



April 2/3, 2011

Revelation 2:12-17

“A Marriage of Compromise” The Church in Pergamum

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Pergamum was the third of seven churches that received a letter from Christ. Like Smyrna, not much is known about Pergamum. The city and the church are only mentioned in Revelation 2. It was located about 50 miles north of Smyrna, and 20 miles inland from the Aegean Sea, on the bank of the Caicus River. Pergamum was a wealthy city like Ephesus and Smyrna. Much of the city’s wealth came from the invention of paper.¹ Pergamum, during Roman dominance, became the capital city for the Roman province of Asia. The citizens of the city prided themselves on the pursuit of knowledge, and they boasted of a collection of more than 200,000 books in their library.²

The people of Pergamum embraced polytheism. They had built a large altar and statue of Zeus atop an 800ft. mountain in the middle of the city. In 1878, Carl Human, a German engineer, discovered the 40ft. statue, which is displayed today in an East Berlin museum. Today, it’s the modern farming town of Bergama, Turkey, which is built on the ruins of Pergamum, with a population of approximately 14,000 people.

The Lord compliments the church because they have not renounced their faith, even though there is martyrdom in their midst. **(Revelation 2:13)** However, Jesus had two complaints against them. Some of them were holding to the teachings of Balaam³ and the Nicolaitans.⁴ Our study today will focus on the teachings of Balaam.

¹ Pergamum was the place where they discovered that paper could be made from wood pulp, replacing papyrus, which was made from reeds.

² The entire library of 200,000 books was later sent to Egypt as a gift from Marc Antony to Cleopatra.

³ **Revelation 2:14**

⁴ Revelation 2:15 NOTE: The study dealing with Ephesus includes detailed information about the teachings of the Nicolaitans. Use this link for the March 19-20, 2011, **Revelation 2:1-7**, Return to Your First Love - The Church in Ephesus message. http://cornerstonechapel.net/?page_id=21

The Problem At Pergamum

1. The main problem at Pergamum was that they were mixing some things together that just don't go together.
2. Why is it that the Lord wrote a letter to this virtually unknown church when there were other well-known churches like Colosse, Thessalonica, and Philippi? Could it be that Jesus intentionally selected them because their name reflects a meaning about their spiritual condition?
3. In last week's study of the church at Smyrna, we learned that the root word for the city's name was myrrh, which is a resin that has a beautiful fragrance when crushed, but in Pergamum's case, the name reflects a flaw in this church.
4. *Gamos* is the Greek word for marriage, and there was in fact a marriage in Pergamum,⁵ but it was a mixed marriage, and that's what Jesus had a problem with.

Balaam

5. The teaching of Balaam helps us to understand what was wrong with the church in Pergamum.
6. Balaam is a complicated man to say the least, and it's often difficult to figure out whether he's a good guy or a bad guy! ([Numbers 22-25](#))
7. In [Numbers 22:9-20](#), we read about the conversation he had with God, and how he obeyed the Lord and called God, "the Lord my God."
8. [Numbers 23:5](#) reveals the fact that God spoke "*through him.*"
9. In [Numbers 24:2](#), "*The Spirit of God came upon him.*"
10. [Numbers 24:1](#) says "*Balaam did not resort to sorcery as at other times,*" which implies that he was routinely involved in sorcery.
11. In [Joshua 13:22](#) we learn that Balaam was killed by the Israelites because he "*practiced divination.*"

⁵ KJV uses Pergamos, which is a variation of Pergamum.

12. Balaam is mentioned three times in the New Testament, and every time he's mentioned there is a warning associated with his name.
 - a. [2 Peter 2:15](#) - The way of Balaam
 - b. [Jude 11](#) - The error of Balaam
 - c. [Revelation 2:14](#) - The teaching (doctrine) of Balaam
13. All of this leads us to conclude that Balaam was a sorcerer who was involved in occult practice.
14. When Balak, king of Moab, saw the Israelites nearing his country, he realized they were too formidable to defeat, so he hired Balaam to practice his divination and pronounce curses upon Israel, but God intervened in an incredible way.
 - a. The Lord thwarted Balaam's best efforts, and every time he opened his mouth to curse Israel, the only thing he uttered were blessings for Israel.⁶
 - b. He was only able to say what God wanted him to say.
 - c. When he realized he couldn't curse the Israelites, he devised a wicked scheme and told King Balak to infiltrate Israel's ranks by introducing Moabite women to seduce the fighting men.
 - i. [Numbers 25:1-3](#) - *"While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor. And the Lord's anger burned against them."*
15. These things lead us to understand that Jesus' problem with the church at Pergamum was that they were guilty of following the way of Balaam because they had married godliness with worldliness.
 - a. In the same way that the Moabite women came in among the Israelites and compromised them, Pergamum was guilty of allowing outside influences to seduce them spiritually.
16. God's judgment came upon them when a plague broke out in Israel and, while Moses and others were weeping before the Lord, one of the Israelites came into the camp with a Midianite woman and brought her before his family.
17. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, followed the man into his tent and drove a spear through the man into the woman!
18. In [Numbers 25:10-11](#), we read that God commended Phinehas for his acting when he was moved by righteous indignation.

⁶ Balaam spoke three oracles of blessing to the people of Israel in [Numbers 22-25](#).

- a. *“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them.’ ” (Emphasis added)*

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Revelation 2:12-17](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Review some of the statistics Pastor Gary referred concerning pornography.
 - a. Sex is the number one topic for Internet searches.
 - b. According to the Sexual Recovery Institute, more than 1.3 million porn sites are in existence.
 - c. Some people have the misperception that pornography is a man’s sin issue, however, the fact is that more and more women are involved in pornography.
 - i. Statistics indicate that 30% of traffic on Internet porn sites comes from women.
 - ii. Pastor Gary said that one study he read found that among Christian women almost 17% admit to having an addiction to Internet pornography, which means that there would be about 250 women at Cornerstone who are addicted to porn.
 - d. As of 2006, the revenue that comes from the pornography industry in the United States was approximately \$13 billion.
 - e. The pornography industry in the United States has greater total revenue than the combined revenues of Microsoft Corp., Google Inc., Amazon.com, eBay Inc., Yahoo Inc., Apple Inc., Netflix Inc., and EarthLink.⁷
 - f. Use this link for more information on efforts to protect children and families from the harmful influences of Internet pornography.
<http://www.enough.org/>
4. Discuss Pastor Gary’s comments about idolatry and sexual sin being closely linked.
 - a. “Idolatry and sexual sin are very closely connected, they are pretty much inseparable. Sexual sin and idolatry is essentially one and the same.

⁷ <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/jul/11/more-women-lured-to-pornography-addiction/?page=1>

Pornography is about idolizing; sexual sin is about loving your flesh and loving lust more than God.”

5. Discuss this quote from Donna Rice Hughes: “If you don’t think you can fall into any kind of sexual temptation, you’re either godlier than David, wiser than Solomon, or stronger than Samson,” said Ms. Hughes.⁸
6. Ask these rhetorical questions to help set the stage for your discussion time, and allow time for each person to be able to consider what it is the Lord may want to say to them.
 - a. Is there idolatry in your life?
 - b. Are there things you adore above your relationship with the Lord?
 - c. Do you spend your time, money and energy loving other things above the Lord?
 - d. How have you attempted to marry godliness and worldliness in your life, and in the process allowed your heart to be seduced away from God?
7. Read and discuss [Numbers 25:10-11](#).
 - a. Spend time talking about times you’ve been zealous for the Lord.
 - b. Are there areas of compromise in your life that God wants you to put to death?
8. Spend time discuss this quote from Pastor Gary: “Balaam resorts to his own wicked scheme, saying to himself, ‘If I can’t get God to remove his blessings from the people, then maybe I can get the people to remove themselves from the blessing of God.’ ”
9. Read and discuss [Revelation 2:16](#) provides the Lord’s answer - “*repent*,” which Christ instructs five of the seven churches to do.
 - a. Have you experienced the “*hidden manna*”⁹ the Lord promises ([Revelation 2:17](#)) when you repented and sought the Lord’s forgiveness?
10. Spend time talking about [Revelation 2:17c](#), and the promise of the white stone with a new name for all Believers.
 - a. Pastor Gary said that the most likely explanation is that white stones and black stones were used to pass sentence in a court of law: a black stone meant guilty and a white stone meant not guilty.

⁸ <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/jul/11/more-women-lured-to-pornography-addiction/?page=1>

⁹ This is probably a reference to [John 6:51](#), when Jesus refers to himself as “*the bread of life that came down from Heaven.*”

11. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: take a spiritual inventory and question themselves to determine if there is any idolatry or compromise that needs to be dealt with; determine with the help of the Lord to get ride of anything that seeks to displace the Lord in their lives; choose to remain true to the Lord and live in such a way as to recognize the Lord's commendation in their life.



Note: Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).