

THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS

TEXT: REV. 2:12—17

Introduction:

1. Pergamos was considered one of the finest cities in Asia. It had a famous library, second only to Alexandria, consisting of 200,000 books.
2. W.A. Criswell said that according to legend, the city of Pergamos was built by a son of Hercules on a hill near the Aegean Sea.
3. Pergamos was a very wicked and idolatrous city – it was well known because the temple of Aesculapius was located there. Aesculapius was the demigod of medicine and healing.
4. In honor of Aesculapius, snakes were often used in healing rituals. Non-venomous snakes were left to crawl on the floor in dormitories where the sick and injured slept.
5. That is why to this day, the caduceus is the symbol of medicine. The caduceus is a winged staff with two snakes wrapped around it.
6. Today when doctors take the Hippocratic Oath they say, “I swear in the presence of the Almighty and before my family...” But the original oath began like this, “I swear by Apollo the physician, Aesculapius, and Hygieia (a daughter of Asclepius and the goddess of health), and Panacea (another daughter), and all the gods and goddesses...”
7. It is no coincidence that snakes symbolize the heathen god Aesculapius, and Revelation 2:13 says, “I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is...”
8. Twice in Revelation 2:13 we are told that Satan seat was (at that time) located in Pergamos.
9. Alexander Hislop, in his famous book, *The Two Babylons*, says that after the death of King Belshazzar, and the expulsion of the Chaldean priesthood from Babylon by the Medo-Persian kings, Satan’s seat was moved from Babylon to Pergamos.
10. Hislop wrote that when Julius Caesar, became both Pontifex Maximus as well as the Roman Emperor, he became both the supreme civil ruler of the Romans, as well as the head of the Roman religion.
11. Later on, during the rise of the papacy, Satan’s throne was moved from Pergamos to Rome (cf. Rev. 17).
12. This is a great location for a Bible-preaching church. CT Studd was an English missionary to China, India, and Africa. He said,

“Some want to live within the sound
Of Church or Chapel bell;
I want to run a rescue shop
Within a yard of hell.”

I. THERE IS THE NEED TO HOLD FAST (2:12, 13).

1. We need to hold fast to Jesus’ name (2:13). Our Lord is “He which hath the sharp sword with two edges” (2:12; cf. 2:16; 1:16; 19:15, 21).
2. Notice in Rev. 2:13:
 - “my name” “my faith” “my faithful martyr”
3. Our Lord told the church at Smyrna, “Be thou faithful unto death” (2:10). Antipas was faithful unto death (2:13). We know nothing about Antipas. His name means, “Against All.”
4. Antipas “held fast” even unto death. Antipas held fast in the face of Satanic opposition. Satan’s seat (throne) was in Pergamos.
5. Today, Satan’s seat could be right here in New York City. He may not live here but he certainly spends a lot of time here, and he has many demons stationed here.
6. New York has more homosexuals, more prostitutes, more drunkards, more dope addicts, and more vicious criminals than any city in America. Probably more than anywhere in the world!
7. Recent statistics from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene reveal that New York City has a 41% abortion ratio –a rate almost twice the national average of 23%.
8. Some of the neighborhoods with the highest abortion rates are in Southeast Queens -- St. Albans 60%, Laurelton 60%, Rosedale 58%, Jamaica 57%, Rochdale Village 57%, Cambria Heights 55%.
9. These statistics also revealed that in 2009 48,627 of the 87,273 abortions in New York City, or 56%, were repeat abortions. 33,401 (38%) were paid for by Medicaid.
10. New York is a very wicked city! Our mayor lives in concubinage with his girlfriend, and so does the governor. In many ways, NYC is far worse than Pergamos!
11. Pergamos was also a stronghold of false religion.
12. And what about NYC? The Jehovah's Witnesses have their international headquarters in Brooklyn. New York is a city dominated by every type of cult and false religion – Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Romanists, liberal Protestants, Scientology, Moonies, voodoo and Santeria, etc.

13. There are even many Satan-worshippers here in NY. Years ago, my family and I were thinking of buying a house in East Rockaway – until we went upstairs to the second floor. There was a huge pentagram drawn on the floor, along with other Satanic symbols.

II. THERE IS THE NEED TO REPENT (2:14-16).

1. I heard a preacher say this one time: “We often hear preachers say that our Lord’s last words were: ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature’ (Mark 16:15). But that is not true. His last words were “Repent, or else...” (Rev. 2:16; cf. 2:5, 21, 22; 3:3, 19).
2. Strictly speaking, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (the Great Commission) was the last thing our Lord said before He ascended into heaven.
3. However, the resurrected Christ’s last words were “Repent, or else...” (Rev. 2:16).
4. The church at Pergamos was tolerating “the doctrine of Balaam” (2:14). They did not necessarily believe the doctrine of Balaam, or endorse the doctrine of Balaam, but they were tolerating it.
5. But there are certain things Christians should not tolerate. Our lord says in Rev. 2:16, “Repent; or else I will come unto thee (church members) quickly, and will fight against them (those who held the doctrine of Balaam) with the sword of my mouth.”
6. What is the “doctrine of Balaam”? Balaam is one of the strangest men who ever walked across the pages of the Bible. We are introduced to him in Numbers 22:1-5.
7. A few chapters later, we read that Balaam was killed by the Israelites when they defeated the Midianites. His death is recorded in Numbers 31:8.
8. His life and death are spread over a few chapters in the book of Numbers, but he is also referred to in the book of Deuteronomy (23:4, 5), the book of Joshua (13:22; 24:9, 10), the book of Nehemiah (13:2), and the book of Micah (6:5).
9. Furthermore, he is referred to three times in the New Testament (cf. II Peter 2:15, 16; Jude 11; Revelation 2:14).
10. Numbers 31:16 refers to “the counsel of Balaam” (cf. Rev. 2:14). Here in the book of Revelation, we see that 1,500 years later “the doctrine (i.e., the “counsel”) of Balaam” had infected the church at Pergamos.

11. Down through the ages, this wicked doctrine of Balaam has been polluting churches and hindering the work of God. Peter refers to “the way of Balaam.” Jude refers to “the error of Balaam.” And here in His letter to the church of Pergamos, our Lord refers to the “doctrine of Balaam.”
12. Going back to Numbers 31:16 we see “the counsel of Balaam.” The counsel of Balaam refers to Balaam’s suggestion to ruin by fleshly seduction the people who cannot be cursed by divine permission.
13. Revelation 2:14 applies it to corruption in the local church – modern day Balaams advocate an unholy alliance with the worldly and with the ungodly. This worldly alliance has corrupted many, many churches.
14. Remember Pergamos was “where Satan dwelleth” (Rev. 2:13). It was a wicked city known for occult activity. Balaam had a great reputation as a soothsayer (fortune-teller), and he is referred to as a soothsayer in Joshua 13:22.
15. Numbers 24:1 tells us that Balaam used “enchantments” (magic spells, sorcery).
16. Divination, sorcery, and fortune-telling are very popular today, but is strongly condemned in the Bible. Peter refers to Balaam as a “mad” prophet (II Peter 2:16). Balaam gave Balak, the king of Moab (Rev. 2:14) certain subtle and immoral advice, which nearly ruined Israel (Numbers 25:1-9).
17. This horrible sin is referred to several times in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The apostle Paul refers to it in I Corinthians 10:8.
18. “Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.”
19. Balaam was behind this horrible sex scandal recorded in the book of Numbers (cf. Num. 31:16). He told Balak, “Listen, I cannot curse Israel because God has already blessed them...but here’s my advice...let your beautiful Moabite women come around at night and before you know it the Israelite men will be worshipping Baal-peor, and committing adultery with them” (Num. 25:1-9).
20. When a church tolerates sin, they need to repent (Rev. 2:14-16).
21. In addition to those holding to the doctrine of Balaam, in Revelation 2:15 our Lord says, “So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.”

22. We need to remember that there are certain things God hates and therefore so must we. Proverbs 8:13 says, “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil.”
23. God hates false doctrine (2:15), and God hates false deeds (2:6). False deeds and false doctrine go together.
24. God hates sin (2:6, 15). Just recently I read about a lady who was visiting a bad neighborhood. She saw a filthy little girl playing in the dirt. She said to her guide, “Why is this little girl so dirty? Why doesn’t her mother clean her up?”
25. The guide said, “Her mother loves her, but she does not hate dirt. You hate dirt but you do not love her. She needs someone who loves her and hates dirt. Otherwise she will remain dirty.”
26. Here is the point: we must love the sinner, and hate sin. Otherwise we will never be an effective soulwinner.

III. THERE IS THE NEED TO OVERCOME

1. Every letter concludes with the same promise: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh...” (2:17).
2. How do you know if you have “overcometh” (2:17). See I John 5:4, 5.
3. Three things are promised here:
 - (1) “The hidden manna,” which represents fellowship with Christ. He is “hidden” from the world.
 - (2) “A white stone.” This represents pardon. In ancient courts of law, a white stone meant acquittal and a black stone meant condemnation.
 - (3) “A new name written” (cf. 3:12). Revelation 21:5 says, “Behold, I make all things new.” In the book of Revelation we see a new name, the new Jerusalem, a new song, and a new heaven and a new earth.

CONCLUSION:

1. Regarding our Lord’s promise in Revelation 2:17, Christ Himself made it clear that the manna from heaven was a type of Himself. He said in John 6:48, 51, “I am that bread of life...I am the living bread which came down from heaven.”
2. Have you received this living bread?