

The Book of Revelation

Week 5: The Letter to Pergamum:

Pergamum was a major cultural center of the Hellenistic area. The city is found in what is modern day south-eastern Turkey. In the Bible you ONLY hear about it in the book of Revelation. The city had temples, theaters, and a library that comes close to rivaling the great library at Alexandria. There was an altar to Zeus in this city which stood on a hill 800 feet above the city and could be seen for miles. AND Pergamum is the chief center of worship for:

Zeus - Chief head of the pantheon, Thunder/lightning/creation God

Athena - Wisdom

Dionysus - partying, debauchery, and wine

Asclepius - healing (the temple was connecting to a medical school.

The Roman Emperor (especially under Domitian)

We discussed the death of Antipas, as further example of the type of persecution that the church is undergoing, and was discussed in the previous letter.

The teaching of Balaam and the (seemingly connected) Nicolaitans:

The Bible uses *three chapters* to record this story so it's clearly important. In it you find a humorous tale of Balaam, a prophet (sorta) of God who is stuck in a dilemma. He would very much like to take payment from king Balak of the Amorites for the job of cursing the oncoming Israelites... Problem is, God does not want that curse applied. Balaam tries to curse Israel *four times* when he *already knows* it's not what God wants.

What is the sin of Balaam?

- He's trying to have his cake and eat it too: He is trying to keep faith with God, and work with (get paid by, be esteemed by) opponents of the people of God. The story uses humor and prophecy to show that this is impossible
- Additionally, it appears Balaam used "insider information" to advise how to bring down the people of God (Numbers 31). This is nowhere near as humorous as his first story and is quite a significant betrayal of the people and will of God.

The people of Pergamum cannot hold onto their Idolatry-based customs and culture AND remain faithful to God. Balaam couldn't, neither can they.

Hidden Manna/White Stone: Again, like Balaam manna is a reference to the Israelite wanderings. Manna is also a picture of God sustaining us. Stones were used as both an entrance tickets and a signs of acquittal (in court).

Scripture Worth Reading:

- The story of Balaam: Numbers 22-24, and 31
- Biblical Name-Changes (because of the promise of a new name):
 - Abraham: Genesis 17
 - Peter: Matthew 16