

The Son of Man’s Message to the Church In Pergamum

(Revelation 2:12-17 NASB) “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: 13 ‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold firmly to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14 But I have a few things against you, because you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. 15 So you too, have some who in the same way hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will wage war against them with the sword of My mouth. 17 The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows except the one who receives it.’

I. Cultural Context of the Church in Pergamum



- a. Pergamum, also known as Pergamos and Pergamon, was an important city that functioned as the capital of the Attalid dynasty roughly 300 years before Christ. This city became an important city for pagan worship and emperor worship. Almost every major deity in the ancient world had a temple in Pergamum.
- b. In Pergamum, there were temples to the gods; Dionysus (god of wine and ecstasy), Demeter (goddess of agriculture), Athena (goddess of wisdom, & military strategy), Asclepius (god of medicine), and also Zeus (god of lightning and thunder “god of all other gods”). Pergamum would also eventually have the temple of Trajan built (started in 114 A.D.). However, The first temple in Asia Minor, which was dedicated to the Roman emperor, was built in Pergamum in 29 A.D. under the reign of Augustus.
- c. The roman governor of Asia Minor had offices in Pergamum and held the power to have criminals or “enemies of the state” killed. It was often said he had the “power of the sword” (the sword represented the empire’s dominance and authority).

II. The Specific Revelation of Jesus to the Church in Pergamum

(Revelation 2:12 NASB) “The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this...”

- a. The sword wasn’t just a symbol of the Roman emperor’s dominance and authority but represented it’s ability to kill criminals. Jesus calling himself “*the One who has the sharp two-edge sword*” is an intentional confrontation of the Roman Emperor. Jesus intends to make clear that He is the only one who truly hold the power life and death and can judge in righteousness.

- b. **Revelation 1:16** depicts this “*sharp two-edged sword*” coming out of the mouth of Jesus. There can be no mistake that the sword He’s talking about are, His words. Jesus’ weapons of warfare are His words and they are true, righteous, and effective to accomplish His purposes.

(Proverbs 18:21 NASB) “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.”

(Ephesians 6:17 NASB) “... take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

(Hebrews 4:12 NASB) “For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, even penetrating as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

III. The Affirmation & Recognition of the Church in Pergamum

(Revelation 2:13 NASB) “*I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold firmly to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells*”

- a. Jesus recognized that even under persecution and martyrdom, many in Pergamum held firmly to His name, and they did not deny faith. Every part of a person’s life would have been touched by their commitment to Jesus. It would have meant ridicule and persecution from the Roman Empire, rejection by friends and family members, and often times an impoverished lifestyle making it hard for them to buy and sell goods and food.
- b. Where Satan’s Throne is – Does Satan have a throne on earth? (Interesting to consider in light of the fact that at the beginning of the great tribulation, Satan will be cast down to earth), but the way 1st century believers would have understood this could include these 5 major dynamics:
- i. A general reference to the multitude of pagan worship taking place in Pergamum. Satan had a major stronghold through idol worship and pagan practice.
 - ii. The Asklepiion (temple to Asclepius) was a major “healing” center for the world. Priests would put people in a trance and then get a vision of what was wrong with them and mix modern medicine, psychiatry, and pagan rituals (such as, allowing snakes to crawl on peoples bodies during their trance to bring healing) to treat these individuals. Asclepius is often depicted as holding a staff with a snake crawling on it because snakes were the symbol for healing and regeneration (mostly because they shed their old skin). Oddly enough, the common symbol for medicine today and the World Health Organization include a logo with the rod of Asclepius.



- iii. The altar of Zeus (Built in the 2nd Century B.C.) was more a place of sacrifice rather than a temple. Sacrifices were made almost 24 hours a day (it’s even believed that during certain celebrations, young boys would be sacrificed). There was a monumental staircase to a courtyard where the sacrifices took place, and the largest marble fresco depicting the victory of the gods over giants. In 1879 fragments of this altar were brought to Berlin and a replica monument was made in the museum. Adolf Hitler also modeled His Nürnberg rally grounds after the altar of Zeus and gave many propaganda speeches from it’s platform.



- iv. At the highest point of the city, the temple of Trajan (The roman Emperor at the time) was built. All around the structure were statements that “the Emperor possessed all power”. There were many statues of the emperor set up within the temple (foreshadowing the Beast’s image in the coming rebuilt temple in Jerusalem).
- c. Antipas – According to Easter Orthodox tradition, Antipas was the Bishop of the church in Pergamum and was martyred because of his consistent faithful witnessing in the midst of the satanic culture. It’s believed that his prayers drove out demons. Eventually, Antipas was forced to offer an incense offering to the emperor and when he rejected doing it he was put inside of a large metal bull that had a fire burning under it and was violently burned alive. When he was confronted by men saying, “Antipas, the whole world is against you!” he replied, “Then I am against the whole world”.

IV. Jesus’ correction and rebuke for the Church in Pergamum

(Revelation 2:14-15 NASB) “But I have a few things against you, because you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. 15 So you too, have some who in the same way hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.”

- a. Jesus called out some among the church in Pergamum that held to the false teaching of Balaam, which was characterized by idol worship and the immoral temple practices. In the Old Testament Balaam schemed a way to cause Israel to stumble into sexual immorality and idol worship so that he could receive a reward from the Moabite king Balak for pronouncing a curse on Israel. With all the pagan worship that was prominent in Pergamum, it’s no surprise that as many were being converted, they were slipping into their old practices through false teaching. The pressure of living impoverished with lack of food also made it easy for many compromise and “eat things sacrificed to idols.”

(Numbers 31:16 NASB) “Behold, they caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to be unfaithful to the Lord in the matter of Peor, so that the plague took place among the congregation of the Lord!”

(2 Peter 2:14-15 NASB) “[related to false prophets]...having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having hearts trained in greed, accursed children; 15 abandoning the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the reward of unrighteousness”

- a. Another false teaching that was among the church in Pergamum, some were holding to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans were followers of Nicolas (***Acts 6:5***), a deacon in Jerusalem who fell away from correct doctrine. 2nd century church leaders explain that the Nicolaitans believed a false grace message (*Gnosticism - A religious and philosophical movement that emphasizes the pursuit of direct personal knowledge and understanding of the divine, viewing the material world as flawed and salvation as attainable through secret knowledge*) and indulged lewd practices, adultery, and idol worship.

(Acts 6:5 NASB) “The announcement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte [gentile convert] from Antioch.”

(Jude 4 NASB) “For certain people have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into indecent behavior and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

V. A Call to Repent And Respond

(Revelation 2:16 NASB) “Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will wage war against them with the sword of My mouth”

- a. If Jesus’ call to repentance was not heeded, He would bring judgement upon those who held to false teaching for the sake of bringing them to righteousness. Jesus committed to have the sword from His mouth rightly divide that which was true and cut off the incorrect doctrine that was spreading in their midst. It is the grace of God to remove unrepentant people from spiritual communities that hold to and teach false doctrines.

(Isaiah 26:9 NASB) “For when the earth experiences Your judgments, The inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.”

(Psalm 45:3-4 NASB) “Strap Your sword on Your thigh, Mighty One, In Your splendor and majesty! 4 And in Your majesty ride on victoriously, For the cause of truth, humility, and righteousness...”

VI. The Overcomers Promise

(Revelation 2:17 NASB) “The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows except the one who receives it.”

- a. Hidden Manna – For many Christians in this hour, the temptation to “eat things sacrificed to idols” likely came as a result of the challenges related to buying and selling items, resulting in a lack of food. Manna was provided for the Israelites while they were in the wilderness. During the first century, and The church in Pergamum (and the greater church throughout Asia Minor) was certainly going through the “wilderness” was in need of God’s supernatural provision (This foreshadows what God will do for Israel and the Church at the end of the age). God’s promise to provide hidden Manna is a suitable promise for those who didn’t have other options.

(Exodus 16:35 NASB) “And the sons of Israel ate the manna for forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.”

- b. White stone and a new name – Because of the many uses for stones in the ancient world, there are many different interpretations of what the white stone with a new name represents. One of the best cases for interpretation is that during this time frame, invites to major festivities would be done through a white piece of marble having the person’s name who was invited inscribed upon it. Despite the fact that believers weren’t often invited to many of those festivities Jesus, promised to invite them into place of privilege within His kingdom. The “new name that no one knows except the one who receives it”, likely is a reference to the “higher calling” that the overcomers would have stepped into (i.e. Abraham, Peter, & Paul).