

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

“The Persecuted Church”

Revelation 2:8-11

Introduction

1. Seven churches are addressed in the Book of Revelation (chaps. 2-3). The first church addressed was Ephesus (2:1-7). While it had much to commend itself to the Lord, it had left (not lost) its first love for Him (2:4). Like its name, Ephesus had “relaxed” and “let go.” How tragic!

2. Each of the letters to the churches focus on a specific concern observed by the Lord. Smyrna is the second church addressed. The name means “bitterness” and is related to “myrrh,” an ointment associated with death (Jn 19:39). This spice, taken from the bark of a tree, hardened to resin, then crushed to powder expresses the experience of this church.

3. The Lord spoke to the church and is characterized: a. “The first and the last” (cf. 1:17, here, 22:13). He is before all and after all. He is God (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:2). b. “Dead . . . Alive.” These two aorist verbs show historicity. He “became” dead, but now lives gloriously! What a consolation for this church.

4. Here is the Lord’s message to the Smyrna assembly:

1. The Church’s CONDITION KNOWN v. 9

The verb “know ()” is innate knowledge. Testifies to His omniscience. What He knows is listed:

a. Church’s Works

This, as with Ephesus, is noted in our KJV and the Majority Text. These are post salvation deeds (Eph. 2:10; Titus 3:8,14).

b. Church’s Tribulation

This comes from a verb meaning “to press, squeeze” (), hence “pressure.” In ancient English law, those who willfully refused to plead had heavy weights placed on their chests and thus pressed/crushed to death. This is the meaning of “tribulation.” Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna 115 A.D., was burned to death in the city’s stadium.

c. Church’s Poverty

This word () is used 34 times in the N.T. and comes from a verb meaning to “crouch, cringe.” Utter destitution is conveyed and connotes one who solicits and lives by alms. Used of Lazarus (Lk 16:20, 22). Their poverty may be traced to their economic position (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-31), thievery of their persecutors, or their readiness to give to God’s work (cf. Acts 4, 5).

d. Church’s Riches

The parenthesis fully describes the true value of the church (Ps. 73; Eph. 1:3). Materialism and economic gain are questionable assets (cf. 1 Tim. 6:17-19).

e. Church’s Blasphemy

Here is a strange phenomenon -- Satan using heathen activities under the guise of Judaism. They say they are Jews so as to attract Christian concern, but they are in fact blasphemers. They may have been Jews by birth, but not the new birth (cf. Rev. 2:9; 3:9). They actually are a “synagogue of Satan” (that is, a gathering of Satan. They were not an “assembly” called out of the world) of the Lord. Satan was using Judaism as a blind to introduce heathenism and get worship for

himself. Obviously, this was an internal suffering for the church.

2. The Church’s COUNSEL GIVEN v. 10

a. Stop Fearing

The present tense negative imperative is extremely significant. Worse things are about to come () to cause suffering. This was cause to fear, but the admonition is “don’t fear.” Consider: “Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take! The clouds ye so much dread are big with mercy, and shall break in blessing on your head.”

b. Expect Suffering

“Behold” is a strengthened particle () giving assurance of the events described. The direct root of the problem is traced to the “Devil” (). No one else is accused. It is all diabolical, a word rooted in “devil.” He will throw (“cast”) some of the believers into prison () i.e. placed under guard.

c. Anticipate Trial

The purpose of the prison is “to be tried” (). This verb is “tried” to uncover good or ill. Here, Satan intends to make the church fall. A time limit is indicated for the trial -- 10 days. In the light of eternity, the time is brief. Since the early church endured 10 severe persecutions, an oblique reference may be given here of them under the following emperors: Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Marcus, Aurelius, Severus, Mazimum, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian, Diocletian.

d. Become Faithful

The present imperative () dictates 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.

3. The Church’s CAPSTONE PROVIDED vv. 10, 11

a. Crown of Life -- Given

Here is a direct promise from the Lord. It is specified by an emphatic plural personal pronoun “you” (). The crown promised is a “victors crown” (stephanos), the same word from which the name Stephen comes. The genitive of apposition denotes the crown as “consisting in life.” So, though persecution brings death, there is the promise of life. Hallelujah!

b. Second Death -- Overcome

A double negative for “not” () affirms that the over comer shall not “be hurt” () This is an aorist passive subjunctive expressing purpose. So, a martyr’s death is like fragrance to the whole house of God (cf. Jn. 11:25, 26). Deliverance from the second death is assured (Rev. 20:14; 21:8).

Conclusion

Any single person who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (plural). Therefore, the Lord and the Spirit combine in an understandable appeal.