

The Church of Pergamos

How It All Ends

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Numbers 22, 23 and 24 are the story of Balaam, the prophet of Baal and it says that he was a Moabite. So, Moab is an old way of saying, I guess you could say it's where Jordan is today. Moab is where Jordan is today. Of course, the boundaries are not exactly the same. It would be kind of foolish if I said, "Oh, by the way, they just changed the country's name, nothing else has changed." And then south of what used to be Moab is what used to be Midian and Midian can be pretty safely said that that is what is now Saudi Arabia.

So, we're going to talk for just a minute about this guy named Balaam. Apparently, he was well-known as someone who might be known as a necromancer or someone who could deal with curses and could talk with dead folks and could do sorcery and so, what happened is, the children of Israel have left Egypt, as you know, and they have traveled through the land of Sinai and then the land of Midian and now they're on their way up through the land of Moab. And Balak, the king of Moab, decided that he wanted to curse the Israelites because there were a ton of these Israelites traveling through their land. So, this guy named Balak, kind of Moab, says he's going to seek out a prophet by the name of Balaam to curse the Israelites. They go and find Balaam and they ask Balaam, "We need you to come and curse the Israelites. We're going to take you up to a high mountain and you're going to do what you do. You're going to curse them and we're going to pay you. You're going to be just amazingly rich and we're going to be on our way."

Well, Balaam wouldn't come the first time. He asked God if he could go; he couldn't go. Balak came again and said, "Well, we're going to send you," end of chapter 22, "another opportunity to come and be with our king and curse the Israelites." Well, he did that time and then he's riding his donkey. This is a funny story, you need to read this story. This is one of those stories that everyone talks about. Look at the heading on your Bible, probably, Numbers 22. Three times Balaam is riding his donkey and three times this donkey goes against where Balaam is trying to steer him and three times Balaam whips his donkey. The third time, the donkey turns his head and talks to him. You say, "Well, that can't happen." You have a talking serpent in Genesis 3. Okay? A talking donkey a few books later is not that hard to believe.

So, you've got a talking donkey. Now, as you look in chapter 23 and 24 of Numbers, you're going to see, especially if you have a version of the Bible that sets it off in paragraphs when you have poetry, you're going to see that three times Balaam tried to curse the Israelites and three times, instead, he does what? Anyone know the story? He blesses them. He says, "I've got to say what God is telling me to say." So, he blesses them. You see in Numbers 24 at the end of the chapter, look there with me in verse 25, "And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place: and Balak also went his way," and so, it seems like, that's the end of the story. "Balaam, you're a horrible prophet. You can't curse anybody. You are a failure."

But, we see in chapter 25, "And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab." Alright, Balak was the king of Moab. Remember, he's trying to get Balaam to curse the Israelites for Moab. Now, we have in verse 1 of chapter 25, the Israelites in their journeys they had encampments and when they would camp for a while, these Moabite daughters would come in and we see in verse 2, "they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baalpeor." And so, we have a mass issue here. By the way, that next story there, Phineas with a javelin is memorable.

Now, you might be thinking, "Well, how do we know who's really in charge of this mass adultery?" which is basically what it turned out to be. Well, we find out later in chapter 31. Go with me, please, to Numbers 31:1, "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites: afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people." So, "Moses, as soon as you're done avenging the Israelites of the Midianites, you're going to die." Verse 3, "And Moses spake unto the people, saying, Arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and avenge the LORD of Midian." And so, he numbers the people that are going to go. I think, if memory serves me, a thousand from every tribe. Yes, verse 6 says that.

Look at verse 9, "And the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods." Look at verse 13, "And Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and all the princes of the congregation, went forth to meet them without the camp." Now, you need to pay attention here, verses 15 and 16 especially, "And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor." Remember chapter 25? So, that's what we're talking about. Later on we find out Balaam is the one to blame for what happens in chapter 25. Apparently, he failed at cursing and he said on his way out, "Oh, by the way, everyone falls for pretty girls so what you need to do is send your women over there to cohabit with their men and you will cause them to anger their God because they'll serve other gods. They'll anger their Jehovah and then, probably, that's

the best way to get them cursed because God has promised he will curse them if they choose cursing.”

Acts 6. Now, it's not saying that the Apostles are super-duper and that they couldn't talk to the people, it's just that there were so many people to care for that the Apostles had to leave the very, very most important work they had which was spending time in prayer and preparing Bible teaching for their people. They had to leave that to go and take care of the menial issues of managing the funds that were collected to care for widows and so, they elected deacons. “And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon.” That's not the Timon from Lion King, it's a different Timon. “And Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch.” Now, we don't know much more about Nicolas from this passage or, really, from the Bible other than what we're going to see in Revelation today and many of the early Church Fathers, Irenaeus and few others like that, believed that this is the guy that is alluded to.

Hebrews 9, “Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all.” Verse 4, “Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly.” Why can they not speak? Because they didn't know where it was. It's not like he wrote it in the order of which it would've traveled to him, but actually that's exactly how he did it.

You might notice, Laodicea is over here. It's the last church. Philadelphia is the second to the last. Thyatira comes after Pergamos which was after last week with Smyrna and Ephesus. It's exactly how they're written, in that order is the order in which he would've traveled in this u-shaped path is the order in which the churches are addressed. And the reason they're addressed that way is because the letters would have been dropped off or delivered in the order in which he would've gone to visit those places. Interesting, eh?

Now, we've already seen in chapter 1, the seven spirits, the seven stars and we will revisit those. There is so much good stuff to talk about in this book. Look at verse 12, here we go,

“And to the angel,” or the messenger, “of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a

stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.” Jesus says, “I hate that stuff.”

Verse 16, “Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”

That is the letter to the third church. So, we have a multitude of questions to answer, don't we? First of all: notice, please, that Jesus refers back to chapter 1 when he introduces himself. Do you remember, the church at Ephesus? He says, “I am the one who hold the stars in my right hand and I'm the one who walks amidst the seven candlesticks.” And that is how he is described in chapter 1. Do you remember that vision of the Son of Man? You need to listen to the recording if you don't remember. I can't reteach it; we've got to keep moving. Smyrna, he introduces himself as “the first and the last and the living one who was dead.” Do you remember that from chapter 1?

Then the church of Pergamos, notice how he introduces himself in verse 12, “These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.” So, here's the question: why did Jesus describe himself this way? Look at chapter 1:16, “And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword.” Now, look at chapter 2:12, our passage for today, “These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.” Please notice the warning in verse 16, “Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them,” that is, those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, “I will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

Now, hold your place here, it's important that you hold your place here. Look at chapter 19, please. We are interested in the themes that John writes in this book. Remember the scene that opens in verse 11. “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.” Please notice verse 12, “His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.” Remember that, please. Did you see that? He had a name written which no man knew because that came up in our passage today. Remember, I'll give you a white stone with a name written on it that no man knows except he himself? So, these are themes that continue all throughout the 22 chapters of Revelation. So, when you are reading something in the book of Revelation, you should be thinking,

“And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.” Now then, you should see in chapter 2:12, “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.” Whatever that meant to them in that culture, we know that

it meant something in particular to them in this book. So, the entire book is about the revelation of Jesus Christ. It says so in the very first verse of the very first chapter that the title of the book is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." It's forecast in chapter 1:7, it's described, or it's recorded, in chapter 19. He says that when he comes, he will come with a sharp twoedged sword coming out of his mouth and with it, he'll smite the nations. Based on that, based on that, in chapter 2:12, when you're reading this as a member of the church of Pergamos, what do you feel like you're being warned about? Punishment. When? When Christ returns.

Let us, please, look at verse 16 and let's see if we see it coming again. "Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." He says it twice. We're supposed to be able to put the twoedged sword coming out of his mouth with the Second Coming and this church is warned about it twice.

1 Peter 4, look at verse 17, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" The church of God was also to fear the day of the Coming of Christ.

Chapter 1 of 1 Peter. The Scripture is amazing; we learn so much reading the Bible. Look at 1 Peter 1 where it says in verse 13, "Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." At the what? The revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now, please, look if you would, at verse 16, "It is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning," how? "In fear." The church needs to be aware that the one with the twoedged sword is coming and they need to prepare themselves. Repent or I'll come quickly and fight against them.

(...) I'm not talking about the punishment of faithful believers. Any other questions? He's worrying about the Nicolaitans, right? (...) While you're looking, we're going to go forward. Ok?

Let's look at verse 13. Why does John, next question up on the screen, why does John describe Pergamos as the place where Satan has a seat? Sarah, I'm sorry to make you do this. Could you back to the very first slide, the title slide, and I want to show you a picture that probably should have been on this slide, but I was suffering from Young-timers. This is the Temple of Zeus in Pergamos and if you look at it from the front, as a matter of fact, I said something about Study Bibles earlier, if you have a Thompson Chain Reference Bible, they have a picture of this in the back of the Bible. So, this is the Temple of Zeus and viewed from the front, what do you suppose that looks like? A throne and that's why the church called it "Satan's seat" because it looked like the throne of Satan. As a matter of fact, there are other guesses. I would be remiss if I were to tell you that there weren't other guesses. This is the altar of Zeus, rather. There is also a temple of the god of healing that looked like a throne of Satan.

The fact is, Pergamos was an interesting city. It had the second largest library in the known world back then. I'm going to ask my bookstore owner back there, Jeremy, where was the biggest library found? Alexandria. Well, the second largest was in Pergamos. It had 200,000 volumes which might not sound like a big deal for a huge library but how about when every book is copied by hand? Do you think that's a big deal, then? 200,000 volumes in Pergamos and they had the second largest amount of gods and temples at Pergamos. So, the fact that it describes Pergamos twice as the place where Satan lives, at the beginning of verse 13, the place "where Satan's seat is" and the last part of verse 13, this is "where Satan dwells," could be a reference to the temple or the altar of Zeus but it could also be just a simple, off-the-cuff, Holy Spirit inspired comment about how thick it is there in demonic activity. That's about all I know on that, we're at verse 13.

Now, let's talk about that sharp twoedged thing again. Help me out. Where were you going with that, sir? (...) Of course. Discipline has the end-game of bringing your children back to you whereas punishment has the end-game of everlasting separation. Sure. Without question. The only people that needed to fear in that church at Pergamos were the Nicolaitans and those who held the doctrine of Balaam. Well said.

Let us look now at verse 13 again and we're going to talk about Antipas. Who is Antipas? And what happened to him? You see verse 13? "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name." Jesus said, "You guys don't ever deny me." "And hast not denied my faith." Jesus says, "It's my faith. It's my body of doctrine." If you didn't get it from Jesus, it doesn't matter if you got it from Joseph Smith or Charles Tates Russell, it's wrong. The real faith comes from Jesus. "You held my faith even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr." So, Antipas, according to Tatford and his "Patmos Letters" says that Antipas, listen to this, was a dentist and physician in Pergamos who was accused of disloyalty to Caesar and so he was given time to repent and he hid and when he was found he was put into a brazen bull that was heated red-hot. That's how he died for his faith. That's humbling.

So, Antipas was a notable man. You can find that record in the book "Martyrs' Mirror." My copy that I had is now in Hawaii. I gave it to some of our folks who have moved on and I will buy another copy as soon as I find one, but it was translated into English in 1644, I believe. It was originally in the Dutch language and it is to the free church, like us, what Foxe's Book of Martyrs was to the protestants. Foxe's Book of Martyrs is to the protestants what the Martyrs' Mirror is to Baptist folks, free-churchers. Because you know, protestants, you know, the truth is, they were state-church folks. You talk about Calvin in Geneva, Switzerland, you talk about Martin Luther in Germany, you talk about the Presbyterians in Scotland, they all still have a state church. England had the Church of England, so protestants still believe in persecuting Baptists if they didn't march to their tune. You just have to go back to Colonial days and you'll see that Baptists from Rhode Island went to Boston, started a church in Boston and they were whipped in the town square of Boston, Massachusetts by Church of England people. Let's be real careful about pointing too many fingers.

Look at verse 14, “I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam,.” Alright, so we’ve already talked about this. This is going to be a quick one. What did Balaam do? Well, he tried to curse the children of Israel, he was unsuccessful and it says in this verse and we find out from Numbers 31 that he actually moved Balak, the king of Moab, “to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel.” What was the stumblingblock? I didn’t want to say it, but I appreciate you being bold about your answer, Brother. Someone says, “You just don’t like women.” No, no, no, no, I love women, my wife is a woman and my mother, she was a woman, too. My grandmother, a woman. Daughters, women. So, there are no issues here with Bill Sturm against women. This is a record from Scripture, okay? I want to eat, I want to sleep in my own bed, you know, you’ve got to be careful about the stuff that you say.

Let’s look further in chapter 2:15. Who is Nicolas and what did he do? Now, why do I ask that question? Maybe that’s leading the witness a little bit. Verse 15, “So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.” So, we have two major guesses as to what Nicolaitan means. Remember, the etymology or the word meaning behind it means “the conqueror of the laity; the conqueror of the common people.” However, it also means “a person who followed Nicolas; someone who followed Nicolas.” Again, I’ve already shared with you that apparently this guy that’s mentioned in Acts 6, later on became what is known as a Gnostic. That doesn’t start with “n,” it starts with a “g.” A Gnostic teaches that the Christ is a spirit; it’s not a particular person, it is a spirit that comes upon certain people in history. That’s what a Gnostic teaches. Of course, there are several brands of Gnosticism, but a Gnostic teaches that Jesus was not the Christ until his baptism when the Holy Spirit came on him. When he died, he was no longer the Christ until his resurrection and then he was the Christ again. So, Gnostics taught that all things that were holy were not of this material world, they were spirit, they were part of a different kind of world.

And you’re probably thinking, “Well, I’m glad that stuff doesn’t come up anymore.” Oh, yes it does. The Christian Scientists teach that. The Buddhists teach that. So, you need to understand that this Gnostic idea didn’t die in the early church. There are many people and, by the way, you can all trace it back to a particular Greek philosopher who taught that all real things were in the realm of the invisible somewhere and all this is imagined and fake. Does anyone remember that philosopher? Plato, right. I didn’t mean to rhyme. Man, I just tell you, when you’re on, you’re on.

Plato says that all reality is found in the realm of the invisible. That sounds boring, but that has some real ramifications, doesn’t it? 1. There is no real sin. If nothing down here is real, this is all imagined and we’re just kind of brains hooked up to sensors, then we’re not really sinning and we don’t really need a Savior and all this evil we’re experiencing is really just imagined. Really? That went from what we call Gnosticism in the days of Nicolas and his Nicolaitans all the way up to Mary Baker Eddy in the 1800s of the Christian Science movement. So, please understand, this stuff has not gone away. All falsehood is not new. And, yes, I meant that.

We're going to move forward and we're going to ask another question. But before I do, do you have any other questions? We're moving through this. I hope you're making notes in the margin of your Bible and just kind of enjoying it with us.

We've already talked about this question so let us move forward. What does an overcomer overcome? So, let's look at chapter 2:17. Remember, we've talked about everything so far that is in between verses 12 and 16, the best I can tell. By the way, what does repent mean in the beginning of verse 16? It means to have a change of mind. It can mean turn away based on the context, but it means to have a change of mind, to think again. So, he says, "You have some people here in your church that are giving parlay to the people who love Balaam and his doctrine and to the Nicolaitans. You'd better change your mind about being hospitable to them. You'd better change your mind or I'm going to come quickly and I'm going to judge them with my twoedged sword."

So, a quick coming of Christ as Brother Walter already pointed out, is not a comfort to everybody. It's not a comfort to everybody, it is a threat. And that's why John says in 1 John 3:23, abide in him so that when he comes we will not be ashamed.

Chapter 2:17, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." We've got to move kind of quickly on this last verse here. To him that overcometh. Again, look, I am sure that the Bible in your lap has an opinion and my opinion is really pointless if I don't have some Scripture to back it up. Not all Study Bibles are wrong. Not all commentators are wrong. I'm not always right and we're not always going to be right. Not even you. As good of a cook as you are, you're not always going to be right.

So, we're not always going to be right but, look, we need to let the Bible tell us what the Bible means. I want to tell you that when you open your Bible tomorrow for your devotions, please, please, think about what God says about his own Word before you think about what Our Daily Bread says about it. It's very important. We've got to be very careful about this.

To him that overcometh. I want to know: what are we overcoming? Well, let's look at chapter 12, let's get John's answer and we will look, probably, in verse 6, "And the woman," now who's the woman? We'll talk about it in weeks to come, "fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days." I have good news for you: if you just came from the early service, you heard a little bit about this. If you're going to the late one, you're going to hear more about this. So, I'm not going to live here long. I just wanted you to know that 1,260 days is 3 ½ years, Jewish years, a Jewish year of 360 days and this is 3 ½ x 360.

Verse 7, "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought," so we are half through what will be known as the tribulation period in this passage. "There was war in

heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they," who is they? "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." You should see that the "they" that overcame is the brethren of verse 10. The brethren overcame him by the blood of the Lamb. They overcame who? The accuser of the brethren. How did they overcome him? The blood of the Lamb.

So, overcomers overcome what? The accuser of the brethren. And in chapter 15, please look there with me, verses 1 and 2. This is further into this tribulation period we've talked about, "And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God. And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God." Now, there is a plethora of things in that verse I can't wait to talk to you about, but, be that as it may, I just wanted you to see the church at Pergamos was told "overcome." In John's context, we're dealing with overcoming the accuser of the brethren in chapter 12 and the beast in chapter 15. Now, that's scary stuff.