

## PERGAMUM (2:12-17)

A temple was built to the god Roma and to the emperor Augustus (31 B.C. to A.D. 14) in Pergamum. Along with a large temple to the imperial cult, there were great altars to Zeus and other gods in the city (the imposing temples and altars may explain the reference to “Satan’s throne”). Jesus sheds light on the Nicolaitans by comparing them to the prophet Balaam. Balaak, king of Moab, tried to pay the prophet Balaam to curse Israel, but God made Balaam bless Israel (Num. 22-24). Balaam couldn’t destroy Israel with curses, so he taught Balaak to causing Israel to compromise — eating “*food sacrificed to idols and practicing sexual immorality.*” It seems the Nicolaitans were dangerous in how they seductively “taught” the Christians to compromise. Bauckham explains that “their teaching made it possible for Christians to be successful in pagan society,” and that this was the beast’s [or prostitute’s] way of winning without killing Christians.<sup>65</sup>

***What stands out to you as significant or instructive here? In what ways might we see manifestations of this church’s successes, threats, and failures?***

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## THYATIRA (2:18-29)

While there is no known temple to the imperial cult in Thyatira, there were temples dedicated to various gods. Similar to the Nicolaitans (or associated with them?), a woman “Jezebel” is called out for seducing into sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols. It is likely Jesus gives her this name as an allusion to the wife of king Ahab who killed the prophets of Yahweh, fed the prophets of Baal and Asherah, and led Israel into idolatry.

***What stands out to you as significant or instructive here? In what ways might we see manifestations of this church’s successes, temptations, and failures?***

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<sup>65</sup> Bauckham, 124.

