

Revelation 2:8-29

The Churches at Smyrna and Pergamos

Introduction

- Apart from the introduction (1:1-8) and conclusion (22:6-21), the Book of Revelation consists of four **Visions**, each introduced by the phrase, “in the Spirit.”
- In the **Vision** of Chapters 1-3, Jesus, the Divine Agent of the Sovereign Father, is revealed in His majesty and sovereign authority.
- In **Chapter 2-3 Jesus** examines the 7 churches, giving praise and comfort where appropriate and giving correction and warning where it is needed.

Map of the 7 Churches



Rev 2:8-11: The Church at Smyrna

Revelation 2:8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, `These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:

⁹ "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan.

Rev 2:8-11: The Church at Smyrna

¹⁰ "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

¹¹ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."

Background about Smyrna

- Smyrna (modern Izmir), is about 35 miles north of Ephesus.
- In N.T. times the population was probably around 200,000.
- Coins describe the city as “First of Asia in beauty and size.”
- The city was strongly pro-Roman with a Jewish population actively hostile to Christianity.

Background about Smyrna

- It was exceptionally difficult to live as a Christian in Smyrna. Persecution was great.
- The most famous martyr of the early church fathers was Polycarp, the “twelfth martyr in Smyrna,” who was killed for refusing to acknowledge “Caesar as Lord.”
- The following four slides show you some of the ruins of the ancient city of Smyrna.

Background about Smyrna



Background about Smyrna



Background about Smyrna



Background about Smyrna



The Church at Smyrna - Explanation

- **The self-description of Jesus to Smyrna**

2:8 “These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life”

- **Jesus reminds them that He too was persecuted and killed for being faithful to God.**
- **He knows the future for He is the “First” and “Last.”**
- **He is the first-fruits of the resurrection and that assures all Christians who die they too will experience a bodily resurrection.**

Rev 2:8-11: The Church at Smyrna

- **Assurance that Jesus knew their situation**

⁹ "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan.

- **Commendation:** "your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)"

- **Evaluation of their persecutors:** "*I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan."

Rev 2:8-11: The Church at Smyrna

- **The peace Jesus wants us to have in the midst of suffering.**

¹⁰ “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.”

- **The prediction God makes about coming suffering.**

¹⁰ “Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days.”

Rev 2:8-11: The Church at Smyrna

- **Jesus' call to faithfulness with a promise of reward.**

¹⁰ “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

- **The importance of receiving Christ's words.**

¹¹ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”

- **“the second death”** is described in Rev. 20:11-15

The Second Death – Rev. 20:11-15

Revelation 20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

The Second Death – Rev. 20:11-15

¹³ The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Rev. 2:12-17: The Church at Pergamos

¹² "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:

¹³ "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne *is*. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas *was* My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

Rev. 2:12-17: The Church at Pergamos

¹⁴ "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

¹⁵ "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

Rev. 2:12-17: The Church at Pergamos

¹⁶ `Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

¹⁷ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*."

Background about Pergamos

- Pergamos, about 45 miles north of Smyrna, is an inland city about 20 miles from the Aegean sea.
- It was primary known as a religious, educational, and medical center.
- Chief deities were Zeus, Aphrodite, and Aesculapius (the god of medicine – pictured as a snake)
- Educationally, had a large library with 200,000 volumes.
- Medical school and school of psychology.

Ancient city of Pergamos



Ancient city of Pergamos



Ancient city of Pergamos



Ancient city of Pergamos



The Church at Pergamos - Explanation

- **The self-description of Jesus to Pergamos**

2:12 “These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword”

- **Jesus reminds them that He has the power to backup what He says.**
- **He has the power to enable them to fully obey no matter what others do.**
- **He also has the power to destroy if they fail to obey.**

The Church at Pergamos - Explanation

- **Jesus commendation**

"I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne *is*. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas *was* My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

- “**your works**” – seems positive here
- “**where you dwell**” – your circumstances and problems. The pressures you face.

The Church at Pergamos - Explanation

- **“you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith”** – severe life-threatening persecution. They refused to deny their faith in Jesus Christ.
- **“even in the days in which Antipas *was* My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”**
- Persecution reveals one’s true loyalties.
- **“Satan’s throne – Satan dwells”** – evidently a stronghold for demonic power and activity.

The Church at Pergamos - Explanation

- **Jesus' evaluation and warning**

¹⁴ "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

¹⁵ "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

The Church at Pergamos - Explanation

- **“the doctrine of Balaam”**
- **Balaam was motivated by greed. Financial gain.**
- **“the doctrine of the Nicolaitans”**
 - taught that Christians could engage in immoral behavior without it affecting their relationship with God.
 - They taught that what the Bible teaches about sexual relationships was not binding at all times.
 - They said there could be exceptions to God’s prohibition.

The Church at Pergamos - Explanation

- **A call to listen with a promise of reward for obedience (17)**

¹⁷ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*."

- "hidden manna" – spiritual food
- "white stone" – used by a judge to vote an acquittal.

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