

Supplemental Material on Revelation 2:17

This document contains excerpts from a few commentaries explaining the possible meanings of the hidden manna and the white stone promised to the overcomers.

Revelation 2:17

[TTC Re](#): Interpretive Insights

To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it. The overcomers are promised two rewards: hidden manna and a white stone with a new name on it. “Hidden manna” represents God’s supernatural and eternal provision that stands in contrast to the idol food offered at the pagan feasts.⁴ This implies participation in the messianic banquet, a heavenly feast focusing on the worship and celebration of the one, true God ([Isa. 25:6–8](#); [Rev. 19:9](#)). 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).⁵ 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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@book{Duvall_2014,  
  place={Grand Rapids, MI},  
  series={Teach the Text Commentary Series},  
  title={Revelation},  
  publisher={Baker Books},  
  author={Duvall, J. Scott},  
  editor={Strauss, Mark L. and Walton, John H.Editors},  
  year={2014},  
  pages={54},  
  collection={Teach the Text Commentary Series}}
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Tags: Re 2:17

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[UBCS Re](#): §3 Greetings from Christ to the Seven Churches of Asia (Rev. 2:1–3:22)

The second reward of faithfulness, a **white stone**, is a more difficult symbol to understand. The **new name written on it**, whether Christ’s ([19:12](#); cf. [3:12](#)) or the

overcomer's, brings to mind a universe of "new things" ([21:5](#)) that will result from God's final triumph over evil—the "new" Jerusalem ([3:12](#); [21:2](#)), a "new" heaven and earth ([21:1](#)), "new" songs ([5:9](#); [14:3](#)), and so on. In addition, the adjective **white** is used elsewhere in Revelation in reference to spiritual purity, which is another eschatological credential. Thus, whatever else the **white stone** refers to, it symbolizes the future blessings poured out on the community of overcomers at Christ's return.

John recognized the significance of the stones in his visions by their function within his world. Two common uses in particular probably informed John's interpretation of the visionary stones. Stones were sometimes used as tickets for admission to public events. Perhaps John viewed the stones held by overcomers as admission tickets to Christ's victory feast (cf. [19:17–18](#)). Especially if the interpreter decides that the **new name written on it** belongs to Christ, then the **white stone** probably has this significance for John. Stones were also used by juries, who gave an acquitted person a white stone at the trial's end. This rendering is also possible, especially if the **white stone** is linked to the "great white throne" ([20:11](#)), symbolic of God's final judgment of good and evil. If the interpreter decides that the **new name written on it** belongs to the overcomer and is therefore written in the "book of life" ([20:15](#)), then a cumulative case could be built for the **white stone** as symbolic of the overcomer's escape from "the second death" ([20:14](#)). We prefer this second view because it fits better this congregation's situation and John's use of the "sword" imagery: the disciple who resists satanic repression inside and outside the church will be acquitted by the heavenly jury and so escape God's eschatological judgment.

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@book{Wall_2011,  
place={Grand Rapids, MI},  
series={Understanding the Bible Commentary Series},  
title={Revelation},  
publisher={Baker Books},  
author={Wall, Robert W.},  
year={2011},  
pages={76–77},  
collection={Understanding the Bible Commentary Series}}
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[LCC:NT](#): Letter to the Church at Pergamum (2:12–17)

Each of the seven proclamations to the churches concludes with a call to hear what the Spirit has spoken through Christ's words. This formula shows that what the Spirit speaks to one church, he speaks to all the churches. This formula differentiates those who do not hear the words of Christ from those whose ear is able to hear him. To

those, the Spirit urges both a listening ear and obedience to what has been said. Each letter ends with a promise to the “overcomer” (i.e., the one who heeds the words of the proclamation). Each promise to overcomers finds its fulfillment in the new Jerusalem. This overcomer promise is intentionally obscure: Christ does not reveal what the white stone is, or why a secret name is written on it.

@book{Mangum_2020,
place={Bellingham, WA},
title={Lexham Context Commentary: New Testament},
publisher={Lexham Press},
year={2020},
pages={Re 2:12–17}}

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[POSB KJV Re: D. The Message to Pergamos: The Church that Is Corrupted and Married to the World, 2:12–17](#)

1. The overcomer is given the right to eat the manna or bread of heaven. This is a reference to the manna that was used to feed the children of Israel during their wilderness wanderings. God actually caused the manna or bread to be rained down from heaven upon them ([Ex. 16:4](#)). The point to note is that the manna was given by God to feed them and to keep them alive during their wandering upon this earth. Now, what does the *hidden manna* mean? What is the bread of heaven? It means Christ Himself. The overcomer is given the right to feed upon Christ. This is exactly what Christ Himself said.

“Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world” ([Jn. 6:32–33](#)).

“And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” ([Jn. 6:35](#)).

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” ([Jn. 6:51](#)).

“This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever” ([Jn. 6:58](#)).

The bread or manna of God is not physical and material bread: it is spiritual. God actually promises to provide for the physical necessities of *His followers* ([Mt. 6:24–33](#)). But physical and material bread is not what Christ was talking about in this passage. Physical and material bread lasts only for a short while. Once consumed, it is gone. Its

satisfaction passes and man's gnawing hunger arises again. But the bread God gives is spiritual bread, that is, spiritual food for the soul (see note—[Ep. 1:3](#)). It is the bread that man really needs more than anything else on earth.

@book{Leadership Ministries Worldwide_1996,
place={Chattanooga, TN},
series={The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible},
title={Revelation},
publisher={Leadership Ministries Worldwide},
author={Leadership Ministries Worldwide},
year={1996},
pages={43–44},
collection={The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible}}

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[Revelation \(NAC\)](#): 3. To Pergamum (2:12–17)

If there have been difficulties in identifying those who held the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans, the three promises offered to the overcomers may be even more challenging. First, those who overcome are promised that they will be given hidden manna. Second, they are promised a white stone. And, third, a new name will be written on that stone, which will be known only to those who receive it.

The reference to manna is easily identifiable since in [Exod 16:32–34](#) God miraculously fed the children of Israel daily with manna from heaven. What makes the reference obscure is the reference to hidden manna. The solution could be as simple as arguing that just as the Egyptians and other surrounding people had no idea how the children of Israel sustained themselves in the wilderness, so the whole world will be amazed at the sustaining providence of God for his churches and for those who overcome. However, there is also a possible reference to incidents reported in Jewish literature relating to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. The authors of *Second Maccabees* and *Second Baruch* in Jewish pseudepigraphal literature record that Jeremiah was warned to take the “tent of meeting,” the ark, and all of its contents out of the temple just prior to the fall of the city, and that he took them to Mount Sinai where they were hidden underground until the time when the Messiah would come. The ark, according to [Heb 9:4](#), contained not only the tablets of the covenant but also Aaron's rod, which miraculously budded, and a pot of manna—all wonderfully preserved. The ark and the tabernacle furnishings have thus been hidden and remain secluded until the Messiah, who alone knows their location, arrives. At that time the pot of manna would again be unveiled, and the hidden manna would be available.⁵² If the reference is to such Jewish tradition, it almost certainly does not anticipate a literal fulfillment of the prediction in

the pseudepigraphal texts but rather utilizes such as a method of suggesting that the overcomers will experience the manna of heaven uniquely prepared for them in that day.

The possibilities associated with the white stone are much more numerous. No explanation has proven strong enough to convince even a majority of the commentators. Hemer's listing of possibilities include the following: (1) a jewel in Old Testament or Jewish tradition; (2) the judicial *calculus Minervae*, the casting of a vote for acquittal; (3) a token of admission, membership, or recognition; (4) an amulet with a divine name; (5) a token of gladiatorial discharge; (6) an allusion to a process of initiation into the service of Aesculapius; or (7) simply as a writing material whose form or color was significant.⁵³

Hemer himself provides lengthy discussion of the evidence favoring each of the propositions. However, he does conclude with the view that holding the white stone as a jewel in the Old Testament or Jewish tradition is likely unsustainable. Various degrees of likelihood are assigned to the others. According to some, there is an allusion to those who had been involved in gladiatorial games and had been spared the necessity of further risk of life. They were given a kind of *tessera*, which exempted them from any further obligation. Most examples of this belong to the first century BC or AD and come from Rome, but that such a practice would have been known in Pergamum also—especially when one remembers that Galan the physician had learned much of his medicine as a result of working with the gladiatorial games—is not inconceivable. In his concluding statements, Hemer was struck when visiting Pergamum by the fact that the acropolis and most of the buildings there show a darker, less beautiful granite in contrast to the blocks of gleaming white marble that are occasionally seen, especially at the reassembled altar of Zeus on the summit. White stone may well have been one of the first things the visitor to Pergamum noticed, and the impression may have been an indelible one. However, the color white is often associated with holiness, and more probably the white stone may merely be John's reference to the imputed holiness and righteousness of the overcomer. Scott sums up the matter, "It is the expression of the Lord's personal delight in each one of the conquering band."⁵⁴

The question of the new name is somewhat more easily decided. In [Rev 19:12](#), the returning Lord is said to have "a name written on him that no one knows but he himself." He also carries recognition as the Word of God, King of kings, and Lord of lords; but this one new name that no one knows save he himself is a similar avowal to what is found in the promise to the overcomers at Pergamum.

Since in antiquity the power of a name was de facto an exercise of authority, the unknowableness of the name Christ carries seems to be a reminder that whatever one may know of him, he being God transcends anything ever communicated to humans. This is part of who God is. To assign to the overcomers at Pergamum a name that no one but the recipient of the name knew is not only to suggest the authority of the divine Christ over the believer but also to establish a personal intimacy with the individual believer.⁵⁵ Whereas the idea of real intimacy with the gods in most other faiths would be unthinkable, in Christianity it is altogether to be anticipated. So the promises for the overcomers at Pergamum include sustenance with heavenly manna,

holiness indicated by acquittal and recognized by a white stone, and a certain intimacy given by the authority of Christ himself to the individual believer.

@book{Patterson_2012,
place={Nashville, TN},
series={The New American Commentary},
title={Revelation},
volume={39},
publisher={B&H},
author={Patterson, Paige},
editor={Clendenen, E. RayEditor},
year={2012},
pages={108–111},
collection={The New American Commentary}}

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[MNTC Re 1–11](#): The Counsel

Christ concludes His letter with words of counsel and encouragement. As noted in chapter [4](#) of this volume, the phrase **he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches** stresses the vital importance of Christ's words and believers' responsibility to hear and heed them. As is the case with the other six letters, the promises are addressed to **him who overcomes**—a phrase encompassing all believers ([1 John 5:4–5](#)). Christ promises three things to the faithful members of the church at Pergamum.

First, He promises to **give** them **some of the hidden manna**. **Manna** was a honey-flavored bread with which God fed the Israelites during their years of wandering in the wilderness ([Ex. 16:14ff.](#)). According to [Exodus 16:33](#), the Israelites were to memorialize that divine provision by keeping a jar of manna inside the Ark of the Covenant during their travels. The **hidden manna** represents Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life who came down from heaven ([John 6:48–51](#)). He provides spiritual sustenance for those who put their faith in Him. The **hidden manna** symbolizes all the blessings and benefits of knowing Christ ([Eph. 1:3](#)).

There has been much speculation about what the **white stone** symbolizes. Some link it with the Urim and Thummim on the breastplate of the high priest ([Ex. 28:15, 30](#); [Lev. 8:8](#); [Num. 27:21](#); [Deut. 33:8](#)). Those stones were used to determine God's will and represented the right of the high priest to request guidance from God for the leader who could not approach God directly, but had to come through the priestly structure. Somehow, God caused those stones to disclose His will in a form beyond just the simple yes and no of casting lots. According to this view, by this **white stone** God

promises the overcomers knowledge of His will. Others identify the **white stone** as a diamond, the most precious of stones, symbolizing God's precious gift of eternal life to believers. It seems best, however, to understand the **white stone** in light of the Roman custom of awarding white stones to the victors in athletic contests. A white stone, inscribed with the athlete's name, served as his ticket to a special awards banquet. In this view, Christ promises the overcomers entrance to the eternal victory celebration in heaven.

There will be **a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it**. As is self-evident from that phrase, we cannot know what that **new name** is until we receive it (cf. [Deut. 29:29](#)). *Kainos* (**new**) does not mean new in contrast to old in time, but new in the sense of qualitatively different. The **new name** will serve as each believer's admission pass into eternal glory. It will uniquely reflect God's special love for and adoption of every true child of His.

The Pergamum church faced the same choice that every similar church faces. It could repent and receive all the blessedness of eternal life in the glory of heaven. Or it could refuse to repent and face the terrifying reality of having the Lord Jesus Christ declare war on it. Maintaining the path of compromise ultimately leads to judgment.

@book{MacArthur_1999,
place={Chicago},
series={MacArthur New Testament Commentary},
title={Revelation 1–11},
publisher={Moody Press},
author={MacArthur, John F., Jr.},
year={1999},
pages={90–91},
collection={MacArthur New Testament Commentary}}

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