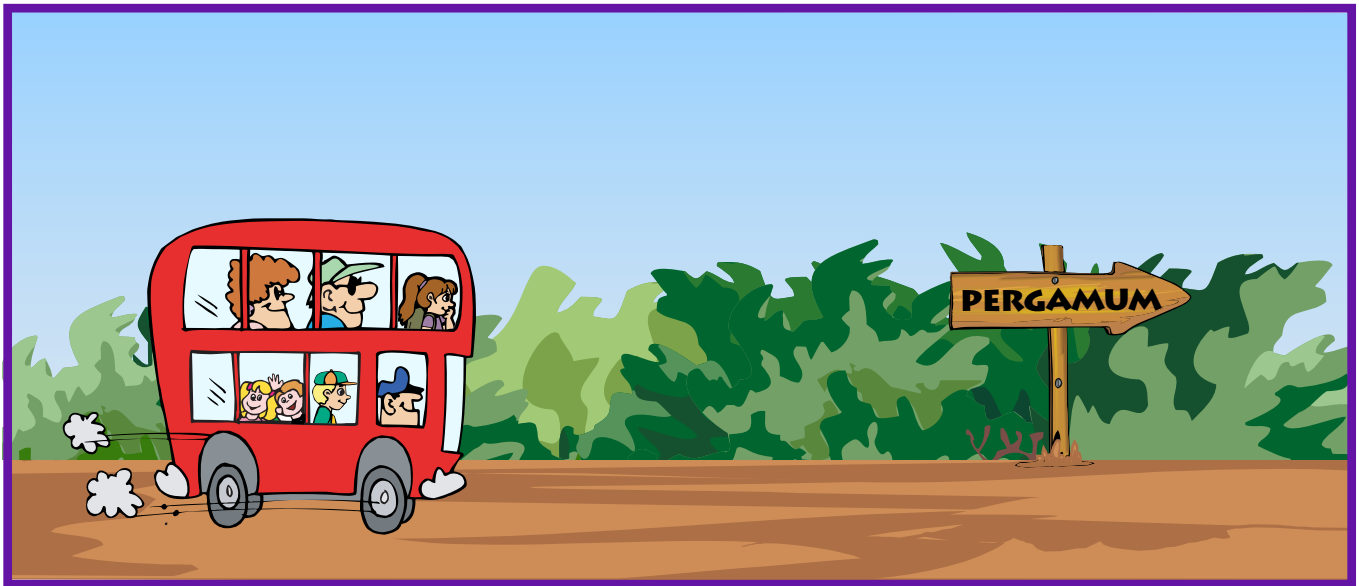


Tour of the Holy Lands - Pergamum



Let's climb aboard our bus and head to Pergamum (per'ga-mum), which is also known as Pergamos. This city was the capital of Asia for almost 400 years. It was famous for its library, which contained more than 200,000 books as well as a huge statue of Athena, goddess of wisdom.



**ATHENA
GODDESS OF WISDOM**



These books did not look like our books today. Early books were written in rolls made of papyrus (pa-pie'rus), which is a large bulrush plant that grows by the Nile River in Egypt. Papyrus was made by cutting the stem into long thin strips and pressing it smooth into sheets. It looked like brown paper, and most of the world used it as paper for writing. In fact, our word, "paper," comes from the word, "papyrus."



PAPYRUS PLANT



PAPYRUS



Three hundred years before John's letter arrived, the king of Pergamum decided he was going to make his library the best in the world. He went to the famous library of Alexandria (al'ex-an'dree-ah), Egypt and persuaded the librarian, Aristophanes (air'i-stof'a-nee-z), to leave Alexandria and become the new librarian at Pergamum. But Ptolemy (tol'a-mee), the king of Egypt, said, "No!" He made sure that his library in Alexandria was going to stay the best in the world. First, he put his librarian in prison. Then, he prevented papyrus from leaving Egypt.



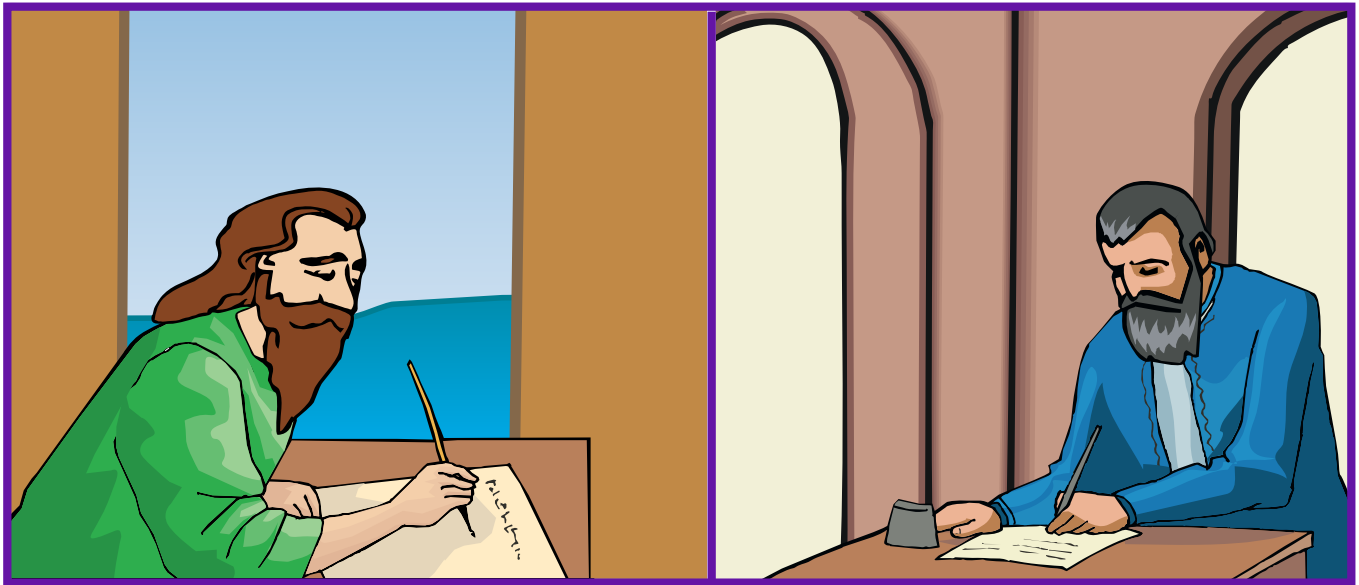
The Pergamum king must have been very disappointed. But something very surprising happened. Some clever men invented a new kind of writing paper, called "parchment," made of sheep or goat skins. Parchment scrolls were made by sewing square skins together and rolling them. Now papyrus wasn't needed anymore. And the library in Pergamum grew to become second in size to the one in Alexandria.



PARCHMENT



But the story doesn't end there! Mark Antony, a famous Roman military commander, stole most of the scrolls from the Pergamum library and gave them as a wedding gift to his bride, Cleopatra.



When the Apostles Paul and John picked up their pens to write to the churches, they chose parchment over papyrus. Why? Because parchment was stronger and didn't wear out as fast as papyrus did, so the letters could be passed around and read again and again without fear of them falling apart. Also, the strength of the parchment meant that writers could use both sides of the "paper."

Guess what was discovered next? Instead of sewing the pages together end to end into a long roll, the pages were sewn along a side edge. The result was something that looked like our books today, with pages that turned one after the other. Each page was written by hand, of course. Pens were made of thin, sharp, hollow reeds, and ink consisted of a mixture of soot and rubbery gum. Isn't it interesting to learn how books were invented?



Look, everyone, look out your windows! Pergamum is up that mountain just ahead. In the Apostle John's letter to the church members there, he wrote, "I see where you live, right under the shadow of Satan's throne." We're going to get off our bus, and visit Satan's throne right now. But the way up there is so steep that we have to ride a cable car to reach the top. Come on – it'll be fun! If you don't like heights, just look up, instead of down. What a beautiful day!



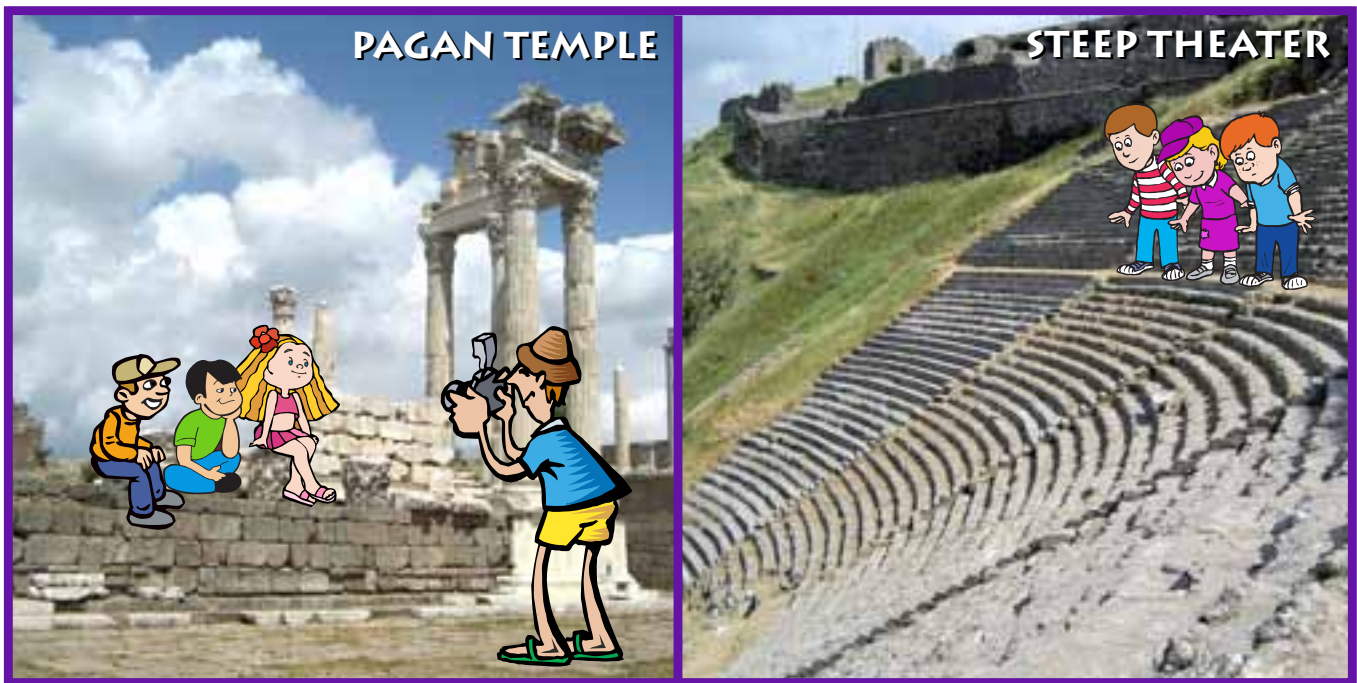
Okay, now that we're at the top, we have to hike along this path, but it's not far. Ahhh, here we are! This rock ledge where we're standing is 800 feet above the city of Pergamum. See the steps here, beside us? Those steps lead up to a platform, which once held the great altar of the god, Zeus, built in front of the Temple of Athena. It is one of the oldest and most important monuments in the world. The altar is 40 feet high and looks like a great throne ruling over the hillside. Its message to the ancient world was that Satan ruled in this mountain.

But, wait a minute, where is the great throne? All we see is its platform. That's because the throne was removed and taken to a museum in Berlin, Germany, over 200 years ago. It was beginning to fall apart, and the museum offered to keep it and protect it as well as display it for the public to see.



The throne is decorated with beautiful reliefs. A relief is a band of sculptures carved into a wall, like a cartoon that tells a story. These illustrate a battle between gods and giants. Satan, or the devil, is shown as a dragon or serpent. The relief was sculpted in memory of a great victory of Pergamum over Galatea. Look to the right to see an example of a relief sculpture.

Many experts believe that all day long in ancient times, worshipers brought gifts for Zeus – gifts like cows and sheep. They were called sacrifices (sak'ri-fy-siz), which means that farmers chose the best of their herds to burn on the altar in order to please their god. Smoke from the burning sacrifices rose high above the mountain day and night.



All the way up the side of the mountain, the ancient people built temples to different pagan gods, such as Zeus and Athena, and to Roman emperors, such as Trajan. The columns holding up the temple roofs look like they touch the clouds. And look at the steep theater next door, where citizens enjoyed plays about gods and goddesses. It is the steepest theater of ancient times. Citizens must have held on tightly as they found their seats.

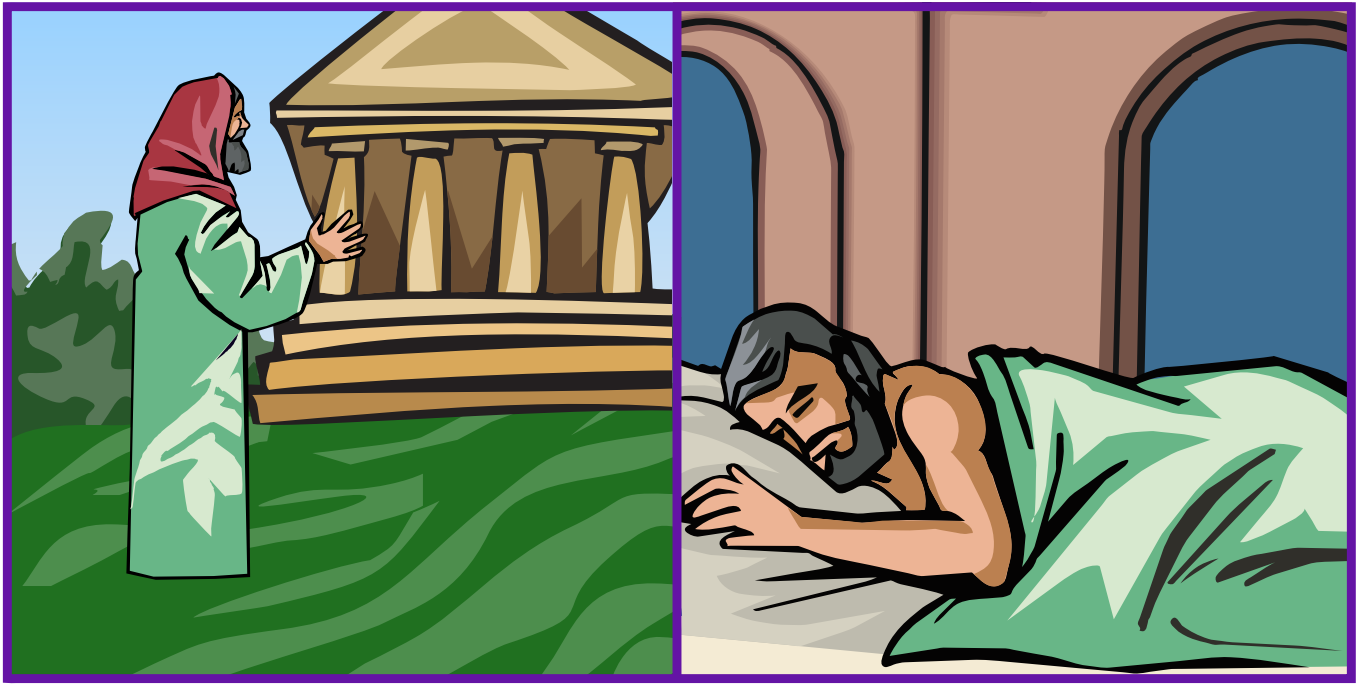
It must have been very hard for the members of the Christian church here to be surrounded by paganism. Imagine how comforted they were to receive John's letter and to hear his words, filled with the Christ, praising them for their strength as they held on tightly to the one God.



We've been enjoying the temples on the mountain top here in Pergamum this morning, but there's more to see on lower levels. Below is a healing center called the Asclepium (as-klep'ee-um). There were two others in Greece. These healing centers were the nearest they had to hospitals in those days.

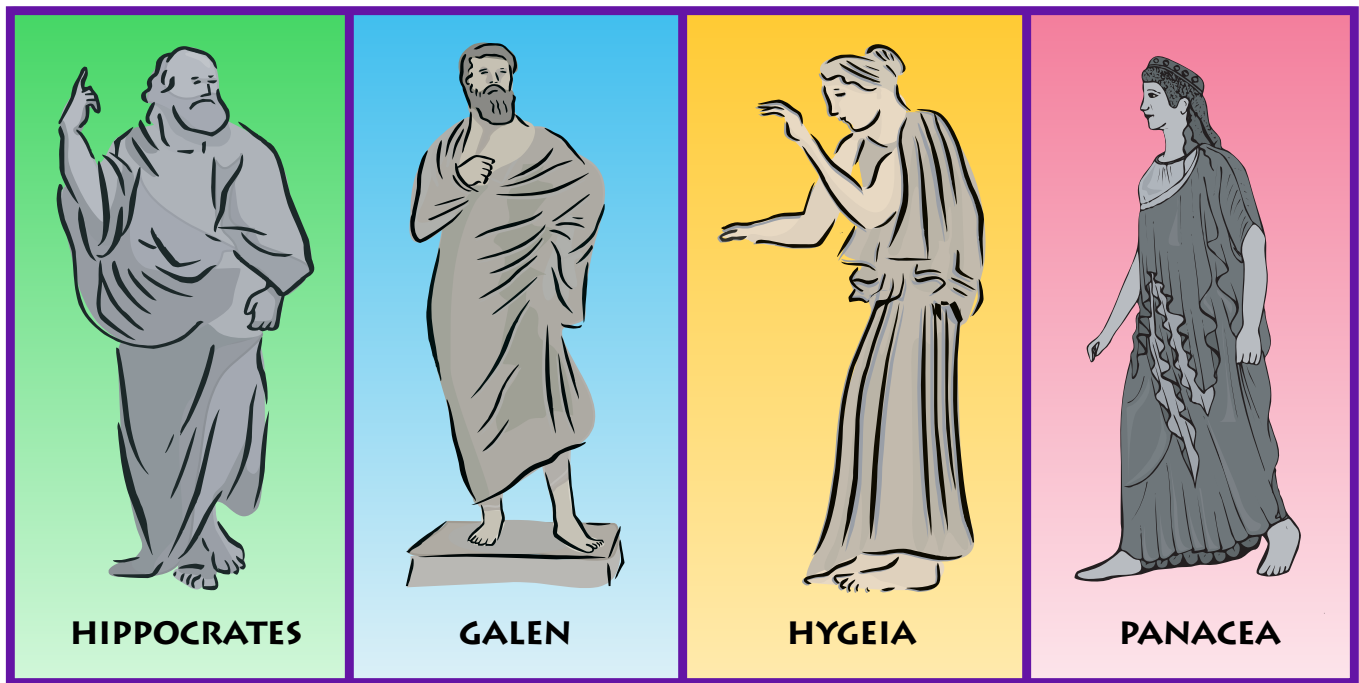
People came from all over the world to be healed by Asclepius, the god of healing. Asclepius' mother was the daughter of a Greek king and his father was Apollo, the god of many things – of healing, of oracles, of music, of archery.

The temple of Asclepius was the most beautiful building down there. If only we could see the original building! The builder copied a building in Rome called the Pantheon (pan'thee-on), but made it half its size. Let's go down and see what we can find.



This medical center opened 300-400 years before Christ, and continued 300-400 years after Christ, until it lost its popularity. Do you suppose that pagan healing began to disappear when the Christians started healing through the power of God?

When a person was ill in this neighborhood, he would visit the temple of Asclepius. First, he'd give a sacrifice; then, he would purify himself in a special pool. Then he would be given a bed in an apartment, and he would expect that Asclepius would heal him while he slept. If he didn't wake up cured, the god would appear in his dream and recommend a treatment, which a priest would explain to the doctor. This sleep treatment was called incubation (in-kew-bay'shun).



The most famous doctor of ancient times was Hippocrates (hip-aw'kra-teez), who was born on the island of Cos in the year 460 BC. The second most famous doctor was Galen (gay'len), who was born 590 years later right here in Pergamum, and who lived from approximately 130-200 AD. He recommended diet, hot and cold baths, and exercise to his patients. He believed that the body fixed itself.

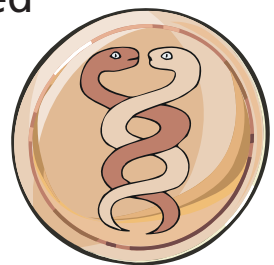
Asclepius had five daughters, one of whom was Hygeia (ee-yee'ya), the goddess of disease prevention. From her name, we get our word, hygiene (hie' jeen). Another daughter was named Panacea (pan-a-kee'ya), goddess of the all-purpose cure, which is the meaning of our word, panacea (pan-a-see'ya).

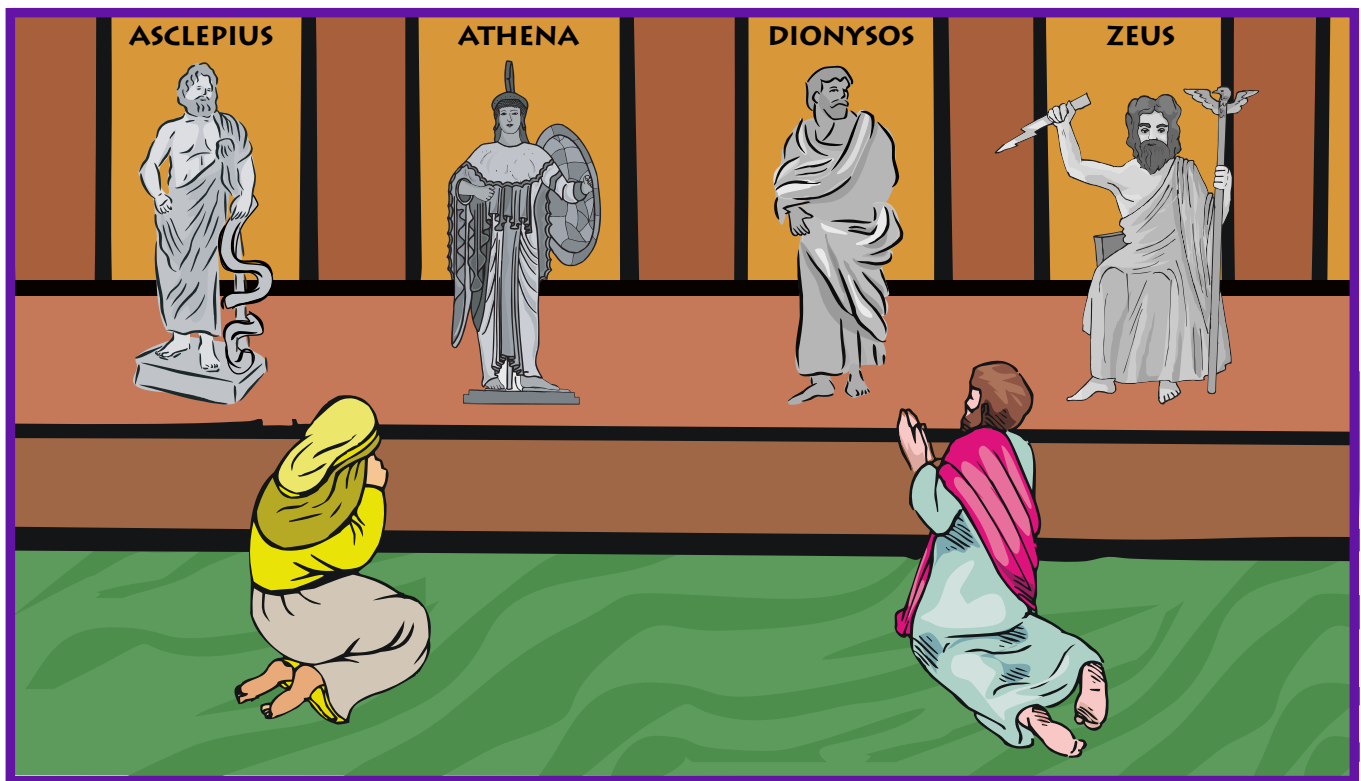


In the center, there were places for mud baths and a spring from which we can still draw water today. There was also a long tunnel for patients to reach the springs in bad weather. And, there was a small theater where royal guests were entertained with music and poetry.



What did Asclepius look like? According to statues and paintings of the time, he was an older man who wore sandals and carried a staff with a snake coiled around it. Snakes were associated with his healing because they renewed their skin every year and because they disappear into holes in the winter and reappear in the spring; these characteristics suggest eternal rebirth. Snakes were often carved in stone and many appeared on the Pergamum coins. But to the Christians who lived in Pergamum, snakes stood for evil.





And when people called Asclepius, "Asclepius the Savior," Christians would have to shut their ears. Why? Because to Christians, there is only one Savior – and that's the power of God and the Christ. Imagine living among neighbors who looked to the god Asclepius for healing of physical problems, to the goddess Athena for wisdom, to Dionysos (die'oh-nee'sus) for a good grape harvest, to Zeus (zoos) for good weather, and so on.



A good Christian would turn only to the power of the one invisible, almighty God as taught by the Gospel of Christ Jesus. Christians had to be prepared to stand firm in their faith against all pressure.

John's letter to the church at Pergamum recalls by name a fellow member, a friend, - "Antipas, my faithful martyr" - who held to his Christian faith, who refused to worship gods and who was killed for it. How strong they must have felt when reading those words! And how grateful they must have been to Antipas for his shining example!