

Revelation 2:12-17 – Remain Faithful to Christ and to His Truth

Christ begins his letter to the church at Pergamum with the statement “*I know where you live*” (v.13). His knowledge of the churches depends on his personal presence among them. He knows them because he walks among them and the places where they live, work and play. He is aware that his people are surrounded by a non-Christian society that is at odds with him and them and he is there to help.

Warm Up Question(s) – choose one

- What kind of pressure have you been under lately? What is the most (or least) helpful advice you’ve received on how to handle the pressure?
- What different kinds of “riches” are there? When have you felt very rich?

Discovering the Word

- 1) **Read Revelation 2:12-17.** How does Jesus identify himself to the church in Pergamum in v. 12? How is this imagery significant for a church living under Roman imperial authority?
- 2) Where does Jesus say the church in Pergamum is living (v.13)? What historical or religious aspects of the city might this refer to? (see history¹) How are the Christians in this city being tested?
- 3) Jesus commends them for remaining true (lit. “holding firmly”—v.13) to His name. How can you practically remain true to your faith and when social pressures oppose Christian values?
- 4) What is the first false teaching or group that Jesus rebukes the church for tolerating (v.14; Numbers 25¹⁻³; 31^{8,16}; cf. Jude 11)? What is the other false teaching/group that Jesus rebukes the church for tolerating (v.15; cf. v.6)?²
- 5) The church in Pergamum was commended for their faith but rebuked for compromise. In what areas do modern believers face the greatest pressure to compromise with culture to keep the peace?

How did/does Christ expect his followers to respond (v.16)?
- 6) Which do you think is easier to endure: persecution by enemies (v.10) or seduction by a culture trying to conform us to it (vv.14-15)? Why?
- 7) What commendations and critiques would you give on how your church is responding to the key temptations in our cultural context?
- 8) What promises does Christ give for obeying his commands (v.17; cf. Psalm 78²⁴⁻²⁵; Isaiah 56⁵; 62²; Gen. 32²⁸)? What is significant about each?

¹ For a brief video on its ruins and history see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnUWxPLUsSU&t=6s>

² Information about the [Nicolaitans](#) is limited, ambiguous, and based on John’s references here in Revelation. Two things are clear: (a) Christ hated their practices (2:6), and (b) they are group with others who taught and practiced an unhealthy and spiritually destructive compromise with pagan beliefs and practices. The Ephesians rightly “hated” the work of the Nicolaitans and refused to tolerate their behaviour ([Rev. 2:6](#)). The church in Pergamum had wrongly welcomed them into the fellowship of the church and given them freedom to propagate their destructive ways.

Balaam and Balak. Numbers 22-25;31

The main story of Balaam occurs during the sojourn of the Israelites in the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River, at the close of forty years of wandering, shortly before the death of Moses and the crossing of the Jordan. The Israelites have already defeated two kings in Transjordan: Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan. Balak, king of Moab, consequently becomes alarmed and sends elders of Midian and his Moabite messengers to Balaam, son of Beor, to induce him to come and curse Israel. Balaam's location, Pethor, which is now located in the region of northern Syria and southeastern Turkey is simply given as "which is by the river of the land of the children of his people" in the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint.

Balaam sends back word that he can only do what Yahweh commands, and God has, through a nocturnal dream, told him not to go. Balak consequently sends higher-ranking priests and offers Balaam greater riches. Balaam continues to press God, and God allows him to go with them but with instructions to say only what He commands. Balaam then sets out in the morning with the princes of Moab. God becomes angry that he went with them and sends the Angel of the Lord (Numbers 22:22) to prevent him. At first, the angel is seen only by the donkey Balaam is riding, which tries to avoid the angel. After Balaam starts punishing the donkey for refusing to move, it is miraculously given the power to speak to Balaam (Numbers 22:28) and says, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" At this point, Balaam is allowed to see the angel, who informs him that the donkey's turning away from the messenger is the only reason the angel did not kill Balaam. Balaam immediately repents (Numbers 22:34), but is told to go on. It would appear from the angel's repeating God's instructions to Balaam (v.35) that Balaam may not have been taking those instructions seriously.

Balak meets with Balaam at Kirjat Huzoth, and they go to Bamoth-Baal (the "high places of Baal"), and offer sacrifices on seven altars, leading to Balaam being given a prophecy by Yahweh, which he speaks to Balak. However, the prophecy blesses Israel. Balak is unhappy about that but Balaam reminds him that he can only speak the words put in his mouth by the God of Israel. Balak then takes Balaam to another "high place" at Pisgah, to try again. Building another seven altars here, and making sacrifices on each, Balaam provides another prophecy blessing Israel.

Balaam finally gets taken by a now very frustrated Balak to Peor, and, after seven more sacrifices, decides not to resort to enchantments as he did earlier but instead looks upon the Israelites dwelling in the wilderness. The Spirit of God comes upon Balaam and he delivers a third positive prophecy concerning Israel. Balak's anger rises to the point where he threatens Balaam, but Balaam merely offers a prediction of Balak's fate. Balaam then looks upon the Amalekites and Kenites, and offers two more predictions of their fates. Balak and Balaam then go to their respective homes.

Later, Numbers 25:1–9 describes how Israel engaged in the Heresy of Peor by having immoral relationships with the women of Moab and by making sacrifices to their gods.

In Numbers 31:16 Moses blames this on Balaam's advice and because of his culpability in the incident. The result of Israel's apostasy was a deadly divine judgement against those Israelites who participated. Balaam was eventually killed in a retaliatory battle against Midian in Numbers 31:8.

Deuteronomy 23:3–6 summarises these incidents, and further states that the Ammonites were associated with the Moabites. Joshua also makes reference to this. With God's protection taken from him, Balaam is later listed among the Midianites who were killed in revenge for the "matter of Peor". Joshua 13:22 records that Balaam died "by the sword" during a battle for the Reubenite occupation of Midianite land.

New Testament references to Balaam:

Revelation 2:14

The significance of Balaam in Revelation 2:14 refers to his association with Balak, teaching him to entice the Israelites into sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and committing sexual immorality.

2 Peter 2:15

Balaam's story illustrates the dangers of false teachers who, like him, forsook the right way for personal gain, as noted in 2 Peter 2:15. He is depicted as someone who loved the rewards of unrighteousness, using his spiritual gifts for profit rather than truth.

Jude 11

Balaam's mention in Jude 11 is interpreted as a warning against greed and the pursuit of profit over integrity, as he is seen as a figure who compromised God's will for personal gain.

These references highlight Balaam's legacy, illustrating his moral and ethical context regards God's people. Two areas particularly stand out:

Greed: Balaam's actions are portrayed as a warning against the love of money and the moral compromises that can arise from it.

Moral Failure: His story serves as a cautionary tale about the consequences of leading others into sin, emphasizing the importance of faithfulness to God.