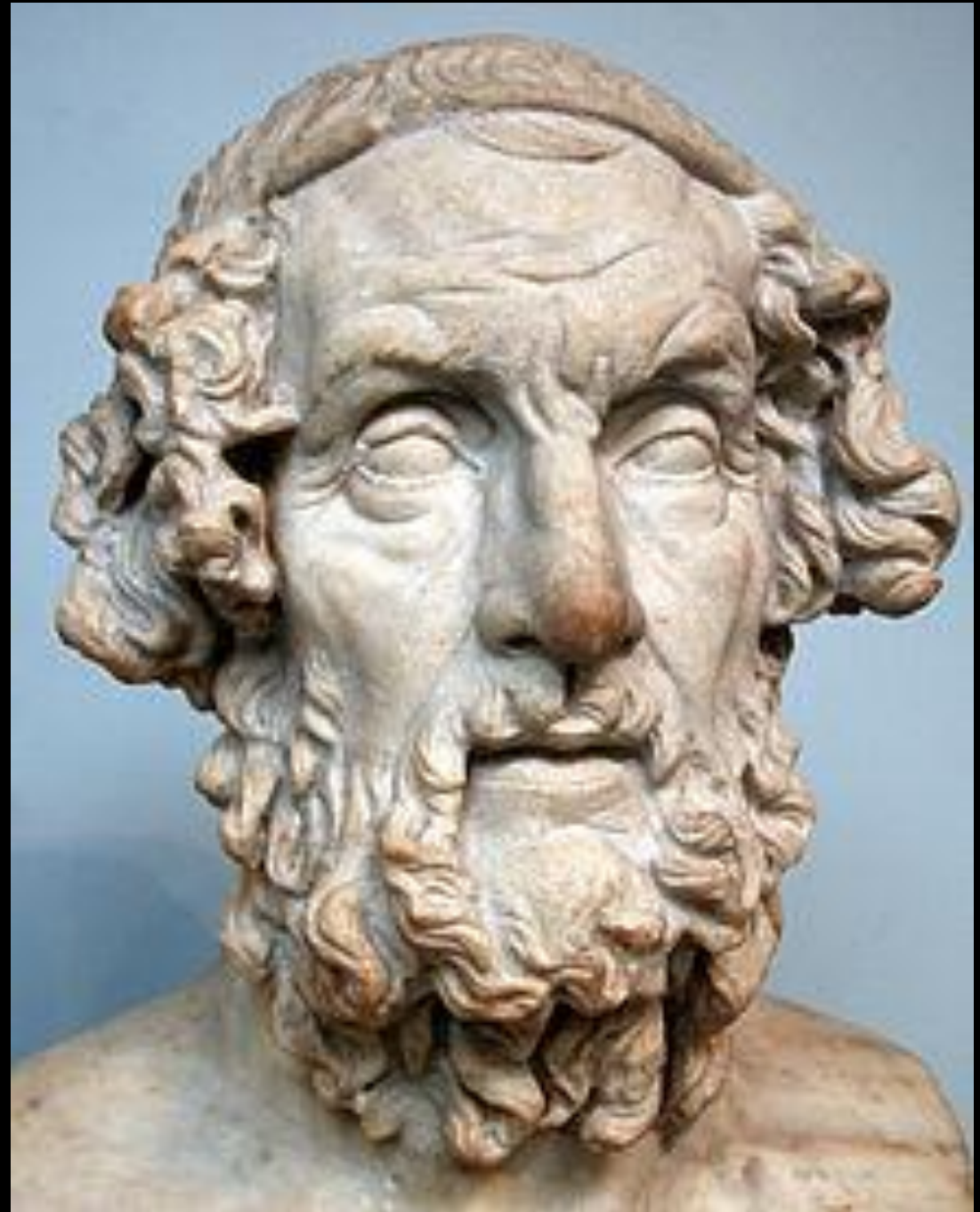
Smyrna



Photos from Wikipedia

Homer (8th Century BC),
Greek poet

Photos from Wikipedia



Polycarp (69 – 155AD),
a disciple of John,
teacher of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon,
angel of the church in Smyrna(?)

Photos from Wikipedia



The Letter to the Church in Smyrna

Revelation 2:8-11 The Format of the Letter(s):

1. The Command to Write
2. Attribute(s) of Jesus
3. What's Right with the Church
4. What's Wrong with the Church
5. What They Need to Do
6. The Personal Call to Anyone with an Ear
7. A Promise to the Overcomer (One Who Conquers)

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- Let's now read the whole letter.
- This is the shortest of the seven.

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- 2:8 Angel – means literally “messenger”
- Likely the leading pastor-teacher of the church.
- In this case, perhaps Polycarp.

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- 2:8 First and the last
- Jesus existed before everything and when all of history is complete, he will still be standing.
- This means that nothing ever happens that is somehow out of his control.

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- 2:8 Who died and came to life
- Jesus has conquered death.
- Unless Christ returns, all of us will have to face death someday.
- We can take comfort in the fact that Jesus has passed through death already and has come to life again.

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- 2:9 Tribulation has to do with extreme pressure.
- John used it of himself in Rev 1:9.
- The church in Smyrna was undergoing severe persecution – worse than in the other cities.
- Jesus knows their suffering and can relate to it as the one who suffered and died for them – and for us.

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- **2:9 Poverty** Greek had two (really three) terms available for poverty.
- The first two contrasted poverty with abundance – like the poor widow who gave her last coins in the temple.
- The term Jesus uses here deals more with the chronic poverty of a beggar.

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- 2:9 But you are rich
- Jesus knows the state of their heavenly treasure.
- It sounds like they have a lot saved up.

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- 2 Corinthians 8:9

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

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You can't really measure your riches by your bank account. The true measure of riches is kept in heaven. The treasures you've laid up in heaven are your eternal wealth.

*– Chuck Smith (1927 – 2013),
Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa*

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- 2:9 Slander [blasphemy] of those who say they are Jews
- These are Jews by blood, but they refuse to honor their own God.
- If they did , they would not be opposed to Jesus.

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- 2:9 Synagogue of Satan
- The devil is the one who accuses believers in Jesus.
- He loves to slander, criticize and condemn.

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- 2:9 Synagogue of Satan
- This synagogue should be full of God's people.
- Having rejected their Messiah, they have unwittingly aligned themselves with the devil.
- They now belong to him.

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- John 16:2-3

2 They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. 3 And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.

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- Theodore Beza, the French Reformer, was once engaged in a discussion with the King of Navarre, an area on the border between France and Spain.
- The year was 1562, and a group of French Protestants were recently massacred.
- Beza commented,



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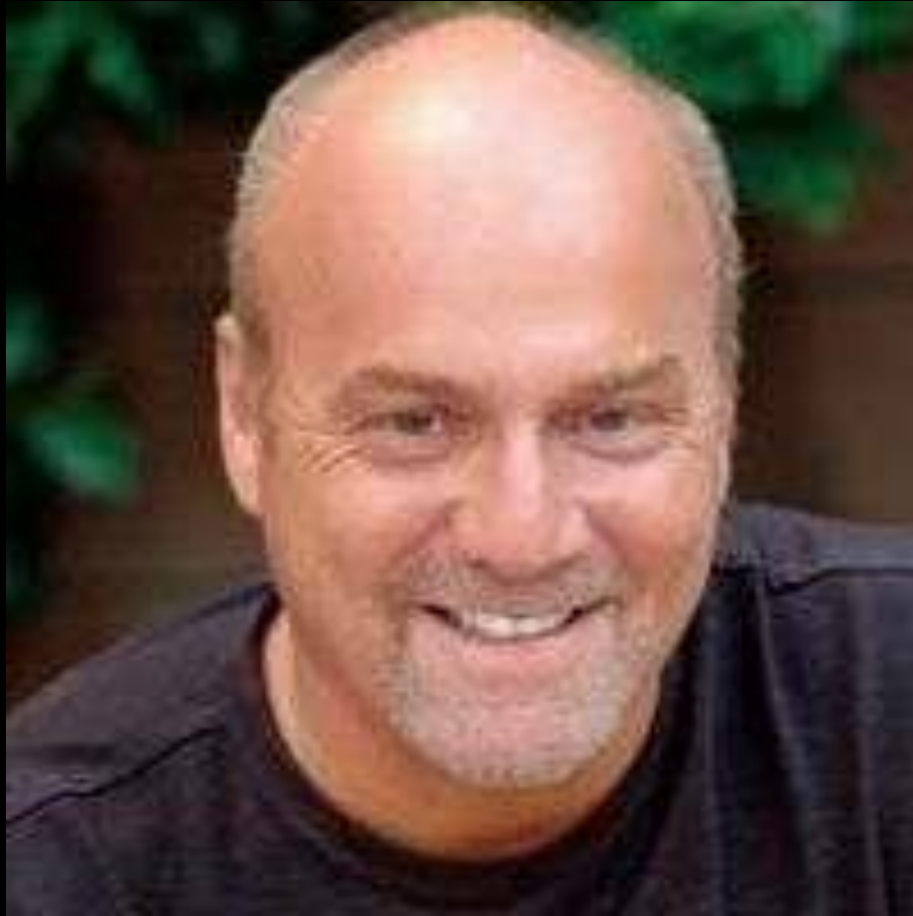
Sire, it belongs in truth to the church of God, in whose name I speak, to endure blows and not to inflict them. But it will also please your majesty to remember that she is an anvil that has worn out many hammers.

*– Theodore Beza (1519 – 1605),
French theologian, disciple and
successor of John Calvin*



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*Historically the church has
always been stronger when it
has been persecuted than
when it has been patronized.*

*– Greg Laurie,
Pastor, Evangelist, Author*

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- 2:10 Do not fear
- This is one of the most common commands in the Bible.
- How important it was at a time like this for this church.

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- Psalm 23:4

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil, for you are with me;

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- 2:10 Ten days
- Persecution in those days was an ongoing problem for the church.
- This may still refer to ten literal, future days of more intense persecution.

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- 2:10 Ten days
- Another view looks forward in history to ten short outbreaks of persecution under ten Roman emperors.
- These were often listed as starting with Nero.
- Others include Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Septimus Severus, Maximin, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian, and Diocletian.

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- 2:10 Ten days
- In any event, an important thing to see is that the persecution was temporary.
- It had a start, and it also would come to an end.

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- James 5:10-11

10 As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

11 Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

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- 2:10 The crown of life.
- Jesus wore a crown of thorns for our sake.
- Believers are promised various crowns.
 - Crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4)
 - Crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8)

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- 2:10 The crown of life.
- To a church facing persecution and possibly death, this would be a most meaningful crown.

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- James 1:12

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

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- 2:11 He who has an ear
- Every letter contains a reminder that we must listen to what the letter says.
- It was not only meant for the church in Smyrna at that time, but it is to all of us right now.

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- 2:11 The second death
- If we are born again, we die only to live forever.
- If we are not born again, we face a further, final home in the lake of fire – the second death.

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- Revelation 20:14-15

14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

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- Revelation 21:6-8

6 And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. 7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son ...

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- Revelation 21:6-8

8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

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Conclusions

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Conclusions

- Jesus had nothing but encouragement for this church.
- We should also remember Christians who are suffering and encourage them.

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Conclusions

- We may not be persecuted very severely, but we can pray for those who are.
- We must remain faithful in whatever trials we have – not only in persecution.

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Conclusions

- If you are personally suffering in any way, then be sure that Jesus knows it.
- He knows your pain, not only because he sees it, but as the one who has suffered and died for our sins.

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Conclusions

- Store up treasures in heaven – which are eternal – not temporary like treasure on earth.

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Conclusions

- Matthew 6:19-21

19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

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- Luke 12:32-34

32 “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

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Conclusions

- To get our heart set on heaven, we have to begin storing up treasure there.
- Trials and troubles, tribulation and persecution can all serve this purpose if we endure them well.
- This was the case in Smyrna, where the church was poor and was suffering.
- It can be the case for many more churches today.