

THE STEADFAST BUT COMPROMISED CHURCH

(Rev 2:12-17) 11/04/18

Grace Bible Church, Gillette, Wyoming

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I. THE CITY OF PERGAMUM

- A. Pergamum (modern Bergama, Turkey) is located about one hundred miles north of Ephesus.
- B. Pergamum was not on the main trade route; however, it was Asia's greatest city and capital.
- C. Pergamum was known for its massive library of approximately 200,000 handwritten volumes. It was second only to the library in Alexandria, Egypt. Tradition has it that parchment was made popular in Pergamum.
- D. Like Smyrna, Pergamum was steeped in pagan worship. It was the center for the worship of four main deities of the Greco-Roman world. There were temples dedicated to Athena (goddess of wisdom, handicraft, and warfare), Asclepius (god of healing), Dionysus (Bacchus, god of wine and festivity), and Zeus (top Olympian god, god of sky and thunder).
- E. As for emperor worship, Pergamum built the first temple dedicated in honor of Emperor Augustus in Asia (29 BC). Later, two other temples were built to honor Trajan and Septimus Severus.

II. THE CHURCH AT PERGAMUM

- A. Christ: Sharp Two-edged Sword (12)
 1. The third letter was written to the messenger of the church in **Pergamum**. Like Smyrna, the church at Pergamum was probably started from Paul's evangelistic endeavors from Ephesus (Act 19:10).
 2. The Lord's **sharp two-edged sword** *rhomphaia* - large broad sword with two cutting edges) is mentioned twice in this letter (cf. Rev 2:12, 16). The "two-edged sword" was also observed in the vision of Christ in Rev 1:16.
 3. The symbolism of the two-edged sword refers to judgment in connection with God's Word (Heb 4:12-13; Eph 6:17). It specifically targeted the unrighteous and false teachers (cf. Rev 19:15, 21). However, here it is applied to the church at Pergamum.
- B. Commendation: Steadfastness of Faith (13)
 1. Pergamum was situated in the midst of **Satan's throne**. Satan's Throne may have been the immense and magnificent altar of Zeus. *The structure is a monumental colonnaded court in the form of a horseshoe, 120 by 112 feet. The podium of the altar was nearly 18 feet high* (Yamauchi).
 2. It may also have been the worship of Asclepius, the god of healing. People would come from all over the world to the Temple and Healing Center of Asclepius. Every shrine of Asclepius depicts him with snakes because he channeled his healing power through snakes. Non-poisonous snakes freely roamed the temple in order to heal the worshippers. This was as satanic as the Old Serpent himself (Rev 12:9; Rev 20:2). Incidentally, the emblem for the medical profession is a snake(s) on a staff (Asclepius' staff).
 3. Others view Satan's throne as the emperor worship in Pergamum. Among all the emperors, Domitian had a hyper-deity complex (*Dominus et Deus* - "Lord and God").
 4. The fact that it was Satan's throne revealed that it was Satan himself who **dwelled** there. He controlled his warfare movement against Christ and Christ's church. As one might expect, Satan is mentioned many times in Revelation (at least 33 times - Rev 2:9, 10, 13, 24; 3:9; 9:11; 12:9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17; 13:1, 2, 4, 11; 16:13; 20:2, 7, 10)
 5. Though the believers lived where Satan's throne was located and were under constant satanic attack, they held fast to the Lord's **name**. The believers "**held fast**" (*krateō*), which means they held strong and steadfast in the faith. They were hard pressed living in Satan's throne, but they **did not deny** the faith ("**My faith**," i.e. Christianity).
 6. So strong was the opposition at Pergamum that the Lord mentioned one of the martyrs by name; his name was **Antipas**. The Lord called Antipas His witness ("**My witness**"). The word "**witness**" is the Greek word *martus*. It did mean witness, but when so many Christian witnesses were killed for their faith, the meaning of the word changed to our English word martyr. The Lord identified Antipas as a powerful and faithful witness (**My faithful one**). Christ used the pronoun "My" four times revealing He has a personal relationship with believers. Antipas must have been so vocal for the Lord that Satan silenced and **killed** him.
- C. Criticism: The Teaching of Balaam (14)
 1. However, despite the fact that they were steadfast in their faith, the Lord had a **few things against them**, namely, that the church had compromised aberrant teaching and behavior.

2. Specifically, some among them were **holding** (*krateō* - same as v. 13, hold strong) to the teaching of Balaam. What exactly was the **teaching of Balaam**? He put a **stumbling block** before Israel involving the women of Moab. They influenced the men of Israel them to **eat things sacrificed to idols** and to commit acts of immorality. Balaam, the prophet for hire, was not able to curse the Israelites for Balak, the king of Moab (Num 22:10-11; 23:8). The men of Israel began to engage in sexual immorality with the daughters of Moab, eat food sacrificed to idols, and worship Baal (Num 25:1-3). According to Num 31:16, Balaam, who could not curse Israel, counseled Balak to lead Israel astray through the women of Moab.
 3. The teaching of Balaam could be summarized as a compromise with paganism and immorality. **Some** in Pergamum **held** to the **teaching** of Balaam by continuing to attend the pagan feasts along with its sexual immorality (temple prostitution). Those within the church, even though they did not commit those acts, tolerated their sinful lifestyle.
- D. Criticism: The Teaching of Nicolaitans (15)
1. In addition, some were “**holding**” (*krateō* - same as vv. 13 and 14) to the teaching of the **Nicolaitans**.
 2. The Nicolaitans were introduced in Rev 2:6 when John wrote to the church in Ephesus. Obviously, the influence of the Nicolaitans had been growing throughout Asia. Tradition suggests that it was started by the deacon Nicolas mentioned in Acts 6:5, who had gone astray.
 3. The phrase **in the same way** (*homoiōs* - likewise, similarly) is emphatic [coming at the end of the construction] and compares the teaching of Balaam with the teaching of the Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans also compromised paganism and immorality. Some would add Gnostic elements to their teaching.
- E. Correction: Repent, or the Sword (16)
1. This was a serious matter for the Lord. Some were holding to teachings that were “hated” by the Lord (Rev 2:6). The only proper response toward sin is to “**repent**” (*metanoēō* - change of mind that results in a change of behavior). The imperative to “repent” is used eight times in chapters 2 and 3 (Rev 2:5; 2:16; 2:21; 2:22; 3:3; 3:19).
 2. If the church at Pergamum did not repent, then the Lord would **come quickly**. This coming was not in the sense of His second coming, but in judgment and discipline
 3. The **sword** is the word of God and sometimes it is used in reference to judgment (cf. Rev 1:16; cf. Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12).
 4. The entire church at Pergamum was in danger of the Lord’s judgment, those who were practicing paganism and immorality, and the rest of the church for tolerating it.
 5. There may also be a play on words here. The angel of the Lord had drawn His sword to keep Balaam [Balaam’s donkey] from going against the Lord’s will (Num 22:23). Now the Son of Man had drawn His sword to keep Pergamum from going against His will.
- F. Conclusion: New Name in Stone (17)
1. This warning was not for Pergamum alone. It was intended for all churches of all ages. It was for anyone who had an ear to hear the **Spirit’s** message to the **churches**.
 2. Once again, the **overcomers** are those who have trusted in Christ for salvation. They have overcome through Christ (1Jo 5:4).
 3. Therefore, they will receive the **hidden manna** from Christ. “Manna” was the supernatural sustenance [type of honey wafer or bread, Exo 16:31] provided for Israel while in the wilderness (Exo 16:14-15, 35). It was even to be kept in a jar and placed in the ark of the covenant (cf. Exo 16:32-34). Christ is the Manna [Bread of Life] that came down from heaven (Joh 6:48-51). Hidden manna symbolizes Christ and all His heavenly blessings given to the believer (Eph 1:3).
 4. In addition, the believer will receive a white stone with a new name written on it. It is believed by some that the **white stone** is similar to one of the stones connected with the high priest’s Urim and Thummim that revealed God’s will (Num 27:21). In heaven, God will reveal His will to the believer. A more plausible explanation is that the white stone was connected with the athletic awards. The winning athlete would receive a white stone with his name on it. He would then be able to present the stone and attend a special awards banquet.
 5. It symbolizes the believer’s invitation into heaven. Each believer will have a **new name** written on the stone. It will be a personal name given by God to the believer. It will have spiritual significance that applies specifically to that believer. **No one** will **know** the name except for the one who **receives it**.