

# REVELATION

## Smyrna and Pergamos

Revelation 2:8

January 27, 2024

**Today we will discuss churches 2 and 3 – Smyrna and Pergamos**

### **Smyrna (2:8-11 - shortest message)**

**Smyrna (modern-day Izmir, Turkey) was a Greek city located about 35 miles northwest of Ephesus on a narrow isthmus on the Aegean coast.**

### **The City**

- Had a major seaport and was an essential stop on the trade route between Anatolia and the Aegean and had a population that rivaled Ephesus.
- Was known for its Myrrh – Smyrna means “myrrh,” its schools of science and medicine, its theater that could seat up to 20,000 spectators and its marketplace (Agora) which was reported to have been the largest in the ancient world.
- Proudly claimed to be the birthplace of Homer.
- Had the reputation of being the “glory” of Asia because of its wealth and exceptional beauty.
- Severed its relationship with Pergamos in 197 B.C. and asked the Roman Empire for aid. To further strengthen its ties to Rome, a cult, known as the “Rome Cult” was created. This special relationship with Rome earned the city many privileges – including the construction of a temple dedicated to Emperor Tiberius. This made Smyrna a center for emperor worship, which was compulsory for all citizens.
  - Emperor worship was a civil duty and was regarded as an act of loyalty. Once a year every citizen burned incense before the statue of the emperor and declared, “Caesar is Lord!” The citizen then received a certificate that allowed him/her to hold a job or conduct business.

### **The Church**

- The Christians in Smyrna did not participate in emperor worship and other pagan rituals. As a result, they faced losing their legal status, persecution and even martyrdom.

### **To the angel at the church in Smyrna write**

**Jesus presents Himself as “The First and the Last” and “The One who was dead and came to life.”**

- The members were going through hardship and persecution and they were anticipating harsher persecution to come. Jesus comes to them as One who understands their situation because he has experienced persecution - even unto death. He will continue to walk in their midst to sustain them.

### **Jesus’ appraisal:**

- I know your affliction and extreme poverty though you are rich *in grace and faith*.
- I know the slander of those who say they are Jews - but are not - they are of the synagogue of Satan.
  - *Jews in Rome were exempt from worshipping the emperor or other gods. Toward the end of the first century the government began to associate Jews with Christians. The Jews wanted to distance themselves from the Christians so they slandered them with malicious accusations that led to persecution. Even though the Jews considered themselves to be the synagogue of God, they were, in fact “the synagogue of Satan,” being used by Satan to harm the people of God.*

### **Jesus' counsel and warning (Smyrna receives no rebuke):**

- Stop being afraid of the things you are about to suffer.
- The devil will put some of you in prison to test you.
- You will have tribulation for 10 days (*a relatively short period of time*).

### **Appeal to hear what the Spirit says to the churches**

#### **Promises to the overcomers:**

- Be faithful to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life.
- Will not be hurt by the 2<sup>nd</sup> death

**\*\*\*\*\* This message coincides with the severe persecution of Christians throughout the Roman Empire during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries (100-313). The persecution came to an end in approximately 313 AD, when Constantine the Great issued the famous edict of Milan, granting Christians religious freedom.**

### **Pergamum or Pergamos (2:12-17)**

**Pergamos (modern-day Bergama, Turkey) was located about 45 miles northeast of Smyrna. It served as the capital city of Asia for more than 2 ½ centuries.**

#### **The City**

- Was a center of learning boasting a library that contained an estimated 200,000 volumes – 2<sup>nd</sup> only to the great library of Alexandria, Egypt.
- Was the birthplace of Galen, the well-known Roman physician, surgeon and philosopher.
- Was the 1<sup>st</sup> city in Asia to embrace Emperor Worship and was famous for its magnificent temples:
  - The great altar of Zeus located on the acropolis – possibly referenced as “*Satan’s throne*” in Revelation 2:13.
  - The immense shrine of Asclepius – the god of healing also known as “*the Savior*” – who was represented by a serpent, an emblem still used by modern medicine. People came from all over the world to the shrine of Asclepius to be healed.

#### **The Church**

- Found itself in a difficult situation being surrounded by paganism and the magnificent temples representing its pantheon of gods.
- They lived in a climate hostile to their faith.

### **To the angel at the church in Pergamum write**

#### **Jesus presents Himself as “*The One who has the Sharp Two-edged Sword.*”**

- The Roman Governor in Pergamos had the right to put a person to death. It was known as “*the right of the sword.*” No doubt he used that power against the Christians. Jesus is assuring his people that he has the ultimate power over life and death – the final word belongs to him.

#### **Jesus' appraisal:**

- I know where you dwell: where the throne of Satan is (*the very headquarters of Satan’s activities*).
- I know you are holding fast to my name.
- I know that you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed among you.

**BUT This I have against you:**

- There are those who hold to the teaching of Balaam. He taught Balak to entice Israel to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and committing sexual immorality.
- There are those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.
  - *Both groups encouraged compromise with regard to emperor worship and participation in pagan activities in order to avoid persecution.*

**Jesus' counsel and warning:**

- Repent! Otherwise, I will come quickly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

**Appeal to hear what the Spirit says to the churches****Promises to the overcomers:**

- Will be given hidden manna.
- Will be given a white stone with a new name written on it - known only to the one who receives it.

**\*\*\*\*\* This message represents the situation of the Christian church during the period following the conversion of Constantine the Great to Christianity in 313 AD (313-538). The church finally won its struggle with paganism and no longer had to fear persecution or outside pressure. However, many in the church chose to compromise Christianity with paganism. Pagan philosophical ideas and customs made their way into the church (including the idea of the immortality of the Soul), gradually replacing the Bible as the source of pure teaching and belief. Many Christians remained unwavering and faithful to the gospel, however, in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries the church wrestled with the temptation of compromise and witnessed spiritual decline and apostasy.**