

## Victoria Fellowship Church

### International & Interdenominational Bible Study Worksheet – July 20, 2025

**Theme:** Letters to the churches: What is the Lord saying to us? **Topic:** The Church in Smyrna: Endure in Tribulation

**Main Text:** Revelation 2:8-11

**Key verse: Revelation 2:10** “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.”

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**INTRODUCTION:** Smyrna, a port city located about 30 miles north of Ephesus, was considered the most beautiful city in Asia Minor. It was a centre of science and medicine, famous for its athletic games, but also a centre of idol worship, particularly of the Roman emperor. The church in Smyrna was persecuted both by those who worshipped the emperor and by a Jewish population strongly opposed to Christianity, which they regarded as a sect. Each of the letters to the seven churches is directly from Jesus and includes a piece of the description of Jesus from Revelation 1. Each description of Jesus as the First and the Last, the one who died and came to life, is repeated. It speaks directly to their situation in which they face suffering and, in some cases, imminent death. It is worth noting that Jesus had no criticism of the church. Whatever we may be going through at any given time, Jesus knows our situation. He is the First Word of creation, and He has the last Word in everything. The message to the church in Smyrna was to remain faithful through intense suffering because God is in control and His promises are reliable. It is a message that we do well to hear today.

- 1. Read John 11:25, Heb 2:14, 1 Cor 15:19(a). What confidence do you draw from Jesus' description of Himself to the church of Smyrna? (b) Why is it important that we know and believe the whole Gospel? (c) Are you comforted by knowing that Jesus “knows” what you are suffering, or does it make you wonder why He doesn't end it sooner?**

“Do not fear.” It is sometimes said that this phrase, or something like it, occurs 365 times in the Bible (one for each day). That is not the case, but Scripture repeats the phrase often enough to make the point (2 Ti 1:7). Fear of persecution is a natural and understandable response in hostile environments. Most of us are fortunate enough to live in situations where we can freely express our faith in Christ and conduct our daily lives without disturbance. Yet many today, even in our own country, face the same severe hostility, violence, and death that the church in Smyrna did. It is estimated that, around the world, 400 Christians are killed for their faith every month. Jesus knew the tribulation, poverty, and persecution that the church was facing. He even tells them that it is going to get worse (v10), but He says, “do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer”, including death! We often pray that God will deliver us from fire, the trials, and the adverse circumstances that face us. Sometimes He will; sometimes He will be in the fire with us (Daniel 3:24-25). Sometimes God will meet us on the other side of the fire after we've walked through it. Never does He abandon us (Heb 13:5). He always knows where we are. If we die, we shall rise again to eternal life. If we remember that, we can endure.

- 2. Read Dan 3:14-18, Matt 5:10, Rom 8:35-37, 1 Pt 2:18-21 (a) Why are those who are persecuted blessed? Is all persecution a blessing? (b) What is the difference between tribulation and poverty? In what way is a poor believer rich? (c) Do you think the Hebrew princes in Daniel 3 were certain of being delivered from the fire? Why?**

Some 50 years after the death of the Apostle John, Polycarp, the pastor of the church at Smyrna, was burned alive at the age of 86 for refusing to renounce Jesus and worship Caesar (see <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/Polycarp>). It is one thing to read what Jesus tells us in His word, and it is another to take it to heart and act upon it. We have been assured of a great reward from standing strong, which Christ has promised (Matt 24:13, emphasizing the need to endure to the end). It is right that we pray to be spared suffering (see Matt ), but we can prepare for it in case it does come by being faithful in small things today, such as bearing the irritations we face from our brothers and sisters in Christ every day with love and grace, extending mercy to everyone.

- 3. Read John 16:33, 1 Cor 10:13, 1 John 5:4-5(a) Have you ever felt persecuted for your faith? How did you respond? (b) How would you encourage someone facing persecution? What can we learn from the fact that Jesus made no criticism of Smyrna?**

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**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, grant us the grace to endure suffering like good soldiers, help us to persevere even when we are persecuted, and to identify with those suffering much more. Thank you that nothing, even suffering, can separate us from you. Amen