

# Letters to Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira

Rev 2:8-29

## 1. Smyrna, [Rev 2:8-11](#)

- Historical Context
  - Was a prosperous port city with very strong allegiance to Rome, which led to heightened persecution of Christians who refused to participate in emperor worship.
    - "The opposition to the new religion of Christianity came from the people rather than from the state. The magistrates were often men of culture and tolerance; but the mass of the pagan population resented the aloofness, superiority, and certainty of the Christians, and called upon the authorities to punish these 'atheists' for insulting the gods." *The Story of Civilization: Caesar and Christ* by Will Durant
    - "Another source of opposition was the large Jewish population in Smyrna. Many Jews resented the new Christian sect and therefore tried to stir up trouble by pinning blame on Christians for every misfortune or calamity that happened." *A Light in Darkness* p149, by Rick Renner
  - So, both pagan and Jewish communities in Smyrna provoked the Roman government to persecute Christians.
    - Polycarp, Foxes' Book of Martyrs, p16
    - [Smyrna video](#) 3 min
- Exposition
  - In v8 Jesus identifies Himself as "the First and the Last, who died and came to life again."
    - This emphasizes His victory over death, offering hope amidst persecution.
  - v9, the synagogue of Satan refers to the large Jewish population in Smyrna that refused to believe in their Messiah.
    - Who are the true Jews? [Rom 2:28-29](#)
    - Instead, the false Jews in the 'synagogue of Satan' inspired pagans to persecute the Body of Christ. [Act 9:1-5](#) [Act 26:11](#)
  - v10, Do not fear what you're about to suffer [Mat 10:22](#) [Luk 12:4-5](#)
    - The call to be faithful "even to the point of death." [Rev 12:11](#)
      - It's the devil who will throw believers into prison. [Eph 6:12](#)
      - [For 10 days you will have tribulation.](#)
        - Ten days between Yom Teruah and Yom Kippur? [Lev 23:23-32](#)
    - The promise of the "crown of life" signifies eternal rewards for enduring persecution.
      - See this very image in [Jas 1:12](#), a familiar metaphor in the games at Smyrna and elsewhere in which the prize was a garland. See also [Rev 3:11](#). The crown consists in life ([Rev 2:7](#)). See Paul's use of *stephanos* in [1Co 9:25](#); [2Ti 4:8](#).
  - "The second death" (v.11) refers to judgment in the Lake of Fire.
    - See [Rev 20:6](#), [Rev 20:14](#); [Rev 21:8](#) where "the second death" is explained as "the lake of fire." It is not annihilation.
    - Overcomers will escape the second death, the Lake of Fire.
- Application Today
  - Food for deep thoughts:
    - What is an overcomer? What does it take to be an overcomer?
    - What's the destiny of Christians who aren't overcomers?
    - Is the Lake of Fire eternal? Is it punitive or redemptive?

## 2. Pergamum, [Rev 2:12-17](#)

- Historical Context
  - Located fifty-five miles north-east of Smyrna, on a lofty hill, a great political and religious

centre. Known as “the royal city, the city of authority” with many great buildings, including a library with 200,000 volumes, second only to Alexandria.

- [Pergamum video](#)
- The Kingdom of Pergamum became a Roman province B.C. 130. Pliny termed it the most illustrious city of Asia. As a provincial capital, Pergamum had a significant Roman presence, intensifying pressure on Christians to conform to state religious practices.
- Pergamum rivaled the pagan temples in Ephesus with its temples to Zeus, Athena, and Dionysis. Also, Asklepios, the god of healing was called the god of Pergamum. His temple complex included a university for medical study.
- Pergamum was the first city in Asia (A.D. 29) with a temple for the worship of Augustus (Octavius Caesar).
  - Hence, in the Book of Revelation Pergamum is the very centre of emperor-worship “where Satan dwells.”
- Here also the Nicolaitans flourished ([Rev 2:15](#)) as in Ephesus ([Rev 2:6](#)) and in Thyatira ([Rev 2:20](#)).
- The Pergamon Altar: Many believe this massive structure dedicated to Zeus and known for its grandiose and imposing presence, was the literal “throne of Satan” mentioned in Revelation. The altar was a center of pagan worship and emperor worship, both of which were antithetical to Christian beliefs.
  - Model of the [Great Altar of Zeus](#)
  - [Inside the Pergamum Meseum in Berlin](#)
  - [The Original Site of the Altar above Pergamum](#)
  - [Roman Emperor Statue inside the Pergamum Museum](#)
  - [One of the Panels in the Pergamum Museum](#)
  - [Nuremburg - site of Hitler's Speeches](#)
  - [Artemis' Hunting Dog](#)
  - [Obama, Hitler, and the Throne of Satan](#)
- Exposition
  - v12, From His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword [Rev 1:16](#) [The Rhomphaian sword](#)
  - v13, Commended for remaining true to the name of Jesus despite living in a city where Satan has his throne.
  - v14, The teachings of Balaam [Num 25:1-9](#) implies a compromise with pagan practices, idolatry, and fornication.
    - These early Gnostics practised licentiousness as a principle since they were not under law, but under grace [Rom 6:15](#)
  - v15, The teaching of the Nicolaitans
    - The use of *homoiōs* (or, in the same way) here shows that they followed Balaam in not obeying the decision of the Conference at Jerusalem [Act 15:29](#) about idolatry and fornication, with the result that they encouraged a return to pagan laxity of morals.
    - Paul also fought against the Nicolaitan teachings [Col 3:5-8](#); [Eph 5:3-6](#).
  - v16, The call to repentance (v.16) emphasizes the need for the church to return to a faithful stance, away from sin and compromises.
  - v17, hidden manna, white stone, new name
    - Hidden Manna: [Exo 15:22-27](#) [Exo 16:1-35](#) [Joh 6:49-51](#)
    - White Stone: This old word for pebble was used in courts of justice; black pebbles for condemning, white pebbles for acquitting. The only other use of the word in the N.T. is in [Act 26:10](#), where Paul speaks of “depositing his pebble,” or casting his vote.
    - New Name:
      - The white stone with one’s name on it was used to admit one to events, and also as an amulet or charm.
      - Not the man’s own name, but that of Christ. See [Rev 3:12](#).

- Application Today
  - The importance of maintaining Christian integrity in a pluralistic society that pressures believers to compromise their values.
  - The importance of doctrinal purity and the dangers of syncretism.

### **Is there a division in the Letters to the Seven Churches (3 plus 4?)**

Three is the number of perfection and divinity, while four is the number of God's created world. Similarly, some believe the first three churches were generally spiritual, while the last four churches were generally worldly.

In support for this division, proponents of this idea point out that, in His letters to the first three churches, Jesus said "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" before He promised what blessing overcomers would receive. But, in His letters to the last four churches, Jesus said "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" after He promised what blessing overcomers would receive.

- The first three churches (Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum) were generally faithful, with a minority who promoted sin, or otherwise failed in some way.
  - Ephesus: lost their first love
  - Smyrna: no criticism
  - Pergamum: 'some' held the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans
- In contrast, the last 4 of the seven churches (Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea) were generally corrupt, with a minority of faithful disciples.
  - Thyatira
    - 2:20 The church generally tolerated Jezebel, who taught disciples to commit sexual immorality and eat food sacrificed to idols.
      - 2:24-25 But to the rest of you, who do not hold her teaching, I do not lay on you any further burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come.
  - Sardis
    - 3:1 You are dead
      - 3:4 Yet you have a few names in Sardis who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy
  - Philadelphia
    - 3:8 You have but little power, and yet you have kept My word and have not denied my name
      - 3:10 Because you have kept My word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world.
  - Laodicea
    - 3:15-16 You are neither cold nor hot... I will spit you out of My mouth.
      - 3:19-20 No minority of disciples. All must repent. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door...

### **3. Thyatira, [Rev 2:18-29](#)**

- Historical Context
  - [Thyatira video](#)
  - A smaller city known for its guilds and crafts, particularly in dyeing and textiles. Lydia, a seller of purple cloth in Acts 16:14, was from Thyatira.
  - Participation in trade guilds often required involvement in idolatrous feasts and rituals, posing a spiritual dilemma for Christians.
- Exposition

- Commends the church's love, faith, service, and perseverance, which were greater than at first (v.19).
- Condemns tolerance of Jezebel, a symbolic name for a prophetess leading believers into idolatry and sexual immorality (v.20-23).
  - Roman Catholic church. *Two Babylons*, by Alexander Hislop
  - Hillary Clinton is a modern Jezebel. *The Paradigm*, by Jonathan Cahn
- Promises authority over the nations and the "morning star" (v.26-28), symbolizing victory and possibly a reference to Christ Himself.
- Application Today
  - The challenge of balancing professional and social obligations with Christian ethics.
    - Are you a team player? [Psa 1:1-6](#)
    - Routinely fellowshiping in unwholesome environments? [1Co 15:33](#)
    - Amusements (a-muse means don't think, or 'turn off your brain')
  - The importance of discernment in recognizing false teachings and remaining steadfast in faith.
    - Biblical concepts and traditions versus secular concepts and traditions
      - Calendar [Exo 12:2](#)
      - Holidays [Lev 23:2-44](#)
      - Morality [Lev 19:2](#)