

SESSION 09 – REVELATION CHAPTER TWO – PART II

¹²to the angel of the church in Pergamum write...(Revelation 2:12-17)

I. TO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM

- A. Jesus introduces Himself to the Church in Pergamum as, “The words of Him who has the sharp two-edged sword.” We saw this from John’s description of Jesus in 1:16. It is *this Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God* wielded through the mouth or words of Jesus that is used to displace His enemies that He first identifies as Satan’s throne. Mounce points to the number of temples and building dedicated to the Greek Pantheon of false gods, the *sons of God* who rebelled:

The most spectacular aspect of this remarkable city was the upper terrace of the citadel with its sacred and royal buildings. Of these, the most remarkable was the great altar of Zeus that jutted out near the top of the mountain. A famous frieze around the base of the altar depicts the gods of Greece in victorious combat against the giants of earth (symbolizing the triumph of civilization over barbarism). It commemorates the victory of Attalus I (the first ruler in Asia to refuse tribute to the plundering Gauls) over the Galatians. Religion flourished in Pergamum. It was a center of worship for four of the most important pagan cults of the day—Zeus, Athene (the patron goddess), Dionysos, and Asklepios (who was designated Sōtēr, Savior). The shrine of Asklepios, the god of healing (also known as “the Pergamene god”), attracted people from all over the world.⁷ Galen, one of the most famous physicians of the ancient world, was a native of Pergamum and studied there.¹

- B. Additionally, Pergamum was the center of Emperor Worship in Asia. It was the first city of Asia to receive permission to build a temple dedicated to the worship of a living ruler. In 29 B.C. Augustus granted permission for a temple to be erected in Pergamum to “the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma.”² Beale writes, “As Revelation proceeds, we will see how Satan (the dragon) gives the political system (the beast) the power to persecute God’s people, as was undoubtedly occurring in this city. In most Greek cities, citizens were typically expected to sacrifice to the gods, who had long been honored in the area because of local religious tradition.”³ In other words the Beast Empire of the Day, the Iron Legs of Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream in Daniel 2, i.e., *Rome*, established the core beliefs, worship of the gods, economy, military, and its efforts to unite man around the image of the Beast and by extension Satan himself.

¹ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 78.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79

³ G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 66.

- C. This is the spiritual and natural climate into which the Church in Pergamum was established, and its *angel* assigned to accomplish its mission. In the face of such spiritual assault, and ultimately natural persecution from Rome and the population of the city, Jesus says, “you hold fast my name, and did not deny the faith” when they killed their Bishop Antipas. This will become evident as one of the markers of believers in this present evil age and in the time of the end of days.

¹Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. (Rev. 14:1 ESV)

Hold fast the name is the OT equivalent to *bearing the Name of Yahweh* from the Ten Words:

⁷“You shall not take (Heb. *nahsah* – to lift up, carry, to bear) the name of Yahweh your God in vain, for Yahweh will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. (Ex. 20:7 LSB)

The point here is *taking the Name* is the equivalent of the same of a bride *taking* the name of her husband in marriage. It also has the meaning of *representing* or *being* what the Name means and to Whom it refers, in this case, Yahweh Himself. This is what the believers, or at least some, did in Pergamum in the face of fierce spiritual opposition.⁴ Bearing the Name results in remaining faithful to the Name of the Person. They go hand in hand. Believers in this pagan city took the Name of Jesus and remained faithful to Him. But not all did.

- D. The issues in this assembly were: 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... some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. (vv. 14-15)

The sins identified by the One who has a Sharp Two-Edged Sword in His Mouth are: *the teaching of Balaam* that led to eating food sacrificed to idols and the corresponding sexual immorality, and *the teaching of the Nicolaitans*. These two teachings were marked by Jesus for those in the congregation that had engaged in mixture with the pagan cults. By calling attention to Balaam, presumably there was intent to influence other believers who were not engaging in the occult practices.

- E. 2 Peter chapter 2 follows a trajectory of thought that identifies false prophets and teachers that use their *prophetic words* and *teachings* as a means to deceive those who hear their words. They *secretly introduce destructive heresies*, even denying their Master, Jesus. The end result is swift destruction *upon themselves*. Notice, these *destructive heresies* are introduced *in secret*. In other words, there is intent to deceive. He follows this intent to deceive with many who will *follow their sensuality and their greed* to exploit the hearer with *false words*. To what is this *sensuality and greed* compared? The sin of the *angels* in Genesis 6 and the parallel account found in 1 Enoch, the Book of the Watchers. The *sensuality and greed* of the false prophets and teachers then is one of the end goals for themselves and they will use their *gift* to reach

⁴ The word Satan literally means *adversary*. That the Adversary’s throne or seat of power was highlighted as the spiritual climate in Pergamum demonstrates the reality of spiritual adversity for believers in that city.

that end. This is the sin of the angels, and the sin of Balaam son of Beor, and it is the aim of Jesus to the Church in Pergamum.

- F. The Apostle Peter then gives a strong word about Balaam in verses 14-22:

¹⁴having eyes full of adultery and unceasing sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed—they are accursed children. ¹⁵Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, **having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness,** ¹⁶but he received a rebuke for his own lawlessness, for a mute donkey, speaking out with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet. ¹⁷These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been kept. ¹⁸For **speaking out arrogant words of vanity,** they **entice by sensual lusts of the flesh,** those who barely escape from the ones who conducted themselves in error, ¹⁹**promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.** ²⁰For **if they are overcome,** having both escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and having again been entangled in them, **then the last state has become worse for them than the first.** ²¹For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. ²²The message of the true proverb has happened to them, “A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT,” and, “A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.” (2 Peter 2:14-22 LSB)

The way of Balaam that is introduced in Numbers 22 and referenced in Deut. 23:4, Neh. 13:2, and Jude 11 found its way into the Church in Pergamum and contains all of the elements that define this way: prophetic greed and the fulfillment of the appetites of the carnal nature in order to achieve the end goal of more money. Driven by a covetous spirit they have embraced whatever sensuality exists within the souls of the believers in Pergamum and exploit that for their own benefit. This is the essence of false prophecy and the way of the Watchers. We may be shocked to see these things in *our day*, but they are not new and have been addressed by Jesus in this Assembly in the First Century AD.

- G. The Way of Baalam or the teaching of Baalam is directly paired with the teaching of the Nicolaitans that produced this rebuke from the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The short version of to whom or to what the teaching of the Nicolaitans refers finds the most probable answer in the name itself as there is no group historically that can be identified with anyone by this name.
- H. Heiser makes the following observation in combining some of the same thoughts of Beale and Aune with Beale giving some clarity on the name Nicolaitans itself, which is far more sinister in its impact than simply a false teaching, which in and of itself is bad enough. Here is it referring to the end result of the prophetic ministry of Baalam:

[Aune and Beale] think that the name...[is] symbolic. And this explanation, I think, seems to have something to it—that this isn't a specific actual group, but the name itself is symbolic. It's using etymology to create an association of the idolatry problem with Balaam. So another way of saying that is the terms (the names), both of Balaam and the problem of idolatry, you can break that name up etymologically and then that was used to create the linkage to what's going on in Ephesus that John is writing about. Let me just quote Beale's explanation. It's a lot more succinct and coherent:

Some suggest that “Nicolaitans” could be merely another name for the Balaam sect, since their teaching is emphatically equated with that of that other group: “in the same manner (οὕτως) you also have some holding the teaching of the Nicolaitans in the same way (ὁμοίως) [MH: later on at Pergamum].” The two teachings are identified further by the similarity of the etymology of their names [MH: so here we go]: νικᾷ λαόν means “he overcomes the people,” and in rabbinic literature “Balaam” (bil’ām) was etymologized to bela’ ’am or balah ’am, “he who consumes the people” [MH: that’s from rabbinic writings] (e.g., b. Sanhedrin 105a), or it could be construed as “rule over the people” (ba’al ’am).

So you have part of the Nicolaitan name and the Balaam name (depending on how you divide the syllables and the etymology you use), they can mean kind of the same thing—this devouring of the people, overcoming of the people. The actual participation in idolatrous situations, Beale feels, sort of reflects the idea that when the people are participating in idolatry, it overcomes them. The church at Pergamum gets (pardon the pun) swallowed up by—they get consumed by—their idolatry. It’s not so much true, obviously, of the church at Ephesus (which was our focus for this episode) because they’re not going down this rabbit trail. They oppose the Nicolaitans. But there’s a greater concern later on at Pergamum for the effect that this idolatry and the immorality is having on the church.

So Beale and Aune and other scholars are saying, the name is probably chosen in Greek, going back to the quote, νικᾷ λαόν, “he overcomes the people, who conquers the people.” So whoever’s teaching them to do this is starting to conquer believers. And since the term balah ’am could be etymologized the same way, that’s why John creates the connection. He wants his readers to understand that what’s happening here in Ephesus and Pergamum and these churches, this is akin to what went on in the days of Balaam.⁵

- I. In no uncertain terms, Jesus in His identification as the One with the Sharp Two-Edged Sword in Revelation 2:13 declares unless those in Pergamum’s Assembly repents, He will *war against them with the sword of His mouth* (refer to Romans 8:5-8 with regard to the use of the language of hostility and positioning against God Himself, which is what these in Pergamum were engaging in.) This positioning against Yahweh and His Anointed, Yeshua the Messiah, sees its final expression in the Day of the LORD when Jesus returns:

¹⁵ *From his mouth comes **a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations**, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. (Rev. 19:15; c.f. Ps. 2:6-12)*

The point here for those engaged in immorality and idolatry: *repent* or Jesus Himself will view you as a recipient for His Divine Judgment due to your hostile stance against Him.

- J. The one who overcomes and conquers, and in context to this Church, the teaching of Baalam and the devouring of *nikalaon* will receive some of the hidden manna. Instead of eating food sacrificed to idols, they will be permitted to eating of the *Hidden Manna*. Additionally, they will be given a *white stone*, with a *new name written on it* that no one knows except the one who receives it. The Manna given to the Children of Israel in the Wilderness was a reality and at the same time a type of what was to come in Christ Jesus Himself:

⁵ <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/NB-360-Transcript.pdf>; pp. 18-19

³¹Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ ” ³²Jesus 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. ³³For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” ³⁵Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. (John 6:31-35 ESV)

The reference to the Hidden Manna is a reference to Himself and the Eating of the Passover Seder, and Unleavened Bread. And this points us back to the Exodus from Egypt and eating the Lamb and Unleavened Bread and bitter herbs with their loins girded, sandals on their feet, and staff in hand, eating it hurriedly (Ex. 12:8-12). In other words, the point is after the sacrifice and ensuing judgment, be ready to leave Egypt and in a hurry. Do not linger. Thus there was no leavening in the bread.

The blessing of the Matza portion of the meal is:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings bread from the earth.

Baruch Atah Ado-nai Elo-heinu Melech Ha-olam Hamotzi Lechem Min Ha-aretz.

Indeed, it is Jesus, the Bread from Heaven whom the Father brought forth from the earth in His death, descent into hell, and His glorious Resurrection.

The matza is torn into three pieces, with the middle piece referred to as the *afikomen*.

Early on in the seder, three pieces of matzah are set aside. The middle piece is removed from the trio and broken in half. The larger half of the broken matzah is the afikomen and is wrapped in linen.

In many traditions, the leader of the seder then hides the afikomen from the children, who search for it. It is then redeemed for a small gift.⁶

Another source notes:

During the Passover meal, the father in the family breaks the middle matzah in two, places the smaller piece on top of the matzah cloth and wraps the larger piece, which is called the “afikomen,” in the clean, white linen cloth which is next to the matzah cloth. The Hebrew word “afikomen” is most likely derived from the Greek word “epikomos” which means “after a banquet,” or “dessert.”

Then, the children leave the room and while they are gone, the leader “buries” (hides) the afikomen, this wrapped piece of matzah, somewhere in the room. Then the children return. They are encouraged sometime during the meal to earnestly search for the “buried treasure” of unleavened bread which is

⁶ <https://www.lifeinmessiah.org/traditions/the-mystery-of-the-afikomen>

striped and pierced, wrapped in cloth, buried, earnestly sought, and when discovered, found to be of great value. This clearly parallels the events surrounding the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.⁷

- K. The *white stone* is less clear and Jesus Himself even brings it into a very narrow understanding when He says, “*no one knows except the one who receives it.*” There are many uses of a *white stone* in the First Century and the Ancient World, for which any of the uses *could apply* but find a number of problems in their application to this specific use. This word is not *petra* nor *petros* (Matt. 16:18), rather is *psephos* and is a small smooth stone such as a river stone smoothed or polished by water.

The Septuagint uses this word five times, one of which compares time in the ages to come. A few years are like a drop of water and a *psephos* of sand, meaning a grain of sand. The point here is the use in Sirach is to point to a small grain in comparison to the day of ages. The white stone can be thought of as the beginning or the inauguration of the age to come for the believer and its continuation on into the age to come. But it can *only be known* by the one who receives it, in the same way oil for the lamps could only be obtained by individual virgins in Matthew 25.

¹⁰ Like a drop of water from the sea and a grain (psephos) of sand, so are a few years in the day of eternity (aionos). (Wis. Of Sir. 18:10 LXX)

- L. It is also not specified *whose name* is written on the pebble. Considering Jesus does mention writing the Name of Yahweh and the name of the City of Yahweh and His own *New Name*, on believers in the Temple of God who overcome in Revelation 3:7, it would appear this pebble would be have the *recipient's* name on it. If that is the case, and it would seem to point that direction, the *new name* is a clear change of identity that happens in the new birth and continues to expand as the believer overcomes, in particular the power of the false prophet and teacher and their influences. Their words, laced with personal deceit, are discerned by the overcomer when the half-truth produces the appetites of the flesh and are rejected because the identity in Christ is known.

¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new (kainos) creation: everything old has passed away; look, new (kainos) things have come into being! (2 Cor. 5:17 NRSVue)

Notice Paul's language, this is not *only* limited to being born again. This is for those *in Christ*, that is not only the new birth, but also those who remain *in Him*. The Greek rendered *new things* at the end of the verse is carried by the New Creation. It is the word *kainos* meaning,

1 pert. to being in existence for a relatively short time, new, unused; 2 pert. to being not previously present, unknown, strange, remarkable, also w. the connotation of the marvelous or unheard-of; 3 pert. to that which is recent in contrast to someth. old, new... b in the sense that what is old has become obsolete, and should be replaced by what is new. In such a case the new is, as a rule, superior in kind to the old.⁸

⁷ <https://www.songforisrael.org/news/index.php/2015/4/the-symbolism-of-the-passover-afikomen-points-to-messiah>

⁸ BDAG *kainos*

²³ and to **be renewed** (neos) in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to **clothe yourselves with the new** (kainos) **self**, created according to **the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness**. (Eph. 4:23-24 NRSVue)

The Greek root used in be renewed is neos that is used by Paul in Colossians 3:10-11, where he says to **clothe yourself with the new self** (neos) **that is being renewed** (Gr. root, kainos) **in the knowledge according to the image** (eikon) **of its Creator**.

Here neos represents that which is *younger* as contrasted with that which is *older* and is a *time* reference, not a change in the thing itself. Paul uses both words describing the event that happens to the believer and the continual stream of salvation (the present tense; think *sanctification*, but it is much more than that; it is experience) that flows from *kainos* to *neos* and *back*. In the New Birth we have a *new mind* which is by virtue of the experience *younger* than the *old mind* of the carnal, old man. It is a combined force and power of newness that should start in the *spirit of the mind* that brings *change* such that we are clothed with *newness* of the age to come. Present Tense, Already, tasting the power of the age to come. The evidentiary experience of the Kingdom of God that brings the Good News of Salvation by His Grace.

¹¹ For **the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation** to all,,* ¹² **training us** to renounce impiety and worldly passions and **in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly**, ¹³ **while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ**. ¹⁴ He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are **zealous for good deeds**. (Titus 2:11-14 NRSVue)