

THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

Pergamum Lesson 7 COC Sept. 9, 2020

Script. Text: — “12 *To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of Him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.* 13 *I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to My name. You did not renounce your faith in Me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.* 14 *Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality.* 15 *Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.* 16 *Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.* 17 *Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious,*

I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.

I. THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM — Rev. 2:12-17

- A. The **Apostle John**, when penning these words of **Jesus**, wrote this letter to encourage the Christians in **Pergamum** for their past & present faithfulness to Christ, & to urge them to reject the false teaching in their midst.
- B. **Pergamum** (modern-day **Bergama**) lies approx. 50 miles north of **Smyrna** (modern-day **Izmir**) — (inland a few miles from the Aegean Sea)
- C. The name "**Pergamum**" means "citadel."
- D. **Pergamum** is noteworthy for three reasons:
1. **First**, it was a center for many pagan religious cults, & Emperor worship was more intense in Pergamum than in any other surrounding city.

2. **Second**, it boasted a University with a large library, second only to the one in **Alexandria, Egypt** —
3. **Third**, it was the leader & center of the production of parchment, which derived its name from the city.

E. It was to the **City of Pergamum** that **Jesus Christ** described **Himself** as **"the One who judges with His Word"** (**"the sharp two-edged sword"**) —

1. In fact, in **Rev. 1:16**, when speaking of the **Vision of the Son of Man**, the **Apostle John** wrote of **Jesus** - **"He held seven stars in His right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from His mouth. And His face was like the sun in all its brilliance."**
 - a. The sword in **Jesus'** mouth symbolizes the power & force of His message. His **Words of Judgment** are as sharp as swords —
 - b. **Isaiah 49:2** prophecies of the future **Redeemer** — **Servant Messiah**, **"He made**

My words of judgment as sharp as a sword. He has hidden Me in the shadow of His hand. I am like a sharp arrow in His quiver."

c. **Hebrews 4:12-13** declares, "12 *For the Word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than any two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.* 13 *Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before His eyes, and He is the One to whom we are accountable."*

2. With the brute force of revelation, **John** would write again in **Rev. 19:15, 21** these words, *"From His mouth came a sharp sword to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will release the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty, like juice flowing from a winepress." ... "Their entire army was killed by the sharp sword that came from the mouth of the One riding*

the white horse. And the vultures all gorged themselves on the dead bodies."

F. **God's** Word both separates believers from the world, & sinners from God.

1. This is its double-edged quality —

2. The *sharp sword*, with its *two edges*, is the ***"sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."*** **Eph. 6:17**

a. The ***Sword of the Spirit*** cuts two ways —

i. It is capable both of a direct thrust & a back stroke —

ii. The forward thrust is for **conviction**

iii. The back stroke is for **destruction**

b. With one edge **Jesus** fights **for** us, with other **He** fights **against** us —

c. The church in **Pergamum** is warned that unless they **repent**, the *sharp sword with two edges* will be turned against them —

G. **Life** and **death** are in view —

1. Why? Because **Pergamum** was one of the only cities outside of **Rome** where officials

were granted the authority to carry this specific sword (Gr. *Hromphaia*), which had the power of life & death in cases of capital offenses.

2. Roman authorities symbolized their power to carry out "capital punishment" in **Pergamum** by wearing the (*ius gladii*) sword.

H. So **Jesus**, when speaking to the Church in **Pergamum**, reminds these precious believers that although they live under the rule of an almost unlimited imperium (absolute power), they were **citizens of another Kingdom**— the Kingdom of Him who needs no other sword than that of **His mouth** —

II. **JESUS' COMMENDATION** —

A. In **Rev. 2:13**, the **Apostle John** records **Jesus'** commendation of the church in **Pergamum**, "**I know where you live - right there where the Satan has his throne! You have clung to My Name, & have not denied My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My faithful witness, who**

was killed in your midst, in the dwelling place of the Satan."

- B. The **Pergamum** Christians had held firmly to their commitment to **Jesus Christ** & their witness for Him, even though they lived in one of Satan's strongholds.
- C. **Andreas** once said, "*there were more idols in Pergamum than in all Asia.*"
- D. The Letter to **Pergamum** reveals to us the alloy of faithful service as well as *the perils of timidity* —
1. **Eusebius**, who wrote from **Caesarea** 300 years after **John** wrote **The Revelation**, informs us with the uncertain voice of tradition — that **Corpus** was the pastor of the church in **Pergamos** & he died, suffering a Martyr's death —
 2. **Antipas** - **the faithful witness**, is said to have been a **dentist** & a **physician**, but the **Aesculapiades** suspected that he was

propagating Christianity secretly & they accused him of disloyalty to *Caesar* —

3. *Antipas* was then condemned to death (during the reign of Nero) & was shut up in a brazen (or copper) bull-shaped altar, which was then heated until it was red-hot.

a. This is the kind of *altar* the local population made sacrifices in to cast out demons —

E. Notice now, In *Jesus'* commendation, *He* graciously concedes that the church in *Pergamum* is in the very "*throne of Satan*" — the most unfavorable position in which it could be placed.

1. *He* notes that when persecution raged with its greatest violence against them, the believers at *Pergamos* maintained their greatest consistency & faithfulness to *His* Name.

2. It is believed by many, that "*Satan's throne*" may be an allusion to one or more of the pagan temples in the city, most likely the *Aesculapium*.

3. The *Aesculapium* was a complex of buildings devoted to the *god of healing*.
 4. According to Charles, this made **Pergamum** "*the Lourdes of the Province of Asia.*"
 5. Others believed that this "**throne of Satan**" could be a reference to the Altar of Zeus, which was very prominent in **Pergamum**.
 6. Another possibility is that "**Satan's throne**" refers to Emperor worship, which was *stronger* in **Pergamum** than elsewhere.
 7. Still another view is that this description pictures **Pergamum** as the most pagan of the seven cities: *Satan* not only controlled it, but it was the site of his "*throne.*"
- F. There were few, if any, parts of the world that presented greater attractions than **Pergamum** to the students of nature, history, or art —
1. **Pergamum** is filled with memorable names & extraordinary mythical exploits —

2. **Pergamum** is the native land of *Homer*, the oldest of the Greek poets, & of *Herodotus*, the father of history —
3. The finest work of art, the celebrated **Venus**, is attributed to the people of **Pergamum** —

G. In **29 A.D.** a temple was erected to the *divine Augustus* & the goddess *Roma*, & there, a special priesthood was formed.

1. This served as the **Cathedral Centre** of the **Imperial Cultus** (a system of religious worship) & dissent was not tolerated.
2. *Swete* writes of **Pergamum's** rampant paganism, including *Emperor* worship.

H. As I earlier stated, **Pergamum's** library was second only to that of *Alexandria*, but **Mark Anthony** took the contents of the library to *Egypt* & gave it to **Cleopatra** as a gift —

I. Galen the Physician was born there.

J. Pliny wrote his "*longe clarissimum Asia Pergamum*" there —

K. The magnificence of **Pergamum's** edifices caused it to be described as the City of Temples —

1. **Pergamum** was a union of a pagan cathedral city, a university town, & a royal residence. —
2. This is what made **Pergamum** such a significant city to the official Roman Authority —

III. **JESUS' REBUKE** —

- A. In **Rev. 2:14-16**, John records **Jesus'** rebuke of the church in **Pergamum**, "14 *But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who instructed Balak to cause the children of Israel to stumble, making them eat things sacrificed unto idols, & indulge in sexual immorality. 15 So, too, you have some among you who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 Repent! If you don't, I*

will come unto you quickly & will fight against them with the sword of My mouth!"

B. *Balaam* told *Balak* (king of Moab) that he could overcome the *Israelites* if he would involve them in *Moabite religious feasts* that included *sacred prostitution* (see **Num. 25**).

1. This was intended to render the people of **God** unfaithful to **God** & consequently, make them subject to **His** discipline —

C. The **pagans** in **Pergamum**, likewise, were encouraging the *Christians* to join in their *pagan feasts* & the *sexual immorality* that accompanied those feasts —

1. By participating, some in the church had given tacit approval to *Balaam's* teaching.

2. The "*Nicolaitans*" also regarded these sins as acceptable, but under the pretense of **Christian liberty** (see also **Rev. 2:6**)

3. Interestingly, "*Balaam*" in Hebrew can mean **"swallow the people,"** so the ideological

connection between the *Nicolaitans* ("*conquer the people*") & *Balaam* is clear.

4. These corrupt teachers are alluded to in **2 Peter 2:15** & in **Jude**.
- a. It is evident that there were two different, but similar groups in the **Pergamum** church, both of which had disobeyed the decision of the *Jerusalem Council* in regard to *idolatrous practices & fornication*.
 - b. Script. "18 ***Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.***
 19 ***And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.*** 20 ***Instead, we should write & tell them to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, & from consuming blood...*** 28 ***For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, & to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these few requirements;*** 29

You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, & from blood, & from things strangled, & from sexual immorality. If you do these things to keep yourselves, you shall do well. Fare ye well. **Acts 15:20, 29**

- D. We easily see one of the main tenets of the **doctrine of *Balaam*** that is widely held as *truth* today in prominent *Christian* circles is the erroneous belief that equal blessings & rewards have been set aside for every *Christian* solely on the basis of **Jesus Christ's** finished work on **Calvary** & the Believer's positional standing **"in Christ."**
1. As a result, all Christians—regardless of their personal conduct during this present time—will receive *crowns & positions of power & authority* with **Jesus Christ** in the [millennial] **Kingdom**.
 2. And yet, that '*belief*' is markedly different & completely contrary to the *teachings* of the of **Scripture**.

E. The *Israelites* did not *sin* with immunity, & neither will the Christian.

1. *Sin* in the *Camp of Israel* resulted in the *Israelites* being overthrown in the wilderness, short of the goal of their calling.
2. It will be no different for the *Church*, thus the language of **Jesus** to **Pergamum** — **Repent!**
 - a. If the erring believers would not judge themselves & **repent**, they could anticipate **God's** judgment!
 - b. The person who is unwilling to repent demonstrates that he/she lacks a faithful relationship with the **love of God** as a Believer.
3. You see, these two sects were at work among the church in **Pergamum** & were influencing them into idolatry & impurity —
 - a. they were effectively **"conquering the people"** because their doctrines were alike in the fact that they were antinomian in principle & immoral in result —

b. As a result, **Jesus** said to **Pergamum**, "*in like manner*" you have this thing at work "*of which I hate.*" (ref. **Rev. 2:6**)

IV. **JESUS' EXHORTATION** —

A. It's interesting to remember that **Paul**, when writing to the **Corinthian** church, said: "30 *That's why several of you are weak & sick, & some have died.* 31 *But if we learned how to judge ourselves, we would not incur judgment.*" **I Cor. 11:30-31**

B. **Jesus** exhorts **Pergamum** to **Repent** —

1. This single-word **admonition** expresses the whole requirement of **God** —
2. And it represents the whole duty of man when *man deviates* from the paths of **God's Word**

C. If **Pergamum** does not, then they would die by "*the sword*" proceeding from **Jesus Christ's** "*mouth.*"

1. **Balaam** had **died**, ironically, by the **Israelites'** *sword* (**Num. 31:8**).

2. This judgment would be by the unyielding standard of **God's** revealed *Word*—that clearly condemns such behavior.
- a. Having taken sides with the enemy they could expect **God** to oppose them in **His** "war" against evil.

V. **JESUS' PROMISE** —

A. Script. *"Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit & understand what He is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give some of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven. And I will give to each one a white stone, & on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understand except the one who receives it."* Rev. 2:17

B. **God's** Word to the church of **Pergamum** makes clear that the Believer can rise up to free him/herself from the Corruption & Condemnation of hell's seducers —

C. To that man or woman who lives in the very

abode of Satan; who resides within earshot of Hell's damnable doctrines — yet if he/she *wills*, they can overcome the *wiles of the devil* by listening to the **Spirit of God** rather than the *seducing spirits* —

- D. To them — **"they shall eat of the hidden manna"** which restores the spirit that the flesh-pots of Egypt have weakened.
1. To them — they choose to turn from the lies of the Nicolaitans & Balaam to receive the *white stone* of absolution, the true spiritual emancipation which the *Balaamite* tried to counterfeit —
 2. The **"hidden manna"** seems to be a reference to the *miraculous manna from heaven*, that sustained the lives of the Israelites in the wilderness, of which a sample keepsake lay **"hidden"** in the holy of holies.
 3. The *Christians* in **Pergamum** did not need the food of pagan festivals, since they already had much better food.

4. For Christians feed spiritually on **Jesus Christ**, the **"Bread of Life"** who is the real Manna, hidden from sight now.

(ref. **John 6:48-51**)

ADDITIONAL NOTES ———

It's interesting that some scholars believe the **"white stone"** may in fact allude to the *tesseron*.

1. Ex: Mounce said a *tesseron* was, "... given to those who were invited to partake, within the precincts of the temple [at Pergamum], of the sacred feast, which naturally consisted only of meats offered to the idol. That stone bore the secret name of the deity represented by the idol and the name was known only to the recipient."
2. A white stone represented a vote of acquittal or a favorable vote.
3. Victors in contests or battles also received a white stone.

4. Perhaps **God** will elevate the overcomer to the position of ruler over the earth, and will give him or her a new name, as **He** did for *Joseph* (see **Gen. 41:39-45**), *Abram* (see **Gen. 17:5**), & *Jacob* (see **Gen. 32:28**).
5. The "*name*" on that stone is "*new*" (Gr. *kainon*) in the sense of being different, not new in contrast to what is old. However, the "*name*" is probably that of "**Jesus Christ.**" (see **Phil. 2:9**)
6. Another view is that the name is that of its possessor, perhaps "*son of God.*"
 - a. This name is "*unknown*" to others ("**which no one knows but he who receives it**"), in the sense that others who are not overcomers do not possess it.
7. The historical parallel to the church in **Pergamum** is the period following Constantine's legalization of *Christianity* in A.D. 313, that lasted for about 300 years.

8. When *Christianity* became the official religion of the empire, *paganism* overwhelmed it.
- a. It became hard to distinguish true *Christians*, because people claiming to be *Christians* were everywhere.
 - b. Many of them were "*practicing pagans*," who indulged in immoral festivals & all kinds of behavior inconsistent with the teachings of *Christianity* —
 - c. Many writers have noted that "**Pergamum**" comes from the *Greek* word, *gamos*, that means "*marriage*."
 - i. Could it be that this letter challenges a church for her "*marriage*" to the world rather than to **Jesus Christ**.