

- ***READ Revelation 1:9-16*** While the incredible imagery of this text can take our breath away as it did for John, let us not fail to understand the simple message that is being painted by these descriptions. I want to key in on the fact that Jesus is described as having “a sharp double-edged sword” coming out of his mouth. While this imagery might have you thinking about those magicians that put swords into their mouths and down their throats, let’s recognize that this seems to be a sword that is not being put into Jesus’s mouth, but it is coming out of His mouth. To me, the message is clear...Jesus’s words are coming with great force and they are coming to judge.
- This idea is not just clearly seen throughout the book of the Revelation, but it is exceptionally clear in **chapters 2 & 3** as Jesus addresses the seven churches of Asia Minor. These churches were all facing the pressures of the secular world around them, and they were responding to such pressures with varying results.
 - The church in **Ephesus** loved the truth, but they were failing in the great love for God that they had in the beginning. Jesus admonishes them to reignite that great love.
 - The church as **Smyrna** was under tremendous pressure from the surrounding influences of pagan and Caesar worship. Jesus’s words offer great encouragement to them to hold on tight to their faiths until the very end.
- The next message is directed towards the church that was located in the city of Pergamum. This message contains both words of commendation and encouragement, but it also contains strong words of rebuke and admonishment. This rebuke and admonishment centers around the fact that these brethren seem to have been willing to compromise with the world around them to some extent. Jesus appreciated what they were doing right, but He strongly rebukes them in what they were doing wrong. Let’s begin with some historical background before we get into the text.

I. Historical Background Of Pergamum

A. This capital city of Asia Minor was located about a hundred miles north of Ephesus.

- Unlike Ephesus and Smyrna, Pergamum was not a port city, but that did not stop it from being the officially recognized capital of all of Asia Minor.

B. It was the cultural, educational, & religious center for all of Asia Minor.

- Part of the reason for this city being so key to these different areas was its very large and impressive library. With around 200,000 handwritten volumes in its collection, this library was second only to the grand library of Alexandria, Egypt during its day. These vast resources naturally gave Pergamum an advantage as far as her ability to bring in masses to educate.

C. Pergamum was situated on a large 1,000 foot tall hill.

- During this age of conquest, Pergamum was a towering and even intimidating sight to behold as you walked up upon from the plains below. One archeologist named Sir William Ramsey said of Pergamum’s authoritative position, *“Beyond all other sites in Asia Minor it gives the traveller the impression of a royal city, the home of authority: the rocky hill on which it stands is so huge, and dominates the broad plain of Caicus [River Valley] so proudly and boldly.”* Pergamum was a stronghold that would not be overtaken easily.

D. We do not know the origins of the church in this city, but it could have been established during Paul’s time in Ephesus when all of Asia heard the Gospel.

- There are a number of times that Paul passed through or around the area in which Pergamum sat. One such occasion was when he went through the region of Mysia in **Acts 16:7,8**, but more than likely we can at the very least assume that disciples would have been established in Pergamum around the time Paul was in Ephesus in which the Bible tells us that all of the residents of Asia heard the Word of God. (**Acts 19:10**)

E. The ancient city of Pergamum no longer exists, and its ruins can be found near the modern day Turkish city of Bergama.

- Unlike Smyrna, but like Ephesus...Pergamum no longer exists today. The nearby town of Bergama is the nearest modern Turkish city. Ruins for the ancient city can be visited.

II. Jesus's Message To Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17)

A. He identifies Himself as the One who has the sharp doubled-edged sword. (2:12)

1. The opening to this message to the church in Pergamum is very different from the previous two messages because this introduction comes as much more of a warning that was to instill fear for what Jesus was about to say. The same fear that John had as he fell down before Jesus in 1:17 seems to be the same kind of fear that Jesus wants for these disciples to feel at this moment because of the strong message He is about to deliver to them.
2. We have seen this type of language in 1:17 and here in 2:12, but we also see it again later on in 19:11-16 as John begins to draw the great narrative of this book to a close. Jesus is described as being on a white horse as He makes judgements and brings forth justice. He is coming to exact judgment and justice upon those who have been against His people, and v.15 brings back the language of a sword coming from His mouth. *"A sharp sword came from his mouth, so that he might strike the nations with it. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will also trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God, the Almighty. And he has a name written on his robe and on his thigh: King of Kings and Lord of Lords."*
3. It seems to me that Jesus wants for these disciples Pergamum to be fully aware that He is about to share some strong words of truth with them, and they need to realize who it is that is sharing these truths. He is the ultimate Judge who is able to not only judge actions, but also the very intent of men's hearts. They needed to sit up and listen to what was said.

B. The church is commended for holding on to Jesus's name and not denying their faith in the face of immense persecution, even death. (2:13)

1. The first portion of this message from Jesus is actually a commendation for the faith of the disciples of Pergamum in the face of extreme difficulties that were unlike anything that many of the other disciples in these other cities of Asia Minor faced. I made mention that Pergamum was the cultural, educational, and religious center for all of Asia Minor, and this was something that the people of the city took very seriously, especially religiously.
2. McArthur notes, *"In the Apostle John's day, Pergamum saw itself as a defender of Greek culture in Asia Minor. There were temples dedicated to Zeus, Athena, Asklepios, and Dionysos. However, the city was dominated by emperor worship. In honor of Emperor Augustus, Pergamum built the first temple devoted to the cultic religion in 29BC. Two more would follow, to Trajan and Septimus Severus. Pergamum held a fervent religious devotion to Rome and its emperor. In neighboring cities, Christians faced danger and persecution annually if they failed to make the yearly sacrifice to Caesar. It was a daily threat in Pergamum."* (Christ's Call...page 92)
3. Even with such a great threat all around them, notice that Jesus commends them for holding onto His name and not denying their faith in Him. This is even more impressive considering the fact that these brethren had one of their own taken from them because of the persecution they had suffered for their faith. "The Days of Antipas" seem to be a reference to a particularly period of strong persecution that the disciples in Pergamum had to suffer through.
4. We don't have any Biblical information given to us about who this Antipas was, but tradition handed down claims that he was a leader within the church in Pergamum who was also a member of the medical community. The Aesculapians (members of the medical guild) accused Antipas of being disloyal to Caesar based upon his faith, and he was sentenced to death. A

number of different resources agree that Antipas was roasted to death inside a giant metal bull that was used as an altar for local pagan worship. Jesus refers to him as His faithful witness which comes from the word *martus* from which we get the modern word martyr, one of which Antipas certainly seem to have been. This church had suffered much for its faith in Jesus.

C. Jesus acknowledges this persecution was so severe because of their being located “where Satan lives.” (2:12)

1. We do not know for certain what Jesus is referencing when He refers to Pergamum as being where Satan lives, but a few explanations have been offered up by a number of historians and commentators. Here are a few highlighted by McArthur. (Christ’s Call...page 93)
 - a) Speaking of the massive altar that had been dedicated to Zeus, Edwin Yamauchi writes, *“The word altar is somewhat misleading. The structure is a monumental colonnaded court in the form of a horseshoe, 120 by 112 feet. The podium of the altar was nearly 18 feet high. The great frieze, which ran at the base of the structure for 446 feet, depicted a gigantomachy, that is, a battle of the gods and the giants. Its as one of the greatest works of Hellenistic art.”*
 - b) Others think this is a reference to the shrine of Asclepius, the Greek god of healing, who was depicted as a snake. This particular shrine was overrun by snakes that were believed to have been able to give healing to those who would lie or sleep on the ground amongst the snakes. Because Satan is referred to as a serpent a number of times in Revelation (**12:9, 14,15; 20:2**) some believe that this reference to Satan’s throne is simply connecting the worship of this God as being worship of Satan.
 - c) Finally, this reference could simply be referring to the intense practice of cult emperor worship that was present throughout Pergamum. This type of worship had the most influence on the city of Pergamum and it posed as a great danger to those did not buy into such practices such as Christians. As we mentioned last week, simply failing to repeat the phrase “Caesar is Lord” could lead to someone being put to death. Satan was certainly behind such evil, and thus it is not a stretch for this city to be known as the place he lives.
2. For these brethren to live in such an environment and not give into the influences of such religious pressure certainly was deserving of praise from Jesus, and He seems to really want for them to know that He is aware of the difficult circumstances in which they were living. But these few words of praise were only leading to some words of rebuke and admonishment for some areas in which they were coming up short.

D. Yet, they are rebuked for their allowing of false teachers to have a place within the church. (2:14-16)

1. Two separate groups are identified as having a negative influence among the church in Pergamum. The first are those among the church who held to the teaching of Balaam.
 - a) Going back to Numbers 22-25, we read of the the Moabite king Balak being terrified of what Israel was about to do to his people after what they had done to the Amorites. Balak sends messengers to Balaam (a prophet for hire) that he might come and curse the people of Israel before they came into his land and defeated his armies and people.
 - b) God was obviously not going to let this happen so he instead caused Balaam to bless Israel instead of curse her. Things were not going the way Balak or Balaam had envisioned, so it seems Balaam’s new strategy was to cause the Israelites to start intermingling with the women of Moab to the point that they were even offering sacrifices to their gods and eating the meat that had been offered. (**Numbers 25:1,2; 31:16**)
2. The similarity between what Balaam had influenced the people to do and what the disciples in Pergamum were doing must have centered around them attending pagan feasts or taking part in the immorality that was common in those practices and then still claiming Christ.

3. The second group that had a negative influences on those in Pergamum were those that held to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Remember that these teachings were also mentioned in the message to Ephesus where they were commended for turning them away whereas these disciples were entertaining their teachings. We still are not given much detail as to what is meant by the teachings of the Nicolaitans, but the writings of the early church fathers indicate that their teachings allowed for unchecked indulging of the desires of the flesh which is why they were able to coexist with those that held to the teachings of Balaam.
 4. Therein really lies the issue with the fact that there were some among this church who were allowing for these types of people with these types of teachings to be present and go unchecked. Those who were leading this church were failing to live up to the good standard that was seen in Ephesus. Where that church was commended for holding fast to the church and testing those who came in among them, this church was doing no such testing and seemingly allowing for anyone and everyone to come in and be a part of the church. As McArthur well notes, *"While the church held fast to Christ's name and did not deny the faith, they were doing an abysmal job of guarding the flock of God. They sat and watched while wolves made off with the sheep."* (Christ's Call...page 97)
 5. They were allowing for a compromising spirit to be present within the church. No, they would not deny Christ, but they would allow for the immorality of the surrounding culture to be present within their number. They had failed to keep themselves unspotted from the world. They had allowed for a love of the world to creep into their number. For this failure, Jesus warned that He would soon come upon them and fight against them with the sword of His mouth. They had to stop compromising with the surrounding cultural and purge from themselves any and everything that had leavened the lump.
- E. Their repentance and conquering would lead to Jesus blessing them with hidden manna. (2:17)**
1. If they were willing to repent and conquer then Jesus says that He would give them some of the hidden manna, a white stone, and on that stone would be a new name that no one would know except those who received it.
 2. Within the Old Testament there are instances of God delivering manna to the people to sustain them through their journeys. No doubt Jesus is saying this as a reference to Himself as manna/ bread from above (**John 6**) and the spiritual blessings that come from being in Him. If they would repent and conquer then they would be sustain by Jesus as they continued to strive to overcome this world and receive eternal rest with God. There was no need for them to participate in these pagan practices because Jesus desired to give them everything they needed in this life.
 3. The white stone might seem strange to us, but in the ancient sporting events of those days, the winning athletes would receive a stone with their name inscribed upon it. It not only was a sign of their winning, but it also admitted them into the great banquet that would be held for all of those who had won. For these disciples, their repentance and overcoming of this world would lead to them have the ultimate victory in Jesus that would lead to their eternal entrance into the presence of their heavenly Father. As far as the name goes...we cannot know anything about it for certain since Jesus says that it would only be known by those who received it. We'll simply have to be content with that.

The church at Pergamum was in a very difficult spot. They were in the midst of the some of the greatest concentration of pagan and emperor worship, and yet they had held onto the name of Jesus even in the face of the death of one of their own. However, they were rebuked for their compromising with the world in some regards. May their good example encourage us, and may their poor example motivate us to make sure that we are staying spotless in regard to the immorality of this world. We face it every day, but may God help us to be a people who refuse to compromise so that we might remain pure, clean, and unstained by the world.