

“The Church in Pergamos”

Revelation 2:12-17

Introduction: Similar to the church in Smyrna, Pergamos had their round of persecutions. However, after Constantine ascended the throne in Rome, things began to change. It was during his conquest to conquer the world, around A.D. 312, that he supposedly saw a cross in the sky. The words “In this sign thou shalt conquer” were over the cross suggesting to Constantine that if he would embrace the cross that he would be victorious. When he consented to this supposed vision, Constantine proclaimed that Christianity would be the religion for the Roman Empire. His first attempt to “Christianize” Rome would be to baptize his armies, making them “Christians”. Through his efforts, he tried to combine the state and the church, making them one. (DeHaan) With the emperor as the head of the “church”, things began to become intolerable. Roman Emperors would now dictate not only the powers of government, but also the powers of religion. The “churches” became filled with unregenerate sinners that tried to lead the nation, and church, spiritually. Only complete chaos and heretical doctrines followed. This was where the doctrines of the Nicolaitans and Balaam took root in the church in Pergamos. Several professed Christ, but only few possessed Christ. This is why the Lord had a few things against the saints at Pergamos, because they too began to mix paganism with Christianity. By way of introduction, notice:

1. The Announcement v. 12- “*And to the angel...*”
 - a. A Divine Announcement Revelation 1:11- “*I am Alpha and Omega*”
 - b. A Direct Announcement- “*to the angel*”
2. The Angel v. 12- “*...the angel of...*”
 - a. The Meaning of an Angel
 - (1) “angel” (Strong’s)- “a messenger, envoy, one who is sent, a messenger from God”
 - (2) “angel” (Webster’s)- “A minister of the gospel, who is an ambassador of God. Literally, a messenger; one employed to communicate news or information from one person to another at a distance.”
 - b. The Message of an Angel- “*write*” Revelation 1:11- “*write in a book*”
3. The Assembly v. 12- “*...the church in Pergamos write...*”
 - a. The Explanation of Pergamos
 - (1) “The chief city of Mysia, in Asia Minor.” (Online Bible)
 - (2) “This city stood on the banks of the river Caicus, about 20 miles from the sea. It is now called Bergama, and has a population of some twenty thousand, of whom about two thousand profess to be Christians. Parchment was first made here, and was called by the Greeks *pergamene*, from the name of the city.” (Online Bible)
 - (3) “Located on the western part of Asia Minor north of Smyrna and about twenty miles from the Mediterranean Sea, it was a wealthy city with many temples devoted to idol worship and full of statues, altars, and sacred groves.” (Walvoord)

- (4) “The city also had a temple dedicated to Aesculapius, the god of healing, whose insignia was the entwined serpent on the staff. (This is still a medical symbol today.)” (Wiersbe)
- b. The Era of Pergamos- A.D. 300-500

Body: Although Pergamos was being pulled to the ways of the world, our Lord offers them a warning to repent. How many times do we begin to drift the wrong direction and the Lord sends a message at the right time to pull us back on course? Worldliness was wrapping its fingers around the church and was about to choke the life out of them until God gave them a sermon through their pastor. Through this message, Pergamos would have another chance to serve the Lord without suffering the consequences of backsliding. Observe the admonition delivered to the saints at Pergamos.

- I. The Overseer of the Church v. 12- *“These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges”*
 - A. The Possession of the Sword- *“he which hath the sharp sword”*
 - B. The Power of the Sword- *“the sharp sword with two edges”*
 1. The Effectiveness of the Sword- *“the sharp sword”*
 2. The Edges of the Sword- *“sword with two edges”* Hebrews 4:12
- II. The Occupation of the Church vs. 13-16- *“I know thy works...”*
 - A. The Seat of Satan v. 13- *“I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is”*
 1. The Disciples’ Seat- *“and where thou dwellest”*
 2. The Devil’s Seat- *“even where Satan's seat is”*
 - a. “Called ‘the greatest city in Asia Minor,’ Pergamos had the first temple dedicated to Caesar and was a rabid promoter of the imperial cult.” (Wiersbe)
 - b. “This is probably what is meant by ‘Satan’s seat’ .” (Wiersbe)
 - c. “When Attalus III, the Priest-King of the Chaldean Hierarchy, fled before the conquering Persians to Pergamos, and settled there, Satan shifted his capital from Babylon to Pergamos.” (Larkin)
 - d. “At first he [Attalus III] persecuted the followers of Christ...but soon he changed his tactics and began to exalt the Church, and through Constantine united the Church and State, and offered all kinds of inducements for worldly people to come into the Church.” (Larkin)
 - B. The Strength of the Saints v. 13- *“and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith”*
 1. They Held His Person- *“and thou holdest fast my name”*
 2. They Heralded His Precepts- *“and hast not denied my faith”*
 - C. The Slaying of a Saint v. 13- *“even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth”*
 1. The Legacy of Antipas’ Death

- a. A Description of his Authenticity- *“Antipas was my faithful martyr”*
- b. A Description of his Assassination- *“who was slain among you”*
- 2. The Location of Antipas’ Death- *“where Satan dwelleth”*
- D. The Straying of the Saints vs. 14-15- *“But I have a few things against thee...”*
 - 1. The Doctrine of Compromise v. 14- *“the doctrine of Balaam”*
Numbers 22-25
 - a. It Teaches Purposeful Stumbling- *“thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel”*
 - (1) Notice Balaam’s teachings in the Scripture:
 - (a) II Peter 2:15- *“following the way of Balaam”*
 - (b) Jude 1:11- *“the error of Balaam”*
 - (c) Revelation 2:14- *“the doctrine of Balaam”*
 - (2) “Balaam was a true prophet who prostituted his gifts in order to earn money from King Balak, who hired him to curse the people of Israel. God prevented Balaam from actually cursing the nation—in fact, God turned the curses into blessings!—but Balak still got his money’s worth. How? By following Balaam’s advice and making friends with Israel, and then inviting the Jews to worship and feast at the pagan altars.” (Wiersbe)
 - (3) “If you cannot curse these people, then corrupt them.” (Phillips)
 - (4) “They ate meat from idolatrous altars and committed fornication as part of heathen religious rites. Twenty-four thousand people died because of this disobedient act of compromise.” (Wiersbe)
 - (5) “Why did this bit of ancient history apply to the believers at Pergamos? Because a group in that church said, ‘There is nothing wrong with being friendly to Rome. What harm is there in putting a pinch of incense on the altar and affirming your loyalty to Caesar?’ Antipas refused to compromise and was martyred; but others took the ‘easy way’ and cooperated with Rome.” (Wiersbe)
 - b. It Teaches Perverted Sacrificing- *“to eat things sacrificed unto idols”*
 - c. It Teaches Personal Sensuality- *“and to commit fornication”*
 - (1) “Fornication was a tolerated practice in this town.” (Simpson)
 - (2) “Demosthenes stated, ‘We have prostitutes for the sake of pleasure. We have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation. We have wives for the purpose of having

children legitimately and of having a faithful guardian of our household.” (Simpson)

2. The Doctrine of Conquering v. 15- *“the doctrine of the Nicolaitans”*

a. The Design of their Teaching- *“So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans”*

(1) The word Nicolaitan means: Niko—to conquer; Laos—the people

(2) According to Strong’s, Nicolaitans means, “destruction of people” or “victor of the people”.

(3) When leaders become lords, man becomes the head of the church instead of Christ.

b. The Detesting of their Teaching- *“which thing I hate”*
Matthew 23:8, I Peter 5:3, Matthew 20:28, III John 1:9-10

(1) Revelation 2:6- *“deeds of the Nicolaitans”*

(2) Revelation 2:15- *“doctrine of the Nicolaitans”* (Deeds lead to a doctrine.)

E. The Sermon to the Saints v. 16- *“Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”*

1. Concerning their Failure- *“Repent”*

2. Concerning their Fight- *“or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”*

a. The Speed of the Fight- *“or else I will come unto thee quickly”*

b. The Superiority of the Fight- *“and will fight against them”*

(1) The Lord does not accept toleration of sin. I Corinthians 5:6-7

(2) *“Either you deal with the Balaamites or I will.”*
(Simpson)

c. The Sword of the Fight- *“with the sword of my mouth”*
Revelation 1:16, 2:12, 19:15

III. The Obligation of the Church v. 17- *“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”*

A. The Prerequisites of Hearing- *“He that hath an ear”* Matthew 13:9

B. The Purpose of Hearing- *“let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”* Matthew 11:15

IV. The Overcoming of the Church v. 17- *“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.”*

A. The Victor’s Substance- *“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna”*

1. “God fed the Israelites with manna during their wilderness travels, and a pot of the manna was placed in the ark of the covenant.”
(Wiersbe) Exodus 16:32-36, Hebrews 9:4

2. “Instead of eating ‘things sacrificed unto idols’, the believers in Pergamos needed to feast on God’s holy food, the bread of life found

in Jesus Christ through the Word.” (Wiersbe) Matthew 4:4, John 6:32

3. “To eat of the hidden manna is to express in a symbolic way that the overcomer may feast upon Christ in the hidden place.” (Phillips)

B. The Victor’s Stone- *“and will give him a white stone”*

1. The Color of the Stone- *“and will give him a white stone”*

a. “In those days, a white stone was put into a vessel by a judge to vote acquittal for a person on trial.” (Wiersbe)

b. “It was also used like a ‘ticket’ to gain admission to a feast.” (Wiersbe)

c. The white stone that was given represented happiness. (Walvoord)

d. The white stone that was given was a symbol of friendship. (Walvoord)

2. The Caption of the Stone- *“and in the stone a new name written”*

3. The Confidentiality of the Stone- *“which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it”*

a. “In the Old Testament the high priest had the names of the twelve tribes of Israel inscribed upon the stones carried upon his breast, symbolic of the fact that whenever he appeared before God he was a mediator representing the entire twelve tribes of Israel.” (Walvoord)

b. “Whatever its character, the name symbolizes the personal heritage of the glories that are beyond this world and the assurance of eternal salvation.” (Walvoord)

Conclusion: As we look at the word Pergamos, we see what their problem was. According to Ironside, the two meanings of Pergamos are “marriage” and “elevation”. It depicts the church at Pergamos as being elevated to a place of prestige, having married themselves to worldliness. Uniting with the Roman government, Pergamos mixed their faith with paganism. Doing so brought the judgment of God on the believers. God desired to purify His church by sending His sword against “them”. The compromisers were punished while the overcomers were blessed with manna and a white stone. One of the greatest attributes of God is His forgiveness when saints do wrong. When the sincere saints at Pergamos repented, the Lord forgave them and continued His church.