

## Insights to the Book of Revelation

### Letters within the Letter

#### Introduction:

1. Last week we looked at the letter to Ephesus and the letter to the assembly at Smyrna
2. Today we will look at the letters to Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis

#### Pergamum:

1. **Revelation 2:12-13** *"to the Angel of the church in Pergamum write: The words of him who has a two-edged sword. 'I know where you dwell and where Satan's throne is'"*
2. Pergamum prided itself on several temples dedicated to the Roman Imperial Cult.
3. Pergamum boasted a theatre, stadium, library, and a healing center of Asclepius, as well as other buildings that were part of the normal life in the Greco Roman world.
4. The library boasted more than 200,000 volumes.
5. Other than temples to emperors and the goddess Roma, the city held high honor hosting a temple to Zeus - according to ancient Greek belief, he was the father of all gods and men and the ruler over all
6. Many suggest that this altar to Zeus is what is meant by the throne of Satan in **verse 13**.
7. But there exists a number of possibilities – maybe it was Asclepius cult headquarters or the concentration of the Imperial in Roman culture
8. In Roman antiquity, the image of a double-edged sword was highly symbolic.
9. Christ introduces himself to the assembly - the Christ followers as **"the one who has the sharp two-edged sword"**.
10. **Revelation 2:13** *"Yet you hold fast my name, and you do not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas, my favorite faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."*
11. Not much is known about Antipas but later Christian tradition holds that the Apostle John ordained him as the Bishop of Pergamum
12. **Revelation 2:14-16** *"But I have a few things against you - you have some who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak, to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food, sacrifice to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also, you have some who hold the teachings of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth"*
13. The most probable explanation is that the Nicolaitans were followers of this movement which in Hebrew means *"we will eat"*, and in this case likely refers to eating meat that was sacrificed to Greco-Roman gods
14. **Numbers 25:1-5** *"While Israel remained Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with their daughters of Moab. For they invited the people to sacrifice to their gods and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So, Israel joined themselves to Baal, and the Lord was angry against Israel. The Lord said to Moses, take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the Lord, so that the fierce anger the Lord may turn away from Israel. So, Moses said to the judges of Israel. Each of you slay his men who joined themselves to Baal"*
15. Christ rebuked those in the assembly of Pergamum who tolerated those who both professed Christ and ate meat sacrificed to Roman deities and He called them to repent.
16. This anti Roman sentiment comes through in passages like **Revelation 2:17** *"He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. 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, and no one knows except the one who receives it"***

17. As in the two previous addresses, the one who hears is called to obey - to hear means to obey Him.
18. He who obeys is described as a conqueror and overcomer and to this overcomer, Messiah promises something very special, hidden manna and a white stone with a new secret name.
19. Manna is a symbol of God's provision for the people of Israel
20. He said, ***"I have food to eat that you do not know" John 4:32*** - The hidden manna that the disciples did not know about, is nothing less than divine energy that is able to provide sustenance in the most unimaginable and perilous circumstances
21. This characterizes the soon to be reality for believers in Pergamum
22. The most likely interpretations of the white stones that they were inscribed with the name of the recipients were given to the winners of Roman sports races.
23. The real race is that of perseverance - whoever perseveres and overcomes will receive a pass into the heavenly banquet
24. Another possibility continues with the theme of priestly attire found in the first chapter of Revelation. The High Priest's robe had 12 Stones, each inscribed with the name of one of the 12 Tribes of Israel. The sacred white stone could have been seen as a symbol of non-Jews residing in Galilee who would receive eternal life through Jesus

**Thyatira:**

1. ***Revelation 2:19-20 "I know your deeds: your love, faith, service, and steadfast endurance. In fact, your more recent deeds are greater than your earlier ones. But I have this against you - you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and by her teaching to deceive my servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols"***
2. Jesus took note of their love, faith, service, and endurance in their congregational life in very difficult circumstances.
3. Nevertheless, ***verse 20***, somewhat unexpectedly tempers the celebration by words of stern warning.
4. The image of Jezebel is invoked, and it's not easy to untangle the logic.
5. Jezebel appears in a variety of stories but the greatest wickedness was to introduce the cults of Baal and Astaroth and this was accomplished through a program of religious education and temple construction.
6. We do not know for sure the identity of this Jezebel of Revelation.
7. Was this Jezebel who practiced wickedness without opposition or deterrence from the congregational participants a real person?
8. As one reads through these words carefully, it becomes doubtful that that this is a case of a woman who was merely sexually promiscuous.
9. ***Hosea 1:2 "When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to him, and take yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry for the land commits flagrant, harlotry, forsaking the Lord."***
10. From this we see the harlotry of Hosea's wife symbolized Israelite idol worship practice the times of Hosea's ministry.

11. ***Revelation 2:23 – “Furthermore, I will strike her followers with a deadly disease. – literally I will kill with death, and then all the churches will know, that I am the one who searches minds and hearts. I will repay each one of you what deeds you deserve”***
12. Jesus threatens to not only judge this Jezebel but also judge all those who followed her.
13. ***Revelation 2:24-25 “But to the rest of you in Thyatira all who do not hold to this teaching who have not learned the so-called deep secrets of Satan to you I say - I do not put any additional burden on you However, hold on to what you have until I come”***
14. It's likely that *the deep secret to Satan* taught by and the things that were discussed under the category of *Nicolaitans* in Pergamum and in Ephesus are essentially the same.
15. ***Revelation 2:26 -27 “He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken in pieces as I have also received authority from My Father”***
16. In a continual series of promises to the ones who overcome, Jesus promises nothing less than the authority over the nations of the world
17. But strikingly Messiah promises to share His own crown rights with those who will keep his commandments for as long as needed.
18. ***Revelation 2: 28-29 “And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”***
19. To be given the morning star should be understood as a promise of the glorious, bright future, the affirmation of great good yet to come.
20. Jesus promises to grant the morning star to the one who overcomes.
21. In ***Revelation 22:16, Jesus states that He is a bright and morning star.***
22. In short, to anyone with the ultimate faithfulness and perseverance of the overcomer, Jesus promises to give a glorious future.

#### **Sardis:**

1. ***Revelation 3:1 “to the messenger at the assembly in Sardis write”***
2. The city was at the crossroads of some of the most important roads
3. The city's wealth and prosperity can be attributed to its location, ideal for trade and commerce, and its abundant source of water and mineral sources - mostly notably the legendary gold bearing sands.
4. Herodotus wrote that coins were firstly minted in this great city
5. The Roman proconsul at the end of the 1st century BC upheld the right of Sardis Jews to practice their religion, including the right to donate to the temple in Jerusalem.
6. The city protected its wealth with a citadel on an acropolis atop a fortified hill that rose approximately about 1/3 of a mile above ground
7. Story of the Persians (547BC) and later Antiochus (214BC) captured the city
8. It seems that Revelation connected the histories and the characters of each city it addresses and draws parallels to the people who live there
9. ***Revelation 3:3 – “He who has the seven Spirits of God and the Seven Stars says this – I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of my God. So, remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore, if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come to you”***

10. Jesus levels one of his harshest criticisms against this assembly  
He states that He is well aware of their deeds - most likely their financial generosity towards others but announces that the good reputation among other congregations was nothing more than a smokescreen that did not impress the God of Israel.
11. Their spiritually strong, imperial impregnable reputation did not at all correspond to the inner reality that Messiah was able to see in the general clutter of their accomplishments.
12. We can clearly see that the author continued to portray Jesus as the high priest who examines the offerings people brought, looking to see if they were perfect and therefore acceptable for worship.
13. Yet other issues, most likely the worship of local and imperial deities, had effectively polluted the offerings they brought to God
14. The call to wake up, to remember, to hear, and to obey which was received was issued by the High Priest of the Heavenly Temple, Jesus.
15. It is here that the centrality of the exclusive oneness of God in worship is paramount
16. Israel's God alone must be worshipped, there can be no other God – (Ten Commandments)
17. ***Revelation 3:4 "but you have a few people in Sardis who have not been soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy"***
18. ***Ecclesiastes 9:7-8 "Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart, for God has already approved your works. Let your clothes be white all the time and let not oil be lacking on your head"***
19. There was an association between the color white and purity.
20. It is easy to see the stains on white clothing and hard to keep clean.
21. ***Revelation 3:5-6 "he who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments, and I will not erase his name from the Book of Life, and I will confess his name before My father and before his Angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies"***
22. Jesus declared the names of those who do overcome would remain in the list of the Book of Life in perpetuity.
23. ***Daniel 7:9-10 "While I was watching, thrones were set up and the Ancient of days took his seat. His attire was white like snow, the hair of His hair was like lamb's wool. His throne was ablaze with fire and its wheels were all aflame. A river of fire was streaming forth and proceeding from His Presence. Many thousands were ministering to Him, many tens of thousands stood ready to serve Him. The court convened and the books were opened."***
24. ***Luke 10:20*** Jesus taught his disciples about their priorities, ***"Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your name stand written in the book of heaven"***
25. As in the case with all the other assemblies this letter ends with the exhortation that the one who hears this message must obey it
26. Repetition may seem redundant, but this is a serious matter and so you and i are called to obey what we have heard today