

11 Pergamos

Names (also known as)

Greek: Pergamon or Pergamum

Turkish: Bergama

Etymology

The name of Pergamon continues to live on even today in the word “parchment”, which is a distortion of Pergamon (“parchment” is *pergamino* in Spanish and *pergamena* in Italian).

Signifies: “Citadel, fortress”.

Location/Description

Pergamon was an ancient city located approx. 25 km from the Aegean Sea in present day Bergama, Izmir Province of Turkey in the Anatolia region. The city was connected to the Caicus river valley (modern name Bakircay) which provided access from Pergamon to the Aegean coast.



Scriptural references

New Testament

Rev. 1:11; 2:12

Famous characters

Attalus 3

Antipas (see page 3)

Brief history

Pergamon reached the height of its influence during the Hellenistic period becoming the capital of the Attalid kings and the Pergamon Empire from the 3rd to 2nd century BC and in the Roman period it was the first capital of the

Asian province until this was moved to local rival Ephesus.

From 336 to 323 BC when Asia Minor was part of the Persian Empire, the Caicus Valley was ruled by a dynasty of expatriated Greeks on behalf of Alexander the Great. Pergamon started out as a hilltop fortress with a population of a few thousand.



Shortly after Alexander’s death it became territory held by his General Lysimachus. In 282 BC, Lysimachus went to fight Seleucus (ruler of Greco-Macedonian administration in Babylon). He asked Philatauerus of Tieium to look after his war chest.

When Lysimachus died in the battle Philatauerus found himself with 9,000 talents and declared himself in charge. Philatauerus became loyal to Selucus and Pergmon became part of the Seleucid Empire. Philatauerus was succeeded by his nephew Eumenes. After Eumenes, Attalus 1 (241-197 BC) was the first to use the title of King.

Attalus 1 drove back the Gauls. He had three successors: Eumenes II, Attalus II and Attalus III. In 190 BC, when Eumenes II ruled Pergamon, the Romans expelled the Seleucids from the Anatolia region but the Romans were not interested in ruling Anatolia themselves, so Eumenes II (who built the temple of Athena), at this point had already become friend and ally of the Romans, was now made the new ruler of territory which had belonged to the Seleucids. Mainland Greece, however, denounced Eumenes as a traitor for joining the Romans against his fellow Greeks. This new scenario did, though, turn Pergamon into a middle-ranking kingdom and Eumenes into a very rich man.

Pergamon was relatively safe at this point in time: the Romans extended their protection over nearly all the Mediterranean coast of Asia but all of these benefits had a high cost, for now Pergamon, although a lot bigger, was

a lot less independent (more than 10,000 people).

Eumenes II took the initiative to turn Pergamon into a centre of art, scholarship and research by establishing a library second only to Alexandria's in terms of the number of volumes and repute of its scholars. It also had a great collection of paintings for public enjoyment (it was estimated the library contained 200,000 books). However, Ptolemy IV, the Greek ruler of Egypt, was not happy with the idea of another library challenging Alexandria, so he forbade the export of the Egyptian papyri from Egypt to prevent the development of the library in Pergamon.

The Pergamon Altar

Eumenes II, (about BC 160), continued the **pro-Roman policy** of his father and brought most of Asia Minor under his control. **He built the altar of Zeus** and developed the library, founded by his father, that rivalled the school in the Library of Alexandria.

The altar is now in the Pergamum Museum in Berlin.



As a result of this the authorities of Pergamon encouraged the mass production of “parchment” (treated skins of sheep and calves), which had long been used for writing purposes in the East.

Parchment ended up rivalling paper as a vehicle of communication, it was much more expensive than papyrus but also far more durable. The name of Pergamon continues to live on even today in the word “parchment”, which is a distortion of Pergamon (“parchment” is *pergamino* in Spanish and *pergamena* in Italian).

Finally, during the time of Attalus III, Pergamon was handed over to the Roman people to be managed by them and the kingdom was transformed into the Roman province of Asia with Pergamon as its initial capital (133 BC). Not everyone accepted the new Roman administration though and a number of revolts took place. The Romans eventually restored order but Pergamon soon lost its status and the neighbouring city of Ephesus became the new provincial capital.

Some time later, under Hadrian (117-138 AD), the city was favoured by several imperial initiatives. It was granted the title of metropolis

and as a result of this an ambitious building program was carried out: massive temples, a stadium, a theatre, a huge forum and an amphitheatre were constructed. In addition, at the city limits the shrine to Asclepius (the god of healing) was expanded into a lavish spa.

Model of the Pergamon Acropolis



During the second half of the 3rd century AD Pergamon started to decline. Things got worse in 262 AD due to an earthquake and after that the city was sacked by the Goths. The arrival of Christianity did not help much as the buildings which had honoured the pagan gods were no longer considered desirable. Even the shrine to Asclepius that used to be visited by invalids was abandoned.

Despite these changes, urban life did continue. In 611 AD the Persians overran Syria and entered Anatolia devastating most of it. The Romans finally evicted the Persians and the Emperor Constant II (641-668 AD) limited himself to fortifying the acropolis. After this initiative only a small ten hectare area remained of this once-proud metropolis.



The archaeological site of Pergamon has provided many fine works of Hellenistic and Roman art but perhaps the most impressive is the altar which now resides in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin (above). The Great Altar

was constructed between 164 and 156 BC and, reassembled, its monumental surface area of some 36 by 34 metres make it one of the most impressive works of art surviving from antiquity. Built to commemorate the victory over the Gauls, the altar was constructed around a staircase and the 2.3 metre high and 120 metre long frieze is topped by a colonnaded hall. Sculpted in high relief, the frieze depicts lively representations of Zeus, Artemis and other Olympian gods fighting the Giants, symbolic of the victory of order over chaos. This gigantic monument is a convincing and lasting testimony to the power and prestige that was enjoyed by this once great city.

Refusing to submit to Caesar could have resulted in the persecution of the ecclesia and the death of Antipas.

Religion

“Satan’s throne” Rev 2:13 – HQ of Roman Authority in Asia Minor.

The pressure of this environment produced two classes in the ecclesia at Pergamos. There was a class Christ called ‘Antipas’ who defended the truth at the risk of their lives.

Antipas – Rev. 2:13

- ❖ Name sig. - “Like the father”.
- ❖ “martyr” – *martus* – witness (by his death – Rev. 17:6 – last occ.)

“The name is typical of a class at that time, and signifies against all Nicolaitanes, Balaamites, children of Jezebel, false apostles, and spurious Jews, who, as Justin says, ‘are called Christians, but are atheists and impious heretics, because that in all things they teach what is blasphemous, ungodly and unsound’.”

Bro. Thomas - Eureka

The opposition to the ‘Antipas’ class were those who adopted the approach of Balaam of old. This was governed by self-interest and self-preservation.

This class were augmented and supported by the philosophical Nicolaitanes.

The Nicolaitanes – Rev. 2:15

- ❖ “Nicolaitanes” is formed of 2 words - *nicos* – victory & *laitos* – people = vanquishers of the people. “oppositions of science”
- ❖ A class of errorists who introduced gentile philosophy – 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; 1 Cor. 15:12. “their word” eats as a gangrene” “the resurrection is past already”

The doctrine of Balaam – Rev. 2:14

- ❖ “Balaam” – “Waster of the people”.
- ❖ Jude 11 – “ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward.” = self interest.
- ❖ “doctrine” – Balaam taught compromise with the world’s religions. Some here taught the doctrine of expediency over offering incense to Caesar.



Politically aligned with Balak king of Moab

Like Balaam, some in Pergamos taught the doctrine of expediency – if Caesar demanded to be worshipped by a pinch of incense on a public altar, then what harm did it do to conform? After all, Paul had taught that “we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) but to us there is but one God, the Father” (1 Cor. 8:4-6).

Christ condemned this compromise as unacceptable and called upon them to repent, offering the ‘hidden manna’ of eternal life and a white stone to those who overcame.

The hidden Manna – Rev. 2:17

- ❖ Lysimachus hid his treasure here.
- ❖ Christ offers his hid treasure.

A golden pot of manna was placed inside the Ark by Aaron – Ex. 16:32-34.

It did not corrupt – hence, spoke of the immortality to be granted in the future to those who constitute the Cherubim of Yahweh.

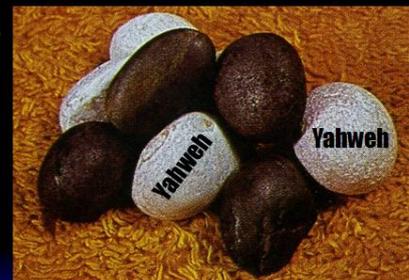


“...with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads.” – Rev. 14:1

The White Stone – Rev. 2:17

Acts 26:10 – “...and when they [were] being executed, I cast my pebble [fig., my vote] against [them].” Analytical-Literal Translation

In ancient trials a black stone meant a sentence of condemnation, while a white stone of acquittal and acceptance.



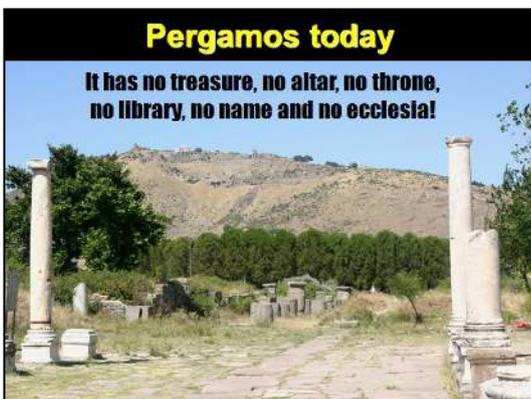


Pergamos – The embattled Ecclesia

- ❖ **Received Christ’s commendation for:**
 - works (omitted by some texts);
 - holding fast to Christ in the **seat of Roman power** in Asia;
 - not denying the faith under trial.
- ❖ **But criticised for:**
 - tolerating adherents to the doctrine of Balaam;
 - tolerating adherents to the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.

Rev. 2:12-17 – Letter to Pergamos

<p>¹²And to the angel of the church in ¹Pergamos write; These things saith he which ²hath the sharp sword with two edges:</p> <p>¹³I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where ³Satan’s seat is: and thou ⁴holdest fast my name, and hast ⁵not denied my faith, even in those days wherein ⁶Antipas was my faithful martyr, ⁷who was slain among you, ⁸where Satan dwelleth.</p> <p>¹⁴But I have a few things against thee, ⁹because thou hast there them that hold the ¹⁰doctrine of Balaam, ¹¹who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things ¹²sacrificed unto idols, and ¹³to commit fornication.</p>	<p>Pergamos – The Embattled Ecclesia</p> <p>¹“Citadel”, “Fortress”. An ecclesia beset by enemies within and without.</p> <p>²Cp. 1:16 The Spirit word is the theme – the issues were doctrinal.</p> <p>³Seat same as throne = authority. Centre of Roman power in Asia – Caesar worship. Seat of pagan idolatry. Had influenced ecclesia.</p> <p>⁴i.e. Jesus – “He who will be salvation”. Tenaciously clung to truth despite cruel persecution.</p> <p>⁵Cp. Heb. 11:6; Rom. 10:17.</p> <p>⁶“Martyr” – one who witnessed by his death. Antipas type of a class who opposed compromise with the world, its philosophies and evils.</p> <p>⁷Lit. at their side, in their presence. At a time of intense persecution.</p> <p>⁸Indicates Satan also in ecclesia.</p> <p>⁹Tolerated heretics in ecclesia.</p> <p>¹⁰Balaam – “Waster of people”. Compromise and bending of word for personal advantage.</p> <p>¹¹Counseled fornication disguised by religion – Num. 31:16; 25:1-2. Balaam spoke well – disguised true sympathies. Such a class in ecclesia.</p> <p>¹²Idolatry entered through a religious exercise. Cp. Num 25:2. Covetousness =</p>
<p>¹⁵So hast thou also them that hold the ¹⁴doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. <i>(Italicised words not in best texts)</i></p> <p>¹⁶Repent; or else I will come unto thee ¹⁵quickly, and ¹⁶will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.</p> <p>¹⁷He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of ¹⁷the hidden manna, and will give him ¹⁸a white stone, and in the stone ¹⁹a new name written, ²⁰which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.</p>	<p>Idolatry - Col. 3:4.</p> <p>¹³Literal fornication a product of spiritual fornication, mixed with world - learnt ways - James 4:4</p> <p>¹⁴Worldly philosophies opposed by faithful. Caused internal strife. A liberal element who corrupted truth to make it less offensive to the world. Error foolishly tolerated.</p> <p>¹⁵tachca – swiftly, unexpectedly or quickly</p> <p>¹⁶Christ is word made flesh (Heb.4:12-13). Will judge by word.</p> <p>¹⁷The uncorrupted manna hidden in Ark of which no mortal could partake. Symbol of eternal life.</p> <p>¹⁸Stone of acquittal and acceptance, while black stone for condemnation. Used in court cases – see R.V. Acts 26:10-11. Hosts gave stone with a message to special guests.</p> <p>¹⁹i.e. Yawheh – represents granting of divine nature.</p> <p>²⁰Only perceived fully (oida) when received.</p>



Sources:

- Ancient History Encyclopedia – Christian Violatti (April 2013)
- New Smith’s Bible Dictionary- W. Smith
- Book of Revelation - H.P. Mansfield

(Compilers – Ian Macfarlane/Jim Cowie)