

THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

[CONTINUED.]

THE MESSAGE TO SMYRNA.

["And to the messenger of the assembly in Smyrna write" Rev. 2:8.]

The name Smyrna means myrrh. Our word myrrh is from the Arabic marra, to be bitter. The Hebrew word mara is the name given to the first water found by the Israelites in the wilderness. Ex. 15:23. It was also the name chosen by Naomi in her affliction. Ruth 1:20.

The symbolic meaning of the title here would be, To the church in bitter affliction. This agrees perfectly with the condition of the Smyrna phase. The chronological location is evidently from the end of the Ephesus period or earlier, to the beginning of the reign of Constantine. It was the period covered by the terrible pagan persecutions.

The message is sent by one who announces himself as "the first and the last; who was dead, and is alive."

This was in itself a message of comfort and hope to these suffering martyrs. It was as if he said: "Fear not, my faithful ones; I was before all these persecutors; I shall be when they are forgotten; I shall take care of you. I, too, was put to death by this same power. Fear not to follow in my steps. See! I have risen in glory, in power, in immortality. Follow me! I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich)." This is an interjection with an emphasis. It is as if he said: You poor? No, no; you are looking at the things which are seen. Look up; the kingdom of heaven is yours. This is the cross, that is the crown.

He reminds them that he, too, has heard the blasphemy of those who claimed to be the favorites of the gods, and to whom he now applies the true symbolic and appropriate name by which they should afterwards be known – Satan, Devil, &c. Ver. 13; 3:9; 12:9. "Fear none of these things which thou shalt suffer; behold the devil (this pagan power) shall cast you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days." This is, of course, symbolic time – a day for a year. It clearly refers to the most cruel persecution under Diocletian. It began Christmas day, A.D. 303. We extract the following from Wilson's Outlines of History: "During ten years the persecution continued with scarcely mitigated horrors; and such multitudes of Christians suffered death that at last the imperial murderers boasted that they had extinguished the Christian name and religion, and restored the worship of the gods to its former purity and splendor." Through all this the faithful flock, as they looked forward to a martyr's death, could see above, spanning the heavens like a glorious bow of promise, the living words in letters of light: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." "He that hath an ear" – listen. "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."

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[The article in our last number headed THE SEVEN CHURCHES was also by Bro. Mann, unintentionally his name was omitted.]
