

MESSAGE NOTES
Revelation Unveiled-- Part 5
“Pergamum – Who Gets The Credit?”
Revelation 2:12-77

Introduction: Pergamum was the capital of Asia Minor from the time of Alexander the Great until 29 B.C. when Ephesus took that role. It was the Washington D.C of that region in the Roman Empire. It was the center of political power and an important center for culture and learning.

Pergamum had the second largest library in the world at the time. It had the largest medical school in the world and was a center of healing and medical science in the whole Roman Empire. In fact, its most celebrated citizen during this period was a physician named Galen, whose work and research was largely responsible for providing the foundation from which modern western medicine was to spring.

People from all over the Mediterranean region would travel to the city to engage in commerce or to visit the famous Asklepiion, the medical center for medical treatments. So, Pergamum was a prosperous city and its strategic location along both land and sea trading routes contributed to its great prosperity.

Pergamum was also a beautiful and magnificent city. The most impressive part of the city was the Acropolis (the highest point of the city) where the government buildings were, and also where the steepest and highest theatre in the ancient world was located with magnificent views of the region.

This is an amazing city, and yet, Jesus says that Pergamum is the place where Satan lives and has his throne! Revelation 2:12-13....

What was it about Pergamum that led Jesus to say it was the place where Satan lived and had his throne? Perhaps it is one or all of the following:

1. Pergamum was a city devoted to the cult of emperor worship and became the first such city in the Roman Empire to do that by building the first temple built in Asia for the purpose of worshipping a Roman Emperor who claimed, *I am God!* Roman Emperors took the credit that belonged to the one true God.

One of the amazing architectural marvels at Pergamum was the Temple for the worship of Emperor Trajan. The towering structure attests to the strength of the imperial cult of Caesar worship in that city. In fact, after Caesar Augustus became the first emperor of the Roman Empire, Pergamum was authorized to become the first city in Asia Minor to be the *Neokoros* (in other words, the Vatican or worldwide Worship Center) of emperor worship.

2. With Pergamum being the Washington DC of Asia Minor, the governor of the city had what is called, “The Right of The Sword”. This meant he could decide whether a person would live or receive the death penalty. He wielded the power of Rome as he ruled the people in that region. That power was not given to other regional leaders, which shows the power that resided in that city. So perhaps Jesus says this is where Satan’s throne is because you had people who were making the decision to kill Christians, including Antipas who Jesus calls in Revelation 2:13: *my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city--where Satan lives.*”

3. The oldest altar to the worship of the mythological god, Zeus, was in Pergamum. The Great Altar of Zeus is one of the greatest surviving monuments from antiquity. It was excavated and is now located in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, Germany. Some think this is what Jesus is referring to as the “throne of Satan.”

Zeus had been worshiped there as far back as 500-600 BC. Like other gods who were originally worshipped outdoors, Zeus was as well. People built a gigantic platform and on top of the platform stood an altar which was shaped like a throne. Sacrifices were made 24 hours a day to Zeus so that smoke was constantly rising up under the columns. People thought *There sits Zeus on his throne* --- THE KING OF THE GODS, and the one who created all things and keeps the creation going. Zeus worship takes credit away from God. **(See Revelation 4 for John’s response...)**

4. Pergamum was a city where there was a temple devoted to Asclepius, or in Latin, Aesculapius, who was a god of medicine in ancient Greek religion and mythology. Asclepius, they said, was born of a virgin and was considered to be the god who controlled healing. He is another false god who takes credit for what God does.

In Greek mythology, his father is Zeus and Zeus does not want to raise him and so gives him to a Centaur who teaches him how to heal with herbal remedies and other means that even allowed him to raise people from the dead. He goes to

hades and brings people back to life. Hades, the God of the underworld, hates Asclepius and is angry because he's taking people from his Kingdom. This was too much for Zeus who was jealous of Asclepius, and so Zeus killed him. But 3 days later he felt badly and so he raised him from the dead and Asclepius, ascended to Mount Olympus where he sat at the right hand of Zeus continuing to be the god of healing.

His symbol was the snake wrapped around a rod because in mythology, snakes were thought to live forever because they shed their skin and are reborn every year in the ancient world. Asclepius was thought to heal people through moving waters with minerals. **(Read John's response to this false god in John 5:1-9...)**

5. In Pergamum, there was a huge temple devoted to the worship of the Egyptian god of healing, Serapis. This is understandable because there was a huge medical school there, and the Egyptian doctors had their place here as well. Serapis had many of the same kinds of treatment as Asclepius worship. There was a river running under this temple. The people built the temple over the river because they wanted moving water. Serapis also supposedly healed not only with moving water and diet, but with combining water with mud. This god had a special gift for healing eyesight. So, people who had eye problems would come from all over the region and Roman world because Serapis promised healing powers over eyesight problems through putting the mud on their eyes. **(Read John's response to this false god in John 9:1-5...)**

6. Another counterfeit god the people worshipped in Pergamum was the mythological god, Demeter, the goddess of groceries. People believed she was responsible for bringing the grain out of the earth. Demeter was the one who said I will give you bread, and so the prayer of people who worshipped her was: *Give us this day our daily bread*. Demeter worship was also a counterfeit of Jesus as if a person wanted to become a follower of Demeter, they would go down into a pit called a Taurobolium. A grate would be laid over the top of the pit, and a bull would be led over the top of it. The bull's throat would be cut, the blood would run down onto the person in the pit who was wearing a white robe, and they would be "washed in the blood", which would hopefully give them eternal life in the next life. Demeter worship took the credit due to God. **(Read John's response to this false god in John 6:1-15...)**

7. Part of the religious landscape in Pergamum was the worship of Dionysus -- the god of wine, party, and happiness. People believed Dionysus was the god who made the grape vines grow and made wine ferment to make people's hearts glad and help them experience true happiness and true joy. They believed Dionysus offered 3 things: Happiness in life; Being one with god which they also called being in the spirit; and Eternal life after they died. People believed that in their drunkenness they would be united to Dionysus in the spirit, and they believed by eating the raw meat of a bull and drinking his blood, they were joined eternally and permanently to the god.

During the festival of this god, vats of water were miraculously turned to wine overnight in the Dionysus Temple for the people to celebrate. **(Read John's response to this false god in John 2:1-11...)**

Do you see what is going on in Pergamum? So much of what is happening in the culture is a counterfeit of Jesus! Hundreds of years before Jesus comes, the devil is so clever that he has counterfeited almost everything about God as Satan has people believing in religious counterfeits which look like the real thing and take the credit away from God.

As we hear this today, maybe you are thinking, what does this have to do with me today? It causes us to ask ourselves:

1. Who or what is on the throne of my life?

We don't worship the mythological gods people worshipped then, but we can get caught up in the worship of other idols (gods) our culture tempts us to pursue. Instead of our relationship with Jesus being first in our life, we put other things on the throne of our life like Money / Possessions we covet / Influence and power over others / Sports / Entertainment / Hobbies / All kinds of pursuits are an idol in our life if they take the place of God.

This is a continuous struggle for us as our human nature and temptation to place these other things in life ahead of God is real. So, we need to be intentional each day to be with God in scripture, prayer, solitude with him, and the practices of Jesus to maintain a connection with God, our heavenly Father. And we need to be in community with other followers of Jesus so we can encourage one another to live for God's glory and Neighbor's good.

2. Do I take the credit that belongs to God for my life?

Satan lives wherever someone gets the credit that belongs to God: for healing and health; daily bread; our talents; successes; etc. If God doesn't get the glory, then someone else other than God is getting the glory and that makes it of Satan.