



# World Christian Fellowship

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## Seven Churches

### Pergamum – Compromised Church

**Revelation 2:12-17**, *“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: <sup>13</sup>‘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. <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. <sup>16</sup>Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. <sup>17</sup>‘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.’”*

### **Pergamum:**

Pergamum was about 100 miles north of Ephesus in the Asia Minor, modern day Turkey.

Smyrna was about 35 miles north of Ephesus and this further 60 miles. So, the postal route, from Ephesus to Smyrna to Pergamum.

Pergamum was about 15 miles inland from the Aegean Sea. It was not on any major trade route. It wasn't a port city.

The Roman writer Pliny called it "The most distinguished city in Asia."

Pergamum had been Asia's capital from 133 B.C. when its last independent king bequeathed the city to Rome. When this letter was written it's been a capital of Asia Minor over 250 years.

Pergamum survives till today we will find its ruins near a place called Bergama.

Much of Pergamum was built on a large conical hill, towering about 1,000 feet above the plain. Ancient cities tended to be built on a hill for defensive purposes.

So impressive is the site that the famed nineteenth-century archaeologist

Sir William Ramsay, 19<sup>th</sup> Century archaeologist commented, *“Beyond all the other sites in Asia Minor, it gives the traveller the impression of a royal city, the home of authority. The rocky hill on which it stands is so huge, it dominates the broad plain of the Caicus River Valley so proudly and so boldly,”*



The most notable thing in Pergamum was a library like Ephesus. The Library had 200,000 volumes of handwritten. The library at Pergamum was second only to the library in Alexandria.

Pergamum's library that Marc Anthony later sent it to his lover Cleopatra of Egypt.

According to some legends, parchment, or velum, was invented by the Pergameans to provide writing material for their extensive library.

Pergamum was an educated place with literate people. Some historians think the Pergameans developed animal skin parchment to use as writing material. Parchment may derive from Pergamum in terms of linguistic orient.



Because of its massive library, it was an important centre for culture and learning. The physician Galen (210-130 A.D.), was born and studied in Pergamum.

The city saw itself as a defender of Greek culture in Asia Minor. There was a **massive altar to Zeus** there, commemorating the victory of the Pergameans over the invading Gauls.

It was an important centre of worship.

There were a number of deities there of the Greek-Roman world.

There were temples dedicated to

- Athena,
- Asclepius,
- Dionysus, and
- Zeus.

Overshadowing all of those was a massive Statue devoted to the cult of emperor worship. Pergamum apparently built the first temple devoted to emperor worship in Asia in 29 B.C. in honour of Emperor Augustus.



## Church at Smyrna:

We have no record of the founding of the church in Pergamum.

**Acts 16:7-8**, *After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. <sup>8</sup>So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.*

According to the above verses Paul, on his second missionary journey, went through Mysia. Mysia is very close to Pergamum. Maybe on his journey in that region, the Lord allowed him the opportunity to leave a gospel message that basically developed into a church.

**Acts 19:10**, *And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.*

Paul's two years in Ephesus preaching Ephesus led to sprung up many churches.

So, it may well have been that it just spread from Paul's two years in Ephesus.

Engulfed in paganism, immorality, and idolatry. They lived in imminent danger. They also were pulled into familiar sins.

The temptations were all around them. They had been rescued out of that culture, but it was a powerful force. There was no separation between social life and religious life. It was all the same all events, all festivals, all feasts, all ceremonies, all celebrations were connected to the worship of the false gods and all the immorality that went along with it.

To set you apart and out of all of that was a very dramatic, dramatic thing. So, there they were living in this encroaching, massive force of paganism, and constantly struggling against the familiar sins.

Also, persecution, in fulfilment of what Peter wrote thirty years earlier.

Peter wrote these words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

**1 Peter 4:17**, *For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

He said it first begins with us and judgment is going to begin with the church at Pergamum.

This judgment tone appears here for the first time.

## **Author of the Letter:**

Our Lord introduces Himself as the author.

**V12**, *“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:*

**Revelation 1:16**, *He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.*

Very scary introduction.

### **What is that “sharp two-edged sword?”**

**Revelation 19:15**, *Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.*

The returning Christ called Faithful and True, the Word of God. It is a weapon.

This is not a promising introduction. The one who wields a deadly weapon.

- This is not positive.
- This is threatening.
- This is terrifying.

Pergamum was not only in danger from the world, but Pergamum was in more danger from the Lord for not separating from the world.

- Disaster and danger were all around them in the culture, but
- Disaster and danger loomed over them from heaven.

So, this is a letter of judgment on a worldly church, a church that would not separate itself from that culture from which it had been redeemed.

## **Commendation**

**V 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.*

You dwell where Satan dwells. You live in Satan’s town.

### **What is that mean?**

Satan is prominent there very prominently.

- The church at Smyrna had to deal with a synagogue of Satan that was Jews.
- The church at Pergamum has to deal with a throne of Satan that has Gentiles.

We all know that Satan is the archenemy of the church.

Satan relentlessly assaults the church with

- hypocrites,
- false teachers,
- temptation, and
- persecution.

This church, this small body of believers, is literally fighting the lion in his own den. They are waging war at Satan's headquarters.

## **1. Zeus**

There was an altar there to Zeus that dominated the acropolis. The acropolis is always the high place. It was not just an altar. It was massive and monumental colonnade at the acropolis.

Copy of Zeus alter at Pergamum made at Museum in Berlin.  
It was a huge court in a horseshoe form.  
It was 120 by 112 feet.

It had an altar in the middle that was 18 feet high.



The base, according to historians, ran for about 446 feet around that horseshoe. All the way around was a mural, or a carved work of art, depicting the battle of the gods and the giants.

It was a massive structure to Zeus. One of the great works of art in the Greek world, dedicated to Satan. There is no Zeus but only Satan.

- It was an altar to Satan.
- It was Satan's throne.

## 2. Asclepius

There was also there an unforgettable and amazing monument to Asclepius, the god of healing.

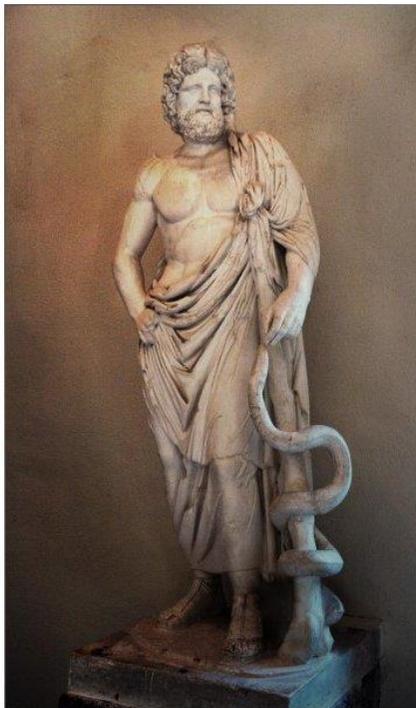


The idea was that this god in this town of Pergamum could heal people from all their diseases, and people came from all over the world to the temple of Asclepius. Now, Asclepius was depicted as a snake. You even see him on the figure that represents medicine. He's depicted as a snake.

In that temple, nonpoisonous snakes lived everywhere and glided all over the floor of the temple. If you wanted to be healed, you came to the temple and you laid yourself down on the temple, maybe sleeping on the temple floor, with the hope that with the snakes crawling over you, they would impart to you the healing power of Asclepius.

So, you could take your pick. The throne of Satan could be named for Zeus. The throne of Satan– the snake, the serpent – could be named for Asclepius.

But in any case, it was for Satan.



**Revelation 12:9**, *So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*

### 3. Emperor Worship

There was massive structure and temple for Emperor Augustus. The emperor cult dominated everything.

This was the most powerful influence in Pergamum. During the reign of Diocletian, some Christians were executed for failing to obey the emperor.

Christians there were in grave danger. The city was full of idolatry, full of immorality, and the Christians were targeted.

One day a year, every year, the people were required to offer a sacrifice to the emperor. If they didn't then they would die.

If Christians said, "Jesus is Lord. I will offer no sacrifice to Caesar," it may have cost their life.

It is likely that Antipas, in verse 13, was martyred for refusing to worship the emperor. This is a vile, idolatrous, pagan, gross, immoral place; but highly educated and satisfied with itself.

Despite all this satanic power and influence, a wonderful commendation:

***"You hold fast My name."***

***"You are faithful to My name – My name, the Lord Jesus Christ."***

- ✓ They clung to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ✓ They clung to the Saviour.
- ✓ They never wavered.
- ✓ They held onto His name.
- ✓ They were faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ.

*“And they held onto My faith.”*

That’s not subjective, that’s objective.

They were faithful to Christ and to sound doctrine. They were Christ lovers, and they were truth lovers like John.

They were so faithful to Christ and so faithful to sound doctrine, the gospel, “even in the days of Antipas.” Those must have been days when Christians were being killed, and Antipas, very likely, was their pastor.

*“My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”*

Domitian’s reign of terror ran from about 81-96 A.D.

Tradition says that Antipas was roasted to death inside a brass bull cooked. We don’t have any more information on Antipas.

*“You hold fast My name.”*

Personal possession of Christ.

- ✓ The truth is His.
- ✓ The people are His.
- ✓ The witnesses are His.
- ✓ He is “My witness.”

That’s the word ‘**martus**’, from which we get **martyr**. Started out meaning “witness.”

Because so many Christians were killed for their witness, the word ‘**martus**’ became martyr.

It was used of Stephen in **Acts 22:20**. So this is a marvellous commendation.

## **Condemnation:**

**V 14-15**, *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.* <sup>15</sup> *Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.*

### **1. Some holding the teaching of Balaam**

Balaam means:

“a corrupter of the people.” “a swallower of the people.” “not of the people.” “a madman.”

**Deuteronomy 23:3-4**, *“An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the Lord forever,<sup>4</sup> because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.*

He was a sorcerer.

He was aware of the God of Israel.

Everybody was aware of the God of Israel because of what the God of Israel had done in delivering His people from Egypt. But Balaam was a sorcerer who was in it like all sorcerers for the sake of money.

So, Balaam made his mysterious services available to anyone who paid him.

**Numbers 22 to 24** tells the story.

Israel arrives in their wanderings at the border of Moab. This is near the end of their wanderings. The king of Moab is a man named Balak. Balak is afraid of Israel. Everybody knows what happened when they went out of Egypt. Everybody knows the power of their God. So, Balak finds this sort of available sorcerer named Balaam, and he tries to hire him to put a curse on Israel.

Balak wants Balaam to curse them so they can't take possession of his land, the land of Moab.

Three times Balaam tries to curse Israel. He can't do it. He can't succeed. So, he develops another strategy. If he can't curse them, he decides he will corrupt them.

Balaam got a bunch of Moab's women to seduce Jewish men into intermarriage. Through the women they pulled those men into idolatrous, immoral life in Moab, into paganism. They went back into eating things sacrificed to idols, and back into committing idolatry, just the very things they had seen in Egypt. Such unions brought the men of Israel into blasphemous union with Satan.

The curse didn't work but the corruption did!

Blasphemous union with the world, with darkness, with false gods, with immorality, sin. It destroyed Israel's power and removed their protection. The plan was successful.

However, not to the degree that the king of Moab hoped because God, in Numbers 24, intervened, severely chastened Israel and the leaders, halting their slide.

Balaam was killed in a battle with Midian, Numbers 31. He had a short career.

## **What the Lord was saying to them?**

Lord is saying to them is that you have some people there who are acting like Balaam, and they are seducing you to go back into the very culture you have been delivered from, to participate in their idolatry and their immorality.

Some in Pergamum were falling to the seducing bells of the Satan's culture.

Apostle Peter warns about them as well.

**2 Peter 2:15**, *They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;*

## **What did it happen?**

Some in the Pergamum church were attending pagan feasts with debauchery, immorality, incest, homosexuality, bestiality, and then coming to church. Apparently, the church had not taken action to confront and correct it.

## **2. Holding to the Teaching of Nicolaitans.**

**V 15**, *“You have also some who in the same way laid hold of the teachings of the Nicolaitans.”*

They have already been mentioned they were around in those days.

## **What was their issue?**

It was the same as those following the error of Balaam.

Whatever it was, it was drawing people back into the world from which they had been rescued for the sake of their personal gain.

They were drawing them

- back into the culture,
- back into the idolatry,
- back into the forms of thinking and
- behaviour from which they had been delivered

Corruption by compromise with the world!

Christians participating in the sins of paganism.

Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria the early church Fathers wrote this about the Nicolaitans.

*“They live lives of unrestrained indulgence, abandoning themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence.”*

The church at Pergamum had people in the church living like pagans, and the church had tolerated this teaching and this compromise, corrupting the household of the Lord.

They weren't separated.

## Command:

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

Turn and go the other way.

Stop tolerating worldly compromise.

Stop tolerating an unequal yoke.

This issue is moral corruption from the surrounding pagan world: uncleanness, immorality, indulgence in the sins of the culture.

*“Repent”*

If we have people in our assembly who are coming to worship Christ and then go right back out and fall into the sins of the culture, we must confront them.

The church today must not fail to exclude unbelievers from the fellowship of the body of Christ.

We are always glad when unbelievers come and hear the message, but you can't participate with the people of God until you are a child of God.

The church must confront professing believers who are living sinful lives, who claim to have been delivered and redeemed out of the world but are literally living the way the world lives.

- ✓ They must be confronted.
- ✓ The church must do that.

If we don't do that then you must be ready to face the consequences.

**V16, "Repent, or else *I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.*"**

A church on the brink of judgment. Not only in danger of the culture around it, but in greater danger of the Lord above it.

- ❖ Of course, we want to reach out.
- ❖ Of course, we want to welcome unbelievers to hear the gospel and be redeemed.
- ❖ Of course, we want sinning believers to be given grace and forgiveness upon forgiveness upon forgiveness - 70 times 7.

But we don't tolerate that as if it's acceptable, and we don't live as close to the corruption of the world as we possibly can.

But we live in great danger.

Not only danger from the culture, but danger from the Lord.

If we don't deal with worldliness, He will.

Today's tolerant, non-confronting churches be warned. You face judgment from the Lord Himself.

## **Commitment:**

**V 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."*

That appears in all these letters.

*"To him who overcomes."*

## **Who is an overcomer?**

**1 John 5:4-5,** *For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

Jesus says that He gives us three things when we are overcomers.

*V17, 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.” ’*

## **1. I will give you hidden Manna**

*“I will give of the hidden manna.”*

### **Do you know what was manna?**

That honey bread that the Lord put in the wilderness day after day after day. He created it on the spot to feed His wandering people.

It is supernatural sustenance, supernatural food. It finds its culmination in Christ who is the Bread of Life. The promise is like the bread in the wilderness that fed Israel through their wilderness wandering. It was memorialized, by the way, in a jar that was then placed inside the ark of the covenant so the people wouldn't forget.

God will provide all your sustenance and provide it all through One who is Himself the Bread of Life, the Lord Jesus Christ. The promise guarantees that we will be blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ.

## 2. I will give you white stone.

**V17**, *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.” ’*

*“I will give you a white stone,”*

The best understanding of this is in the ancient world of athletics, victors were given a white stone.

They were given a white stone as a symbol of their victory. We would say today that when you are a victor of a great event, you receive a medal. That medal is engraved to indicate your triumph.

The Roman custom was to give white stones to a victor, and that white stone in the victor’s hand became his ticket to the great feast of victors. When the feast was given, he would come, and his entrance would be granted if he had a white stone.

More than that, this identifies you as an overcomer, a victor, more than a conqueror. It means you have complete access to all the lavish provision that God has.

### 3. A New name on the stone

**V17**, *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.” ’*

#### **What is that name?**

No one knows.

#### **Why?**

It's a new name identifying you.

The victor would have his name engraved on the stone, and that would be his access to all the regalia that belong to those who triumphed. The Lord is going to give you a new name.

**Philippians 2:9-11**, *Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

That is going to happen to us. When we go into glory as overcomers, we will have the white stone, we have triumphed in Christ.

We will have access to the marriage supper of the Lamb and all the joys of heaven.

We will have a new name, eternal, perfect identification and it's a name because each of us is distinct.

Each of us is a person in and of ourselves, who will be loved. That's hinted at when our Lord in verse 13 says, "Antipas, My witness." "Antipas, My faithful one who was killed among you." The Lord knows those that are His. By the way, that might be the name that He wrote down in the Lamb's Book of Life before the world began.

So, the Pergamum church faced a crisis.

The church, holding fast to Christ, holding fast to sound doctrine but among them were the worldly.

The church is told, "Repent. Remove the worldly compromise or expect a terrible reality of the Lord Himself declaring war on your church."

What a warning - the church is courting the world!

What a blessing to us to know that the Lord promises to those who trust in Christ, genuinely, that we will have all we need in Christ.

We will have a victor's stone and access to all eternal joys; and we will be known with a name that will be only ours.