

## Revelation 2:12-17

### Satan's Throne & Dwelling

#### Review:

**Outline:** The book of Revelation has 22 chapters and can be divided into two parts (**1:19**):  
Chapter 1-3—"things ... that are" (Epistles to the Seven Churches)  
Chapters 4-22—"things ... that are to take place after this" (Prophecy)

My premise is that the things "that are" are now things that *were*, and even the things that "are to take place" are now things have *already* taken place (orthodox preterism).

#### Performance Review: Pergamum

##### Pergamum:

- 1) **Patmos** was 40 miles out in the Aegean sea, southeast of the port city of **Ephesus**; **Smyrna** (also a port city) was 35 miles north up the coast from Ephesus; **Pergamum** was 40 miles north of Smyrna and 10 miles inland).
- 2) Was built on a 1,000' high, terraced, cone-shaped hill.<sup>1</sup> It looked like a fortress and its name means citadel.<sup>2</sup>
- 3) Was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia. As such, it was the official eastern center for the imperial cult of emperor worship, with temples to both Augustus and Trajan.<sup>3</sup> They worshipped the Caesar as a living god and referred to him as the Pontifex Maximus, the chief bridge between man and God. The Roman Catholic Church later appropriated this title and applied it to the Pope.<sup>4</sup>
- 4) On the uppermost terrace there was an altar to Zeus (which was moved *in toto* by German archaeologists to a museum in Berlin in the late 1800s).
- 5) Had a huge library that rivaled Alexandria's, stocked by Cleopatra.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it was where parchment or vellum was invented (using animal skins to write on rather than papyri).<sup>6</sup>  
**Example:** College diplomas used to be called "sheep skin" because they were printed on velum.

-----

\*\*\*\* **How did Jesus describe Himself in 2:12?** Of all the unusual imagery of the vision in Revelation **1:12-20**, to the church in Pergamum Jesus repeated that He had a sharp, two-edged sword protruding from His mouth. In some way, this had relevance to the Pergamum church in particular.

**What function did a sword serve in the first-century?** It primarily served to kill people. Every government has the God-given responsibility to punish evil doers:

---

<sup>1</sup> By way of comparison, Stone Mountain, Georgia, is around 1700' high.

<sup>2</sup> "Pergamum meaning", abarim-publications.com. Accessed December 10, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Mounce, *Revelation*, 95-96.

<sup>4</sup> J. Hampton Heathley, "5. The Message to Pergamum (Rev 2:12-17)", Bible.org. Accessed December 13, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> J. Hampton Heathley, "5. The Message to Pergamum (Rev 2:12-17)", Bible.org. Accessed December 13, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Barclay, *Revelation*, 107.

ESV **Romans 13:3-4** ... rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad ... if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

Since it was the capital of Asia, Pergamum was a governmental center. This is perhaps why Jesus presented Himself to the church there with a sword in His mouth: Jesus is the ultimate One with the authority to judge and execute.

-----

**\*\*\*\*The church at Pergamum was faithful in one area, but failed in another. What wins and what fails did they have (2:13-17)?** They had remained faithful during a time of persecution and did not deny Jesus' name (2:13), but were tolerating false teaching and immorality (2:14-15).

### 2:13

**Based on 2:13, what made it hard to be a Christian in Pergamum?** Both Satan's throne and dwelling were in Pergamum (to say that both Satan's throne and dwelling were there are synonymous ideas; there is no difference in meaning).

**Did Satan *really*, literally dwell in Pergamum (2:13)? What this is mailing address? Why?** If so, that would have meant he just vacationed in Jerusalem or Rome! And, that would make Pergamum hell on hearth! Pergamum would have been better named Purgatory!<sup>7</sup> Most probably this was just a figure of speech. The point is that Pergamum was a stronghold of Satanic activity.

**What do you think could have been happening in Pergamum (as opposed to the other six cities) to qualify it as the location of Satan's throne (2:13)?** A "throne" is associated with kings and ruling; throne is the seat of government. Pergamum was the regional Roman capital. The association of Satan with a regional Roman capital city suggests that the true power behind Rome was Satan. Writing arguably about the Roman Empire, John later recorded:

ESV **Revelation 13:1-2** ... I saw a beast rising out of the sea [the Roman Empire].... And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.

**Jesus commended them because they held fast His name (2:13). What does it mean to hold fast to Jesus' name?** The word fast has several meanings: speed, abstaining from food, and to be secure or tight (as in "fastener"). The next phrase explains what it means: they did not "deny my faith" (2:13). The footnoted alternate translation "your faith in me."

---

<sup>7</sup> Though similar, Hell is not the same as Purgatory.

**What did the Romans require that would have pressured the Christians to deny their faith in Jesus (2:13)?** One way might have been to engage in emperor worship. The Romans never intended to make emperor worship exclusive. A person could worship Caesar and along with any other gods. It was a pragmatic way to attempt to unify the empire; more a statement of political loyalty than an act of worship. However, citizens were required to say, “Caesar is Lord,” a statement that just happened to contract the Christian statement of faith that only “Jesus is Lord.” Thus, most Christians refused to participate in the imperial cult.

ESV **Matthew 10:28-33** ... do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.... So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

**Example:** To be involved with academia today in China, one has to be a member of the communist party. Recently, the party required all professors to fill out a form that included a question about their religious affiliation. It would not cause to problem to be a Buddhist or Taoist, but putting declaring ones' self to be a Christian will likely lead to a failure to advance and even termination. This caused a crisis of conscience for many believers: *Would it be denying Christ to leave the question blank?*

**How did Jesus describe Antipas (2:13)?** See 1:5. All we know about Antipas is recorded right here, but that is enough! Jesus said Antipas was killed and that he was “my faithful witness” (“witness” is from *martus*, basis for “martyr”). This is quite a commendation since the same thing about Jesus earlier:

ESV **Revelation 1:5** ... Jesus Christ the faithful witness ...

**Based the Satanic activity unique to Pergamum, what educated guess could be made about why Antipas was killed (2:13)?** His death likely had something to do with refusing to participate in emperor worship.<sup>8</sup> John later predicted this about the Roman Empire’s relationship to the church:

ESV **Revelation 13:7-10** ... it [the sea beast] was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them ... all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain. If anyone has an ear, let him hear: If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

**Martin Luther:** “And tho this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph thru us: The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, for lo his doom is sure, one little word shall fell him.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Since Jews were exempt from emperor worship, this also indicates that Antipas was a Gentile.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther, “A Might Fortress is Our God.”

## 2:14-15

**According to 2:14-15, what false teachers had influenced some within the church?** Some among them held to the teaching of **Balaam**, and others to the teaching of the **Nicolaitans**.

**Insight:** Having failed to cause the church to deny Jesus through persecution (as exemplified in Antipas), Satan then turned to tempting them with the sexual immorality associated with pagan feasts.

### Balaam

**Who were the historical figures Balaam and Balak (2:14)?** See *Numbers 22-25, 31:16*. Balak was a condemned Moabite king and Balaam worked for a company called Rent-A-Prophet: “Have Prophecy, Will Travel”). Balaam was a false prophet that Balak hired to curse Israel.

**Balaam was hired to curse the Israelites. but every time he tried to do so, God supernaturally caused him to bless them. When Balaam wasn’t able to curse them, what plan did he come up with a plan to cause God to curse (2:14)?** Sex sells; Balaam advised Balak to send out the young Moabite women to sexually seduce the Israelite men and turn their hearts to worship false gods. Their wicked plan was to cause the Israelites to eat food sacrificed to idols and engage in sexual immorality. These two activities are related. “Food sacrificed to idols” (2:14) refers not to food purchased in the market that came from the pagan temples, but to actually participating in feasts associated with pagan worship.<sup>10</sup>

ESV **Numbers 25:1** ... Israel ... began to whore with the daughters of Moab.

ESV **Numbers 31:16** Behold, these [Moab women], on Balaam's advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the LORD ...

- **“sexual immorality” (2:14):** From *porneuo* (as in “pornography”), it refers to any type of sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and woman.

**Application: Do you think Satan has changed tactics since then? No. Do you think people have changed since then? No.** We can learn about Satan’s ploys from this. We are not ignorant of his schemes (**2Co 2:12**). For example, Satan still tempts Christian singles by arranging for them to meet attractive members of the opposite sex, seemingly perfect in every way, quite interested in a relationship, but who are not Christian. Furthermore, Satan holds unbelievers in his orbit by offering them unrestrained sexual activity that they’d have to give up if they turn to Christ. I have witnessed to several men who said they thought the gospel was true, but would not accept Jesus because they were unwilling to give up their sexual adventures.

---

<sup>10</sup> Mounce, *Revelation*, 98.

## Nicolaitans

**The Ephesian church also had trouble with the Nicolaitans (2:6). What was the “teaching” of the Nicolaitans (2:15)?** All we know about them is that they were within the fellowship, claiming to be Christians, and yet practiced evil works. Their error was somehow different from that of Balaam. Perhaps their evil lay in participating in emperor worship so as to avoid persecution.

### 2:16

**What correction did Jesus offer in 2:16a?** Jesus called for the immoral and compromising among them to repent.

**Review: What does it mean to repent (2:16a)?** Repent is from *metanoeo* (μετανοέω) and literally means to change one’s thinking. It is a change of thinking that leads to a change of action.

**What should a church do if “some” within it practice sexual immorality?** They should follow the Matthew 18 restoration process, ultimately removing those in sin from the fellowship if they do not repent.

**Consequences:** A denominational leader from the Georgia Baptist Convention reported that 80% of pastors surveyed would leave the ministry if they had another way to make a living. This is likely because their churches never exercise church discipline and are filled with unregenerate people (goats rather than sheep), making a pastor’s ministry nearly impossible.

**According to 2:16b, what consequences would they suffer if they did not repent?** Jesus said he would come soon to wage war against them with the sword of His mouth. This is similar to a statement made later in Revelation:

ESV **Revelation 19:15** From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty

**Is the coming of Jesus here (2:16) the same as the second coming?** No; the coming of 2:16 was totally hinged on the failure of some within the Pergamum church to repent. It would have been a localized, metaphysical, judgment coming on those within that one church, not the actual second coming.

**Eschatology:** When the New Testament speaks of the “coming” of Jesus, do not automatically assume it refers to the second appearing of Jesus at the end of the church age. Often it refers to a localized judgment coming (as in **2:16**). One way to tell the difference is when a time statement is given. In this case, it was said it would be “soon.”

**If Jesus had come to wage war against some in that particular church (2:16), what would it have looked like?** Perhaps an indication of what would have happened can be seen in what Jesus said to the church in Thyatira:

ESV **Revelation 2:21-23a** I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed and I will strike her children dead.

Consider what happened in other churches:

ESV **1 Corinthians 11:30** ... anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

In **Acts 5:1ff**, Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for lying to the church.

ESV **1 John 5:16** If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.

ESV **1 Corinthians 5:5** ... deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

**Eschatology:** If Jesus coming here to wage war with the sword in His mouth was not the actual second coming and literal war, then perhaps the similar statement made in **Revelation 19:15** also did not refer to the actual second coming and literal war.

### So What?

**What, in 2:17, shows that this message is for a wider audience than just the church in Pergamum?** Whereas Jesus spoke directly to the church in Pergamum, He appealed to those who have an ear to hear what the *Spirit* said to the *churches* (plural).

**What did Jesus promise those who conquered faith-numbing sexual temptation (2:17)?** Jesus promised **1)** hidden manna, **2)** a white stone with a new secret name. There's a lot of hiding and secrecy promised here!

- 1) What is hidden manna (2:17)?** This was not explained. We know from the Old Testament that manna (Greek: *manna*) was a good thing, so whatever Jesus meant, it was a blessing!
- a)** God instructed the Israelites to keep some of the manna inside the ark of the covenant. In that sense, it was hidden.
  - b)** The Jews had a tradition that just before the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, Jeremiah rescued the manna that was kept there and hid it for safekeeping until the Messiah comes.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps this legend was the basis for what Jesus promised.
  - c)** Since part of the problem with Balaam was eating things sacrificed to idols (**2:14**), perhaps the play on ideas here is that Jesus promised his own manna feast for those who refused to take part in the pagan feasts: the wedding banquet of the Lamb. It is hidden to unbelievers because the **1)** don't know about it and **2)** wouldn't believe it even if they did hear about it.

ESV **Revelation 19:9** Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

---

<sup>1111</sup> Mounce, *Revelation*, 99.

d) Since literal manna gave the Israelites physical sustenance, perhaps the promise here is that Jesus would meet their needs in unexpected (hidden) ways.

**2) Why was getting a white rock with a secret name on it a good thing (2:17)?** This was not explained. There are over a dozen plausible explanations. Here are two:

a) It was common for people to carry a small white stone as sort of a good-luck charm (like a rabbit's foot or silver dollar). On that stone was a secret name, the name of a god, who was looked to for assistance. The name was secret because to know his name was to have access to his power. Jesus could have simply been making reference to this common superstition.<sup>12</sup>

b) If it is related to the manna, then perhaps the reference is to a white stone that was given to victorious athletes as a token to gain entry to the victory banquet.<sup>13</sup> Thus, white stones were associated with a good outcome. The significance is of having a secret name on the stone is perhaps to make it very personal.

- \*\*\*\* = Ask this question aloud before having someone read the text.
- These lessons are designed for 45 minutes and are based on the ESV.
- You can hear this lesson taught at [SermonAudio.com/NTRF](http://SermonAudio.com/NTRF).
- Stephen E. Atkerson NTRF.org Revised 12/13/2020

---

<sup>12</sup> Barclay, *Revelation*, 120.

<sup>13</sup> Dennis, *ESV Study*, 2466.