

Dr. David Mathewson, Revelation, Session 6, 7 Churches—Pergamum, Thyatira (Rev 2-3) Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Revelation, Session 6, 7 Churches— Pergamum, Thyatira (Rev 2-3), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Dr. Dave Mathewson's course on Revelation **analyzes** the messages to the churches of Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis in Revelation 2-3. **Key themes** include the churches' **struggles** with compromise and idolatry, specifically relating to Roman culture and emperor worship. Mathewson **interprets** the symbolic language used by John, connecting it to Old Testament figures and themes to reveal the nature of their spiritual challenges. He **explains** the commendation and condemnation each church receives and the **eschatological promises** offered to those who overcome their respective trials. Finally, the lecture **shows** how the events of Revelation 4-22 provide both warning and encouragement to these early churches.

**2. 36 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 6 – Double click icon to
play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (New Testament → Revelation).**



**Mathewson_Revela
tion_Session06.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts on Revelation 2 & 3, focusing on the churches of Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis:

Briefing Document: Revelation 2 & 3 - Churches of Pergamum, Thyatira, & Sardis

Overview: This lecture focuses on the messages to three of the seven churches in Revelation: Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis. Dr. Mathewson analyzes each message by considering:

1. **Christ's Identity:** How is Christ portrayed, drawing on his description in Revelation chapter 1?
2. **Church's Situation:** What are the specific challenges or problems the church faces?
3. **Message to the Church:** What does Christ call them to do or avoid?
4. **Eschatological Promise:** What is the promise to those who overcome (remain faithful)?
5. **Relevance of Revelation 4-22:** How do the later chapters of Revelation connect to their situation?

Key Themes Across the Churches:

- **Commendation and Condemnation:** Each church receives both praise for their good qualities and rebuke for their shortcomings. These are not mutually exclusive.
- **Compromise with Pagan Culture:** A major problem is the temptation to compromise with the surrounding Roman culture, including idolatry, emperor worship, and the associated social practices.
- **Faithful Witness:** The core calling of each church is to maintain a faithful witness to Jesus Christ even in hostile environments.
- **Old Testament Allusions:** John frequently uses Old Testament figures and events (Balaam, Jezebel) to illustrate the dangers and temptations the churches face, emphasizing continuity between the Old and New Covenants.

- **Spiritual Adultery:** Idolatry and compromising one's faith is described as spiritual adultery, a breach of the covenant relationship with God.
- **Call to Repentance:** Each church is called to repent, a prerequisite for "overcoming."
- **Eschatological Rewards:** Those who "overcome" are promised specific eschatological blessings, often linked to images in Revelation 21-22.
- **Symbolic Language:** Revelation is highly symbolic; the images should not always be taken literally.

Church of Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17)

- **Christ's Identity:** Christ is depicted as having a sharp, double-edged sword coming out of his mouth, emphasizing his role as a warrior and judge. *"Christ now comes to the church of Pergamum primarily as a warrior, primarily as one who will judge."*
- **Church's Situation:** They live in a hostile environment described as "where Satan has his throne," possibly referring to the altar of Zeus, or more broadly as Satan's domain. *"...I think the throne of Satan probably should not be too closely equated with the altar of Zeus or any other thing. But again, maybe just be another metaphorical way of John saying this is the domain of Satan."*
- They are commended for maintaining their witness despite this environment, including one man, Antipas, who died for his faith. *"In this environment where Satan rules and has his throne and holds sway, they have maintained their faithful witness, and one person, Antipas, has even died for that witness."*
- They are condemned for allowing those who hold the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. *"...the church of Pergamum has people...who hold the teaching of Balaam...Likewise, you have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans..."*
- **Message to the Church:** Repent from tolerating false teaching. *"...repent, therefore, otherwise, I will come to you and fight against you with the sword of my mouth."*
- Balaam is a symbol for false teaching that leads people to compromise with idolatry and immorality, particularly in the Roman context.
- The Nicolaitans seem to promote similar compromise, such as eating meat offered to idols (which is not an issue in itself, but participation in pagan festivals

would be), and engaging in spiritual adultery with pagan practices, possibly also physical immorality with temple prostitutes.

- Compromise with Roman culture would have included eating meat sacrificed to idols in pagan feasts and festivals, and idolatrous worship.
- **Eschatological Promise:** "Hidden manna," possibly a reference to Old Testament manna in the wilderness, and possibly linked to the eschatological expectation that manna would be revealed again at the coming of the Messiah, representing future salvation. *"So, John has taken a common image from the Old Testament, perhaps as it's been interpreted in other literature to refer to manna that would be revealed in the end time, and now uses it symbolically as another way of saying the same thing he does in other promises."*
- A "white stone" with a new name written on it, which could symbolize acquittal, acceptance, and/or protection; but the meaning is uncertain. *"Often John uses imagery. We'll see. John may use imagery because it's evocative of more than one meaning. ...Sometimes John's images are evocative of more than one meaning."*
- The "new name" alludes to Old Testament passages (Isaiah) about God restoring his people. *"So the new name actually is one that is found in a couple of places in Isaiah. For example, in chapter 62."*
- **Relevance of Revelation 4-22:** The rest of Revelation would be a call to persevere, warning them of the battle that awaits if they compromise, as seen in imagery throughout Revelation 4-22.

Church of Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29)

- **Christ's Identity:** Christ is described as having eyes like blazing fire and feet like burnished bronze, emphasizing his ability to see and judge their hearts. *"This suggests obviously that Christ's primary posture towards the church in Thyatira is again one of a judge."*
- **Church's Situation:** Thyatira was known for its trade guilds that were heavily connected to pagan religious practices and emperor worship. *"...To participate in the trade guilds would also mean participating in the social and religious life of the trade guilds connected with your commerce."*
- They are commended for their love, faith, service, perseverance, and increasing good works. *"...I know your deeds, your love and your faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first."*

- They are condemned for tolerating "Jezebel," a woman who calls herself a prophet and leads people into sexual immorality and idolatry. *"Nevertheless, I have this against you. You tolerate that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophet."*
- **Message to the Church:** Repent for tolerating false teaching like that of Jezebel. *"...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."*
- Jezebel is an Old Testament figure who led Israel into Baal worship; here, she symbolizes a person or group that is leading the church into compromise. *"...John now uses that story, once again, much like he did Balaam. John uses that story now to help the church perceive of a similar threat."*
- Jezebel's teachings lead to participation in idolatry, which is described as spiritual adultery and sexual immorality.
- **Eschatological Promise:** Authority over the nations, ruling with an iron scepter, a quote from Psalm 2, applying to the overcomers. *"To him who overcomes and does my will to the end I will give authority over the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter."*
- The "morning star" is also given, though the symbolism is not further explained in this passage. *"I will also give him the morning star."*
- **Relevance of Revelation 4-22:** The rest of Revelation would serve as a warning, with the plagues and judgments corresponding to the consequences of tolerating false teachings like Jezebel's.

Church of Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6)

- **Christ's Identity:** Christ is described as the one who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, implying the fullness of God's power and the ability to see their true spiritual condition. *"These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars."*
- **Church's Situation:** Sardis was a city of military strength and great wealth, with a history of earthquakes and rebuilding.
- The church has a reputation of being alive but is actually dead, perhaps due to spiritual complacency or compromise. *"...You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead."*

- A few have not compromised, but most have. *"...Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments."*
- **Message to the Church:** Wake up, strengthen what remains, repent, and live consistently with their Christian claims. *"Wake up, strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God."*
- They must repent because they have compromised with the idolatrous and pagan environment around them.
- Christ will come like a thief if they do not wake up, using Jesus' words from Matthew 24-25. *"But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you."*
- **Eschatological Promise:** To be dressed in white, representing righteousness, and walk with Christ. *"He who overcomes will be like them and be dressed in white."*
- Their name will never be blotted out from the Book of Life, but will be acknowledged before God. *"I will never blot out his name from the Book of Life, but will acknowledge his name before my father and his angels."*
- **Relevance of Revelation 4-22:** The rest of Revelation serves as a warning of the unexpected coming of Christ, where they will face judgment rather than the blessing if they don't repent.

Conclusion:

These messages to the churches in Revelation 2 & 3 are not simply historical documents but serve as a timeless call for all believers to maintain faithfulness, reject compromise, and persevere in their witness of Jesus Christ. They emphasize the need for vigilance against false teaching and the dangers of spiritual complacency, in anticipation of the great eschatological victory that awaits those who overcome.

4. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 6, 7 Churches— Pergamum, Thyatira (Rev 2-3)

Revelation Study Guide: Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. How is Christ portrayed in the message to Pergamum, and how does this relate to the message's content?
2. What does the text mean when it refers to "Satan's throne" in the context of Pergamum?
3. What were the main problems identified in the church of Pergamum, and how did they mirror Old Testament events?
4. How does the text interpret the Nicolaitans, and what was their impact on the church of Pergamum?
5. What specific commendations are given to the church in Thyatira?
6. What is the main issue for which the church in Thyatira receives condemnation?
7. Who is Jezebel, as used symbolically in the message to the church at Thyatira?
8. How is the church at Sardis described, and what is the primary problem identified by Christ?
9. What does Christ mean by, "I will come like a thief," to the church in Sardis?
10. What are the promises to the overcomers in each of the three churches discussed?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Christ is portrayed as having a sharp double-edged sword coming from his mouth, indicating he comes as a warrior and judge. This portrayal corresponds to the message's emphasis on judgment for the church's sin and call to repentance.
2. "Satan's throne" is likely a metaphorical way of describing Pergamum as Satan's domain, where Satan rules and deceives, rather than a literal identification with a specific object like the altar of Zeus.

3. The church in Pergamum allowed those who held to the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans, who were leading them to idolatry and sexual immorality, mirroring how the Israelites were led astray in the Old Testament.
4. The Nicolaitans were a group, possibly the same as Balaam, teaching compromise with pagan culture, particularly eating meat sacrificed to idols and committing adultery, undermining the church's witness.
5. The church in Thyatira is commended for their good works, love, faith, service, and perseverance, noting that their later works are even greater than their first.
6. The church in Thyatira is condemned for tolerating the woman Jezebel who, like the Old Testament Jezebel, led God's people into idolatry and immorality through false teaching.
7. Jezebel symbolizes a false prophetess (or group) who is leading the church to compromise their faith by engaging in idolatrous practices and immorality, deceiving them to worship pagan gods.
8. The church in Sardis is described as having a reputation for being alive, but Christ declares them spiritually dead due to their lack of faithfulness and compromise with pagan surroundings.
9. Christ's coming "like a thief" means that if they do not repent, He will come unexpectedly in judgment, a reference to his second coming as a surprise for those who are not spiritually prepared.
10. The overcomers in Pergamum are promised hidden manna and a white stone with a new name; in Thyatira, they are promised authority over nations and the morning star; and in Sardis, they will be dressed in white, never blotted from the book of life, and acknowledged before God.

Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast the challenges faced by the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira, focusing on the specific forms of idolatry and false teaching that each faced, and how these challenges are represented through Old Testament imagery.
2. Analyze the use of Old Testament figures and narratives (Balaam, Jezebel, manna) in the messages to the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira. How do these references function in the text, and what do they reveal about the author's understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments?
3. Discuss the concept of "overcoming" as it is presented in the messages to the churches in Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis. How does the meaning of overcoming differ in each context, and what promises are given to those who successfully overcome?
4. Evaluate the ways in which the message to the church at Sardis differs from the messages to Pergamum and Thyatira. Consider the specific problems addressed, the imagery employed, and the overall tone of the message.
5. Examine the symbolism of the white stone, the hidden manna, and the new name given to the overcomers in the message to Pergamum. How do these symbols connect to the broader themes of eschatological salvation and reward in the book of Revelation?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apocalyptic:** A genre of literature characterized by symbolic language, visions, and revelations about the end times, often focusing on cosmic battles between good and evil.
- **Balaam:** A Gentile prophet from the Old Testament who was hired to curse Israel but ended up blessing them. He later led Israel astray into idolatry and sexual immorality, becoming symbolic of false teachers.
- **Eschatological:** Pertaining to the end times, or the ultimate destiny of humanity and the world.
- **Hidden Manna:** A reference to the manna God provided in the desert during the Exodus, with some Jewish traditions holding that it would be revealed again in the end times; used symbolically for spiritual sustenance and salvation.
- **Idolatry:** The worship of idols or false gods, often involving the use of physical objects or practices that replace worship of the true God.
- **Jezebel:** The wife of King Ahab in the Old Testament who led Israel into worship of Baal. In Revelation, she represents a false prophetess (or group) who leads the church astray through false teaching and idolatry.
- **Nicolaitans:** A group in the church that promoted compromise with pagan practices, particularly eating meat offered to idols and engaging in sexual immorality.
- **Overcoming:** In Revelation, a call to maintain faithfulness and witness to Jesus in the face of adversity and persecution, which is promised to have reward in God's final kingdom.
- **Spiritual Adultery:** Used metaphorically to describe unfaithfulness to God, often through idolatry or the worship of false gods.
- **Trade Guilds:** Associations of merchants or craftsmen that existed in the Greco-Roman world. These groups often had religious practices and feasts that Christians were tempted to participate in.
- **White Stone:** A symbol of acquittal, acceptance, or entry into a special event; in Revelation, it symbolizes the heavenly reward and salvation of the faithful.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Revelation, Session 6, 7 Churches—Pergamum, Thyatira (Rev 2-3), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Revelation and the Churches of Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis

1. **What is the primary issue faced by the church at Pergamum, and how is Christ portrayed in response?** The church at Pergamum is commended for maintaining its faith in a hostile environment, even with a member named Antipas dying for his faith. However, it is also condemned for tolerating those who hold to the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. These teachings led some members into idolatry and sexual immorality by compromising with Roman culture. In response, Christ is portrayed with a sharp, double-edged sword coming from his mouth, symbolizing his role as a warrior and judge who will come against them if they do not repent.
2. **What is the significance of the "throne of Satan" in Pergamum, and what does it reveal about the church's environment?** The "throne of Satan" is a symbolic reference to the intense spiritual opposition the church faces in Pergamum. While it has been speculated to refer to a specific altar like that of Zeus, the throne is more likely a metaphor for Satan's domain and influence over the city. This indicates the church is in an environment where Satan rules and where they are likely to experience deception and persecution for their faith. The persecution of the church is also previewed in this section, and the idea of martyrdom and witnessing to the point of death is a major theme in Revelation, as seen in the example of Antipas.
3. **Who are the Balaamites and Nicolaitans that are criticized in the message to Pergamum?** The Balaamites are described as those following the path of Balaam from the Old Testament, who led Israel into idolatry and sexual immorality. The Nicolaitans, while possibly the same group as the Balaamites, also encouraged compromise with pagan practices, including eating meat offered to idols and committing acts of immorality. Both groups are teaching that it is acceptable for Christians to participate in Roman social and religious life, even the emperor worship and festivals that included pagan gods. They are encouraging them to compromise their faith and thus are labeled as unfaithful.

4. **What are the promises made to those who overcome in Pergamum, and what do they symbolize?** Those who overcome in Pergamum, meaning those who repent and refuse to compromise with the pagan Roman environment, are promised "hidden manna" and a "white stone with a new name written on it." The hidden manna likely recalls the manna that God provided in the Old Testament and is a symbol of the spiritual nourishment and salvation they will receive in the end times. The white stone is more ambiguous but suggests acquittal and vindication before God, perhaps also passage to a heavenly banquet or warding off demonic forces and has no singular interpretation and may have been used to communicate multiple meanings to the original audience. The new name alludes to Old Testament prophecy of a new creation and God's restoration of his people.
5. **How is Christ depicted to the church in Thyatira, and what is the church commended and condemned for?** Christ is described as having eyes like blazing fire and feet like burnished bronze, signifying his role as a judge who sees into hearts and minds. The church of Thyatira is commended for their love, faith, service, perseverance, and increasing good works. However, they are condemned for tolerating a "Jezebel," a false prophetess, who leads the church into sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols. This again points to the theme of compromise with Roman pagan culture and idolatry.
6. **Who is Jezebel in the message to the church of Thyatira, and how does her story connect to the rest of Revelation?** Jezebel is a reference to the Old Testament figure of the same name, who led Israel into idolatry. In Thyatira, Jezebel is depicted as a false prophetess who encourages compromise with Roman culture by participating in idolatrous practices. The way she deceives God's people links her with the deceptive activity of Satan and the beasts in Revelation chapters 12 and 13, further highlighting the pervasive threat of false teaching in that age.
7. **What is the main problem identified with the church in Sardis, and how does Christ address it?** The church in Sardis is said to have a reputation for being alive, but is actually spiritually dead due to their compromise with pagan practices and culture. Christ addresses this by calling them to "wake up," strengthen what remains, remember what they received, obey, and repent. He warns them that if they do not repent, he will come like a thief, highlighting the unexpected nature of judgment. This reflects the need for genuine faith and faithful witness, and not just an outward appearance of devotion.

8. **What are the implications of the messages to Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis for how those churches would interpret the rest of Revelation?** The churches at Pergamum, Thyatira and Sardis would read the rest of the book of Revelation differently based on their response to these specific letters. Those who maintain their faithful witness would read the rest of the book as a source of hope, knowing they will be on the right side of the coming conflict and receive salvation. However, those who are engaging with and tolerating compromise will read the book as a warning and may fear judgement. The book is used to exhort them to repent and refuse to compromise with Roman pagan culture, or they will be on the wrong end of the battles that are described.