

WEEK 5
THE CHURCHES AT PERGAMUM AND THYATIRA
40 DAYS THROUGH REVELATION
REVELATION 2:12-29

Revelation 2:12-13

To the angel of the church (2:12) : This is likely the pastor of the church.

In Pergamum (2:12) : Pergamum is in northwest Asia Minor. It featured large buildings and a library with more than 200,000 items. At one time, Pergamum was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia.

The sharp two-edged sword (2:12) : This is apparently a reference to the Word of God (see Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 19:19-21).

I know where you dwell, where Satans throne is (2:13) : Satan is not omnipresent (only God is), so he can be in only one place at a time. Perhaps at the time Christ spoke these words, Satan was localized in Pergamum.

Pergamum was the official center of emperor worship in Asia. It also featured a temple of Asclepius, a pagan god whose symbol was a serpent (like Satan—see Genesis 3:1; 2 Corinthians 11:3). A giant altar of Zeus overlooked the city. With this abundance of false religion, it is not surprising that Satan has a throne there.

You hold fast my name (2:13) : Citizens of Pergamum were expected to participate in the civil and pagan religion of emperor worship. A failure to comply was interpreted as disloyalty to the state. The Christians in Pergamum refused participation.

You did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you (2:13) : Antipas—perhaps a church leader—was a faithful defender of the truth who was burned to death inside a brass bull positioned over burning flames.

Where Satan dwells (2:13) : As a bastion of anti-Christian false religion, this area would have made Satan feel right at home.

Revelation 2:14-15

I have a few things against you (2:14) : Despite these believers commitment to Christ, they were not faultless. Corrective action was required.

The teaching of Balaam (2:14) : In Old Testament times, Balaam had been hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to lure the hearts of the Israelites away from the Lord God by having Moabite women seduce Israelite men into intermarriage (Numbers 22–25; 31). The Israelites succumbed to fornication and idolatrous feasts.

The teaching of the Nicolaitans (2:15) : The Nicolaitans were open to license in Christian conduct, they ate food sacrificed to idols, and they engaged in idolatry.

Revelation 2:16-17

Therefore repent (2:16) : Repentance involves a change in ones thinking that yields changed behavior (see Matthew 4:17; Luke 24:47; Acts 3:19). Members of the church were called to repent of their openness to false teachings.

I will come to you soon (2:16) : This is not the second coming, but rather a coming in judgment. These church members would not be permitted to continue in sin.

War against them with the sword of my mouth (2:16) : Antipas had died by the Roman sword, but some members of this church would encounter Christs sword if they did not repent.

He who has an ear, let him hear (2:17) : Hearing implies obedience to the message.

What the Spirit says to the churches (2:17) : The Holy Spirit inspires all Scripture, including prophecy (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:21).

The one who conquers (2:17) : This describes the Christian who is faithful and obedient. He will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ.

Hidden manna (2:17) : Just as manna sustained the Hebrews during the wilderness sojourn (Exodus 16:32-36; Hebrews 9:4), so Christ Himself, the bread of life, sustains believers (see John 6:33,35,48,51). Believers who refused to eat food sacrificed to idols would enjoy a much better banquet in heaven—the hidden manna, Jesus Christ Himself.

A white stone (2:17) : There are several viable interpretations of the significance of the white stone. Winning athletes in biblical times were given white stones that served as admission passes to a winners celebration. The faithful believers white stone may point to admittance into the ultimate winners celebration: eternal life in heaven.

Roman gladiators who became favorites were granted retirement from life-endangering combat. A white stone was given to them to symbolize this retirement. Perhaps believers who are engaged in battle against sin and an ungodly world will be granted retirement to heaven, where they enjoy eternal rest (see Revelation 14:13).

Judges in Bible times indicated defendants innocence by placing a white stone in a vessel. Perhaps the white stone represents the believers assurance of being acquitted before God (see Romans 8:1).

With a new name written on the stone (2:17) : In the Old Testament, the high priest wore 12 stones on his breastplate that were inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes (Gods chosen people). A new name on a stone may point to believers being included in Gods chosen people.

Revelation 2:18-19

To the angel of the church (2:18) : Apparently the pastor of the church.

In Thyatira (2:18) : Thyatira was located about halfway between Pergamum and Sardis and had been under Roman rule for centuries. The city was a thriving commercial center. Its primary industries were wool and dye (see Acts 16:14).

The Son of God (2:18) : This is a title of deity. Whenever Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, His Jewish contemporaries fully understood that He was making an unqualified claim to be God (see John 5:18; 19:7).

Eyes like a flame of fire (2:18) : Christ has penetrating scrutiny and sees all things as they truly are—something He will demonstrate at the future judgment (see 1 Corinthians 3:13).

Whose feet are like burnished bronze (2:18) : The polished brass feet may symbolize divine judgment. Fire consumed sin offerings on the bronze altar.

I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance (2:19) : Christ with His eyes like a flame of fire (Revelation 1:14) is aware of all the good things that characterize members of this church.

Revelation 2:20-23

I have this against you (2:20) : Despite the love, faith, and patient endurance these believers had, they were nevertheless in need of corrective action.

You tolerate that woman Jezebel (2:20) : This brings to mind the idolatrous queen who enticed Israel to engage in Baal worship (1 Kings 16–19). The evil woman of Revelation 2:20 may have been named Jezebel. Or Jezebel may have been her pseudonym or simply Christ's description of her—a Jezebel-like woman.

Seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality (2:20) : This woman promoted the idea that people could engage in sins of the outer body (such as sexual immorality) without injuring the inner spirit (see Acts 15:19-29).

I gave her time to repent (2:21) : God always provides people with ample time to repent (Genesis 15:16; Isaiah 48:9; Romans 2:4-5). Recall that He gave the Ninevites 40 days to repent, which they did, thus averting judgment (Jonah 3:4; see also Jeremiah 18:7-10).

She refuses to repent (2:21) : Many people harden their hearts against God, refusing to repent (see 2 Kings 17:14; 2 Chronicles 28:22; 33:23; Nehemiah 9:29; Jeremiah 6:15; Daniel 9:13; Luke 16:31; Revelation 9:21). The false prophetess Jezebel was hardened against God.

I will throw her onto a sickbed (2:22) : Notice the irony. This woman promoted sexual immorality, a sin committed on a bed. In judgment, she would be thrown on a sickbed.

I will throw into great tribulation (2:22) : The Greek is literally, throw into great distress. Severe judgment was imminent.

Unless they repent (2:22) : Only repentance can avert judgment (Jeremiah 18:7-10).

I will strike her children dead (2:23) : These are not literal offspring but rather her followers.

I am he who searches mind and heart (2:23) : Nothing escapes God's (Christ's) notice. He has a perfect knowledge of what transpires in every human heart (see Psalm 7:9; Proverbs 24:12).

I will give to each of you according to your works (2:23) : God's (Christ's) judgment is just, commensurate with one's deeds (Matthew 16:27; Romans 2:6; Revelation 20:12).

Revelation 2:24-29

The rest of you (2:24) : Not everyone in the church had been unfaithful to the Lord, and He provides a special word for them.

The deep things of Satan (2:24) : This apparently refers to the seductive false teachings that led to eating food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality. (Contrast this with the deep things of God—1 Corinthians 2:10.)

I do not lay on you any other burden (2:24) : Christ did not wish to make their already difficult lives any more difficult.

Hold fast what you have (2:25) : Jesus urges these faithful believers to not give up in resisting evil.

Until I come (2:25) : Believers are to remain faithful until Christ's second coming, at which time He will reward all of them for their faithfulness (Revelation 3:3; 16:15; 22:7,17,20).

The one who conquers (2:26) : The Christian who is faithful and obedient.

Who keeps my works until the end (2:26) : God's people are to perpetually remain faithful.

I will give authority over the nations (2:26) : Faithful believers will reign with Christ during His future millennial kingdom (Revelation 20:6; see also 1 Corinthians 6:2-3; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 3:21). Believers who do not remain faithful apparently forfeit participation in this reign.

He will rule them with a rod of iron (2:27) : Christ will rule in the millennial kingdom with unbending and relentless righteousness, justice, and equity (see Psalm 2:9).

Even as I myself have received authority from my Father (2:27) : Christ received His authority from His Father (see John 5:22). Faithful believers will have authority under Christ.

I will give him the morning star (2:28) : Christ Himself is the morning star (see Revelation 22:16). Though this morning star has already dawned in the hearts of believers (2 Peter 1:19), they will one day encounter Him directly and in fullness.

He who has an ear, let him hear (2:29) : Hearing implies obedience to the message.

What the Spirit says (2:29) : The Holy Spirit inspires all Scripture, including prophecy Scripture (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:21).

MAJOR THEMES

Satan

Satan is called the ruler of this world (John 12:31) and the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). He deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9; 20:3). He has power in government (Matthew 4:8-9), health (Luke 13:11,16; Acts 10:38), spiritual forces (Jude 9; Ephesians 6:11-12), and religion (Revelation 2:9; 3:9).

God doesn't want people to perish

God typically delays judgment to give people time to repent and thus not perish. Second Peter 3:9 affirms, The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

DIGGING DEEPER WITH CROSS-REFERENCES

Martyrdom—Matthew 10:39; 16:25; 24:9; Mark 13:12; Luke 9:24; Revelation 6:9; 11:7; 16:6.

Spiritual adultery—Hosea 3:1; Matthew 12:39; 16:4; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-16.

Importance of correct doctrine—Romans 16:17; Ephesians 4:14; 1 Timothy 1:10; 4:1; 6:3; 2 Timothy 4:3-4; Titus 1:9; 2:1.

LIFE LESSONS

A failure to repent brings discipline

A failure to repent of sin always brings God's discipline to believers (Psalms 32:3-5; 51; Hebrews 12:5-11). Developing a lifestyle of repentance before God therefore makes good sense. First Corinthians 11:31 affirms, If we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.

Avoid sexual immorality

Christians are commanded to abstain from fornication (Acts 15:20). People should flee fornication (1 Corinthians 6:13,18). Fornication should not be named among Christians (Ephesians 5:3).