

Revelation 2:12–17 — Verse-by-Verse Bible Study

Pergamos = the “married-to-the-world” church

Reminder

- literal first-century churches
 - spiritually relevant for believers today
 - prophetic pictures of periods in church history
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7 Elements -

- Title (taken from the vision in chapter 1)
- All addressed to angel/messenger
- Calls out their works
- Commendation, compliant or both
- Allusion of 2nd coming
- Reward
- same challenge

Every church will be surprised ... our assessment may not be Jesus' perspective.

- Ephesus - Apostolic Church (first church era) - Devotion over Doctrine
 - Smyrna - Persecuted Church - Faithfulness Through Suffering
 - Today Pergamos - State Church era - compromise under pressure
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PART 2 — Pergamos (Revelation 2:12–17)

Pergamos represents the **State Church era (AD 312–606)**

This is when Constantine converted to Christianity and ceased official persecution of Christians through the Edict of Milan ... but he didn't declare it a state religion.

Theodosius I did officially through the Edict of Thessalonica declared Christianity (Nicene Christianity / based on the Nicene creed) as the state religion and declared other religions as heretical around 380 AD.

But what happens when you mix religion and government?

Pergamos also known as Pergamum

- 48 Miles north of Smyrna
- Early ally with Rome - resulting in extremely wealthy and prosperous city
- Official capital of the Roman province of Asia for over 2 centuries
- Today the present city is called Bergama (approx 42k people -- 200k in NT times)
- Said to be the birth place of Zeus
 - Great altar stood there on the side of a mountain/hill overlooking the city.
 - It's foundation was 125 feet by 115 feet and over 50 feet High.
 - Picture
- City of the Serpent
 - Comes from it's worship of Aesculapius (S - skull - lape - is) known as the god of medicine, healing
 - Aesculapius is often portrayed with a pole and a snake.
 - In the bible we see this correlation a few times.
 - Snake is a symbol of sin and the brass (sustains heat) so speaks of judgement. Sin being judged. Picture of a snake on a pole.
 - From that, we get the official emblem of the city is the Caduceus (Ca-do-sis) - 2 snakes on a pole. We see this often when we look at logos of the medical community.
 - Picture
 - Discussed in Chapter 1 a bit of review.
 - Num 21:8-9: The Lord said to Moses, "8Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." 9So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.
 - Became part of Jewish culture
 - Jews began to worship it, so King Hezekiah destroyed it.
 - 2 Kings 18:4 *He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it - as an idol.*
 - Questions why this symbolism as nothing else is said about it in the Bible until it was explained by Christ Himself in John 3. Jesus is talking to Nicodemus (one of the Jewish Ruling council, Pharisee).
 - John 3:13-15: *13No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. 14Just as Moses lifted*

up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

- Shreds light on the OT reference -- it was a sign of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ -- not sure if Moses understand that let alone any of the prophets. But we get the benefit of Jesus' explanation.
- Jesus says it is a sign that points to the cross! And this discussion with Nicodemus leads into the most famous verse in all the Bible. John 3:16.
- *The New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed; The Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed.*

Read Revelation 2:12-17

Verse 12

| *"To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:"*

Pergamos - fortified 4010 (treasury)

- Per - mixed, objectionable, concerning, 4007
- gamos - marriage 1062
- a "concerning marriage"

| *"These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword."*

Jesus' Title -->

The sword traditionally represents:

- judgment
- truth
- authority

But we know it as The Word of God which will represents the solution or fix to all of Pergamos problems. Jesus is coming to Pergamos with correction. Smyrna received comfort, no correction. Pergamos will be confronted

Pergamum needs correction, so Jesus introduces Himself as Judge.

Verse 13

"I know where you live—where Satan has his throne."

Was Satan's throne there? Not everywhere, so needs to be somewhere.

Pergamos was filled with:

- emperor worship
- pagan temples
- idol worship
- a massive altar/statue to Zeus

The city was spiritually dark.

Commendation -->

"Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives."

Commends them for remaining faithful to the name of Jesus Jesus honors **Antipas**, a faithful martyr -- not exactly known -- against all Jesus' message here is that faithfulness in darkness matters deeply to Him.

Satan lives --

- Satan is real (ton of biblical references of a physical being)
- Has a huge demonic kingdom (Matt 25:41 and Rev 12:7)
- World System belongs to him (1 John 5:19 - We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one (1 of many titles given to Satan).
- Prince of the Power of the Air (Eph 2:2) - book

Church was within enemy lines.

- Interestingly enough, all the priests of Babel (which became Babylon) migrated to Pergamos when Cyrus conquered Babylon -- adding to the darkness of the city.
- And note: that later all of those priests and their beliefs end up in Rome.

Verse 14

"Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality."

Concern/Complaint -->

Yet Another OT reference ... for the Jews.

Reference: Numbers 22–25

Who is Balaam?

- Called himself a Prophet but in the bible is called a soothsayer (seer) Joshua 13:22
- Not a Jew/Gentile - but from Mesopotamia (Deut 23:4,5) specifically we find out in Number 22 by the River Euphrates in Aram (modern day Iraq)
- Famous story of Balaam being rebuked by his donkey Num 22
 - Donkey won't go certain directions 3 times because it saw the angel of God, but Balaam did not and kept hitting the donkey.
 - The bible says the Lord opened the donkey mouth and started talking to him.
 - The Lord opens Balaam's eyes and finally sees the angel
 - Angel tells Balaam not to say anything more than I tell you to say.
 - All this leads up to Balaam being hired by the King Balak - Num 23, 24
 - Balak wants Balaam to curse Israel - Balaam won't do it (because of the angel)
 - We say all of this to come back to the verse ... what did Balak learn from Balaam?
 - If find out in Num 31:16 Balaam eventually teaches Balak on how to defeat Israel (deliver a blow)
 - Send your young, good looking, virgin moabite women to the Israeli camp and either engage in fornication and/or marriage
 - Torah not allowed to marry a Moabite -- results in a plague against Israel and the killing of the young fighting age males
 - So what do we learn from Balaam?
- Doctrine of Balaam - Spiritual immortality; marriage with the world comes from...enter into a concerning marriage -- what are doing? You are compromising your beliefs because you are not only marrying the woman but

her culture, her beliefs -- the only way through a marriage like this is compromise.

- So Balak wasn't able to curse Israel, but he was able to conquer from within --
- through compromise.

Verse 15

| *"Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans."*

Likely:

- spiritual compromise
- moral compromise
- blending pagan life with Christianity

Jesus says:

- "Which thing I hate"
- Strong language.
- Truth matters.
- Holiness matters.

So the reprimand is that some of the people in this church are believing and teaching false doctrine. Causing a spirit of compromise to take place and alter the beliefs of the church. And the people who know better are tolerating it. They have 1 foot in the church and 1 foot in the world -- thus they are married to the world.

Verse 16

| *"Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."*

This is urgent.

If they do not repent: Judgement will come and come hard ... Jesus Himself will fight against them. -- with the Word -- the sword of judgement, truth and authority

This is serious:

The church will face discipline from Christ in their beliefs.

If there was a message here tolerance of sin inside the church can conquer it from within -- and Satan knows this.

Verse 17

"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it."

Hidden Manna: God's true provision, Christ Himself as the Bread of Life (John 6 I am)

White stone: Many conjectures - not clearly agreed upon

- Rome - id card (stone with your name) to access
- Priestly garment - in the vestment -- inside two stone ir-rum - white - yes and tomb-um - black - no. would use to make decisions.

White stone:

- acceptance
- invitation
- victory

New name:

- Every believer will receive a new name from Jesus—he only knows
- one reflecting your personal relationship with Him

This is deeply personal from Jesus to us and its eternal.

Summary

In this letter they are/we are warned of two things: don't compromise your beliefs and don't be married to the world.

During this church age, yes persecution stopped, but something else happened.

- We talked earlier about the migration of Babylonian priests and beliefs into Pergamos and eventually into Rome.
- Starting with Damasus 378 AD (first Bishop of Rome) - we mark the time where Babylonian beliefs are being absorbed into the Roman Church.
- Pergamos is the start of the State Church and that church during this time is compromising the Gospel and belief in Christianity to be aligned with the World of that day.
- State vs church debates start...

Do you find yourselves married to something other than the church? What does married to the world mean today? Any different?

Next week Thyatira - longest letter -- learn about Jezebel - 1 Kings 21
