

## Introduction

The seven churches represent at least four different things:

- Seven literal churches which existed at the time Revelation was given;
- Seven types of churches which can exist at any time in history;
- Seven types of churches which will exist in the Last Days;
- Seven types of individual believers.

Additionally, this writer believes as many do that each church represents a 5<sup>th</sup> aspect of a sequential, overlapping period of history when the corresponding church characterizes its overall condition for that time.

This is provided in much more detail in Jacob Prasch's book, "The Dilemma of Laodicea", which says of the age of Pergamum that it characterizes the rise of the institutional church of the 4<sup>th</sup> century through the early Middle Ages, overlapping into the Dark Ages. Pergamum corresponds to a time when the Church is transitioning mostly into an organized religion to the next period to come when the Church sinks to an all-time spiritual low. All of these churches existed and were present, but the main environment was dominated by what is written about Pergamum.

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

## Read verse 12

### **Q: What appears to be the main issue at Pergamum?**

A: It is the worst combination of spiritual pressures working simultaneously from without and within in conflict with Satan and his personal representatives.

### **Q: How does the meaning of "Pergamum" correspond to the spiritual condition of this church?**

A: The meaning of "much marriage" is the Greek word from which English derives "bigamy" and "polygamy". It suggests an unhealthy mixture of the Church's relationship with the world.

### **Q: What characteristic of Christ is emphasized for Pergamum?**

A: "...the sharp two-edged sword..."

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

*Hebrews 4:12*

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

*Ephesians 6:17*

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<sup>13</sup>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.

**Application:** Regardless of how spiritually **dark** it can get, the remedy is always a complete commitment to **God's Word**.

### Read verse 13

**Q: What is the first "good news"?**

A: "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is..."

**Application:** Christ is always acutely aware of our situation. Just because it is the worst imaginable does not mean we are in the wrong place.

**Q: What is the second "good news"?**

A: "...you...did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas..."

**Q: Why would this be such a big deal?**

A: On those occasions when it appears that Satan has overcome a man or woman of great faith, it tests the faith of all those in the vicinity.

**Point:** Think of how the disciples and Apostles reacted in Gethsemane to Jesus' arrest. In this case, those at Pergamum found themselves likewise tested and did not deny the faith.

**Q: Who was Antipas?**

A: All we can say based on Scripture is that he was an early martyr, a model of faithfulness, and that an English translation of his name is "against all".

**Point:** Church tradition, which cannot be verified by firsthand accounts, holds that he was the head of the church at Pergamum who was martyred under Emperor Domitian by being thrown into a heated bronze bull, which stood at the temple of Diana, and roasted alive.

**Q: But how does Christ characterize the actions of Antipas?**

A: "My witness, My faithful one".

**Application:** Antipas was a dual witness of faith both to believers and unbelievers. This is what is most important in times of duress.

**Q: How could this be the location of "where Satan dwells"?**

A: This was the center for worship of Asclepius and the Roman emperor, both as a god.

- **Asclepius:** He was someone worshiped throughout the ancient world in the form of a serpent, the same biblical symbol for Satan's working through deception. Asclepius' staff was intertwined with a serpent which is the origin of the symbol for medicine still used today. In the same character as the Nehushtan, the bronze serpent raised by Moses to bring healing to all who looked upon it in a symbol of the Messiah (Num. 21:8-9; Jn. 3:14-15), it was believed in the ancient world that healing could come by likewise gazing upon this similar-looking staff ascribed to Asclepius. Counterfeiting the

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authentic is always a primary tactic at the heart of the way Satan works spiritual deception.

- **Emperor Worship:** This is historically attributed as the first place to worship the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus as a god, equating him to Zeus. An enormous temple was dedicated in Pergamum for this purpose.

**Q: How could this be the location of “Satan’s throne”?**

A: “The Seat of Satan”, or “The Pergamon Altar”, was an archaeological discovery moved and placed on display in Berlin, Germany in modern times. It currently sits in a museum just outside Berlin.

**Note:** In Alexander Hislop’s book, “The Two Babylons”, he documents that the center of all false religion can be traced historically from its beginnings with Nimrod in Babylon, and its subsequent migration first to Pergamum and finally to Rome, which Peter also calls “Babylon”. (1 Pe. 5:13) He shows how nearly every false religion and cult can trace its origins back to Nimrod.

**Point:** The origin and foundation for the final “Babylon the great” to come in the final week of years has been animated by Satan beginning with Nimrod, the literal Babylonian Empire, and subsequent migrations to Pergamum and Rome. Each teach something about the final one to come.

**Application:** Although we may find ourselves in the worst **location** possible, we can still be a **witness** for Christ to both the saved and unsaved.

**Read verses 14-16**

**Q: What is the “bad news”?**

A: There are two major false influences which have been willingly allowed by some of the members of the church to take hold.

**Q: What is the nature of the first false influence?**

A: It is “the teaching of Balaam”.

**Q: What is this referring to?**

A: Numbers 22-25 & 31 record a famous incident when Israel had left Egypt and was approaching the Promised Land. King Balak paid Balaam “fees for divination” (Num. 22:7) to pronounce a curse on Israel, but God instead intervened so that he could only pronounce blessings.

**Q: So how did this “put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit adultery”?**

A: He devised a plan for Balak which would cause Israel to act unfaithfully toward God, using Midianite women to seduce Israel into false and lustful worship.

**Point:** The way to undermine a fellowship with a sizable core of faithful believers is to introduce ways to corrupt worship. It will soon infect everything else.

<sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup>Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

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**Application:** *There are personal consequences for allowing a false influence to cause us to forego our steadfast faithfulness in the Lord.*

**Q: What is the nature of the second false influence?**

A: For a second time in these letters mention is made that some are following “*the teaching of the Nicolaitans*”.

**Point:** *“Nicolaitans” means “suppression of the laity” to describe an inappropriate agenda of leadership.*

**Q: How might this indicate the problem in Pergamum was much greater than that of Smyrna?**

A: In combination with the influence of Balaam, it would seem that corruption is being experienced by both the congregation and its leaders, who may be forcefully mandating an agenda based on idolatry and immorality.

**Application:** *There are personal consequences for allowing corrupted leadership to enforce a corrupted agenda.*

**Q: What is the proposed solution to their problem?**

A: “*Repent...*”

**Q: What is the warning if no such repentance and change in behavior is realized?**

A: “*...or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth*”.

**Point:** *Their word will be turned back by His Word.*

**Observation:** *Take note of how the issue with Balaam is more in the character of internal deception while that of the Nicolaitans to internal persecution—both are the primary tools of Satan.*

**Application:** *Deception and persecution are not limited to only worldly sources but can operate solely within the walls of the Church.*

**Read verse 17**

**Q: What is the promise to all believers provided by Christ to all overcomers?**

A: “*...I will give some of the hidden manna, and...a white stone, and a new name written on the stone...*”

**Q: How does this specifically relate to this particular church?**

A: It is interesting that both manna and stones are associated in Scripture with God’s Word, and that the other major biblical illustration for the Word—a two-edged sword, is prominently featured in this letter.

**Q: What exactly is the “hidden manna”?**

A: This is the only time Scripture mentions this, so commentators are divided as to its meaning.

17He 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.

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**Note:** Many subscribe to the Jewish tradition that when the Messiah comes to establish His kingdom He will restore the Ark of the Covenant, which contains a jar of manna, to a new Temple. But there is no sufficient explanation for why literal or metaphorical manna is hidden to begin with or why it is only given to overcomers.

**Point:** Since this involves manna that is hidden and an assigned name privately conveyed, there seem to be personal and customized benefits Christ gives to each individual.

**Application:** Those holding fast to His **name** will obtain a new **name**; to those faithful to His **Word** will be revealed His hidden **Word**.

...your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Matthew 6:18b

### Overall Application

- How do you introduce the Word into a situation where no one gives priority to the Word? If no one responds to God's Word, what are your options?
- Do you often believe you are in the wrong place at the wrong time? Does your witness and behavior matter at such a time?
- What are you to do when either deception or persecution comes from sources inside the Church? How do you identify them to know for sure?
- How well do you recognize that all your deeds in Christ do not have to be performed or acknowledged publicly? Are you more concerned about what people see or what the Father sees, even in private?

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