

STUDY GUIDE 16

Revelation 2:12-29

Study warm-up: Think of some circumstances in which compromising is a dangerous practice.

OBSERVATION – Lord, help me to discover it! & INTERPRETATION – Lord, help me to understand it!

Our study guide this week looks at the message to the Pergamum church and the letter to the church at Thyatira.

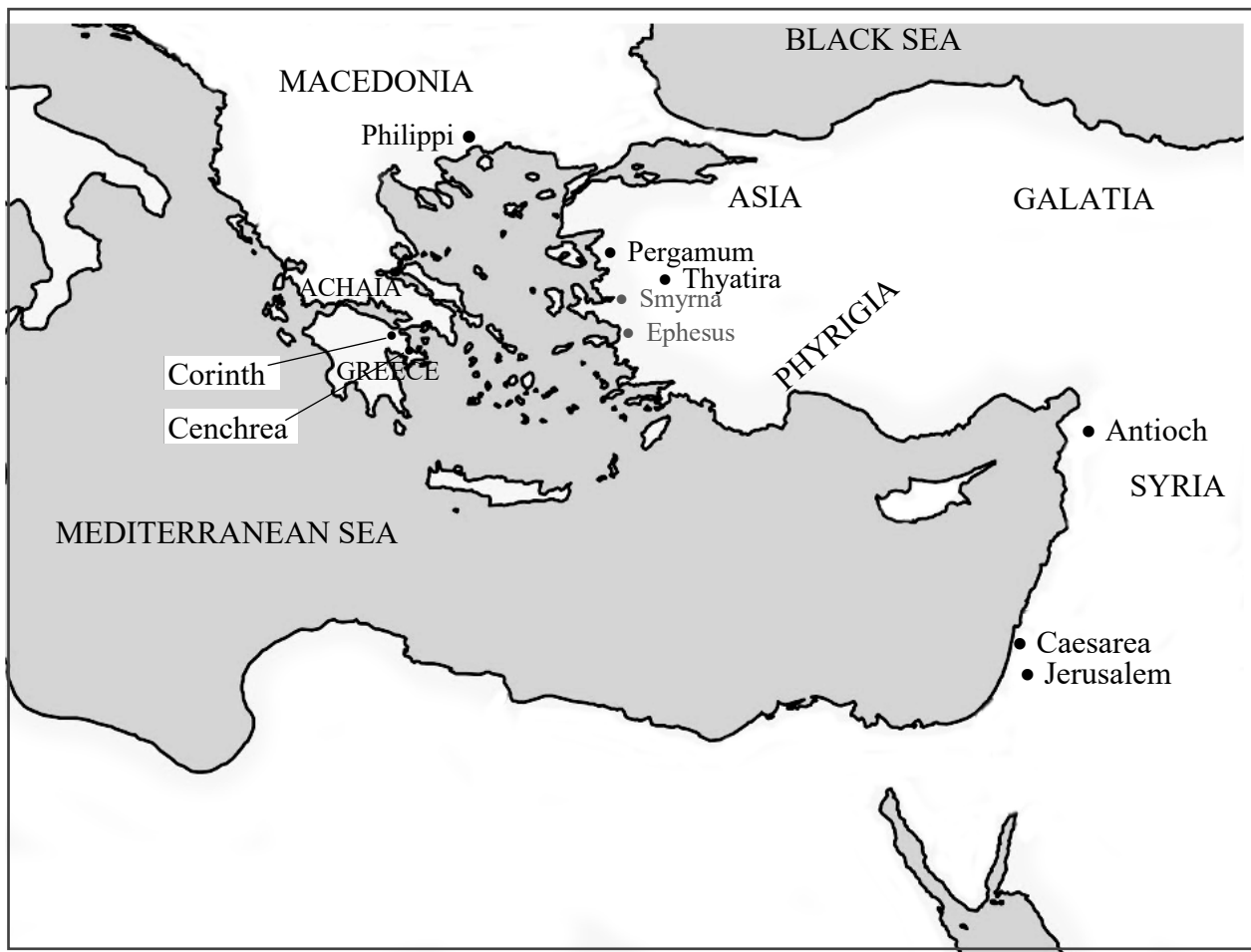


Figure 16-1

Pergamum

In the time of the Apostle John, Pergamum was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia. It had a been a provincial capital city for centuries – first as a part of the Greek Empire, then under the Romans.

As a province capital, Pergamum was home to a governor assigned by Rome. The Pergamum governor belonged to a class of Roman proconsuls who received *ius gladii*, the *right of the sword*. Governors of this class held the power of life and death; they could execute people at will.

While Ephesus was known for its impressive harbor and its Temple of Artemis, and Smyrna was renowned for its myrrh and its beauty, Pergamum was known for its temples. The imperial cult or emperor worship, had a significant presence. There were temples to Augustus (Caesar), Trajan (Caesar), Athena (goddess of wisdom and war), Dionysus (god of wine-making), and to Asclepius (god of medicine.)

The most recognizable artistic artifact, the Altar to Zeus, was located in proximity to the Athena temple. See Figure 16-2.



Altar to Zeus
Pergamon Museum, Berlin
Photo: Wikimedia Commons
Figure 16-2

Pergamum had a great library, second only to the Great Library of Alexandria in Egypt. The library was said to have 200,000 rolls of parchment. According to one legend, parchment was invented in Pergamum.

The Theatre of Pergamon is the steepest of the ancient theaters, seating about 10,000 people in 78 rows.



Theatre of Pergamon

Photo: Tim and Jan Cowles

Figure 16-2



Pergamon Ruins

Photo: Tim and Jan Cowles

Figure 16-3

Read Revelation 2:12-17.

1. At the end of this Study Guide there is a place to summarize the message to the church in Pergamum. Record the following on those pages. (Note that some messages may not have every element.)
 - a. The description of Jesus
 - b. The church's commendation
 - c. The church's admonishment
 - d. Instructions/warnings to the church
 - e. Consequences if the instructions are not followed
 - f. Promises to the overcomer

2. Consider the following cross-references. Note anything that helps you understand the description of Jesus in Revelation 2:12.

a. Hebrews 4:12, 13

b. John 1:1, 2

3. How is the description of Jesus fitting for the culture of Pergamum?

4. What can you deduce about the following from Revelation 2:13?

a. Pergamum, the city

b. Believers living in Pergamum

- c. Antipas (who is only mentioned this one time in the Bible)

There is an early church tradition that Antipas was a disciple of John and a regional bishop in Pergamum. The tradition holds that he was martyred by being roasted alive in a bronze bull-shaped vessel in 92AD.

5. Read Numbers 22 where Balaam and Balak are first mentioned in the Bible.
- a. Who is Balak?

 - b. Who is Balaam?

 - c. What does Balak ask of Balaam?

Summarizing Numbers 23 and 24, Balaam pronounces three blessings on Israel, and at the end of chapter 24, the men part ways – seemingly Balak without his result and Balaam without his reward.

6. Read about what then happens in Numbers 25:1-9 and Moses' words later in Numbers 31:16, recounting the plague. Balaam thought he found a workaround to God's instructions to him in Numbers 22. What can you deduce about Balaam's counsel to Balak and the part it played in the events of Numbers 25?

The church at Pergamum is also reprimanded for having followers of the Nicolaitans in their midst. We learned a bit about the Nicolaitans in Study Guide 1 and also saw in the message to the church at Ephesus that they were commended for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* (Book 1, Chapter 26) states that the Nicolaitans practiced adultery and ate food sacrificed to idols.

7. Read Revelation 2:14-16 once more and consider the numerous temples in Pergamum. What was likely happening in the church in Pergamum? What was the remedy?

Re-read Revelation 2:17.

Manna, which means *what is it*, was provided by God to the Hebrews in the exodus from Egypt. (Read Exodus 16:9-18) It sustained the Hebrews for 40 years, until they entered the Promised Land.

The white stone with a new name is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. There was a Roman practice, however, that winners of athletic contests

would receive a white stone on which the athlete's name was inscribed. This white stone served as an entry pass into a celebratory banquet.

8. Read John 6:51-58. How was manna a foreshadowing of Jesus? How does Jesus surpass this symbol?

9. What celebration awaits the overcomer? Read Revelation 19:5-9, which follows judgment pronounced against "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth."

10. Before we move on to the message to the church in Thyatira, review your summary pages about Pergamum and make note of any additional information you have found helpful.

Thyatira

Thyatira was located about 52 miles to the south east of Pergamum. Thyatira was primarily a commercial town and was home to many trade guilds. We know from Acts 16 that the Apostle Paul met a tradeswoman named Lydia while he was in Philippi (map, Figure 16-1.) Lydia was originally from Thyatira and a merchant of purple cloth.

Thyatira had guilds for workers in wool, dyeing, pottery, bronze, leather, garment making, baking, and slave trading. Each guild had its own deity and worship practices, many of which included sharing meals together. Failure to belong to a guild resulted in ostracization – both socially and economically.

Read Revelation 2:18-29.

11. At the end of this Study Guide there is a place to summarize the message to the church in Thyatira. Record the following on those pages. (Note that some messages may not have every element.)
 - a. The description of Jesus
 - b. The church's commendation
 - c. The church's admonishment
 - d. Instructions/warnings to the church
 - e. Consequences if the instructions are not followed
 - f. Promises to the overcomer

12. How are aspects of Jesus' description appropriate to the situation in Thyatira? (Review your answers to questions 6h and 6i of Study Guide 14 if you need a hint.)

The name Jezebel in the message to the church at Thyatira may be familiar. In 1 Kings 16, King Ahab of Israel married the Sidonian princess Jezebel. Jezebel brought the worship of Baal to the northern kingdom of Israel. She was responsible for the murder of many prophets of Israel and manipulated her weak husband. Her name went on to epitomize evil.

13. Is the Jezebel mentioned in Revelation 2:20 a threat from inside or outside the Thyatira church? Explain.
14. In light of the importance of trade guilds in Thyatira, for what may Jezebel have been advocating?
15. Read Revelation 2:26, 27 once more. The first part of the promise to the overcomer is taken from messianic Psalm 2. Does this promise seem fitting to the situation at Thyatira? Record any additional understanding about these verses, you receive from reading Revelation 20:4-6 and what follows the destruction of the Antichrist's kingdom in Daniel 7:26 and 27.

16. Read Revelation 22:16 and share the insight it gives you about the second part of the promise to the overcomer in Revelation 2:28.
17. Finally, check your summary pages on the message for the Thyatira church – is there anything you wish to add?

APPLICATION – Lord, help me to live it!

18. Reflect on the spiritual compromises the church at Pergamum tolerated. What is the lesson for you personally? What does the message mean for you as a member of church?

19. How does the message to the church in Thyatira encourage you to remain steadfastly anchored to Jesus Christ, especially in circumstances that would cause you unpleasant social or economic consequences from the world?

*FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION OR
CONTEMPLATION:*

- I) There is a great tangent to follow about the temple of Asclepius that was in Pergamum. If you have time, read Numbers 21:1-9 and then John 3:13-15. Then consider the image of the rod of Asclepius in Figure 16-4. (Some scholars believe that the account in Numbers 21 is the origin of the myth of Asclepius.). What connections do you see?
- II) From the outside, how would the church at Thyatira appear? (What does that tell you?)



Rod of Asclepius
Image: Wikimedia
Commons
Figure 16-4

REFERENCES

Barclay, William. *The Revelation of John*. Vol. 1, Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.

Missler, C. *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary*. Koininia House, 2005,

Ramsay, W. M. *The Letters to the Seven Churches in Asia*. First Rate Publishers, 2023.

 Cole Women's Bible Study Writing Team, 2024

Additional Scripture for Study Guide 16

□ Hebrews 4:12, 13

¹² For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

□ John 1:1, 2

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God.

□ Numbers 22

Then the sons of Israel journeyed, and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan *opposite* Jericho.

² Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. ³ So Moab was in great fear because of the people, for they were numerous; and Moab was in dread of the sons of Israel. ⁴ Moab said to the elders of Midian, “Now this horde will lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field.” And Balak the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time. ⁵ So he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, at Pethor, which is near the River, *in* the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, “Behold, a people came out of Egypt; behold, they cover the surface of the land, and they are living opposite me. ⁶ Now, therefore, please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.”

⁷ So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the *fees for* divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam and repeated Balak's words to him. ⁸ He said to them, “Spend the night here, and I will bring word back to you as the LORD may speak to me.” And the leaders of Moab stayed with Balaam. ⁹ Then God came to Balaam and said, “Who are these men with you?” ¹⁰ Balaam said to God, “Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent *word* to me, ¹¹ ‘Behold, there is

a people who came out of Egypt and they cover the surface of the land; now come, curse them for me; perhaps I may be able to fight against them and drive them out.”¹² God said to Balaam, “Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.”¹³ So Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak’s leaders, “Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to let me go with you.”¹⁴ The leaders of Moab arose and went to Balak and said, “Balaam refused to come with us.”¹⁵ Then Balak again sent leaders, more numerous and more distinguished than the former.¹⁶ They came to Balaam and said to him, “Thus says Balak the son of Zippor, ‘Let nothing, I beg you, hinder you from coming to me; ¹⁷ for I will indeed honor you richly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Please come then, curse this people for me.’”¹⁸ Balaam replied to the servants of Balak, “Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the LORD my God.¹⁹ Now please, you also stay here tonight, and I will find out what else the LORD will speak to me.”²⁰ God came to Balaam at night and said to him, “If the men have come to call you, rise up *and* go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do.”²¹ So Balaam arose in the morning, and saddled his donkey and went with the leaders of Moab.²² But God was angry because he was going, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as an adversary against him. Now he was riding on his donkey and his two servants were

with him. ²³ When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand, the donkey turned off from the way and went into the field; but Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back into the way. ²⁴ Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path of the vineyards, *with* a wall on this side and a wall on that side. ²⁵ When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she pressed herself to the wall and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall, so he struck her again. ²⁶ The angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn to the right hand or the left. ²⁷ When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam was angry and struck the donkey with his stick. ²⁸ And the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" ²⁹ Then Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a mockery of me! If there had been a sword in my hand, I would have killed you by now." ³⁰ The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I ever been accustomed to do so to you?" And he said, "No." ³¹ Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed all the way to the ground. ³² The angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out as an adversary, because your way was contrary to me. ³³ But the donkey saw

me and turned aside from me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, I would surely have killed you just now, and let her live.”³⁴ Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, “I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the way against me. Now then, if it is displeasing to you, I will turn back.”³⁵ But the angel of the LORD said to Balaam, “Go with the men, but you shall speak only the word which I tell you.” So Balaam went along with the leaders of Balak.³⁶ When Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at the city of Moab, which is on the Arnon border, at the extreme end of the border.³⁷ Then Balak said to Balaam, “Did I not urgently send to you to call you? Why did you not come to me? Am I really unable to honor you?”³⁸ So Balaam said to Balak, “Behold, I have come now to you! Am I able to speak anything at all? The word that God puts in my mouth, that I shall speak.”³⁹ And Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kiriath-huzoth.⁴⁰ Balak sacrificed oxen and sheep, and sent *some* to Balaam and the leaders who were with him.⁴¹ Then it came about in the morning that Balak took Balaam and brought him up to the high places of Baal, and he saw from there a portion of the people.

□ Numbers 25:1-9

While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab.² For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and

bowed down to their gods. ³ So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the LORD was angry against Israel. ⁴ The LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." ⁵ So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor."

⁶ Then behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting. ⁷ When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, ⁸ and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked. ⁹ Those who died by the plague were 24,000.

□ **Numbers 31:16**

¹⁶ Behold, these [women] caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the LORD.

□ **Exodus 16:9-18**

⁹ Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, 'Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your

grumbings.”¹⁰ It came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.¹¹ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,¹² “I have heard the grumbings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’”

¹³ So it came about at evening that the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.¹⁴ When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground.¹⁵ When the sons of Israel saw *it*, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.¹⁶ This is what the LORD has commanded, ‘Gather of it every man as much as he should eat; you shall take an omer apiece according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent.’”¹⁷ The sons of Israel did so, and *some* gathered much and *some* little.¹⁸ When they measured it with an omer, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no lack; every man gathered as much as he should eat.

□ **John 6:51-58**

⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will

live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.”
⁵² Then the Jews *began* to argue with one another, saying, “How can this man give us *His* flesh to eat?” ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. ⁵⁴ He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever.”

□ **Revelation 19:5-9**

⁵ And a voice came from the throne, saying, “Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.” ⁶ Then I heard *something* like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” ⁸ It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright *and* clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

⁹ Then he *said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And he *said to me, “These are true words of God.”

□ **Revelation 20:4-6**

⁴ Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I *saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.

⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

□ **Daniel 7:26, 27**

²⁶ But the court will sit *for judgment*, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. ²⁷ Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of *all* the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom *will be* an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.’

□ **Revelation 22:16**

¹⁶ “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”



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Pergamum

pithy description

name meaning (if available)

Jesus' description (a)

Church's Commendation (b)

Church's Admonishment (c)

Instructions/Warnings (d)

Consequences (e)

Promise to Overcomers (f)

Personal Application

***The one who has an ear,
let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.***

Thyatira

pithy description

name meaning (if available)

Jesus' description (a)

Church's Commendation (b)

Church's Admonishment (c)

Instructions/Warnings (d)

Consequences (e)

Promise to Overcomers (f)

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