



## REVELATION. 2:8-11 THE BITTER CHURCH

SMYRNA – The modern city of Izmir, Turkey



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"Agoura" Marketplace in Smyrna today

The name Smyrna means “bitter” and is related to the word myrrh. <sup>1</sup>

- Typically representing the fragrance of Christ

**Song of Solomon 3:6** Who is this coming out of the wilderness  
Like pillars of smoke,  
Perfumed with **myrrh** and frankincense,  
With all the merchant's fragrant powders?

**Psalms 45:8** (Describing the heavenly Bridegroom) All Your garments are scented  
with **myrrh** and aloes and cassia,  
Out of the ivory palaces, by which they have made You glad.

**Matthew 2:11** And when they had come into the house, they saw the  
young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And  
when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold,  
frankincense, and **myrrh**.

**Mark 15:22-23** And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is  
translated, Place of a Skull. **23** Then they gave Him wine mingled with  
**myrrh** to drink, but He did not take it.

**John 19:39-40** And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also  
came, bringing a mixture of **myrrh** and aloes, about a hundred pounds.  
**40** Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the  
spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury.

## The Fragrance of Christ:

**2 Corinthians 2:14-16** Now thanks be to God who always leads us in  
triumph (over death) in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His  
knowledge in every place. (every where we go we speak and live a  
triumph over eternal death and eternal judgment)

**15** For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being  
saved and among those who are perishing. (Our Father loves to smell His  
victory fragrance on us, every where we go.)

**16** To the one we are the aroma of **death leading to death**, and to the  
other the aroma of **life leading to life**. And who is sufficient for these  
things? (the fragrance of death, a sweet smell to those saved, a wretched  
stench to those that are damned.)

- “In Smyrna” (ἐν Σμυρνῇ [en Smurnēi]). North of Ephesus, on a gulf of the Aegean, one of the great cities of Asia (province), a seat of emperor-worship with temple to Tiberius, with many Jews hostile to Christianity who

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 573.



later join in the martyrdom of Polycarp, poor church (rich in grace) which receives only praise from Christ, scene of the recent massacre of Greeks by the Turks. <sup>2</sup>

- **As early as 195 B.C., Smyrna foresaw the rising power of Rome and built a temple for pagan Roman worship.**
  - **In 23 B.C., Smyrna was given the honor of building a temple to the Emperor Tiberius because of its years of faithfulness to Rome.**
  - **Thus, the city became a center for the cult of emperor worship—a fanatical “religion” that later, under such emperors as Nero (ruled A.D. 54–68) and Domitian (ruled A.D. 81–96), brought on severe persecution for the early church.**

- **At about the time of Revelation, the emperor Diocletian was the first to make emperor worship COMPULSORY.**

## Polycarp:

- **Polycarp** (/ˈpɒliˌkɑːrɪp/; Greek: Πολύκαρπος, Polýkarpos; Latin: Polycarpus; AD 69 – 155) was a 2nd-century Christian bishop of Smyrna. **Polycarp** is regarded as a Church Father in the Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches. **His name 'Polycarp' means 'much fruit' in Greek.** <sup>3</sup>
- **One of the Apostle John's converts: Polycarp, served here as a bishop until his martyrdom about AD 168.**

**Polycarp** heard that he was sought after by soldiers and attempted to escape but was discovered by a child. After feeding the guards who captured him he asked for an hour in prayer, which they gave him. He prayed with such fervency, that his guards said they were sorry that they were the ones who captured him. Nevertheless, he was taken before the governor and condemned to be burned in the market place. After his sentence was given, the governor said to him, “Reproach Christ and I will release you.”  
**Polycarp answered, “Eighty-six years I have served Him, and He has never once wronged me. How then shall I blaspheme my King who has saved**

<sup>2</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Re 2:8.

<sup>3</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polycarp>

me?"



*In the market place, tied to the stake rather than nailed, as was the usual custom, because he assured them he would stand immovable in the flames and not fight them. As the dry sticks placed around him were lit, the flames rose up and circled his body without touching him. The executioner was then ordered to pierce him with a sword. When he did, a great quantity of blood gushed out and put out the fire. Although his Christian friends asked to be given his body, as it was, so they could bury him, the enemies of the gospel insisted that it be entirely burned with fire, which was done. <sup>4</sup>*

- **Other ancient literature notes that this city was known for its wickedness and opposition to the Christian Gospel in the first century. <sup>5</sup>**

**8** “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, **who was dead, and came to life:**

- Jesus introduces Himself to Smyrna as:
  - **First and Last**
    - I was here before you, I’ll be here with you, I’ll be waiting for you!

**Revelation 1:8**

<sup>4</sup> *The New Foxes Book of Martyrs*, John Foxe, rewritten and updated by Harold J. Chadwick, Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1997, North Brunswick, NJ, Pgs 16-17

<sup>5</sup> *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, A commentary by John F. Walvoord,* by John Walvoord, Moody Press, Chicago, 1966.

**8** “**I am** the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, **the Almighty.**”

**Isaiah 41:4** Who has performed and done it,  
Calling the generations from the beginning?

**‘I, the LORD, am the first; And with the last I am He.’ ”**

**Isaiah 44:6–8**

**6** “Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,  
And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:

**‘I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God.**

**7** And who can proclaim as I do?

Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me,  
Since I appointed the ancient people.

And the things that are coming and shall come,  
Let them show these to them.

**8** Do not fear, nor be afraid;

Have I not told you from that time, and declared it?

You are My witnesses.

Is there a God besides Me?

Indeed, there is no other Rock;

I know not one.’ ”

**Isaiah 48:12–13**

**12** “Listen to Me, O Jacob,

And Israel, My called:

**I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last.**

**13** Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth,

And My right hand has stretched out the heavens;

When I call to them,

They stand up together. (imagine the stars standing up all together!)

- **“I Was dead”**
- **“I Came to life”**
- The encouragement that even death cannot suppress the hand of God!

**Revelation 1:18** I am He who lives, **and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.** Amen.

And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.

**1 Corinthians 15:20–22, 50-55**

**20** But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

**21** For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.

**22** For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

**50** Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

**51** Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—

**52** in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

**53** For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

**54** So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: **“Death is swallowed up in victory.”**

**55** **“O Death, where is your sting?  
O Hades, where is your victory?”**

**9** “I know your **works**,  
I know your **tribulation**, and  
**I know your poverty (but you are rich);**  
and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not,  
but are a synagogue of Satan.

- Separate articles of same gender, emphasizing each item. <sup>6</sup>
- They may not have enjoyed the approval of men, but they certainly received the praise of God. However, the Lord did give them solemn words of admonition as they faced increased suffering: **“Don’t be afraid!”**<sup>7</sup>
- Your works:
  - Tribulation
  - Poverty

<sup>6</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Re 2:9.

<sup>7</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 573.

- Besides suffering persecution, they were also enduring **extreme poverty** (in contrast with *penia*, the ordinary word for “poverty”).<sup>8</sup>
  - Blasphemies
  - Liars
- All of these make for a “rich church” in Jesus’ estimation.

**James 2:5** Listen, my beloved brethren:

Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

**2 Corinthians 6:10** as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

**2 Corinthians 8:2** that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.

### Contrast this with the report of the Church of Laodicea:

**Revelation 3:17** Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

**10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.** Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days.

**Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.**

- Crown of Life
  - The reward for faithfulness is the crown of life, that is, **the crown that is life itself**. It is not the royal crown (the *diadēma*) that is promised, but the wreath or garland (the *stephanos*) that was awarded to the victor at the games. Its value lay not in itself but in what it symbolized.<sup>9</sup>
- God knows ALL the plans of the Devil – long before they hit us!
  - **4 promises:**

**1 Corinthians 10:13** No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to

<sup>8</sup> Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

<sup>9</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 76.

be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

**1. Satan can't do anything more than tempt you – he cannot make you commit a sin! WE CAN RESIST THE DEVIL!**

**James 4:7–8**

**7** Therefore submit to God.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

**8** Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. . .

**2. Every temptation is a “common” one – you’re not singled out**

**3. God is faithful – never allowing you to be tempted beyond what you can endure!**

**4. God will always provide an ESCAPE from that temptation!**

**10 days?**

• **“Tribulation of ten days” (or “within ten days”).**

It is unwise to seek a literal meaning for ten days. Even ten days of suffering might seem an eternity while they lasted. <sup>10</sup>

- In the years A.D. 100 through A.D. 313, there were ten Roman emperors who correspond to the ten days spoken of here. They launched such massive attacks against the believers that **between five and seven million Christians were killed during their rule.** <sup>11</sup>
- **“Testing” for “ten days”** is a symbolic allusion to the minor test of Daniel 1:12, which preceded the major trials faced by Daniel and his three companions. <sup>12</sup>
- **Thomas suggests that βάλλειν has the durative idea of the present tense (“keep on casting”).** He writes that “one after another, certain members of the Christian community could expect to be seized by the Roman authorities in Smyrna as a result of accusations brought by the Jewish community in the city” (1.167). <sup>13</sup>
- **That you may be tested:** it should be noticed that it is the jailing itself of some of these Christians that is the “test,” so it may be better to translate “and in this way you will be tested.” The use of the verb “to test” here is different from its use in verse 2; here the purpose is either their enemies’ attempt to get them to renounce their Christian faith, or else (which is more likely) it is part of the divine plan to test the genuineness of their faith. <sup>14</sup>
- **And for ten days you will have tribulation:** in apocalyptic literature *ten days* stands for a short, limited amount of time. Some commentators connect the phrase to Daniel 1:14. For *tribulation* see the comments at 1:9. Other ways of phrasing this clause are “and you will go through hard times for ten days” or “and you will suffer trials for a short time.”<sup>15</sup>

• **“Keep on becoming faithful”** (present middle imperative of γινομαι [ginomai]), “keep on proving faithful unto death”. <sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Re 2:10.

<sup>11</sup> Jon Courson, *Jon Courson’s Application Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 1672.

<sup>12</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Re 2:10.

<sup>13</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 48.

<sup>15</sup> Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 49.

<sup>16</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Re 2:10.

**11** "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.  
**He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."** ' "

### **Overcomers:**

1. Eat from the Tree of Life – will live forever. (Rev 2.7)
2. Shall not be hurt by the second death. (Rev 2.11)

**Revelation 20:6** Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection.

**Over such the second death has no power,** but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

### **Revelation 20:11–15**

**11** Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

**12** And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

**13** The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

**14** Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. **This is the second death.**

**15** And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

### **Ezekiel 18:31–32**

**31** **Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit.**

For why should you die, O house of Israel?

**32** For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord God. **"Therefore turn and live!"**