

The Book of Revelation

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Chapter 2:12-17

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

What is the greatest danger the church faces? Is it Satan? Demons? Is it persecution? Opposition from wicked men? Is it the competition of other world religions? Is it the zealous proselytizing of the cults? No, the greatest danger to the church is none of these, enemies though they be. Actually our greatest danger is not found outside the church but inside the church. Furthermore, our greatest danger can be summed up in one word: **compromise**.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Nothing will drain the energy and poison the lifeblood of the church like the toxin called compromise. Whether it is in the area of theology, morality or both, compromise is a cancer that left unchecked will eventually render the witness of a church null and void. This was the disease that infected the church at Pergamum, and no church, including this one, is immune from its attack.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

There is a basic and common literary pattern of 5 parts:

- 1) The addressee and a **characterization** of Christ from the vision of chapter 1
- 2) Christ's knowledge of the church's condition and a word of **commendation**;
- 3) A word of reproof or **correction**;
- 4) A word of exhortation or **council**;
- 5) A word of promise which presents a hopeful **challenge**.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:12–13 (CSB)

12 “Write to the angel of the church in Pergamum: Thus says the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword:

13 I know where you live—where Satan’s throne is. Yet you are holding on to my name and did not deny your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness who was put to death among you, where Satan lives.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:14–15 (CSB)

14 But I have a few things against you. You have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to place a stumbling block in front of the Israelites: to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality.

15 In the same way, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:16–17 (CSB)

16 So repent! Otherwise, I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name is inscribed that no one knows except the one who receives it.

**The Path
Through the 7
Churches
will take
place
Clockwise
from Ephesus**



modern day
TURKEY

Pergamos

Smyrna

Ephesus

Laodicea

Thyatira

Sardis

Philadelphia



The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:12 (CSB) “Write to the **angel** of the church in **Pergamum**: Thus says the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword:

Angel (messenger) – 1) literal angel (cf. 1 Cor. 11:10); 2) pastor of the church; 3) messenger to the church

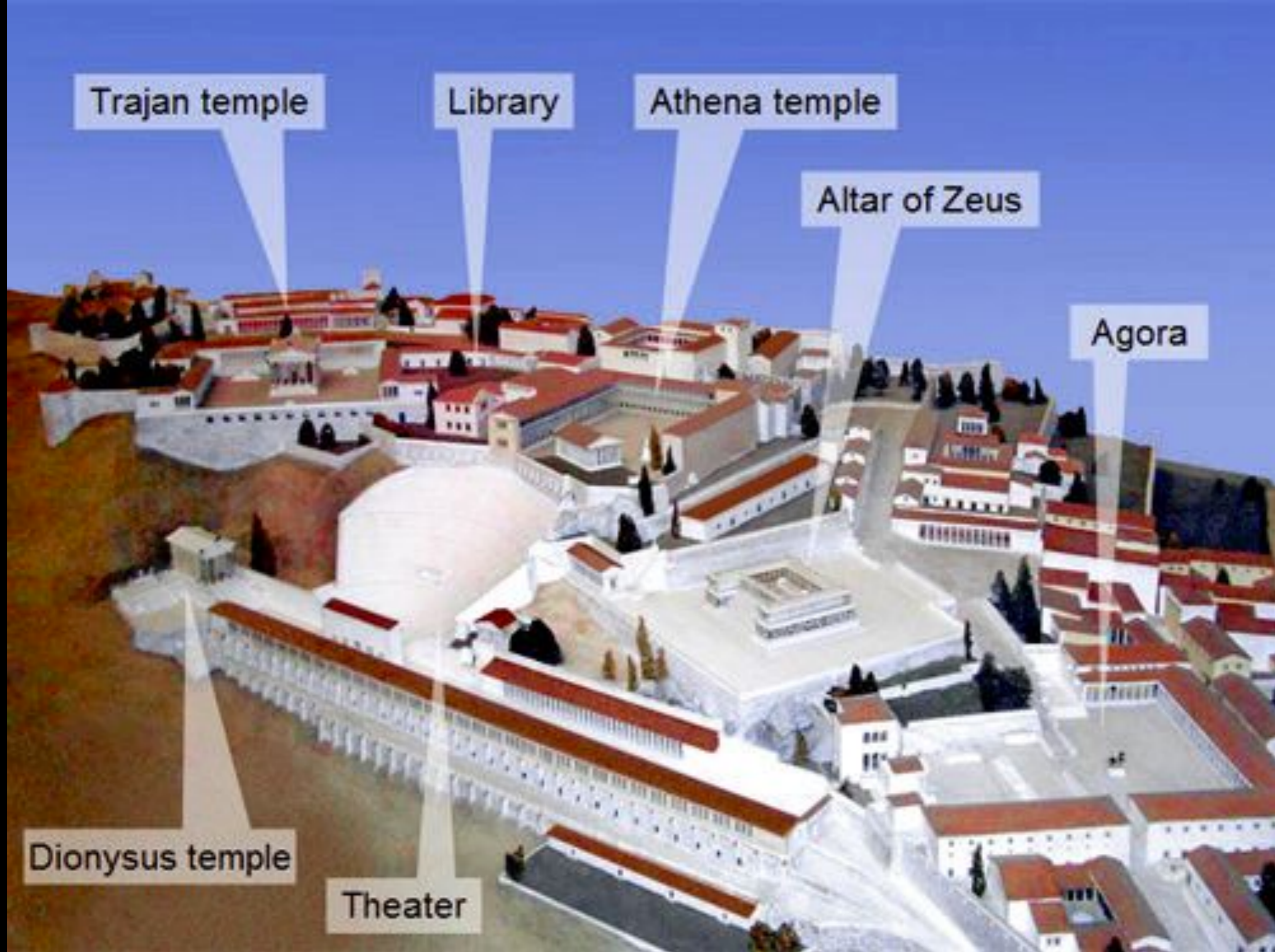
- **Pergamum** – The official capital of Roman Asia Minor, though Ephesus & Smyrna also claimed the distinction. It had a library of 200,000 (second only to Alexandria, Egypt). Pliny called it “by far the most distinguished city in Asia [Minor].” It had temples dedicated to Dionysus, Athena, Asclepius (god of healing, symbolized by a serpent entwined around a staff) and Demeter. The great altar to Zeus, one of the 7 ancient wonders of the world was here. It was a city steeped in pagan religion.

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Revelation 2:12 (CSB) “Write to the angel of the church in **Pergamum**: Thus says the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword:

- **Pergamum** – It was a city joined at the hip to Rome. Pergamos was the official center for worship of the emperor. It boasted of 3 temples dedicated to the emperor, and in 29 BC it was the first city in Asia to receive permission to build a temple dedicated to the worship of a living emperor. The church in Pergamos faced stiff and zealous opposition from without. However, her vulnerability resided from within. In this context the characterization of Christ is instructive.



An artists depiction of ancient Pergamum.







The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:12 (CSB) “Write to the angel of the church in Pergamum: **Thus says the one** who has the sharp, double-edged sword:

Thus says the one – He who is the truth incarnate (John 14:6) is the one who speaks to this church, to all the churches. The one who speaks is significant. His judgment is neither superficial nor bias. It is true and trustworthy, accurate and correct. For another to render judgment one might raise an objection. Not so with this judge, for His name is Jesus, and His evaluation of His church is always right on target, dead center.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

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Revelation 2:12 (CSB) “Write to the angel of the church in Pergamum: Thus says the one who has **the sharp, double-edged sword**:

The sharp double-edged sword (cf. 1:16; 2:16; 19:15, 21)
The sword is the word of God. In Hebrews 4:12 the Lord teaches us, “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of the soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

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Revelation 2:12 (CSB) “Write to the angel of the church in Pergamum: Thus says the one who has **the sharp, double-edged sword**:

The sharp double-edged sword The sharp sword typically symbolizes warfare or judgment. The sword comes out of Jesus’s mouth in 1:16; 2:16; 19:15, 21, indicating the power of his words to execute judgment on his enemies. The Roman government had the right to execute capital punishment (*ius gladii*, or the right of the sword). Here Jesus identifies himself as the one who truly holds the power of life and death, far superior to any Roman official.

J. Scott Duvall, Revelation, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 53.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:12 (CSB) “Write to the angel of the church in Pergamum: Thus says the one who has **the sharp, double-edged sword**:

The sharp double-edged sword - The sword conveys absolute authority, decisive discernment invested with the power of life and death. The Word of God is at once an instrument of life and an instrument of death. Interestingly Rome had given Pergamum the rare power to exercise capital punishment on its own. The symbol of this authority was the sword. The city of Pergamum might wield the sword on earth, but the glorified Christ wielded a mightier sword from heaven. This is the sword the church should fear. This is the sword we should revere.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

To effectively overcome compromise...

1. Resist the pressures of Satan (12-13)

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:13 (CSB) **I know** where you live — where Satan's throne is...

I know - As Christ walks in the midst of his churches He looks carefully to see what we are doing. He is honored by our taking a stand for His name. He is pleased when we love him even to the point of death. NEVER BE IN DOUBT: HE KNOWS WHAT IS HAPPENING. HE KNOWS WHAT WE ARE FACING.

Two activities in particular receive his recommendation.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:13 (CSB) **I know where you live** — where Satan's throne is...

1. You must be faithful where you live.

I know (if no one else does, I do!) where you dwell (live, reside, to settle down permanently, where your home is) where the throne of Satan (adversary) is.

- 1) Altar to Zeus
- 2) Cult of Asklepios
- 3) Center of emperor worship in Asia (#3 is best)

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:13 (CSB) **I know where you live** — where **Satan's throne** is...

1. You must be faithful where you live.

Here was **Satan's** home, his **throne**. Where they lived, he was lord. Where they resided, he reigned. Where they had settled, he was sovereign. It was hard, it was difficult, but they were faithful where they lived. The same must be true of us; Wherever Christ places us, may we be found faithful.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

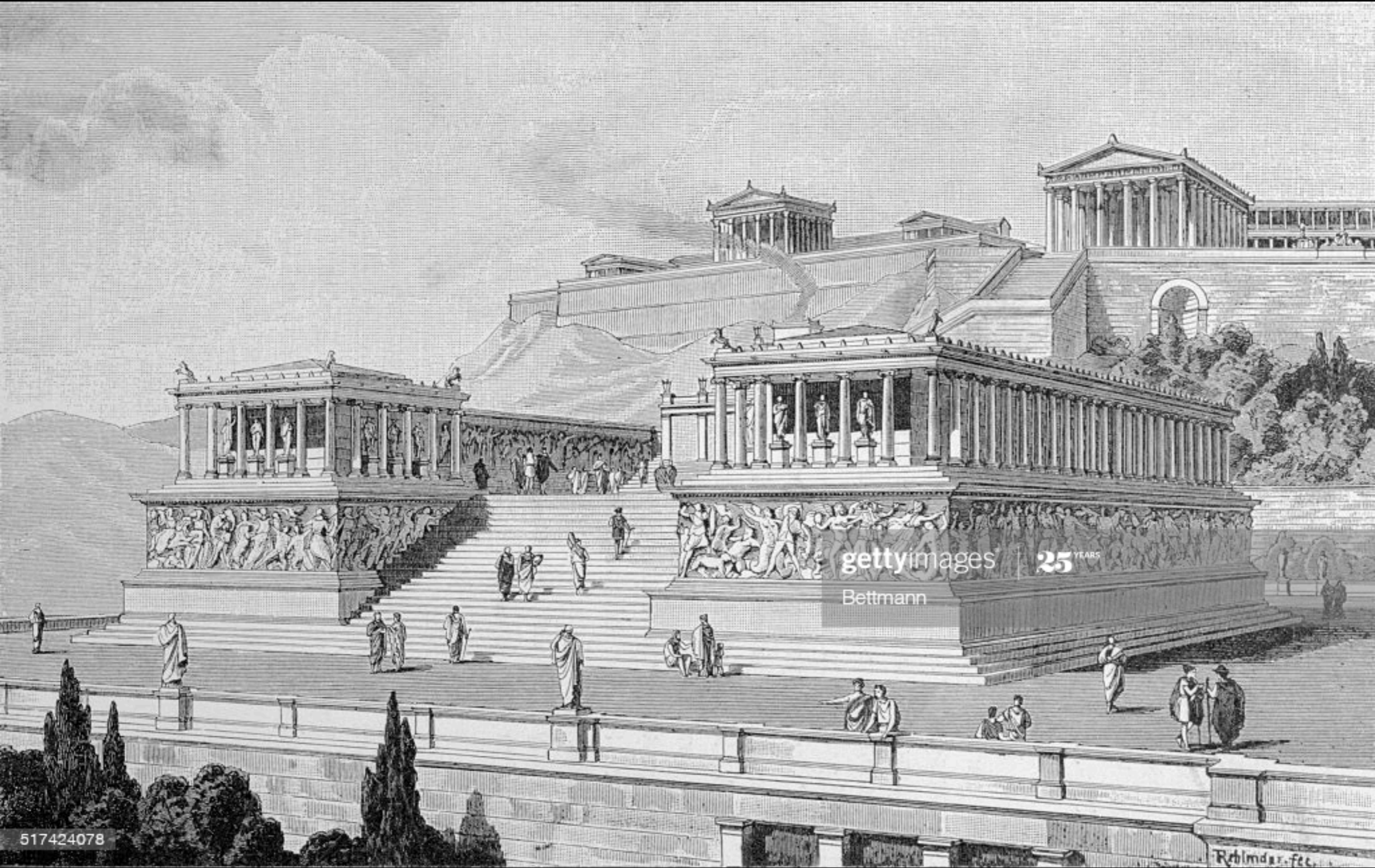
Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:13 (CSB) **I know where you live** — where **Satan's throne** is...

1. You must be faithful where you live.

The leading interpretations of “**Satan's throne**” include (1) the hill or acropolis of Pergamum, which resembled a crown; (2) the altar of Zeus; (3) the temple and cult of Asclepius; and (4) the Roman imperial cult. The last option seems most likely because Rome is portrayed throughout Revelation as the primary human enemy of God's people and Pergamum was the center for the imperial cult in Asia Minor.

J. Scott Duvall, Revelation, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 53.



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The Altar to Zeus at Pergamum



Pergamum was a challenging city in which to be a Christian. It is described as the place “where Satan has his throne” (2:13). One of the interpretations of Satan’s throne is that it was the altar to Zeus at Pergamum. Shown here is the western side of the altar, which has been reconstructed and restored (second century BC).





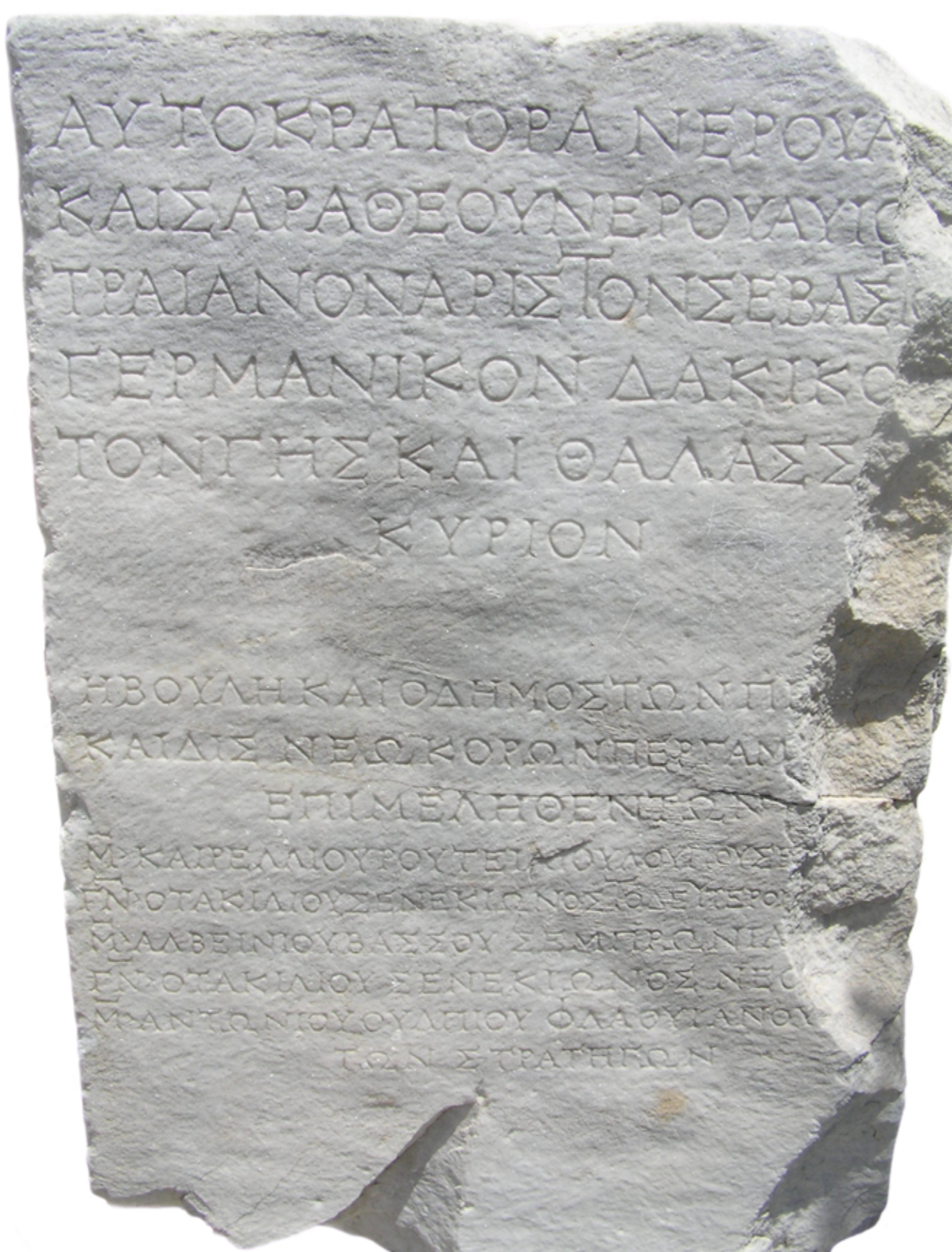
What is the Imperial Cult?

The “imperial cult” refers to a political and religious system of worshiping the Roman emperor as a divine being, an incarnation of god. It was common throughout Asia Minor in the first several centuries AD and provides an important part of the historical context for understanding Revelation (see Rev. 2–3; 13; 17). The worship of the emperor reached its height with Domitian (AD 81–96), who demanded to be addressed as *dominus et deus noster* (“our Lord and God”). The cities of Asia Minor competed for the prestige of building a temple in honor of the emperor.

J. Scott Duvall, *Revelation*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, *Teach the Text Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 53.

What is the Imperial Cult?

The imperial cult often partnered with other local institutions and religions (e.g., local trade guilds and their deities) so that its influence permeated the entire society. The actual worship events often included idolatrous and immoral activities completely objectionable to Christians. In addition, many of the titles Christians used to worship Christ were also used to worship the Roman emperor (e.g., Lord, God, Savior, Son of God). The false teachers who plagued the churches of Asia Minor seem to have approved of worshiping both Christ and the emperor. In the book of Revelation, the refusal by Christians to worship the emperor provides the primary reason for their persecution.



This inscription on the acropolis at Pergamum uses divine titles for the Roman emperor. Caesar is spoken of as autokrator, “son of god,” and “lord.” Revelation uses pantokrator, “the Almighty,” to speak of God.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:13 (CSB) I know where you live — where Satan's throne is. **Yet you are holding on to my name and did not deny your faith in me...**

2. You must be faithful in your witness

You are holding fast (cont.) My name – they had not denied Jesus as Lord and did not deny the faith.

Note several important truths in the text:

- Pergamum is where Satan's throne is and where he dwells. This is repeated for emphasis and is parallel to "I know where you dwell." Where you dwell, Satan dwells too.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:13 (CSB) I know where you live — where Satan’s throne is. Yet you are holding on to my name and did not deny your faith in me, even in the days of **Antipas**, my faithful witness who was put to death among you, where Satan lives.

Antipas - Their faithful witness had resulted in the martyrdom of one of their own: Antipas. We know nothing about him. He is the only named martyr in the book of Revelation. Some speculate he may have been their pastor.

Note how Jesus describes Antipas: my faithful martyr (better “witness”). This is the exact same description that is applied to our Lord in Rev. 1:5! Christ was God’s faithful witness unto death and Antipas was Jesus’ faithful witness unto death! The Son honored His Father in death and Antipas honored his Lord in death.

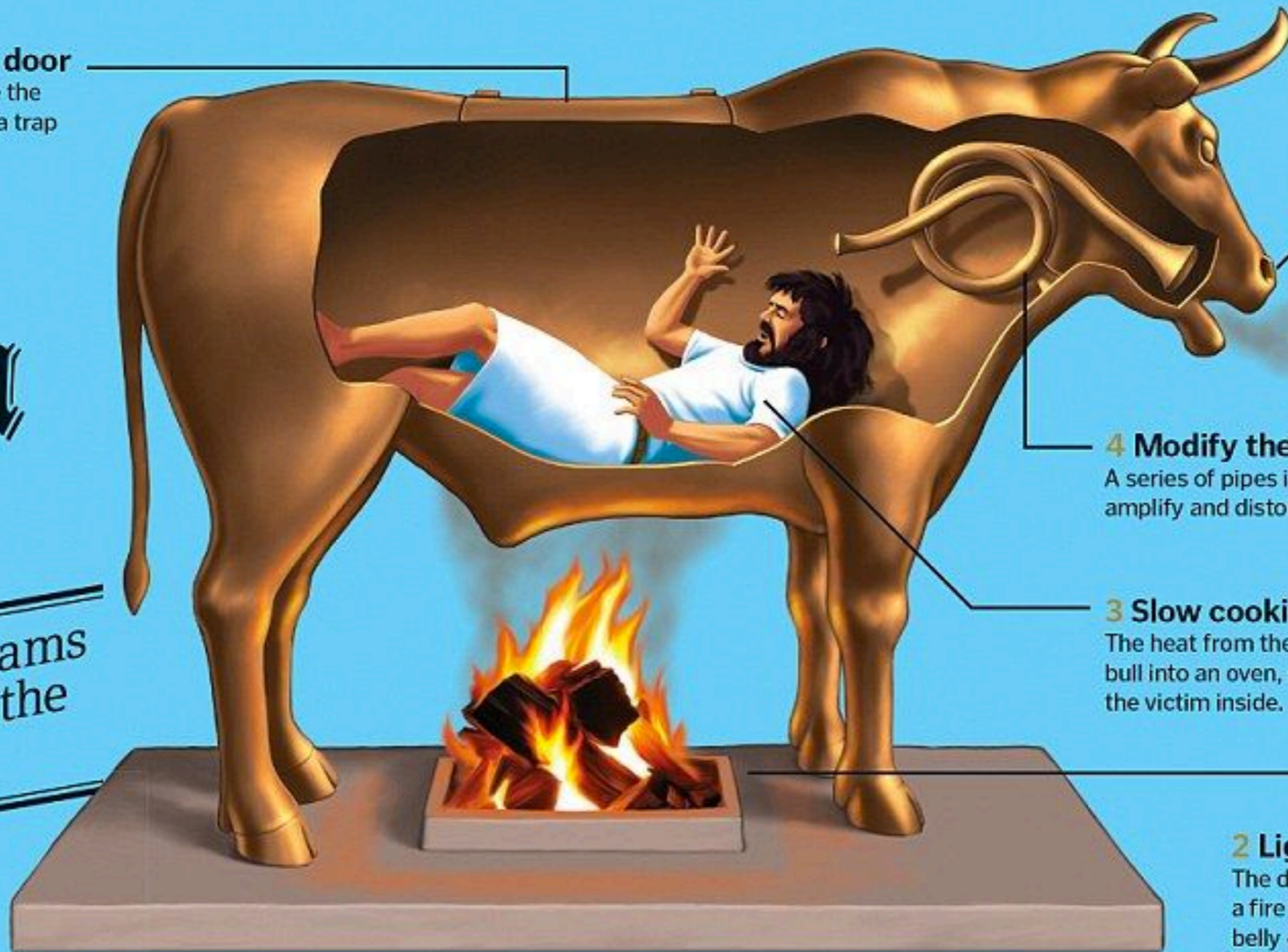
One tradition says Antipas was roasted inside the “brazen bull” during the reign of Domitian.

1 Through the trap door
The victim is placed inside the hollow brass bull through a trap door in its back or side.

The brazen bull

Turning the screams of the dying into the roar of a beast

HOW IT WORKS



5 Hear the bull roar
The victim's screams leave through the nostrils of the bull, sounding like the bellowing roar of the beast.

4 Modify their screams
A series of pipes in the bull's head amplify and distort the victim's cries.

3 Slow cooking
The heat from the fire turns the bull into an oven, slowly roasting the victim inside.

2 Light the fire
The door is closed and a fire is lit beneath the belly of the bull.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:13 (CSB)...even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness who was put to death among you, where Satan lives.

“It’s happening as you read these words. Somewhere a Christian is dying for his faith. Christian women are being raped. Christian children are being sold into slavery. It is happening to our own brothers and sisters – torture, imprisonment, harassment, starvation, to say nothing of banishment, family destruction, literature bans, and prohibition to meet as believers.

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Revelation 2:13 (CSB)...even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness who was put to death among you, where Satan lives.

In their shocking, up-to-date, well documented book, Their Blood Cries Out, Paul Marshall and Lela Gilbert cite the following:

- In more than 60 countries, Christians are harassed, arrested, tortured or executed, specifically because of their faith.
- More than 600 million who take the name Christian live under political restrictions on religious liberty. • Perhaps 225 million of those suffer “severe state interference in religion, obstruction, or harassment.”

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

To effectively overcome compromise...

1. Resist the pressures of Satan (12-13)
2. Remove all false teaching from your life. (14-15)

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:14 (CSB) But I have a few things against you. You have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to place a stumbling block in front of the Israelites: to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality.

The church is condemned for compromise. 2:14-15

Many were faithful, some even to death. But this was not true of everyone. Within this church a crowd of compromisers had appeared and the health and vitality of the church was at stake. A group that said let's go along to get along had arisen and the church was doing what the world would applaud but Jesus would say is an abomination. They were tolerant. They compromised. Two areas in particular were infected with this debilitating disease.

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We must not compromise our morality. 2:14

Some at Pergamos hold the name of Jesus. Some at Pergamos hold the doctrine of “Balaam” (used symbolically).

- The story of Balaam is found in Numbers 22-25; 31:16. Note 25:1-3. Pagan food and pagan women led to spiritual compromise and adultery!
- Stumbling block (scandalon) 1) immorality, 2) idolatry

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Compromise and accommodation: an attempt to serve God and live like the world. (cf. James 4:4)

- Vance Havner, “What we live is what we really believe. Everything else is just religious talk.”
- Pergamum means “thoroughly married.” Here was a church thoroughly married to the world. Satan could not defeat this church with a front assault from without, so he revised his strategy and fostered friendly accommodations from within, and with deadly success. We must not compromise our morality. It will destroy our witness and invite the judgement of God.

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We must not compromise our theology.

Some at Pergamos hold the name of Jesus.

Some at Pergamos hold the name of Balaam.

Some at Pergamos hold the name of the Nicolaitians.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:15 (CSB) In the same way, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the **Nicolaitans**.

We met the **Nicolaitians** at Ephesus in 2:6. The Ephesian church rejected them. The Pergamum church embraced them. The teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitians are closely related if not identical. Immorality and idolatry were distinctive characteristics of these false teachers as well. Theologically they were antinomians, libertarians. Doctrine mattered little and behavior mattered even less. With each passing day the distinction between the church and the world became more blurred and less clear. The lifestyle of one was barely distinguishable from the other. Worldliness, compromise and tolerance had rushed into this church like a flood and she was on the verge of drowning.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:15 (CSB) In the same way, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Practices such as eating food sacrificed to idols in the worship of false gods and sexual immorality were often part of festivals associated with local temples and trade guilds. Christians who refused to compromise suffered social and economic persecution or worse.

J. Scott Duvall, Revelation, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 54.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

To effectively overcome compromise...

1. Resist the pressures of Satan (12-13)
2. Remove all false teaching from your life. (14-15)
3. Repent (16-17)

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:16 (CSB) So repent! Otherwise, I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

The church is corrected by a warning. 2:16

Compromise is one of Satan's favorite and most effective weapons. Why is this so? 4 reasons:

- 1) It never occurs quickly so you hardly notice the change.
- 2) It always lowers the original standard you once held precious.
- 3) It is seldom offensive because it is perceived as loving.
- 4) It eventually leads you to accept what you once thought repulsive.

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:16 (CSB) So **repent!** Otherwise, I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Christ warns us to repent. **Repent** (aor. imp.) – involves 3 elements:

- 1) contrition of heart,
- 2) confession of sin, and
- 3) change in conduct.

It is a total reversal, an about-face, a 180 degree turn. The imperative denotes urgency! Don't delay! Do it now!

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:16 (CSB) So repent! Otherwise, I will **come to you quickly** and fight against **them** with the **sword of my mouth**.

Christ warns us of rejection.

- **Come quickly** – He will not wait. The time for waiting is over.
- **Fight** – Christ fighting His church. I can think of no sadder, more fearful, more tragic words.
- **Them** – it was a portion of the church, not all of it. Some were committed but some were compromisers.
- **Sword of my mouth** – His Word of truth in action. Antipas felt the sword of Rome, but Pergamum would meet the sword of Christ! They may compromise but Christ will not!

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Revelation 2:17 (CSB) “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give some of the **hidden manna**. I will also give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name is inscribed that no one knows except the one who receives it.

The church is challenged by a reward. 2:17

Hear – imperative churches – conquers - 1 John 5:4-5 1.

Christ will nourish us: **Hidden manna** – reflect a Jewish tradition that manna was placed in the ark of the covenant for a memorial to future generations (Ex. 16:32-34; Heb. 9:4). It speaks of the gracious provision of God in spiritually feeding his people. He who is the “bread of life” (See John 6:35; cf. 48-51) says to us: Refuse the banquets of pagan gods and the world, and I will give you the manna of eternal life in my heavenly banquet and kingdom.

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Live for me and not the world and I will take care of you.

2. Christ will receive us: **White stone** – Scholars suggest various possibilities for the meaning of the white stone. In this context, the stone most likely indicates a believer’s ticket of admission into the messianic banquet or a positive vote of acquittal from God (in contrast to the verdict of condemnation from Rome).

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Live for me and not the world and I will take care of you.

2. Christ will receive us: Since the “**new name**” is known only to its recipient, it probably refers to a new name given by God to each believer. In any case, those who refuse to compromise will be rewarded and cared for by the Lord in ways that far outweigh what they now suffer at the hands of the pagan powers.

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When the world challenges us to compromise we should remember: Christ says: I will be your food now and in eternity. Christ says: I will be your entrance into heaven. Christ says: I will give you my name forever.

What the world offers pales in comparison doesn't it!
Compromise? No! Faithfulness? Yes, now and forever!

Now I belong to Jesus, Jesus belongs to me. Not for the years of time alone, But for eternity!

Old Testament Connections

Revelation 2:12 “Write to the angel of the church in Pergamum: Thus says the one who has the **sharp, double-edged sword**:

Isaiah 49:2 He made my words like a **sharp sword**; he hid me in the shadow of his hand. He made me like a sharpened arrow; he hid me in his quiver.

Old Testament Connections

Revelation 2:14 But I have a few things against you. You have some there who hold to the teaching of **Balaam, who taught Balak** to place a stumbling block in front of the Israelites: **to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality.**

Numbers 25:1–2 While Israel was staying in the Acacia Grove, the people began to prostitute themselves with the women of Moab. **2The women invited them to the sacrifices for their gods, and the people ate and bowed in worship to their gods.**

Numbers 31:16 “Yet they are the ones who, **at Balaam’s advice, incited the Israelites to unfaithfulness against the Lord in the Peor incident,** so that the plague came against the Lord’s community.

Old Testament Connections

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Psalms 78:24 He rained **manna** for them to eat; he gave them grain from heaven.

Isaiah 62:2 Nations will see your righteousness and all kings, your glory. **You will be given a new name** that the Lord’s mouth will announce.

Isaiah 65:15 You will leave your name behind as a curse for my chosen ones, and the Lord God will kill you; but **he will give his servants another name**.

Old Testament Connections

Revelation 2:18 - "Write to the angel of the church in Thyatira: Thus says the Son of God, **the one whose eyes are like a fiery flame and whose feet are like fine bronze:**

Daniel 10:6 - His body was like beryl, his face like the brilliance of lightning, **his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze,** and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.

The Book of Revelation

The Church that Compromises the Truth

Chapter 2:12-17