

SMYRNA & PHILADELPHIA: THE SEVEN CHURCHES

SMYRNA

The City:

- A major trading center.
- Famous for their grape vines.
- The "Glory of Asia." Known for its temple to the Mother Goddess and its imperial cult temple to Tiberius.
- Citizens were required to offer a pinch of incense every year on the altar of the shrine to the godhead of Caesar. It was more about political loyalty. Citizens received their yearly certificate for doing so. Afterwards you were free to worship your god.

The History:

- We're not sure. When both Jews and Greeks throughout Asia heard the word in Ephesus (Acts 19:10).
- Did Jews from Asia (Acts 2:9) carry the word back home?

Smyrna:

vs. 8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

- "The leading god of Smyrna was "Dionysus," the god of wine. Smyrna was famous for its vines. Each year the death and resurrection of Dionysus was acted out in public plays."
- May be a coincidence, but Smyrna was called "the first of Asia" by Rome and Rome gave her life. The city was known for its beauty. They took pride in who they were. They truly worshipped Rome and Rome favored her. However, everyone falls short when compared to Christ.

vs. 9 I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

- They were crushed under all sorts of pressure and poor . . . really poor is the idea behind the Greek.
- **James 2:5** Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which He has promised to those who love Him?
- **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.
- **Galatians 6:12-16** It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.
- Tradition states that the Jews would make their sacrifice to the Caesar shrine. They would also turn over Christians to the Roman authorities. One of whom was Polycarp, a disciple of John. At his death (155 A.D.), Polycarp is quoted saying, "Eighty and six years have I served Christ and He has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me? I fear not the fire that burns for a season and after a while is quenched. Why do you delay? Come, do your will." As the flames licked his body he prayed, "I thank Thee that Thou has graciously thought me worthy of this day and of this hour that I may receive a portion in the number of the martyrs, in the cup of Thy Christ."

vs. 10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

- Jesus never promised us physical peace. He did promise persecution.
 - **2 Timothy 4:6-8** *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing.*
 - **1 Peter 5:4** *And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*
 - **1 Corinthians 9:25** *Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.*
- vs. 11** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.
- We cannot imagine what our brethren suffered so long ago. Or what other brethren face today in other countries. However, it's always good to ask, "What's the worst that can happen to me?"
 - Jesus seems to answer, "You'll die and be with Me."

PHILADELPHIA

The City:

- In recognition for the aid after an earthquake in A.D. 17, the city was briefly renamed Neocaesarea ("Caesar's New City"). They were continually hit with small earthquakes through the years.
- Also called "Little Athens" because of its impressive temples.
- Near a fertile valley known for growing wine grapes.
- Many Jews lived there with a local synagogue.

The History:

- When both Jews and Greeks throughout Asia heard the word in Ephesus (Acts 19:10).
- Did Jews from Asia (Acts 2:9) carry the word back home? Again, we're just not sure.

Philadelphia:

- vs. 7** And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.
- The Jews may have felt they were the "separated ones" to God. Jesus was THE sanctified one.
 - The Jews may have felt they were "sincerely His", but Jesus was the only sincere one in town.
 - The Jews may have a lineage tying back to David, but Jesus held the keys to the Kingdom.
 - This seems to be a clear reference to **Isaiah 22:22** (*And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open*).
 - In this passage, Shebna (governor) is told that he would be replaced by Eliakim. He would be given authority. We read about this in **Isaiah 36:3** when Eliakim served over the household and Shebna was now secretary. However, Jesus uses **Isaiah 22:22** to reference Himself - that is - the one over the household of God. In **Isaiah 9:6** we read about this "son" and how "the government shall be upon His shoulder . . ."
 - Jesus had opened the door to those in Philadelphia and no one could close it. Jesus had shut the door to the Jews and no one could open it.
- vs. 8** I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept My word and have not denied My name.
- Paul would typically use the phrase "open door" to reference opportunities for evangelism. Coincidentally (or not), Philadelphia was a missionary city for spreading Hellenism to the east.

- They may not have been a large group or perhaps He's referencing a lack of their power of influence in regards to "worldly power". Yet, they were a power house to God.
 - We all have talents given by God. We are to use them to His glory. Let Him give the increase.
- vs. 9 Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie - behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.
- Terrifying to think you're serving God when you're serving Satan. Anyone remember John 8?
 - Being totally convinced you're right doesn't make it so.
 - Imagine how Jews would feel if the church was made up of Gentiles?
- vs. 10 Because you have kept My word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.
- Perhaps this is speaking of the testing inflicted by Rome who demanded worship. Jesus would see them through this trial.
 - The fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70? The fall of Jerusalem didn't affect these churches in Asia Minor. I don't believe this is speaking of His second coming either.
 - We pray that we be "delivered from temptation." Are we asking that we not be tempted or to carry us through the temptation? Children of God were told in the past they would be "kept" from certain things (Ezekiel 9:1-8; 21:3-4), but they still suffered. Yet, they made it through. That seems to be the idea. Just see the next verse - sounds like they're going to go through something.
- vs. 11 I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.
- Harmonize with verse 8. Probably shouldn't use to promote "once saved, always saved." Someone can seize your crown - fight for it!
- vs. 12-13 The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from My God out of heaven, and My own new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
- "You're an oak." Even better for a Christian to hear, "you're a pillar." Paul called Peter, James and John "pillars."
 - Apparently they experienced several tremors which caused the people to flee to the countryside.
 - The city comes down from God. Seems to communicate its origin and nature. In Daniel 7, the bestial kingdoms rise out of the water or earth. The Messianic Kingdom comes from the heavens where the Son of Man is in the clouds. He was given a kingdom that could not be destroyed.
 - Having His name shows a connection to Him. It shows His ownership over the one who wears it.