

The Seven Churches of Asia Minor

Smyrna – Revelation 2: 8-11



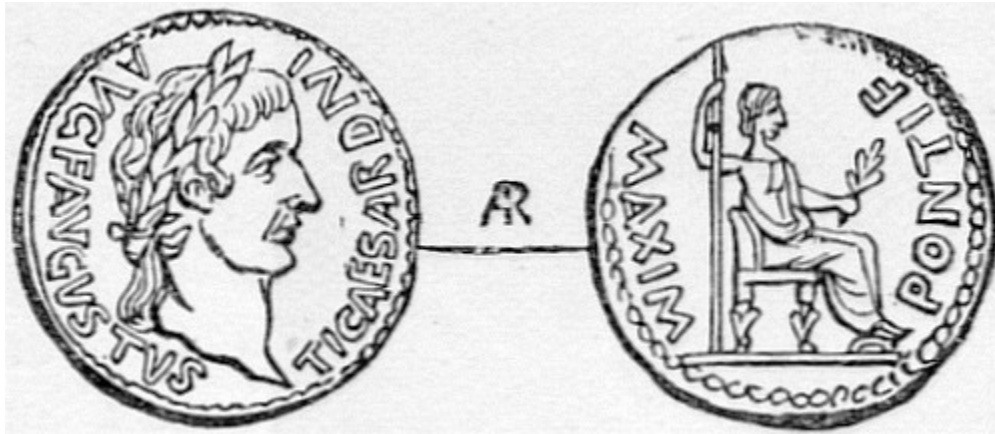
Port of Ancient Smyrna

Myrrh, (called Smyrna) is an ancient city in Ionia, on the western coast of Asia Minor, about 40 miles to the north of Ephesus. It is now the chief city of Anatolia, having a mixed population of about 200,000, of whom about one-third are professed Christians. The church founded here was one of the seven addressed by our Lord ([Rev 2:8-11](#)). We know nothing of the founding of the city except that there has always, since recorded history began, been a city at this location. The celebrated Polycarp, a pupil of the apostle John, was in the second century a prominent leader in the church of Smyrna. Here he suffered martyrdom, A.D. 155.

Tiberius Caesar

As known in Roman history, Tiberius Claudius Nero, was only mentioned in [Luke 3:1](#). He was the stepson of Augustus, whom he succeeded on the throne, A.D. 14. He was noted for his vicious and infamous life. In the fifteenth year of his reign John the Baptist entered on his public ministry, and under him also our Lord taught and suffered. He died A.D. 37. He is frequently referred to simply as "Caesar" ([Mat 22:17, 21](#); [Mark 12:14, 16, 17](#); [Luke 20:22, 24, 25](#); [Luke 23:2](#); [John 19:12, 15](#)).

The city of Smyrna had its own currency. It was a derivative of the normal Roman coins except all the money in Smyrna had the picture of engraved image of Tiberius Caesar. This was a very rich city.

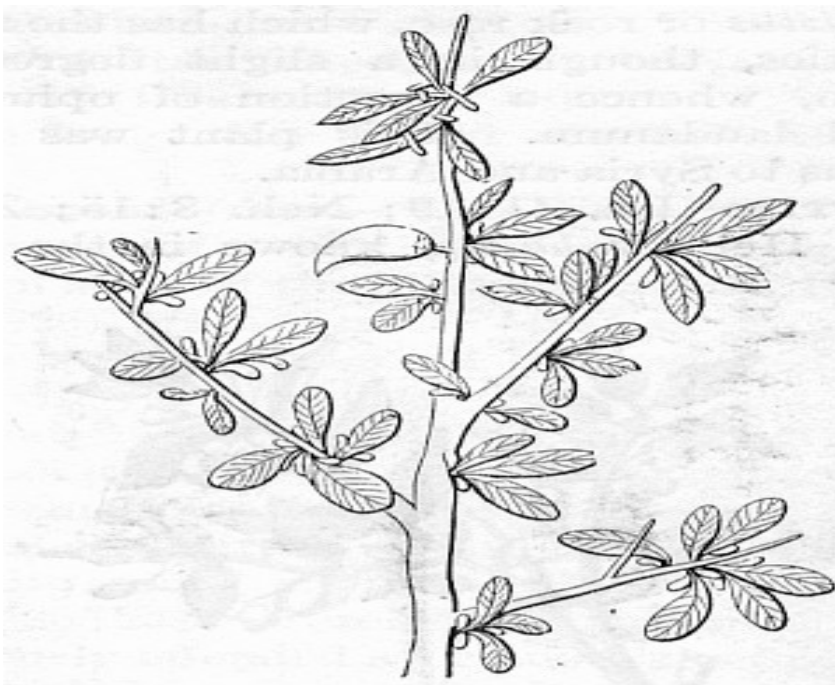


Coin of Tiberius Caesar

THE CITY OF SMYRNA

The name of the city is interesting. It is a derivative of the word “myrrh.” The word is used three times prior in the New Testament:

1. Matthew 2:11 – The Magi presented the Baby Jesus “gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh.



Myrrh is mentioned numerous times in Scripture (Psalm, 45: 8; Exodus 30:23) It is the dried gum of the balsam bush. The balsam bush is a stunted tree that grows in Arabia. Gum resin exudes during a season in small tear-like drops which harden into a rich brown or reddish-yellow with a brittle surface. It was and is still used in medicine. It was mostly used in Bible times to prepare the body of the deceased. This kept down the odor of decay. It was very expensive.

2. The second mention was in Mark 15 when it was reported that some of those who stood by offered Jesus myrrh to quench His thirst. This was actually a gesture of kindness as myrrh was medicinal.
3. The third is in John 19 that reports that when Jesus died, Nicodemus came with Joseph of Arimathaea, and the two men, after carefully taking down the body of the Lord from the cross, wrapped it in a long, linen cloth in the folds of which they placed a hundred pound weight of aloes and myrrh.

It is said that the great port of Smyrna got its name from its substantial export of myrrh.

Since the beginning of recorded geography there had been a city on the site at Smyrna. It is today the Turkish city of Izmir, which is the Turkish corruption of the word Smyrna.

A. Smyrna had a great culture:

- It was a great trade city. It was on a deep gulf thirty miles north of Ephesus. It has a magnificent harbor that allowed for significant trade and, subsequently, many jobs and great wealth.
- Smyrna was a beautiful city. It was called “agalma tes Asias” – Δόξα της Ασίας – the Glory of Asia. It has been built in the fourth century and was a model of town planning. Great, straight, spacious streets ran from one end of the city to the other.
- The most famous of the streets was called the Golden Street. At one end of the street (the sea end) was the statue of Asclepius and to Aphrodite and the inland end of the street was adorned with the mighty statue of Zeus.
- Alexander the Great rebuilt Smyrna after it had been destroyed in battle and made into the modern Greek City. The Generals who followed continued this legacy.

The Christians in Smyrna lived in an environment in which every main artery or passage

B. Smyrna was an important political city.

- Like Ephesus, Smyrna was a free city – it was not occupied by Roman garrisons.
- It was an exize town – people went there to pay taxes, thus providing shopping opportunities.
- It claimed to be the birthplace of Homer, the great poet. *(This is not a provable fact, but is recorded in virtually all historical documents as being true.)*

C. There were two characteristics that made life for Christians very difficult:

1. It was a great – perhaps the first – center of Caesar worship. The issue with Caesar worship was the management structure in the Roman Empire. Inside the empire, there were so many religions and God that Rome had to choose one for the masses. The elected not to do that. They chose instead to require everyone the pay worshipful homage to Caesar, after which they could do whatever they wanted religiously.

So was born “Dea Roma” – the goddess of Rome. Everyone was required to God to a central location and make an animal sacrifice to Caesar. This was compulsory. When they made the sacrifice, they were given a certificate that said:
 “We the representatives of the Emperor, Seremos, and Hermas, have seen your Sacrifice.”

They could then worship as they pleased.

So then, all the Christians had to do was pay their allegiance to Caesar, offer a pinch of incense and they were free to worship whomever they pleased.

The Christians elected NOT to participate in this ritual, and that was a problem.

2. The second problem was that a very large number of Old Testament Jews lived in Smyrna and these were the Jews that had no patience with Christians – in fact, Christians were seen as apostates.

To make a point of their dislike for the Christians, the Jews staged the cruel and much written about execution of POLYCARP.

WHAT, THEN, DOES JESUS SAY TO THIS GROUP OF CHRISTIANS IN THE MAGESTIC ROMAN CITY?

⁸ *"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:*

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. ⁹I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.

¹¹ *Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.*

- I. **“These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again . . .”**
 - Jesus is saying: *“Because I am who I am, I can speak to who you are and the situation in which you have found yourself.”*
 - Hebrews tells us that we have a *“High Priest who is able to sympathize with our weakness because He has been tempted in every way like as we, yet without sin.”*
 - This is virtually the same message to the church at Smyrna – Because I am the first and the last – because I have been here through all time, I get what you are going through.
- II. **“I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich!”**
 - King James used the word “tribulation” where the NIV uses “afflictions.”
 - The Greek is the word “thlipsis” (θλίψις)

- The word literally means pressure. It like a kind of Roman torture that had the prisoner placed under a large bolder that was slowly lowered on his chest until it took all the life out of the prisoner.

Consider the “pressure” that was regularly placed on the Christians at Smyrna:

1. They were expected to pay homage to Caesar and make a sacrifice showing their allegiance to Him.
2. They were put upon by the Jews as apostates and were forever under the pressure of having left what the Jews would define as the one true faith.
3. They were denied the better jobs.
4. They lived in poverty, just getting by.
5. The Greek for poverty is “penia” (**φτώχεια**) from which we get our word **penury**.
6. It is the picture of a beggar or one who lives “hand to mouth.”
7. This was not new business as set forth in I Corinthians 1: 26-27 and James 2:5.

Jesus says: I see your pressure and poverty – but you are actually rich.”

III. **“I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not. . .”**

The word translated “slander” is the Greek word “blasphemia” (βλασφημώ) which is interesting since this is the word that is used to describe the only sin that cannot be forgiven man. (Mark 3:29)

What was it that Jesus was calling “blasphemy?”

1. The way Christians were slandering each other.
2. The loyalty that the Jews were so ready to pay to the Romans even to the point of denying Jesus, paying homage the Rome and Caesar, and agreeing to pay the “worship tax” to Rome. (See the Book of Daniel and the circumstances of Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednigo – pretty much the same as Smyrna)

IV. **Listen to the words of the risen Christ directed to the Jews: “ I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, *but are a synagogue of Satan.*”**

There is no chance that turning the synagogue of God into a “house Synagogue of Satan is going to work out well for these people.

V. **But listen to the comforting messages of Jesus to His people: ¹⁰“Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.”**

1. Once again, our message is that we have nothing to fear.

2. He did not say that He was going to protect the Christians from the persecution, imprisonment, or even death.
3. He promised them a crown of life for eternity on the other side of it.
4. “Be faith even to the point of death and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.”

VI. ¹¹“**Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will *not* be hurt at all by the second death.**” (*“not” is the strongest negative in Greek*)

There are two deaths:

1. The ***physical body*** dies – this is the death that we will all face. It is the death of the physical body. We get old, we get sick, we have an untimely accident and the physical person ceases to exist on this earth. It is the death that we inherited as a result of the sin of Adam. (I Corinthians 15:21)
2. There is the ***spiritual death***. This is an eternal separation from God and all that is Godly. It is eternal agony.
3. Jesus said to the Christians at Smyrna “Don’t worry about that death. You are not going to be hurt by it.” (I Corinthians 15: 35 ff)
4. This is our promise in Him.

See John 14

Romans 8

I Corinthians 15:58

I Corinthians 10: 11-13