

THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

LESSON TWELVE = *The Church in Smyrna*

Bible Class Series by Ray Reynolds (3/20/11)

Introduction: Each of the congregations in the New Testament had unique features and characteristics. They all had qualities we can learn from and use to better our own congregations today. In this lesson we are going to consider the church in Smyrna. Let's study together

Discussion:

I. *The Geography of Smyrna*

The city of Smyrna was located on the coast of the Aegean Sea.

The ancient city ruins can still be found in Izmir in Turkey (50 miles north of Ephesus).

Smyrna was located at a central and strategic point on the Aegean coast of Anatolia.

The geography of this beautiful city gave it many advantages not afforded to other cities.

The smaller harbor of Lindos is very well protected by rocks, access into it was very narrow.

Paul supposedly stopped at Lindos on his journey to Rome, so the harbor is now named after him.

II. *The History of Smyrna*

The city of Smyrna was founded in the third century BC by Alexander the Great.

* It was the commercial center of Asia Minor on the trade route from India and Persia to Rome.

During Roman times it surpassed Ephesus both as a seaport and trading center.

* There is some disputing between Ephesus and Pergamum as to which is "the first city of Asia."

In Paul's day it was considered by most to be the greatest city in all of Asia Minor.

* The streets were wide and paved, there were schools of medicine and science, etc.

* In the New Testament age this city had a population of more than 100,000 people.

The city had an amazing marketplace (Agora) that was the largest in the world.

* It was established in 333 B.C. by Alexander the Great on the slopes of Mt. Pagos.

* A large variety of coins have been found by archaeologists.

The city's name "Smyrna" means "myrrh" which is taken from a tree.

* Myrrh was used in embalming the dead.

* This type of embalming was used in Egypt and Judea.

Smyrna was the second city to receive a letter from the apostle John in the book of Revelation.

There were many pagan temples and alters could be found in the city.

* Smyrna was the first city in all of Asia to build a temple to Dea Roma (the goddess Rome).

* The god of Rome (Jupiter) was worshipped in this city.

* They also built the Temple of Tiberius for emperor worship.

III. *The Beginning of the Church in Smyrna*

There was a small Jewish population in Smyrna.

The congregation was probably established because of Paul or those at the School of Tyrannus.

Acts 19:10 suggests that many churches were founded during Paul's third missionary journey.

The congregation was strong by the end of the first century.

IV. The Work of the Church in Smyrna

There are very little details known about the history and work of the Smyrna church.

The book of Revelation is the key to understanding more about this congregation.

The brethren were strong and faithful.

The brethren were promised swift deliverance from their enemies by Jesus.

V. The Letter to the Church in Smyrna

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: I know your works, tribulation, and 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. 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. 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." **(Revelation 2:8-11 - NKJV)**

VI. The Dilemmas of the Church in Smyrna

The church feared the persecution of the Romans.

- * The churches of Asia were under heavy persecution.

The church suffered from poverty.

- * Remember that this was an affluent community, but the Christians were not.

- * This is covered in Revelation when John mentions "666" and the mark of the beast.

The people were reviled by the Jews and the Greeks.

- * This is an unfortunate trend in many first century communities.

Jesus equates the so-called Jews with Satan and his synagogue.

- * He knew that they (the devil and his children) would send them to prison.

The Christians in Smyrna were told they would have a limited persecution.

- * They received torture and death because they would not recognize Caesar as god.

- * The number 10 stands for the covenants and laws of establishment.

VII. The Maturity of the Church in Smyrna

The congregation benefited from John's correspondence.

Jesus saw that the church could have a future.

- * What Did Jesus Say?

Commendation: They were gracefully bearing the suffering of persecution.

Criticism: None. We can glean they may have been fearful and discouraged by poverty.

Command: Be faithful until death.

Compensation: Receive a crown of life.

- * They simply had to stay faithful and endure the trial.

After the second fall of Jerusalem in 135 AD Smyrna rose in significance.

- * It was universally recognized that the successor of the Apostle John was Polycarp of Smyrna.

Conclusion: God clearly blessed the church in Smyrna. We can see that history shows the wisdom and providence of God throughout the New Testament. We should trust Him to provide direction for the church today. It is my prayer that by studying about these wonderful congregations of the Lord's people that we will see our place in the kingdom. Next week we will begin our study of Pergamum.