

John Phillips calls this church The Faltering Church - a church that was drifting into worldliness and carnality. Our letter to Pergamum begins and ends with the image of the Sharp Two-Edged Sword of Messiah. Our letter begins: Thus saith the One who has the Sharp Two-Edged Sword. The picture of the Sword is that of judgment. Thus Yeshua stands poised over this church with His Sharp Two-Edged Sword because of the sins present in this church.

*Pergamum was a famous city that had long prospered, with an estimated 120,000 to 200,000 population. Its citizens had been foresighted enough to take the lead in joining Rome to defeat the other kings of the eastern Mediterranean, thus securing for themselves special favor. The image of the "sword" may allude to the Roman ius gladii, the Roman short-sword, the right to execute capital punishment. If so, this is Yeshua reminding the believers at Pergamum that He holds the power of life and death, not Rome. This letter focuses on false teachers in the church who are corrupting the church.--Craig Keener, Revelation in the NIV Life Application Commentary, p. 122.*

Yeshua begins with an affirmation of the faithful, ***you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you.*** This acknowledgment indicates a time of persecution where one of their number was put to death for his faith. There was then, both internal and external opposition to the faith.

Our text basically calls the place where this congregation dwells the Throne of HaSatan. Satan had a stronghold in this city. *It was a center of pagan religion in Asia Minor. The healing cult of Asclepius was famous at Pergamum; Christians from this city may recognize in Revelation's serpent the chief symbol of their cities deity. There was also the famous huge throne-like altar of "Zeus the Savior," whose sculptures included serpents; it was a monumental colonnaded court in the form of a horseshoe, 120 by 112 feet, whose podium was nearly 18 feet high....If a specific allusion to paganism is in view, however, the greatest immediate threat to believers would have been the cult of the emperor; the old temple of Augustus stood on the lofty rock citadel, conspicuous to anyone who approached the city. As a center of the provincial imperial cult, Pergamum not surprisingly*

*appears among the cities some Jews thought slated for divine destruction (Sibylline Oracles 5.119.--Keener, p. 123.*

We might well note that Satan rules as king behind all false religions. There are no other gods, but there is the activity of HaSatan and his demons to counterfeit all that God sets in motion. So it is correct for us to see demons behind all false religions. The death of Antipas, Yeshua's faithful witness is most likely due to the Roman governor who alone had the power to put to death. This is the reason why the Jews had to deliver Yeshua to Pontius Pilate, for they no longer had the power and authority to put anyone to death under Roman rule.

Yeshua however, is the final judge of all the earth, ***Daniel 2:37-38; 5:18-21; 7:9-14; Revelation 19:11-21.*** Our LORD Yeshua is sovereign over all the earth, and He will judge Satan and his minions who seek to dominate this earth with their vile and wicked ways.

We find in our text, then, the concept that Light and Darkness cannot dwell together peacefully, seeing as how this congregation suffered because they dwelled in the same city as the throne of Satan. A witnessing congregation will be a persecuted congregation.

This congregation had false teachers within, a compromise, a threat to their good standing with ADONAI. Two such groups emerge, first associated with the teachings of Bila'am, and then with the Nicolaitans. The false teacher was not likely actually named Bila'am, but associated with the likes of this false prophet of the Tanach. Bila'am was hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to come and curse Israel. While ADONAI did not allow Bila'am to curse Israel, he nonetheless taught Balak how to bring Israel to compromise their faith, their walk with God and their witness. ***Numbers 31:16; 25:1-9.*** These particular sins were sexual immorality and food offered to idols. This has remained a constant threat to the faithful throughout their history.

Both of these atrocities were literally true of the pagan temples in Pergamum. ***Polycarp was accused of being a "puller down of our gods, teaching many not to sacrifice or worship." Trade guild festivals, celebrating patron deities through feasts and sometimes immoral activities abounded at Pergamum. There would be much pressure to compromise with such activities. And just as Israel was influenced to fornicate both sexually and spiritually, the same was true of Chris-***

*tians in Pergamum.--G.K. Beale, The Book of Revelation in The New International Greek Testament Commentary, p. 249.*

To be engaged in a trade meant to be a member of a guild, and thus the influenced to be involved in such atrocities. In other words, like we have our trade unions today, such as the Steel Workers Union, etc., to have a good job with good pay meant being a part of a guild. So whether a carpenter, stone mason, baker, etc., the pressure to conform would be great. And additionally, there would be festivals and banquets where free food was made available, food that had been specifically sacrificed for a pagan deity. By the early second century Roman officials came to recognize Christian influence in refusal to eat sacrificial meat and responded harshly.

Is failure to condemn the same as condoning the practices of the pagan society? Does it indeed water down our witness? Whether or not some of these believers were actually engaged in temple practices or not, these false prophets were no doubt teaching that it was permissible to do so.

*Numbers 22:21-35* gives the picture of the Angel of the LORD standing in the way as an adversary to Bil'am. Bil'am did not heed this warning, and later was indeed killed by the sword, *Numbers 31:8*. The Jews at Pergamum would not be ignorant of this story and its outcome. It would serve as a powerful threat not to assimilate as some did back then and 24,000 destroyed by the plague. In this case, there is the Sword of the LORD Yeshua that threatens them. Pergamum must repent of allowing this false teaching to continue in their midst. We must not tolerate false teaching nor false doctrine in our congregations!

There was this other group, called the Nicolaitans, most suppose they are teaching the same basic doctrines. They take the little phrase "the same way" to indicate the same basic teachings. We have already noted the connection between Bil'am, Jezebel, and the Nicolaitans in an earlier teaching in Revelation. The name Nicolaitan is understood to arise from two separate words which means "to overcome the people." In rabbinic literature, Bil'am was understood to mean "he who consumes the people." Thus there is a strong similarity in the names themselves.

Therefore, they are to repent, or else! Yeshua will come and fight against them Himself with the Sword of His Mouth. To repent would mean to stand up against the false doctrines within their congregation, and to discipline them, or to put them out so that the community not be plagued with this compromise and assimilation. *1 Corinthians 5:1-8; 15:33.*

Now comes the constant refrain, the admonition to hear what the Ruach HaKodesh says to the churches. We need an ear trained to His Voice, and the convicting power of the Holy Spirit.

Who is he who overcomes in this situation? It is the one who continues steadfast as did Antipas in the face of both the opposition without and the false teachers within. The overcomer is the one who does not give up nor does he give in, who refuses to compromise with the world and seeks to purge the false teachings. To the ones who so overcome, our LORD Yeshua promises an inheritance.

The "Hidden Manna."

***Hebrews 9:3-5 Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.***

***Ex. 16:31-34 The house of Israel named it manna, and it was like coriander seed, white, and its taste was like wafers with honey. Then Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded, 'Let an omerful of it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.'" Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omerful of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations." As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the Testimony, to be kept.***

To eat of the hidden manna is to express in a symbolic way that the overcomer may feast with Messiah at the end times, which will be consummated in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. ***Much of the Jewish eschatological writings also portrayed the restoration of the Ark and the manna hidden within it, to be partaken of by Israel in the Messianic era: Babylonian Talmud Chagigah 12b; 2 Baruch 29:8; Sibylline Oracles 7:149; Midrash Rabbah Ecclesiastes 1:9; 2 Maccabees 2:4-7. The manna given to Israel in the wilderness is said to have been "hidden in the high heavens...from the beginning of creation (Targum Pseudo Jonathan Exodus 16:4, 15) and was ultimately to prosper Israel "at the end of days" (Targum Neofiti 8:16).--Beale, p. 252.***

To be able to eat of the "hidden manna" is no doubt seen in stark contrast to the eating of things offered up to idols. However, the bigger picture is that of communion with Messiah Yeshua at the end of time.

The "White Stone." Manna is said to appear as a coriander seed, in appearance as bdellium. Babylonian Talmud Yoma 75a says that the manna was "round ...and white like a pearl. The color white stands throughout scripture as a symbol of purity, or righteousness, *Isaiah 1:18; Psalm 51:17; Matthew 17:2; John 20:12; Revelation 3:18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13; 19:14*. Some suggest that this white stone was used for admission, in this case, to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

A "New Name." This is no doubt an allusion to *Isaiah 56:5; 62:2*. This fits the time of New Jerusalem and a New Creation, *Isaiah 65:15-59*. We should compare however, *Revelation 3:12; 19:12; 22:3-4*. At the end of time, when we are joined together with Messiah Yeshua as One, then we will bear His likeness in a full and complete way, and will be identified with Him and with His New Name. We are, after all, His Bride! This is a name that no one knows but He Himself, and it will not be known until the end as He comes as a conquering warrior and King.

*The Babylonian Talmud Baba Bathra 75b, affirms, partly on the basis of a parallel name prophecy in Isaiah 43:7, that "three are named after the name of God, and these are the righteous, the Messiah, and Jerusalem."*

*The church is to behave faithfully, overcome the threat of false teachers and assimilation into the worship systems of this world, in order to inherit the restoration promises and to avoid judgment. The prophetic segment of Isaiah 62 and 65 was also chosen because of its suitability to the problem at Pergamum, especially in respect to compromising participation at idolatrous feasts. The context of Isaiah 65:5 primarily contrasts God's faithful servants in Israel with Israelites who compromise by dedicating meals and cup offerings to idols and false gods, Isaiah 65:3-12....That the same idea rounds off the two concluding verses of the letter to Pergamum shows an awareness that OT prophecy is going to be fulfilled in this community and lays before the readers a prophetic warning of judgment for disobedience and of blessing for faithfulness.--Beale, p. 256.*

Our text says this new name "no one knows except the one receiving it." "To know the name" is a Hebrew expression denoting intimate relationship. Our first experience with this concept is in Exodus 33 where ADONAI says of Moshe, I have known you by name. The context is to find favor with God and to come into per-

sonal experience with Him. **Beale** made a strong case for this expression simply meaning that which shall come to pass in latter days, when we become One with God and we experience a union with His Name as did Moshe as ADONAI went before Moshe, proclaimed His Name, and allowed Moshe to come to a deeper and more intimate walk with Him.

Many will focus on that phrase "no one knows" and indicate that it is an individual name that will be given to a faithful believer at that time. Either is a possible understanding of our text. Our God is quite capable of giving new names to each individual making up the Bride of Messiah at the end of time.