

NASB 1977 Pergamum, the church that married the world

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

The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: 13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality. 15 'Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 'Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. 17 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

If you study church history, you will find that the church began with miraculous strength and declined into fuzziness that got increasingly dark and evil. A thousand year decline into darkness and death. There are two more letters in the prophetic order, Thyatira and to Sardis, that get increasingly dark, that span more than a thousand years as types in the church timeline.

What was it that sent it on that trajectory? This letter to Pergammum is fascinating and holds the clues that explain that descent.

Pergammum is ancient, like Smyrna and it is littered with temples and gods. I had a good description of their layout and all of the temples in the first study we did here 14 years ago. I'm going to re-visit what I said then;

["Pergamum was already an ancient city when the christians of Paul's day were turning the world upside down.

They had a long history as a city state that always seemed to land on the right side of every greek and roman conquest. By Roman times, they were the capitol city of Asia Minor.

If you go there today, you can find extensive ruins of all of the palaces and theatre areas that represented their gods. At the end of a long-ish canyon there is a prominent hill, an acropolis area, where they built temple after temple after temple. Quite an accomplishment.

The temple for Trajan, the Roman Emporer~God is at the top. Then there was a complex of buildings which was a library of 200,000 volumes, 2nd largest in the ancient world, then the temple of Athena, which spills out onto the gigantic and incredibly steep arena~theatre which is the most prominent remaining piece of antiquity. It could seat 10,000 people.

From the temple of Athena, you go down some switchback ramps and land at the altar of Zeus. This structure may have been what Jesus called Satan's throne. It has a throne like shape to it. Further down the hill is the Agora, and now you're at the level of the great staging area of the theatre~colliseum.

1/2 mile or so downhill on the more flat area where the ancient city used to be, is the 'Red Basilica'. It was a temple to the God Serapis, but the christians worshiped there. It still stands. Tradition holds that this is where Antipas was martyred.

Tradition is that Antipas was appointed bishop of Pergamos by John the apostle. Tradition also is that he was burned alive in a giant bronze bull shaped incense burner.

Another mile down the hill on the flatter area is the temple and pools of the god, Asklepios. Asklepios was the god of medicine, and Pergammos was the place where modern medicine takes it's roots. The symbol of the snake entwined staff that you see on medical things is from here. That's

asklepios.

So the culture here is ancient and steep. And worship of everything NON-God is deep here."]

Let's dive in. There are good things here that we would want to emulate. And there is the root cause of decline into darkness here that we want to both understand and repel and if necessary, fight against.

*12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:
The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:*

The angel, as we saw previously, is the messenger. The person delivering this letter. In this case, their pastor.

Jesus uses men to deliver His word, His revelation, to the churches. He still does. Real churches that are lampstands in this world, are still receiving God's word through the mouths of men who speak forth the Word of God.

In the case here, this is new revelation, never before revealed by God that He is giving to these folks. For us, 2000 years later, there is no new revelation that isn't in the closed canon of scripture.

God still speaks through mens voices to His church but it is constrained to the words of this finished revelation we hold in our hands. The angel of the church at such and such a place has the responsibility to teach this book. Frighteningly, for all of us, that responsibility has fallen on me in this place

It's OK to substitute our name here for Pergammum and indeed all of these churches. *12 "And to the angel of the church in Tonopah, write:*

The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

He still has a sharp two edged sword. He still speaks to His church through messengers who hold that somber office.

Why does He choose a sharp two edged sword which is the Word of God as His imagery to describe who is writing this letter. It's because, we will see in vs. 16 that if they don't repent and change He is going to wage war with them, and that war is based in His word. This letter is fascinating and important for **us**.

13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

Jesus knows their situation, and ours. He is omniscient. All knowing. He reminds us, "**I know**." I know where you dwell. I know how difficult it is to be christians in that place.

It's as if Pergammum is ground zero for Satan's false religions. All the different false religions had the same source. All those temples to different deities. Satan is behind it all. And Satan despises christians. He hates them.

Hopefully we become enough of a threat that Satan hates us here in Tonopah. That would make me happy. I think most churches are so neutered that Satan doesn't really need to pay them much mind. I'd like to be a threat to his kingdom, his cosmos. With you. I'd like it if Tonopah Community Church was causing him headaches.

The rest of the verse explains why Satan was threatened and responded. This is the part we want to emulate and copy. We want these things to be said of Tonopah Community Church.

*13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast **My** name, and did not deny **My** faith, even in the days of Antipas, **My** witness, **My** faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*

It should jump out at you that Jesus uses the same possessive pronoun here 4 times in rapid fire. My, my, my, my. My name. My faith. My witness. My faithful one.

It may be Satan's throne, but Jesus is very possessive of what is His. In the midst of Satan's house, Jesus has a presence and possessions. Stark contrast. This place is Satan's throne, but these are mine.

They held on to their identity as those who belonged to Jesus with tenacity. They held fast His name indicates that they held on to the distinctiveness of belonging to Christ. They were Christians. Little Christs. Set apart from Satan and his temples and his false religions.

Church tradition is that Antipas was their bishop, their pastor, and that he was put in place there by not less than the apostle John himself. Tradition also tells us that Antipas was burned alive in a large bronze urn that was in the shape of a bull.

Rams horns and the horns of bulls seem to always wind up in satanic symbolism. That Ram symbol on Dodge trucks gives me pause. There's a reason Israel fell into calf worship. There's a creepy connection to Ram horns and bull horns and the death culture. Have you noticed that. I have.

No surprise that at that moment in time, while Paul and the rest of the church have literally turned the world upside down, Satan has chosen this central place in all that is happening perhaps as home base. He can only be in one place at one time.

When God asks him where he's been he tells God that he has been roaming to and fro in the earth. In the prophets we have two references to world leaders and it's actually Satan behind the leader doing harm to God's people. We don't know where he's at, but God does.

So these folks dwell in a massively challenging place in the world and they have been faithful enough that it has cost them dearly. Antipas has died for the cause of Christ. There is pressure. Most are returning fire, but some there have decided to make a treaty with the world.

14 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality.

The story about Balaam, a prophet for hire, and Balak who was king in Moab is a fascinating tale, not the least of which is the story of the donkey that talks to Balaam in Numbers 22. It goes on for 4 chapters. We won't take time to read Numbers 22 - 25 this morning, but quickly, here's what happened. I urge you to read that account though.

Balak, king of Moab, is alarmed that God has made Israel victorious in every region they've entered. Kings and kingdoms fall in battle with Israel as they move forward towards the promised land. Moab is next.

So Balak hires Balaam to put a curse, a whammy on Israel. And Balaam is willing, he's a prophet for hire, show me the money. But Balaam tells Balak, he'll prophesy, but he has zero control over what the Lord will say.

So this goes on 3 times and each time the Lord gives a prophecy in Israel's favor and not Moab's. I'm going to read a piece of the story from Numbers 24 so that you will get a feel for what's happening here. For money Balaam would curse Israel, but when he opens his mouth to do that, blessing comes out instead.

1 When Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not go as at other times to seek omens but he set his face toward the wilderness. 2 And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe; and the Spirit of God came upon him. 3 And he took up his discourse and said,

*"The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,
And the oracle of the man whose eye is opened;*

*4 The oracle of him who hears the words of God,
Who sees the vision of the Almighty,*

Falling down, yet having his eyes uncovered,

*5 How fair are your tents, O Jacob,
Your dwellings, O Israel!*

*6 “Like valleys that stretch out,
Like gardens beside the river,
Like aloes planted by the LORD,
Like cedars beside the waters.*

*7 “Water shall flow from his buckets,
And his seed shall be by many waters,
And his king shall be higher than Agag,
And his kingdom shall be exalted.*

*8 “God brings him out of Egypt,
He is for him like the horns of the wild ox.
He shall devour the nations who are his adversaries,
And shall crush their bones in pieces,
And shatter them with his arrows.*

*9 “He couches, he lies down as a lion,
And as a lion, who dares rouse him?
Blessed is everyone who blesses you,
And cursed is everyone who curses you.”*

10 Then Balak’s anger burned against Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam, “I called you to curse my enemies, but behold, you have persisted in blessing them these three times! 11

*“Therefore, flee to your place now. I said I would honor you greatly, but behold, the LORD has held you back from honor.” 12 And Balaam said to Balak, “Did I not tell your messengers whom you had sent to me, saying,
13 ‘Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything contrary to the command of the LORD, either good or bad, of my own accord. What the LORD speaks, that I will speak’? 14 “And now*

behold, I am going to my people; come, and I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the days to come.” 15 And he took up his discourse and said,

*“The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,
And the oracle of the man whose eye is opened,*

*16 The oracle of him who hears the words of God,
And knows the knowledge of the Most High,
Who sees the vision of the Almighty,
Falling down, yet having his eyes uncovered.*

*17 “I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near;
A star shall come forth from Jacob,
And a scepter shall rise from Israel,
And shall crush through the forehead of Moab,
And tear down all the sons of Sheth.*

*18 “And Edom shall be a possession,
Seir, its enemies, also shall be a possession,
While Israel performs valiantly.*

*19 “One from Jacob shall have dominion,
And shall destroy the remnant from the city.”*

*20 And he looked at Amalek and took up his discourse and said,
“Amalek was the first of the nations,
But his end shall be destruction.”*

*21 And he looked at the Kenite, and took up his discourse and said,
“Your dwelling place is enduring,
And your nest is set in the cliff.*

*22 “Nevertheless Kain shall be consumed;
How long shall Asshur keep you captive?”*

*23 And he took up his discourse and said,
“Alas, who can live except God has ordained it?”*

*24 “But ships shall come from the coast of Kittim,
And they shall afflict Asshur and shall afflict Eber;
So they also shall come to destruction.”*

25 Then Balaam arose and departed and returned to his place, and Balak also went his way.

But, Numbers 31 tells us Balaam counseled Moab to infiltrate Israel's camp with their daughters, and there was intermarriage and idol worship as a result. Immorality with women who were not daughters of Israel. The law of Moses forbade both sexual immorality but also marriage with non israelite women in Deuteronomy 7:3-4

Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, / because they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and He will swiftly destroy you.

The Moabite women then led the men of Israel into fornication, and to worship their god, baal. It was a disaster.

What does that have to do with a church in Turkey? A millenium in the future? Simple. What happened to Israel at Moab can happen to the church, spiritually. X2

The church is strong when it stays separate and distinct from the world's culture and the world's morality.

But when the world intermarries with the world's culture, we blend in, we adopt the world's ways and become a melting pot of world and christians, together, wheat and tares together in the same field, the church never wins.

When you've got a little girl with white gloves and a mud puddle, the mud never gets glovey. The gloves only get muddy. That image is exactly what happens when the church flirts and engages with the world. The church gets muddy. The world doesn't get churchy.

This church at Pergamum was tired of the world beating them up and waved a white flag and quoted Rodney King. Can't we all just get along? Actually, historically, what happened in the future, in the prophetic era that this church represents is far more bizarre.

Prophetically, this church represents the time roughly from 320 - 620 or so AD.

Satan spent the first couple of hundred years persecuting the church, but it kind of backfired. Sort of like Balak's results from Balaam. Balak kept trying to harm Israel but God kept blessing them through the prophecies.

Satan's trying to slaughter the church and snuff it out, but it only worked to make the church pure and strong. Bad plan, if you're Satan. So what did Satan do?

Emperor Constantine. Has a big vision in battle and Jesus brings him to a stunning victory, blah blah blah. So Constantine declares all of Rome will be christian or suffer the consequences. Convert or perish. Jesus is the official and required religion of the Roman Empire.

So all of the secular religions kept right on going and changed all the names to christianize them. All of the old gods are now Saint this and saint that. Springtime immoral frolicking is now called Easter. Winter solstice is now Christmas and New Years.

Everything just got a name change and kept right on doing what it was doing. The distinctive holiness and righteous living of christians, overwhelmed by a world that is ordered to christianize. When you order the world to christianize, all you get is tares. I'm oversimplifying to make

my case. An emperor declares the world christian, but only God can choose and quicken to life, real christians.

The church married the world like Israel married Moab. And all of Rome's gods (small g) came on board. They all got new names.

What that looked like locally at Pergammum was probably not so dramatic. They simply did the Rodney King thing and said, we can all get along. Give in a little. Close the gap between church and culture.

14 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality.

Committing acts of immorality is unchanged. It means exactly the same thing now as it did 1930 years ago when John wrote that down. Outside of marriage of one man to one woman, sexual intimacy is forbidden. Period. No exceptions. That sounds astoundingly bizarre to our culture in 2026. That idea is untenable in our 21st century cultural experiment.

One man, one woman, binary sex assigned at birth, married in christian marriage, faithful to each other for life. In 2026 that's crazy talk, but it's crystal clear in this book. It is what makes the true church distinct. Separated from the world.

What about not eating things sacrificed to idols. Is there a modern equivalent? I think there's a principle here. Christians, keep a distance from Satan's rituals. Eating meat sacrificed to idols may have required attending false religious rituals where that was happening.

We need to keep ourselves unstained by the world. The idea here is to keep yourself removed for yours and other weaker christians safety.

Our kids didn't understand why we forbade them to go play basketball and

hang out with the Mormon kids at the Mormon church. We were wise parents and understood the vulnerability of kids in a situation that appears to be so innocent. We took some flak for that.

You get sucked in. In ancient times you might go to some foreign god's temple. Very innocent. Want a slab of meat at a bargain price. The idol is nothing. That meat didn't change appreciably. The dead idol didn't eat it. Brisket for half price. Cow is delicious. That's all I'm interested in. The raz matazz isn't going to get me. Oh, but it does.

Christians need to keep a barrier of separation between safety and danger. Degrees of separation. This rule kept christians safely away from the danger of Satan's tricks and lures. We need to live defensively. Don't get close to spiritual danger.

The world loved to laugh at Mike Pence. Remember that. His rule, like Billy Graham's was to not be in a room alone with another woman. The world thought he was ridiculous. That made me respect him. That's the idea here. Leave the old worldly stuff alone. You may not be as strong as you think.

Meanwhile the world laughs at you. Losers. Can't get close to the fire? Wimps. Lightweights. This church was toying with the world. It was allowing worldly values. It had dropped the bar and become friends with the world. High tolerance for evil. No church discipline of members who lived continually in sin. Sinful lifestyles tolerated.

And they had the Nicolaitins also.

15 'Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

There was an interesting note in my study from 14 years ago. Some think the etymology of the word describes this particular problem.

Nicos = conquer and Laity = people. And thus a two tiered church of

professionals and ordinary people who are lorded over by the Lords. It's an interesting possibility. Especially if the lording class is abusing their forbidden power by requiring sexual favors. It could get pretty ugly.

Somehow there is a connection to sexual immorality. We know that much.

16 'Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

Jesus has no tolerance for compromise with Satan's world. And that battle is always against the book. Somehow you have to dismiss the crystal clear commands of this book in order to allow for compromise with evil.

How do you accomplish that. It's a simple flip flop. We believe the book is plenary inspired. That means every word. And the words are crystal clear.

I'm going to pick on low hanging fruit in order to show a clear example of how the church marries the world. If you've made up your mind you're going to live an LGBTQ lifestyle, (just one of gazillions of possible examples, but easy for illustration purposes,) what can you possibly do with Romans chapter one where Paul describes that as an abomination. But you want to be some kind of so called christian any way. Keep your sinful lifestyle and claim to have Jesus. How is that possible.

Well you have to cancel out the book. Somehow. And so you attack inspiration. You attack the belief that this book in it's entirety is God breathed.

There's errors in the ancient book. It was written by goat herds who had very normal for their ignorant times distaste against LGBTQ folks. They were ignorant. They didn't know any better. We do.

Some portions of this book are inspirational but some are just ignorant goat herder speak. We decide what's in, what's out. See what happened.

Instead of a God breathed book that holds authority over you, it's just a book and we have the authority to pick the parts we like and relegate the parts we don't like to the dustbin of ignorant history.

Get rid of a God breathed inspired book with authority over sinners and you can marry the world. That's our modern method. In ancient times, another way to limit the book is to make man made things equal to or more authoritative than the Bible. Like church traditions. Church magisterium. Traditions of the fathers. All that stuff gets piled on and becomes more authoritative than the book. Christ plus a pile of traditions and church magisterium.

Anything that displaces this book as sole authority over christians lowers the bar and lets in the world. That's why Jesus tells them, I'm going to make war, and it's going to be a war conducted with the sword of the Spirit, which is the very word of God. Sola Scriptura (only the scriptures) was the cry of the reformation that got the church back on the train tracks.

*17 'He who has an ear, **let him hear** what the Spirit says to the churches.*

Exactly what we said last night. Will TCC be going strong 120 years from now? Only one possibility for that to happen. Listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. Learn from their mistakes and shun the errors that killed them. Listen to the positives and copy them.

If you want to be here next year, listen and do. He isn't telling you these things in order for you to add it to your knowledge base. He's telling us so that we will act accordingly. Listen, and then do. Trust and obey.

To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

The hidden manna is in heaven. Listen to the command to preserve an omer of manna for future generations. That's us beloved, if we hold fast to

Jesus.

Exodus 16:32 Moses said, “This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Keep an omer of manna for the generations to come, so that they may see the bread I fed you in the wilderness when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’ ” 33 So Moses told Aaron, “Take a jar and fill it with an omer of manna. Then place it before the LORD to be preserved for the generations to come.” 34 And Aaron placed it in front of the Testimony, to be preserved just as the LORD had commanded Moses....

That Manna is for those who will be with Jesus in heaven. Jesus just said so. That promise is real. We'll get to see and experience God's manna, in heaven some day.

And the stone with the name. What in the world is that? Peter says we are living stones. Being built into a spiritual house. Every stone has a unique name.

We know, in 2026, what these folks did not yet know. The DNA genome that makes Jim, Jim, is a word, a single word that is 3.4 billion letters long. Lucky for the world the word that formed Jim is unique. No one else has the same 3.4 billion letter name as I do.

But my 3.4 billion continuous letter word design has issues. I do bad things. And I'm feeling my years, more and more. That Jim genome has an expiration date. I look at pictures from even 15 years ago, and then in the mirror now and I think, yikes, these past few years have been rough on me.

But guess what. In heaven I'm going to be a stone in a spiritual temple and I'm going to have a new name, an eternal one, with no expiration date. I'll still be a unique creation, but no death working against me. No sinful rebellion inside me.

That's motivation to listen and overcome. More and more I'm longing for eternity. Longing for the line in the song that we don't sing.

*Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
May I thy consolation share,
Till, from Mount Pisgah's lofty height,
I view my home and take my flight:
This robe of flesh I'll drop and rise
To seize the everlasting prize;
And shout, while passing through the air,
"Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer!"*

Jesus gives us sweet motivation to listen and overcome. I want my new name, in heaven. I want to be a stone in a structure that is a temple to His names honor. I want to experience that manna that Moses saved in the jar.