

# Revelation 2:12-17 Letter to Pergamos

## BACKGROUND TO PERGAMOS

Pergamos was one of the most spectacular cities in Asia Minor at the time of writing. Its theatre was world class for the day. From around BC280 until BC133, Pergamos was actually the seat of an independent kingdom. The reign of Attalus I (BC241-197) elevated Pergamos to prominence. The last king, Attalus III (BC 138-133) bequeathed his kingdom to Rome - and then Pergamos served as the capital of the Roman province of Asia.

It was an important centre for pagan worship. Emperor worship became established there, making the city a headquarters for religious devotions. The city is described in **Rev 2:13** as "where Satan's seat is". Emperor worship was compulsory, and became a test of a citizen's loyalty to Rome. Refusal to participate was often a reason for persecution and martyrdom. Christians from northern areas of the province were often brought to Pergamos for trial. Life in this city was therefore a trial for believers.

## THE REVEALING OF JESUS CHRIST

**v12 He which hath the sharp sword with 2 edges:** This title is drawn from **1:16** and is highly relevant to Pergamos. This ecclesia had those who held the doctrine of Balaam: **2:14**. As Balaam saw an angel standing with a sword in **Num 22:31**, so this ecclesia looks up to see Christ. This is a sword of judgment. There are 2 types of swords in the Greek NT.

The **long sword** (Gk. *rhomphaia*) is used here and **2:16** as it is also in **Lk 2:35; Rev 6:8; 19:15,21**. It is this sword that is used to *execute judgement upon the nations*. It is often used in the Hebrew OT eg. **Gen 3:24**. In **Rev 2:16** Christ gives it a latter-day context with reference to Messianic prophecies in **Isa 11:4; 49:2**.

The **short sword** (Gk. *machaira*) is used metaphorically to represent God's Word in **Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12**. It is a short sword because it is used at close quarters. The *machaira* helps believers discern between good and evil: **Heb 5:13-14**. The Saints will be given authority to judge the nations with the *rhomphaia* if they have firstly used the *machaira* on themselves.

## THE LORD'S COMMENDATION

**v13 Satan's seat:** Pergamum was the centre of Rome's power in Asia Minor. Antipas was most like slain by the authorities who were their "adversary" (satan). The Greek word for "seat" literally means "throne" as it used for Rome's power in **13:2; 16:10**.

**Hold fast my name:** A common theme: **2:1,13,14,15,25; 3:11; 7:1; 20:2**. The Greek indicates *strength* as to grasp something tightly. To hold fast to "the name" of Jesus Christ is to understand the purpose of God revealed in that Name: **Jn 17:3**. "Jesus" is equiv. to the Heb. "Yahshua" ("Yahweh will save"). The Yahweh Name is revealed in **Ex 3:14**. The Name is **Yah** (*He who will be*) **Shua** (*will save*). Believers are called out of the Gentiles to be "a people for His Name": **Acts 15:14**. See also **Rev 3:12**.

Colour code: Blue (God and Jesus Christ); Red (sin/devil/judgment of wicked); Green (Kingdom); Orange (important words & phrases); Purple (return of Jews to the land); Yellow (practical exhortation). Prepared for Rathmines Bible School Teenagers.

**12** And to <sup>a</sup>the angel of the church in <sup>r</sup>Pergamos write; **These things saith <sup>v</sup>he which hath the sharp sword with two edges:**

**13** I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where <sup>s</sup>'Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not <sup>k</sup>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 <sup>o</sup>Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, <sup>p</sup>to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and <sup>r</sup>to commit fornication.

**15** So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of <sup>t</sup>the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.

**16** Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and <sup>v</sup>will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

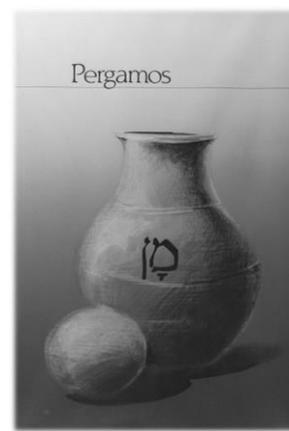
**17** He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; <sup>b</sup>To him that overcometh will I give to eat of <sup>e</sup>the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone <sup>e</sup>a new name written, <sup>v</sup>which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

**Not denied my faith:** Philadelphia similarly had "not denied my name" **3:8**. Of such believers Christ "will confess his name before his Father, and before His angels" **3:5**. Christ says similar words in **Mt 10:32; Lk 12:8**. Faith comes by hearing God's Word: **Rom 10:17**. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the confident expectation of things unseen: **Heb 11:1**. By faith believers are moved to action and given a vision of the future: **Jas 2:17-18; Heb 12:22**.

**Antipas my faithful martyr:** "Antipas" means "against all". Most likely one particular believer who was *against all* the adversaries because of his beliefs. In **Acts 22:20**, Stephen is described as a "martyr". Antipas followed in the footsteps of Christ who is "the faithful witness": **Rev 1:5**. The Gk. word translated "martyr" is often translated "witness" in Revelation. See notes on **Rev 1:9**.

## THE LORD'S DISAPPROVAL

**v14 Doctrine of Balaam:** Christ disapproved of them tolerating this: **Rom 16:17-18; 2 Jn 9-10**. Balaam's name aptly means "waster of the people" with 24,000 slain as a result: **Num 25:9**. Balaam perverted God's Word for his own advantage: **Num 22:20-22**.



**Who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block:** Balak King of Moab asked Balaam to curse the Israelites and promised him riches: **Num 22:6,16-17**. While God agreed that Balaam could go to Balak, it was only on one condition: "if the men come to call thee" **22:20-21**. Next morning Balaam rose up to go to Balak *without* the men coming to call him. He went against God's Word. He knew he could not curse the nation because they were blessed: **Num 23-24**. However, he knew how to bring *God's curse* upon them. He told Balak to send Moabitish women to commit whoredom with the children of Israel: **25:1-2; 31:8,16**. The story of **Num 22** is a parable of this Ecclesia. The donkey symbolises the ecclesia. Balaamites are pushing the ecclesia in a way it doesn't want to go. The ecclesia is weighed down by them. They read this letter and see Christ standing with the sharp sword! Events in **Num 22** symbolise false teachers in first century ecclesias: **2 Pet 2:1-3,15-16; Jude 11**.

**Eat things sacrificed unto idols and to commit fornication:** Balaam's doctrine was actively practised in Thyatira: **Rev 2:20**. Covetousness is *idolatry*: **Col 3:5**. Indulging in the world is *fornication*: **Jas 4:4; Rev 17:1-2**. Believers were being enticed to act against their conscience: **1 Cor 8:1-13**. Fornication in **Num 25:1-2** is associated with religious worship of the Moabites. This motivated Phineas to do away with 2 people who were blatantly defying God: **Num 25:10-14**. He turned away God's wrath and made atonement for the children of Israel: **Num 25:13**.

**v15 Doctrine of the Nicolaitanes:** See Ephesus notes on **2:6**.

**v16 Repent:** See notes on **2:5**. **Or else I will come unto thee quickly:** Suddenly, by surprise. See also **2:5,16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7,12,20**. **Fight against them with the sword of my mouth:** Direct reference to **Isa 11:4; 49:2; 2 Thess 2:7-10**. Christ's judgments on false Christianity at his coming: **Rev 14:19-20; 19:15,21**. Balaamites were one of many first century corruptions of the Truth which eventually developed into the Catholic Church.

## THE PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE

**v17 He that hath an ear:** See notes on **2:7** and **2:11**. **Him that overcometh:** See notes on **2:11**. **Eat of the hidden manna:** A symbol of eternal life: **Deut 8:3; Jn 6:48-51**. A day's supply of manna was placed in a golden pot under the mercy seat within the Ark of the Covenant: **Ex 16:32-35**. Symbolic of God's Word, this manna never corrupted. The manna, along with Aaron's rod and the tables of the law, was hidden from view. To eat of the "hidden manna" we must go via the mercy seat (Christ): **Acts 4:12; Jn 5:26; 1 Jn 5:11**. Only when the golden pot is opened can believers partake of immortality: **Phil 3:21; 1 Cor 15:49-50; Psal 17:15**. Immortal life is concealed until Christ's return: **1 Jn 3:2; 1 Cor 13:12; Rev 19:9; Lk 22:16**.

**White stone:** In **Acts 26:10** it literally means "I gave my pebble against them". A black stone means *guilty*, a white stone *not guilty*. **New Name written:** New in *experience*, given to those who sing a "new song" in immortality: **Rev 5:9-10**. Promise also to Philadelphia: **3:12**. Yahweh's Name is engraved on the Saints' foreheads to symbolise their Godly thinking: **14:1**.