

Revelation 2:12-17 | To The Church At Pergamum

Background on Pergamum

Pergamum was the northernmost city of the 7 churches of Revelation – about 16 miles off the coast of the Aegean Sea. It's a very artsy city, had a large library that held 200,000 volumes, and was famous for its contributions to science and medicine. It was also an extremely *pagan* city and the imperial cult was deeply entrenched there.

Verse-By-Verse Notes

Verse 12

- * By identifying Himself as the “one who holds the two-edged sword” Christ affirms His ultimate power over life and death and the One who will execute vengeance on the wicked who persecute His people. This would have been encouraging to Christians who were dying by the sword of the Roman Empire.

Verse 13

- * “Satan’s throne” is most likely a reference to Pergamum as *the* center of Emperor worship in Asia. One could also read the implication of Satanic strongholds in geographic areas in this verse.
- * Christ’s commendation that the Christians at Pergamum held fast to His name means that they would not deny Him by confessing “Caesar Is Lord.” For the Christian, only Jesus Is Lord – exclusively Lord and Lord *alone*.
- * “Antipas” – very little is known about this individual besides being an early martyr. One legend claims he was roasted to death in a brass bull oven during Domitian’s reign (81-96 A.D.).

Verse 14

- * Christ’s *first* critique is that Pergamum has tolerated false teachers that led His church into compromise with the surrounding culture.
- * Robert Mounce: “*Balaam became a prototype of all corrupt teachers who betray believers into fatal compromise with worldly ideologies.*” How do some churches tolerate false teachers today?

Verse 15

- * Christ’s *second* of the Pergamum Christians – they tolerated the “teaching of the Nicolaitans” (antinomianism, hyper-grace theology, the belief that one could live in licentious ways because of grace.)
- * Robert Mounce: “[*The Balaamites and Nicolaitans*] describe an antinomian group that had accommodated itself to the religious and social requirements of the pagan society in which they lived.”

Verse 16

- * The remedy for Pergamum's problem is *repentance* – just like the remedy for the modern church's problem is *repentance*.
- * This is the 2nd time Jesus mentions his sword – which is his word: the 1st time it was an encouragement as vengeance on those who were martyring the believers at Pergamum; the 2nd time it is a frightening warning against those who were tolerating false teachers and teaching in the church.

Verse 17

- * This verse contains: 1) the call to hear and respond;
- * 2) the “hidden manna” seems best interpreted in two-ways: Jesus will take care of the faithful and the faithful will feast at the Messianic banquet in the coming kingdom;
- * 3) the “white stone with a new name” likely represents his “admission ticket” into that messianic banquet – only the faithful overcomers get it. There is a lot of background cultural stuff going on here that leads most commentators to understand these unusual statements that way. See additional handout.

The Big Takeaway: *“[The believers at Pergamum] are not openly embracing immorality and idolatry but are not closing the door to it either. . . . We need to be convinced that we must never flirt with evil.” (Jim Hamilton)*

Revelation 2:17 – The Manna, Stone, & New Name?

2:17 The promise to the overcomer includes three difficult symbols: “hidden manna,” “a white stone,” and “a new name.” The “hidden manna” is reminiscent of the manna hidden in the ark of the covenant by Moses (Ex 16:33–34; Heb 9:4). Since Moses’ pot of manna was designed to remind the Israelites of God’s grace and faithfulness in the wilderness (Ps 78:24), there may be a similar thought here. In apocalyptic Jewish teaching, however, the messianic era will see the restoration of the hidden wilderness manna: “And it shall come to pass at that self-same time (in the days when the Messiah comes) that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years” (2 Bar. 29:8; Sib Or. 7:149). **To those at Pergamum who refused the banquets of the pagan gods, Christ will give the manna of his great banquet of eternal life in the kingdom (Jn 6:47–58).****

The “white stone” is a puzzle. It has been thought of in relation to voting pebbles, an inscribed invitation to a banquet, a victory symbol, an amulet, or a counting pebble. **It seems best to link the stone to the thought of the manna and see it as an allusion to an invitation that entitled its bearer to attend one of the pagan banquets.****

The “new name ... known only to him who receives it” is either the name of Christ himself, now hidden from the world but to be revealed in the future as the most powerful of names (3:12; 14:1), or the believer’s new name or changed character through redemption (Isa 62:2; 65:15). J. B. Pritchard (*Ancient Near Eastern Texts* [3d ed.; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969], 12) cites an Egyptian text concerning the goddess Isis, who was plotting to learn the secret name of the supreme god Re to gain his hidden power for herself. The one who knew the hidden name received the power and status of the god who revealed it. Hence the name was jealously guarded by the god. This background would fit the context here in Revelation; **to Christians tempted to compromise their loyalty to Christ to gain the favor of the pagan gods, Christ generously offers himself and the power of his name so that those who have faith in him may overcome.**¹**

****emphasis mine**

¹ Alan F. Johnson, [“Revelation,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews–Revelation (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 13 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 621.