

SECTION 5

Text 2:8-11

8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last, who was dead, and lived again 9 I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synogogue of Satan. 10 Fear not the things which thou are about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life. 11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Initial Questions 2:8-11

1. How can a poverty stricken Church be rich?
2. What does the term *blasphemy* mean?
3. Does John believe that the Devil was a real person and responsible for evil?
4. How would being thrown into prison, try or test our faith in Christ?
5. Does the Lord expect us to be faithful, even to the point of surrendering our own lives?
6. What does the phrase - "the second death" mean?

The Church in Smyrna
Chp. 2:8-11

Professor William M. Ramsay called Smyrna the city of Life; it was also the seat of the Imperial Cult. Smyrna has existed from a millennium before Christ to the present. Today it is a city of over 250,000 inhabitants. "The Glory of Asia" stood 35 miles to the north of Ephesus. Damascus had her "street called straight"; and Smyrna has the Golden Street. This street was lined with infamous temples to Aphrodite, Asklepios, Apollo, and to the mighty Zeus. From a Christian perspective, its most notable contribution to the world of the N.T. was a congregation of the Lord's people. Polycarp was bishop of this congregation soon after its basic departure from the biblical concept of the Church and its polity. What did our Lord think of this Church?

Verse 8

John was commanded to write (see vs. 1) to the angel of the Church in Smyrna. Christ addresses this congregation as the first and the last, who became (*egene to* - II Cor. ind.) in a single act - dead and lived (*ezmsen* - I Cor. mid. voice in a single act lived again of his own will; the force of the middle voice). The King James erroneously translates this as a present tense "is alive." With His credentials of the fact of His resurrection, Christ addresses this Church. What greater grounds could there be for His demanding obedient response to His Lordship?

Verse 9

Christ acknowledges that He is aware of their affliction. (*Thlipis* - pressure, i.e., burden - pressing down). Their suffering was not unknown to their God. The Lord's vivid imagery is again apparent as He speaks of their poverty (*ptōcheia* - is a man who has nothing. Another term, *penia* means a poor man or a man who works for a living.) The great contrast was that this great commercial metropolis was rich, but the Christians were destitute.

In what way could a poverty-stricken congregation be rich? They were wealthy with the things that last - faith, etc. They were building for Eternity! It was their commitment to Christ which enabled them to withstand the railing (*blasphēnian* - from two Greek words which mean to speak, to hurt). It takes Christ given courage to maintain a progressive faith, when there were no physical signs of God's blessing (they were poverty stricken), and Jews of the synogogue of Satan were blaspheming their Christ by railing against them. The phrase "a synogogue of Satan" means that their assembly is dedicated really to Satan and not God.

In our day there are many learned documents written to set forth the thesis that contemporary anti-Semitism had its origin in the scriptures. They often fail to consider the Jewish enmity toward the cause of Christ (see Book of Acts) - as long as Christians were a minority group.

Note: R. Wilde, *The Treatment of the Jews in the Greek Christian Writers of the First Centuries*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 1949; Jules Isaac, *Has Anti-Semitism Roots in Christianity?*, National Council of Christians and Jews, New York, 19, N.Y.; The Talmud speaks of good and bad Pharisees, but still Jewish and Liberal Christians continue to attach the biblical data with regards to

Christ's attack on the Pharisees, John's use of the term "The Jews, etc.": Jacob R. Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World*, The Jewish Pub. Soc. N.Y. second printing, 1961; David Daube, *The N.T. and Rabbinic Judaism*; Athelone Press, Univer. of London; H. Loewe, "Pharisaism," *Judaism and Christianity* volume I (ed. by W.O.E. Oesterley) gives summary of passages showing that Pharisees were opponents of legalistic Jewish religious as was Jesus. These give examples to what is found in the N.T.; C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, pp. 202-232 for other examples - A. T. Robertson's work, *Jesus and the Pharisees* - very defective study. Use it with care! John (4:22) said that "Salvation is of the Jews." Yet today, there are three Jews who influence the world more than our Lord - Freud, Einstein, and Marx. But ultimately the Jew from Nazareth shall prevail!

Verse 10

In the midst of all their tribulation and persecutions, etc., Christ commands them "do not fear" (*phobon* - per. imper. mid.) the things there about to suffer." Had not they suffered enough for Christ's sake? Now He comes in person and tells them that things will grow worse than they are at present. That certainly was not a very comforting message. Christ declares that "The devil is about to throw some of you into prison in order that (this is a *hina* clause or a purpose clause, that is the purpose of their being cast into prison was) you may be tested" (*peirasthēte* - pl. 1st aor., passive voice, subj. mood). They were being put to the test (the implication of passive voice) in order to determine their ultimate commitment. They were to have affliction ten days. Next, the Lord commanded that they be faithful (*ginou* - sing. imper. present - means that each individual in the Church was commanded), because their faithfulness unto death was a necessary condition for receiving the crown of life (*zōes*) not *bios*. Christ does not offer mere biological existence. (He offers Life! - a sermon suggestion - "Passing from Existence to Life.")

Verse 11

"The one continually having an ear let him hear what the Spirit keeps on saying to the Churches" (plural - therefore does not merely apply to the Church in Smyrna). The one who is continually victorious (*nikōn* - sing. pres. part. - the individual who constantly overcomes or is victorious) will by no means be hurt by the second death." What does "the second death" mean? From contemporary Jewish literature, we know that this means "damnation." Death of the body was physical death; death of the

God-given spirit, damnation by which it would be dead to all that it had been created for was "the second death" which could be avoided.

Note: For the Rabbinic literature, etc., see Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar Zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 1922-1961 - 6 volumes in 7 parts - volume 3 contains *Briefe des N.T. und Offenbarung*, 1924. An indispensable work for any serious background study of any N.T. book; see appendix III at end of this chapter.

Review Questions

1. What credentials did Christ set forth as He began to condemn the Church - vs. 8?
2. How poor was this congregation - vs. 9?
3. Study James chapter 2 and 3, and discuss in light of this poor-rich congregation - vs. 9.
4. What does phrase "the synagogue of Satan" mean - vs. 9?
5. What did our Lord command that these Christians do in view of the coming, more intense, persecution - vs. 10?
6. What were the necessary conditions for "receiving the crown of life" - vs. 10?
7. How are we to hear the Word of God - vs. 11?
8. What does "the second death" mean - vs. 11?

SECTION 6

Text 2:12-17

12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These things saith he that hath the sharp two-edged sword:

13 I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is; and thou holdest fast my name, and didst not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth. 14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. 15 So hast thou also some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner. 16 Repent therefore; or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make

war against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it.

Initial Questions 2:12-17

1. Where was the phrase - "the sharp two-edged sword" used in *The Revelation* before this verse?
2. What was the teaching of Balaam?
3. Where is the Old Testament background for vs. 14 located?
5. Is it possible today that entire congregations like the 1st century Church in Pergamum needed to repent?

The Church in Pergamos Chp. 2:12-17

Pergamos, (the Greek form is Pergamum) stood approximately 55 miles N.E. of Ephesus in the valley of the Caicus. Pergamos was the capitol city of the Attalid realm. Later, the Romans made it the capitol of the province of Asia. The inland location of the city precluded it as a candidate for taking over the trade of Smyrna and Ephesus.

There are at least two things which should be remembered about Pergamos: (1) That it had a great library of 200,000 books, and the word parchment is derived from the city's name; (2) It was internationally famous as a center of Asklepios worship. Asklepias was the god of healing. Asklepios' chief descriptive title was (*sōter*) saviour. The emblem of this Asian saviour is the serpent.

Pergamos was the outpost metropolis of Greek civilization. Beyond the city's borders lie the hordes of barbaric Celts. It is particularly important for our study of the Revelation, to know that Pergamos gloried in the presence of the Temples to Athene, Zeus, and was a center of the Caesar Cult. Caesar claimed to be god, but the Church in Pergamos acknowledged only one saviour (not *asklepios*) and one God (not Caesar) but rather the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 12

John is once more commanded to write (same form as the other instances). Who is speaking, and how is He described?