

## 07. Pergamos: Church of Compromise

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*Letters from Jesus*

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**Bible Text:** Revelation 2:12-17

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Turn in your Bibles to Revelation 2 and verse 12. I'm taking just a brief moment to clean my glasses because either the Shekinah cloud of glory has settled on all of you or my glasses are dirty and I'm betting it's the latter. Here we go. We're continuing our study in the letters to the seven churches and we spent about four weeks with the visions of Christ that led up to that and then we looked at the church at Ephesus that had lost its first love and then we looked at the church at Smyrna who were one of the only two churches that didn't receive some sort of criticism from Christ and they were being faithful. Today we want to look at, really a compromised church and this is the church at Pergamos. A good question for us to think about is: what is it that Christians are supposed to be doing anyway?

There is a gentleman by the name of Frank S. who is a postman in Louisville, Kentucky a number of years ago and apparently one day he'd kind of decided that maybe he wanted to knock off work a little early. Maybe it was a hot summer day like we are known to have around here and so he took off work a little early and he took some bags of mail and just threw them up in his attic. Apparently this became such a good idea to be able to take off work early and enjoy the day, that he repeated this process again and again and over time, people began to complain to the post office that their mail wasn't being delivered and they finally did an investigation because, you know, more than one person took care of that route and they tracked it down to this one particular postman, Frank S., and they went into his house and they found over 15 tons of other people's mail stored in 1,200 bags, large bags of mail in his attic. First of all, I wonder how you crate bags that big up to your attic. Secondly, it makes me wonder if that was an efficient insulation and maybe his air-conditioning bills were really low. But at any rate, what do you expect a postman to do? You expect him to deliver the mail but there were times that he just decided to take the easy way out. You know, a mail person is supposed to deliver the mail.

Now we can ask the question: what is it exactly a Christian is supposed to be doing? Of course, we have all kinds of things on our list. Things like: read your Bible; pray. But if you just boil it down, one pretty good definition is that a Christian is someone whose faith is in Jesus Christ and he is faithful in serving Jesus Christ. His faith is in Christ and he is faithful serving Jesus Christ but let's be honest, that's not always an easy thing. As the song that Richard led us in said in verse three, "There are enemies both without and

within." You know, I struggle against my own flesh not to mention all the opposition of our society today that makes it hard to live the Christian life. It's kind of a jungle out there. There are some people that just are hard to be nice to. Have you ever noticed that? I pray I'm not on your list but some people are just kind of hard to be nice too. There are times when we don't feel like being forgiving toward people. There are situations at work and situations on the school campus and situations other places in business where it's just sometimes, I think we're tempted to be Christians the way Frank S. was tempted to be a mailman. In other words, we just think, "You know, I'm going to just let this Christianity thing slide today. Today, I'm going not do some of the stuff I should do because it's just inconvenient." Maybe the weather is too hot. Maybe I'm too tired. Who knows what.

Let's look at Revelation 2 and I'll ask you if you'd stand in honor of God's word. We'll begin reading at verse 12 and we'll read through verse 17. It says,

12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; 13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is [and you could put the word "throne" there, that's a better translation] and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. 14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. 15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

We'll read about the promise here in just a little bit. Let's pray.

*Father, thank you for this time together and as we keep our Bibles open, may we also keep open our hearts. Father, help us to recognize our own sins of compromise, those that are motivated by external forces as well as those that are just giving in to our flesh. Lord, too often we excuse our fleshliness by saying, "I am only human," when you have taught us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and yes, with all our strength. Not with our weakness but with all our strength and that we are to love you so much that we would avoid the compromise that really is adultery with the world. Father, thank you for each one that's here. May your Spirit open their hearts to hear your word. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.*

Thank you. You may be seated.

Let me give you just a quick overview. Most of the letters to the seven churches have a similar format and the format begins with some portrait of Jesus that we see and here it says that he is the one with the sharp two-edged sword. Of course, if we look back at Revelation 1, it describes Jesus as the one with the sharp two-edged sword coming out of his mouth and so you see some artist rendering of that they are on the left side. Then

there is a praise or acknowledgment of what the church was doing right and you will remember that one of those parenting tips I gave you a few weeks ago is that you need to point out to your children what they are doing right. You need to bless them. You need to praise them because you always get more of what you praise and if you are always speaking words of criticism to your children, then you're going to lose their hearts but by praising them and blessing them, you have a way of motivating them. But sometimes you must also give that word of critique but Jesus always gave the word of commendation before he gave the word of critique. So then you see the condemnation or chastisement, if you would, on the negative effects when he says, "You have some there that hold the doctrine of Balaam and you have those who are all of the Nicolaitans." Then there is correction and the correction in this particular letter is pretty simple: he says, "Repent or else I'm going to come and when I come, I'm coming with a sword." Then he gives a promise and the promise here, it says, "To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the hidden manna and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written therein." So that's kind of the pattern that goes on here.

So let's talk a little bit about Pergamos, the city there and that storefront that you see there is a modern-day storefront in Pergamos and that is the word "Pergamos" written in Greek there. Let's talk a little bit just about the city. First of all, if you're looking at a map, you notice that it's kind of due north of Ephesus, maybe it's about 25 miles further to the inland than Ephesus is. It was a wealthy city. You will sometimes hear it referred to as Pergamum in some documents, kind of an alternate spelling. It had a population of about 200,000, about 40,000 of those were citizens and the rest were slaves. It was a wealthy city and they could afford slaves and so most of that population was actually made up of slaves. It was the capital, if you're a history buff, of Attalus II kingdom. It was given to him by the Romans in 133 BC. It's famous for its library. It was started about 197 BC and the library was later destroyed by Caliph Omar. The significant thing about the library is that they had invented a new kind of thing to write on called parchment. In Greek it was called pergamena and that was based on sheepskin so they would take sheepskin and they would cure it and they would turn it into a kind of paper and they would write on it and it was far more durable than the papyri that was made from reeds like the Egyptians had.

So it was a city of wealth and it was a city of renown but it was also a city of great wickedness in many places. They had tons of pagan culture. They worshiped Athena, which was the goddess of wisdom and Asclepius who was the god of healing; Dionysius, the Roman name for that was Bacchus, he was the god of wine and partying and drama; Serapis, which is a very interesting god I want to talk to about in just a minute because I think it's illustrative of the kind of compromise that was going on and I'll show you that in a minute. Of course, Zeus, who is the king of the gods. They had about 200,000 volumes in their library but, you know, being a Christian here was kind of a hard place because everywhere you went there was a rich lifestyle and emphasis on materialism but there were all these gods and all the aspects of immorality, especially with the worship of Dionysius. There were all these aspects of immorality that were associated with that worship. Being a Christian in Pergamos was a little bit like trying to be a really good Christian inside the city limits of Las Vegas Nevada. It was just a hard place to be and any of you that have walked around Las Vegas because you had to be there, people try to

hand you flyers on the street corner, you know what a horrific place, really, that is. So it was just an amazing thing. By the way, they had a temple to Zeus that was over four stories high.

Let's look at a few of these gods that they worshiped. Asclepius, was the god of healing. Interestingly enough, he was actually called Asclepius Soter. "Soter" is the word for "savior" in Greek. So they really called this their savior god. It's interesting if you look very closely on the coins that you see on the right hand side that were recovered from Pergamos, you see the image of a snake. The symbol of this healing god was a snake. The fact is that if you go to any doctor today, you probably have seen the emblem of a pole maybe with a couple of wings and a snake wound around that pole and that harkens back to the days of the worship of Asclepius that that became the symbol for healing. There was a large temple there, the remains of which are still visible and there was one large temple for Asclepius and then three smaller ones for Asclepius, his wife, Hygeia, from which we get the word "hygiene," so if you've been to a dentist and had your teeth cleaned, you've seen a hygienist and she got that role, got its name from Hygeia. Then there was another one to yet another Greek God. Later, Asclepius became known as Zeus Asclepius, trying to associate his name with the king of the gods. There was a medical college there and they had priests that were trained in the medical profession. Most of us think of Hippocrates as being the father of medicine but actually while he was the one that invented the Hippocratic Oath, the father of medicine in most regards is a man by the name of Galen and he was the dominant authority in medicine during the middle ages. He came from Pergamum actually and he claimed that he received communications about medical practices directly from the god Asclepius and so it's a very interesting place with regards to this whole practice of healing.

Then we have Serapis. Now, this is an interesting god. I remember on my first trip to Taiwan many, many years ago, seeing a god factory. It was a place that you could go and basically there were people manufacturing gods and, of course, there are a whole bunch of god's in different aspects of the Buddhist faith and so there is Gwangon who is the god of business. There was Tin-moo who was the heavenly mother. I remember going to a temple of Tin-moo down in a place called ??? And there was one God on one side that was like this that supposedly could see for 1,000 miles. There was another god on the other side of the heavenly mother that was like this who could supposedly hear for 1,000 miles and between the two of them they were supposed to protect her. Here you have the heavenly mother in the middle and actually the worship of the heavenly mother in Taiwan goes all the way back to the book of Genesis where you read about Nimrod and Tammuz and the cult of Tammuz that developed. In fact, it's not uncommon to watch someone come in to worship the heavenly mother and they do this, making the sign of a "t," not of a cross but making the sign of a "t" over their body when they come in as part of that ancient religion, part of that ancient faith. There is nothing in Scripture that tells us that we need to cross ourselves and a lot of the Catholic religion takes aspects of the ancient cults and Christianizes it, if you would.

Well, this is a particularly interesting one. First of all, here we are in Greece and yet this is an Egyptian deity. They took one of the Egyptians gods, Osiris, and they kind of

combined him with another Egyptian god called Apis but then Ptolemy I who was one of the pharaohs of Egypt, wanted to have better relationships with Greek and, of course, most of the Egyptian gods were some form of animal. Ra, who was the sun god was often pictured not as the sun but as a picture of a raven. They had others that were like the picture of, they had gods like Osiris, the god of death that often was pictured like a jackal and they had all these, but Grecian people didn't get into worshipping pictures of animals but they would worship something that looked like a human and so Ptolemy I said, "Well, let's kind of throw Osiris and Apis together and make him this new god and we'll call him Serapis and make him look like a man and we're going to make him look like a Grecian man but we're going to put an Egyptian hat on him." What you see there in that statue is basically someone who is looking in facial appearance and the coif of his hair looks like a Grecian person but he actually has kind of an Egyptian sort of hat on and this is, by the way, the head that toppled off about a 20 foot high statue of Serapis. So the idea was, "Hey, if we can get them to worship one of our gods and we're worshipping the same god, we can come together and we can be more politically aligned." So think of it this way: it was a religion or a worship of convenience. It was a compromise between Egyptian deities and Grecian deities and it's really a great symbol for the kind of compromise that was rampant throughout Pergamos, moral compromising, compromise even within Christ's church there.

Now, there was also a temple to Zeus. This thing is over four stories tall. This, by the way, is one of the most well-preserved remnants of antiquity. It was taken out of Pergamos many, many years ago but prior to World War II and it's in the museum in Berlin now and you can walk up the steps, you can see inside of it. It's a great ancient ruin. Actually, the architect who helped move it actually later became one of the chief architects for Adolf Hitler and he helped to build a special stage for Adolf Hitler to make one of the most important speeches of his political career from and he designed and patterned the stage for Adolf Hitler to be like the temple of Zeus. Now, I'll let you do your own cogitating on what that means and what Adolf Hitler must have thought of himself to want to speak from something that looks like a god. Maybe this is what Jesus means when he says, "You're where the throne of Satan is." We'll talk more about that in a minute but we kind of live today beneath the throne of Satan. The world's hatred and men's evil deeds affect our lives and drug deals go down in local parks and homosexuality and prostitution are running rampant. There is all kinds of corruption inside of our government and they are destroying the economy and basically enslaving most of us without even understanding what's happened.

So now we see that really the kinds of things that are going on in Pergamos hit very close to home for us. We really do live today where Satan rules and to complicate matters, it seems like Satan has blurred for most of us the lines between good and evil, between black and white so that everything kind of falls in a gray area now. Technology and science and psychology and sociology have all been used to teach an entire generation to question morality and we're told that we need to be tolerant and what they mean by tolerant is that we have to accept what everybody else does even though society in general will never accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and that's what their definition of tolerance is. Sin is protected by political correctness. Fornication has become the lifestyle

and the motto of the day is, "If you can't be with the one you love, then love the one you're with." It's very much the motto of today.

Pergamos is also a city of political expedience. As I mentioned, they'd already created this special god, Serapis, just to unite the Greeks and the Egyptians in a political alliance but it also was the leading city in the worship of Roman emperors. Roman emperors proclaimed themselves to be deity and Pergamos thought that they'd cash in on this idea and so they actually asked permission of a Roman Emperor and said, "We'd like to build a temple to you here to worship you," and of course, you know, if you tell a government official that you want to worship them, they usually don't turn you down. I think in many ways we've got one now. I remember when he was running for his first term, some people actually used the word in the media "savior." God help us if he's the savior. So this is the kind of thing that was going on but this practice gave them great favor with the government and the fact is that there is a proclamation that they were the first city in the region to have a temple dedicated to "the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma." And so this became a very big deal. Do you know what? If there were contracts up or there was a new trade route being established and the Roman government had a choice between building a road through Pergamos or going some other route, well, they were going through Pergamos. Why? Because that's where the Emperor got worshiped and so they really liked that.

Now, that was Pergamos the city. Let's look a little bit at Pergamos the church and see what it is that Christ is saying to the Christians there. First of all, I think the name "Pergamos" itself is interesting because it means "two marriages." The word means that one person is married to two other people at the same time. Now, today we'd call that bigamy, that's one of the words that's used for it but the idea is that one person married to two others. It's fascinating to me that that's a picture of what Jesus is about to describe in the church when he says that they have a compromise, that is they haven't denied their faith, they are holding onto their Christianity but at the same time he says, "You've got some that hold to the doctrine of Balaam," which means you can live like you want to live, do what you want to do because your morals don't matter. We're going to talk about where that comes from and the story behind it in just a few moments. But basically he's telling the church, "You have compromised. You're holding onto Jesus with your words but you're living like the world. You're like one person trying to be married to two others."

Now, I mentioned when we started this study that there are two ways of looking at the seven churches. One way of looking at it is that there are seven literal churches that existed during the time that John is writing his epistle and I believe that. Another way, however, is to look at the churches as representing seven different periods in Christianity and the more I study, the more I see that there is a great validity to that view. Pergamos really represents the church in about the third century because this is a church now, you remember during the first and second centuries, there was a lot of persecution, particularly during the second century. You've got Diocletian and Domitian and all these others that are creating havoc. Then one day a fellow by the name of Constantine comes along and Constantine had a rival by the name of Maxentius whom he faced in battle and

Constantine claimed that the night before he went to battle with Maxentius that he had a vision of Christ bearing a cross with the words "In hoc signo vinces" which means "In this sign go and conquer." The next morning, he had a banner made and he held the banner up and Constantine proclaimed himself the victor and they went to battle and he did defeat Maxentius and also someone else and he proclaimed himself Emperor of all the Roman Empire. He still kept the name or title "Pontifex Maximus" which basically means "the high priest." So he said, "Okay, Christianity is going to be the official religion." This was a huge change for Roman Emperors because prior to this, they killed Christians and now he says, "This is the official religion but I am the high priest of the religion. I get to be the high priest." There actually isn't any historical data that would suggest to us that Constantine ever really became a convert to the Lord Jesus Christ but he set up a religion, got people behind it, went forth and conquered the enemies he wanted to conquer, all the while proclaiming himself a high priest. And then the alliance between the government and what was known as the Christian religion began to corrupt the church and we have the rise during the third century, not during the time of Christ, please don't do that to me, but you have the rise during the third century of the Catholic Church.

Now, some of us have friends that decided to become Catholic so you know where my passion is on this subject but you need to understand something: they first of all say that, well, Peter, their church is built on Peter. If you don't believe it, what do they call the square there in the Vatican? It's St. Peter's Square, it's St. Peter's Basilica, right? All of that is part of that. They base that on a misinterpretation of a Scripture when Jesus is talking to Peter one day, he says, "Your name has been Cephas which means little pebble, but now I'm going to call you Petros which means rock." Then he says, "Upon this rock I will build my church," and the Catholic Church says, "Oh, that means Peter is what the church is built on." If so, then the church has got one very unstable foundation, folks, because Peter was a man of outrageous extremes. He couldn't even keep his faith to the point of not denying Christ three times before the cock crowed. He's not what the church is built on and if you had any understanding of Greek and any understanding of the context of when Jesus said that, you would know that when Jesus spoke that, he's standing next to a massive, massive rock and he's standing in the middle of a dry river bed and he's playing to Peter and he says, "Your name has been stone and now I'm calling you rock like these rocks down here in the river bed," but then he points to himself because in Greek there are two ways of saying "this rock." It could mean this rock there or it could mean this rock right here and so when he says, "Upon this rock," Jesus is pointing to himself. He uses a Greek word that cannot refer to Peter and he says, "Upon this rock I will build my church." What is one of the name's of Jesus, by the way? The Rock of what? The Rock of Ages. He's the Rock of Ages. The Old Testament even calls him, "My fortress, my Rock, my Deliverer." He's saying, "Upon this rock, me, I'm building the church," and thank God the church is built on Jesus because if it was built on Peter, it would have crumbled a long time ago. But the Catholics got this wrong and they built a whole religion based on Peter and they tell priests they can't marry because Peter wasn't married which I find difficult because Jesus, I think, healed Peter's mother-in-law in the New Testament and I'm pretty sure you're not supposed to have a mother-in-law unless you got married.

So there are just so many possible things wrong with this but in the third century, we started having this whole idea of a supreme pontiff being over everything which, of course, was Constantine to begin with and from this today we get the idea of the pope who is called "the pontiff." He's the head of the church. Then you've got cardinals underneath that and then you've got bishops under that and you've got the priest down here and they have this whole ecclesiastical hierarchy. By the way, that is one of the meanings for the words "the doctrine of the Nicolaitans." Nicolaitan in Greek means "the people conquerors." It's the idea that there are people who have all this ecclesiastical authority and there's hierarchy and they are lording it over others. Then they started dressing fancy and they started wearing robes that were fit for kings and they started wearing tall hats to look more important. Let me help you understand something: God's design for a pastor or a Christian leader, I do believe that God calls certain people to be pastors. I believe that it's a call from the Lord. I think he calls certain people to be preachers. I think that any Christian man can stand up and speak for the Lord if he has a walk with Jesus. I want to be clear about that but I also believe that there is a certain call he puts on certain people to devote and dedicate their lives to shepherding God's people. When that happens and when we find someone and we test them because the Bible says not to ordain a novice but when they have proven their character and they have proven their consistency, you can ordain those people. What happens when we have an ordination is you have other people who have been ordained in the past that come over and they convene a presbytery and the person is quizzed about not only about his doctrine but about his lifestyle and all about his beliefs. They want to make sure that this person is not a novice, that he is mature enough for us to look at and say, "Okay, he can be a pastor."

But beyond that, you need to understand that a pastor is really just a member of the congregation that God has given a special office to but he's not someone that is part of an extended ecclesiastical hierarchy. I don't even like the idea that a bishop can tell a Methodist pastor to move. I don't think that's appropriate. I think that God should move on the hearts of a church to call a pastor and that they should follow the pastor. In Hebrews 13, it does tell those of you who are in a church where there's a godly pastor, it says, "Obey them which have the authority over you as they must give an account for your souls." A pastor is responsible for saying, God's going to ask me some day and he's going to ask our pastor some day, "Did you feed my flock faithfully? Did you preach to them the word of God? Did you minister to their hearts like you were supposed to?" God holds us accountable. That's why James says, "Brethren, strive not to be many masters." In other words, don't strive or look for the opportunity to be in charge because it's a pretty serious thing. It's a responsibility and the responsibilities outweigh the privileges, trust me. That's why Paul said that even though God had called him to the Gospel ministry who had been the chiefest of all sinners but then he says, you know, look at his life. He was shipwrecked a few times and he was whipped with 39 lashes to the point that he was nearly dead. He was left for dead one time. He had escaped in a bucket being let over the side of a wall. This is not a glorious pathway. Now, I don't want to discourage any of you that if God is calling on your life that he is saying, "You need to start preaching the Gospel," don't ignore it because ignoring God's call is worse than answering it. In fact,



preaching the Gospel is the highest privilege I've ever been given but I'll tell you that it weighs heavily on my soul. But we need to understand the reason we call this a fellowship is we're two fellows in the same ship. We're in this together. We're journeying together. We're making this trip together and that there is not an ecclesiastical hierarchy here. I'm blessed, I know some pastors are so protective of their pulpits, they won't even let anybody else in their pulpit and I am blessed that our pastor and I have a perfectly compatible relationship. I'm not here to take over his job, I'm here to make sure he does his job as long as God gives him the health to do it. That's a blessing for me to be able to be part of that.

But the devil tried during the first century of Christianity to put to death all the Christians. Now, you've got to understand something: God knows everything. The second thing you need to understand is: the devil is a whole lot smarter than you and me but he doesn't know everything. So the devil thought he could wipe out Christianity if he could just kill all the Christians and yet he discovered after 100 years of trying that the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the faith. The more martyrs that were put to death for Christ and people witnessed them being willing to die for their faith, the more people who became Christians. You even start seeing that in Acts chapter 8 and Acts chapter 9 where Paul is breathing out threatenings and slaughtering's against the church and yet he himself comes under conviction when he sees Stephen and he's holding a robe and he sees Stephen on the ground being stoned to death for his faith and that troubled Paul and in the next chapter you start seeing Paul come to know the Lord and one day he's knocked off of his horse by a blinding light and he falls to the ground and he hears this person saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" And the very first question that he asks, he says, "Who art thou, Lord?" He already knew the Lord was talking to him, he was just trying to clarify who that Lord was. His next question was, "What do I do? What do you want me to do?" And the greatest persecutor of the faith became the greatest advocate for it.

So you see here that this really does represent a period of Christianity for us in the third century. Now, you see at the start of this letter we see who Jesus is and this is one of the, I guess, the harsher descriptions of Jesus. He says, "I am the one with the two-edged sword," and if we go back and look in chapter 1, verse 16, it tells us in chapter 1, verse 16, "And he had in his right hand seven stars and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword." What's the deal with the two-edged sword? It cuts both ways. In fact, this is a principle you see throughout Scripture. In the Old Testament when they read the law of God, it was read from two mountains. They got on top of Mount Gerrizim and they read all the blessings of the law and then they went over to the top of Mount Sinai and they read all the curses of the law. Now, by the way, if you had a chance to only make one of those two meetings, which one would you pick? I'd have much rather been over here at Mount Gerrizim, quite frankly. But you know, that's the choice we have every day. I can either do something that honors God's principles and get what was promised from Mount Gerrizim or I can violate God's principles and I can get what comes from Mount Sinai. I can have blessing or I can have chastisement. It's also a two-edged sword in this sense that the word of God separates believers from the world and then it judges

the world for its sin. It is both at the same time, a sword of salvation and a sword of judgment.

Now, after Jesus identifies himself, he makes an acknowledgment that we all pretty well know, "Life is tough. Life is tough." What does he say, he says, "I know you live where Satan's throne is." The King James version has "seat." A better definition is "throne." He's talking about where Satan is in charge. Maybe he's talking about that temple of Zeus which if you look at that picture of the temple of Zeus, you can almost see a throne there. It looks like it's got two big arms on either side of it and maybe he sits in the middle of the whole thing. Maybe it's talking about this reference to Asclepius where it was dominated by images of serpents because that was what they thought the God looked like. But he says, you know, "there are two things you've done right." Isn't it nice to know that you've done something right? I love it when somebody tells me that I did something right. I try to tell my kids when they've done something right and Jesus says, "Okay, first of all, you have held fast to Christ's name." He says, "You haven't denied my name," and he also says, "You haven't denied your faith in Christ." That's a pretty good commendation. He says you haven't denied my name. You haven't been like Peter, by the way, who said, "Oh, I don't even know him." No, their willing to name the name of Christ in their lives in spite of the fact that that's a hardship. Now, it's not the same kind of hardship that you would have experienced maybe in the first century but it's still a hard thing to do.

Then he says, "You didn't deny your faith even when my faithful martyr Antipas died." Now, we don't know a whole lot about this fellow. He's not mentioned by any of the early church fathers. There is one reference to him in history. There is no other reference in Scripture. The word "antipas" by the way, means "against everything." That's kind of an interesting title. There are only two people in the Bible named Antipas and one is Herod Antipas which was not a nice guy. Just read the Gospels and the book of Acts and you'll understand. Herod Antipas, not a nice guy. But then there is this Antipas who really is evidently Jesus says he is, "My faithful martyr." Boy, I'll tell you what, you probably can't have many approbations from Jesus better than that one to be called "My faithful martyr." It means that you were willing to go the ultimate distance for Jesus Christ and that's what Antipas did. What we're told about Antipas is that because of his faith, he was put inside of a brass statue of an oxen and then the brass statue of the oxen was put over a flame and he is basically inside a giant Dutch oven being roasted to death and as he's dying for his faith inside of this oxen, they can hear him outside singing praises to his Savior.

He was from Pergamos and the people from Pergamos saw this example and heard it and they knew that they might be next in the oxen and yet they still didn't deny their faith and that's pretty awesome except for one thing: Antipas was faithful but the people in Pergamos began to compromise. He says, "I know you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam," verse 14. "I have a few things against thee because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam." Now, we have to go back in the Old Testament starting around Numbers chapter 22 to get the story of Balaam and basically it works like this, king Balak was the king of Moab so let's do a little backtrack to the Old Testament

for just a minute. King Balak of Moab knew that whoever Balaam cursed got cursed and whoever Balaam blessed got blessed. This guy had a great track record when it came to prophecy and so he says, "Do you know what? I'm going to hire him." And he sends people over to Balaam and says, "I want to hire you to come because there are these people, these nasty people that have just come out of Egypt and they're like trying to take over the whole land it looks like and these nasty people, everywhere they go, things seem to happen to people around them. I want you to come and place a curse on them so that we don't have to worry about them affecting things here in Moab." So he sends a bunch of messengers, they send money and to Balaam's credit, when he first heard this, he said, "No, I will only do what God tells me to do. I'm not going to go," by the way, Balaam himself was not an Israelite so I don't quite know how he came to this relationship with God but he said, "Listen, I'm not going to go with you. I don't care what the fee is. I'm not going to go." So the people went back and they told Balak, they said, "He won't come with us." So they sent messengers this time with bigger gifts. They upped the ante. It almost makes you wonder if Balaam is trying to drive up the price a little bit. And he goes back and he said, "Well, I'll tell you what, that's a great offer. You stay the night here and I'll talk to the Lord about this," and he tells the Lord, "Lord, these people came back and they've offered a better price, you know. Do you want me to stay here or do you want me to go?" And God says, "Okay, you can go." By the way, have you ever done this, parents? Don't raise your hands because you might be embarrassed for your kids to know this. But have you ever, your kids have pleaded with you, you know you don't want them to do it and finally just in desperation you say, "Yeah, go ahead." And you think, "Just let them see. Let them see that this is a bad plan." Now, sometimes you do that with your kids. It's kind of like my dad used to tell me, he'd say, "You're not always punished for what you do. Sometimes God just lets you live with the consequences of what you do." I went, "Okay."

So sometimes you think, "Okay, well, go ahead. Live with the consequences." So basically that's what God did. He said, "Okay, go ahead and go with them." But then God is kind of ticked off at Balaam. So much so that Balaam is riding a donkey down the road and he gets down the road a little bit and all of a sudden the donkey sees something that Balaam didn't. This is maybe the only time in history that a Democrat saw the truth but anyway, pardon me. Forget that. But Balaam looks and the donkey sees what? He sees an angel of the Lord standing opposed to Balaam and the donkey won't go and so he tries to veer out of the path and in doing so, he rubs Balaam's leg up against a rock because he's pressed, he's up in a narrow pass and he basically crushes Balaam's leg between the donkey and the rock and Balaam just gets up and just hits that old, stubborn donkey. They go a little bit further down the road and this time the donkey sees the angel of the Lord and now there is nowhere to turn. You can't turn to the left and you can't turn to the right. It's an even narrower pass and the donkey just lays down. He won't go any further because that donkey sees the angel of the Lord and he knows bad stuff is about to happen. This time, he doesn't take a whip or a stick, he takes his staff. That's a big old chunk of wood, like a big old rod, and he takes it like a club and whacks that donkey over the head. No comment here about what other donkeys today need. But he whacks him over the head and then all of a sudden, God gives, the angel of the Lord speaks to him through the donkey. He says, "Listen, have I ever treated you wrong before? Is it my habit to treat

you like this when you're on my back and we're riding somewhere?" Of course, Balaam is like, "Oh, I guess I now know. You've been a pretty good donkey up until now." Then he says, "Well, there is something here you ought to see." About that down, the angel of the Lord reveals himself to Balaam and he says, "You've struck your donkey now three times but he was trying to keep you from getting killed." He said, "Okay, you go ahead and finish this trip but don't you dare say anything that the Lord doesn't tell you."

So Balaam gets out there where Balak is waiting and they go up on top of a mountain and Balaam does all these little things that he does, you know, parts of his ritual that kind of get him insight. All of a sudden, he speaks an oracle and this word comes out of his mouth and it totally blesses Israel. He even says, "This King asked me to curse Israel but how can I curse that which God is blessing." And out it comes. Needless to say, Balak is not happy with the investment he's made so far and so he says, "Now wait a minute, that's not what I asked you to do. I asked you to curse them." He says, "Let's try this. Let's go to a different hill." So they move over to a different hill thinking that maybe a change of perspective on the geography. By the way, if you remember, the tribes of Israel camped in the shape of a cross. I've shown you that picture before. The Bible tells us who camped on the south, who camped on the east, camped on the west, who camped on the north. It even tells us how many people were in each camp and if you draw that out proportionally, it makes a picture of a cross and the tabernacle of God was in the middle. The Shekinah cloud of glory was there by day and by night it was a flaming pillar of fire. Then you had all the tents hung up and they would have all had lights at the entrances to their tent and so when you went out on the side of a mountain in Numbers 23 thinking you were going to curse Israel, you saw the picture of a giant flaming cross in the middle of a desert. Fascinating stuff.

He tried a second time. He came out with another oracle. This time not only did he bless Israel but he cursed all the enemies of Israel. Well, now the king of Moab is really not happy because he was one of those enemies. Then they tried going somewhere else and he said, "Let's do it again." This time he says, Balaam says, "Well, maybe we'll change things up here. Build me seven altars and go and get me seven bulls and put a bull on each altar. We'll offer it and see if now I can curse them." And so out they come and they do all this and now in addition to all of the travel and entertainment expenses you now have dinner out for everybody with these seven bullocks. They make this big to-do and he comes out with the third oracle and once again, blesses Israel. To make a long story short, four times Balaam tries to curse Israel. Four times he blesses Israel and curses Israel's enemies. And he even makes some pretty specific predictions, some of which didn't even come true until the days of the Roman Empire but they were very specific predictions about who would conquer whom.

Now, what's interesting is that in the Bible we're not really told what happens between that chapter and the next chapter. What happens between Numbers 22 and Numbers 23? We find in Numbers 23 that suddenly Israel is being judged for their compromise. But the Bible does give us some other clues about Balaam and what he did. So here in Numbers 22, I'm not going to read that whole story. I would love for you to go home and read

Numbers 22 beginning at verse 4 and you can see the whole story about where he tried to hire him.

But the story unfolds and he gives those four blessings. Then a plague comes upon the children of Israel. You think, "What happened?" Here every time he tries to curse Israel he blesses them and now a plague has come upon Israel? What happened between the two chapters? We actually see in Numbers 25 that Moses says that the problem is that the children of Israel have married the children of the Midianites and some of the Moabites and they have begun, the women from those groups of people, got the Israelite men to start accepting, first of all, tolerating then accepting and then participating in the worship of their pagan gods. When they did this, they lost God's blessing and so a plague comes upon Israel. Moses is leading Israel and Moses says, "We've got a problem here." He figures out that what's happening and so he basically does something that sounds pretty horrendous but he orders the execution of all the Israelite men who have begun worshipping the false gods because he knew that the nation would never be what God wanted it to be unless they followed the Lord and so these men are hanged. While they are in the process of hanging them and Israel is weeping because these are some of its most beloved chieftains and elders, this guy comes into camp with a Midianite prostitute on his arm and walks right in front of Moses. Talk about not hiding your sin. He walks right in front of Moses. Do you know what happens? Some fellow follows them into their tent and he drives a spear through both of them and at that point, God stopped the plague but the Bible tells us but not until 24,000 Israelites had died of a plague sent by the hand of the Lord. You see, God takes compromise very seriously. He takes compromise very seriously. And there is a reference you notice that Jesus makes in this letter to the church at Pergamos. He says, "They hold the doctrine of Balaam," but then he makes this other observation here. He says, "Who taught them to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication." We have a phrase today when two companies unite and you say "Such-and-such company got into bed with So-and-so." Jesus is using this phrase deliberately because he's basically telling the church, "You've gotten into bed with the world. You've compromised that much." There's that reference.

But now look, we don't have to guess entirely about the character of Balaam. Nobody tells us in the Bible what he said but look at this comment about Balaam in Numbers 31:16, "Behold, there caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregations of the LORD." Now, the historian Josephus records what was passed down by tradition as to what happened. Listen to this, "O Balak, and you Midianites that are here present," this is Balaam's words as reported by Josephus, "for I am obliged even without the will of God to gratify you," he said, "Well, you've paid me. I've got to give you something." "It is true no entire destruction can seize upon the nation of the Hebrews, neither by war, nor by plague, nor by scarcity of the fruits of the earth, nor can any other unexpected accident be their entire ruin; for the Providence of God is concerned to preserve them from such a misfortune; nor will it permit any such calamity to come upon them whereby they may all perish; but some small misfortunes, and those for a short time, whereby they may appear to be brought low, may still befall them; but after that they will flourish again, to the terror of those that brought these mischiefs upon

them. So that if you have a mind to gain a victory over them," meaning the Israelites, "for a short space of time you will obtain it by following my directions," and here's what he told them: "do you therefore set out the handsomest of such of your daughters as are most eminent for beauty, and proper to force and conquer the modesty of those that behold them, and these decked and trimmed to the highest degree you are able. Then do you send them over to be near the Israelites' camp and give them in charge, that when the young men of the Hebrews desire their company, they allow it them; and when they see that they are enamored of them, let them take their leaves; and if they entreat them to stay, let them not give their consent until they have persuaded them to leave off their obedience to their own laws and the worship of that God." He says, "Give them whatever they want, girls, as long as they quit worshiping God." Interesting. "Who established them, and to worship the gods of the Midianites and Moabites; for by this means God will be angry at them. Accordingly, when Balaam had suggested this counsel to them, he went his way."

Now, the New Testament says some more stuff about Balaam in just a minute but I want to point out that there is a very slippery slope of compromise that happens. They intermarried with the pagans, they tolerated the worship practices and then they are involved in the worship practices and then they begin to be part of the immorality. By the way, did you notice, look at verse 14 again. It says in Revelation 2:14, "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a," underline this next word in your Bible, "a stumblingblock." The word "stumblingblock" there is the word that's used to describe the part of an animal trap that sets the trap off. You have all seen pictures of like a bear trap, you know, those giant claws and you have to spread them back and they are spring-loaded and in the middle is that piece of metal that if they step on it, the clamp comes down on their legs. Or you've surely all baited a mouse trap and you know that you put a little rod on this little piece of metal that is going to basically wiggle just a little bit. You put some bait there and as soon as the mouse or the rat moves it, it lets loose the rod and the spring that holds the bar comes crashing down upon the animal's spine and crushes them. That trigger, the thing that sets off the trap is what the Greek word here is translated "stumblingblock." What Jesus is saying is that Balaam cast a trap for the Israelites by their moral compromise. What he's now telling his church is, "You are giving in to those who are setting a trap for your ruin." It's a downward slope.

By the way, here's another reference to Balaam in the New Testament. Jude, verse 11. Jude has only got one chapter. I thought about telling you to turn to Jude chapter 4 and verse 11 just to see how long you looked for it but I won't do that. It says, "Woe unto them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core." 2 Peter 2:15 says this, "Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness." In other words, he said, "in the end, he really did enjoy the money. He felt like he had to give something of value so he came up with a plan. He couldn't curse them with his mouth prophetically but he said here's a plan for their destruction and so he earned his keep that day." It makes me wonder about people who do ministry for money.

Now let's go back to Revelation and finish. There was a big problem in Pergamos and that is that it was easy to intermarry with heathens because it was a heathen society and any social contact with the world also involved compromise. Many of them were eating meats that had been offered to idols. You may remember in Acts chapter 15, the Council of Jerusalem encouraged them to abstain from doing that. Paul talks to the Corinthians about that problem.

Then you have those pesky Nicolaitans again. We've mentioned them several times but basically what the Nicolaitans did were two things: one is, they absorbed the doctrine of Balaam but made it religious. Now it was like, "Now that you've named Jesus as your Savior, your ticket is bought, it's paid for. Do whatever you want to because after all, you're already forgiven." Or they would say things like, "What you do really doesn't matter because as long as you have the right belief." Or, "A little compromise is okay, just remember to ask forgiveness before you fall asleep at night. You can't expect to relate to the world if you are not involved in its activities." It went to the extreme that later we see an organized church, the Catholic church, selling what were called indulgences. In other words, you could pay a fee and then you could go sin without any consequences because you had paid for an indulgence. Those pesky Nicolaitans. By the way, you remember the letter to the church at Ephesus, they were commended for rejecting the Nicolaitans but here the church at Pergamos is criticized because they've tolerated them. By the way, Nicolaitans is a compound of "nikao" which means "to domineer or conquer," "laos," meaning "people or laity." It really means the domineers of the people. It was a priestly class that had sprung up and created its own hierarchy to dominate the laity. You know, let me give you a little reference. You should go read the book of 1 Peter where it says that "all of you have been made kings and priests to our God." I'm not a priest in the sense of a formally recognized ecclesiastical hierarchy and you've got to come to me so that I can intercede for you but I'm a priest because I'm a Christian. But so are you. You're supposed to intercede for others. You are supposed to minister the Gospel to others. You are supposed to bind the wounds of others. You're supposed to give wisdom to others. We're all supposed to be grace dispensers. We're all in the priest business together.

Now, look at the one command of Christ. He's real simple. Not a whole lot of elaborate stuff here. Here's what he says, one word: repent. That's an aorist imperative verb so today we could translate it, "repent and do it now." By the way, that word comes up eight times in the book of Revelation, mostly with reference to the seven churches. But he says, "Guess what's going to happen if you don't repent?" Look at verse 16, "Repent or else I will come unto thee quickly and I will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." Now, this verse bothers me. It bothers me because there is a "they" and a "them." Which one is which? We have to remember that the letter is addressed to the messenger of the church so it could be interpreted he's saying to the pastor of the church, "You repent and get everybody else on board with repentance or else I'm going to destroy, I'm going to take away your candlestick. I'm going to take away your church." Or he could be saying, "I'm going to come in your midst and I'm going to wipe out those that have the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and you're going to see people die and it's going to be mournful and sad for a time because I'm going to cleanse my church." And to be honest, I can't really

tell you which way is the correct way but I'm going to tell you this: he is serious about eliminating compromise from his church. We know how serious he is because he let 24,000 people die in a plague.

Now, what's his promise? Look at verse 17, "He that hath an ear," in other words, if you can hear, listen up, here it is, "let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give," two things, "to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." By the way, I mentioned Nicolaitans meant "people conquerors." The word Balaam means "lord over the people." A little interesting insight there for you.

So let's look at these two things. First of all, what is this hidden manna business? The hidden manna is a reference to the tabernacle. You remember that in the tabernacle you came in on a gate, the gate was on the east side. Over here was the tribe of Judah. You couldn't come into the tabernacle unless you walked through the tribe of Judah and Jesus is called the Lion of the Tribe of what? Judah. So you can't come to God at all unless you come through Jesus. You come inside and there is a brazen altar there. Sacrifice was always killed on the north side of the altar. Blood was poured there because without blood there could be no remission of sins and yet this expiated sins, that pushed them forward, it shoved them under the carpet until Jesus became the propitiation, not expiation but propitiation for our sins. Expiation covers it up, propitiation actually deals with the problem. Then you go in and you'd reach the tabernacle proper which is a large tent and the first section of that tabernacle was the holy place. Right here was the table of showbread. Over here was the candlestick and right here in front of the curtain was the altar of incense. Then you went into the Holiest of Holies it was called, and the only thing in there was the Ark of the Covenant of God. Inside that Ark, the Bible tells us there were basically three items: there were the 10 Commandments, Aaron's rod that budded and there was a pot of manna. That's pretty hidden. In fact, it was only the great high priest who could go in there to begin with. Only the great high priest had access to it and yet Jesus says, "I'm going to give you to eat of the hidden manna." In other words, "I'm going to give you a source of strength and a source of nourishment that can only come from me." That's the real meaning of the hidden manna. By the way, Jewish tradition says that Jeremiah before his death hid the Ark of the Covenant and it's believed that nobody will ever find the Ark until the Messiah is ready to rule and reign in Jerusalem and they believe that that manna will be preserved perfectly until that time which I have no question that God is capable of doing that. Then they believe that the miracle of manna will be repeated during the messianic reign of Jesus Christ. I don't know if all that's true but I do know he's saying, "You're going to enjoy the blessings of the Messiah." That's what he means by the hidden manna.

Then he says, and "I'm going to give you a white stone with a new name written on it." What's the deal with the white stone? By the way, there is one other reference to hidden manna I want you to pay attention to. We've done at least two times in the last several years, we've done a Passover ceremony here, kind of a Christianized Passover ceremony. You know, there is a part of the Passover where you take three pieces of matzoh bread and you put them in a bag or a pillow called a matzotash and during the ceremony there



comes a time where you only pull out the middle piece, it's always the middle piece, never the end pieces. You pull out the middle piece from the matzotash and you break it and that is what is eaten during the Passover ceremony. The other two pieces are never eaten. They stay in the matzotash. They are basically hidden. Why the middle piece? Because Jesus is the bread of life and he's called the second person of the Godhead and it was that person who was broken for our sins on the cross at Calvary. It's a very significant part of the Passover ceremony.

Now, what is that white stone? Here are the things you used white stones for back in this day. One is when a jury or a judge would vote on your guilt or innocence, they would signify that you had been acquitted or forgiven or presumed to be innocent with a white stone. It was a sign of acquittal where as a black stone meant judgment. Jesus here is saying, "You're going to be acquitted of your crimes." Why? Because Jesus paid for your crimes.

The next thing was, it was the dismissal of a gladiator. When a gladiator finished his service to the Roman Empire and he had earned his right to be free because most of them were slaves, he was given a white stone that says you're free and also it says that you fought the good fight, you've kept the faith, you've finished the course.

Then and I think this is the primary meaning, people went around all the time during the time that John is writing in Revelation, wearing amulets. An amulet was something you wore kind of for good luck. It was like a safety charm. On one side it would have the picture of a certain God and on the backside it had a secret inscription that only you knew. Nobody else could read that inscription and it was meant to confer a blessing or security on you. And Jesus is basically saying he's going to give you a white stone and it's going to have his image on it and the name on the back is going to be personal and private with you but it's going to be the name of Christ and it's going to be a name that relates to you and it's going to be a name that's precious to you. He's basically saying that you're going to be sealed eternally under the protection of Jesus Christ. That's what that means.

It could also be a token of citizenship. Paul said in Philippians 3, "For our citizenship is in heaven from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."

And the Urim, you remember the priest had two stones inside his breastplate and he would reach in there and one was called the Urim, it meant the light. That's the white stone. Isaiah 62:2, refers to the new name. He says, "And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, And all the kings thy glory: And thou shalt be called by a new name, Which the mouth of the LORD shall name." This means that there's going to be a personal, private relationship between us.

Here's the real idea. The real idea means that we're eternally protected by God. You know, when I got married, Judy and I made some vows before the Lord and one of those vows was "till death do we part." Because it was a vow made before God, we never made divorce an option over these last 34 years. It just wasn't an option; you couldn't do it. So

you work things out. But that was a vow before God. Now, our marriage is supposed to be a picture of our relationship with Jesus Christ and I want you to know that when you get to heaven, Jesus takes his vows even more seriously than you do yours and when you get to heaven, he's not going to look at you after the first few thousand years there and say, "Do you know what? I think this was a mistake. I'm kicking you out." No, you are eternally sealed, that's the meaning behind that white stone. That's the real idea.

Now, as Richard comes to lead us in a song, let me just ask you this question, I don't really have a good application slide here, I should. Let me ask you this: if Jesus were looking at you today, would you be more like the church of Smyrna who was faithful and willing to suffer for Christ or would he see you as kind of compromising with the way the world does stuff? Compromising with its standards. Compromising with its language. It's vocabulary. It's dress. It's manner of life. Would he think that we were like the church at Pergamos? Judy sang in her special a while ago and said,

"O Holy Ghost, revival comes from thee,  
Send a revival, let it begin in me."

I don't know about you, but I need that and it doesn't shame me one bit to have to pray up here every week and ask God to start a revival at First Baptist, Las Colinas inside Robert Rohlin.

Would you stand and if that's your prayer, please join me at the altar.

Hymn 378, "Take My Life and Let It Be."

1 2 

What's a Christian supposed to be doing?

3  **Revelation 2:12-13**

*And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.*

4  **Revelation 2:14-17**

- *But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*

5  **An overview**6  **Pergamos, the city**7  **Pergamos**8  **City of wealth**

- Pergamum (alternate spelling) had about 200,000 population (40,000 citizens)
- Wealthy city
  - Capital of Attalus the Second's kingdom, bequeathed by him to the Romans, 133 B.C.
  - Famous for its library, founded by Eumenes (197–159 B.C.), and destroyed by Caliph Omar.
- Parchment called *pergamena* invented here from sheep skin

9  **City of wickedness**

- People in its pagan cults worshiped Athena, Asclepius, Dionysus, Serapis, Athena, and Zeus.
- Pergamum was famous for its university with a library of about 200,000 volumes, and for manufacturing parchment from sheepskin resulting in a paper called *pergamena*.
- Being a Christian here was hard – like being a Christian in Las Vegas today.

10  **Asclepias**

- The god of healing
- Called "savior" by the inhabitants of Pergamos.

11  **Serapis**

- A god of compromise

- Combines 2 Egyptian gods – Osiris and Apis  
(Osiris + Apis = Serapis)
- Given Greek look with Egyptian costume by Ptolemy I in order to foster ties between Egyptians and Greeks

12  **Zeus**

- King of the gods

13  **City of political expedience**

- Pergamos was the leading city in the worship of Roman emperors
  - This practice gained them great favor with the government
- It was the first city in the region to have a temple dedicated to “the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma.”

14  **Pergamos, the church**

What does He say to compromising Christians?

15  **One person, 2 marriages**

- Pergamos means “twice married” and is a typical name for the professing church which claims to be the bride of Christ, but is married to the world.

16  **A period in church history**

- After the devil had played the roaring lion for several centuries, trying to exterminate the church of Jesus Christ, he discovered that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”
- He then stopped the persecutions suddenly and began to corrupt the church.
  - The rise of a formal catholic church with exalted ecclesiastical hierarchy

17  **Jesus – a sure Judge**

- The One with the 2-edged sword
  - Pictured in 1:16 as coming from His mouth
- The two edges:
  - Blessings (Mt. Gerazim) and curses (Mt. Sinai)
  - Separates believers from the world; condemns the world for its sin
  - Sword of salvation / sword of judgment

18  **Life is tough...**

- Jesus acknowledges that these people live where Satan’s throne is
  - Perhaps a reference to the temple of Aclapias (represented by a serpent)
- Two things the Christians at Pergamos did right:
  - Held fast to Christ’s name
  - Did not deny their faith in Christ, even when one of their own—Antipas—was martyred.
    - Antipas = “My faithful martyr”

19  **Jesus’ faithful martyr**

- Little is known about Antipas
- Simeon Metaphrastes tells the story that Antipas—during the reign of Domitian—was shut up in a red-hot brazen bull, and ended his life in thanksgivings and prayers as he roasted.

#### 20 **The doctrine of Balaam**

- You have those who hold the doctrine of Balaam
- Balaam had been guilty of counseling King Balak to cause Israel to sin through intermarriage with heathen women and through idol-worship (cf. Num. 22–25; 31:15–16).

#### 21 **Backtrack to Balaam**

#### 22 **Remember Balaam?**

- Hired by King Balak of Moab to put a curse on the Israelites
  - Made offerings from 7 altars and at least 2 places
  - Tried to curse Israel, but a series of 4 oracles blessing Israel and cursing its enemies came out of his mouth
- Gave Balak advice on how to get Israel to compromise with Midianite women; led to plague killing 24,000 Israelites at Baal of Peor (Numbers 31:16)

#### 23 **Numbers 22:4-6**

*And Moab said to the elders of Midian, "This horde will now lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field." So Balak the son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the people of Amaw, to call him, saying, "Behold, a people has come out of Egypt. They cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me. Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."*

#### 24 **The story unfolds**

- Balak sends gifts to entice Balaam to come curse Israel
  - Balaam refuses to go
  - Balak sends bigger gifts
  - God now tells Balaam to go but to do only what He says
  - God is angry with Balaam and an angel of the Lord is prepared to slay Balaam; the donkey saves the day
- Balaam utters 4 oracles blessing Israel

#### 25 **The plague of compromise**

- Israelites intermarry with pagan women
  - They get involved in pagan worship
- God sends a plague among the Israelites
  - Moses orders the execution of those Israelite chiefs who had compromised by

worshiping Baal (Numbers 25:1-9)

- One man brazenly brings a Midianite prostitute into the camp in plain sight; only when they are both killed does the plague stop (after killing 24,000 Israelites)

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26  **Numbers 31:16**

- *Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.*
- At some point, Balaam offered advice to get Israelites to intermarry with Midianite women who led them into immorality and compromise leading to the death of 24,000

27  **Josephus (Antiquities 4.6.6)**

- *“O Balak, and you Midianites that are here present (for I am obliged even without the will of God to gratify you), it is true no entire destruction can seize upon the nation of the Hebrews, neither by war, nor by plague, nor by scarcity of the fruits of the earth, nor can any other unexpected accident be their entire ruin; (128) for the providence of God is concerned to preserve them from such a misfortune; nor will it permit any such calamity to come upon them whereby they may all perish; but some small misfortunes, and those for a short time, whereby they may appear to be*

28  **Josephus (2)**

- *brought low, may still befall them; but after that they will flourish again, to the terror of those that brought those mischiefs upon them. (129) So that if you have a mind to gain a victory over them for a short space of time you will obtain it by following my directions:—Do you therefore set out the handsomest of such of your daughters as are most eminent for beauty, and proper to force and conquer the modesty of those that behold them, and these decked and trimmed to the highest degree you are able. Then do you send them to be near the Israelites' camp and give them in*

29  **Josephus (3)**

- *charge, that when the young men of the Hebrews desire their company, they allow it them; (130) and when they see that they are enamored of them, let them take their leaves; and if they entreat them to stay, let them not give their consent till they have persuaded them to leave off their obedience to their own laws and the worship of that God who established them, and to worship the gods of the Midianites and Moabites; for by this means God will be angry at them.” Accordingly, when Balaam had suggested this counsel to them, he went his way.*

30  **The slippery slope of compromise**

- Balaam's counsel led to the enslavement of the Israelites.
  - They intermarried with pagans
  - They tolerated the worship practices of their pagan wives
  - They began participating in these practices
  - They committed immoral sensual acts with a religious excuse as part of their

worship to pagan gods

31  **Jude 11**

- *Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.*

32  **2 Peter 2:15**

*Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.*

- God here condemns Balaam for seeking to make money through religious error.
- What could that say about some ministries today?
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33  **Return to Revelation**

34  **A problem in Pergamos**

- Intermarriage with heathen women was a problem in Pergamum where any social contact with the world also involved worship of idols.
- Usually meat in the marketplace had been offered to idols earlier (cf. 1 Cor. 8).

35  **Those pesky Nicolaitans**

- The Nicolaitans took the compromise of Balaam and made it religious.
  - “You’re already forgiven, so why not enjoy life?”
  - “What you do doesn’t really matter any more, as long as you have the right belief”
  - “A little compromise is OK; just remember to ask forgiveness before you fall asleep tonight”
  - “You can’t expect to relate to the world if you aren’t involved in its activities”

36  **One command from Christ**

- REPENT and do it now!
  - This command occurs 8 times in Revelation
- Failure to repent leads to:
  - Christ coming in judgment to the messenger of the church and fighting against the people of the church
- God hates compromise
  - The plague of Peor (24,000) illustrates this point

37  **The promise**

- Two things are promised to those who hear this Word, repent, and remain free from compromise:
  - Hidden manna
  - A white stone with a new name written in it; the name is known only to the Lord and the recipient

38  **The hidden manna**

- Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life
  - The believer's unseen source of nourishment and strength
  - This is a reference to the pot of manna hidden in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle before the ark of the testimony
  - Only the High Priest had access to this manna; believers are priests to our God.

39  **The hidden manna (2)**

- Matzotash
  - Manna hidden in or under a pillow
  - Only middle piece of matzo bread taken out, broken, and eaten (symbolizes that the second person of the Godhead was crucified for our sins.

40  **The white stone**

- White stones used to indicate:
  - Acquittal (or forgiveness) of a crime
  - Dismissal of a gladiator (who had fought the fight and finished his course)
  - An amulet with a divine name written on it indicating the blessing of a deity on the wearer
  - Token of membership or citizenship
  - The *Urim* ("light") was a white stone

41  **The new name**

- Isaiah 62:2 – *And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, And all kings thy glory: And thou shalt be called by a new name, Which the mouth of the LORD shall name.*
- Amulets worn during this time had the image of a god on one side and a hidden text on the other side. It connoted blessing and protection on the one that wore it.

42  **The real idea**

- The white stone with the new name written indicates we have eternal protection granted by God. For that reason, there is no need to compromise now which would result in the forfeiture of eternal rewards.