

## **Session 3 Pergamos: A Church with Compromise (Rev. 2:12-17)**

<sup>12</sup>“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: <sup>13</sup>“I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. <sup>14</sup>But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup>Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. <sup>16</sup>Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. <sup>17</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”” (Rev. 2:12-17)

### **I. THE PRIMARY MESSAGE**

Pergamos was encouraged for their faithfulness as they were called to stand up against false teaching that tolerated compromise with idolatrous feasts, which were like parties filled with immorality.

### **II. THE CHURCH OF PERGAMOS**

- A. The church in Pergamos was in a wealthy city and was a center for idol worship. It was about 20 miles from the Aegean Sea. It is also spelled Pergamum, Pergamus, and Pergamon. It had a large university with a famous library of 200,000 volumes. Today, the village of Bergama is on the ancient site.
- B. It was the first city in Asia to build a temple to worship the emperor. In 29 BC, the temple for Augustus was completed making it the religious capital in the east as Rome was in the west.
- C. The throne of Satan refers to a multitude of major altars of worship to the four most prominent Greek gods: Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, and Asclepius (Aesculapius), along with being the center of emperor worship for Asia. Each had a priesthood with temple prostitution. When the cult of the Magians was driven out of Babylon, it relocated in Pergamos.

### **III. JESUS’ REVELATION OF HIMSELF**

<sup>12</sup>“These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword.” (Rev. 2:12)

- A. The sword comes from Jesus’ mouth to release judgment on His enemies (Rev. 1:16; 19:15, 21).  
<sup>15</sup>*Out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike nations...*<sup>21</sup>*The rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him...* (Rev. 19:15, 21)
- B. Jesus uses the sword of His mouth to withstand the threats of evil governments such as ancient Rome and especially the Antichrist’s government at the end of the age. He uses the sword of His mouth to war against sin and darkness anywhere that it persists.

### **IV. AFFIRMATION FOR FAITHFULNESS**

<sup>13</sup>***“I know your works, and where you  dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.” (Rev. 2:13)***

- A. ***I know you dwell where Satan’s throne is and where Satan dwells:*** In Pergamos there was reference to a complex of pagan temples and demonic activity.
1. The throne of Satan refers to the multitude of altars of false worship (Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, Asclepius, emperor worship, and Magians), along with the demonic spirit of persecution, plus the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans that were strong in that church. The combination of these made Pergamos an oppressive satanic city.
  2. As Rome was the center of Satan’s activity in the west, so Pergamos was his “throne” in the east. Satan’s throne, or center of manifest power and activity, is also in other cities. Will the throne of the Antichrist in Revelation 16:10 be at Pergamos?
- B. Satan’s activities will escalate in the Tribulation to fill the earth with Satan worship.
- <sup>21</sup>***They did not repent of their murders...sorceries or their sexual immorality. (Rev. 9:21)***
- C. ***I know your works:*** Jesus understood the dynamics in which they had to minister.
- D. ***You hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith:*** Jesus knew that many held fast to His name in the midst of so much satanic activity. To hold fast to Jesus’ name refers to doctrinal purity and faithfulness even in the face of death. Jesus will give us power to be faithful in the midst of hostile and sinful cultures.
- E. We hold fast to Jesus’ name in the end times by refusing the mark of the Beast (Rev. 13:13-17). We will do this by using the authority of God’s Word by speaking it with our mouths.
- <sup>11</sup>***They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. (Rev. 12:11)***
- F. ***Antipas was My faithful martyr:*** Tradition says that Antipas was the bishop in Pergamos and that he was placed in a copper vessel heated by fire and boiled to death.
- G. Jesus is called the faithful witness (Rev. 1:5). He referred to Antipas by this title.
- H. Jesus will have a multitude of faithful witnesses who will be with Him as He makes war with the Antichrist to end the Armageddon campaign.
- <sup>14</sup>***These [10 kings] will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them...and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful. (Rev. 17:14)***

**V. CORRECTION FOR COMPROMISE**

<sup>14</sup>“**But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.** <sup>15</sup>**Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.**” (Rev. 2:14-15)

- A. ***I have a few things against you:*** the two groups (Balaamites and Nicolaitans) were similar yet distinct. They both taught a perversion of the doctrine of liberty. They taught that it was okay to participate in the partying and immorality of that day under the pretense of Christian liberty.
- <sup>4</sup>***Certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness.*** (Jude 4)
- B. Antinomianism is the erroneous belief that the gospel frees us from obedience to specific moral standards, holding that salvation is given as a gift by faith and, therefore, that there is no need to repent (*nomos* is Greek for “law”).
- C. ***You have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam:*** the doctrine of Balaam involved participating in temple feasts and their orgies. Some of the leaders in the church taught it was okay to participate in these parties or pagan feasts.
- D. ***Who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality:*** Balaam advised King Balak to defeat the Israelites by getting them to participate in feasts related to idolatry and immorality (Num. 25). This caused God to judge Israel. The Israelites came under God’s judgment as 24,000 people died.
- E. A stumbling block is a trap that, when triggered, shuts on its prey. This refers to anything that causes a person to fall into sin.
- F. ***You also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate:*** This refers to followers of Nicolas, the Jerusalem deacon who fell into error (Acts 6:5). This was the common view among the early church fathers. For example, Irenaeus in the second century taught that the Nicolaitans were without restraint in their indulgence of the flesh, especially with immorality. This distortion of “liberty in grace” that allows for compromise within a sinful culture is prevalent in the Church today. This view best represents what Jesus was saying in this passage.
- G. This doctrine and practice was also prominent in Ephesus (Rev. 2:6).
- <sup>6</sup>***But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.***” (Rev. 2:6)
- H. Twice Jesus mentions His hatred of the Nicolaitans. What were *deeds* in Ephesus were *doctrines* in Pergamos. The teaching allowed the spirit of compromise to go unchallenged. The church continued to allow those who held the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans to remain. They had not purged themselves of such false doctrine as the church in Ephesus had (Rev. 2:6).

## VI. EXHORTATION TO RESPOND (WITH A WARNING)

<sup>16</sup>“**Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.**” (Rev. 2:16)

- A. **Repent:** We must turn away from personal compromise and tolerance of it in the Church.
- B. **I will come to you quickly:** Jesus comes to His Church to evaluate it at specific seasons.  
<sup>3</sup>***“If you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.” (Rev. 3:3)***
- C. **I will fight against them with the sword of My mouth:** Jesus will release the sword of His mouth in judgment against this toleration in the church. Jesus will cleanse His Church. This is not a reference to the second coming but a coming related to this church’s failure to repent.
- D. Balaam was eventually killed by the sword (Num. 22:23, 31; 25:5; 31:8). However, the Lord sent an angel to warn Balaam with a drawn sword to obey God’s Word. He would have been killed with the sword earlier if it had not been for his donkey speaking up (Num. 22:22-25).
- E. Phinehas, filled with God’s zeal, stood up against the sin that Balaam helped facilitate.  
<sup>11</sup>***“Phinehas...has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal.***  
<sup>12</sup>***Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; <sup>13</sup>and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.’” (Num. 25:11-13)***

## VII. PROMISE FOR OVERCOMERS

<sup>17</sup>***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.” (Rev. 2:17)***

- A. **I will give some of the hidden manna to eat:** It was hidden only after it was put in the golden pot in the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies (Ex. 16:32-36; Heb. 9:1-5). This speaks of having increased capacity to be fed by the revelation of the Word in this age and in the age to come. Hidden manna suggests the marriage supper of the Lamb. Only the high priest could see this hidden manna once a year, on the Day of Atonement, as he entered the Holy of Holies.
- B. Jesus is the true bread or manna from heaven that sustains us (Jn. 6:48-51). The overcomer is promised full enjoyment of something he already has a foretaste of.
- C. God supernaturally sustained His people in the OT with manna. The manna was called angels’ food (Ps. 78:19-25). In the Tribulation, God’s people will receive natural “manna” in the wilderness (Rev. 12:6, 14).
- D. **I will give him a white stone:** precious stones were given as awards to honor those who offered valiant service to the community or in battle. Those receiving these stones were also given special privileges. A white stone with one’s name on it gave them admission to special events, including the games and feasts hosted by the Roman Empire.

1. I believe this applies to various degrees of honor and privileges in the marriage supper of the Lamb or the messianic feast of Revelation 3:20; 19:9. Jesus will exalt the overcomer to positions of authority over the millennial kingdom. This was given to motivate greater faithfulness to Jesus. Overcoming this affects their status at the messianic banquet.
  2. There is some uncertainty what the white stones exactly mean because there is no specific scripture that tells us clearly what it is. Since there is no need of protection for born-again believers in eternity and because these rewards are to those already secure in God's presence, this cannot be the white stone of acquittal from guilt as some suggest.
  3. The stone (Gk., *petros*) referred to a precious stone (diamond). White (Gk., *leukos*) refers to shining or glistening (Mt. 17:2; Rev. 3:4, 5; 6:11; 7:9, 13; 19:14).
- E. ***On the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it:*** a special name will be given to indicate one's faithfulness, character, and role in the millennial kingdom (Isa. 62:2; 65:15; Rev. 19:11–16; Rev. 14:1; Song 1:3; Acts 15:17). The new name will be written on the white stone.
1. It reflects our unique relationship with Jesus. The new name denotes the victor's new state in the age to come. It also reveals one's personality (Gen. 32:28; Isa. 62:2; 65:15). This is an aspect of our intimacy with God.
  2. They held fast Jesus' name (2:13). In return, they will get a new name.
  3. Simon was renamed Peter to speak of his character and position as the rock. Abram's name was changed to Abraham to indicate that he was to be the father of a multitude (Gen. 17:5-15). God changed Sarah's name. Jacob's name was changed to Israel to speak of his place of government and access to God.
- F. To overcome in this context means to refuse to participate in idolatry or immorality and to stand up against false teaching on grace that allows others to be confident in their compromise.

#### **VIII. THE TIME PERIOD PROPHETICALLY SPOKEN OF BY CHURCH OF PERGAMOS**

The period refers to the time when the Church and state functioned closely together (313–606 AD).