



**SEVEN  
LETTERS  
REVELATION 2-3**

**CRITICAL REVIEW:**

**Ancient letters with an urgent  
message for today...**



# Smyrna

## 2: Smyrna

### BACKGROUND ON THIS CITY

- Under Roman control 27 BC, very prosperous
- Earthquake prone, suffered many quakes. Each time restored even bigger, better
- Many temples (Zeus, Apollo, Aphrodite, Aesclepios, Cybele, Poseidon, Demeter) No lack of “gods” – ceremonies full of sexual immorality, wild orgies
- City specialized in Caesar worship
- Also thriving community of Jews, who persecuted believers (called “The Way”)

## 2: Smyrna

- Caesar worship required (“act of patriotism and loyalty to Rome”) Christians could not do it
- Believers poor in this area, excluded by Jews, persecuted by Rome, but Jesus says they are rich
- Remained faithful “until death”
- Interesting “Smyrna” comes from Hebrew word translated “myrrh” a bitter gum, costly perfume, used for anointing the dead (*very appropriate for this letter*)
- Theme of death running through this letter.
- Ruins of old Smyrna, but city remains (Izmir)

# Revelation 2:8-11, Church 2: Smyrna

Symbolic Age	Persecuted Church (age of Martyrs) 100-312 AD
Speaker	<i>“The First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life.”</i>
Praise	Works, perseverance ( <i>He knew their suffering, poverty, persecution—Synagogue of Satan!</i> )
Problem	<b>NONE!</b>
Counsel Or Warning	<b>Don't be afraid, be faithful to death. No fear!</b>
Promise	Crown of life, not hurt by second death (saved from eternal separation from God)
Nutshell	No problems, just <b>hang on with no fear.</b>

## 2: Smyrna

- Description of author (*“First and the last, who was dead, and came to life...”*) very appropriate for this group of saints
- ***Nothing bad said about this group***
- Only encouraged to not be afraid, informing them they would suffer for their faith.
- **“Ten days”** – lots of speculation, not known.
- Some speculate had to do with 10 specific periods of persecution from that time until Constantine declared Christianity “legal” and the religion of the empire (mid 300s AD)

## 2: Smyrna

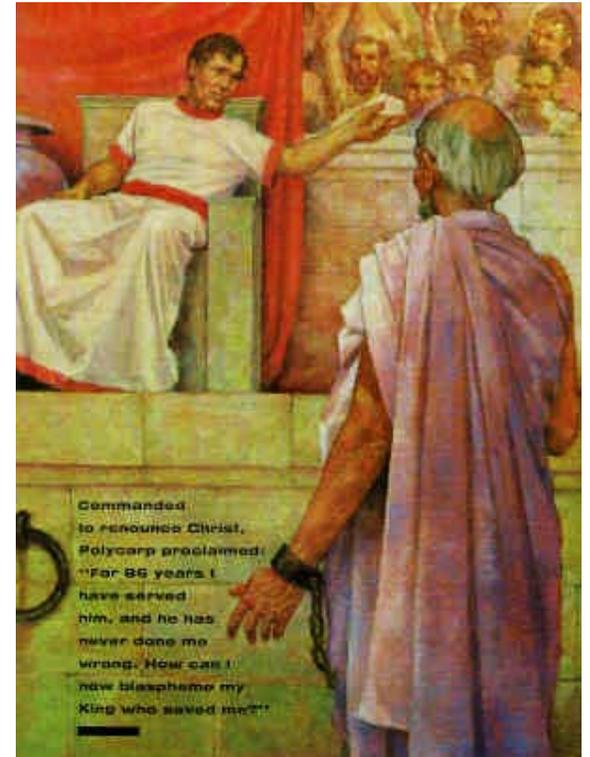
**Possible explanation** = terrible times for Christians under 10 Caesars for 250 yrs:

- **Nero (54-68)**: Paul beheaded, Peter crucified upside down after watching his wife die
- **Domitian (95-96)**: John exiled
- **Trajan (104-117)**: Ignatius burned at stake, (Antipas?)
- **Marcus Aurelius (161-180)**: Polycarp martyred
- **Septimus Severus (200-211)**: Irenaeus killed
- **Maximinus (235-237)**: killed Ursula, Hippolytus
- **Decius (249-251)**
- **Valerian (257-260)**
- **Aurelian (270-275)**
- **Diocletian (303-313)**

*(Over 5,000,000 Christians martyred in this time under these Roman Caesars)*

## 2: Smyrna

- *"and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."*  
Christians' worst persecution came from Pharisees, other non-Christian Jews who persecuted/killed new believers.
- Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, burned alive on Sabbath by such Jewish leadership.
- Jesus used right term for these pious, evil hypocrites (*Jews by birth, but not people of God as New Testament defines*) - a **synagogue of Satan**.
- Before dying, Polycarp quoted:  
*"Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me wrong. How can I now blaspheme my King who has loved me so?"*



## 2: Smyrna

- ***"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."*** These believers suffered terribly. Many faithful, literally unto death. But their death meant permanently **receiving the crown of life**
- Crown here = "*stephanos*" victor's crown given to athletes (laurel leaves). *(NOT diadem, crown of royal authority - reserved for Jesus!)*
- **Promise:** ***"He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."*** (Notice promise comes after closing words "*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*")

## 2: Smyrna

- **First** death = death of body, physical death.
- **Second** death is spiritual. Not *death* of spirit, but **separation from the One who gave it life.**
- The spirit does not die. It lives on into eternity one of two places, with God, or apart from Him.

We choose.



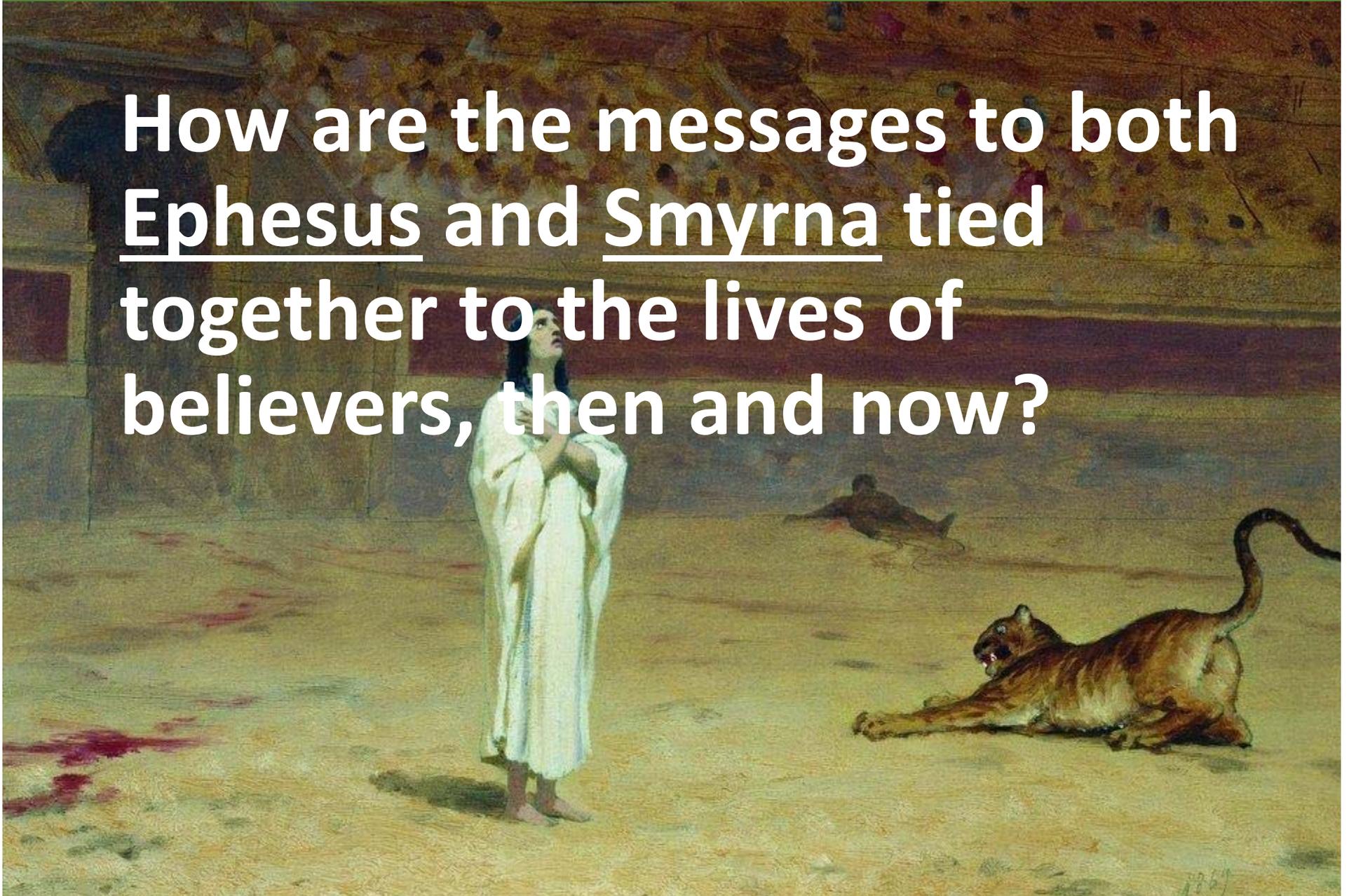
## 2: Smyrna

What do you see in today's world that can and will relate strongly to believers living in Smyrna at that time?

Give examples of evidence that today's believers are already suffering persecution and death for their faith...

## 2: Smyrna

How are the messages to both Ephesus and Smyrna tied together to the lives of believers, then and now?



## 2: Smyrna

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

Why are  
these two  
messages  
*(Ephesus and  
Smyrna)*  
important  
for us  
today?

Revelation 2:10

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