

Revelation Four –

1. We continue with the introductory messages to the seven churches.
2. Smyrna was another beautiful port city, famous for its beauty and for its loyalty to Rome. Cities would often compete with each other, each wanting to be more loyal, more obsequious than the others. I don't know where Smyrna would rank in that contest, but it was over the top enough to cause Christians real issues.
3. The trade guilds ran Smyrna at this time. Trade Guilds limited who could do what work in their area. At their meetings, at public events, and any meaningful contact between citizen groups, it was expected to pinch a bit of incense and say "Caesar is Lord." (Almost like "Heil Hitler") Christians in Smyrna would not do that and, so, were frozen out of all but the most menial jobs. That is why Jesus addresses them like this: **Revelation 2:8-11**.
4. The persecution of Christians would not end soon in Smyrna. Almost 60yrs later, in 156AD, the great Christian leader, Polycarp, would be killed in Smyrna because he professed that Jesus is Lord and would not worship the emperor (he is recorded as the 12th martyr there). He famously said, when offered the chance to live if he would just deny Christ, "Eighty six years have I served Christ, and he has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"
5. Smyrna was hanging tough, knowing the lessons of Ecclesiastes and Job. Some of the Jews in town were causing them problems, most likely by telling the Roman authorities that the Christians were NOT part of the Jewish faith and, therefore, not a protected religion. Jesus was warning them that this would not end well for them on earth, but would end well for them in heaven.
6. Now, Pergamum: **Revelation 2:12-17**. Pergamum was a city of 180,000 that was dominated by a massive hill covered with temples. Three temples were dedicated to the emperor – and the first and largest was dedicated to Augustus, the Caesar who decreed the tax that drove Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem - but there were also temples to Dionysus, Athena, Asclepius (snake god over medicine), and Demeter.

7. There was also there the second largest library in the ancient world – perhaps 200,000 volumes. They wanted to become the largest library in the world but when Ptolemy, ruler over Alexandria, heard about it, he blocked all export of papyrus. So, someone in Pergamum created vellum or parchment made from animal skins.
8. People were already being killed for their faith (martyr = witness), and one is named here. Jesus warns that some are weakening and offering sacrifices to idols (Balaam) or adopting the sexual practices of those around them (Nicolaitans). The church is warned to repent – interesting that individuals were not named here, indicating the church was accepting those doing wrong. (once again, this is likely antinomianism at some level. Since two groups are mentioned, it is possible that they each had their own list of which sins were now freedoms. We saw last week that the law of love gives rise to kind behavior and holiness. Let's remember that)
9. When Satan cannot destroy us using outside enemies, he works on getting the people inside the community sin, causing rot from within.
10. The author uses the term “double edged sword” here. Pergamum was one of the few cities that Rome gave the power of capital punishment. Jesus is reminding the faithful that he has a sword, too. He is not calling the faithful to grab swords but threatens to use “the sword of his mouth’ – a declaration from God that they were done. God’s decrees and laws are sometimes called “sharper than any two edged sword.”
11. **Revelation 2:18-29**. Thyatira was a much smaller town than the rest, but it was ruled by trade guilds. Its size made it even harder for a Christian to fly under the radar. There was a woman prophet there (not a group of women or a mixed group) who was misleading the people by claiming that she knew deep secrets about Satan and knew how to disarm him. This was causing some to lose their fear of Satan and, therefore, willing to enter into the worship, feasts, and culture of those around them. **1st John 4:1 and Deut. 18:21-22 and 13:1-3.**

12. The promise to them is that they will have authority over the nations and the morning star. We need to be humble here and say we don't know what this means...but they would have.
13. We DO know that Jesus calls himself the morning star later in this book. That is in contrast to Lucifer – a name that literally means “morning star.” It was a name given to the planet Venus that shines brightest just before dawn. Thyatira had a temple to Venus and Venus stood in for the gods worshipped in the area.
14. It seemed that Satan wanted Jesus' title (as in Isaiah and Ezekiel). To this very day, we have to be careful to discern because Satan likes to dress up like an angel of light. As we close, hear the words of the Lord.

2nd Corinthians 11:13-15

1st John 4:1-3