

Living Word Fellowship Church
Revelation
An Overview of the Seven Stars and The Seven Churches of
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I. An Overview of the 'Seven Stars' and the 'Angels of the Church'.

Part III - The church of Smyrna and the Church of Pergamum

A. The Church of Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11):

1. Strengths:

- a) Christ's approach to this church took place through the pastor that was established there.
- b) The pastor was held accountable for what is taking place or not taking place.
- c) Whether the church listens to God or not Christ still holds them accountable to His Word and His authority as head of the church. We can ignore what God is saying about His church or not respect His authority but in the end He is still going to hold His church accountable to His Word.
- d) This church was going through a lot of tribulation (tremendous emotional pressure, pain and affliction) and poverty and Christ knew about all of it. He has a reward for those who endure no matter what (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10).
 - The attacks against them even though it was people coming after them was motivated by Satan. This is another reason it was so intense.
- e) They were challenged to do the following:
 - *"Do not fear what you are about to suffer."* Christ did not stop the suffering because He then did not provide them their reward. Satan will be punished (Revelation 20) but it is years to come.
 - THANK GOD, the tribulation had a limitation (10 days). The tribulation period is 7 years. Christ says the same for us (1 Corinthians 10:12-13).
 - *"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."* (James 1:12) This seems to review ongoing trials because the tribulation is going to last 10 days. Faithfulness is required and it is rewarded (Hebrews 11:6).

f) *Second death* - This is described in Revelation 21:8

2. Weaknesses:

- a) No weaknesses - WOW! This in reference to a church that was very poor and being attacked by 'a synagogue of Satan;' meaning a lot of Jews who were a part of the synagogue.
- b) No weaknesses - no weaknesses does not mean they were perfect it means that their faithfulness was sincere because under much tribulation they remained faithful.

3. Consequence:

- a) No consequences because they remained faithful

4. Overcomers are Blessed:

- a) They will be given the crown of life.

B. The Church of Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17) - Christ added this sentence; "The One who has the sharp two-edged sword.... ." Christ come to this church as a 'sharp two-edged sword.'

1. Historical Background:

a) Pergamum:

- Pergamum was traditionally known for its worship of Asclepius (whose symbol on Pergamum's coins was the serpent; cf. chap. 12), Demeter, Athena and Dionysus, along with Orphic elements. Its famous giant altar of Zeus (120 by 112 feet) overlooked the city on its citadel, and some have suggested that this is the background for "**Satan's throne*" in this verse. . (from IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament by Craig S. Keener Copyright © 1993 by Craig S. Keener. Published by InterVarsity Press. All rights reserved.)
- All citizens were expected to participate in civil religion or they would be suspected of disloyalty against the state; but Christians could not participate in imperial festivals or eat the meat doled out there, and as a group would thus naturally be suspected. Once one Christian was martyred, the legal precedent was set for the execution of Christians in other provinces. (from IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament by Craig S. Keener Copyright © 1993 by Craig S. Keener. Published by InterVarsity Press. All rights reserved.)

2. Christ and the Church of Pergamun:

- a) Christ's approach to this church took place through the pastor that was established in Pergamun.
- b) Christ knew where they dwelt - He knew everything about them because He is walking among these churches. The word know here means that Christ experientially knows. His knowledge of this church is gathered from all that He has experienced being among them. It is not just because He knows all things, it is also because He has been so engaged that He can speak from experience.
- c) Church, means that all these people Christ is talking to He considered a saved community committed to gather for the purposes of Christ.
- d) Despite being in the midst of a city that is the throne of satan, they kept the faith like Christ faithful servant Antipas who was killed for the faith. This death highlights how treacherous this situation was for these believers.
 - Christ says "My faith" - Revelation 1:5 - ... "*Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and releases us from our sins by His blood.*" So Antipas did not deny Christ no matter how much persecution he suffered.
- d) Sharp sword – Serves to separate believers from the world, critically examine thoughts and motives and serve as judgment to those believing in false doctrine. The sword is a symbolic representation of the Word of God's twofold ability to separate believers from the world and to condemn the world for its sin. It was the sword of salvation as well as the sword of death.

3. Their Strengths:

a) *Where Satan has his throne*: Satan “ruled” from pergamum in that it was the official center of emperor worship in Asia.

- "Where Satan has his throne-where he reigns as king, and is universally obeyed. It was a maxim among the Jews, that where the law of God was not studied, there Satan dwelt; but he was obliged to leave the place where a synagogue or academy was established."

b) John, under the inspiration of Jesus Christ, uses the phrase 'hold fast'. It means that they refused to let go of the Word of God and this is something they actively and consistently did with no intention of ever stopping. This made them trustworthy and a reliable group of people.

- [Thou holdest fast my name] Notwithstanding that the profession of Christianity exposed this church to the bitterest persecution, they held fast the name of Christian, which they had received from Jesus Christ, and did not deny his faith; for when brought to the trial they openly professed themselves disciples and followers of their Lord and Master.
- Faith implies that their conviction and deep commitment rest on the Word of God. They were fully surrendered to do whatever the scriptures instructed them to do. This is why they can be defined as holding fast.

b) *Antipas*: First martyr of Asia. According to tradition he was slowly roasted to death in a bronze kettle during the reign of Domitian.

- Who this Antipas was we cannot tell. We only know that he was a Christian, and probably bore some office in the church, and became illustrious by his martyrdom in the cause of Christ. (from Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1996, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)
- It is supposed that he was murdered by some mob, who chose this way to vindicate the honour of their god Aesculapius, in opposition to the claims of our Lord Jesus. (from Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1996, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

3. Weaknesses:

a) Some people held to the teaching of Balaam and apparently they did not confront them and made them stop this kind of teaching.

- Balaam advised the Midianite women how to lead the Israelites astray (Numbers 25:1-2; 31:16; Jude 11).
- The false teachers may be advocating compromise with the imperial cult, for humanly appealing reasons (2:13). "Balaam" was the most famous pagan prophet of the *Old Testament and Jewish tradition (see comment on Jude 11) and is thus provided as the pseudonym for the heretical leader of the compromisers, like "Jezebel" in Thyatira (2:20). (from IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament by Craig S. Keener Copyright © 1993 by Craig S. Keener. Published by InterVarsity Press. All rights reserved.)

- Intermarriage with heathen women was a problem in Pergamum where any social contact with the world also involved worship of idols. Usually meat in the marketplace had been offered to idols earlier (cf. 1 Cor. 8).¹

c) They were also condemned for following the Nicolaitans' teaching. Earlier the Ephesian church had been commended for rejecting what appears to be a moral departure (cf. Rev. 2:6). Some Greek manuscripts add here that God hates the teaching of the Nicolaitans, as also stated in v. 6. Compromise with worldly morality and pagan doctrine was prevalent in the church, especially in the third century when Christianity became popular. So compromise with pagan morality and departure from biblical faith soon corrupted the church.²

- The church of Ephesus hated these teachings but this church allowed those who held to these teachings to serve among them.

4. Consequence:

a) They are told to repent or the Lord is coming quickly. Christ did not use the word 'quickly' for the church of Ephesus. Repent means to:

- "To perceive beforehand," hence signifies "to change one's mind or purpose," always, in the NT, involving a change for the better, an amendment, and always, except in Luke 17:3,4, of "repentance" from sin. The word is found in the Synoptic Gospels (in Luke, nine times), in Acts five times..".(from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.).

b) Christ says He will 'make war against them with the sword of My mouth.'

- Christ's response is decisive (will come quickly) and substantial until the church of Ephesus. Tolerating false doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1-4) and immorality in the church is very upsetting for Christ.

Some people get upset when I talk about homosexuality if we hold people accountable for sleeping together etc. Christ responds to those issues specifically and aggressively. Does this mean we need to be negative in our attitudes, no, because if we did we would also sin (Galatians 6:1-5) and we would then become like the church of Ephesus.

5. Overcomers are Blessed:

a) "He who has an ear" - this is speaking to those believers who are still committed to do what the Lord says to do.

b) 'the Spirit' - This is a reverence to the Holy Spirit because He serves the churches in the following manner:

- The Spirit renews us (Titus 2:5) to a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- It puts to death the misdeeds of the body (Romans 8:13)

¹ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 936). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 936). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

- Causes us not to be controlled by the sinful nature (Romans 8:9-10,13).
- He solidifies our ability to connect to God as Christ Helper (John 14:16-17) with our bodies being His dwelling place on earth (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20).
- The Spirit illuminates the Word (1 Corinthians 2:10-15), guides us walk in it (John 16:13) and teaches us what it means (1 John 2:26-27) so that we can develop the divine nature of Christ (2 Peter 1:3-4; Romans 8:16-17).
- The Spirit reminds us of the Word of God (John 14:26).
- The Spirit fills us so that we experience God fully (Ephesians 3:14-19).
- It does not allow us to be slaves to fear (Romans 8:15; 2 Tim. 1:7).
- The Spirit is the inner power that blesses us to be overcomers (Romans 8:37).
- The Spirit blesses us to live by faith and not by sight cause 'all things to work out for our good' (Romans 8:28).
- When we don't know how to pray the Spirit prays for us (Romans 8:26).
- The Spirit provides us peace (John 14:27).
- When the Word is practiced by a believer the Spirit helps us know good and evil (Hebrews 5:14).
- Walk wise making use of the time (Ephesians 5:15-18).
- He comforts us in times of grief (John 14:6).
- Because of all these principles listed and more the Spirit blesses us so that 'He who is in us is greater than He who is in the world' (1 John 4:4).

c) Overcomes are blessed in the following manner:

- *"I will give some of the hidden manner:"*

Hidden manna: The heavenly food available to the believer who overcomes (Psalms 78:24), in contrast to the unclean food of the Balaamites. (NASU Study Bible notes)

Instead of eating "things sacrificed to idols" (Rev. 2:14), the believers in Pergamos needed to feast on God's holy food, the bread of life found in Jesus Christ through the Word (Matt. 4:4; John 6:32ff). The ark of the covenant was the throne of God (2 Sam. 6:2; Ps. 80:1; Isa. 37:16; all NASB), in contrast to Satan's throne which held authority in Pergamos (Rev. 2:13).³

- *'Give him a white stone..'* - White Stone: Certain kinds of stones were used as tokens for various purposes. In the context of Messianic banquet the white stone was probably for the purpose of admission. (NASU Study Bible notes)

TRENCH'S explanation seems best. *White* is the color and livery of heaven. "New" implies something altogether renewed and heavenly. The white stone is a glistening diamond, the Urim borne by the high priest within the *choschen* or breastplate of judgment, with the twelve tribes' names on the twelve precious stones, next the heart. The word *Urim* means "light," answering to the color *white*. None but the high priest knew the name written upon it, probably the incommunicable name of God, "Jehovah." The high priest consulted it in some divinely appointed way to get direction from God when needful.⁴

- *'..and a new name..'*

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 574). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 557). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

The “new name” is *Christ’s* (compare Rev 3:12, “I will write upon him *My* new name”): some new revelation of Himself which shall hereafter be imparted to His people, and which they alone are capable of receiving. The connection with the “hidden manna” will thus be clear, as none save the high priest had access to the “manna hidden” in the sanctuary. Believers, as spiritual priests unto God, shall enjoy the heavenly antitypes to the hidden manna and the Urim stone. What they had peculiarly to contend against at Pergamos was the temptation to *idol-meats*, and *fornication*, put in their way by Balaamites. As Phinehas was rewarded with “an everlasting priesthood” for his zeal against these very sins to which the Old Testament Balaam seduced Israel; so the heavenly high priesthood is the reward promised here to those zealous against the New Testament Balaamites tempting Christ’s people to the same sins.⁵

⁵ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 557). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.