

Handout 5: Revelation, Chapter 2:12-29 (Talk 5)
David Crabtree, Reformation Fellowship, July 25, 2021

I. Introduction

- A. Before beginning a description of the events associated with the Day of the Lord, Jesus, our heavenly high priest, critiques seven of the churches of Asia Minor.
 - 1. A time for the saints to reflect on their relationship with God before entering into a period of persecution.
 - 2. A random sampling of strengths and weaknesses are represented.
- B. Last week we saw the letters to Ephesus and Smyrna.
 - 1. The Ephesians were praised for identifying false apostles but criticized for their lack of love for their fellow believers.
 - 2. The Smyrneans were praised for being “rich” but warned that they will soon suffer persecution.
- C. Today we will look at two more letters to churches.

II. Pergamum

- A. Geographical setting
 - 1. Built on a plateau
 - a) Located 15 miles from the sea on a raised area on the Caicus plain.
 - b) Very stately looking
 - 2. Importance was dependent solely on its status as a seat of Roman rule.
 - a) Not a port and not located on an important trade route
- B. Historical setting
 - 1. Ancient city
 - a) Originally Asian population base
 - 2. Came under control of Hellenistic rulers
 - a) Became Greek culturally
 - 3. Overthrew Hellenistic control and became a kingdom (282 BC)
 - 4. In 133 BC, the last king of Pergamum died and willed the kingdom to Rome.
 - 5. Pergamum became the center of Roman rule in Asia.
- C. Social setting
 - 1. Population—150,000 (very approximate)
 - 2. Facilities
 - a) 3 theaters
 - (1) One stunningly beautiful

- b) A stadium specifically for gladiatorial fights
 - c) A stadium for chariot races
 - d) A large library
 - (1) As big as the one in Alexandria
 - (2) Estimated 200,000 documents
 - (3) The word “parchment” comes from the name Pergamum.
 - (a) Egypt banned the export of papyrus.
 - (b) Pergamum developed.
 - e) 4 gymnasiums
 - (1) One was the largest in the Greek world (490 feet x 650 feet)
3. Pagan religion was very prominent in Pergamum.
- a) Traditional pagan gods
 - (1) Athena
 - (a) Prominent temple
 - (2) Zeus Soter
 - (3) Dionysus
 - (4) Asklepios—god of healing
 - (a) Asklepios was symbolized by a serpent.
 - (b) Pergamum was a famous place of healing.
 - b) Egyptian gods
 - c) Other gods
 - d) Roman imperial cult
 - (1) First temple built in honor of Augustus (in 29 BC).
 - (a) First imperial cult temple in Asia.
 - (2) During the Roman period, religion was used as a unifying force.
4. Some Jews lived there but not as many as in the other cities.
- a) May have been an influx after 70 AD.

III. Revelation 2:12-13

12 “To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. 13 I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

- A. To the angel of Pergamum
- B. From

- 1. The one who has the sharp, double-edged sword
 - a) This is the Messiah.
 - (1) We saw this in 1:16.
 - (2) This image appears twice in Isaiah.
 - (a) Both in reference to the Messiah ready to act on God’s behalf
 - (i) This image is usually used in the context of judgment.

C. Commendation

1. Jesus is fully aware of their circumstances.
 - a) He knows that they live in a tough neighborhood.
2. Throne of Satan
 - a) Pergamum was a religious center for paganism.
 - (1) Several possible explanations of the Throne of Satan.
 - (a) Seat of Roman power
 - (b) Center of Imperial cult in Asia
 - (c) Particularly wicked city
 - (d) Visual impact of seeing city upon approach
 - (e) An altar to Zeus-Soter looked like a throne.
 - (i) Sometimes referred to as a throne
 - (ii) Decorated with carvings in which snakes were prominent
 - (iii) I favor this option, but I don't know enough to be confident.
3. They remained true to God's name even though they were threatened with death.
 - a) Antipas was a martyr for the faith.

The legend appears in later hagiographers (Simon Metaphrastes, the Bollandists) that he was slowly roasted to death in a brazen bowl during the reign of Domitian. (Mounce)

Zahn notes that under Diocletian, Christian stonecutters from Rome working in the quarries of Pannonia refused to carve an image of Aesculapius (Latin designation of Asklepios) and consequently were put to death for being followers of Antipas of Pergamum. (Zahn, *Introduction*, 3.421). (From Mounce)

- b) Some in their midst were willing to stand by God even when there was risk to life.

The peril of the church is surely to be related to the pressure of the imperial cult. The case of Antipas showed the way things were going. The whole religious history of Pergamum is instructive because it shows how the background of divine kingship made the place so apt a setting for the development of the forms of emperor worship." (Hemer, p. 86)

4. Satan's footprint in Pergamum was mentioned a second time.
 - a) Four of the letters include a reference to Satan.
 - (1) Jesus is not at all reticent to make reference to the persecution of the churches as the activity of Satan.
 - b) Only in this letter are there two mentions.
 - (1) There must have been a particularly pronounced spirit of wickedness at work in Pergamum.

IV. Revelation 2:14-16

14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. 15 Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

A. Criticism

1. Their congregation contains people who hold to the teaching of Balaam.
 - a) They have adopted the strategy of Balaam.
 - (1) This is not talking about theology or doctrine.
 - b) What did Balaam do?
 - (1) He was hired by Balak, king of the Moabites, to curse the Israelites.
 - (a) Every time he tried to curse the Israelites, God turned it into a blessing.
 - (2) But he eventually came up with another way to curse the Israelites.
 - (a) He advised seducing the Israelites into worshipping other gods so that YHWH would punish them.
 - (b) In Numbers, we first read that some Israelites were seduced.
 - (3) One has to tease this out of the text, but this appears to be what happened.

Num. 25:1 While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, 2 who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. 3 So Israel joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor, and the LORD'S anger burned against them.

- (4) Later we read that Balaam was the one who engineered this.
 - (a) Balaam was listed as one of those killed by the Israelites.

Num. 31:7 They fought against Midian, as the LORD commanded Moses, and killed every man. 8 Among their victims were Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba—the five kings of Midian. They also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword.

- (b) Later we learn that it was Balaam's advice that they were following.

Num. 31:13 Moses, Eleazar the priest and all the leaders of the community went to meet them outside the camp. 14 Moses was angry with the officers of the army—the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds—who returned from the battle.

Num. 31:15 "Have you allowed all the women to live?" he asked them. 16 "They were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the LORD in what happened at Peor, so that a plague struck the LORD'S people. 17 Now kill all

the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man, 18 but save for yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man.

- (5) So Balaam was the mastermind behind the plot to get the Moabite women to seduce the Israelites into committing sexual immorality and coaxing them to participate in sacrifices to idols.
- c) There are apparently some in the midst of the church in Pergamum who are doing a similar kind of thing.
2. Jewish literature from the time refers to Jesus as a “Balaam.”
 - a) Because, as the Jews understood it, he taught that one need not follow the law.
 - b) But John would be taking this term and using it to apply to those who were truly antinomian.
3. Hemer argues that these are the same thing as the Nicolaitans.
 - a) Could be seen as having the same meaning
 - (1) Nicolaos – he conquers the people.
 - (2) Balaam – he rules over the people.
4. So the Nicolaitans and the Balaamites could be two ways of indicating the same group.
 - a) Nicolaitan was the name.
 - b) Balaamite is a derogatory nickname.
5. What did the Balaamites teach?
 - a) They probably taught that a Christian could engage in acts of idolatry and sexual immorality with a clear conscience.
 - (1) This would allow Christians to participate in the pagan religions and avoid the persecution.
 - b) How could they justify this?
 - (1) My guess—they argued if a believer firmly believes that these activities are meaningless, he is free to participate in them.
 - (2) They could have supported this position from I Corinthians 8:1-13:

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. 2 The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. 3 But the man who loves God is known by God.

1Cor. 8:4 So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), 6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

1Cor. 8:7 But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. 8 But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

1Cor. 8:9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? 11 So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. 12 When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

- (a) Verse 4-6 could be used to justify doing these things.
 - (b) But this ignores the social dimension of these acts.
 - (i) What do these acts communicate?
6. What were they enticed to do?
- a) It does not say that these teachers enticed people to commit sexual immorality and to eat meat sacrificed to idols.
 - (1) It says these teachers were like Balaam who did this.
 - b) These teachers may have enticed people to do something comparable but not these exact things.
 - c) However, they may have enticed people to do these very things.
 - (1) I am inclined to think this is the case.
7. How could it be said of this church that “you remain true to my name” and “you did not renounce your faith” on the one hand, but, on the other hand, “you have people who hold to the teaching of Balaam?”
- a) Two different groups
 - (1) Did those who hold to the teaching of Balaam remain true to God's name?
 - (2) Are these two groups completely separate?
 - (3) Are the Balaamites a distinct minority?
8. Solution—Repent!
- a) Or Jesus will come and judge them with the sword of his mouth,
 - (1) He will come in judgment,

V. Revelation 2:17

17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

A. Closing

1. This message is for the one who is willing to listen.
2. To the one who overcomes
 - a) Hidden Manna
 - (1) Don't fall for meat sacrificed to idols.
 - (2) There is something better, something that will nourish your soul that is available to you.

- (a) The bread that comes from heaven
 - (i) It is not visible.
 - (ii) Contrary to the way it seems
- b) White stone
 - (1) White stones were sometimes used as entrance passes.
 - (a) Invitation to Jesus's supper?
 - (b) Rev. 19:9?
 - (2) With a name on it that only he knows
 - (a) The name on it is apparently "Jesus"
 - (b) One has to be one of Jesus' to know the name.
 - (i) Cf. Rev. 19:12
 - (3) To be invited to Jesus' final feast would be far better than to attend a meal dedicated to the pagan gods.

VI. Observations about church in Pergamum

- A. Pergamum was a dark place.
 - 1. Worship of other gods was everywhere.
 - 2. To resist must have seemed impossible.
- B. Some of the saints did resist.
 - 1. And were killed because of it.
- C. You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, the teaching of the Nicolaitans.
 - 1. This ought not be.
 - a) They are leading people astray.
 - 2. More about this later.

VII. Thyatira

- A. This letter is the most challenging of the seven.

The longest and most difficult of the seven letters is addressed to the least known and least important and least remarkable of the cities. . . .The scantiness of our usual materials makes the difficulty the more acute. (Hemer, p. 106)

- 1. Rarely mentioned in contemporary literature
- B. Geographical setting
 - 1. Located on a large plain
 - a) No defensible borders
 - 2. Inland from Pergamum

- a) Designed to provide a buffer for Pergamum
- C. Historical setting
 - 1. Originally an Asian settlement
 - 2. Hellenistic king Seleucus Nicator made it into a Hellenistic (Greek) city.
 - 3. In 262 BC, it was conquered and incorporated into Pergamum kingdom.
 - a) Became a frontier outpost for Pergamum
 - (1) Deep rooted military culture was established.
 - b) Frequently conquered and changed hands several times
 - 4. It didn't flourish until Pax Romana.
- D. Social setting
 - 1. Population 25,000
 - a) Very mixed
 - b) Some Jews, but not many
 - (1) No special privileges for Jews
 - 2. Textile manufacturing was main industry.
 - 3. Metalworking was also important.
 - a) Made weapons and armor
 - 4. Guilds were especially strong.
 - a) Extremely high number of guilds
 - (1) No indication of tribes; guilds appear to have replaced the tribes.
 - b) Notable features of guilds
 - (1) Basis of civil cohesion
 - (2) Very enduring
 - 5. Syncretistic religion
 - a) Worshipped Apollo Tyrimnaeus
 - (1) Apollo was the son of Zeus.
 - (2) Worship of Apollo was merged with worship of the emperor.

VIII. Revelation 2:18-29

"To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

- A. To the angel of the church in Thyatira
- B. From
 - 1. Son of God
 - a) Only time this title is used in Revelation.
 - (1) Son of man is used elsewhere in Revelation.
 - (a) From Daniel 7

- (b) Seems to be synonymous with Son of God
 - b) Could be an allusion to Psalm 2.
 - (1) A quote from the end of the letter comes from Psalm 2.
 - c) What is Psalm 2 about?
 - (1) To be sung when new King of Israel enthroned
 - (a) So this is talking about the sons of David who become king.
 - (b) But it is most purely talking about **the** son of David who becomes king.
 - (2) We will come back to this.
 - d) This could be a polemic against Apollo.
 - (1) Apollo was the son of god (Zeus).
 - (2) Jesus is the true Son of God.
2. Eyes blazing like fire
- a) We saw “his eyes were like blazing fire” in Rev. 1:14.
 - b) An allusion to Daniel 10.
 - (1) A militant Messianic figure who appeared to Daniel in a vision
 - c) Rev. 2:18 says, “his eyes like a flame of fire.”
 - (1) Daniel says, “his eyes like a lamp of fire.”
3. Feet like burnished bronze
- a) We saw “His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace” in Rev. 1:15.
 - b) An allusion to Daniel 10.
 - c) Rev. 2:18 uses the word χαλκολιβάνω.
 - (1) Daniel uses the word χαλκός.
 - (a) This word means bronze or brass.
 - (2) χαλκολιβάνος is not found anywhere else.
 - (a) The meaning is not certain.
 - d) Hemer argues that this word means brass.
 - (1) Brass is an alloy of copper and zinc.
 - (a) Bronze is an alloy of copper and nickel.
 - (2) It has long been thought that the ancients could not make brass.
 - (a) But one item has been found that dates to 2nd century BC.
 - (b) Made in Asia Minor (materials came from around Troas)
 - (3) As a military outpost, they apparently made their own weapons and armor.
 - (a) They apparently figured out how to make brass.
 - (b) Brass is a superior metal to the more common bronze.
 - (4) The etymology is defensible for this meaning.

I suggest then that an alloy of copper with metallic zinc was made in Thyatira, the zinc being obtained by distillation. This was a finer and purer brass than the rough and variable coinage-alloy. It may have derived from older skills preserved by the craftsmen of the guild. The product, I suggest, was known there as χαλκολιβάνος, which I conjecture to be a copulative compound, literally rendered ‘copper-zinc,’ λιβανος being an unrecorded word, perhaps peculiar to the trade, for a metal obtained by distillation, and so derived from the verb λειβω . (Hemer, p. 116)

- e) So John was alluding to Daniel 10, but tweaked the wording to make it more appropriate to Thyatira.
- f) There are two aspects of the Daniel 10 passage that are particularly appropriate to Thyatira.
 - (1) Jesus is depicted as a warrior.
 - (2) Jesus has feet of bronze/brass.

C. Commendation

- 1. He knows their
 - a) Love
 - (1) Probably love for one another, but may not be so specific
 - b) Faith
 - c) Service
 - d) Endurance
 - e) And they have grown in their works.

IX. Revelation 2:20-29

20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 22 So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. 23 I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. 24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): 25 Only hold on to what you have until I come.

A. Criticism

- 1. You tolerate that prophetess, Jezebel.
 - a) She teaches people to engage in sexual immorality and eating meat sacrificed to idols.
 - (1) Same two sins associated with Balaam but in reverse order (2:14)
 - (2) Literal or metaphorical?
 - (a) I think metaphorical is more likely, but both are possible.
 - (b) Other places in Revelation these terms are more clearly metaphorical.
 - b) Why Jezebel? Why not refer to this person as another Balaam?
 - (1) This is a specific individual.
 - (2) A female
 - (3) An insider
 - (a) Balaam was not an insider; Jezebel was an insider by marriage
 - c) Jesus has given her time to repent.
 - (1) But she refuses to repent.

- d) Jesus is going to submit her and her followers to intense suffering.
 - (1) Unless they repent
 - e) Jesus will take her children.
 - (1) This could be metaphorical (but cf. below).
 - f) Then all the churches will know that
 - (1) Jesus searches the minds and hearts of everyone.
 - (2) Jesus gives to everyone according to their deeds.
 - (3) This is easiest to imagine if Jezebel's literal children were taken.
 - (a) A clear sign of God's judgment
2. To the rest in Thyatira
- a) The rest defined
 - (1) Those who do not follow the teaching of Jezebel
 - (2) Those who have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets
 - (a) The "deep secrets" could have been a phrase used by Jezebel and her followers.
 - (b) Could the secret be that God actually **wants** them to compromise?
 - b) Keep what you have till Jesus returns.
 - (1) No additional burden
 - (a) Other flaws could be pointed out.
 - (b) But just keeping what they have is enough to ask right now.

X. Revelation 2:26-29

26 *To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—*

27 *'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery'—*

just as I have received authority from my Father.

28 *I will also give him the morning star. 29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

A. Reward

- 1. To those who overcome
 - a) Authority over the nations
 - (1) Jesus will be given authority over the nations.
 - (a) He will delegate that authority to the saints.
 - (2) Apparently in response to a situation where saints are feeling oppressed by the powers that be
 - (a) Christians might have been under considerable pressure.
- 2. Psalm 2

1 *Why do the nations conspire*

and the peoples plot in vain?

2 *The kings of the earth take their stand*

*and the rulers gather together
against the LORD
and against his Anointed One.*

3 *“Let us break their chains,” they say,
“and throw off their fetters.”*

Psa. 2:4 *The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.*

5 *Then he rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,*

6 *“I have installed my King
on Zion, my holy hill.”*

Psa. 2:7 *I will proclaim the decree of the LORD:
He said to me, “You are my Son;
today I have become your Father.*

Psa. 2:8 *Ask of me,
and I will make the nations your inheritance,
the ends of the earth your possession.*

Psa. 2:9 *You will rule them with an iron scepter;
you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”*

Psa. 2:10 *Therefore, you kings, be wise;
be warned, you rulers of the earth.*

Psa. 2:11 *Serve the LORD with fear
and rejoice with trembling.*

Psa. 2:12 *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry
and you be destroyed in your way,
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*

- a) The kings of the world are chomping at the bit to free themselves from God’s control.
 - (1) God, through his representative, the king of Israel, will eventually establish control over the kings of the world.
 - (a) Every king of Israel will be a placeholder for the one true king.
 - (i) But the one true king, the Messiah, will come and take his place on the throne.
 - (b) His control will be complete.
 - (i) No rebelliousness will be tolerated.
 - (c) There will be no more oppression of the saints.
 - (1) A metal weapon that will be used to great effect
 - b) He will rule them with an iron scepter.
 - (1) A metal weapon that will be used to great effect
 - c) Just as surely as God gave authority to the Messiah, the Messiah will give that authority to the saints.
3. Jesus will also give him the morning star.

- a) A symbol of power and prominence?

2Pet. 1:19 *And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*

- B. Closing

- 1. Let those receptive to critique receive the critique.

XI. Observations about church in Thyatira

- A. Small military outpost

- 1. A culture of military discipline and military values

- B. Praised for love, faith, service, and perseverance

- 1. These are very good things.

- C. But they tolerated a “Jezebel” in their midst.

- 1. A woman who led people in the church into sexual immorality and eating meat sacrificed to idols
 - 2. Assimilation was a particularly attractive option in a time of intense persecution.

- D. The reward for those who overcome is to share in the establishment of the kingdom ruled by their military leader and king, Jesus.