

1. Review:

- Suffering – Suffering is an inherent part of “being.” We experience **suffering** when we bump into one of our many limitations. For example, when our future is unknown, we “suffer” anxiety. When our body fails and we get sick, we “suffer” from disease.
 - Being = Limitation
 - Limitation = Suffering
 - Being = Suffering
- The goal of spiritual growth is to “hear” God –
 - As we grow spiritually, we attune our spirit to God.
 - No single word in the Hebrew language means “Obey.”
 - The word we translate into “Obey” is the same word for “hear” – *Shema*.
 - We must be careful not to reduce the idea of “hearing God” (obedience) to a list of rules. Jesus’ confrontations with the Pharisees surround the notion of obedience to God as following a list of rules.
 - Focusing too much on external rules can result in a formulaic faith.

2. Smyrna –

- Smyrna was initially settled by the Greeks around 1000 BC.
- Around 600 BC, the Lydian Empire destroyed Smyrna (the city died).
- Alexander the Great dreamed of rebuilding Smyrna (came back to life).
- Smyrna was a very proud city that gave themselves the title “First in Asia.”
- They are claimed to be the birthplace of Homer.
- Was faithful to Rome:
 - In 195 BC, they built a temple to the goddess Roma (1st city in Asia)
 - Maintained allegiance to Rome when Rome was at war with Mithradates (a King to the east) (Ephesus betrayed Rome and allied with Mithradates. Thousands of Romans were slaughtered – even inside the Temenos of Artemis)
 - In 26 AD, they beat out Pergamum and Ephesus to become *Neorkoros* (temple keeper) for the worship of Tiberius Caesar. Based on their past faithfulness.
- Smyrna was a beautiful city. Called the “Crown of Asia.”
- Resurrection
 - Smyrna is related to the Greek word for Myrrh.
 - Myrrh is associated with death and burial in anticipation of the afterlife.
 - Myrrh is associated with the myth of the “Phoenix,” which dies and rises to life every 500 years.
 - When the Phoenix died, it encapsulated the parent in Myrrh before being reborn.
 - In the New Testament, myrrh symbolizes death/resurrection (Matt. 26:12; Mk. 14:8; John 12:7, 19:39).

3. Read Revelation 2:8-11:

v.	Old Testament Text	Cultural Context
8	This title is applied to God in Isaiah Isaiah 44:6 / 48:12	- Smyrna titled themselves “First in Asia.”
8	“resurrection” – Daniel 12:2	- History of Smyrna: At one point, they were destroyed (ca. 600 BC) and brought back to life (ca. 300 BC).
8		- Smyrna's name is derived from the Greek word for myrrh, which is associated with death and the afterlife
8		- An ancient writer compares Smyrna to the Phoenix that dies, comes to life every 500 years, and is associated with myrrh.
9		- the theme of suffering just as Smyrna had suffered for years after the destruction
9		- a historical indication that Jews in Smyrna were particularly aggressive toward Christians.
10	“Do not be afraid” is repeated throughout the Old Testament.	“be faithful” – Smyrna had a reputation for being faithful to Rome.
10	“ten days” – possible Daniel 1:12 “ten” is the number of completion	- prison is not used for extended incarceration. Instead, a prison holds an individual before trial or execution.
10		- Smyrna was called the “crown” of Asia
10		- Smyrna held annual games where the victor would receive a crown.
11	“Second death” is seen as a Rabbinic term or from the Dead Sea Scrolls and not used in the Old Testament.	

4. The Symbol of the Phoenix:

- The Phoenix was a mythical bird from Egypt that died and rose again every 500 years.
- A possible allusion to the Phoenix in the Bible is Job 29:18

Then I thought, ‘I shall die in my **nest**, and I shall multiply my days as the **sand**, (ESV)

Then I said: ‘I shall die with my **nest**, and I shall multiply my days as the **phoenix**, (JPS, 1917)

- Jewish folklore and Rabbinic writings reference the Phoenix as proof of the resurrection.¹
- Early church fathers regularly used the Phoenix to explain Jesus' resurrection and equated Jesus with the Phoenix.
- Clement of Rome writing to the church at Corinth (100 AD):²

“Let us consider that wonderful sign [of the resurrection] which takes place in Eastern lands, that is, in Arabia and the countries round about. There is a certain bird which is called a phoenix. This is the only one of its kind, and lives five hundred years. And when the time of its dissolution draws near that it must die, it builds itself a nest of frankincense, and myrrh, and other spices, into which, when the time is fulfilled, it enters and dies.”

See the footnote below

¹ Ginzberg, Louis, and David Stern. *Legends of the Jews*, Jewish Publication Society, 2003, p. 34.

² <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/1clement-roberts.html> – Chapter 25.