

NOTES FOR PERGAMUM EPISODE

Next to Ephesus, Pergamon was our favorite site we visited. In this episode, we'll share pictures of what it's like today, some background on its historical greatness and then relate that to the message to the church there.

City pictures and videos

Pergamum was rich and powerful and had some of the most beautiful pagan temples. This is a very interesting section of Revelation and a very interesting place to visit. In this episode, we'll set the historical scene, read the section from Revelation and try to explain its importance to the church there at that time and to us today.

Alexander the Great died at age 33 in 323 BC in Babylon, having conquered the world. He was succeeded by 4 main generals. Lysimachus was the one who got this area. It is said that the treasure Lysimachus had from war booty was 9,000 talents of silver—which is a whole lot of money. He went off to war again and left **Philetaerus** in charge. Lysimachus died in battle and never came back. Philetaerus was a eunuch and was succeeded by his nephew Eumenes I and this started the short-lived Attalid dynasty. They used all this wealth to hire the best Greek sculptors and artisans to adorn Pergamum. It was quite splendid and had some of the best stuff in the Greek world. When the Romans were starting to be a power in that area, the Attalids pledged allegiance to Rome.

Archaeology got going in the 1800's, and before that, many marvelous sites were just lying in ruins and people would take the marble or the stones or build other things there. That is why large parts of the Parthenon, treasures from Egyptian tombs and other things are in the British museum. It was German archaeologists who excavated Pergamum. In Berlin, you can visit the Pergamon Museum and see the gates of Nebuchadnezzar and the altar of Zeus from Pergamon. Germany actually did buy it from the Ottoman Empire. There were many other splendid pagan temples. When Rome took over and Augustus Caesar established the cult of emperor worship close to the turn of the first century, Pergamos was chosen as the headquarters, and a temple was built in honor of Rome and Augustus, approximately 29 BC. . Britannica

The reference to Satan's throne could have been the altar of Zeus, the site of emperor worship, all of the above, or a reference to spiritual principalities active there.

- Altar of Zeus with frieze showing Olympian Gods defeat of the Titan Gods
- This was where the worship of the divine emperor had been made the touchstone of civic loyalty under Domitian.
- Center for worship of Asclepius, demi-god of healing, often portrayed with a serpent on a staff

The consequence was that refusal to perform the outward rituals was bound to incur penalties. Both Jews and Christians were conscientiously unable to burn incense to any human being: Jews, after some initial persecution, got exemption from Claudius; but Christians suffered when

the Church's numbers expanded sufficiently to attract the State's hostile attention (1 Pet. 4: 16). Failure to give divine honours to the emperor or 'to swear by the genius of Caesar' was not the only ground for persecution; but the anti-Christian writer Celsus (about 178 ce) warned Christians of the perils of their lack of civic sense and of their disloyalty to an empire from which they derived many material benefits. *Oxford Reference*

birthplace of the Greek physician [Galen](#) (l. 129-216), as the site of one of the greatest libraries of antiquity, and for its production (though not invention) of parchment.
a library that rivaled [Alexandria](#).

This is not low-quality idolatry. This is paganism with great splendor. The town's importance depends on it. The economy depends on it. All the most sophisticated and successful people are into it. It is pleasing to the senses. It is impressive. What's impressive about Christian worship? They were called atheists. They were accused of cannibalism. Yet they conquered. Light triumphed over darkness, even though it was deeply compromised.

- Altar of Zeus with frieze showing Olympian Gods defeat of the Titan Gods
- This was where the worship of the divine emperor had been made the touchstone of civic loyalty under Domitian.

Center for worship of Asclepius, demi-god of healing, often portrayed with a serpent on a staff

Pictures of ruins

Video teaching on site

Who was Antipas

- Only mentioned here, but later church tradition said he was a bishop and saint to pray to for dental problems
- Legend also says burned alive in a brazen bull altar
- Legend his offense was casting out demons
- Or an ex-disciple of Asclepius (the demi-god of healing) was claiming Jesus Christ was the Great Physician, not Asclepius.
- Possible that he abandoned the cult of Mithra, where the highest level was called "Antipatre"

Baalim Caused Stumbling

- Balaam hired by King of Moab to curse Israel. Num 22:5-7
- Angel of the LORD forbids it and he blesses Israel. Num. 22:22-35
- Some of Israel worship Baal of Peor and 24,000 die Num. 25:1-9
- "Behold, these, on Balaam's advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the Lord. Num. 31:16

Food Sacrificed to idols

- 3 things forbidden to Gentiles by Jerusalem Council: 1) food sacrificed to idols 2) things strangled not bled 3) fornication (porneia), in Acts 15.
- In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul explains it is not because the idol is real, but in their conscience they would be respecting pagan worship and thus be defiled and they would stumble.

What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. 1 Corinthians 10:19-21

Sexual Immorality or Fornication (porneia)

We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents... Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 1 Corinthians 10:8,9,11,12

Nicolaitans

“The Nicolaitanes are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles. They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence. The character of these men is very plainly pointed out in the Apocalypse of John, [when they are represented] as teaching that it is a matter of indifference to practise adultery, and to eat things sacrificed to idols.”

Iraenaus in Against Heresies written around 180 AD also connects them with gnosticism

Sometimes, men of God, gifted spiritual leaders, go down in sexual scandal. Sometimes it's not an isolated incident, where fleshly attraction won over their better side. For some it was repeated, systematic adultery going on for years. How did they keep up appearances? This kind of thinking. I have known people in leadership roles who would say that if you truly understand how great our spiritual standing in Christ is, these things of the flesh don't really matter. I've justified my own behavior that way at times. Obviously, what the Lord Jesus Christ is saying here is completely at odds with that kind of thinking.

Is these teaching from Revelation practical for me? Why do I need to know this? I just need inspiration for daily living. Do we care how the church operates? Do we care about doing it right?

You may have heard it said that Satan wrestles with us by push and pulling to get us off balance so we will fall. The pushing is with pressures and the pulling is with temptations of pleasure. The pressures is a great city like this were tremendous. Why are you an atheist. Why don't you worship the great, powerful gods here like everyone else? You are going to anger these gods. They will punish us. Why not enjoy fornication like the rest of us. The gods approve. We think it's great. What's wrong with you? Living with that every day yet staying faithful to the end because they know His power and his resurrected glory.

Rev 2:17. The promise for those who overcome are special, mysterious presents from Lord Jesus. White stones and hidden manna may both relate to blessings of the old covenant at Mt. Sinai. Jesus Christ fulfilled the law and brings the new and better covenant.