

church of Jesus Christ) 10 severe persecutions: Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Marcus, Aurelius, Severus, Mazimum, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian, and Diocletian. The reference here may well be to these events.

b. Become faithful

The present imperative here also advances the thought of persistence in one's attitude right up to martyrdom. Death was a real factor in the matter. In comfortable America, this is not an issue for most believers. There are countries where this has been and is a vital matter and we have witnessed the same in our day!

To heed this counsel would result in a crown. The Greek word implies a "victor's crown." It is the same word which we gain the name "Stephen." The appositional phrase used with this word means "consisting in life." So, though dead, there is the promise of life. Hallelujah!

NOTE: Two essential ingredients are given here for resisting persecution: don't fear and keep being faithful. Nothing is said about worry or frustration. God's answer to difficulties of this nature is an assured rest in His eternal promises! God help us to listen!

3. The church's CAPSTONE PROVIDED v. 11.

What a blessed personal invitation this is. Any single person who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of God is saying to the church! Hence, both the Spirit (here) and the Lord (v. 8) join in beseeching the church! The promise is deliverance from the second death. Indeed, the double negative in Greek ("not") shows that a martyr's death is like fragrance to the whole house of God! He lives and never dies. Sounds just like the promise of our Lord to Mary and Martha (John 11:25, 26). The Gospel is just this (John 5:24).

Conclusion There are many lessons to learn from this study. Add these to those already provided: 1. In times of suffering, the easy path of renouncing Christ is to be rejected! Be faithful! 2. Never doubt the goodness of the Lord in the midst of persecution. You never know the battle going on behind the scenes between Satan and the Lord (cf. Job). 3. Fear not! God sits on His throne! Amen.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

"Smyrna: Church Persecuted"
Revelation 2:8-11

Introduction

1. Seven churches are addressed in the Book of Revelation (chaps. 2-3). The first was Ephesus. It had much to commend itself to the Lord, BUT it had left its first love of HIM (v. 4). Like its name, Ephesus had apparently "relaxed" and "let go." How tragic!

2. Each of the letters to the churches zero in on a specific historical period of this Age of Grace. Ephesus noted the apostolic church life. Now comes Smyrna and it tells the story of the persecution which arose following the apostolic period. The name of the church tells the story: it means "bitterness." The city was the pride of Asia and second only to Ephesus. Its name comes from myrrh, a spice taken from the bark of a tree. It was hardened to resin and then crushed to powder. It is mentioned three times in the N.T. (Matt. 2:11; Mark 15:25; John 19:39). The spice depicted the experience of the church.

3. It was the Lord our Redeemer Who spoke to the church (v. 8). He is described: a. As first and last. He will always be this. None before nor after HIM! b. As dead and alive. The "was" means He "became" dead, but the vital truth is that "He lives again." Both verbs are aorist and show the historicity of the events stated.

4. This is what He said to Smyrna:

1. The church's CONDITION KNOWN v. 9.

The verb "know" is the essential word for innate and in-born knowledge. It affords a testimony to our Lord's omniscience. Hallelujah. Nothing is outside His province of knowledge! This is what He knows:

a. Church's tribulation

The word used here comes from a verb meaning "to press or squeeze." It was used in connection with a threshing roller of the Romans. Dominant idea of the word is "pressure." In ancient English law, those who willfully

refused to plead had heavy weights placed on their breasts and were so pressed and crushed to death. This is the force of the word "tribulation." Polycarp, the alleged first bishop of the church, suffered martyrdom in the city's stadium.

b. Church's poverty

The word employed here is used 34 times in the N.T. It conveys every gradation of want. It is allied to a verb which means to "crouch or cringe." Therefore, it conveys the idea of utter destitution and connotes one who abjectly solicits and lives by alms. It is used of Lazarus who is termed a "begger" (Luke 16:20, 22). Why the church was so poor is not difficult to discover:

- 1) Church probably taken from lower classes. This seems to have been the common lot of believers (1 Cor. 1: 26-31).
- 2) Church probably robbed of much of its possessions by its persecutors.
- 3) Church may well have given all that it had to the work of the Lord and thus was poor in this world's goods. The kind of people intimidated by this letter would have been giving people in any case!

c. Church's riches

This is a parenthesis but one which describes fully the true value of the church. It is not in goods of this world that God actually looks, but what one possesses in the Lord (Psa. 73). So it always is (Eph. 1:3). This is a glorious parenthesis which needs the spotlight in days of plenty and materialism.

d. Church's blasphemy

It is true that most blasphemy is considered that which is against God directly. In this case, however, that is not the situation. The blasphemy or railing is directed against the church, true believers on Christ. John is not careful to leave the problem people in anonymity. He calls them by their group name: Jews. These Jews were so by nature, but not by the Spirit! Hence, what is mentioned here is a group which were liars by claim and character (Rom. 2:9; 3:9). One has only to read the Book of Acts to see how natural Jews opposed the true Gospel of our Lord. It is

reported that Jews were in the forefront of the crowd which wanted to dispose of Polycarp at Smyrna later on. They desired to cast him to the lions or burn him alive. John records the evaluation of such by our Lord: they were actually "the synagogue of Satan." That's a strong phrase. Enemies of the work of God and the true servants of the Lord are just the same today! This is not a very popular designation, but it is nonetheless true! Our Lord Himself gave it! In contrast with the "church" (a called out body), this group is labeled a "synagogue." There was no reality of relation to our Lord in them at all.

NOTE: The word for "works" is not given in all MSS, but it is well worth including. The Lord "knew" the works of this church: their taking of tribulation and poverty and blasphemy. Blessed words: He knows. This is still true.

2. The church's COUNSEL GIVEN v. 10.

a. Stop fearing

The present tense imperative is a genuine encouragement to the believers. Worse things were about to come, but there was nothing to fear! The list of events (v. 9) for which they had every reason to fear would be added to, but the admonition is: don't fear!

"Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take!
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessing on your head."

It is clearly stated in the text that there were things "about to" bring suffering on the church. The strengthened word for "behold" gives the sense of assurance for these events. The direct root of the problem is traced to the "devil." None else is accused. When we affirm that things are diabolical, the same root is used as found here for "devil." "Prison" is anticipated. The word here means "to put one under guard." It is the first step toward execution! (cf. Acts 5:18, 21 for different words used for "prison".) This whole effort is referred to as a specific intent "that ye may be tried." The verb "tried" means to uncover good or ill. Here, obviously, to make the church fall! Incidentally, the other Greek verb for "try" is never used of Satan. That one means to "approve." This Satan never seeks to do. The "ten days" tribulation suggests the brevity of the matter in the light of eternity. Actually, the church endured (i.e. the