

## THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Christ's Imperial-Prophetic Address to the Church in Pergamum (2.12-17)



*Balaam (by Rembrandt)*

### I. Review From Last Week

1. Why were Christians persecuted in the Roman Empire?
  - a. intersection of politics, religion, culture, society, and economics
  - b. Pliny's letter to Trajan (111 AD); *pax romana*, *pax deorum*; the martyrdom of Polycarp (teacher of impiety)
2. Christ's address to Smyrna (Revelation 2.8-11)
  - a. tribulation, perseverance, and coronation
  - b. the hope of resurrection

## II. Christ's Imperial-Prophetic Address to the Church in Pergamum (2.12-17)

And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: "The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. <sup>13</sup> I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. <sup>14</sup> But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup> So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup> Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it."

1. Pergamum in the First Century
  - a. provincial capital; imperial cult; Asclepius (the serpent god of healing); library
2. **Christ's Self-identification:** "The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword."
  - a. Pergamum had "the right of sword" (*ius gladii*)
  - b. judgment (cf. Revelation 19)

**Hebrews 4:12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

3. **Commendation:** "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells." (2.13)
  - a. Satan's throne (Pergamum itself enthroned on a mountain; idolatry in medicine, politics, education [library], and religion)
 

**Revelation 13:2** And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. (cf. Rev 12.9: the dragon/serpent = Satan)
  - b. "you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith"
 

**Song of Songs 3.3-4:** The watchmen found me as they went about in the city. "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?" Scarcely had I passed them when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go ..."

4. **Rebuke/Accusation:** “But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup> So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.” (2.14-15)

- a. “you have some there ...” (these “some” are not addressed directly because Christ does not recognize them as his church; the church is rebuked for allowing this group to remain; cf. Num 25.1-9: the evil must be purged from the people)
- b. the teaching of Balaam (eating food sacrificed to idols and practising sexual immorality) (cf. Numbers 22-25.9; 31.1-24)

**Numbers 25.1-3** (NET): When Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to commit sexual immorality with the daughters of Moab. <sup>2</sup> These women invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods; then the people ate and bowed down to their gods. <sup>3</sup> When Israel joined themselves to Baal-peor, the anger of the LORD flared up against Israel. (*note:* Ba'al means “husband”)

**Numbers 31.16**(NET): Look, these people through the counsel of Balaam caused the Israelites to act treacherously against the LORD in the matter of Peor – which resulted in the plague among the community of the LORD!

**1 Corinthians 10.14-22:** Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. <sup>15</sup> I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. <sup>16</sup> The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup> Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. <sup>18</sup> Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? <sup>19</sup> What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? <sup>20</sup> No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. <sup>21</sup> You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. <sup>22</sup> Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

- c. “the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam; instead the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you” (Deut 32.2-5; Josh 24.9-10; Neh 13.1-2; Micah 6.1-5)
  - d. Prophet or profit (2 Pet 2.12-16; Jude 11)
  - e. the Nicolaitans (both Nicolaus and Balaam “he who conquers the people”)
5. **Exhortation to Repentance:** Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.
- a. “I will come to you soon”
  - b. “the sword”

**Numbers 22.23, 31:** And the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand. And the donkey turned aside out of the road and went into the field.

And Balaam struck the donkey, to turn her into the road ... Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face.

**Numbers 31.8:** They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of their slain, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. And they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword.

6. **Promise:** “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.” (2.17)

- a. hidden manna (bread from heaven vs. food for idols)

**Exodus 16.32-36:** Now the house of Israel called its name manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. Moses said, “This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’”<sup>33</sup> And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations.”<sup>34</sup> As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept.<sup>35</sup> The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan.<sup>36</sup> (An omer is the tenth part of an ephah.) (note: very next passage is Exodus 17.1-7)

**John 6.31-35:** “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”<sup>32</sup> Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.<sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”<sup>34</sup> They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”

- b. white stone (acquittal and admission)

- i. stones used for judicial voting (black = convicted; white = acquitted)

**Acts 26.10:** And I [Paul] did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote [Greek: “stone”] against them.

- ii. white stones were a token of membership and were used for admission to special banquets, occasions, etc.

**Revelation 19.6-9:** Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.”<sup>7</sup> Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;<sup>8</sup> it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.<sup>9</sup> And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”

**IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS:** For Christ took upon himself and bore the sins of the world, and satisfied divine justice. Therefore, solely on account of Christ's sufferings and resurrection God is propitious with respect to our sins and does not impute them to us, but imputes Christ's righteousness to us as our own (II Cor 5.19ff; Rom 4.25), so that now we are not only cleansed and purged from sins or are holy, but also, granted the righteousness of Christ, and so absolved from sin, death and condemnation, are at last righteous and heirs of eternal life. Properly speaking, therefore, God alone justifies us, and justifies only on account of Christ, not imputing sins to us but imputing his righteousness to us. (Second Helvetic Confession XV, 1564)

iii. according to Numbers 11.7, the manna looked like a white stone

➤ *the church in Pergamum should not fear the condemnation and rejection of the world because God has justified and accepted them, and he will supply their needs*

c. new name (naming is sign of authority and ownership; a name signifies a person's character and identity; a new name = new identity)

**Revelation 3.12:** The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

**Revelation 21.1** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

**Revelation 22.3:** No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

**Isaiah 62.1-5:** For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. <sup>2</sup> The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. <sup>3</sup> You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. <sup>4</sup> You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. <sup>5</sup> For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

**Isaiah 65.11-15:** But you who forsake the LORD, who forget my holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny, <sup>12</sup> I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter, because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not listen, but you did what was evil in my eyes and chose what I did not delight in." <sup>13</sup> Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, my servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; behold, my servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; behold, my servants shall rejoice, but you shall be put to shame; <sup>14</sup> behold, my servants shall sing for gladness of heart, but you shall cry out for pain of heart and shall wail for breaking of spirit. <sup>15</sup> You shall leave your name to my chosen for a curse, and the Lord GOD will put you to death, but his servants he will call by another name.