

The Church In Pergamum

Rev. 2:12-17

REV 2:12 "And to the angel [messenger] of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

1. "And to the angel" - See notes on Rev. 2:1
2. "of the church in Pergamum write" - "Pergamum" is considered the best spelling of this city, but some versions spell it "Pergamus" and the KJV has "Pergamos."
 - a. ESV & ASV have "Pergamum. "
 - b. The Greek spelling is "Pergamos," and "Pergamos" is a transliteration of that word.

City

1. It was a city of Mysia in NW Asia Minor and about three miles North of the river Bakyrtschai.
2. It was about twenty miles from the sea.
3. It had a vast library of about 200,000 volumes, and was a city of learning.
4. In this city was first discovered the art of making parchment, which was called "pergamena."
5. This was a very idolatrous city, and was filled with statues and altars.
 - a. Zeus considered their "Savior" was there.
 - 1) In Greek mythology he was king of the gods and of men.
 - 2) He is identical with the Roman Jupiter.
 - b. Athena meaning "Victory-bearer" was there.
 - 1) She was the goddess of wisdom, courage, inspiration, civilization, law and justice, just warfare, mathematics, strength, strategy, the arts, crafts, and skill.
 - 2) Athena was also a shrewd companion of heroes and is the goddess of heroic endeavour.
 - c. Dionysos [or Dionysus] their "Leader" was there. He was the god of the royal family, and the kings claimed to descend from him.
 - 1) Dionysos was the son of Zeus, chief of the Olympians, and Semele, a woman of Thebes, according to the most used geneology.
 - 2) Dionysos was the god of wine and madness, vegetation, and the theatre, and was the focus of various mystery cults (which were not, perhaps, exactly cults, but let's not get into that).

- d. Asklepios was the god of medicine and healing and was their “Healer.”
6. The citizens of Pergamum believed the Roman Emperor was divine, and engaged in Emperor worship.
 - a. The first temple build in honor of the Emperor was erected at Pergamum in about 29 B.C..
 - b. There was an Imperial Cult there that worshiped the Emperor and pressured others to do the same.
 - c. Pergamum was the seat [center] of the Imperial Cult and its citizens showed their allegiance to the Emperor by exclaiming “Caesar is Lord” and worshiping him.
 - d. It was extremely difficult to be a Christian in this wicked city due to the influence and threats of the majority of its citizens.
 7. “Pergamum” or “Pergamos” was the political capital of Asia Minor.

Church At Pergamum

1. Nothing is known about this church beyond what Jesus here reveals about it.
2. It may have been established when Paul’s co-workers were evangelizing Asia.(Acts 19:10).

ACT 19:10 And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

3. In the New Testament “Asia” is sometimes used to mean Asia Minor. (Rev. 1:4).

REV 1:4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne;

Description of Jesus

1. “The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this” - “Distomos” [**dis** tah mahs] means “with two edges, two-sided.”
 - a. The Hebrew writer compared the word of God to a sharp two-edged sword and affirmed it is “sharper.” (Heb. 4:12).

HEB 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

- b. One must never underestimate God’s powerful word.
2. This language was used earlier in Revelation. (Rev. 1:16).

REV 1:16 And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

- a. The Roman proconsul ruled by the sword, but Jesus had a sharp two-edged sword proceeding from His mouth.
- b. This reveals the awesome power of Jesus.

- c. This sword was able to utterly defeat His enemies.
- d. His powerful words can convert men and they can also destroy those who oppose Him.

What Was Right With The Church

REV 2:13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

1. "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is"
 - a. "Pergamum" may be called "Satan's throne" because of Satan's strong influence in that city.
 - b. See earlier notes about the Imperial Cult
 - c. The word "Satan" comes from the Greek word "satanas" and means "Satan, adversary, opponent." (Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:11; 11:14; 12:7; 1 Thess. 2:18; 2 Thess. 2:9; 1 Tim. 1:20; 5:15).
 - 1) Satan is real and powerful as the leader of the fallen angels.
 - 2) He constantly seeks to devour us. (1 Pet. 5:8).
 - 3) Satan is not omnipresent, omnipotent or omniscient, but he works for the condemnation of every human being.

2. "and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith"
 - a. It seems most of the members had remained true to the Lord in their personal lives, and had not denied the faith.
 - 1) The word "faith" is objective and refers to the gospel system. (Acts 6:7; Gal.1:23; Jude 3).
 - 2) It does not refer to some subjective faith that differed with each individual.
 - 3) They had not denied the faith, but had remained true to Christ and the gospel.
 - b. They believed the words of Jesus. (Matt. 10:32,33; Mk. 8:38).

MAT 10:32 "Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.

MAT 10:33 "But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

MAR 8:38 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

- c. They followed the admonition of Peter. (1 Pet. 4:16).

1PE 4:16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.

- d. The word "name" stands for Christ and His authority in the New Testament. (Acts 4:7-12; Col. 3:17).

ACT 4:7 And when they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"

ACT 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people,
ACT 4:9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well,
ACT 4:10 let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead-- by this name this man stands here before you in good health.
ACT 4:11 "He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the very corner stone.
ACT 4:12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved."

COL 3:17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

- e. They had faithfully and courageously remained true to the commandments of Jesus.
 - f. All must do this to be saved. (Matt. 7:21; Lk. 6:46; Jn.14:15; 15:14).
3. "even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells"
- a. Nothing is known about Antipas except what Jesus states about him.
 - b. He had been a faithful witness of the truth, and Jesus calls him "My faithful witness."
 - c. He had been killed at Pergamum because of faithfulness to Christ.
 - d. He lived sometime before A.D. 96 assuming this is when John penned this book.
 - e. There are some who believe that Antipas was not a real person but that he represented those who had remained faithful to Jesus to the point of death. It is argued that Jesus would not have used his real name because it would have meant persecution for that family.
 - f. They view "Antipas" as a cryptic way of describing those who had resisted their enemies to the point of death.
 - g. This may be true, but there is really no evidence for this theory.

What Was Wrong With The Church

REV 2:14 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality.'

1. Most had been faithful, but were sinning by tolerating evil teachings.
2. Christians must not be tolerant of those abiding in sin and refusing to repent.
3. Paul had warned against toleration of evil. (1 Cor. 5:6).

1CO 5:6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?

"Balaam"

1. Balaam was an Old Testament prophet who encouraged Balak King of Moab to entice Israel to engage in immorality and idolatry. (Num. 25:1-5; 31:16).

2. In this regard he is mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament.

2PE 2:15 forsaking the right way they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness,

JUD 1:11 Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

Teaching of Balaam

1. “But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam”

- a. Note only “some” held to “teaching of Balaam.”
- b. They did not escape the knowledge of the Lord. See Prov. 15:3.

2. “who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel”

a. Balaam “kept “ the teaching of Balak.

- 1) Balak was the son of Zippor, the king of the Moabites (Num. 22:2, 4).
- 2) He was terrified by army of the Israelites who had encamped near his territory, and had been victorious over their enemies.
- 3) He appealed to Balaam for help, and paid Balaam to seduce the Israelites to commit fornication. (Num. 25:1; Rev. 2:14).

b. Balak set out to lead the Israelites astray and was very successful in this endeavor.

c. Balaam was a heathen diviner who lived at Pethor.

- 1) Pethor was a city of Mesopotamia. (Deut. 23:4).
- 2) He belonged to the Midianites, but possessed some knowledge of the true God. (Num. 31:8).
- 3) He acknowledged his superior powers as a poet and prophet were derived from God.
- 4) He was a very greedy man and this greed led him to lead Israel astray for money. (Num. 22:5-7).

NUM 22:5 So he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, at Pethor, which is near the River, in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, "Behold, a people came out of Egypt; behold, they cover the surface of the land, and they are living opposite me.

NUM 22:6 "Now, therefore, please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

NUM 22:7 So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam and repeated Balak's words to him.

3. “to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality”

- a. It was not wrong per se to eat meat sacrificed to idols. (1 Cor. 8:4-8).

1CO 8:4 Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.

1CO 8:5 For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords,

1CO 8:6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.

1CO 8:7 However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

1CO 8:8 But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.

b. It was wrong to eat it in the idol's temple, and to eat it in any way associated with idolatrous worship.

c. It was wrong if it led others astray. (1 Cor. 8:9-13).

1CO 8:9 But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

1CO 8:10 For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?

1CO 8:11 For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.

1CO 8:12 And thus, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

1CO 8:13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble.

d. It was wrong if it violated conscience. (Rom. 14:23).

Note:

1. Paul revealed some 23,000 were slain in one day because of their sins. (1 Cor. 10:8).

1CO 10:8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.

2. The Old Testament affirms that 24,000 died because of their fornication and immorality. (Num. 25:9).

NUM 25:9 And those who died by the plague were 24,000.

3. There is no contradiction. Paul gives the number who died "in one day" - not the total killed.

Teaching of the Nicolaitans

REV 2:15 'Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.'

1. This party is mentioned twice in the book of Revelation. (Rev. 2:6, 15).

a. The church at Ephesus hated the works of these men. (Rev. 2:6).

b. It is sad that some in this church held "the teaching of the Nicolaitans."

c. Ancient sources affirm that they believed in eating things offered to idols and believed it was permissible to participate in idolatrous worship.

d. They also practiced immorality that nearly always accompanied the worship of idols.

2. The teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans were very similar, and scholars have long discussed the differences without a decisive conclusion.

Call To Repent

REV 2:16 'Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.'

1. "Repent therefore" - The word "repent" comes from the Greek word "metanoeo" [meh tah nah eh oh] meaning a change of mind, a change of heart produced by "godly sorrow." (2 Cor. 7:10).
 - a. It is significant to point out that "godly sorrow" is not repentance.
 - b. It leads to repentance.
2. "or else I am coming to you quickly" - This would be an invisible coming to exercise discipline or judgment on evil doers who did not repent.
 - a. It is not a reference to Christ's second coming at the end of time.
 - b. Note "coming to you quickly."
3. "and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth" - This is a reference to the powerful and destructive words of Jesus. The words of Jesus can save and they can destroy.
 - a. Men feared the fierce sword of Rome.
 - b. The sword coming forth from the mouth of Jesus was to be more feared.

Admonition And Promise

REV 2:17 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

1. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" - They were to hearken to what the Spirit was saying to them.
2. "To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna" - This is likely the true spiritual food that will sustain believers in heaven.
 - a. It was promised to those who did not eat at the pagan banquets and embrace idolatry and the immoral life associated with it.
 - b. "Hidden manna" may be the same as "the tree of life."
 - 1) Adam and Eve were separated from "the tree of life" lest they partake of it and live forever. (Gen. 3:22,23).

GEN 3:22 Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"--

GEN 3:23 therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.

2) This tree exists in heaven and is available to the saved. (Rev. 2:7; 22:2).

REV 2:7 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.'

REV 22:2 in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

3. "and I will give him a white stone" - White stones or pebbles were used in courts for acquittal and black stones for condemnation.
 - a. No information is given here about the "white stone."
 - b. It is a stone denoting victory rather than condemnation.
 - c. Here are uses of "a white stone."
 - 1) It was used as a vote for acquittal.
 - 2) It was symbolic of victory.
 - 3) It has been suggested that this might be a ticket to the heavenly banquet.
 - 4) Some think it was a tablet on which something victorious was written.
4. "and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it"
 - a. Only the one receiving the "white stone" would know the "new name."
 - b. Since only the Lord and the one receiving it knows the name written on the stone, it is vain to interpret the exact meaning of it.
 - c. It is certainly something indicating victory.
 - d. The one trusting in Jesus is promised victory. (1 Jn. 5:4,5).

1JO 5:4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith.

1JO 5:5 And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

5. Christians today can be confident they will be victorious in Christ and one day eat "the hidden manna" in heaven.
6. We are "more than conquerors" in Christ. (Rom. 8:37-39).

ROM 8:37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

ROM 8:38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

ROM 8:39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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