

Study for the Month March 2012

The Seven Churches of Revelation

THIS MONTH'S FOCUS: SMYRNA ***The Age of Martyrdom (Persecution by Roman Emperors)***

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Smyrna means “Myrrh,” or “sweet-smelling savor.”

Time Period: 100 to 313 or 323 A.D.

Described in: Revelation 2: 8-11

“The names of the seven churches are symbolic of the church in different periods of the Christian [not Jewish] era. The number seven indicates completeness, and is symbolic of the fact *the messages extend to the end to time*, while the symbols used reveal the condition of the church at different periods in the history of the world.” – E. G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 685

MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES:

1. There are only two of the seven churches that receive divine commendation and no condemnation, strong reproof or reprimand, i.e. Smyrna and Philadelphia.
2. Two receive one commendation and no commendation, i. e, Pergamos and Laodicea.
3. The other three are a mixture of both upper classes, i.e., they receive commendation first, and condemnation or strong reproof after.
4. Of the seven letters to the churches, the first three receive the call: “He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches . . . which is followed by a promise. The last four letters to the churches have a reversed order, i.e., (a) first the promise, then the call (b) this follows the rule that the sevens of Revelation are regularly sub-divided into 3’s and 4’s:
 - (a) In the Seven Trumpets- the first four come together; the last three are called “woe” or tragedy trumpets.
 - (b) In the Seven Seals- the first four go together under the symbolism of horses and riders usually called “the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.” The last three seals have an entirely different imagery.

8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the First and the Last, which was dead and was alive.

Brief Historical Background

Source: SDA Bible Dictionary, Commentary Reference Series, Vol. 8, art. “Smyrna.”

“Traditionally explained as meaning ‘myrrh,’ [Greek *Smurna*] but scholars doubt that this was the original meaning. One of the most important cities of western Asia Minor. It was founded by Aeolian Greeks, but it later became an Ionian city and was incorporated into the Ionian confederation. Smyrna was one of the 7 cities that claimed to be the

birthplace of Homer [author of the Iliad, etc]. After its destruction by the Lydians in the 6th century B.C., it remained a place of little importance for some time, until its ideal location was recognized by Alexander, who ordered its rebuilding.

The city was rebuilt by Lysimachus according to Alexander's plans (301-281 B.C.). It thereafter grew quickly, becoming one of the richest coastal cities of Asia Minor. In 133 B.C. Smyrna became part of the Roman province of Asia, and in the imperial period was one of the strongest centers of the *emperor cult* in Asia Minor.

A Christian church existed there by the end of the 1st century, as is evident from the fact that the book of Revelation, written by John probably about A.D. 96, contains a letter to the Smyrna church (Rev. 2: 8-11). The spirituality of that church must have been excellent at that time, for the letter contained no rebuke of any kind, whereas with the exception of the church at Philadelphia, the other churches addressed at this time were all censured.

The Smyrna church may have come into existence through the efforts of Paul, who spent 3 years in nearby Ephesus (Acts 20: 31). In A.D. 169 Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, was burned at the stake near the stadium of the city. Smyrna was destroyed several times by earthquakes and wars, but because of its favorable location on a protected bay, it always recovered itself. Today, under the name Izmir, it has a population of 230, 000, and is thus the third largest city of Turkey."

COMMENT: Wikipedia says: "Izmir (Turkish) is a large metropolis in the western extremity of Anatolia. The metropolitan area in the entire Izmir Province had a population of 3.95 million, making the city third most populous in Turkey. . . . The ancient city was known as Smyrna, and the city was generally referred to as Smyrna in English, until the Turkish Postal Services Law of 1930 made 'Izmir' the internationally recognized name."

The Footnotes of *An Exhaustive Ellen G. White Commentary on Revelation*, Vol. 2, art. "Smyrna," says: (all emphasis, both in italics and bold, supplied):

"This name was long thought to be derived from *muron*, the name of an aromatic gum derived from the Arabian tree *Balsamodendron myrrha*. This gum was used for embalming the dead, and medicinally as an unguent, or salve, and was burned as incense. See Matt. 2: 11. More recently, scholars tend to favor a derivation from an Anatolian goddess, Samorna, who was worshipped in the city. . . . Historically, the Smyrna period of the church may be thought of as beginning about the close of the 1st century (c. A.D. 100) and continuing until about A.D. 313, when Constantine espoused the cause of the church (see additional Note at end of the chapter; see on verse 10). Some suggest A.D. 323, the date of his supposed conversion to Christianity. *It should be noted that the prophecies of chapters 2 and 3 are not, strictly speaking, time prophecies, and that dates are suggested simply to facilitate an approximate correlation of prophecy with history.*"

The Works, Tribulation, and Poverty of Smyrna

9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say that they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

"Christian believers at this time specifically suffered for rejecting [Roman] emperor worship. Christ's special message and relationship with them was and is as "One who died but lives again." His promise to those martyred and slaughtered during this time was: "I will give you a crown of life," or more accurately, "a crown that is eternal life."

Tribulation means “a state or time of great affliction.” Here it definitely refers to distress, trouble, affliction, and persecution. “Intermittent persecutions at the hands of various Roman emperors characterized the experience of the church during this period.”

“Under **Trajan** (98-117), **Hadrian** (117-138), and **Marcus Aurelius** (161-180), persecution was sporadic and localized. The first general, systematic persecution of Christians was conducted by **Decius** (249-251) and **Valerian** (253-259). Political oppression reached a bloody climax under **Diocletian** (284-305) and his immediate successors (305-313). The centuries since have been *fragrant* (see on v. 8) with the love and devotion of thousands of unnamed martyrs of this period who were ‘faithful unto death.’- *Ibid.*

Poverty. - Greek *ptocheia*, abject poverty (cf. on Mark 12: 42). “Doubtless the church at Smyrna was not so large or as prosperous as the neighboring congregation at Ephesus. The Christians at Ephesus had left their ‘first love,’ but no such rebuke is sent to those at Smyrna. Instead Christ reminds them that spiritually they are ‘rich’ (see on James 2: 5).”

“Blasphemy.- Greek *blasphemia*, ‘evil-speaking,’ whether of God or man. In the present context the translation ‘slander’ may be preferable.

“Jews.” –Jews here has to be figurative, not literal in the sense that Christians are now described by Apostle Paul as *Israel*, i.e., spiritual Israel or “the Jew circumcised of the heart, and not of the flesh, i.e., the prepuce of the male organ. (See Rom. 2: 28, 29: 9: 6, 7; Gal. 3: 28, 28; 1 Pet. 2: 9). The State of Israel and the city Jerusalem in the Near Eastern Asia was a creation of the Jewish Zionist nationalist movement. It was proclaimed a state by the UN on May 14, 1948 and the recognized as such by the U.S. on the same year. Constantly embroiled in conflict, intrigue, bloodshed, and war, it cannot therefore be a “holy place.” As here used, the term “Jew,” no doubt refers to those who claimed to serve God, but actually were in Satan’s service.

“The figure has its basis in history. The book of Acts reveals that many of the troubles of the early church grew out of slanderous accusations hurled at them by Jews (see Acts 13: 45; 14: 2, 19; 17: 5, 13; 18: 5, 6, 12; 21: 27). Apparently the situation was true at Smyrna. In the second century Jews are said to have brought about the martyrdom of *Polycarp*, a bishop of Smyrna. During this time Tertullian speaks of the [Jewish] synagogues as ‘fountains of persecution.’ (*Scorpiace* 10; *ANF*, vol. 3, p. 643).”

“Synagogue of Satan.” – Compare this term with the ignominious term John used to describe “many of the scribes and Pharisees who came to his baptism” as “a generation (brood) of vipers or poisonous snakes.” See Matt. 3:7. “As a center of Jewish communal life the synagogue (see Vol. 5, pp. 56-58) was doubtless the place where many an evil plot was formed against Christians. The name Satan represents ‘accuser,’ or ‘adversary’ (see on Zech. 3: 1; Rev. 12: 10). These Jewish centers became literally, ‘synagogues of the accuser.’” – EGW Commentary Footnotes.

Who make up the “Synagogue of Satan”?

First, **synagogue**, in Greek, is an assembly. It was a Jewish place of worship. The building served also for local law court and school. Previous to the captivity, worship of the highest kind could be performed only at the temple in Jerusalem. Of the course, the Scriptures could be publicly read elsewhere (Jer. 36: 6, 10, 12-15), and the people could resort to the prophets anywhere for religious instruction (2 Kings 4: 38). Worship at

Jerusalem was impossible when the people were in captivity in Babylon, and it seems to have been then and there that synagogues first arose. –*Dictionary of the Bible*.

“Christ speaks of the church over which Satan presides, as the synagogue of Satan. Its members are the children of disobedience [or all or any one who deliberately and knowingly chooses to obey the teachings and laws of men and traditions over the plain teachings of the Word of God]. They are those who love to sin, and choose to sin, always laboring to make void the law of God, which is holy, just, and good. [Rom. 7:12]. It is Satan’s work to mingle evil with good, and to confuse the distinction between good and evil. Christ would have a church that labors to separate the evil from the good whose members will not knowingly tolerate wrongdoing, but *will expel it from their own hearts and lives*. How careful should we be in passing judgment on the work of others, how careful lest we become guilty of ascribing to evil agencies the manifestations of the Holy Spirit.”- *Review & Herald*, Dec. 4, 1900/(1888) p. 139 E. G. White Commentaries.

“Satan has a church upon the earth which outnumbers the church of Christ. Christ calls it the ‘Synagogue of Satan,’ because its members are the children of sin and transgression. They have ceased to honor God, they have cast His divine law aside, they have confounded the distinction between good and evil. But the world’s Redeemer will have a church in which these essential differences will be made apparent, where the character of God will be represented. In marked contrast to the character of Satan, the beauty of holiness will be exemplified, the loveliness of truth shine forth in life and practice. Its members will honor, love, and glorify God whom the world has despised. These are fruits by which they are known to the world; they will have the superscription of heaven by which all men may know that they are Christ’s disciples.”- E.G. White, *General Conference Bulletin*, Apr. 1, 1897.

“**Spiritualism** is about to take the world captive. There are many who believe that spiritualism is upheld through trickery and imposture, but this is far from truth. Superhuman power is working in a variety of ways, and few have any idea as to what will be the manifestations of Spiritualism in the future. The foundation for the success of Spiritualism has been laid in the assertions that have been made from *the pulpits of our land* [America]. The ministers have proclaimed as Bible doctrines falsehoods that have originated with the arch deceiver [Satan].

The doctrine of consciousness after death, of the spirits of the dead being in communion with the living, has no foundation in the Scriptures, and yet these theories are affirmed as truth. Through this false doctrine the way has been opened for the spirits of devils to deceive the people in representing themselves as the dead. Satanic agencies personate the dead and thus bring souls into captivity [to Satan]. *Satan has a religion*, he has a synagogue and devout worshippers. To swell the ranks of his devotees, he uses all manner of deception.”- *Undated Manuscript 66/Education*, pp. 602, 603.

“The doctrine of *natural immortality* has prepared the way for modern Spiritualism. If the dead are admitted to the presence of God and holy angels, and privileged with knowledge far exceeding what they before possessed, why should not they return to the earth to enlighten and instruct the living? How can those who believe in man’s consciousness in death reject what comes to them as divine light and regarded as sacred, through which Satan works for the accomplishment of his purposes. The fallen angels who do his bidding appear as messengers from the spirit world. While professing to bring the living into communication with the dead, Satan exercises his bewitching influence upon their minds.

He has the power even to bring before men the appearance of their departed friends. The counterfeit is perfect; the familiar look, the words, the tone, are reproduced with marvelous distinctness. Many are comforted with the assurance that their loved ones are enjoying the bliss of Heaven; and without suspicion of danger, they give ear to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils [1 Tim. 4:1].” - Vol. 4, *Spirit of Prophecy*, pp. 370-1 (1884)

“For years Spiritualism has been growing in strength and gaining in popularity by advocating a certain faith in Christ, and thus many PROTESTANTS are becoming infatuated with this MYSTERY OF INIQUITY [2 Thess. 2; 7]. It is little wonder that they are deluded when they persistently retain the error that the spirit goes immediately to heaven or hell as soon as the breathe leaves the body. Through the hold this doctrine has upon them, the way is prepared for the delusive working of the prince of the power of the air [Eph. 2: 2].”- *Manuscript 66*, Undated. See also *Evangelism*, pp. 603-3/ LDE 206.

“Remember that the nearer we approach the time of Christ’s coming, the more earnestly and firmly we are to work; *for we are opposed by the whole synagogue of Satan*. We do not need feverish excitement, but the courage which is born of genuine faith.”- *Testimonies*, Vol. 6, p. 475.

Seventh-day Adventists will be tested by Spiritualism/Miraculous Healing

“We need not be deceived. Wonderful scenes, with which Satan will be closely connected, will soon take place. God’s Word declares that Satan will work miracles [Rev. 13: 12-14, etc]. He will make people sick, and then will suddenly remove from them his satanic power. They will then be regarded as healed. These works of apparent *healing* will bring *Seventh-day Adventists* to the test. Many who have had great light will fail to walk in the light, because they have not become one with Christ.” – Vol. 2 *Selected Messages*, p. 53/*Maranatha*, p. 209.

“We are warned that in the last days he will work with signs and lying wonders. And he will continue these wonders until the close of probation, that he may point to them [lying wonders] as evidence that he is an angel of light and not of darkness. Satan will come in to deceive if possible the very elect [Matt. 24: 24]. He claims to be Christ, and he is coming in, *pretending to be the great medical missionary. He will cause fire to come down from heaven in the sight of men to prove that he is God.* [Rev. 13: 12-14]. . .

Some will be tempted to receive these wonders as from God. The sick will be healed before us. Miracles will be performed in our sight. Are we prepared for the *trial* which awaits us when the lying wonders of Satan shall be more fully exhibited? Will not many souls be ensnared and taken? By departing from the plain precepts and commandments of God, and giving heed to fables, the minds of many are preparing to receive these lying wonders. We must all now seek to arm ourselves for the contest in which we must soon engage. Faith in God’s word, prayerfully studied and practically applied, will be our shield from Satan’s power and will bring us off conquerors through the blood of Christ.”– *Ibid*, p. 208.

“Through Spiritualism, Satan appears as a benefactor of the race, healing the diseases of the people, and professing to present a new and *more exalted system of religious faith; but at the same time he works as a destroyer*. His temptations are leading multitudes to ruin. Intemperance dethrones reason; sensual indulgence, strife, and bloodshed follow. Satan delights in war; for it excites the worst passions of the soul, then sweeps into eternity its victims steeped in vice and blood. It his object to incite the nations to war against one another; for he can thus divert minds of the people from the work of preparation to stand in the day of God.”- Vol. 4, *Spirit of Prophecy*, pp. 406-7.

COMMENT: The passage “*he will cause fire to come down from heaven in the sight of men*” to prove that he is God (Rev. 13: 12-14) is often thought and interpreted to mean that the “he” is “the image of the beast” or America. But the passage above renders it clear that it is not the image of the beast nor the beast, but Satan himself who “performs signs so that he even makes fire to come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.” The following verses establish the context when and for what reason Satan does these wonders (italics mine):

14 And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted [by God] to do in the sight of the beast [papacy], telling those who dwell on the earth *to make an image to the beast* who was wounded by the sword and lived.

15 He was granted power to give breathe to the image of the beast, *that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.*

16 And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads.

COMMENT: God grants Satan the power at this time to perform signs and wonders, including making fire to come down from heaven in the sight of the papacy, i.e., the Roman Catholic Church, in order to convince “those that dwell on the earth,” i.e., the whole world, “to make an *image* of the beast.” The “beast” here is the papacy exemplifying the union of church power and state power with the former dictating the latter. The “image” therefore is the likeness of the papacy’s persecuting characteristics and nature as demonstrated during the Dark Ages. Protestant America, “the beast with lamb-like horns,” will be granted power, “breathe,” by the papacy, to “both speak,”—enact into law, “and cause,” ---enforce, “that as many as would not worship [obey] the image of the beast be killed [by a death decree].”

17 And he [the image of the beast] causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a *mark* on their right hand or on their foreheads. [After America passes the Sunday law, the rest of the nations of the world follow suit quickly].

18 And that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”

COMMENT: All who refuse to keep the idol-sabbath Sunday, and refuse to work on the Saturday seventh-day Bible Sabbath, will lose the right to buy or sell, i.e., to engage in any kind or form of business or legal transaction. They will be forced to depend on the most basic things and on fellow-brethren suffering the same fate. This will develop a bond between them that the times of prosperity did not afford. This will be the early time of trouble which climaxes into the great time of trouble during the outpouring of the seven last plagues after earth’s probation closes.

10 Fear none of these things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation ten days; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

“I was carried forward to the time when the heathen idolaters cruelly persecuted the Christians, and killed them. Blood flowed in torrents. The noble, the learned, and the common people, were alike slain without mercy. Wealthy families were reduced to poverty because they would not yield *their religion*. Notwithstanding the persecution and sufferings those Christians endured, they would not lower the standard. *They kept their religion pure.* I saw that Satan exalted and triumphed over the suffering of God’s people. But God looked with great approbation upon his faithful martyrs, and the Christians that lived in that fearful time were greatly beloved of Him; for they were willing to suffer for His sake. Every suffering endured by them increased their reward in heaven. But although Satan rejoiced because the saints suffered, yet he was not satisfied.

He wanted control of the mind as well as the body. *The sufferings those Christians endured drove them closer to the Lord, and led them to love one another, and caused them to fear more than ever to offend Him.* Satan wished to lead them to displease God: then they would lose their strength, fortitude and firmness. Although thousands were slain, yet others were springing up to supply their place. Satan saw that he was losing his subjects, and although they suffered persecution and death, yet they were secured to Jesus Christ, to be the subjects of His kingdom.” - *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, pp. 103-105.

“Fear none. – The apostle James wrote: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into diverse [various] temptations: knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” James 1: 2, 3. Jesus Himself said: “These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” John 16: 33. These counsel and promises was for the Smyrna church and more particularly now for all who will be called to suffer persecution.

“Shall suffer. – Or, ‘art about to suffer.’ Apparently, the Smyrna church had been an important target of Jewish slander, but the members had not yet felt the full brunt of persecution. However, the Christians there doubtless knew of the persecution that already raged elsewhere, and must have anticipated future trouble for themselves. This is implied by the form of the verb here translated ‘fear,’ which indicates that they were already fearful. Christ consoles them with the assurance that, despite the prospect of persecution, they need not be afraid. See on Matt. 5: 10-12.

“Tried.- Or ‘tested. Satan would subject them to persecution in order to prevail upon them to relinquish their faith. God would *permit* the persecution as a means of strengthening and proving the genuineness of their faith. Though Satan may rage against the church, God’s hand accomplishes His purpose. See on James 1: 2; Rev. 2: 9.

“The Roman emperor **Trajan** (A.D. 98-117) *laid down the first official Roman policy toward Christianity.* In the famous Ninety-Seventh Letter, written to Pliny the Younger, his governor in Bithynia and Pontus in Asia Minor, Trajan outlined a procedure for dealing with Christians, who were, at that time, an *illegal religious society.* He ordered that Roman officials were not to hunt Christians out, but if persons were brought before them for *other offenses* and proved to be Christians, they were to be executed unless they recanted. This regulation, though by no means uniformly enforced, remained the law until Constantine issued his Edict of Toleration in A.D. 313.”

COMMENT: How important it is that the true followers of Christ in these last days be not found guilty of any offense against the civil government other than being faithful to God and His law of Ten Commandments, particularly the Sabbath of the fourth commandment!

“Thus, for two centuries Christians were constantly subject to the possibility of sudden arrest and death for their faith. Their well-being depended in large measure upon the favor of their pagan and Jewish neighbors, who might either leave them in peace or complain against them before the authorities. These might be termed *permissive persecution.* The emperor did not take the initiative of persecuting Christians, but permitted his own representatives and the local authorities to take such measures against Christians as they might see fit. This policy left the Christians to the mercy of the various local administrations under which they lived. *Especially in times of famine, earthquake, storm, and other catastrophes, Christian found themselves the objects of*

attack, their pagan neighbors supposing that by refusing to worship the [pagan] gods, Christians had brought divine wrath upon the whole country.

COMMENT: The inspired writer says that in these last days the destruction and devastation resulting from increasing natural disasters and cataclysms will be blamed on the failure of the nation to keep the “Christian sabbath” or Sunday. This will bring about the enforcement of the long-anticipated Sunday Law, the “mark of the beast.”

“Satan works through the elements also to garner the harvest of unprepared souls. He has studied the secrets of the laboratories of nature, and he uses all his power to control the elements as far as God allows. When he was suffered to afflict Job, how quickly flocks and herds, servants, houses, children, were swept away, one trouble succeeding another as in a moment. It is God that shields His creatures, and hedges them in from the power of the destroyer. But the Christian world has shown contempt for the law of Jehovah; and the Lord does just what He has declared He would do, He withdraws His blessings from the earth, and removes His protecting care from those who are rebelling against His law, and *teaching and forcing others* to do the same. *Satan* has control of all whom God does not especially guard. He will favor and prosper some in order to further his own designs, and he will bring trouble upon others, and lead men to believe that it is God who is afflicting them.

While appearing to the children of men as great physician who can heal all their maladies, he will bring diseases and disaster until populous cities are reduced to ruin and desolation. Even now he is at work. In accidents and calamities by sea and by land, in great conflagrations, in fierce tornadoes and terrific hailstorms, in tempests, floods, cyclones, tidal waves [tsunamis], and earthquakes, in every place and in a thousand forms, is Satan exercising power. He sweeps away the ripening harvest, and famine and distress follow. He imparts to the air a deadly taint, and thousands perish by the pestilence. These visitations are to become more and more frequent and disastrous. Destruction will be upon the inhabitants of the world. The beasts of the field will groan, and the earth will languish.

And then the great deceiver will persuade men that those who serve God are causing these evils. The class that have provoked the displeasure of Heaven will charge all their troubles upon the faithful few whom the Lord has sent to them with messages of warning and reproof. It will be declared that the nation [America] is offending God by the violation of the Sunday-Sabbath, that this sin has brought calamities which will not cease until Sunday observance shall be strictly enforced, and that those who present the claims of the fourth commandment, thus destroying reverence for Sunday, are troublers of the nation, preventing its restoration to divine favor and *temporal prosperity*. . . . Those who honor the Bible Sabbath will be denounced as enemies of law and order, as breaking down the moral restraints of society, causing anarchy and corruption, and calling down the judgments of God upon the earth. Their conscientious scruples will be pronounced obstinacy, stubbornness, and contempt of authority. They will be accused of disaffection toward the government. Ministers who deny the obligation of the divine law will present from the pulpit the duty of yielding obedience to the civil authorities as ordained of God. In legislative halls and courts of justice, commandment-keepers will be censured and misrepresented. A false coloring will be given to their words; the worst possible construction will be put upon their motives.”- Vol. 4 Spirit of Prophecy, (1884), pp. 407, 408, 409.

“At times, however, the Roman government carried on aggressive persecution against the church (see on v. 9). Thinking Romans observed that Christianity was constantly growing in extent and in influence throughout the empire, and that it was fundamentally incompatible with the Roman way of life. They realized that, given time, it would destroy the Roman way of life. Accordingly, it was often the *more capable* emperors who persecuted the church, whereas those who took these responsibilities less seriously were usually content not to molest Christians.

“**The first general systematic persecution** of the church was undertaken by the Emperor **Decius**, whose imperial edict of the **year 250** decreed the universal

suppression of Christianity by means of torture, death, and the confiscation of property. The occasion for this decree was the *millennial celebration of the founding of Rome*, some three years earlier, when the decadent state of the empire was rendered more apparent by comparison with the glories of the past. *Christianity became the scapegoat, and it was decided to obliterate the church, in order, presumably, to save the empire.* The policy lapsed with the death of Decius in A.D. 251, but was revived by Valerian a short time later. *With his death [Valerian] the policy again lapsed, and not until the reign of Diocletian did the church face another major crisis.* (see below on ‘ten days’).

“Ten days.- “This expression has been understood in two ways. On the basis of the year-day principle of reckoning prophetic time periods (see on Dan. 7: 25), it has been interpreted as a period of ten literal years and applied to the period of unmitigated imperial persecution from A.D. 303-313. *During this time Diocletian and his associate and successor, Galerius, conducted the most bitter campaign of annihilation of Christianity ever suffered at in pagan Roman hands.**Like Decius and Valerian before them, these believers believed that the church had grown to such dimensions of strength and popularity in the empire that unless Christianity should be promptly stamped out the traditional Roman way of life would cease to exist and the empire itself would disintegrate. Consequently they inaugurated a policy designed to exterminate the church. Diocletian’s first decree against Christians was issued in the year 303, banning the practice of Christianity throughout the empire.

COMMENT: Ten years of the most bitter campaign of annihilation of Christianity by Rome of the *pagan emperors* pales in comparison with the *1,260 years of the Dark Ages* when Rome of the *popes* is estimated to have destroyed through the Office of the Inquisition anywhere from 75 to 100 million whom the Papacy declared as “heretics” throughout the Old World. One condemned as a heretic was deemed as having “no soul” therefore worthy of the most heinous and cruel tortures that could ever be invented by diabolical minds—all in the name of religion and enforced by the state or civil powers.

“Persecution began in the *army* and spread throughout the empire. The Roman authorities concentrated their terrors on the *Christian clergy*, in the belief that if the shepherds were destroyed, the flock would scatter. The horrors of this persecution are vividly described by the historian Theodoret (*Ecclesiastical History* 1.6) who describes the gathering of bishops of the church to the **Council of Nicaea** some years after the end of the end of the persecution (**A.D. 325**). Some came without eyes, some without arms, which had been pulled from their sockets, others with their bodies horribly maimed in different ways. Many of course, did not survive this time of trouble. In **313**, about ten years after the beginning of these persecutions, Constantine issued an edict that granted Christians full liberty to practice their religion.

“Others, however, think it is not altogether certain that the ‘ten days’ were intended to represent *prophetic* time. They reason thus: ‘The things which thou shalt suffer,’ ‘the devil,’ and ‘death,’ are obviously literal, and it would seem most natural to expect the ‘ten days’ to be literal also. In this case the number ‘ten’ would be considered a *round number*, as is so often the case in Scripture (see Eccl. 7: 19; Isa. 5: 10; Dan. 1:20; Amos 6:9; Haggai 2:16; Zech. 8: 23; Matt. 25: 1, 28; Luke 15: 8, etc.; cf. Mishnah *Aboth* 5. 1-9). As a round number ‘ten days’ would represent a brief period of persecution such as the literal church at Smyrna no doubt suffered in apostolic times. It would be entirely consistent with sound principles of prophetic interpretation (see on Deut. 18: 15) for the ‘ten days’ to have a literal application to the immediate historical situation at Smyrna and a figurative application to the period of history represented by the Smyrna church

(see on Rev. 1: 11; 2: 1, 8); see p. 725; Additional Note at end of the chapter.” – *Ibid*, p. 541.

Special Message for Today

The faithful leaders, pastors, elders, and even administrators as well as laymen and regular or self-supporting ministries, who uphold the present truth of the foundational pillar doctrines of the remnant church and faithfully proclaim these “by pen and voice” to the world around them as well as giving the unpopular “straight testimony to the Laodiceans” to the lukewarm members of the remnant church and courageously reveal “the man of sin” and what the “mystery of iniquity” are, especially when the “mark of the beast” is finally enacted and enforced, are the “third angel” of Revelation 14. And as it was in the time of the Smyrna church, they will be the first to feel the brunt of the venom of the enemies of the cross of Christ. They will suffer persecution; many will be martyred.

See John 16: 2. “The two armies will stand distinct and separate, and this distinction will be so marked that many who shall be convinced of truth will come on the side of God’s commandment-keeping people. When this grand work is to take place in the battle, prior to the closing conflict, many will be imprisoned, many will flee for their lives from cities and towns, and **many will be martyrs for Christ’s sake** in standing in defense of the truth.”- *Maranatha*, p. 199

“There is no necessity of thinking that we cannot endure persecution; we shall have to go through terrible times. The persecutions of Protestants by Romanism, by which the religion of Jesus Christ was almost annihilated, will be more than rivaled when Protestantism and popery are combined.” – *Ibid*, p. 194.

“Those who live during the last days of this earth’s history will know what it means to be persecuted for the truth’ sake. *In the courts injustice will prevail* The judges will refuse to listen to the reasons of those who are loyal to the commandments of God, because they know that arguments in favor of the fourth commandment are unanswerable. They will say, ‘We have a law, and by our law, he ought to die.’ God’s law is nothing to them. ‘Our law,’ to them is supreme. Those who respect this human law will be favored. But those who will not bow to the idol sabbath will have no favors shown to them.” – *Ibid*, p. 195.

“Brethren it is no time now for mourning and despair, no time to yield to doubt and unbelief. Christ is not to us a Savior in Joseph’s new tomb, closed with a great stone, and sealed with the Roman seal. We have a risen Savior. He is the King, the Lord of hosts; He sitteth between the cherubim [in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary], and amid the strife and tumult of nations He guards His people still. He who rules the heavens is our Savior. He measures every trial. *He watches the furnace fire that must test every soul*. When the strongholds of kings shall be overthrown, when the arrows of God’s wrath shall strike through the hearts of His enemies, His people have the assurance that they safe in His hands, in patience they are to possess their souls.” – E. G. White, *Review & Herald*, Jan. 11, 1887.

“Jesus is the foundation and the author and finisher of our faith. Why are we so powerless? Jesus lives; and because He lives, we shall live also. He is to us not a Savior in Joseph’s new tomb, closed with a great stone, and sealed with the Roman seal. Mourn not as those who are hopeless and helpless; never, under any circumstances give way to despair; but from grateful hearts, from lips touched with holy fire, let the glad song ring out, ‘Jesus is risen; He lives to make intercession for us.’ Grasp this hope, and will hold the soul like a sure, tried anchor. Believe, and thou ‘shalt see the glory of God.’”- *Ibid*, July 22, 1884. – end.

