

Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.

The Book of Revelation was written by John on the Isle of Patmos. He experienced a vision of Jesus who delivered the message of Revelation to him. As Jesus began speaking to John, he instructed him to write down the vision and send it to the seven churches of Asia, in modern day Turkey.

“Write in a book everything you see, and send it to the seven churches in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.”

The seven churches were real churches filled with real people. Each church was enduring a form of spiritual warfare. Revelation is a message to them, as it is to us, that Christ will prevail and will keep his promise to the faithful.

Pergamum

The third of the seven churches of Revelation is the church at Pergamum - a city that was a hub of Roman temple worship. The letter opens, like the others, with Jesus’ understanding of the situation the church faces. In this case, they live in a city where the culture is against them.



“I know that you live in the city where that great throne of Satan is located, and yet you have remained loyal to me. And you refused to deny me even when Antipas, my faithful witness, was martyred among you by Satan's followers.”

Even though Jesus understands the problems facing the church in Pergamum, he still has two complaints against them. What are these complaints and what does Jesus suggest he will do if they do not repent?

Jesus is again shown to speak as a “two-edged sword.” In week one, we discussed that this was “the truth” - words which often cut the listener spiritually. The two edged sword was also explained in the sense the the letters to the churches had a praise and a complaint. Look up Hebrews 4:12 and see how this fits in with what we see in the letters.

Pergamum no longer exists as an active city. The ruins of the biblical metropolis sit on top of a mountain in western Turkey today. At right, the restored ruins of the Great Altar of Pergamon are shown on display in a museum in Germany. In verse 13, it mentions the great throne of Satan. Many scholars believe that passage refers to the Great Altar of Pergamon.



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Antipas is mentioned as a martyr. According to church tradition, he was ordained by John and led the church there until he was roasted alive inside of a bull shaped altar which the pagans believed could cast out demons. It is not known how much of that Eastern Orthodox tradition is factual, but it is known that Jesus mentions Antipas as being dead at the time of the letter. It is believed Antipas was killed in 92 AD. If accurate, this gives us a good idea of the date of the Book of Revelation.

Jesus praises the people there for their faith in the face of adversity. Like all of the letters, he ends with a promise to those who repent and remain in faith. What promise is made to the people of Pergamum?

Since the literal city of Pergamum no longer exists, does this indicate to you that they did not repent or does it indicate that the letters of Revelation applied to all churches (believers) then and today?

Jesus promised the believers there that they would be given a white stone engraved with a new name. In ancient times, a person who was acquitted in a trial was given a white stone to symbolize his not guilty verdict. Certainly, this is significant to the Christian in terms of salvation. Revelation uses the color white several times. What significance do you place on this? Think white robes (Rev. 7:9), white garments (3:5), and even the white throne judgement (20:11).

REFLECTION: In Pergamum, we see that the people were faithful but they tolerated pagan beliefs among their flock. Today, do we sometimes ignore false teachings in the church or in our society in the name of tolerance. If we are to also heed the warning to the Ephesians and not be so focused on judging others, how can we avoid being like Pergamum?