

## Jesus Wants an Uncompromising Church

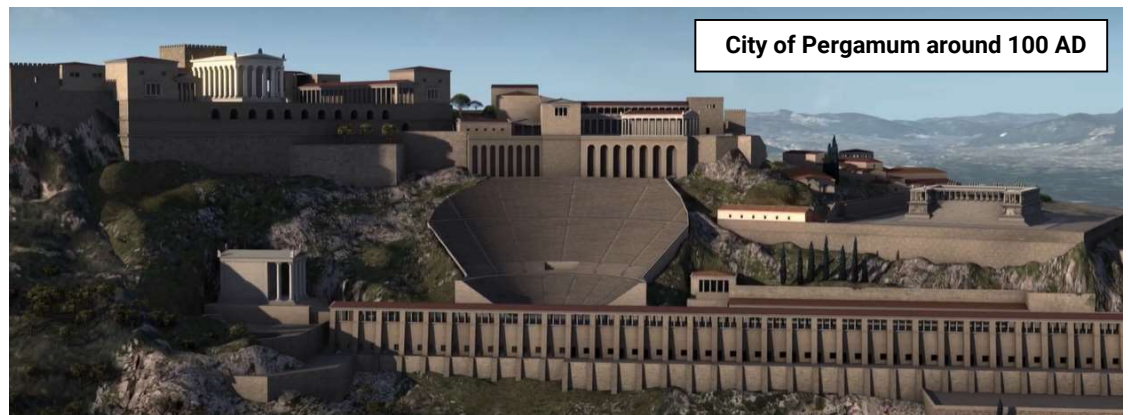
(Revelation 2:12-17)

### Churches so far:

The Church at Ephesus (The apostolic church, A.D. 30-100)

The Church at Smyrna (The persecuted church, A.D. 100-312)

**The Church at Pergamum**  
(The church that married the world, A.D. 300-500)



Revelation 2:12-17 (NKJV) – Bible passage [my explanatory notes]

<sup>12</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:

- “This sword of Christ conveys absolute authority, decisive discernment. ... Rome had given Pergamum the rare power to exercise capital punishment on its own. The symbol of this authority was the sword. Rome might wield the sword on earth, but the glorified Christ wielded a mightier sword from heaven. This is the sword the church should fear. This is the sword we should revere.<sup>1</sup>

<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 [or, witness – same as Rev. 1:5], who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

- “Satan’s throne” might refer to<sup>2</sup>:
  - 1) The idols, altars, shrines, and temples of Pergamum were tools of Satan. It is difficult to consider the city itself as Satan’s throne, for most of these churches (ch. 2-3) were centers of idolatry and paganism.
  - 2) The altar to Zeus on top of the mountain was a magnificent structure that dominated the city. The legs of the giants in the sculpture were serpent’s tails, and such a structure epitomized idolatry and paganism.



<sup>1</sup> Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Revelation, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 57.

<sup>2</sup> Grant Osborne, *Revelation: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2002), 230-231.

- 3) The center of the cult of Asclepius was Pergamum, and the symbol of Asclepius was a serpent, aligned with Satan in 12:9 and 20:2.
- 4) The imperial cult, the major problem behind Revelation as a whole and the core of Pergamum religion. It was emperor worship that most directly occasioned the persecutions under Domitian and Trajan, and Pergamum was the center of this cult for all of the provinces of Asia.

**14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam [see Numbers 22-25], who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.**

**15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.**

- “the doctrine of Balaam” – Committing physical adultery (immorality) and spiritual adultery (idolatry) while still active at the church and claiming devotion to Jesus Christ.
- “Nicolaitanism” literally means “conquer the people (or laymen)” – which could reference a hierarchical system between clergy and laymen.
- “the doctrine of the Nicolaitans” – “Abusing Christian liberty, the Nicolaitans also taught that Christians could participate in pagan sexual practices.”<sup>3</sup>

**16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them [not everyone, but those who were promoting the doctrine of Balaamism and Nicolaitanism] with the sword of My mouth.**

**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 [supernatural food provided by God in Exodus 16:31]. And I will give him a white stone [a black stone represented a “guilty” vote and a white stone represented an “innocent” vote], and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it. [it was common for non-Christian citizens to carry stones with the names of gods and goddesses engraved, so as to provide good luck.]” ’**

- **The “hidden manna”** either symbolizes spiritual food/nourishment, like the manna given to Israel in the wilderness, or symbolizes Christ Himself, Who referred to Himself as “the bread of life” (John 6:35) that provides eternal sustenance (John 6:37). **Jesus was saying, “I will provide for you, and I will sustain you.”**
- **The “white stone” options<sup>4</sup>: [I prefer #2]**
  - 1) Referring to the stones in the breastplate of the high priest with the names of the tribes written on them.
  - 2) **In ancient trials jurors would cast a white or black stone to vote for acquittal or guilt (Acts 26:10). Jesus was saying, “I have reviewed all the evidence, and I am casting a white stone in your favor.”**
  - 3) It was common for members of a guild or victors at the games to use stones as a ticket for admission to feasts, and also for free food or entrance to the games.
  - 4) Pagans often had magical amulets with secret “names” (usually one of the gods) on them to protect from evil and bring good luck. If this were the background, the name of God or Christ would be inscribed on the believer’s “stone.”
  - 5) When gladiators were freed from the arena, they were given stones (actually bone tablets) with their name and date of discharge inscribed.
  - 6) The giving of a stone with a new name inscribed on it was often done for initiates into the cult of Asklepios.
  - 7) There could be a contrast between the permanent nature of a “stone” as a writing surface (often used in antiquity) and the impermanence of parchment, so famed at Pergamum.
- **“a new name”** – Perhaps God will give each of us an additional name – like Simon/Peter or Jacob/Israel, or perhaps God will write His name on the stone – either way, it is a gift for the overcomer.



Asclepius, Greek god of healing and medicine. **Many healthcare symbols today feature the rod of Asclepius.**

<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, *Because the Time Is Near: John MacArthur Explains the Book of Revelation* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 68.

<sup>4</sup> Grant Osborne, *Revelation: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2002), 240-241.