

PERGAMOS



The city of Pergamum (Pergamos) was the center of the imperial cult; the name of the city means “Fortress”. The city dates from the time of nearby Troy 1200 B.C. Alexander the Great’s general Antigonus seized Pergamum for Alexander’s Kingdom. The city passed to Lysimachus, another general of Alexander’s who succeeded him after his death.

Pergamum became a city-state under the control of the Seleucid’s in 263 B.C. The city later changed alliances to Rome, and still later under Attalus II (159-138 B.C.) the city was willed to Rome. The city was made famous by its library of 200,000 scrolls and rivaled Alexandria’s. Pergamum popularized writing on goatskin sheets later known as “Parchment” a corruption of the name Pergamene. The city was known for its Altar of Zeus and its large theater at the top of the acropolis.

REV. 2: 12

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;”

This letter once again is addressed to the angel of the church in Pergamos. The angel means messenger, which also means the pastor of that church. John is instructed to write this letter to the pastor.

Sharp: Jesus when addressing this refers back to Rev. 1:16, to describe his sword used in judgment throughout the book of Revelation. The double- edged sword cuts both ways. Pergamos brought the threat of Christ’s wrath for their actions.

Two-edged sword: The sword is a *Rhomphaia*, a large rather long sword which came crashing down on its opponent. Jesus Christ was and is able to bring judgment on his church. God’s Word, the Bible is a two-edged sword.

Hebrews 4:12 says: ***“For the word of God [is] quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and [is] a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”***

You might ask, "Why does the sword have two edges?" The answer is that the Word of God has two functions.

a. The Instrument of Salvation:

The Word of God separates a man from his sin. The power of the Word of God cuts loose the man who is bound by the chains of sin and death. That is why Jesus said, **"... I came not to send peace, but a sword"** (Mt. 10:34). He came to cut a man off from his family and the sinful world that he lives in (Mt. 10:35). The function of one edge of the Word of God is to cut through sin, condemnation, and the judgment that is pending so a man can experience salvation in Christ.

b. The Instrument of Judgment

The other edge of the sharp two-edged sword is the edge that will fall in judgment on the unbelieving world. That edge will be used when Christ comes out of heaven on a white horse with a two-edged sword coming out of His mouth (Rev. 19:11, 15). At that time, he will use the edge that metes out judgement. One edge of the sword separates a man from his sin; the other edge separates him from God for all eternity. One is **salvation** and one is **judgment**. As Christ writes to the church at Pergamos, He purposefully says, **"I am the One with a sharp two-edged sword."**

Why does Christ refer to Himself that way?" Pergamos was starting to flirt with the world, so He says, "Remember, I cut you off from the world. I severed you from sin. I am coming in judgment upon sin. Why are you playing with the world again?" The correspondent is seen in terms of judgment and salvation. That introduction of Christ is pertinent to the church in Pergamos. The people needed to be reminded of their salvation. They also needed to be reminded that God would eventually judge the world. Since they had already been cut off from the world with one edge of the sword, they had no business playing around with the world when God would use the other edge to judge the world. So, Christ, as the correspondent, divides the believer from sin and the world. The believer has been set apart to God. There is no place in his life for compromise or indulging in anything that Satan propagates in the world.

REV 2:13

"I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth."

Your works:

Christ understood the opposition this church faced by being in close proximity to Satan's power. Jesus takes this into account with the Church of Pergamos. Christ acknowledges their location, but Smyrna, the persecuted was also faced with difficult decisions. The church of Smyrna thrived under persecution, and so did the persecuted church. The last Emperor to persecute Christians was Galerius, who died an excruciating death as his body rotted from within while he was alive. Days before his death, he recanted his orders of Christian persecution and then died.

Pergamos was an important religious center because four main temples were found there: the temples to Athena, Asclepius, Dionysus (better known as Bacchus), and Zeus. All four prominent temples were built on a large hill in the city of Pergamos. Pergamos was important because it was a center of worship of those four key (false) gods, and for being the capital city.

Today, on the ancient site of Pergamos, about fifteen miles inland from the Aegean Sea, there exists a little village called "Bergama." That is the Turkish version of the word Pergamos. And there is still a small Christian church in that city. When John wrote the letter to Pergamos in about A.D. 95, it had already been the capital of Asia Minor for three hundred years.

Dwelling in Satan's Territory

In the midst of Pergamos, which was completely adverse to all Christian testimony or anything that was godly, was situated the little church that Christ addressed this letter to. It is described in **Revelation 2:13**:

"I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is...."

The church was right in the middle of Satan's territory. Somebody says, "I thought Satan's throne was in hell." It is not. Satan is the god of this world (**2 Cor. 4:4**). His throne is here, not in hell. The whole world lies in the arms of the wicked one (**1 Jn. 5:19**). This is his world; his throne is on earth, and it was once centered in the city of Pergamos.

Unfortunately, some of the people in the church at Pergamos began to court the world. They became a victim of Satan. That is the smartest thing that Satan could have ever done. Persecution doesn't destroy the church; it makes it grow. The church is destroyed when its members compromise with the world. They suck the lifeblood out of the

church and eliminate any distinction that it had in the world. You only have so much affection. It can't be split between God and the world. John said, "**... If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him**" (1 Jn. 2:15).

You only have so much love to give, and it can't be split. Israel tried and fell, and Pergamos tried and fell into sinfulness. You cannot court the world and love Christ; the church cannot marry the world and survive. That is compromise, and God hates it. That was the problem of the church at Pergamos. It is a graphic illustration of the disaster that follows the Christian who marries the world.

For the most part, the church of today compromises with Satan. God hates compromise, because it is a mockery to Him when a Christian joins himself with Satan and the world. The church in Pergamos lived in the center of pagan, Satanic worship, and some of its members were part of it. That was the problem.

But at the same time, there is ...

THE COMMENDATION:

"I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is; and thou holdest fast My name, and thou hast not denied My faith, even in those days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth."

Despite being in the fortress of Satan's operation, the church did not deny their faith in Christ. The church during the time of Constantine was known that it held to the name of Christ. Satanic power was being manifested in the evil religious character of Pergamos. It put the church in a treacherous position. Of course, **Satan would want to destroy that church**. Wherever God sows good seed, Satan wants to sow bad seed. He is the absolute enemy of the church. The little body of believers at Pergamos were face to face with the Enemy in his own territory. It wasn't easy for them. They were fighting the lion in the lion's den. But they stood true. Christ says that they kept His name and didn't deny the faith. They hung on, even when Antipas (perhaps a member of their church) became a faithful martyr. Antipas was an early model of faithful saints, faithful to the Lord despite the condition of the church.

You say, "I would never deny His name!" I wonder if that's true. I have said that to myself, but sometimes when I have a perfect opportunity to tell people how much I love Christ, I clam up! In my heart and mind, I know what I've done: I've denied Jesus Christ the expression He wanted to do to and through me.

Antipas lost his life because he held on to the name of Jesus Christ. What a wonderful Christian he must have been!

REV 2:14

"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."

Doctrine of Balaam:

Unlike Ephesus, Pergamum was willing to indulge the ways of the world into their system. In **Numbers 22—25** Balaam was a prophet hired by the king of Moab, Balak, to find a way to destroy Israel. You say, "What is the doctrine of Balaam? What did Balaam teach Balak to do to make Israel stumble?" Balak didn't like Israel. He was the king of the Moabites (who were pagans), and he wanted to eliminate Israel because they were a threat to him.

Balaam was a prophet, but **he was a prophet for hire**. He would prophesy for whoever paid him the highest price. Balak said, "I'm going to give you a lot of sheep, and I want you to curse Israel." But Balaam said, "I could never curse Israel." Balak eventually bought him off. Three times Balaam tried to curse Israel, and each time God stopped him (**Num. 23:1--24:10**). On one occasion God even stopped him through his donkey (**Num. 22:22-31**). God stopped Balaam every time he tried to curse Israel.

Finally, Balaam said, "I've got to do something to Israel. If I cannot curse them, I'll corrupt them." So, he taught Balak to set up a stumbling block (**Rev. 2:14**). What was Balaam's plan? He said to Balak, "Send your Moabite women to intermarry with the Israelites" (**Num. 24:10--25:18**). The Moabites worshiped all kinds of idols. Their worship was nothing but an orgy. **Revelation 2:14** says that they ate things sacrificed to idols. They had gigantic feasts that would last many days. They would sacrifice an animal by first pulling a few hairs out of its forehead, throwing them in the fire, and eating the rest of the animal. Balaam knew that if he could get Israel to fellowship with godless people, they would be dragged into idolatry and fornication. **Balaam's plot was simple: Get the people of God to marry pagans**. Israel did, and it was a disaster. Tragedy began in Israel when they intermarried.

Christ's absolute condemnation of such a union in Israel or in Pergamos is clear testimony to the fact that Christians must, at all costs, remain pure and separated from the world. That is so clear. Paul reiterates the same point in **2 Corinthians 6:14-17**:

"¹⁴Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?¹⁵ And what communion hath light with darkness?¹⁶ And what concord has Christ with Belial [Satan]? Or what part

hath he that believeth with an [unbeliever]? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? ... ¹⁷Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing"

A disaster was occurring in the church of Pergamos: Believers were intermarrying with unbelievers, and the testimony of the church was being destroyed.

The church at Pergamos had allowed intermarriage with the world. Consequently, their testimony was destroyed. The doctrine of Balaam is the problem of intermarriage. It was a problem in the church at Pergamos, and it is still a problem in the church today as people court the world. All those things cause people to view Satan and Christ as the same. But God wants His church to be pure (Eph. 5:27).

REV 2:15

"So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolatanes, which thing I hate."

NICOLATANES

The Nicolatanes were teaching false doctrine which was causing confusion in the church.

1 Timothy 1:3-7: (NKJV) *"³As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, ⁴nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. ⁵Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, ⁶from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, ⁷desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm."*

REV 2:16

"Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

Repent from what?

The church at Pergamos needed to repent from involving themselves with the world. They needed to repent from compromise, from flirting with the world, and seeking to be entertained by what it offers. You say, "What if I don't?"

Do you know what happens to the believer or the church that courts the world? Unless there is repentance, Jesus Christ will fight against them with His Word. That is serious! That should show you what God thinks of compromise and marrying the world. Christ has called out a peculiar people separated to Him. When they begin to mingle with the world and confuse that separation, He says, **"If they don't repent, I'm going to fight against them with the sword in My mouth,"** (which is the Word.) (Rev. 2:16) God judges the believer who is married to the world.

Examine your life in all honesty. If you are courting the world in some way, you had better think twice about it or Christ will fight against you. You say, "Why would He fight against me?" Because He loves you and wants to drive you back to the place of purity in your life. Until you are there, you are no use to Him or the church. Many churches struggle today because Jesus Christ is fighting them. I thank God that He's keeping many people away from them.

Christ says, **"Repent, or else I will fight against you with the sword of My mouth."** If you are courting the world in some area of your life, repent unless you want Christ to struggle against you. And when you see someone in the church who doesn't know Jesus Christ, never give him a sense of security until he does. That's why we believe that the body of Christ is a closed fellowship to those who love Jesus Christ. But the beauty of that fellowship is that it is not exclusive: Anyone who wants to can love Jesus Christ. You don't have to do anything to gain salvation except fall in love with Jesus Christ and invite Him to be your Savior. But until you know Christ, you have no part in the fellowship.

REV 2:17

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

Jesus says, "If you don't know Me, then believe in Me, and move into the fellowship. There are two things I have promised for you who know Me and overcomes the world, sin, and Satan."

What are those two things? HIDDEN MANNA, AND A WHITE STONE.

HIDDEN MANNA

The overcomer gets to eat hidden manna. You say, "What's that?" In the Old Testament, the Israelites were fed with manna from heaven (Ex. 16:15). In the church we are fed with hidden manna. You say, "What is it?" It is the spiritual sustenance that Christ gives us

every moment of every day. The world doesn't know anything about it. Hidden manna is the refreshing food of fellowship with Jesus Christ. It is hidden from the eyes of the world, but we enjoy it. We have Jesus who is the bread of life, (John 6:22-40) (spec. 33)

A WHITE STONE

1 Peter 2:5 says that we are lively or living stones and are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. White designates purity. We are black in sin, and washed by the red blood of Jesus, but made as white as snow. ***“Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”*** (Isaiah 1:18) God always used stones to build an altar to offer sacrifices. We are lively stones, and living sacrifices, wholly acceptable unto the Lord.

The hidden manna takes care of us for today, and the white stone is our promise for the future. For the man who puts his faith in Christ, there is sustenance for today and the promise of an eternal heritage. The white stone with his name written on it symbolizes that eternal life.

When we come to Christ, we are “born again.” On the outside we look the same but spiritually we are born again. Each believer has a unique relationship with Christ, a special relationship. In heaven, we will have a special name only known to Christ and the believer.