



# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

## Bible Study 08

Text: Rev. 2:12-17

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**2. What the text means.**

**Message to Pergamum**

### Greek NT

12 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν·

13 οἶδα ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ, καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπάς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῖν, ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ. 14 ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα ὅτι ἔχεις ἐκεῖ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαάμ, ὃς ἐδίδασκεν τῷ Βαλακ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι. 15 οὕτως ἔχεις καὶ σὺ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν [τῶν] Νικολαϊτῶν ὁμοίως. 16 μετανόησον οὖν· εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι ταχύ καὶ πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου.

17 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκὴν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων.

### La Biblia de las Américas

12 Y escribe al ángel de la iglesia en Pérgamo:

El que tiene la espada aguda de dos filos, dice esto:

13 'Yo sé dónde moras, donde está el trono de Satanás. Guardas fielmente mi nombre y no has negado mi fe, aun en los días de Antipas, mi testigo, mi siervo fiel, que fue muerto entre vosotros, donde mora Satanás. 14 Pero tengo unas pocas cosas contra ti, porque tienes ahí a los que mantienen la doctrina de Balaam, que enseñaba a Balac a poner tropiezo ante los hijos de Israel, a comer cosas sacrificadas a los ídolos y a cometer actos de inmoralidad. 15 Así tú también tienes algunos que de la misma manera mantienen la doctrina de los nicolaítas. 16 Por tanto, arrepíentete; si no, vendré a ti pronto y pelearé contra ellos con la espada de mi boca.

17 El que tiene oído, oiga lo que el Espíritu dice a las iglesias. Al vencedor le daré del maná escondido y le daré una piedrecita blanca, y grabado en la piedrecita un nombre nuevo, el cual nadie conoce sino aquel que lo recibe.'

### NRSV

12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword:

13 I know where you are living, where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives. 14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practice fornication. 15 So you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.

### NLT

12 Write this letter to the angel of the church in Pergamum.

This is the message from the one who has a sharp two-edged sword:

13 I know that you live in the city where that great throne of Satan is located, and yet you have remained loyal to me. And you refused to deny me even when Antipas, my faithful witness, was martyred among you by Satan's followers. 14 And yet I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you who are like Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel. He taught them to worship idols by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin. 15 In the same way, you have some Nicolaitans among you -- people who follow the same teaching and commit the same sins. 16 Repent, or I will come to you suddenly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Everyone who is victorious will eat of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven. And I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.

## INTRODUCTION

This third message of the Son of Man continues the exact same literary form as found in the previous two messages. But the thematic content is where the difference surfaces. To be sure, some of the themes in the first two messages resurface here, but even these have some different twists in them. The repeated themes simply underscore the universal message reserved for all seven churches.

The problem of general orthodoxy with some real holes in it is not limited to ancient Pergamum. Their problem was discontinuity between belief and practice. It is a hugely modern problem in contemporary church life as well. What Christ had to say to this ancient Christian community contains critically important lessons for us today.

### 1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Background issues loom important here for interpreting the passage. The literary aspects are relatively easy to identify, while some of the historical aspects are challenging to understand clearly.

#### Historical Aspects:

As always numerous historical issues impact how accurately we can understand the meaning of Christ's words to the church at Pergamum.

**External History.** The history of the hand copying of this text over the centuries following its composition are important to examine. This is essential for us to be certain of the correct wording of the original language biblical text.

As has been the case in the two previous messages in Revelation chapter two, the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed.) did not consider any of the variations in wording to be sufficiently significant so as to impact the translation of the passage.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, no variations



<sup>1</sup>One side note that is important. Although there will be a few instances show up in the text apparatus of the UBS Greek NT where significant variations surface, one of the reasons behind this minimal number is that a much smaller number of manuscripts containing much or any of Revelation are known to exist than is true for virtually all the remaining content of the New Testament. Often times the deterioration of a manuscript over time means that the beginning and ending sections completely disintegrate and are lost from the manuscript. This would especially be the case in a single scroll where Revelation would have been at the top surface of the scroll. In the codex (book style manuscript) format, Revelation coming on the bottom side was more exposed to elements of sun, water etc. and thus deteriorated faster. Since the beginning of most of the mss start with other documents outside the NT, the Gospel of Matthew does not suffer such a fate as does Revelation.

are listed in the text apparatus of this printed Greek text of the New Testament.

But in the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (UBS 27th rev. ed), the text apparatus lists sixteen places where variations of wording surface in the existing manuscripts containing this passage.<sup>2</sup> But careful examination of each of these instances reveals scribal efforts to update the style of the Greek, or in a few instances just careless copying mistakes.



Thus we can exegete the adopted reading of the

#### <sup>2</sup>Offenbarung 2,12

\* τω 2050 pc sy<sup>h</sup> (the article τῷ replaces τῆς in some mss)

#### Offenbarung 2,13

\* τα εργα σου και M sy<sup>h\*\*</sup> (The phrase τὰ ἔργα σου from 2:2 is added here after οἶδα)

| txt κ A C P 1854. 2050. 2053. 2329 pc latt sy<sup>ph</sup> co

\* σου κ\* (μου replaces σου in codes Sinaiticus)

\* κ M gig t vg<sup>ms</sup> sy<sup>h</sup>; Prim Bea (καὶ is omitted in some mss)

| txt A C 1854. 2050. 2053. 2329 pc ar vg sy<sup>ph</sup> co

\* αις 1006. 1841. 2351 M<sup>k</sup> sy<sup>h</sup> (a variety of different words are added after ἡμέραις in different mss)

| εν αις κ(\*) 1611. 1854. 2050 mA gig t

| μου 2329

| txt A C 2053 pc ar vg

\*<sup>1</sup> κ M latt sy<sup>ph</sup> (μου is omitted in some mss)

| txt A C 2050. 2053. 2351 pc sy<sup>h</sup>

\*<sup>2</sup> 2016 pc vg<sup>ms</sup> (ὄς is omitted in these mss)

#### Offenbarung 2,14

\* C 1611. 1854. 2053 pc ar vg<sup>ww</sup> sy<sup>h</sup> (bo); Prim (ὄτι is omitted in these mss)

\* -ξεν 1006. 1841. 2351 M<sup>k</sup> (ἐδίδασκεν is replaced with ἐδίδα ξεν in some mss)

\* εν τω Βαλααμ τον Βαλ. M<sup>A</sup> (τῷ Βαλάκ is replaced with ἐν τῷ Βαλάκ τὸν Βαλάκ)

| - κ\*

\* και 1006. 1841. 2351 M<sup>k</sup> vg<sup>ms</sup> sy<sup>h</sup> (καὶ is added before φαγεῖν)

#### Offenbarung 2,15

\* A C 1611. 1854 M<sup>k</sup> (τῶν is omitted in some mss)

| txt κ 1006. 1841. 2050. 2053. 2329. 2351 M<sup>A</sup>

\* ομ. (-1 pc) ο μισω M<sup>A</sup> (ὁμοίως is replaced with ὁμοίως ὁ μισῶ)

#### Offenbarung 2,16

\* κ 2053. 2329. 2351 M<sup>A</sup> latt sy<sup>h</sup> sa<sup>ms</sup> (οὖν is omitted in some mss)

#### Offenbarung 2,17

\* αυτ. φαγειν 1611. 1854. (2050). 2344. 2351 M<sup>A</sup> ar gig t sy<sup>h\*\*</sup> sa; Bea (αὐτῷ is replaced with αὐτῷ φαγεῖν)

| - κ pc vg<sup>cl</sup> sy<sup>ph</sup>

\* απο (εκ κ 2050 pc) τ. μ. κ 2050 M<sup>A</sup> (ἀπό or ἐκ is added before τοῦ μάννα)

| απο τ. ξυλου P

\* κ pc (δῶσω αὐτῷ is omitted)

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 635-36.]



conservatively it seems to have at least had about 120,000 residents. It had a long and rich history.<sup>4</sup> Its rise to prominence seems to have begun with Alexander the Great first as a major military center and subsequently as a political center.<sup>5</sup> Having functioned for centuries as a typical Greek city with local council rulership, the coming of the Romans created problems for the city. Gradually in the first Christian city Ephesus replaced Pergamum as the dominant city of the region, in part due to geography and likely also because earlier Pergamum had come out on the losing side of the war between the Romans and Mithridates of Pontus (89-84 BCE). Recovery began slowly with Augustus as the first Roman emperor, but it was the substantial growth of the temple of Asclepius that centered on medical training which spurred the city to become a major intellectual center for the region. But it took until well into the second century AD for the city to reach its highest point of prominence and influence. The Attalids, as the original ethnic group of the region were called, were the most loyal supporters of the Roman empire in the Hellenistic world.

The old city was situated some fourteen miles in-

<sup>4</sup>“One of the seven cities whose Christian community was addressed in the book of Revelation (1:11; 2:12). Also known by the form ‘Pergamon,’ this city had a long history. Pergamon (modern Bergama; 39°07’N; 27°11’E) emerged as the center of the most important kingdom in W Asia Minor during the early 3d century B.C. and remained one of the cultural and political centers of the region into the 4th century A.D.” [D. S. Potter, “Pergamum (Place)” In vol. 5, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 228-29.]

<sup>5</sup>“The earliest record of settlement at Pergamon comes in the course of Xenophon’s description of the Spartan campaigns of 399 (Hell. 3.1.6). He says that the city was one of several which had been given to the descendants of the Spartan king Demaratus, who had been driven from his throne in 490 and became a close adviser to the Persian king Xerxes. The city itself does not appear to have been a very important place at this point, and it is possible that the Persians discouraged extensive development on a site of such great natural strength. It was not until after Alexander the Great’s conquest of Asia (334–323 B.C.) that Pergamon began to emerge, first as a major military center, and then as a major political center. By the time of the battle of Courepedium, fought between Lysimachus and Seleucus in 281, the last of the diadochoi or ‘successors’ of Alexander, the acropolis had become one of the most important fortresses in western Asia Minor. It was here that Lysimachus had deposited a significant portion of his treasury under the care of the eunuch Philetaerus. In the confusion which had preceded Lysimachus’ defeat at Courepedium, Philetaerus had begun to assert his independence from the king (283) (Allen 1983: 11). The years after the battle were even more confused, because of the chaos in the Seleucid court after the murder of Seleucus I shortly after his victory, and because of the Celtic invasion of Asia Minor in 278/277. Philetaerus took advantage of these troubles to begin building up his own kingdom around Pergamon (283–263).” [D. S. Potter, “Pergamum (Place)” In vol. 5, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 229.]

text with full confidence that it reflects accurately the original wording of what was first written.

**Internal History.** Quite a few time and place markers are present in vv. 12-17, but most all of them relate better to exegetical concerns than to background issues. They will be addressed in the exegesis below.

The one place marker of background importance is the reference to the city of ἡ Πέργαμος (also in ancient Greek, τὸ Πέργαμον), spelled in English either as *Pergamus*, *Pergamon*, or *Pergamum*. Several helpful issues emerge here needing clarification.

A number of fascinating aspects about the city lie behind much of what is said to the church there.

Estimates<sup>3</sup> vary about the size of the city, but

<sup>3</sup>“The population of Roman Pergamon has been estimated at 200,000 (Magie, *Roman Rule* 1:585; Frank, *Economic Survey* 4:812–16). A different, and perhaps more realistic, estimate is provided by the second-century A.D. physician Galen, who put the population of Pergamon, including women and slaves, at 120,000 (*De cognoscendis* 9). In *De propriorum anim.* 9, Galen says that Pergamon had 40,000 citizens and equal numbers of women and slaves, i.e., ca. 22 percent to 25 percent of the total population. Based on this evidence, Duncan-Jones (*Economy*, 260–61 n. 4) claims that Pergamon in the second century A.D. had a free adult population of ca. 80,000 together with 40,000 slaves, suggesting a total population of about 180,000. Duncan-Jones assumes that the free adult male population is 28.6 percent of the free population (*Economy*, 264 n. 4).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 181.]



Model of the Acropolis in the Pergamon museum in Berlin

land from the Aegean Sea and on an unusually high hill some 1,300 feet above sea level. The plain of the Caicus river spread out at the base of the hill. The well fortified acropolis at the top of the hill was the center of the town which spread out over the hill and into the area below.

A later Roman historian named Eunapius of Sardis suggests that Christianity had been in the city since the first century but had not grown to become a dominating presence like in some of the other cities. The implication from his writings is that the influence of the temple of Asclepius, the god of healing, remained a powerful and dominating influence throughout this period of time.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>“The vigorous intellectual life of the city is eloquently reflected by inscriptions; remarks in Philostratus’ *Lives of the Philosophers*; in the works of Galen, the greatest doctor of antiquity, who was born in Pergamon in 129 and practiced there in his early years; and in the remarkable spiritual autobiography, *The Sacred Tales*, of the professional rhetorician or sophist, Aelius Aristides, who lived in the Asclepium for many years (for the intellectual life of this period, see Bowersock 1969; for Galen, see Bowersock 1969: 59–75; for the Asclepeium, see Habicht 1969: 6–18). Even though the city seems to have suffered in the course of the 3d century — as did the other cities of Asia Minor — the writings of the 4th-century historian and biographer Eunapius of Sardis provide further glimpses of life in the city which suggest that it retained its importance as an intellectual center into his own time. His evidence also suggests that, despite the presence of a Christian community in the city since the 1st century (Habicht 1969: 19), the city as a whole was very slow to adopt the new faith. One reason for this may have been the importance to the city of the cult of Asclepius, who was himself a god of healing, and the feeling among many pagans that the healing miracles which Asclepius was believed to have performed proved that he was a true protector of his people. It is therefore not surprising that it was at Pergamon that the future emperor Julian first encountered important teachers of the Neoplatonic school. This was a decisive point in the intellectual odyssey which ended in his apostasy from the Christian faith and his effort to restore the worship of the pagan gods during his brief reign (361–363). The continuing importance of the cult of Asclepius may also be illustrated by the fact that one of Julian’s closest advisers was the doctor Oribasius, who was a native of the city (Bowersock 1978: 28–29).” [D. S. Potter, “Pergamum (Place)” In vol. 5, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Dou-



Pergamon Altar

The religious life of Pergamum in the late first Christian century is at the heart of most of the issues treated in John’s words to the church there in vv. 12-17. From all available evidence the city possessed an unusually high number of temples to a wide variety of deities in the first century world. It was one of the chief centers of emperor worship in this region of the Roman empire. Perhaps beyond the temple of Asclepius<sup>7</sup> was the great altar probably dedicated to the worship of both Zeus and Athena, or just to Athena.<sup>8</sup> This huge altar and related items are now housed in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, Germany. Many are convinced that John’s reference to ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ, *Satan’s throne*, is an allusion to this altar. But we will explore this in greater detail in the exegesis section below. Clearly from the *narratio* section of v. 13, the Christian community in Pergamum faced substantial obstacles from the many other religious traditions with deep roots and large followings in the city.

### Literary Aspects:

Again the importance of the literary aspects cannot be stressed enough. At this point because of the repetitious nature of each of the messages, the genre issues are already set and merely repeat what preceded in the first two messages. The literary setting is simple: this is the third of seven messages. It is the Literary Structure where the changes from the previous messages show up, since each message is custom-

bleday, 1992), 230.]

<sup>7</sup>One should remember that the cult of Asclepius was widely worshiped across the Roman empire with numerous sacred locations. “The most famous temple of Asclepius was at Epidaurus in north-eastern Peloponnese. Another famous healing temple (or *asclepieion*) was located on the island of Kos, where Hippocrates, the legendary ‘father of medicine’, may have begun his career. Other asclepieia were situated in Trikala, Gortys (in Arcadia), and Pergamum in Asia.” [“Asclepius,” Wikipedia.org]

<sup>8</sup>“The structure is 35.64 meters wide and 33.4 meters deep; the front stairway alone is almost 20 meters wide. The base is decorated with a frieze in high relief showing the battle between the Giants and the Olympian gods known as the Gigantomachy. There is a second, smaller and less well-preserved high relief frieze on the inner court walls which surround the actual fire altar on the upper level of the structure at the top of the stairs. In a set of consecutive scenes, it depicts events from the life of Telephus, legendary founder of the city of Pergamon and son of the hero Heracles and Auge, one of Tegean king Aleus’s daughters.” [“Pergamon Altar,” wikipedia.org]

ized to the needs of the individual congregations.

**Genre:** Here we merely summarize the existing structures and refer you to study #6 on 2:1-7, which has the detailed background analysis of each of these subforms.

Eight clearly identifiable subgenres surface in each of the seven messages, many of them using identical wording repeated seven times. For those who know ancient Greek, this borders on the miraculous given the immense diversity of possible idea expression in Koine Greek (easily over a thousand times greater than with American English).

Each message begins with an **Adscriptio**, which only varies in wording with the naming of the city to which the message is addressed: Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν ----- ἐκκλησίας. Only the first message omits the Καὶ, **and**. The message is targeting the τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ...ἐκκλησίας, **to the angel of the church**. What becomes increasingly clearer with the study of each message is that this phrase really means, **To the angel which is the church**. Such a grammatical understanding was commonplace in ancient Greek with τῆς ...ἐκκλησίας in the Genitive of Apposition case function.

This introductory form is linked to the **command γράψον**, **write**. This Aorist imperative verb form is directed to John and is the only part of the message with him as the focus. It comes in the ancient Hebrew prophetic pattern of the prophets seeing a vision of God's will and the subsequent command to speak it to God's people. Uniquely, Jeremiah was also instructed by God to write this message down, which his writing secretary Baruch did for him. The actual writing then took place sometime after seeing the vision. Interestingly, the Hebrew concept of inspiration centered on the prophet seeing the vision but not on the writing down of what he saw.

The third subform is **the Τάδε λέγει formula** which is repeated exactly the same in all seven messages, and at exactly the same place in all seven messages. The formula comes out of the LXX formula for introducing the prophetic speech to the people in God's behalf, "**Thus says the Lord...**". Therefore the one speaking these words is actually God, and not just John.

**The subject of the verb λέγει** in the above formula is expressed differently in each letter. But to make it clear that God is speaking appropriate elements of the portrait of the risen Son of Man in chapter one are chosen as title designations of Christ as the speaker.

The heart of each message surfaces in the words anticipated by the demonstrative pronoun Τάδε. Here is where the customization to each congregation comes to the surface the greatest. This always contains two sections: **the narratio** and **the dispositio**.

The **Narratio section** is always introduced by the

verb οἶδα with a direct object specifying certain things about the church known by the risen Christ. This section highlights the complete knowledge that Christ has about both the past and the present situation that exists inside each congregation. Since these were real, functioning congregations in late first century Christianity, the situation in each church will not be exactly the same as that in any of the other six churches. Some of these do overlap but each description is unique to each church.

This section is followed by the **Dispositio section** which issues commands and commendations to each church based in the evaluation summarized in the preceding narratio. In three of the four letters a negative emphasis surfaces with the introductory ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ (ὀλίγα) ὅτι, **but i have a few things against you, because...** Mostly, this section highlights commendations and promised blessings.

The final two subforms bring the message to a close.

**The Hearing command** is repeated exactly the same way in all seven messages: Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, **The one having a ear must listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches**. Again this formula plays off the OT prophetic speech command for the people to **Hear the Word of the Lord**, as well as a common emphasis on many of Jesus' teaching in His earthly ministry. The point is to underscore the critical importance of paying close attention to what God has spoken in the message.

This command to listen is reinforced by the **Promise of Victory formula**. Two separate formulations of the present tense Greek participle are found in these seven messages: Τῷ νικῶντι and Ὁ νικῶν. Again the promised blessing defines the Μακάριος in the opening beatitude in 1:3 more specifically. Yet each of these 'blessings' in the seven messages define the one idea of eternal salvation in Heaven.

These eight subforms combined in these seven messages give to each message a clear tone of divine authority and together push the broad genre of the entire message strongly in the direction of an ancient Imperial Decree or Edict. These edicts were delivered to their destination in written form and then read orally to gathered assemblies of citizens in the theaters of the cities across the empire. John's point is that the Ruler of the kings of the earth (cf. 1:5) has spoken His edict to these congregations and they need to pay close attention to this message.

**Literary Setting:** The literary setting is very clear. This is the third message of seven messages sent out to all these churches. The listing of this message in the third place is primarily due to Pergamum being on one of the major trade routes which enabled



and  
 66 I will give to him a white stone  
 and  
 on the stone  
 67 (there is) written a new name  
 which no one knows  
 except the one receiving (it).

### Analysis of Rhetorical Structure:

Regarding the arrangement of ideas inside the passage, both the genre subforms and the Greek grammar structures determine how they are connected to one another. This is reflected in the above diagram.

The **Adscriptio** in statement 56 sets up the message with instructions to John.

The message itself (# 57-63) is introduced by the *Τάδε λέγει* formula in statement 57. This is followed by the content of the message first in the **narratio** (# 58) and then in the **dispositio** (#s 59-63) sections. The **narratio** (# 58) lists a series of complements given by Christ to the church against the backdrop of them living where Satan’s power and influence is unusually strong. But the **dispositio** (#s 60-63) issues stern demands for repentance because of the church allowing false teachers to operate who corrupted the message of the Gospel.

The conclusion of the message contains the **Hearing Command** (# 64) and the **Victory Promise** (#s. 65-67). The logic here is to admonish the readers to pay close attention to the message. This is re-enforced with the promise of eternal life expressed in terms uniquely appropriate to those living in Pergamum.

### Exegesis of the Text:

The exegesis of this passage will follow the internal structure of the text as analyzed above. Closely related items in the second and third headings below will be grouped together for clarity but treated individually as a sub section of the outline.

#### A. Command to write, v. 12a

Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψων.  
 And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

As we have noticed in the first two messages, John is instructed to write the message to the angel of the church at Pergamum. But the content of the message that follows directs these words to this ἀγγέλω, as though he were the church itself. The uniform use of the second person singular references in vv. 1b-16 dramatically highlight this in the Greek text,<sup>9</sup> although

<sup>9</sup>These forms include κατοικεῖς, κρατεῖς, ἡρνήσω, σοῦ, ἔχεις, ἔχεις καὶ σὺ, μετανόησον, σοί. Interestingly, one plural form ὑμῶν surfaces in reference to the martyrdom of Antipas in the city. But clearly this form refers to the church, as does this host of second person singular references in spite of going back to ἀγγέλω in verse 12. This is a further signal that ἀγγέλω and ἐκκλησίας are referring



The Acropolis at the top and the Theater on the side of the hill

in English translation this becomes obscure because of the ambiguity of English in not distinguishing between the singular and plural forms of the second person references. All the other modern western languages maintain this clear distinction, and thus the translation retains a clear expression at this point.

Thus, clearly the ‘angel’ and the ‘church’ are one and the same both here and in all the other six messages as well.

What do we know about the Christian movement at Pergamum? In truth, very little! Some possible insight from a non-Christian comes in the fourth-fifth century AD from Eunapius of Sardis, who wrote extensively about ancient Anatolia, although most of his writing centered on the Sophist movement in the ancient world. Eunapius claims that Christianity made very little inroads into the residents of the city. But he reflects a bitter hostility toward Christianity, and this may possibly have biased his depiction of their influence in Pergamum which he claims to have not been very significant over the four plus centuries of the existence of the church in the city.<sup>10</sup>

to the church itself, rather than two separate entities.

<sup>10</sup>Eunapius’ comments come in the midst of his treatment of the life of Emperor Julian (reigned 361-363 AD), the last pagan emperor before Constantine came to power in the 300s. Prior to his coming to power in 361, Julian had visited the city and was influenced by the very popular Neoplatonic school located there. Eunapius praises Julian’s reign as “one of sweetness and gold.” He along with most all the philosophers living at the time saw the beginning of the Christian domination of the empire as signaling the death of meaningful Roman and Greek culture. For more details

Pergamum is mentioned by name only twice inside the New Testament at Rev. 1:11 and 2:12. These references provide no details about the beginnings of the church there and only minimum information about the situation of the church at the end of the first Christian century. When Paul came to Troas, also in Mysia, on the second missionary journey his route was north of where Pergamum lay quite some distance to the south of Troas. Then when he came directly from Galatia / Phrygia to Ephesus on the third missionary his route was considerably south of Pergamum. Thus there is no indication that the apostle ever visited the city. It is pure speculation that during the lengthy ministry at Ephesus on the third missionary journey that the apostle traveled the 160 kilometers north from Ephesus to Pergamum in order to establish the church. Nothing in the church fathers suggests this, and clearly nothing inside the NT even hints at it. That Paul was later esteemed by Christians at Pergamum is clear, but nothing suggests this was due to him having established Christianity there.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently we know virtually nothing about the beginnings of the Christian community there. Evidently it came into being during the substantial growth period beginning with Paul's missionary activity at both Troas and Ephesus in the mid first century and continuing through the end of the first Christian century. By the end of the century, a Christian congregation existed there, and already had a martyr named Antipas. It never achieved the significance in later centuries that Ephesus and many of the other churches in the region gained.

## B. Situation of the church, vv. 12b-16

12b *Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν·*

13 *Ὁῖδα ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ, καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπᾶς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῖν, ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ. 14 ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα ὅτι ἔχεις ἐκεῖ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαάμ, ὃς ἐδίδασκεν τῷ Βαλάκ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ*

see "*The Emperor Julian: Conceptualizations of Ideal Leadership and Martial Manliness in the Histories of Ammianus and Eunapius*," at Academia.edu.

<sup>11</sup>Recorded martyrs [in the city] besides Antipas are Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonike under Decius (LTK, VIII, 273). A ruin called Red Basilica in the plain beneath the lower agora of the Pergamum Acropolis, excavated in 1934–38, may have been a temple built to Egyptian Serapis before 200 B.C. but transformed into a Byzantine church of St. Paul (Boulanger, p. 289). Hadrian visited Pergamum in A.D. 123 (PaulyWissowa, I/1, 505). Three temples to Roman emperors explain Pergamum's title of 'thrice temple-warden' (PaulyWissowa, XIX/1, 1235–63)." [*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 3:769.]

φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθута καὶ πορνεῦσαι. 15 οὕτως ἔχεις καὶ σὺ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν [τῶν] Νικολαίτων ὁμοίως. 16 μετανόησον οὖν· εἰ δὲ μὴ, ἔρχομαί σοι ταχὺ καὶ πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου.

12b These are the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword:

13 I know where you are living, where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives. 14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practice fornication. 15 So you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth.

The One speaking carries a double edged sword in His right hand. Now that should get your attention! Of course this is the second time that mentioning of such a sword shows up in Revelation; the first instance is in 1:16, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα ἐκπορευομένη, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword. In 2:12 no mention is made of it coming out of His mouth via ὁ ἔχων, the one having. But this is intended as is reflected at 2:16 in the same message: πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου, I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth. This strange picture of a sword sticking out of the mouth of Christ surfaces again in 19:15, 21, ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἐκπορεύεται ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῇ πατάξῃ τὰ ἔθνη, From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations (v. 15), and καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ ἵππου τῇ ἐξελεύσει ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, And the rest were killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth.

Two important points here: the nature of the sword, and the meaning of a sword sticking out of the mouth of a powerful person. Uniformly John uses ῥομφαία for sword in Rev. 1:16; 2:12; 6:8; 19:15, 21. This term (7x; 6 of the 7 times in Rev.) is in contrast to the more commonly used term μάχαιρα inside the NT (29x), which is also translated as sword. μάχαιρα is only used in Rev. 6:4; 13:10 and 13:14, and never refers to a sword that Christ has. This contrast seems to be intention by John since μάχαιρα defines a small sword referred to as less than 16 inches long in biblical archaeology. But ῥομφαία refers to a sword from two feet and longer in length. John's point in referring to the sword in Christ's mouth as a ῥομφαία rather than as a μάχαιρα is to emphasize that Christ has the real fighting weapon rather than a measly dagger in His mouth.<sup>12</sup> What people are

<sup>12</sup>τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν, 'Thus says the one with the sharp two-edged sword.' This



able to gain is only the μάχαιρα, which is rather useless in combat with one possessing a ρομφαία, something strongly emphasized in the chapter 19 references. And in Revelation only Christ possesses the ρομφαία.

But why in the world is this sword sticking out of Christ's mouth rather than being held by His right hand? In the background both in the Old Testament and in the Greco-Roman literature is the figurative meaning of a sword, either μάχαιρα or ρομφαία, sticking out of the mouth of a person suggesting the power -- usually destructive -- of words spoken by the individual. This meaning is strongly suggested in 19:15 by the purpose clause ἵνα ἐν αὐτῇ πατάξῃ τὰ ἔθνη, *so that with it the nations may be stuck down*. Christ merely by speaking has the power to strick down any and all who oppose Him.<sup>13</sup> Such words take on the power of a deadly military weapon in the hands of a well trained Roman soldier. Thus His words seem as though they are τὴν ρομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν, *a sharp two-edged sword*, that comes out of His mouth.

Thus readers beware. The Lord Christ is poised

repeats the mention of sword in 1:16, which is sharp and two-edged, and which also issues from the mouth of the exalted Christ (1:16; 2:16). The author has chosen to place the first motif ('sharp, two-edged') here and delays mentioning the second motif ('of my mouth') until 2:16. Thus the statement that the exalted Christ 'has' the sword in v 12 means not that he holds it in his hand but that it issues from his mouth (W. Michaelis, TDNT 6:667). The sword proceeding from the mouth of Christ is further mentioned in 19:15, 21. The term ρομφαία was normally used to refer to a large sword used both for cutting and piercing, while μάχαιρα was used for a short sword or a dagger (the somewhat arbitrary rule of thumb for archaeologists is that the latter is sixteen inches or shorter). The Hebrew term חרב *hereb* is used in the OT for both the two-edged short sword or dagger (Judg 3:16; LXX: μάχαιρα δίστομος) and the single-edged long sword (Josh 6:21; see A. M. Snodgrass, *Arms and Armour of the Greeks* [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1967] 97–98; see O. Kaiser, TDOT 5:155). The phrase 'sharp as a two-edged sword' occurs in Prov 5:4, and the two-edged sword is also mentioned in Ps 146:6; Sir 21:3. This is similar to the proverb found in Ahiqar 2.18 (tr. Charlesworth, OTP 2:500): 'A king's word is gentle, but keener and more cutting than a double-edged dagger.' Reason, effective speech, or God's word is often compared with a sword or dagger (Pss 52:2; 57:4; Wis 18:15–16; Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12; the term μάχαιρα is used in the last two references). In Isa 49:2, in the context of the second Servant Song, the speaker says 'He [God] made my mouth like a sharp sword.'" [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 181–82.]

<sup>13</sup>"To the Roman the sword was the symbol of the highest authority; cf. the phrase *ius gladii* given to an officer, such as the proconsul of the province who wielded power over life and death. Here, therefore, we have the Christ depicted as a warrior king in language derived from Isa 11:4, 49:2; cf. 2 Thess 2:8. The implication is that the power of life and death belongs to the Messiah, not the emperor." [J. Massyngberde Ford, vol. 38, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 398.]

to speak such words. Those with any intelligence at all will pay close attention to what He is about to say. Although not mentioned directly here, John has clearly indicated already that when the Son of Man speaks it is not in a quiet, soft voice. Instead, "his voice was like the sound of many waters," ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν (1:15).

The *narratio* in vv. 13–15 is introduced by the standard οἶδα, *I know*.<sup>14</sup> Two direct objects define what Christ knows about the church at Pergamum. First, ποῦ κατοικεῖς, *where you are living*. The precise meaning of this is then defined by the appositional ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ, *where Satan's throne is*. Second, the next direct object is actually a doublet expression in antithetical parallel form: κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου, *that you are holding fast to my name and have not denied faith in Me*. This somewhat complex system of direct objects to the verb οἶδα is intended as a huge compliment to the church at Pergamum. In a place where it was more difficult than normal to be a Christian these folks were maintaining their Christian faith commitment exceptionally well. This compliment is enhanced yet further by the example of Antipas, a member of the church there, who had earlier suffered martyrdom as a believer in the city. Thus the church was gaining inspiration from the example of Antipas in maintaining its unwavering commitment to Christ.

Let's take a closer look at each of these direct objects in order to understand more clearly how Christ complimented the church.

Christ refers to Pergamum as ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ, *Satan's throne*. At Smyrna He had indicated that the Jewish synagogue in the city belonged to Satan rather than God, συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανᾶ (1:9). But Satan's throne was located in Pergamum.<sup>15</sup> Many di-

<sup>14</sup>"The opening sentence (all of v. 13) is one of the more convoluted in the entire book, and has rightly been broken up in the NIV into something more manageable in English." [Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 34.]

<sup>15</sup>"Attalus III (138–133) at his death bequeathed his kingdom to Rome, and it became the Roman province of Asia. Pergamum's influence waned, however, after it joined Mithridates VI of Pontus in his war against Rome in 89–84 B.C. and executed all its Roman citizens. After Cornelius Sulla's defeat of the coalition, Pergamum went into nearly a century of decline, and Ephesus replaced it as the central city of the region until the reign of Augustus, when Pergamum regained its status.

"Its regaining of status was made possible primarily by the architectural innovations of Eumenes II (197–159), who built up the acropolis by adding a circuit wall, the temple of Athena, a great altar to Zeus, and a library that held two hundred thousand volumes. Along with Athens and Alexandria it became a major intellectual center. Eumenes II was directly responsible for popularizing writing sheets made from animal skins that became known as περγαμηνή (*pergamēnē*), known today as 'parchment' (tradition

verse interpretations have arisen as to the meaning of Satan's throne in Pergamum.<sup>16</sup> The best clue probably

says it was invented there, but that has been disproven). Therefore, by the first century A.D. Pergamum had become not only an important political center but a major intellectual and religious center as well.

"The city also became the leading religious center of Asia. Temples, altars, and shrines were dedicated to Zeus (king of the gods and known there as 'savior-god' from the primary titles taken by the Attalid kings), Athena (goddess of victory and patron of the city), Dionysus (patron god of the dynasty, symbolized by a bull), and Asklepios (god of healing, symbolized by a serpent). A huge area of the city and a temple were dedicated to Asklepios and the healing arts. As a result Pergamum became a medical center as well as the Lourdes of its day. The great altar to Zeus, forty feet high, depicting the victory of Attalus I over the Galatians and with a frieze around the base depicting the victory of the Hellenistic gods over the giants of the earth (civilization over paganism), stood on a high terrace at the top of the mountain. In addition, Pergamum was the center of the imperial cult in Asia. It was the first city to be allowed a temple to a living ruler when in a.d. 29 Augustus allowed a temple to be erected to him. There was a great deal of precedent for this. Attalus I called himself 'savior,' and Eumenes II labeled himself 'savior' and 'god.' A temple with royal priests and priestesses was erected near the palace, and Pergamum three times was named *neōkoros* (temple sweeper or warden of the imperial worship). This honor more than anything else made it the leading city in the province."<sup>17</sup>

[Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 138-39.]

<sup>16</sup>"There are a number of possibilities that have been suggested for identifying the 'throne of Satan,' some very specific and others very general: **(1) The temple of Augustus and Roma** (Zahn, 1:249; H. Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1961] 29; Hemer, *Letters*, 87), also known as the 'Sebastion.' This temple was built, perhaps at the foot of the acropolis of Pergamon, by permission of Augustus in 29 B.C. (its site has never been located). It was the first imperial temple in the Roman province of Asia and was one of the more important centers of the imperial cult (Mellor, *ΘΕΑ ΠΙΩΜΗ*, 140-41; J. C. Fayer, *Il culto della dea Roma: Origine e diffusione nell'Impero* [Trimestre Pescara, 1976] 109-11). In the second century A.D., Telephus of Pergamon wrote a two-volume book about this sanctuary, now lost (FrGrHist 505 T 1). This view coheres well with the view expressed in T. Job 3:5b; 4:4c, where a pagan temple is called ὁ τόπος τοῦ Σατανᾶ, 'the place of Satan.'

**(2) The Great Altar of Zeus Soter** (Deissmann, *Light*, 280 n. 2; Lohmeyer, 25; Rohde, *Pergamon*, 60-62; cf. L. L. Thompson, *Revelation*, 173). This elaborate columned structure was constructed during the reign of Eumenes II (197-59 B.C.) to commemorate a Pergamene victory of the Gauls in 190 B.C. It was decorated with elaborate bas-reliefs depicting the Gigantomachy (battle between the Olympian gods and the giants) and, like the Temple of Augustus and Roma, was located on the acropolis (Pausanias 5.13.8). Reportedly, this acropolis could be seen from all sides at a great distance (Aristides Or 23.13). Further, the equation altar = throne is an ancient one.

**(3) The judge's bench or tribunal** (βῆμα) where the proconsul sat to judge could be referred to here as the throne of Satan. The term θρόνος is occasionally used for a judges bench (Plutarch

arises from a later reference to Satan's throne in 13:2, where he, the old Dragon (cf. 12:9), gives his throne to the Beast from the Sea. Here against the history of

*Praec. ger. reipub.* 807b). The Roman proconsul resided in Pergamon, and it was to Pergamon that Christians in the surrounding area were brought after being denounced by informers even at a later date (*Mart. Carpus* 1-23). The Province of Asia was divided into first nine, then eleven, regions; in the main city of each area (one of which was Pergamon), the conventus juridicus, 'judicial assembly,' was convened by the proconsul or the legates and a court of provincial judges called the centumviri. In a trial, the first stage involved a hearing *in iure*, i.e., before the jurisdictional magistrate (the *praetor*), while the second stage of the trial was the *iudicium centumvirale*, i.e., an appearance before a court selected from the *centumviri* (Philostratus *Vitae. soph.* 1.22; Berger, *Roman Law*, 386, 521).

**(4) The temple of Asklepios** (Bousset [1906] 211; Swete, 34; Zahn, 253-63; Hadorn, 48; Schmitz, TDNT 3:166; Kraft, 64). Pergamon was one of the major centers for the cult of Asklepios (Lucian *Icar.* 24; Pausanias 2.26.8; Polybius 32.15.1; Galen *De anat. admin.* 1.2; Aristides *Or* 42.4; Statius *Silvae* 3.4.21-25; Philostratus *Vita. Apoll.* 4.34), though Epidaurus (on the eastern part of the Peloponnesus) remained the primary center. The cult was founded in Pergamon by Archias, who purportedly brought it from Epidaurus (Pausanias 2.26.8; Aristides *Or* 39.5; E.J. Edelstein and L. Edelstein, *Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1945] 2:249). This temple was located about one mile from the acropolis and included a number of temples, including a large temple of Asklepios and three smaller ones for Asklepios, Hygeia, and Apollo, a theater that could accommodate ca. 3,500. Aristides called Pergamon 'the hearth of Asklepios' (*Or* 23.15). The temple of Asklepios was dedicated to Asklepios Soter ('savior') and his mythical daughter Hygieia (Aristides *Or* 23.15; 39.6); later he was called Zeus Asklepios. A new temple of Zeus Asklepios was built as part of the Asklepieion by L. Cuspius Pactumenius Rufinus in A.D. 142 (Aristides *Or* 42.6; Galen *De anat. admin.* 1.2; see Behr, Aelius Aristides, 27-28). Asklepios was linked in special ways with the symbol of the serpent, which Christians associated with Satan (Rev 12:9, 14, 15; 20:2; 1 Cor 11:3).

**(5) Pergamon as a center of Christian persecution**, exemplified by the execution of Antipas (2:13b). Eichhorn (1:93) construes 'the throne of Satan' as *Satanae imperium*, 'the dominion of Satan,' which caused the oppression of Christians in Pergamon.

**(6) Pergamon as a major center of the imperial cult** (Bousset, [1906] 211-12; Charles, 1:61; Kraft, 63-64; Hemer, *Letters*, 82-87). While Pergamon did function as one among many important centers for the imperial cult, there is no explicit evidence in 2:12-17 (or in Rev 2-3) to suggest that the imperial cult was a major problem for the Christians of Asia or for the author of the final edition of Revelation.

**(7) Pergamon as an important center for Greco-Roman religion generally** (Andreas *Comm. in Apoc.* 2.13 [Schmid, *Studien* 1/1, 29], describes the city as *κατείδωλος*, 'full of idols'; Ramsay, *Letters*, 291-98; Roloff, 54; Metzger, *Code*, 34-35).

**(8) The shape of hill on which the city was built.** Wood (ExpTim 73 [1961-62] 264) has suggested that this is an allusion to the shape of the major hill within the city, particularly when approached from the south."

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 182-83.]

the late first century stands a clear reference to the imperial cult that worshiped the emperor as a god. This corresponds easily with the fact that Pergamum was the first city in that region to adopt the worship of the emperor and remained its most vigorous advocate for several centuries. Add to this emperor Domitian's revival and expansion of emperor worship during his reign of the late 80s and 90s, and the answer to what Satan's throne in Pergamum means is narrowed down somewhat. The alternatives move between literally identifying it with one of the temples, perhaps the Temple of Augusta and Roma, or figuratively identifying it with the opposition of Rome to Christians living in the city. The subsequent references to either Satan's throne (13:2) or the throne of the Beast (16:10) clearly refer to a figurative meaning of the idea of throne as a symbol of their power and dominance. This would tend to favor the figurative understanding here in 2:13. But one may not need to push a sharp distinction between the literal and figurative meanings. The emperor cult emphasis in the city coupled with the unusually large number of other temples to pagan deities (unlike what Paul encountered in Athens where he mostly saw numerous statues to many different pagan deities) may well have been bundled up by John into this graphic image of ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ. Pergamum was a city where the power of Satan reigned supremely. Living there as a believer in Christ would have been unusually challenging.

Thus Christ's compliments in the second direct object pair takes on even more significance. These two verbs, κρατεῖς and οὐκ ἠρνῆσω, stand in contrast to each other in a complementary relationship as a doubled emphasis on faithfulness to Christ.<sup>17</sup> The first positive line, κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου, literally means "you have a tight grip on my name." Remembering the Hebrew significance attached to names,<sup>18</sup> to hold fast to My name signifies that these believers remained absolutely loyal to Christ Himself although they were living where Satan's throne was located.

The converse of holding fast would be to deny. The verb ἀρνέομαι means simply to renounce loyalty to someone or something, and thus stands an antonym

<sup>17</sup>In the background stands the very common Hebrew antithetical parallelism structure which served as one of the several ways in both ancient Hebrew and Greek to heighten emphasis on one central point, usually the one set forth in the first strophe of the doublet. The conceptualization is simply "by doing this and then not doing its opposite you really did this."

<sup>18</sup>One's name equals himself. This is much more than the modern concept that a name merely references a person by providing a point of identification. This Hebrew perspective lays behind the 'name changing' that sometimes took place in the Old Testament. Some life changing event changed the essential character of the individual. This triggers a name change intended to reflect the impact of this event on the individual who is now a different person.

to κρατέω in the first strophe. The negating expression οὐκ ἠρνῆσω, you did not deny, adds heightened emphasis to the first line of holding fast. The two direct objects, τὸ ὄνομά μου, my name, and τὴν πίστιν μου, faith in me, further complement one another. To hold fast Christ's name was to be loyal to Him. To refuse to renounce faith commitment to Christ says the same thing from the opposite perspective.<sup>19</sup>

Then as a further affirmation Antipas<sup>20</sup> is mentioned as a possible additional direct object expression.<sup>21</sup> Even earlier in the church's history they did not denounce faith in Christ although one of their members, Antipas, -- perhaps a leader<sup>22</sup> -- was executed in

<sup>19</sup>"You hold fast my name and you did not deny my faith: this is one compliment, stated first positively and then negatively. To 'hold (fast) the name (of)' means to be true to, to be faithful and loyal to the person named. For name see 2:3. The statement you did not deny my faith means 'you did not give up your faith in me,' 'you did not stop believing in me,' or 'you have always been loyal to me.' The genitive phrase my faith is objective: 'faith in me,' not 'the faith I have' (see the parallel statement in 3:8, "you ... have not denied my name")." [Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 52.]

<sup>20</sup>Ἀντιπᾶς is often listed as the nominative case form, which it is. But Ἀντιπᾶς is also an indeclinable noun in ancient Greek meaning that it stays in the same spelling through all of the case expressions. Thus it can be understood legitimately in three possible ways: 1) οἶδα... Ἀντιπᾶς, I know Antipas, accusative of direct object; 2) οἶδα... Ἀντιπᾶς... οὐκ ἠρνῆσατο, I know that Antipas did not deny, subject nominative; or 3) ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπᾶς, in the days of Antipas, genitive of reference. The third option is taken most often by modern Bible translators. This carries with it the implicit full expression: and I know that you did not deny faith in me in the days of Antipas.

The noun phrase ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, "my faithful witness," is a nominative of apposition modifying "Antipas," which is an indeclinable noun but syntactically must be in the genitive case (for other examples see 1:5; 20:2). The name "Antipas" is anarthrous because names followed by nominatives of apposition are regularly anarthrous in Revelation (Mussies, Morphology, 191).

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 184.]

An alternative understanding of οὐκ ἠρνῆσω τὴν πίστιν μου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπᾶς is suggested by the Aorist tense of the verb and a special function of καὶ. The resulting translation would move along these lines: "and you have never denied faith in me even in the days of Antipas...". The addition of καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπᾶς... provides an earlier reference point of potential denial under severe pressure due to the execution of Antipas. Not even then nor since has there been a denial of faith in me.

<sup>21</sup>The syntax of the Greek sentence seems really complex at this point and moves in directions that seem hugely strange from a modern language perspective. But in terms of ancient Greek sentence structure patterns (= syntax) the expression is not unusual or overly complex. The modern complexity is derived primarily as a translation issue, and not a syntactical Greek grammar issue.

<sup>22</sup>"It has been suggested, due to the term 'my faithful witness,' that Antipas may have been pastor of the Christian congregation at Pergamum. This is interesting but uncertain." [Ray Summers,

persecution.

The spelling Ἀντιπᾶς is actually a short form of Ἀντίπατρος and thus also shows up in the ancient literature as Ἀντίπα as well.<sup>23</sup> Although consistently copied in the Greek manuscripts as Ἀντιπᾶς, many of the early versions clearly had trouble with this spelling in large part because it did not follow the more common short spelling of Ἀντίπατρος, and Ἀντιπᾶς seemed to be in the wrong case form which would have been Ἀντίπα for the genitive case demanded by the context.<sup>24</sup>

One of the implications from this uncertainty about the spelling of Ἀντιπᾶς has to do with whether the name as an indeclinable proper name signals a Semitic, i.e., Jewish name, or not. While the Greek of both the LXX and the NT dominantly brings over pure Hebrew proper names as undeclined, the reality is that sometimes in secular Greek proper names clearly Greek in designation did the same thing. Consequently, one cannot

*Worthy Is the Lamb: An Interpretation of Revelation.* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1951), 115.]

<sup>23</sup>Ἀντιπᾶς, ᾶ, ὁ (Avtei-Tdf., Avti-other edd.; declinable like Σατανᾶς, cp. gen. σατανᾶ Ac 26:18 and Rv 2:13, and for the form Ἀντίπα s. W-H., Introd: 'Notes on Select Readings' 137f [on Rv 2:13].—Sb 4206, 65; 255 [I B.C.]; RCharles, ICC Rv I 62 declared it like Κλέοπας for Κλεόπατρος short for Ἀντίπατρος [cp. Jos., Ant. 14, 10; on hypocoristic names in-ᾶ in Attic ins s. Threatte II, 71–75], found IPergamon 524, 2 et al.; but the textual problem is far more complex than indicated in N. app.: s. ἀντιλέγω, ἀντεῖπον, and Borger below) Antipas martyr (s. μάρτυς 3) in Pergamum Rv 2:13 (unless Ἀντιπᾶς is understood as indeclinable [s. GMussies, *The Morphology of Koine Greek* '71, 94; idem, Antipas: NovT 7, '64, 242ff; but s. above], the syntax in N. must be considered barbarous).—WSchulze, Kl. Schr.2 '66, 67; 275 n. 1; RBorger, TRu 52, '87, 45–47.—M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 90.]

<sup>24</sup>“Since the name Ἀντιπᾶς (nom.) should be in the gen. case (Ἀντιπᾶ, like σατανᾶ in v 13a), Lachmann conjectured that Ἀντιπᾶ must have been the original reading, though unsupported in the MS tradition. Yet Mussies (NovT 7 [1964–65] 242–44) has provided several examples in which proper names are treated as indeclinable on analogy with Semitic names not adapted to Gk. paradigms: CIJ 944: Παρηγορῆς υἱὸς Ἀνανίας [instead of Ἀνανίου], ‘Paregores son of Ananias’ (see also CIJ 1007, 1085, 1086). R. Borger (TRu 52 [1987] 45–47) has proposed an ingenious solution to the problem based on the itacized variant ἀντεῖπας (κ<sup>c</sup> A together with nearly thirty minuscules; see Hoskier, Text 2:68; several similar variants are attested by a very small number of minuscules), which is a second person sing. aor. verb from ἀντιλέγειν, ‘to speak against,’ meaning ‘you [sing.] spoke against.’ Tischendorf (*NT Graece* 2:915) printed the name Ἀντεῖπας, observing that the Coptic and Syriac versions had mistakenly read Ἀντεῖπας as a verb from ἀντιλέγειν (*NT Graece* 2:916). Borger (45–47) has assembled the evidence from the Philoxenian and Harclean Syriac versions, which reflect this way of construing the text.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 178.]

conclude with confidence that Antipas was a Jewish Christian, which has often been done down through the centuries.

The referencing of Antipas<sup>25</sup> only here inside the New Testament has occasioned all kinds of speculation about his identity and circumstance. Two modifying phrases here provide the only known details about him. *First*, he was ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, *my faithful witness*. Perhaps most importantly this expression echoes Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, *from Jesus Christ the faithful witness* in 1:5. No higher compliment could be offered about Antipas than for this identical praise to be spoken about Christ Himself. Antipas had clearly recognized the value in the earlier divine command γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς, *be faithful unto death, and I will personally give you the crown, which is life* (2:10).

One of the side issues here concerns the translation of ὁ μάρτυς. Should it be translated ‘witness’ or ‘martyr’? The Greek background of the word group from which this noun comes sees the idea of ‘witness’ as foundational. But a μάρτυς is one who has given his witness through death.<sup>26</sup> A few commentators see

<sup>25</sup>“The name Antipas is a diminutive form of the common Greek name Antipatros (see Reynolds-Tannenbaum, *Godfearers*, 97–98; Petzl, *Smyrna* 2/2:353–54). The shortened form is not widely attested (it is used of an Idumean and his son in Jos., *Ant.* 14.1.3–4, and of a son of Herod the Great by Malthace in Jos., *Ant.* 17.1.3 (see M. Fränkel, ed., *Römische Zeit*, vol. 2 of *Altortümer von Pergamon* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1895] 524, line 2). Antipatros was a Greek name without any Hebrew equivalent. It was popular in Greece and Macedonia in Hellenistic and Roman times (CPJ 1:29; Petzl, *Smyrna* 2/2:102, 429.6) and is used of five different Jewish men in the Jewish papyri: CPJ 1:28.20; 29.10; 125.2; 2:201.1–2 (the same person is mentioned again in 207.1–2); 3:407.3. There is not a single occurrence of the diminutive form of the name Antipas in documentary evidence from the Aegean islands, Cyprus and Cyrenaica, and the full form of the name Antipatros occurs 168 times in those regions in inscriptions and other evidence (Fraser-Matthews, *Names* 1:47).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 184.]

<sup>26</sup>“The verb μαρτυρεῖν used in the sense of ‘to die as a martyr’ and the noun μαρτυρία in the sense of ‘martyrdom’ first occurs in *Mart. Pol.* 1:1, while the term μάρτυς meaning ‘martyr’ is first found in *Mart. Pol.* 14:2 (Polycarp died ca. A.D. 155/56, though the exact date is disputed); see TWNT 4:505. According to Trites (NovT 15 [1973] 73–80), there was a five-stage process whereby μάρτυς was transformed from ‘witness’ to ‘witness through death,’ i.e., ‘martyr’: (1) first, it has the original forensic sense of witness in a court of law; (2) then, it is applied to someone who testified in faith in court and is killed as a consequence; (3) death comes to be regarded as part of the witness; (4) μάρτυς comes to mean ‘martyr’; (5) the notion of ‘witness’ disappears and the terms μάρτυς, μαρτύριον, μαρτυρία, and μαρτυρεῖν are used to refer to martyrdom. However, while this development seems logical enough, semantic development is rarely so neat.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 178.]

the use of μάρτυς here as signaling the transition of the meaning of the word from ‘witness’ to ‘martyr.’<sup>27</sup> But this is highly doubtful here, in large part because John felt compelled to add a *second* modifier, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ’ ὑμῖν, *who was killed among you*, as a definition of ὁ μάρτυς. This strongly implies that at this point in time the idea of ‘witness’ was still central to the use of μάρτυς. If a μάρτυς went to the limit of witness via death, this needed to be directly stated since it was not yet automatically implied.<sup>28</sup>

Later Christianity in its glorification of martyrs began developing a theology of martyrdom that elevated such individuals immediately to full ‘sainthood’ and this supposedly enabled them to function somewhat as angels in a mediating role with believers on earth and Christ in Heaven. No such idea is present here and neither does this passage lay a foundation for such thinking.

The precise time when this took place is unknown: ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ’ ὑμῖν, Antipas, *who was killed among you*.<sup>29</sup> The Aorist verb ἀπεκτάνθη makes it clear that the execution had taken place sometime earlier, but no temporal adverb signaling how much earlier is incorporated, [1998], 184-85.]

<sup>27</sup>“This could be the first occasion of witness (Gk ‘martyr’) being consciously used of one who laid down his life on account of witness to Christ.” [New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition, ed. D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer and G. J. Wenham, 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), Re 2:12–17.]

“The inhabitants prided themselves on their loyalty to Rome. Consequently they were unrelenting in their persecution of any who seemed to oppose themselves to any of the claims of Rome, most especially its religious claims. So we may easily understand that this church was the first to be distinguished by a martyr’s blood.” [H. E. Dana, *The Epistles and Apocalypse of John: A Brief Commentary* (Kansas: Central Seminary Press, 1947), 106.]

<sup>28</sup>“It is tempting to translate μάρτυς by ‘martyr’ in the last two passages, and even R.V. yields to the temptation in Apoc. 1.c., though it is content to call Stephen and Antipas ‘witnesses.’ But it may be doubted whether the word had acquired a technical sense at the end of the first century; Clem. Cor. 5 μαρτυρήσας ἐπορεύθη εἰς τὸν ὀφειλόμενον τόπον τῆς δόξης is not decisive. Even in the second half of the second century the title could be given to confessors at Lyons and Vienne, though it is significant that they disclaimed it as due only to the Lord (Apoc. 1:5) and to those who had died for Him. By that time the technical sense had nearly established itself (see Lightfoot’s note on Clem. 1.c., and Benson’s Cyprian, p. 90 f.); but in the N.T. this stage has not been reached, though the course of events was leading up to it.” [The *Apocalypse of St. John*, ed. Henry Barclay Swete, 2d. ed., *Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1906), 35.]

<sup>29</sup>“The plural form of the pronoun ὑμῖν, ‘you,’ indicates that the address has shifted from the angel of the church to the members of the church who are now addressed directly (see the same phenomenon in 2:10, 19–20, 23–24).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 185.]

ed. One would assume that this had taken place during the reign of Domitian (89–96 AD) since he promoted so vigorously both emperor worship and a revival of devotion to the traditional Roman deities. But such a guess is conjecture and doesn’t rest on direct evidence.

Some commentators are convinced that the addition of the clause ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ, *where Satan lives*, signals by its close proximity to the reference to Antipas’ execution that the execution was due to a refusal to burn incense with a pledge of loyalty to the emperor as a god. Although tempting to conclude, direct evidence confirming this just doesn’t exist.<sup>30</sup> This is a likely scenario, but not a confirmed one. One of the interesting legends about Antipas in much later church tradition is that he was slowly boiled to death in a brazen bowl during Domitian’s reign.<sup>31</sup> The church historian Eusebius in his *Church History* will allude to later Christians who suffered martyrdom at Pergamum:<sup>32</sup>

And there are also records extant of others that suffered martyrdom in Pergamus, a city of Asia,— of Carpus and Pappylus, and a woman named Agathonice, who, after many

<sup>30</sup>“Kraft (65) suggests that the ὅπου, ‘where,’ indicates that Antipas was executed because he refused to sacrifice to the statue of the emperor, but this is too speculative.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 185.]

<sup>31</sup>“The name is found in a third-century inscription of Pergamum,<sup>17</sup> and he is mentioned by Tertullian.<sup>18</sup> The legend appears in later hagiographers (Simon Metaphrastes, the Bollandists) that he was slowly roasted to death in a brazen bowl during the reign of Domitian. His name (abridged from Antipater) has mistakenly been taken to mean ‘against all,’ and the idea that he gained the name by his heroic stand against the forces of evil is unfounded.<sup>19</sup>” [Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 80.]

The allusion by the third century church father Tertullian is less clear. In his letter *Ad Scapulam* about 217 AD to the Roman governor at Carthage, he alludes to an Arrius Antoninus who in the last decades of the first century was pushing emperor worship hard in Asia (5.1):

When Arrius Antoninus was driving things hard in Asia, the whole Christians of the province, in one united band, presented themselves before his judgment-seat; on which, ordering a few to be led forth to execution, he said to the rest, “O miserable men, if you wish to die, you have precipices or halters.”

Amazingly this story implies that Christians in Asia at the end of the first century who were under persecution voluntarily presented themselves for martyrdom to the Roman authorities. The credibility of such is questionable. Whether this refers to the execution of Antipas mentioned in Revelation is at best questionable.

<sup>32</sup>Eusebius of Caesaria, “The Church History of Eusebius”, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert In *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, Volume I: Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 192-93.

and illustrious testimonies, gloriously ended their lives.<sup>33</sup> What gradually emerges is a tendency of the Roman government to systematically persecute Christians in and around the city of Pergamum for a long time to come at Antipas was killed.

The clause ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ, *where Satan lives*, does seem at first glance to point to one or all of the pagan temples in Pergamum being the dwelling place of Satan. The verb κατοικέω with a supernatural reference as its subject tended to refer to a temple as the place of dwelling, but the two relative clauses here, ποῦ κατοικεῖς, *where you live*, and ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ, *where Satan lives*, point more to the city with the same verb specifying the place where both the church and Satan live.

The compliments now shift in verse fourteen to a complaint: ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα, *but I have a few things against you...* This is the second of three instances of this phrase surfacing: at Ephesus, ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ

<sup>33</sup>“A detailed account of the martyrdoms of Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonice is extant in numerous MSS., and has been published more than once. It has, however, long been recognized as spurious and entirely untrustworthy. But in 1881 Aubè published in the *Revue Archéologique* (Dec., p. 348 sq.) a shorter form of the Acts of these martyrs, which he had discovered in a Greek MS. in the Paris Library. There is no reason to doubt that these Acts are genuine and, in the main, quite trustworthy. The longer Acts assign the death of these martyrs to the reign of Decius, and they have always been regarded as suffering during that persecution. Aubè, in publishing his newly discovered document, still accepted the old date; but Zahn, upon the basis of the document which he had also seen, remarked in his *Tatian's Diatessaron* (p. 279) that Eusebius was correct in assigning these martyrdoms to the reign of Marcus Aurelius, and Lightfoot (I. p. 625) stated his belief that they are to be assigned either to that reign or to the reign of Septimius Severus. In 1888 Harnack (*Texte und Unters.* III. 4) published a new edition of the Acts from the same MS. which Aubè had used, accompanying the text with valuable notes and with a careful discussion of the age of the document. He has proved beyond all doubt that these martyrs were put to death during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, and that the shorter document which we have contains a genuine account related by an eye-witness. These are evidently the Acts which Eusebius had before him. In the spurious account Carpus is called a bishop, and Papyrus a deacon. But in the shorter account they are simply Christians, and Papyrus informs the judge that he is a citizen of Thyatira.

“Eusebius apparently did not include the account of these martyrs in his collection of Ancient Martyrdoms, and Harnack concludes from that that he found in it something that did not please him, viz. the fanaticism of Agathonice, who rashly and needlessly rushes to martyrdom, and the approval of her conduct expressed by the author of the Acts. We are reminded of the conduct of the Phrygian Quintus mentioned in the epistle of the Smyrnæans but in that epistle such conduct is condemned.”

[*A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, Volume I: Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890).]

σοῦ (2:4), and at Thyatira, ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ (2:20). The strong contrastive conjunction ἀλλὰ, *but*, is common in secular Greek, but of the thirteen instances in the entire book of Revelation eight of them are in chapters two and three: 2:4, 6, 9 [2x], 14, 20; 3:4, 9. This sets Christ's complaint against the church in very strong contrast to His compliments that precede and sometimes follow this expression. The Lord is highly displeased with these three churches where this expression is used.

What so upset Him? The subsequent ὅτι-clause both defines the content and gives the reason for His displeasure. At Ephesus, it was ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφῆκες, *because you have left your first love* (2:4). At Thyatira, it was ὅτι ἀφείς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ, *because you tolerate the woman Jezebel* (2:20).

But here in Pergamum it is ὅτι ἔχεις ἐκεῖ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδασχὴν Βαλαάμ, ὃς ἐδίδασκειν τῷ Βαλάκ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι, *because you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practice fornication* (2:14).

The church had not taken disciplinary action against some of its members who had become devoted followers of the ‘teaching of Balaam.’ The references to Balaam and Balak clearly are not names of individuals living in Pergamum. Instead they reference two Old Testament characters. Why did John reference them this way? We don't know with certainty. A common view is that he is using a ‘guilt by association’ argument here.<sup>34</sup> The condemnation of false teachers in Jude 11

<sup>34</sup>“The association of opponents with disreputable characters from the past (guilt by association) is one technique used to vilify them (du Toit, *Bib* 75 [1994] 410). The mention here of Balaam (cf. Jude 11; 2 Pet 2:15) and later of Jezebel (2:20) are examples of that technique, as are references to such paradigmatically disreputable characters elsewhere in Jewish literature as Jannes and Jambres (4Q267 = 4QDa 3 ii 14; 4Q269= 4QDd frag. 2, line 2; 6Q15 = 6QDamascus Document frag. 3, line 2; 2 Tim 3:8; b. Menah 85a; cf. Pliny Hist. nat. 30.2.11; Apuleius Apol. 90; Str-B 3:660–64; McNamara, Targum, 90–93); Nadab and Abihu (1QM 17:2); Korah (Ps.-Philo Bib. Ant. 16:1–7; 57:2). The error of Balaam is also mentioned in Jude 11 and 2 Pet 2:15 and appears to be connected with the teaching of the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:15). In rabbinic literature, Balaam and Abraham are seen as opposites, and the followers of Balaam are contrasted with those of Abraham (see *m. Abot* 5:19). Actually, the earliest evidence for regarding accomplished sinners as disciples of Balaam is found in Rev 2:14; Jude 11; 2 Pet 2:15–16 (Vermees, “Balaam,” 135, 172). The figure of Balaam, mentioned in Num 22–24, is very complex in the history of biblical tradition (Greene, “Balaam,” 57–106). In 1967 at Deir 'Alia, fragments of a book of Balaam inscribed on a plaster wall dating from the mid-eighth century B.C. (though the exemplar from which the text was copied was perhaps centuries older) were discovered (A. Lemaire, “Fragments from the Book of Balaam

and 2 Peter 2:15 as followers of Balaam is centers on false teaching as a money making scheme.<sup>35</sup> The OT character Balaam had a compromising relationship with Israel and sought to lead them to worship idols and to commit immorality.<sup>36</sup> John saw substantial moral connections of the unnamed teachers at Pergamum with this OT character, who had become a symbol of corrupting teaching, especially at the point of moral behavior in Jewish thinking. By labeling them this way he avoided the direct naming of names, which if such fell into the wrong hands could have led to severe repercussions for these individuals.

Further insight comes with exploring the connections between these people and those who are called the Nicolaitans in 2:16. This people were present at Ephesus also but not allowed influence in the church there (2:6). At Thyatira, the church was having problems with a “Jezebel” -- not her real name -- who was teaching believers “to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols,” πορνειῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθουτα (2:20). Teaching God’s people to worshiping idols and commit immorality were the two central teachings of Balaam in the OT. And these are the two emphases of those ‘Balaamites’ operating at Pergamum (2:14). These connections seem to suggest that we are look-

Found at Deir ‘Alla,” BARev 11 [1985] 26–39). The reconstructed title of at least part of this text is ‘Inscription/text/book of [Ba] laam [son of Beo]r, the man who was a seer of the gods’ (Lemaire, BARev 11 [1985] 35).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 185-86.]

<sup>35</sup>**Jude 11.** Woe to them! For they go the way of Cain, and abandon themselves to Balaam’s error for the sake of gain, and perish in Korah’s rebellion.

οὐαὶ αὐτοῖς, ὅτι τῇ ὁδῷ τοῦ Κάιν ἐπορεύθησαν καὶ τῇ πλάνῃ τοῦ Βαλαάμ μισθοῦ ἐξεχύθησαν καὶ τῇ ἀντιλογίᾳ τοῦ Κόρε ἀπόλωντο.

**2 Peter 2:14-16.** 14 They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! 15 They have left the straight road and have gone astray, following the road of Balaam son of Bosor, who loved the wages of doing wrong, 16 but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.

14 ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντες μεστοὺς μοιχαλίδος καὶ ἀκαταπαύστους ἁμαρτίας, δελεάζοντες ψυχὰς ἀστηρίκτους, καρδίαν γεγυμνασμένην πλεονεξίας ἔχοντες, κατάρας τέκνα· 15 καταλίποντες εὐθεῖαν ὁδὸν ἐπλανήθησαν, ἐξακολουθήσαντες τῇ ὁδῷ τοῦ Βαλαάμ τοῦ Βοσόρ, ὃς μισθὸν ἀδικίας ἠγάπησεν 16 ἔλεγξιν δὲ ἔσχεν ἰδίας παρανομίας· ὑποζύγιον ἄφωνον ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ φωνῇ φθεγξάμενον ἐκόλυσεν τὴν τοῦ προφήτου παραφροσύνην.

<sup>36</sup>“This inner compromise is explained through reference to the compromising relationship Balaam had with Israel (Num. 22:5–25:3; 31:8, 16). Israel was led to worship idols and commit immorality as a result of his deceitful counsel.” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 248.]

ing at perhaps three versions of essentially the same group of teachers in Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira. They are Nicolaitans at Ephesus, followers of Balaam at Pergamum as well as Nicolaitans (cf. 2:15), and followers of a “Jezebel” at Thyatira.

The two central issues, at least bothering Christ, were eating food sacrificed to idols and immorality: φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθουτα καὶ πορνειῦσαι. Not to be overlooked are these two activities as forbidden in the Jerusalem conference agreement for the Gentle churches (Acts 15:29):

that you abstain *from what has been sacrificed to idols* and from blood and from what is strangled and *from fornication*.

ἀπέχεσθαι εἰδωλοθύτων καὶ αἵματος καὶ πνικτῶν καὶ πορνείας,

From the indications in both Acts 16 and following, as well as from Paul’s letters, these two emphases were consistently taught in the Christian communities where Paul had traveled, and this included Asia as a major place. Now some half a century later that emphasis was being compromised by false teachers in these three churches in Asia.

One interpretive issue with φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθουτα pertains to where such meat was eaten.<sup>37</sup> Paul speaks about Περὶ τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων, *concerning food sacrificed to idols*, in 1 Cor. 8:1-13. He implies that eating such

<sup>37</sup>“The term εἰδωλόθυτος is a pejorative term meaning ‘animals sacrificed to idols.’ The pejorative denotation of the term suggests that it was probably coined in Hellenistic Judaism as a polemical counterpart to the neutral denotation of the Greek word ἱρόθυτος (1 Cor 10:28; Plutarch Quaest. conv. 729c; see Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians, 139); a related term is θεόθυτος, ‘sacrificial victim.’ There is slim evidence for the Jewish origin of εἰδωλόθυτος, however, for it occurs outside of early Christian literature only in two first-century A.D. Jewish sources, 4 Macc 5:2 and Ps.-Phocylides Sententiae 31 (reproduced in Sib. Or. 2.96). Part of the flesh of victims sacrificed in Greek temples was consumed by priests and worshipers on the premises, while the rest was sold to the public in the market place. Therefore, φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθουτα, “to eat meat sacrificed to idols” could refer to four possible situations: (1) participation in the sacrificial meal in a temple, (2) accepting sacrificial meat distributed during a public religious festival, (3) the practice of eating meat purchased at the marketplace that had originally been part of a pagan sacrifice (the possibilities are formulated too narrowly by Fee, 1 Cor., 357–63), or (4) the sacrificial meals shared by members of a club or association, i.e., an ἔθνος, θίασος, or collegium, a context in which Christians mingled with non-Christians, though scholars who imagine that such collegia had the character of trade guilds (e.g., Beasley-Murray, 86, 89–90; Yarbrow Collins, Crisis, 132), are mistaken, for there was no ancient equivalent to the medieval trade guild or modern labor union, since *collegia* had no regulatory or protective functions (Finley, Economy, 138; R. MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations* 50 B.C. to A.D. 284 [New Haven; London: Yale UP, 1974] 18–19). Opposition to this practice is also articulated in v 20.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 186.]

meat is okay if bought in the market place and not done in the presence of ‘weaker’ brothers who would be offended to see a Christian eating it. He clarifies this stance even further in 1 Cor. 10:23-30. What he doesn’t address and what seems to be the issue here in these three churches in Asia is the eating of such meat in the presence of the idol, that is, in the precincts of the temple of the idol. Clearly this stood in violation of the agreed upon teaching of the apostles from the Jerusalem conference in Acts 15. Refusal by Christians to participate in such actions certainly raised eyebrows and fired up hostility against them.<sup>38</sup> Thus some in the church were compromising this stance by arguing that such was okay, rather than sinful.<sup>39</sup> What may very well be behind this teaching was a desire to avoid economic persecution, especially with the emphasis on greed in the references in Jude and 2 Peter.

The other teaching stressed that it was okay *πορνεῦσαι*, to engage in immorality.<sup>40</sup> Of course, these

<sup>38</sup>“This was no mere issue of indifferent things and matters of conscience, as some propose was the case in 1 Corinthians 8. Perhaps token public acknowledgments to Caesar are in mind or participation in pagan festivals, or even both, since all the guilds formally recognized Caesar’s deity. (Polycarp was accused of being a ‘puller down of our gods, teaching many not to sacrifice or worship’ [*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 12:1–2].) In particular, what may be included are trade guild festivals involving celebration of patron deities through feasts and sometimes immoral activities. Refusal to participate in such activities could result in economic and social ostracism (cf. 1 Pet. 3:11–21). Therefore, there was much pressure to compromise. And just as Israel was influenced to fornicate both sexually and spiritually, the same was true of Christians in Pergamum.” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 249.]

<sup>39</sup>“Like Balaam, this was a group of false prophets who were encouraging participation in idol feasts by teaching that such permission was permissible for Christians. We may speculate, as have others, that this course of action was rationalized by thinking that it was only an empty gesture that fulfilled patriotic or social obligations and was legitimate as long as Christians did not really believe in the deities being worshiped (see further on 2:24–25). And, like Balaam, they probably also believed they would be blessed for their prophetic instruction (cf. Num. 23:10). Part of the false teachers’ effectiveness, perhaps, lay in their sincere belief that they were teaching correct doctrine; while possible, it is unlikely that they were intentionally trying to deceive the church. Of course, their teaching would ultimately dilute the exclusive claims of the church’s Christian witness to the world, which was still the church’s strength. Perhaps part of the motivation for the teachers’ attitude was the threat of economic deprivation, which may have facilitated the comparison with Balaam, since the original narrative and subsequent reflections on it associate his deceptive motives with financial gain.” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 249.]

<sup>40</sup>*πορνεῦω* fut. *πορνεύσω*; 1 aor. *ἐπόρνευσα*; pf. 3 pl.

people would not have labeled sexual immorality as such since in their teaching there was nothing wrong with such activity outside of marriage.

One’s first impulse is to ask how in the world supposed Christian teachers could be advocating sexual immorality as being okay for Christians.

The teachings of the Old Testament and official Judaism in that world were very clear: sexual activity is strictly limited to the marriage of a man and woman. Anything beyond this is sinful abomination to God. The teachings of Jesus and of the apostles in the documents that would become the New Testament clearly continue that emphasis and heighten the importance of sexual purity and fidelity inside marriage only.

This is the clear teaching of scripture and the Judeo-Christian religious heritage. But this teaching stood diametrically opposite of what dominated the Greco-Roman world, both in teaching and in practice. Homosexual practice was massive in that world. Sexual activity beyond one’s wife with other women was considered normal. In the Jewish world functionally, only the woman came under severe penalty for having sexual relations with men beyond her husband.<sup>41</sup> In a

*πεπορνεύκασιν* Ezk 16:34 (Hdt. et al.; LXX, En; TestAbr A 10 p. 88, 8 [Stone p. 24]; Test12Patr; Ar. 15, 4; Just.; Tat. 34, 3) of a variety of ‘unsanctioned sexual intercourse’.

**1. to engage in sexual immorality, engage in illicit sex, to fornicate, to whore**, in Gk. lit. freq. in ref. to prostitution (s. L-S-J-M s.v.). In a gener. sense **1 Cor 10:8ab**. Distinguished fr. *μοιχεύειν* ‘commit adultery’ (Did., Job 133, 22ff [quote fr. Hos 4:14], 25ff); D 2:2; B 19:4; **Mk 10:19** v.l. Regarded as a sin against one’s own body **1 Cor 6:18**. W. *φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα* ‘eat meat offered to idols’ **Rv 2:14, 20**.

**2. engagement in polytheistic cult, fornication**, in imagery (Phalaris, Ep. 121, 1), of polytheistic cult in the sense ‘practice image-worship/idolatry’ (*πορνεία* 3 and cp. Hos 9:1; Jer 3:6; Ezk 23:19; 1 Ch 5:25; Ps 72:27; En 8:2) **Rv 17:2; 18:3, 9**.—DELG s.v. *πέρνημι*. M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 854.]

<sup>41</sup>One sociologically contributing factor in the background here was the substantial age gap between husband and wife. Normally the husband was in his 30s while the wife in her early teen years at marriage. This was true typically for virtually every culture in the Greco-Roman world of the first Christian century. Added to that was the inherent weakness of arranged marriages which meant the marital relationship was mostly formal and a contractual agreement between two families. Commitment to one another as a married couple had to develop after the wedding, if it came at all. Love for one another was a very secondary optional matter. The physical aspect of marriage primary for producing heirs to the family of the husband played the dominant role. Thus for the Greco-Roman male every non-married woman beyond his wife was ‘fair game,’ especially slave girls and prostitutes. And even other married women if he were powerful enough to defend himself against the husband.



cultural world where sexual relations outside marriage were considered normal and completely okay, it is not surprising that teachers pop up inside Christianity offering to compromise the teachings of Jesus and the apostles at this point.

Even the bizarre surfaces on occasion, like the situation at Corinth where a man was having sexual relations with his birth mother and it was touted in the church as a sign of superior spirituality (1 Cor. 5:3-8). Paul comes down hard in demanding that the church remove such a person from its congregation and have no contact with such immoral people (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

In the Jewish background of John stands the substantial tendency to link idolatry and sexual immorality closely together.<sup>42</sup> Just from living in the Greco-Roman world where the worship of many of the gods and goddesses centered in sexual orgies, one could easily make such a connection. The fertility base of so many of the pagan religions linked worship of the deity with human sexual activity supposedly that pleased the deity enough to grant fertility to the soil for producing abundant harvest of crops. The very ancient Canaanite religions were some of the most corrupting religious influences at this point in the entire ancient world.

Thus these teachers at Pergamum were seriously corrupting the Gospel message and witness of the church to the surrounding pagan world by their com-

This is why the early Christian teaching on Christian marriage, for example, in the *Haustafeln* materials of Col. 3 and Eph. 5 were revolutionary teachings in that world. For Christians, marriage between a man and woman needed to be based on *ἀγάπη*, a self-sacrificing commitment to one another modeled after Christ's commitment to the church and vice versa.

For Gentile Christians especially the teachings of their new found faith in Christ posed huge demands for lifestyle change. This was a struggle, as Paul's teaching to the Corinthian men in 1 Cor. 6:9-20 reflect.

<sup>42</sup>“A close association is assumed by Judaism to exist between idolatry and sexual immorality (Exod 32:15–16; Wis 14:12–31; T. Reub. 4:6; T. Benj. 10:10 [in the phrase διὰ τῆς πορνείας καὶ εἰδωλολατρείας, ‘through immorality and idolatry,’ the nouns are linked with a single article, indicating that they describe aspects of the same thing]; 3 Apoc. Bar. 8:5; Spire Deut. 171; b. Sanh. 82a; b. Šabb. 17b; b. Meg. 25a; b. Ketub. 13b; see Simon, BJRL 52 [1970] 446–47). In the OT, the idolatry of Israel is frequently condemned through the use of the metaphor of prostitution and sexual immorality (Jer 3:2; 13:27; Ezek 16:15–58; 23:1–49; 43:7; Hos 5:4; 6:10). Idolatry is often regarded as the root of all other forms of vice; according to Wis 14:12, ‘the invention of idols is the beginning of fornication,’ and Wis 14:27 says ‘for the worship of the unspeakable idols is the beginning, cause, and end of every evil.’ Sexual immorality (πορνεία) can also be considered ‘the mother of all evil’ (T. Sim. 5:3). The connection between idolatry and sexual misdeeds in Judaism is taken over by Christianity (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; Rom 1:23–25; Gal 5:19f–21; 1 Cor 6:9–11; 1 Thess 1:9 together with 4:3; Rev 22:15).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 188.]

promises.<sup>43</sup>

Additionally this teaching was floating around at Pergamum also under the banner of the Nicolaitans: οὕτως ἔχεις καὶ σὺ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδασχὴν [τῶν] Νικολαϊτῶν ὁμοίως, *So you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans*. The significance of the coordinate adverb οὕτως is to introduce the Nicolaitans as these are the same as the others I mentioned.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup>One possible side issue here relates to the Jewish foundation for opposing φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθουτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι. In some ancient Jewish traditions certain laws were considered to have been given prior to Moses and given to Noah so that they apply to all humanity and not just to covenant Israel.

There appears to be a close connection between the two prohibitions mentioned in this verse (and Rev 2:20) and the apostolic decree in Acts 15, for only in Acts 15:20 [here the phrase τῶν ἀλισθημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων = εἰδωλόθουτος], 29; 21:25; Rev 2:14, 20 are the notions of πορνεία and εἰδωλόθουτος closely connected (Simon, BJRL 52 [1970] 442, 450). The list of prohibitions promulgated by the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 itself reflects the tradition-cif the Noachide Laws (Bockmuehl, RB 102 [1995] 93–95). The Noachide Laws reflect the early Jewish view that God gave pre-Sinaitic law to all people, Gentiles as well as Jews (Dietrich, ZRGG 1 [1948] 301–15; Callan, CBQ 55 [1993] 284–97; Bockmuehl, RB 102 [1995] 72–101). These Laws, from a Jewish perspective, provided a common ethical and ritual basis for both Jews and Gentiles. This conception was based primarily on Gen 9:3–6, where Noah prohibits the consumption of the blood of slaughtered animals and murder. The earliest extant text in which Gen 9:3–6 is expanded into a body of Noachic law is Jub. 7:20 (tr. Vanderkam, Jubilees 2:46–47):

Noah began to prescribe for his grandsons the ordinances and the commandments—every statute which he knew. He testified to his sons that they should do what is right, cover the shame of their bodies, bless the one who had created them, honor father and mother, love one another, and keep themselves from fornication, uncleanness, and from all injustice.

While there is some ambiguity, it appears that the tradition of the Noachide Laws has influenced Ps.-Phocylides Sent. 3–8 (first century B.C. to first century A.D.); see Wilson, *Mysteries*, 69. In b. Sanh. 56b and t. Abod. Zar. 8.4, the two laws of Gen 9:3–6 are expanded to seven, though other rabbinic sources vary in the number of Noachide Laws (Bockmuehl, RB 102 [1995] 87–91): the prohibition of idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, robbery, and eating meat torn from a living animal and the positive command to have recourse to established courts of justice. In Acts 15 the issue appears to have been the halakhic status of gentile Christians, not simply the issue of table fellowship (Bockmuehl, RB 102 [1995] 93). The list of prohibitions in the apostolic decree in Acts 15:20, 29 includes abstention from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what is strangled, and from fornication, all similar to prohibitions associated with the Noachide Laws (Bockmuehl, RB 102 [1995] 94–95).

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 187.]

<sup>44</sup>“The οὕτως, ‘so, thus, in this way,’ coordinates the phrase that it introduces with the statement that immediately precedes in v 15, by way of interpretation or explanation. Thus, ‘the teaching of Balaam’ is the same as ‘the teaching of the Nicolaitans’ (against MacKay, *EvQ* 45 [1973] 111–15). The καὶ σὺ, ‘you too,’ refers to the presence of this influence in Ephesus previously mentioned in 2:6; the concluding ὁμοίως, ‘as well, likewise, similarly,’ also

Additionally the *καὶ σὺ*, you also, along with *ὁμοίως*, *similarly*, links these Nicolaitans with those mention at Ephesus in 2:6.<sup>45</sup> Both at Ephesus and at Pergamum these people were called ‘followers of Nicolaus.’ This may very well explain in part why John chose to also label them followers of Balaam, with all the negative image that suggested out of the Jewish background. The justification for this is the commonality of teaching between these contemporary teachers at Pergamum and the teachings of Balaam, at least as popularly understood in first century Jewish tradition. So we have one set of teachers at Pergamum with two labels: Nicolaitans and followers of Balaam.

The short *dispositio* in verse sixteen centers on a call to the church to repent of its toleration of these teachers in its midst: *μετανόησον οὖν· εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι ταχὺ καὶ πολεμήσω μετ’ αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου*, *Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth.*

The conjunction *οὖν* links this admonition closely to what preceded in the complaint as a logical implication of the complaint. If the King of this universe is unhappy with what we are doing, then we had better change what we are doing. Or, else there will be unpleasant consequences. This is the logic being followed here.

The demand *μετανόησον*, *repent*, is stated intensively as an Aorist tense imperative mood verb expression. The King of this universe means serious business with this demand. The verb coming from *μετανοέω* stresses a complete turn around in our thinking and commitments. It is one of several words in Koine Greek used in the NT to emphasize a drastic change of behavior demanded by God in the way people live.<sup>46</sup> Thus

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compares the situation in Pergamon with that in Ephesus. This close coordination between the Nicolaitans (for more details, see Comment on 2:6) and Balaam may suggest the reason that John has chosen ‘Balaam’ as a symbol.” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 188.]

<sup>45</sup>For a detailed treatment of the Nicolaitans, see study 6 on Rev. 2:1-7 in volume 32 of the *Biblical Insights Commentary* series at [cranfordville.com](http://cranfordville.com).

<sup>46</sup>Note the following:

### E Change Behavior (41.50–41.54)

**41.50 στρέφομαι**<sup>a</sup>: to change one’s manner of life, with the implication of turning toward God; **41.51 ἐπιστρέφω**<sup>d</sup>; **ἐπιστροφή**<sup>b</sup>, **ἦς** f: to change one’s manner of life in a particular direction, with the implication of turning back to God; **41.52 μετανοέω**; **μετάνοια**, **ας** f: to change one’s way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness; **41.53 γεννάω ἄνωθεν** (an idiom, literally ‘to be born again’); **παλιγγενεσία**, **ας** f: to experience a complete change in one’s way of life to what it should be, with the implication of return to a former state or relation; **41.54 ἀμετανόητος**, **ον**: pertaining to not being repentant.

the repentance demanded, in that it is directed to the church and not just to these false teachers, is that the church abandon its lax attitude toward these teachers and instead take serious disciplinary action against them if they are unwilling to abandon their false teaching.

The warning that follows levels serious threats against both the church and these false teachers: *εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι ταχὺ καὶ πολεμήσω μετ’ αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου*. Two threats are made: *ἔρχομαί σοι ταχὺ*, *I will come to you quickly*, and *πολεμήσω μετ’ αὐτῶν*, *I will wage war against them*.

In the background is the OT experience of Balaam who did not obey God and was killed by the sword at God’s command: Josh 13:22 and Num. 31:8.<sup>47</sup> In light of the subsequent picture of Christ with the sword coming out of his mouth in 19:21,<sup>48</sup> the meaning of this threat is clear. The Son of Man will come down upon the church quickly at Pergamum and ‘clean house’ of all the false teachers and their followers.<sup>49</sup> Physical death

[Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 509-510.]

<sup>47</sup>**Joshua 13:22.** *καὶ τὸν Βαλααμ τὸν τοῦ Βεωρ τὸν μάντιν ἀπέκτειναν ἐν τῇ ῥομφίᾳ.*†

*Along with the rest of those they put to death, the Israelites also put to the sword Balaam son of Beor, who practiced divination.*

**Numbers 31:8.** *καὶ τοὺς βασιλεῖς Μαδιαν ἀπέκτειναν ἅμα τοῖς τραυματίαις αὐτῶν, καὶ τὸν Εὐνι καὶ τὸν Σουρ καὶ τὸν Ροκομ καὶ τὸν Οὐρ καὶ τὸν Ροβοκ, πέντε βασιλεῖς Μαδιαν· καὶ τὸν Βαλααμ υἱὸν Βεωρ ἀπέκτειναν ἐν ῥομφαίᾳ σὺν τοῖς τραυματίαις αὐτῶν.*

*They killed the kings of Midian: Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian, in addition to others who were slain by them; and they also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword.*

48 Rev. 19:21. *καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ ἵππου τῇ ἐξελθούσῃ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, καὶ πάντα τὰ ὄρνεα ἐχορτάσθησαν ἐκ τῶν σαρκῶν αὐτῶν.*

*And the rest were killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.*

<sup>49</sup>The core concept of the verb *πολεμέω*, along with the noun *πόλεμος*, is to wage war. It is a part of a large military oriented vocabulary found inside the NT:

*πόλεμος* G4483 (polemos), war, battle, fight, strife, conflict, quarrel; *πολεμέω* G4482 (polemeō), make war, fight; *στρατεία* G5127 (strateia), expedition, campaign; *στράτευμα* G5128 (stratema), army, detachment, troops; *στρατεύω/στρατεύομαι* G5129 (strateuō), serve as a soldier; *στρατηγός* G5130 (stratēgos), general, chief magistrate, praetor; *στρατιά* G5131 (stratia), army; *στρατιώτης* G5132 (stratiōtēs), soldier; *στρατολογέω* G5133 (stratologeō), gather an army, enlist soldiers; *στρατοπέδαρχης* G5134 (stratopedarchēs), military commander, commandant of a camp; *στρατόπεδον* G5136 (stratopedon), camp, body of troops, army; *ἐκατοντάρχης* G1672 (hekatontarchēs), ἐκατόνταρχος (hekatontarchos), κεντυρίων G3035 (kentyriōn), centurion; *μάχιρα* G3479 (machaira), sword; *μάχη* G3480 (machē), battle, fighting, quarrels, strife, disputes; *μάχομαι* G3481 (machomai), fight, quarrel, dispute; *Ἀρμαγεδ (δ)ών* G762 (Harmaged(d)ōn), Armageddon; *Γῶγ* G1223 (Gōg), Gog; *Μαγῶγ*

that condemns them to eternal damnation is the threat. How would Christ do that? The easiest option already in place was simply to allow the government authorities to unleash severe persecution on the Christian community in Pergamum. But this would be only one of an infinite variety of options available to the risen Christ in order to punish the Christian community at Pergamum for refusing to carry out His command. The adverb ταχῦ defines this as a soon to take place temporal judgment, rather than an eschatological Day of Judgment moment.<sup>50</sup>

Again the image of the sword here signals the appropriateness of the same image in the Adscriptio (v. 12), which echoes the image in 1:16. The picture is that of unlimited power just in the words spoken by the Son of Man.

The impression created by this graphic and very blunt language used by the risen Christ to the church at Pergamum should give Christians everywhere cause to pay close attention.

### C. Admonition and promise, v. 17

Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκὴν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων.

Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.

Again, as is the case in all seven messages the closing section contains two elements: the command to hear and the promise of victory. These come as the natural closing to the message and, in this sequence of command / promise here especially, reflect a traditional Jewish way of thinking. When God tells us to do something, usually He re-enforces it with a promised

G3408 (Magōg), Magog; ὄπλον G3960 (hoplon), weapon; ὀπλιζῶ G3959 (hoplizō), equip, arm; πανοπλία G4110 (panoplia), full armour, panoply; θώραξ G2606 (thōrax), breastplate; θυρεός G2599 (thyreos), shield; περικεφαλαία G4330 (perikephalaia), helmet; βέλος (belos), arrow, dart; ρομφαία G4855 (rhomphaia), a large, broad sword; παρεμβολή G4213 (parembolē), fortified camp, barracks or headquarters, army in battle array, battle line; παρεμβάλλω G4212 (paremballō), throw up a palisade.

[C. Brown, J. Watts, C. Brown and C. Brown, “War, Soldier, Weapon” In vol. 3, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther and Hans Bietenhard (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 958-59.]

<sup>50</sup>For the use of ταχύς, εἶα, ὕ inside Revelation see 2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20. It uniformly specifies an event anticipated in the immediate future. And this is consistent with its meaning elsewhere inside the NT (13x with 5x in Rev).

blessing.

The **command to listen** is stated the exact same way in all seven messages: Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. The background is the OT prophetic “Hear the Word of the Lord.”<sup>51</sup> This particular formulation of it reaches especially back to the teaching ministry of Jesus in the gospels.<sup>52</sup> Also some similar sayings with the same thrust surface in the gospels in connection to Jesus’ teachings.<sup>53</sup> One of the distives to this set of sayings in Revelation is the τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις direct object clause. Although it is the Son of Man speaking (Τάδε λέγει, v. 12b), these words also become at the same time the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking their meaning and application to the churches. Therefore the listeners, i.e., those with an ear, should pay careful attention to these messages for they have vital relevance to all seven churches. And thus ultimately to us today.

The **victory formula** comes next as an incentive to hear and obey the message of the Son of Man. Although formulated with slightly differing grammar structure, the central meaning of all seven of these is the same: the promise of eternal life. This variation is due to the customization of each victory formula to the individual church.

Here is a twofold promise to give that is highly symbolic and appropriate to the history of the city of Pergamum.

The promise is made Τῷ νικῶντι, to the one over-

<sup>51</sup>“Proclamation formulas often introduce OT prophetic oracles, such as ‘Hear the word of Yahweh’ (1 Kgs 22:19; 1 Chr 18:18; Amos 7:16; Jer 29:20; 42:15), often with the name of the recipient in the vocative (Jer 2:4; 7:2; 19:3; 22:11; Ezek 6:3; 13:2; 21:3). The proclamation formula, probably derived from usage in public assemblies and in courts of law (see Mic 6:2; Jer 2:4), was used to introduce instruction in the law (Prov 4:1; Job 13:6; 33:1, 31; 34:2, 16; Isa 49:1; 51:4) and instruction in wisdom (Deut 32:1; Prov 7:24; Ps 49:1; Isa 28:23).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 150.]

<sup>52</sup>“The formula ‘Let the person with an ear hear’ (and variants), an aphorism rooted in the Jesus tradition (see *Excursus 3A: The Sayings of Jesus in Revelation*), is found in six independent variant versions (Crossan, *Fragments*, 68–73). It occurs seven times in the synoptic Gospels (Mark 4:9, 23; Matt 11:15; 13:9, 43; Luke 8:8; 14:35) and six additional times as variant readings (Mark 7:16; Matt 25:29; Luke 8:15; 12:21; 13:9; 21:4).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 150.]

<sup>53</sup>“Closely related formulas include Matt 19:12, ὁ χωρῶν χωρεῖτω, ‘let the one who understands understand’; Rev 13:18, ὁ ἔχων νοῦν ψηφισάτω, ‘let the one who has understanding reckon’; and Ignatius, Smyrn. 6:1, ὁ χωπῶν χωπεῖτω, ‘let the one who understands understand’ (perhaps an allusion to Matt 19:12; Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers 2/2*, 304).” [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 150.]

coming. The idea in the verb νικάω is literally prevailing in battle, a most appropriate image given the military language in this message: cf., τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὄξειαν and πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν. But its figurative meaning is the point in these victory formulas. And that meaning is to remain faithful to the end, to persevere in commitment without failing. Again, this underscores the concept of salvation emphasized by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 7:21): Οὐ πᾶς ὁ λέγων μοι· κύριε κύριε, εἰσελεύσεται εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἀλλ' ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, **Not everyone saying to me "Lord, Lord," will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; instead, the one doing the will of My Father in Heaven.**

How is eternal life described here? First, the Son of Man promises, δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου, **I will give to him of the hidden manna.** The OT background of the manna eaten by the Israelites during the exodus lies behind this image.<sup>54</sup> For John's

<sup>54</sup>“The term ‘manna’ (from the Hebrew term מַן *mān hū*, ‘what is it?’ in Exod 16:15; see Jos. *Ant.* 3.32: τί τοῦτ' ἔστιν, ‘what is it?’) refers to the miraculous feeding narrated in Exod 16:4–36 (retellings of the story are found in Jos. *Ant.* 3.26–32; Ps.-Philo *Bib. Ant.* 10:7). Manna is often called ‘bread from heaven’ (Neh 9:15; Ps 105:40; John 6:31–33, 50–51; Apost. Const. 8.12.26), the ‘food of angels’ (LXX Ps 77:25[MT 78:25]; Wis 16:20; b. Yoma 75b; 4 Ezra 1:19; Adam and Eve 4:2; see Jos. *As.* 16:14), and occasionally ‘bread of life’ (Jos. *As.* 8:5; John 6:35, 48). According to one tradition, manna is produced in the third heaven (b. Hag. 12b). One of the eschatological expectations of early Judaism was that the future time of salvation would correspond to the period of wilderness wandering in which God would again supply manna miraculously (Volz, *Eschatologie*, 388). According to 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 29:8 (tr. Charlesworth, OTP 1:631), ‘And it will happen at that time that the treasury of manna will come down again from on high, and they will eat of it in those years because these are they who have arrived at the consummation of time’ (see also Sib. Or. 7.149; Hist. Rech. 13:2; Num. Rab. 11.2 on Num 6:22; Qoh. Rab. 1:9). Manna is called **לחמו של עולם הבא** *lḥmw šl .wlm hb.*, ‘the bread of the age to come’ (Gen. Rab. 82.8 on Gen 35:17). According to Jos. *As.* 16:14 (tr. Burchard in Charlesworth, OTP 2:229), ‘And all the angels of God eat of it [i.e., ‘honeycomb’ in the context, but note the proverbial sweetness of manna] and all the chosen of God and all the sons of the Most High, because this is a comb of life, and everyone who eats of it will not die for ever (and) ever.’

“The adjectival participle τοῦ κεκρυμμένου, ‘hidden,’ is problematic and has three possible explanations. (1) Manna is ‘hidden’ in the sense that it is reserved only for those who enter into the age to come (Malina, *Manna Tradition*, 101; Bietenhard, *Der Tosefta-Traktat Sota*, 73–74 n. 42). (2) Manna is ‘hidden’ because it was placed in ajar that was set before the Lord (Exod 16:32–36) and will one day again be made available to the righteous by the Messiah (a view also found in Samaritan eschatology). There was a legend in Judaism that Jeremiah hid the ark to keep it from being carried off to Babylon (2 Macc 2:4–6; Eupolemus frag. 4 [Eusebius *Praep. evang.* 9.39.5; Holladay, *FHJA* 1:134]; Alexander Polyhistor [FrGrHist, 723, F 5]; Ginzberg, *Legends* 6:19 nn. 111–12), and the manna was hidden along with it. (3) The heavenly manna referred to in the OT will be restored in heaven through eternal

readers with a Jewish background or awareness, this manna is the nourishment provided by God Himself that sustains His people throughout eternity.

Second, the Son of Man promises, καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκὴν, **and I will give him a white rock.** This came out of the Greco-Roman background for the city.<sup>55</sup> The white stone, actually a beryl stone, came to mean a ‘vote’ in the Greco-Roman world. This because citizens were give such stones for voting on acquittal in court settings; the black stone meant guilty. In other instances, it was the ‘entrance ticket’ into the theater for important civic meetings. Particularly in Pergamum, it often was required for entrance into the temple of Asklepios in order to receive healing. Against this backdrop of multiple positive meanings of a white stone in Pergamum, Christ says in effect “You belong; God gives you a ‘thumbs up’ for all eternity.”

The further qualification of the white stone adds to its value as a symbol of eternal life: ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων, **and on the white stone is written a new name**

life. The meaning of this metaphor, however, is clear; victorious Christians will be rewarded with eternal life in which intimate fellowship with God will be enjoyed.”

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 189.]

<sup>55</sup>“Beryl is called ‘a well-known white stone, very valuable’ in Cyranides 1.2.6; on beryl in Revelation, see Comment on 21:20. ψῆφος means ‘pebble,’ ‘stone,’ and so ‘gem’ (Philostratus *Vita Apoll.* 3.27; Artemidorus *Oneir.* 2.5: ‘the stone in a ring we call a ψῆφος’); it can even be used in the more specific sense of ‘magical gem’ or ‘magical amulet’ (PGM XII.209, 280; cf. IV.937, 1048, 1057). Most frequently, however, since ψῆφοι were used for voting, ψῆφος came to mean ‘vote.’ The adjective λευκοί, ‘white,’ is used of favorable votes (SEG 26:1817.80; see Horsley, *New Docs* 1:39; Horsley, *New Docs* 4:209). The precise meaning of this ‘white stone’ remains uncertain; the most likely explanation is that it represents an amulet (see Comment on v 17d). The most extensive survey of proposed solutions to the problem is found in Hemer, *Letters*, 96–104: (1) a ‘jewel’ in Israelite-Jewish tradition; (2) white stones indicating a vote of acquittal, black a vote of condemnation (Ovid *Metamorphoses* 15.41–42; Plutarch *Alc.* 202D; Mor. 186F; Aelian *De nat. anim.* 13.38; Lucian *Dial. meretr.* 9; the ψῆφος is found in association with νικάω, i.e., ‘victory’ in the sense of ‘acquittal’ [Theophrastus *Characters* 17.8; Aeschylus *Eum.* 741], and the ‘prevailing vote’ can be called a νικητήριος ψῆφος [Heliodorus *Aethiopia* 3.3]. This is close to the view of Andreas [Comm. in *Apoc.* ad loc.], who interprets the phrase ‘they shall receive a white stone’ with **τοῦτέστι νικῶσαν**, ‘that is, they will be victorious’); (3) a token of membership or recognition; (4) an amulet on which a divine name is inscribed (Artemidorus *Oneirocritica* 5.26); (5) a token of gladiatorial discharge; (6) an allusion to initiation into the cult of Asklepios; and (7) a writing material with a significant form or color. In *Hermas Sim.* 9.4.6, the stones (= Christians) used in building the tower (= the church) all turned white when they became part of the building.”

[David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 189–90.]

that no one knows except the one who receives it. Clearly the value of this stone rests largely on the secret name written on it. What is not spelled out is whether that name is a 'divine name' or the name of the overcoming believer. If the rather obvious parallel in 3:12 influences the understanding, then this 'new name' is a divine name.<sup>56</sup> But here the name is a ὄνομα καινόν, ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων, **new name, which no one knows except the one receiving it.** In 3:12, the written names are of God, the city of God, and Christ's own new name. Nothing particularly secretive about these! Very likely in the background stands the Greco-Roman pagan traditions about secret names for some of their gods, coupled with magical practices geared toward knowing these secret names in order to gain supernatural power.<sup>57</sup> Against this backdrop, the words of the risen Christ

<sup>56</sup>**Rev. 3:12.** If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. ***I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.***

Ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἐτι **καὶ γράψω ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου,** τῆς καινῆς Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἢ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, **καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν.**

<sup>57</sup>“The white stone mentioned in v 17c must be interpreted in connection with the inscription of a secret name. A major problem is that of determining whether a divine name (i.e., the name of God and/or Jesus) is written on the stone, or the name of the conquering Christian who receives the stone. Hemer argues that the 'new name' refers to a name given the conquering Christian (Letters, 102–3). The phrase 'new name' occurs in Isa 62:2, while the related term 'different name' is found only in Isa 65:15. In Tg. Isa. 65:15b this notion of a 'different name' is connected with another concept found in Revelation, the second death: 'and the Lord YHWH will slay you with the second death [cf. Rev 2:11], but his servants, the righteous, he will call by a different name [שֵׁם אַחֵרָא שְׂמַן אַחֵרָא].' There is an obvious parallel with Rev 3:12, where the exalted Christ says that the name of God, the name of the city of God, and 'my own new name [τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν]' will be written on the conquering Christian (see 19:12, where the exalted Christ appears under the imagery of a conquering warrior who 'has a name inscribed which no one knows but he himself'). The likelihood that this passage refers to the secret name (s) of God and/or Jesus together with the fact that this 'new name' is inscribed on a white stone inevitably suggests that the imagery of the magical amulet is in view (W. Heitmüller, "Im Namen Jesu": *Eine sprach- und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Neuen Testament* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903] 174–75; 234–35; Bousset [1906] 215; Beckwith, 461–63; Clemen, *Erklärung*, 373–74; Charles, 1:66–67; Lohmeyer, 27; Lohse, 29; Metzger, *Code*, 36). According to ancient Egyptian tradition, the sun god Re had a true name that remained a secret until revealed to Isis (Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 21). Magical amulets normally have an image on the obverse and a magical text on the reverse; when worn, the image would be easily seen while the text (often containing secret magical names) would be concealed.

“While the precise function of the amulet is left unspecified,

affirm to the overcoming one that the power of God will carry him into the next world safely and for eternity. For the Gentile believers in the church, who came out of a deeply superstitious religious heritage, such words carried a powerful affirmation of the ultimate superiority of Christ over all the gods of the Romans and Greeks, whose massive temples they would frequently pass by as they moved about the city.

## 2. What does the text mean to us today?

Again, as one reads this message to the church at Pergamum, the spiritual reality and superiority of the

it appears that it is a reward for perseverance and that it therefore guarantees the permanent protection of the possessor (see T. Job 46:7–47:11). A close parallel to Rev 2:17 is found in a magical procedure in PDM xii.6–20 (Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*, 152): 'You bring a ring of iron and you bring a white stone which is in the shape of a grape ... Write this name on it [etc.].' Magical procedures that give instruction for making amulets (and other materia magica) occasionally mention the importance of inscribing secret names on amulets (PGM I.146: ὑπὸ δὲ τὸ ἔδραμος τοῦ λίθου τὸ ὄνομα τοῦτο (κρύβε), 'below the design on the stone is this name (conceal it)!'). Names that cannot be spoken are occasionally mentioned in the magical papyri (PGM XIII.763–64, 845). If the inscribed white stone is an amulet, the 'new name' is perhaps that of God or (more probably) Christ (see Phil 2:9, where God bestows on the exalted Jesus 'the name which is above every name,' i.e., *kyrios*; see v 11). The new name is probably in contrast to the great variety of old pagan names for various supernatural beings found on amulets and magical gems. Origen argued for the magical efficacy of such Hebrew names for God as 'Sabaoth' and 'Adonai' (*Contra Celsum* 1.24). The magical use of the formula 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' is particularly powerful (*Contra Celsum* 4.33; 5.45; cf. Justin Dial. 85, 135), as are the names 'the God of Israel,' 'the God of the Hebrews,' and 'the God who drowned the king of Egypt and the Egyptians in the Red Sea' (*Contra Celsum* 4.34). Jewish exorcists reportedly had many ισχυρὰ ὀνόματα, 'powerful names,' at their disposal (see Matt 12:27 = Luke 11:19; Acts 19:11–20; Jos. *Ant.* 8.45–49; Justin Dial. 85; Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* 2.6.2). Christians, too, used the name Jesus Christ to perform healings and exorcisms (Acts 3:6; 4:10; 9:34; 16:18; Justin 2 *Apol* 6.6; Dial. 30.3; 76.6; 85.2; Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* 2.32.4; 2.49.3; Epideixis 97; Origen *Contra Celsum* 1.6, 25, 67; 3.24; *Acts of John* 41; Eusebius *Demonstr. evang.* 3.6; Arnobius *Adv. nat.* 1.46; Lactantius *Div. inst.* 2.16; 4.27). Mark 9:38–41 (= Luke 9:49–50) is an anecdote about the disciples forbidding an unauthorized person from casting out demons in the name of Jesus; this pericope reflects the fact that, in early Christian tradition, the purely magical effect of the name of Jesus was accepted (Eitrem, *Demonology*, 31). A surprisingly large number of early Christian magical amulets have been recovered, though none dates as early as the second century A.D.: H. Leclercq, "Amulettes," *DACL* 1:1795–1822; Bonner, *Magical Amulets*, 208–28; F. Eckstein and J. H. Waszink, "Amulett," *RAC* 1 (1950) 407–10; Daniel-Maltomini, *Supplementum Magicum* 1, nos. 20–36; Delatte-Derchain, *Les intailles magiques*, 283–87. On the magical use of the name of Jesus in early Christianity, see D. Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," *ANRW* II, 23/2:1545–49; id., "Jesus II (im Zauber)," *RAC* 17:821–37." [David E. Aune, vol. 52A, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 190-91.]

Gospel message over against the teaching of pagan religions jumps out dramatically.

Unlike the believers at Smyrna, some 68 miles to the south, their challenges were not so much centered on facing hostility from the Jewish segment of the city. Instead, they lived where paganism and governmental opposition thrived in intense hostility to the Gospel message. At least one of their number, Antipas, had already paid with his life for his Christian commitment. Generally speaking the believers had withstood these pressures very successfully. And Christ compliments them for this (v. 13).

I wonder how successfully our church would stand up should we face a barrage of hostility from non-Christian religions and governmental authorities. To stare death in the face with the option of surviving if we recanted our Christian faith would be a hard test. Christians in the modern western world have very little direct experience with the kind of hostility the believers at Pergamum faced. But unfortunately, Christians in other parts of our modern world know exactly what these ancient believers were facing. Our constant prayer for them should be, "May God help them to remain faithful unto death!" And we should use every available, legitimate means possible to help them in such hostile environments.

What we in modern western Christianity do face every day is what began making inroads into the church at Pergamum: compromising the Gospel in our behavior and practices.

Surrounded by a deep structure of polytheism and a daily living where the role of the pagan gods and goddesses touched virtually every aspect of life, the pressure on believers to accommodate themselves to that world was enormous. The Jewish community felt similar pressures but over time by hook and crook they had gained for themselves special exemptions from many of these pressures via Roman imperial legal decrees. The believing community at Pergamum, made up of Jews and mostly non-Jews, had no such exemptions. The role of religion -- pagan Greco-Roman religion -- was unusually significant at Pergamum; it was where Satan lived and ruled (vv. 13-14). When one went to the market place to buy food, especially meat, the likelihood was this what was for sale there were the left-overs from food consumed in the temples to these deities, and thus had been dedicated to them in official liturgy at the temples. When one participated in a collegia, a social or work group necessary to gaining and keeping jobs in the city, each collegium had its patron deity and the required meetings always began with dedicating the meal to this patron deity. Could a Christian participate? Plus, most all the time, these meetings took place in the temple of the patron dei-

ty. Social gatherings with non-Christian friends nearly always included a meal. And the likelihood is that this food, especially the meat, had been previously dedicated to the patron deity or deities of the family. Everywhere around you were these not too subtle influences pushing the believer to ignore his Christian teaching and join in with the group.

Add to that the indescribably immoral atmosphere of the city when it came to sexual activity. Immoral heterosexual activity outside marriage was the norm; homosexual activity was present in almost every family with a Greek background especially, and massively present with other ethnic groups in the city. Even the Jews often preached one thing in their synagogues but practiced the opposite in daily life.

Not surprisingly then was the surfacing of teachers inside the Christian community who found various ways to twisting scripture or claiming special 'revelations' arguing that adapting to the surrounding world at these points was okay with God, and perhaps a necessary action for witnessing purposes. The Ephesian church had strongly rejected such teachings (2:6), but the churches at Pergamum (2:14) and Thyatira (2:20) had not taken disciplinary action against these corrupters of the Gospel inside their churches. The risen Christ warned them in the bluntest of terms to clean house or else He would in a devastating manner.

Here is the ongoing challenge to churches today. How soft are we on sin? Christ is hard on sin. We dare not be anything less! Every possible effort must be made to keep the teaching and behaving of the church dead center on the principles of scripture laid down by this Christ. God help us solve our problems before Christ does!