

Revelation 2:8-9

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/rev/rev-2/revelation-28-9/>

Jesus, conqueror of death, addresses the church in Smyrna. He tells them He knows their sufferings and their worldly poverty, but reminds them they are rich in spiritual wealth. They are being persecuted by Jewish enemies.

Now the second letter to the seven churches begins, this time to the *church* in *Smyrna*. Revelation 1:2 said that God communicated the message to His servants “by His angel to His bond-servant John.” There, the word translated *angel* comes from the Greek word “angelos,” which means “messenger.” In that context, the messenger referred to Jesus, who gives God’s message to John.

Here in Revelation 2:8, as with the greeting to each of the seven *churches*, the word *angel* is also the Greek word “aggelos” which means “messenger.” Following the instructions for blessing in Revelation 1:3 to read, hear, and heed, it can be inferred that the messenger here is the person who is going to read the letter to the church in *Smyrna*. It seems unlikely that there is a heavenly angel/messenger that John is referring to, but rather a human messenger who will deliver the letter from John to the people of *Smyrna*. Therefore, Jesus the “messenger” gives a message to John, which he is instructed to write and deliver to the seven churches of the Asian province by means of human “messengers.”

The letters to each of the *seven churches* starts with a greeting, but it’s more like a “memorandum” greeting format such as “To: all office employees” rather than the more formal greeting that is seen in the Pauline letters.

The root word of *Smyrna* is “mir,” which means “bitter.” This seems appropriate since the church at Smyrna is encountering substantial trials of persecution. So here the greeting could read like “To: the place of bitterness,” “From: the one who writes history, has everything under control, and who was dead and came to life.”

Jesus being cited here as *the first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life* references back to Revelation 1:17-18:

“Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.”

The image of the *first and the last*, beginning and end, and alpha and omega runs throughout the book of Revelation. In Chapter 1, it was established that the overarching theme of Revelation is Jesus writing to His servants to show them how to win at life by becoming great witnesses: “martyreo,” those who live as a faithful and courageous witness in the face of the difficulties of life ([for more, read our Tough Topics article on Overcomers](#)). He wants us to make being a faithful and courageous witness such a priority that we are willing to lay down our lives to live faithfully for Jesus.

Jesus begins this letter by asserting His dominance over *death* to establish a key theme in the letter to *Smyrna* concerning the persecution they will face and what their perspective should be in the midst of it. There are many difficult days ahead, but God wants the church in *Smyrna* to know that He already has these days ordered. This ties to another theme of Revelation, that God is always on His throne, and is therefore in control of all events. The only things God allows into our lives are those things which He chooses to allow.

Jesus reminds the church in *Smyrna* that He was *dead* and has *come to life*, and now He offers them the chance to lay down their lives as faithful witnesses, and in doing so live in His resurrection power.

When we go through persecution for the sake of the Lord, He not only promises us restoration in the days to come; He promises us His presence now. God tells His people: *I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)* (Revelation 2:9). He is not a God who is blind to the suffering of His people, but He knows our struggles and meets us in them (Hebrews 2:17). God asks us to adopt an eternal perspective, and choose to view living faithfully through present difficulties as a means by which we gain great wealth. Rather than having our primary identity be the *tribulation* and the *poverty* of our circumstances, we can choose to see God's perspective, which is that we are actually *rich*.

In the letter to the seventh church, the church of Laodicea, Jesus says, "I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich," explaining that the way to get an unlimited amount of gold is to listen when He knocks, and then open the door to fellowship with Him (Revelation 3:18). There are no riches material wealth can provide that even come close to the true and lasting riches we have when we walk in fellowship with God. In fact, Jesus is recorded in John's gospel as saying that the greatest experience of fulfillment available in life (eternal life) is to know God, and to have intimate fellowship with Jesus (John 17:3).

Jesus' address now shifts from the church in *Smyrna's* general *tribulation* to naming a specific problem they are facing right now: that is, *the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan* (Revelation 2:9).

Likely what has happened here is that these Jews are persecuting the believers in *Smyrna*. The synagogue was where Jews gathered. This pattern of some Jews resisting the gospel can be seen throughout Paul's writings: that he will go to a city, go to the synagogue, start making great progress, but then the Jews will organize opposition, and seek to have him stoned, arrested, or run out of the city (Acts 14:19; 17:5, 13). They probably are called a *synagogue of Satan* because anyone that opposes the gospel is doing the will of *Satan*.

It is worth noting that even believers in Jesus can find themselves doing the work of the devil. Jesus spoke directly to the Apostle Peter and said "Get behind me, Satan" shortly after telling Peter that God had blessed him greatly to know and understand that Jesus was the Christ, the anointed Messiah of Israel (Matthew 16:23). Jesus said the reason Peter was at that moment working as an agent of Satan was because he had his mind on the things of man rather than the things of God.

Biblical Text

“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this: ⁹‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.