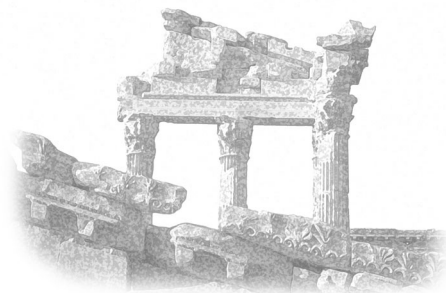


# THE LOST LETTERS OF PERGAMUM

A STORY FROM THE  
NEW TESTAMENT WORLD



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WITH EXTRACTS FROM  
BEN WITHERINGTON III

 **Baker Academic**

A Division of Baker Book House Co  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49516

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Published by Baker Academic  
a division of Baker Book House Company  
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287

Printed in the United States of America

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Longenecker, Bruce W.

The lost letters of Pergamum : a story from the New Testament world /  
Bruce W. Longenecker with extracts from Ben Witherington III

p.        cm.

ISBN 0-8010-2607-5 (pbk.)

1. Luke, Saint—Fiction. 2. Church history—Primitive and early church, ca.  
30–600—Fiction. 3. Bible. N.T.—History of Biblical events—Fiction. 4. Evan-  
gelists (Bible)—Fiction. 5. Christian saints—Fiction. 6. Physicians—Fiction.  
I. Witherington, Ben, 1951– II. Title.

PS3612.O53L47 2003

813'.6—dc21

2002074407

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## ANTIPAS' LETTER

Antipas,<sup>1</sup> son of the nobleman Philip, civic benefactor of the cities of Tyre and Caesarea, freeborn citizen of the blessed empire of Rome, and worshiper of Jupiter, Zeus Olympios the Savior;

To the most excellent Calpurnius, son of the distinguished Theophilus, benefactor of the people of Ephesus, nobleman of the Lydian region;

Greetings.

On this tenth day before the ides of January [5 January], I write to you, most excellent Calpurnius, as one nobleman to another, with an invitation from L. Cuspius Pactumeius Rufinus, a leading official of the city of Pergamum and one to whom I have committed myself. Rufinus has managed to earn from our great emperor Domitian the honor of sponsoring two days of gladiatorial contests in the course of the next year. As you may have heard, Rufinus' father, Drusus, has recently died and has left an endowment along with instructions for sponsoring two gladiatorial days in Pergamum. These instructions are being implemented by Rufinus himself, who will use the occasion to celebrate the memory of his father as an esteemed citizen of the empire, as well as to celebrate our beneficent gods and our illustrious emperor, whose guiding spirit fills the empire.

The first gladiatorial day will take place on the thirteenth day before the calends of April [19 March; the "calends" is the first of the month]. The second will fall just before the autumn equinox on the sixteenth day before the calends of Domitianus [15 September].<sup>2</sup> These days will adorn the great city of Pergamum, whose citizens are even now full of anticipation.

1. As in most ancient correspondence, the sender (i.e., Antipas) is identified first in the letter, and the addressee (i.e., Calpurnius) is identified second.

2. At this time, Domitian had renamed the months of September and October "Germanicus" and "Domitianus," respectively. The traditional names were reinstated after Domitian's death.

Rufinus has conscripted me to undertake several organizational tasks for these gladiatorial contests, which I am happy to do. One of those tasks includes extending an invitation to the honorable men of the region, bidding them to attend and thereby helping to promote harmony among the great benefactors of our regional cities. Since you rank among that esteemed number, it falls to me to request your presence at the first of these occasions. You would be one of six officially recognized representatives of the noblemen of Ephesus, Pergamum's sister city in concord and itself a promoter of Rome's magnificence. You will have a place specially reserved in the *tribunal editoris* [the area designated for highly regarded civic magistrates alongside the holder of the contest], together with the other noblemen and invited guests. Although the emperor has agreed to offer part of his own gladiatorial troupe for the occasions, he himself will not be in attendance. Nonetheless, many esteemed citizens will be gathered, and we hope that you will be among that number. Should you and your entourage require housing for the event, I have a list of Pergamene noblemen who will gladly extend hospitality to visiting noblemen. Simply let me know your needs, and I will make the necessary arrangements.

The gladiatorial school here at Pergamum is making preparations for the event, and we have notified the gladiatorial schools in Smyrna and Philadelphia as well, each of which have agreed to supply contestants for the first event. Gladiators from Galatia and Egyptian Alexandria will also be there. At present just over one hundred gladiators have been purchased for the day, but Rufinus is hopeful for more. If you meet with any itinerant *lanistae* [owners of gladiatorial troupes] who are not aware of these events, we would be in your debt if you would pass on the information. They should make contact with Rufinus of Pergamum directly.

Euphemos of Pergamum, my honorable host, also sends his greetings. Stachys, my servant, delivers this message. If your response to this message is not delayed, he is at your service for delivering your response to me. He should be no burden upon you. I have instructed him to find accommodation at a local inn if you require him to remain overnight before delivering your response.

May the gods continue to bless you and your household.

## CALPURNIUS' LETTER

Calpurnius of Ephesus, son of Theophilus;

To Antipas, nobleman of Pergamum;

Greetings.

You have honored me with your kind request for my attendance at the gladiatorial contest in the spring. The occasion falls just prior to a voyage that I hope to make, so I should be able to attend. I am not a keen enthusiast for the contests, you should know, since throwing men to wild beasts or watching them kill each other in combat for the amusement of spectators has never seemed to me either prudent or tasteful. But your invitation is gracious, and I am concerned to preserve healthy relationships between the cities of Ephesus and Pergamum. Their long-standing competition for civic honors and prestige has too frequently induced an unhealthy enmity between the noblemen of our two grand cities. While I applaud civic competition to the extent that it sharpens our interest in promoting the beneficence of our own citizens, I regret the lack of concord that occasionally transpires. For that reason, although I will not revel in the contests, I nonetheless consider it my civic duty to comply with your gracious invitation and represent my fair city in the Pergamene games. The riot that broke out between the people of Pompeii and Nuceria at a gladiatorial competition some thirty years ago clearly indicates the severity with which Rome looks upon intercity discord, with the emperor forbidding further shows in Pompeii for a decade and rewarding the senator who sponsored the competition with exile. There is a need for intercity cooperation in events of this sort, and so I will be content to play a role in ensuring civic stability. I am greatly honored by your invitation. I

will make my own housing arrangements for the time that I am there, since I have strong ties with certain leading men of Pergamum.

Your host, Euphemos, is himself a man of high repute, and your association with him in Pergamum is sure to prosper. Please send him my regards.

Your servant Stachys has been no burden. Upon my insistence, he was provided with food and accommodation at my own house. I did not want to subject him to one of the crude local inns that are famous for their bedbugs and foul practices. I send him back to you with a gift of friendship for you, along with this brief letter.

Farewell.<sup>3</sup>

3. If Antipas wrote his letter on 5 January, his messenger Stachys would have departed from Pergamum on 6 January and arrived in Ephesus on the afternoon of 9 January. If Stachys then left Ephesus on 10 January, he would have arrived back in Pergamum on 13 January with Calpurnius' reply.