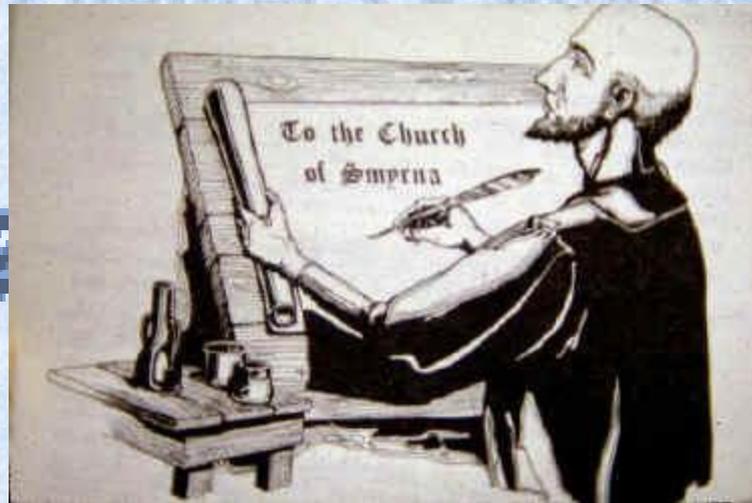


Revelation Study Guide

Chapter 2 - Smyrna



Rev. 2:8. And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

The Destination- "**And unto the church in Smyrna write**" Who is this letter to? -The Angel of the church, which is the pastor of Smyrna. This is the message that he should give to his church. This sermon is very short compared to that of the other churches. Jesus has no condemnation for Smyrna. We should recognize the shortness of the sermon as an indication of how these people lived- the more righteous the lifestyle, the shorter the sermon. The word Smyrna is derived from the name of an herb, which when crushed gives off a sweet aroma. It was used to embalm the dead and the word has the meaning of bitterness. This is a prophetic name for this church because they suffered bitterly. The time of Smyrna is from 100 AD to 312 AD. The church age actually started in 64 AD. Some church ages overlap. As 100 AD brings one age to a close, another has already begun. We end this church age at 312 AD because it marks the time when Emperor Constantine won total control over the Roman Empire. Constantine believed that he could use the church to unite the empire. He told the Christians they would no longer be persecuted if he were victorious in his struggle for command. There is always great danger when the government seeks to use the church. There is a chance of the church becoming like the world rather than a place of worship.

THE CHURCH IN PERSECUTION

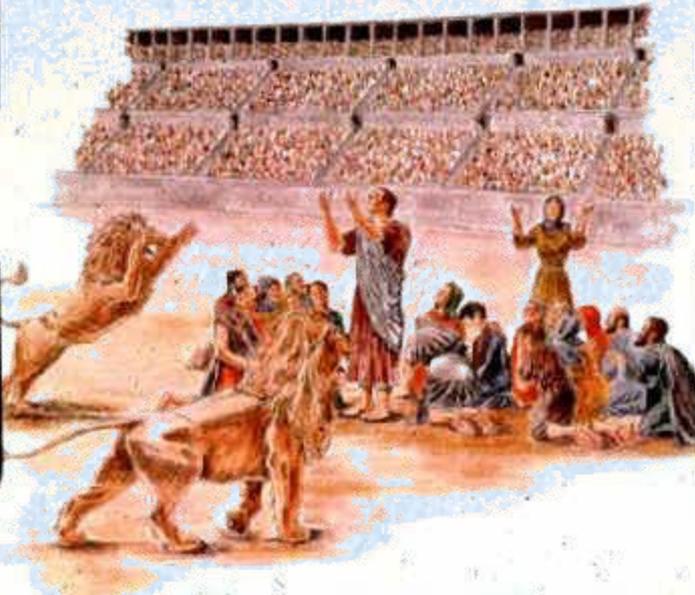


Persecution spreads the Gospel



Persecution of Nero 64 A.D.

The Roman Persecution



Catacombs of Rome 257 A.D.



Diocletion burns Bibles 303 A.D.

Description- "These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;" Why do you think he would refer to himself in this way when addressing of this church? He knows that this church will face death on a daily basis. To be a Christian during this time period was often to sign your own death warrant. If certain people found you to be a Christian you could become entertainment in the coliseum facing a gladiator, hungry lions, or some other wild beast. The Romans killed Christians by the millions for sport. He who is alive forever more tells this church not to fear death. It is not the end. Death is only a tunnel they must pass through to find eternal life.

20. Who is the angel of the church at Smyrna?
21. Who is speaking to the Pastor?
22. Why is Jesus speaking to the Pastor?
23. In Jesus description of himself what does he mean when he says "These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;"?

Rev. 2:9. I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.



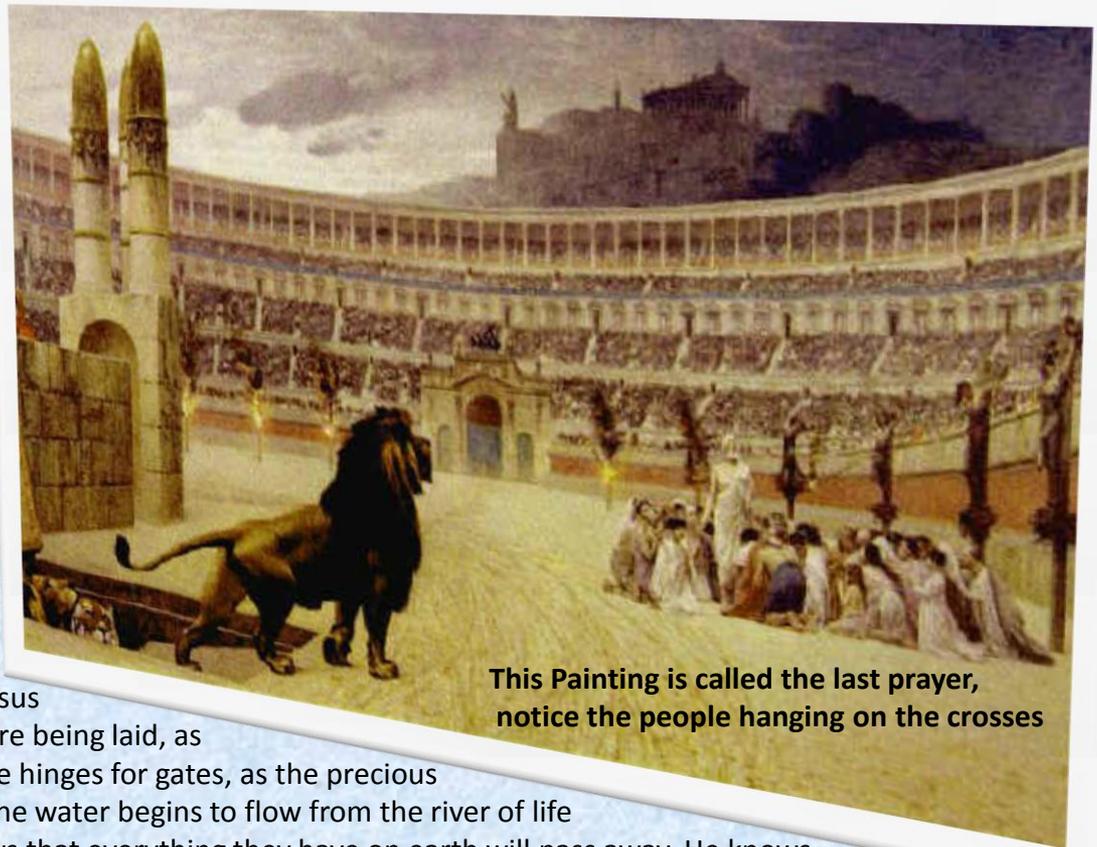
The Commendation- " I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich)"

Jesus had reviewed the works of this church. Smyrna was most effective in spreading the gospel. While they were being persecuted they were scattered throughout the world giving witness to the gospel. Some teach that the church will go through the Tribulation period that starts after chapter 4 of Revelation. Only a false church will go through the Tribulation. The true Christian church will have already been persecuted, already died on crosses, already been burned at the stake, and already been made slaves before the Tribulation begins. The Tribulation coming is for Israel and all other unbelievers. The true church will be taken in the rapture.

"But thou art rich" How can they be rich if they have lost everything they had? What does Jesus mean? Jesus is in New Jerusalem (Heaven) as the golden streets are being laid, as the one hundred mile wide pearls are being set in the hinges for gates, as the precious jewels are being laid for the twelve foundations, as the water begins to flow from the river of life and the mansions are raised in pure gold. Jesus knows that everything they have on earth will pass away. He knows that they have their treasures laid up in heaven. Every time one does God's will with a pure heart they build up their treasure in heaven.

"and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan."

Jesus is saying that he knows the Jews are lying about the people of Smyrna. There then was a group of Jews dedicated to the destruction of Christianity. They would spread stories about Christians to the Romans. The Romans would then use the stories against the Christians. God was telling this church that these people were not Jews- they only appeared to be. In their hearts they were evil and held Satan as their leader. There were four main accusations that the "Jews" placed upon the Christians. The first was of being atheists. Because there were no statues or images in their places of worship, their God must not exist. The Christians knew that no idol could ever reflect His glory and would only serve to lower the expectations of the believer.



This Painting is called the last prayer, notice the people hanging on the crosses

Instead of seeing the almighty God who created the universe, they would see something made by human hands. The early Christians refused to pray or worship where statues were present. This is why Christians today cannot go to an ecumenical service and be one with other denominations or religions. We would be participating in idol worship- this would be sin. The second accusation was Christians were cannibals. It was reported that believers eat the body and drink the blood of their founder. They twisted the facts to make them sound like a crime. Thirdly, Christians were charged with being unpatriotic. They would not bow to Caesar as a God-like image. The Christians knew then that they only bow and pay homage to one- the Almighty. Finally, the ruination of the economy was blamed upon the Christians. People began to be saved causing their visits to the temples of Baal to cease. They no longer paid tribute to the goddess Diana. In those times the temple was the place of commerce. When the Christian money stopped being paid, there was no longer money to lend. No loans meant the silversmiths were out of a job, the miners could not work, the stock market fell and the economic world was turned upside down. Just imagine what would happen if this kind of Christianity were alive in every town in America. Think of the upset it would cause to the business world. We can learn from the example of this church. Remember to be strong when you are persecuted or made a mockery of. Jesus is your champion- He always know the truth.

24. What are your works, tribulation, and poverty?

25. Why does Jesus say "(but thou art rich)"?

26. What does Jesus mean by "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan."?

Rev. 2:10. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall 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 a crown of life.

Condemnation- There is no condemnation for this church.

The Council- "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer:" Jesus does not want them to be afraid. He is telling them that they are in His hand. He is assuring them that nothing will happen which he does not already know. Humans tend to have an earthly view of what will occur in their lives, but He has a heavenly and eternal view. He is aware of all things. He knows that what we do in this life will have a direct effect on the life to follow. After a person is saved hard times often happen. They are living right and still things are going wrong. There is confusion as to why these things should be happening. The reason is because of their Christianity. He never promised that the cross would not get too heavy to carry.

": behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried" The Lord knew that the devil would test them. He allowed the testing to continue. Only upon trial is a true heart revealed.

"and ye shall have tribulation ten days:" The ten days Jesus spoke of were fulfilled in the campaigns of ten different imperial reigns. Each reign was of a man named Caesar. These men sought to persecute and destroy Christians and Christianity. There is grace in this statement because in it Jesus sets a limit to their suffering. Ten in Scripture stands for the limit. This time of suffering isn't going to go on forever. Even with the limit however, the Smyrna period of church history was the greatest time of persecution the church of Christ has ever known.



————— Nero (64-68)- said to have killed Peter and Paul.



————— Domitian (81-96)- thought Christianity was atheistic. He had thousands of believers killed. He banished John to the Isle of Patmos.



————— Trajan (98-117)- He was the first to pass laws against Christianity. He had Ignatius burned at the stake. Emperor Trajan said "anyone who will deny being a Christian and actively proves it by adoring our gods must be forgiven on the basis of his repentance no matter how suspect his past".



————— Pius (137-161)- He killed Polycarp, disciple of John.



————— Marcus Aurelis (161-180)- He thought Christianity was an absurd superstition. He beheaded the great writer and defender of faith, Justin Martyr.



————— Severus (193-211) He killed Origen's father.



————— Maximinus The Thracian(235-238) He was a brutal barbarian and commanded all Christian leaders to be killed.



————— Decius (249-251) He was determined to exterminate Christianity.



Valerian (235-260) He killed Cyprian, bishop of Carthage.



Diocletian (284-305)- His was the last and most severe persecution. For ten years believers were hunted in caves and forests. They were burned at the stake, thrown to hungry lions and other beasts, and put to death by every torture that could be devised. An interesting fact: Diocletian's wife and daughter accepted Christ.

The rein of terror stopped with Emperor Constantine.



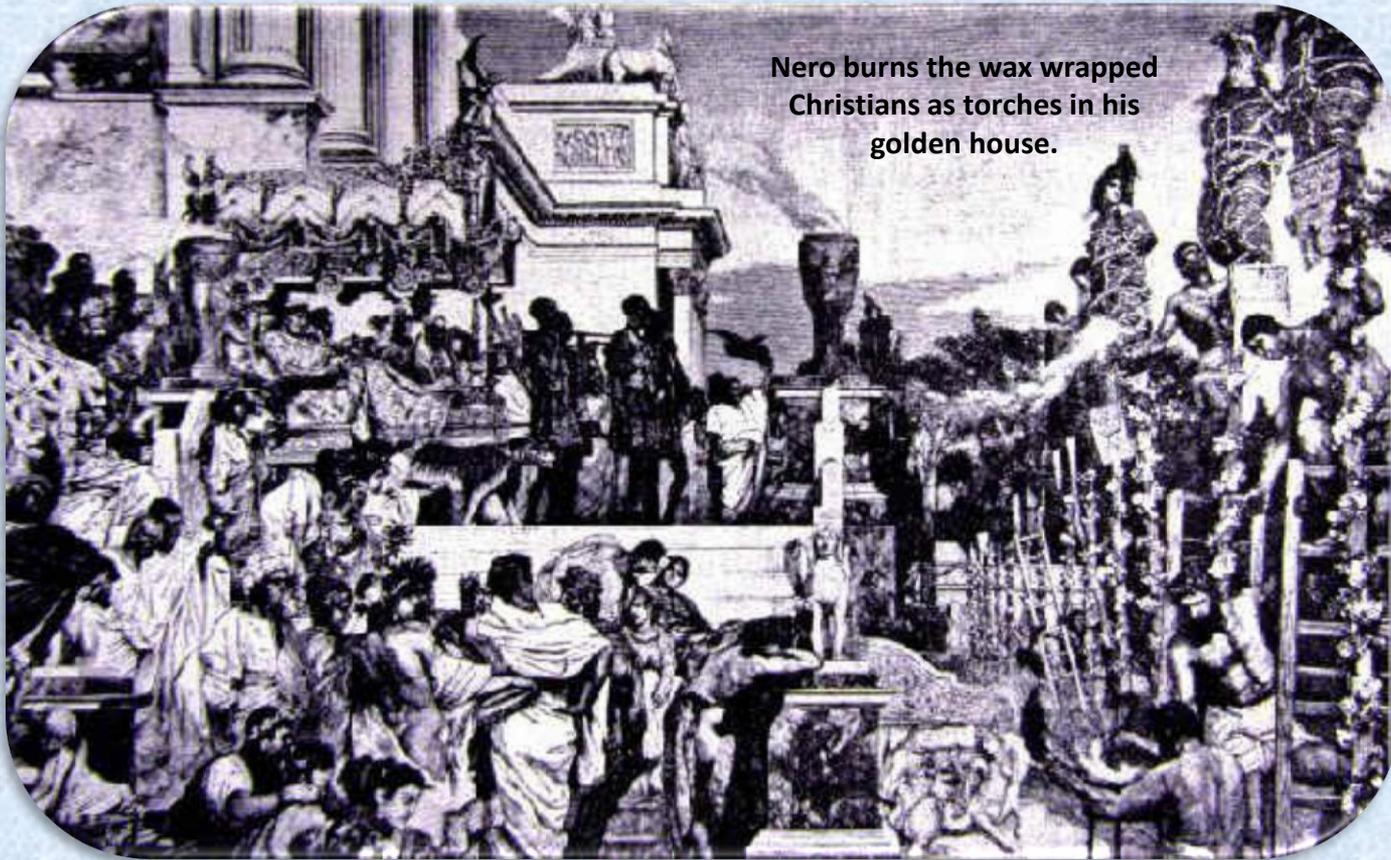
The only place of refuge for Christians was a tunnel system dug by their hands. The system was called the catacombs and it stretched mile upon mile underneath the city of Rome. Only the Christians could find their way without getting lost. They lived their lives in a maze of tunnels where they worshiped God and buried their dead. Many bodies have been taken from the catacombs at the command of the Catholic Church. It was said that if a church contained the bones of saints it would be more powerful. The Pope took it upon himself to distribute the bones throughout the church for a price.

While I was in Rome I visited the catacombs. There was a man there giving a sermon on the resurrection. I thought to myself, "If I knew the day of the Rapture, this is where I would want to be". As the dead in Christ rise first I would get to see with my own eyes seven million Christian bodies form out of the dust. My ears could hear their shouts of praise as Jesus calls the believers to heaven with their newly glorified bodies.



Catacombs under the city of Rome





Nero burns the wax wrapped Christians as torches in his golden house.

"be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." When a person is going through a trial in their life he will sometimes ask the Lord how long he will have to suffer. Jesus answers saying be faithful unto death. Romans would wrap Christians in wax and then mount them on posts. As they hung they would be set on fire and used as torches. These Christians did not falter. They knew the crown of life awaiting them. Christians of today must remember to be faithful. God will never forsake us. He will remain strong when we are weak.



27. Why does He tell them "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer:"?

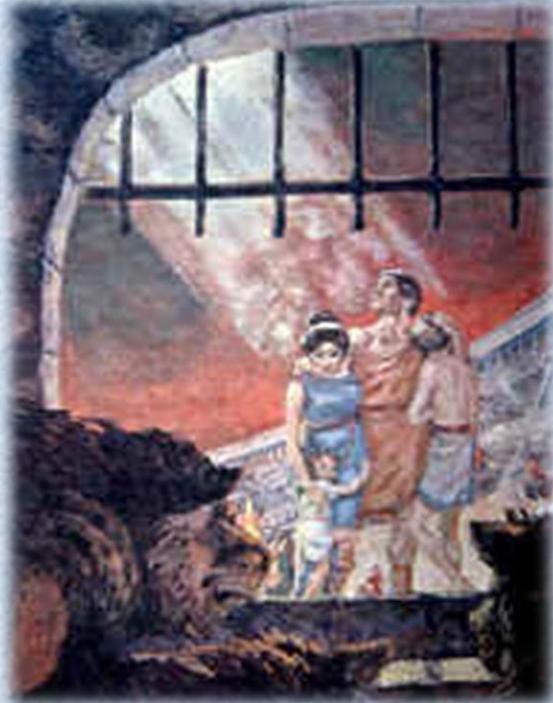
28. What does Jesus mean when He says "behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried;"?

29. What does Jesus mean when He says "and ye shall have tribulation ten days:"? 30. What does Jesus mean when He says "be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."?

Rev. 2:11. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

The Discrimination- **He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches;**" The spirit speaks plainly, but not everyone hears His voice. Christ makes no thunder or earthquake when He wants to be heard. He is that still small voice within the mind of a person. He directs your path quietly. He has no need to bark orders. The pure in heart will do the will of the Lord, yielding their life into His hands. **"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Mat 5:8 KJV**

The Promise- **"He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."** Jesus is referencing the trials Christians will face. He knows that Christian lives will be taken. The enemy will threaten death, but the Lord makes a promise. He gives hope to those who stand faithful when death is at hand. All men must die, but in chapter twenty the White Throne Judgment is described. This is the time when people who were not taken in the rapture will be judged. If they are found to be unbelievers they will be cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. No harm will come to a child of God. Only the flesh can be wounded by man. The soul will survive and find glory in heaven.



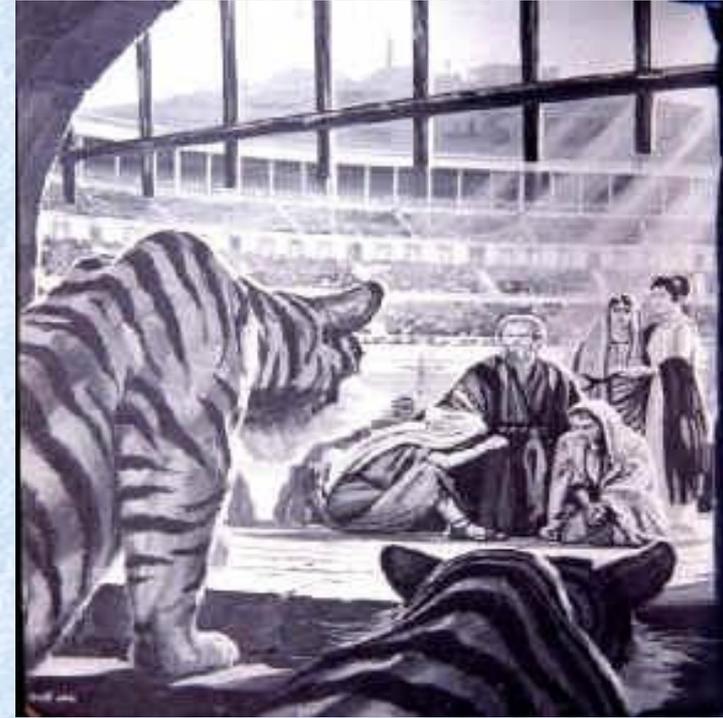
I once saw a picture of a man facing the lions in a coliseum. Can you imagine? This man's family surely was in the crowd. Perhaps the screams of his wife or child would be the last thing he would hear. All he would have to do is tell his captors he did not believe in God. He would be free to live his life with his family. He remained faithful. He knew that Jesus was the son of God. This man would not deny Jesus to save his own flesh.

There is a story of a master architect who designed a coliseum. He was seated in a place of honor next to Caesar on the day of dedication. Roman soldiers escorted a band of Christians into the coliseum. The lions were to be loosed upon them. Caesar exclaimed, "Today the blood of these Christians will be the dedication to this temple!" At that point the architect stood and said, "Emperor, I am a Christian and I give my blood to dedicate this temple to God." He then jumped into the lion pit and was killed.





It is said today that in order to build a "super church" you must only use positive scriptures. Messages coming out of the pulpit should only be positive with the guidance of a user friendly Bible. Music played in the sanctuary should be attractive and alluring to the public- something to make them feel more comfortable. The church must come across as non-intrusive. People should not feel the slightest distress. The truth of the matter is, when a person is won for Christ they



will experience discomfort on their road to finding Jesus. Not all lessons can be positive. When a person is born again they must first repent. Often they will not do this until they come under conviction of those sins. This means they must first understand the things they are doing to be wrong.

31. What does Jesus mean by hear what the spirit says?
32. What will he give them if they hear the message?