

NOON BIBLE STUDY: REVELATION 2: SMYRNA

HERE'S A REMINDER OF OUR APPROACH TO THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN REVELATION 2 & 3: WE WILL READ THESE LETTERS TOGETHER AND SEEK TO UNDERSTAND WHAT JESUS' MESSAGE WAS FIRST TO THESE SEVEN CHURCHES IN ASIA AND THEN EXAMINE WHAT WE MUST HEAR FROM HIM FOR OUR OWN CHURCH TODAY.

THE SEVEN LETTERS ARE MOSTLY STRUCTURED IN THE SAME PATTERN.

- JESUS WILL SPEAK AND INTRODUCE SOMETHING ABOUT HIMSELF TO EACH CHURCH
- HE WILL SAY "I KNOW..." WHICH IS THE GREEK WORD **οἶδα** (OIDA) WHICH LITERALLY MEANS "TO SEE". IN OTHER WORDS, THIS "KNOWING" IS ONE BASED ON FIRST HAND OBSERVATION.
- BASED ON WHAT JESUS SEES AND KNOWS HE WILL TYPICALLY GIVE A COMMENDATION OF WHAT THEY ARE DOING WELL FOLLOWED BY A REBUKE OF SOMETHING THAT NEEDS REPENTANCE.
- HE WILL GIVE THEM GUIDANCE AS TO WHAT REPENTANCE LOOKS LIKE AND WARN THEM WITH THE CONSEQUENCE OF DISOBEDIENCE.
- IN EVERY CASE HE WILL GIVE THEM A PROMISE AND REWARD FOR THEIR OBEDIENCE AND OVERCOMING - ROOTED IN THE PROMISES OF THE AGE TO COME.



THE CITY OF SMYRNA AT THE TIME OF THIS WRITING WAS A BEAUTIFUL PORT CITY. GEOGRAPHICALLY IT IS LOCATED BETWEEN EPHEBUS AND PERGAMUM AND RIVALED THEM AS THE CHIEF CITY OF THE REGION. IT WAS VERY WEALTHY AND PROSPEROUS.

"SMYRNA HAD SUPPORTED ROME LONG BEFORE SHE HAD BECOME A WORLD POWER, AND AS EARLY AS 195 BC HAD ERECTED A TEMPLE TO THE GODDESS OF ROME. THIS NATURALLY MADE SMYRNA A SEAT OF EMPEROR WORSHIP, AND IN 26 BC, WHEN SEVERAL CITIES OF ASIA WERE COMPETING FOR THE HONOR OF BUILDING A TEMPLE TO THE EMPEROR TIBERIUS, SMYRNA ALONE SECURED THIS PRIVILEGE. (GEORGE ELDON LADD, "A COMMENTARY ON THE REVELATION OF JOHN", PAGE 42).

HISTORIANS ALSO NOTE THAT AT SOME POINT PRIOR TO THE CURRENT MOMENT, SMYRNA WAS DESTROYED & AMAZINGLY REBUILT. A CITY ONCE CRUMBLING AND DEFEATED FINDS NEW LIFE & RESURRECTION. A FITTING SETTING FOR THE CHURCH THAT WOULD INHABIT THIS PLACE IN THE LATE 1ST CENTURY.

REVELATION 2:8-11 - TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST:

COMMENDATION:

SOLUTION:

PROMISE FOR THOSE WHO OVERCOME:

WHAT CHRIST KNOWS & SEES:

REBUKE:

CONSEQUENCE OF DISOBEDIENCE:

EACH DESCRIPTION OF JESUS AS HE ADDRESSES THE CHURCHES REFERENCES BACK TO ELEMENTS WE READ IN REVELATION 1 AND IT SEEMS LIKE THE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS HE HIGHLIGHTS IN HIS INTRODUCTION TO THE CHURCH ARE RELEVANT TO THE SITUATION THEY ARE IN AND THE MESSAGE HE GIVES.

"THE FIRST AND LAST, WHO WAS DEAD AND HAS COME TO LIFE...(2:8)"

THE MESSAGE FROM JESUS IS AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ABOUT THE TROUBLES SMYRNA HAS ALREADY FACED AND A WARNING ABOUT THE DIFFICULT DAYS THAT ARE COMING. THERE IS AN INDICATION THAT THEY HAVE ALREADY BEEN FACING PERSECUTION IN SMYRNA AT THE HANDS OF THOSE WHO "SAY THEY ARE JEWS BUT ARE NOT" AND THOSE OF THE "SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN." WOW. QUITE THE DESCRIPTION.

THOUGH AT THE TIME OF THE WRITING OF REVELATION, ROME IS A PRIMARY PROSECUTOR OF THE CHURCH, THE BOOK OF ACTS RECORDS, THE EARLY CHRISTIANS STRUGGLED LESS AT THE HANDS OF GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL OFFICIALS AND MORE AT THE HANDS OF JEWISH OFFICIALS. THE JEWS RESISTED THE APOSTLES PREACHING OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIM AS MESSIAH. THE REFERENCES HERE INDICATE THAT THE JEWISH PERSECUTION CONTINUED.

"JEWS THAT ARE NOT" IMPLIES THAT THESE INDIVIDUALS CLAIMED TO BE JEWS (AKA "THE CHOSEN PEOPLE", "CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM") BUT IN FACT, BY THEIR DEEDS WERE ANYTHING BUT. RATHER THEY WERE WORKING FOR SATAN AGAINST THE PURPOSES OF THE TRUE GOD.

"ONLY JEWS WERE EXEMPT FROM WORSHIPING THE EMPEROR, FOR ROME KNEW THAT JEWS WERE MONOTHEISTIC AND WERE AN ANCIENT, ETHNIC RELIGION THAT MERITED TOLERANCE. THE RECOGNITION THAT CHRISTIANS WERE PART OF JUDAISM (THEY CLAIMED THAT JESUS FULFILLED BIBLICAL PROMISES TO ANCIENT ISRAEL) THUS PROTECTED CHRISTIANS (AT LEAST INITIALLY) FROM UNNECESSARY PERSECUTION. UNFORTUNATELY, MANY SYNAGOGUE LEADERS SEEM TO HAVE FELT IT NECESSARY TO DISTINGUISH THEMSELVES SHARPLY FROM CHRISTIANS OR EVEN MAKE THE JEWISH CHRISTIAN UNWELCOME IN THE SYNAGOGUES...(BECAUSE OF THE FRAGILE PEACE JEWS HAD WITH THE ROMAN GOVERNMENT), MANY ASIAN JEWISH LEADERS WERE PROBABLY NERVOUS ABOUT BEING ASSOCIATED WITH PROPHETIC, MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS LIKE CHRISTIANITY." (CRAIG S. KEENAR, "THE NIV APPLICATION COMMENTARY ON REVELATION", PAGE 114-115)

REVELATION 2:10

AT THE HANDS OF THESE FALSE-JEWS IN CAHOOTS WITH THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT, THE CHRISTIANS ARE GOING TO SUFFER. CHRIST TELLS THEM IT WILL BE FOR 10 DAYS. **WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THIS NUMBER?**

DANIEL 1:5-19

SIMILARLY TO THIS WELL KNOWN STORY OF THE FAITH, GOD TOOK CARE OF THOSE WHO DECIDED TO STAND FOR HIM. SURROUNDED BY PRESSURES FROM THE POWERS OF THIS WORLD (IN DANIEL'S CASE BABYLON, IN SMYRNA'S CASE ROME), THEY REMAINED FAITHFUL, TRUSTING IN GOD. AFTER THE TESTING, GOD'S WAY WAS PROVEN RIGHT.

THE USE OF TESTING AND TRIBULATION FOR "10 DAYS" LIKELY ALLUDES TO THIS RECORD IN DANIEL. IN ADDITION, IT IS AN INDICATION THAT THOUGH THERE WAS GOING TO BE A GREAT TRIAL, IT WOULD HAVE AN END. KNOWING THAT THERE IS AN END GIVES HOPE AND FUELS ENDURANCE.

TYING THIS IN TO JESUS, "THE FIRST AND THE LAST, WHO WAS DEAD, AND HAS COME TO LIFE"

SMYRNA HAS ALREADY SUFFERED AND IS GOING TO SUFFER AGAIN IN THE COMING DAYS. THE TRIALS WILL BE HARD (INCLUDING IMPRISONMENT AND FACING DEATH), BUT THE TRIALS WILL END (10 DAYS). JESUS, ACCORDING TO HIS USUAL MANNER, GIVES THE STRAIGHT TRUTH AND ALSO GIVES HOPE. HE DOESN'T LEAVE THE SAINTS IGNORANT, BUT HE DOESN'T LEAVE THEM IN DESPAIR. THEIR TRIALS IN THE CONTEXT OF ETERNITY AND LIFE IN THE AGE TO COME, ARE SHORT AND LIMITED. THE ONE WHO IS FAITHFUL DURING THESE TRIALS WILL RECEIVE THE CROWN OF LIFE

(2:10) AND THOSE WHO OVERCOME "WILL NOT BE HURT BY THE SECOND DEATH (2:11)". AND SO HOW JESUS INTRODUCES HIMSELF FITS PERFECTLY AS A REMINDER FOR THE CHURCH ABOUT PERSPECTIVE.

JESUS' FIRST WORDS TO SMYRNA ARE: I AM THE "**FIRST AND LAST**". IN OTHER WORDS, I AM THE GREAT BOOKENDS TO HISTORY. THE STORY OF SALVATION HAS BEEN WRITTEN AND TOLD BEFORE THEM AND WILL BE CONCLUDED AFTER THEM. IF INDEED THE TRIALS ARE TO LAST 10 LITERAL DAYS, THAT'S A SPECK IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GRAND TALE ENCOMPASSED BY THE "FIRST AND LAST". THAT DOESN'T MINIMIZE THE CHALLENGES THEY WILL FACE, BUT IT DOES PROVIDE CONTEXT BY WHICH THE CHALLENGES CAN BE JUDGED.

MUCH OF WHAT IS ADDRESSED TO SMYRNA IS A MATTER OF WHAT APPEARS TO BE VERSUS WHAT IS. THEY APPEAR TO BE POOR IN A WEALTHY AND PROSPEROUS CITY, BUT IN TRUTH, THEY ARE RICH (2:9). IT APPEARS THE JEWS ARE THE TRUE PEOPLE OF GOD, BUT IN TRUTH, THEY ARE NOT - THE SUFFERING SAINTS OF SMYRNA ARE. IT WOULD APPEAR THAT SOME OF THESE CHRISTIANS WOULD SUFFER AND DIE AND THUS BE LOSERS, BUT IN TRUTH, THEY WILL WIN - ILLUSTRATED BY THE CROWN OF LIFE, SYMBOLIZING VICTORY.

THESE REALITIES HELP US UNDERSTAND THE SECOND PART OF HOW JESUS INTRODUCES HIMSELF AT THE START OF THE MESSAGE. HE PROCLAIMS THAT HE IS THE ONE "**WHO WAS DEAD, AND HAS COME TO LIFE.**" IN OTHER WORDS, JESUS KNOWS A THING OR TWO ABOUT APPEARING TO LOSE BUT WINNING, APPEARING TO BE DEFEATED, BUT OVERCOMING, APPEARING EVEN TO BE DEAD, BUT APPEARING AGAIN ALIVE.

SMYRNA IS THE RARE CHURCH (ALONG WITH PHILADELPHIA) THAT RECEIVES NO REBUKE OR WARNING ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISOBEDIENCE. INSEAD SHE RECEIVES POWERFUL ENCOURAGEMENT TO REMAIN FAITHFUL, EVEN UNTO DEATH. SMYRNA IS SUFFERING BECAUSE SHE IS A FAITHFUL WITNESS OF AND FOR JESUS.

AS WE CONCLUDE THIS SECTION, LET'S TALK A LITTLE ABOUT TROUBLE, TRIALS & TRIBULATIONS.

THERE ARE THREE KINDS OF TROUBLE IN THE WORLD

- 1 - GENERAL TROUBLE THAT AFFECTS EVERYONE BECAUSE WE LIVE IN A FALLEN AND CORRUPTED WORLD
- 2 - TROUBLE THAT COMES AS A CONSEQUENCE FOR SIN
- 3 - TROUBLE THAT COMES AS RESULT OF BEING A CHRISTIAN

THE NEW TESTAMENT IN PARTICULAR OUTLINES A VERY CLEAR AND OBVIOUS THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING. THE SCRIPTURE SPEAKS TO EACH OF THE THREE KINDS OF TROUBLE I LISTED ABOVE, BUT SPECIFICALLY RELATING TO THE THIRD KIND - THE TROUBLE THAT COMES SPECIFICALLY AS A RESULT OF BEING A CHRISTIAN. CHRISTIANS WILL EXPERIENCE THE OTHER TWO AS WELL BUT IT'S IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER THE THIRD TODAY. JESUS SAID:

MATTHEW 5:10-12 - "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN PERSECUTED FOR THE SAKE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. 11 "BLESSED ARE YOU WHEN PEOPLE INSULT YOU AND PERSECUTE YOU, AND FALSELY SAY ALL KINDS OF EVIL AGAINST YOU BECAUSE OF ME. 12 "REJOICE AND BE GLAD, FOR YOUR REWARD IN HEAVEN IS GREAT; FOR IN THE SAME WAY THEY PERSECUTED THE PROPHETS WHO WERE BEFORE YOU.

JOHN 16:33 - "THESE THINGS I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU, SO THAT IN ME YOU MAY HAVE PEACE. IN THE WORLD YOU HAVE TRIBULATION, BUT TAKE COURAGE; I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD."

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

THE EARLY CHURCH WAS NOT SURPRISED TO SUFFER TROUBLE BECAUSE OF THEIR WITNESS FOR JESUS. THEY DIDN'T SEEK THE SUFFERING, BUT THE SUFFERING FOUND THEM. IT WASN'T BECAUSE THEY WERE DISOBEDIENT, BUT IN FACT IT WAS BECAUSE OF THEIR OBEDIENCE.

FOR MOST OF US, WHEN WE SUFFER, WE SUFFER BECAUSE WE LIVE IN A FALLEN WORLD (PEOPLE ARE EVIL, THE WORLD STINKS, OUR BODIES HURT, OUR JOBS ARE HARD, WE GET SICK) OR BECAUSE OF OUR OWN SIN (WE HAVE CONFLICT BECAUSE WE WERE UNKIND OR INSENSITIVE, WE ARE IN DEBT BECAUSE WE SPENT TOO MUCH, WE ARE IN JAIL BECAUSE WE BEAT UP SOMEONE WHO CUT US OFF IN THE APPONAUG ROTARY, ETC.). BUT IF AND AS WE LIVE AS CHRISTIANS, EVEN IN AMERICA, WE WILL SUFFER PERSECUTION - NOT SIMPLY OUR POLITICAL PARTY BEING IN THE MINORITY OR UNJUST LAWS BEING PASSED, ETC - BUT PERSONAL AND PRECISE PERSECUTION BECAUSE WE ARE CHRISTIANS.

BUT THE QUESTION FOR US IS WHETHER OR NOT IF AND WHEN THAT COMES, WE WILL BE SURPRISED. WHEN TROUBLE COMES WILL WE BE OUTRAGED "HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN TO ME!? I'M AN AMERICAN!? I'M A TAX PAYER!? I'M A VOTER!? I'M A WHATEVER..."

ARE WE SURPRISED? IF WE ARE, WE NEED TO ADJUST OUR THEOLOGY ON SUFFERING. BECAUSE JESUS HAS ALREADY TOLD US AHEAD OF TIME IT WILL COME - AND NOT JUST IN THE LAST WEEKS/DAYS OF THIS AGE. 2000 YEARS AGO OUR BROTHERS IN THE COSMOPOLITAN CITY OF SMYRNA WERE BEING IMPRISONED AND PRESSURED. AND WHEN JESUS SHOWS UP TO SPEAK TO THEM HE DOES NOT TELL THEM THAT HE'S GOING TO STOP OR TAKE AWAY THE SUFFERING. HE DOESN'T STOP THE SUFFERING. HE SAYS "I KNOW YOUR TRIBULATION...DON'T FEAR, MORE SUFFERING IS AHEAD...BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH..."

HE DOESN'T STOP THE SUFFERING. HE STANDS WITH THEM IN THE SUFFERING AND PROMISES VICTORY ON THE OTHER SIDE. IN A CULTURE FILLED WITH FALSE HOPE FOR A PAIN, TROUBLE AND TRIAL FREE LIFE, DOES THIS SURPRISE YOU?

WHAT ARE WE TO TAKE AWAY FROM THIS MESSAGE TO SMYRNA? I THINK WE KNOW THAT GOD IS GOOD, EVEN WHEN LIFE IS NOT. I THINK WE KNOW THAT GOD WINS IN THE END. I THINK WE KNOW THAT JESUS IS "WITH US, ALWAYS, EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE." SO WHAT LESSON DO WE GLEAN FROM WHAT CHRIST HAS TO SAY TO THIS REMARKABLE CHURCH?

I THINK ONE OF THE LESSONS FOR US IS THAT WE NEED TO EXPAND OUR CAPACITY FOR SUFFERING. IN OTHER WORDS, WE NEED TO ACCEPT AND ANTICIPATE TROUBLES, BUT NOT THE TROUBLES WE THINK WE ARE CURRENTLY FACING. FOR THE AMERICAN CHURCH, WE DO NOT HAVE A FIRST HAND UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT SMYRNA FACED, NOR HOW EMPOWERING THE WORDS OF CHRIST MUST HAVE BEEN TO THEM.

REVELATION 2:9 QUOTES JESUS AS SAYING: "I KNOW YOUR TRIBULATION...BE FAITHFUL UNTIL DEATH AND I WILL GIVE YOU THE CROWN OF LIFE. HE WHO OVERCOMES WILL NOT BE HURT BY THE SECOND DEATH." JESUS SEES THE TROUBLE AND TRIBULATION BUT SEES BEYOND IT TOO. AND THAT'S WHERE HE'S CALLING HIS PEOPLE TO PUT THEIR SIGHTS.

HE DOESN'T PROMISE DELIVERANCE FROM THAT TROUBLE HERE AND NOW, HE PROMISES DELIVERANCE FROM ALL TROUBLES THERE AND THEN. THIS MESSAGE, IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING AND TRIAL, OR FOR US BEFORE SUFFERING AND TRIAL IS TO EMPOWER US NOT TO ESCAPE TRIALS - BUT TO EMPOWER US TO ENDURE TRIALS, FAITHFULLY UNTO THE END. LIKE JESUS DID FOR US AND JESUS DOES WITH US.

JOHN 16:33 - "THESE THINGS I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU, SO THAT IN ME YOU MAY HAVE PEACE. IN THE WORLD YOU HAVE TRIBULATION, BUT TAKE COURAGE; I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD."

JESUS IS A GOOD LORD - THE FIRST AND THE LAST - THE ONE WHO WAS DEAD AND NOW IS ALIVE. SO DO NOT FEAR WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO SUFFER, IT WILL BE SHORT...BE FAITHFUL UNTIL DEATH. JESUS WILL BE FAITHFUL TO YOU LONG AFTER THAT.