

Daily Bible Study

“Seven Letters ~ Pergamos”

Revelation 2:12-17

March 2 – March 8, 2014

MONDAY – In our study of the letters to the seven churches of Revelation we have seen the loveless church of Ephesus, the persecuted church in Smyrna, and now we come to the compromising church in Pergamos. Michael Wilcock states that “If Ephesus was the New York of Asia, Pergamum was its Washington, for there the Roman imperial power had its seat of government.” As a side note, if there is another underlying lesson we can learn in this letter it is that the government can’t save you. Policy and order can’t save and rescue a sunken ship. It may have lots of nice rules posted on the walls and the deck chairs may be polished and placed in order but if it sits dead on the bottom of the ocean, it is of no real and lasting use. We also know that here at Pergamos the earliest temple for the state-sponsored worship of the Emperor was built. In summary we shall see that Satan is working here through the pressures of non-Christian society. He persecutes (Smyrna) and He seduces Ephesus & Pergamos) as he desires nothing better than to lead God’s people into sin and apathy and destroy their testimony to the power of Jesus Gospel and here he attempts to do it through temptation to sin and embrace the world in its thinking and practice. He likes “worldliness” for it is opposed to God and is proud, disobedient and unsubmitive like it’s father, Satan himself. After all he tells us, where is the harm in being like everyone else in the world? Everyone else does it; why shouldn’t you? Read: **Revelation 2:12-17:** ¹²“*And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: 13 ‘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. 14 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. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. 17 ‘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.’”*

Suggestion for Prayer: God, teach me from Sacred Scripture that You called me to be separate from the world and its way of thinking which lies in opposition to You & Your Word. Help me see I can overcome through the power of Your written & living Word.

TUESDAY – **Revelation 2:12:** ¹²“*And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword.’*” This third church was located in Pergamum or Pergamos (modern Bergama) some sixty-five miles to the north of Smyrna and fifteen miles from the Aegean Sea. Its name has been perpetuated in the English term *parchment*. This expression illustrates the industry of ancient Pergamum, where due to a trade embargo its people, unable to buy paper products (made from Egyptian papyrus leaves), and prepared animal skins for writing purposes. The city not only marketed these skins but also opened a library that eventually housed some two hundred thousand scrolls (books). The city had this enormous library and a university and it became a learning center. Pergamos was located at an elevation of about one thousand feet and was a city of prominence in the centuries before the Romans invaded and made it a capital. Like Ephesus and Smyrna it was a wealthy city, but it was wicked. Pagan cults here worshiped among others, Athena, Asclepius, Dionysus, and Zeus. Asclepius was the god of healing and was famous for “healing” and attracted the interest of countless people suffering from physical maladies. His symbol was the snake, which still can be found in our medical emblems today. Zeus was the main god, as Walter Burkert points out in his book, *Greek Religion*, “*Even the gods who are not his natural children address him as Father, and all the gods rise in his presence.*” For the Greeks, Zeus was the “King of gods” and he oversaw the universe; he is in fact another of Satan’s attempts to replace the true, living, ruling Creator God Father, Son Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit. To say the least, the proud sinful atmosphere of this city was adverse to any effective Christian life and testimony. The city was evil and immoral and the rebuke coming from Jesus is prefaced by John who describes Jesus in this record as the one *who has the sharp two-edged sword*. The sword is symbolic of the Word of God’s and its ability to separate believers from the world and to condemn the world for its sin. It is the sword of salvation as well as the sword of death. Even though the same words “*the sharp two-edged sword*” appear earlier in the text (**1:16**), the Greek here uses a sequence with definite articles for emphasis. Literally, the clause reads, “*the one who has the sword, the two-edged one, the sharp one.*” It was and is not the Roman proconsul or the governor who decided on matters of life and death, but it was Jesus, with the sharp, double-edged sword of his word proceeding from his mouth. It is not the President, governor, or House and congress either. It is Jesus and He will indeed fight with this sword against his enemies (see – **2:16, 19:15, and 21**). Again we are taught the power of Word of God (**Hebrews 4:12**).

Suggestion for Prayer: Thank You Jesus that it is Your Word that brings life, it is the power, and I can trust You. Help me not put my trust in the wisdom of man, the government or my own feelings & thinking. Help me treasure, trust, and obey Your Word.

WEDNESDAY – Revelation 2:13-14: ¹³ “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. ¹⁴ 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.” Jesus now says He knows their works and where they live, where Satan’s throne is. He is fully aware of the situation in Pergamos and Salamanca and everywhere else for that matter. He is addressing believers that He has called out of their pagan environment to be his people. Jesus explains the phrase *where Satan’s throne is* with the words *where Satan dwells*. *Dwell* means to live in an established, settled manner, IE-permanently with. These believers faced strong local governmental and demonic pressure but God knew them and their perilous place and situation and was there with them. The word *throne* appears forty-two times in Revelation: forty refer to God’s throne and two to the throne of Satan and the beast (2:13, 16:10). In other words, not Satan but God is in control. There are different thoughts concerning the meaning of “*Satan’s throne*”. (1) it could refer to the large throne of Zeus which was located in Pergamum; (2) it seems that the whole city looked like a giant throne because being built on a plateau, the Acropolis stood hundreds of feet above the city itself; or (3) it could be a reference to the Concilia, the local organization to promote emperor worship, which was very powerful in Pergamum. Regardless of precisely what was meant by the phrase, we find these believers are *holding fast to My name*. They did not renounce their faith even in the days where a faithful witness of Jesus, Antipas, was killed. Despite the hardships that the Christians in Pergamum endured, they remained faithful to their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They are commended for this confessing his name not merely by word but also living in harmony with the Scriptures and walking in Jesus’ footsteps (1 Peter 2:21). By influencing the Roman authorities to enforce emperor worship, Satan sought to exploit the weaknesses of those in the church who might be tempted to renounce their faith in Jesus. But Jesus told his disciples that they are in the world but not of the world (John 17:14–18) and they are to take His message everywhere because “*I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33). We must take heart and go forth with the knowledge, assurance, and confidence that God is with us, we are victorious in Him, and His Word never returns void (Isaiah 55:11), for that Word as Paul said is never bound (2 Timothy 2:9). Jesus now says that although He commends their faithfulness, He has a *few things against them*. A reference is now made to *Balaam*

and *Balak* who in the Old Testament led God’s people into sin (Numbers 31:16, 25:1–3) and there are some people in the church of Pergamos who hold to this false teaching. Both the sins mentioned appeared in the time of Balaam, both reappeared in the New Testament church (1 Corinthians 5 and 8). The world offers the church seduction or persecution. The world can be surprised and hard on those who refuse to go along with it (1 Peter 4:4). As we mentioned last week, the very two things that the Apostles sent word to the churches to abstain from (*to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality*) are the very two things Satan wants the church to participate in.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, thanks for being with me and giving me strength to carry out Your will. Help me seek You, remain faithful, and not be influenced by the world.

THURSDAY – Revelation 2:15-16: ¹⁵ *Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.* ¹⁶ *Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.*” We learn that because of the similarity of the teachings of Balaam and the teachings of the Nicolaitans (2:6) and the teachings of Jezebel (2:20), that all three of these refer to pagan, idolatrous worship practices. As Balaam suggested to Balak, King of Moab, to involve the children of Israel in the fertility worship of Baal (Numbers 25:1–3) the Nicolaitans sought to “conquer the people” by also suggesting they could compromise with the world and embrace both sinful worldly behaviors and God’s commands. Jesus gets right to the point in **verse 16**, *Repent or else...* There is an ongoing emphasis concerning repentance from Jesus to His church. The verb *to repent* occurs twelve times in Revelation with eight of them addressing the churches in the form of a command and the other four times are in the past tense and refer to unbelievers who refused to repent. The Christians of Pergamum had to repent of their failure to expel the compromisers and the compromise with the world from among them. They and we need to see that if Jesus hates something so should his people. So he called the Christians to turn their laxity into watchfulness, to enforce spiritual discipline, and to expel the Nicolaitans and their followers. Jesus *coming* refers not to the Second Coming but to his imminent judgment that is swift and certain. The Nicolaitans would not have to wait until the Second Coming for Jesus to execute his threat. Just like the Midianites and Balaam experienced God’s judgment in the OT so the Nicolaitans would soon experience Jesus the warrior. Interestingly, during the battle that Israel fought against the Midianites at God’s command, the Israelites killed Balaam (Numbers 31:1–8, Joshua 13:22). The good news is that God works out all things for good to those who love and serve Him (Romans 8:28). Those who turn to the Lord and repent experience His love, grace, and mercy but He forsakes all those who have forsaken him (2 Chronicles 15:2, Isaiah 1:28, 65:11–12).

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, please help me to repent when You convict me of my sin and thank you also that You will fight against Your and my enemies.

FRIDAY – Revelation 2:17: ^{“17} “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.” ’ We now find he that hears Jesus Word and obeys *overcomes* being given hidden manna and a white stone. God instructed Moses to place a jar of manna in the ark of the covenant, and it was hidden from sight (**Exodus 16:32–34**). The writer of 2 Maccabees 2:4–7, states that at the destruction of Solomon’s temple Jeremiah hid the tent, ark and altar of incense in a cave of Mount Nebo and sealed its entrance and the Jews looked for the coming of the messianic age when they would eat the hidden manna. As Christians, we know that Jesus brought in the messianic age and we have since eaten the hidden manna and enjoyed His blessings. Jesus, is the bread of life (**John 6:48–49**) which satisfies forever in contrast to the temporary fulfillment of manna which needed to be gathered every day. This life-giving bread is indeed our spiritual food and the hidden manna. It is hidden from view for the unbeliever but is available to all those who put their faith in Jesus (**Matthew 11:25, Colossians 2:3, 3:3**). The meaning of the white stone remains a mystery, which commentators have tried to solve in a variety of ways. They include: **1.** White stones were cast in courts of justice to signify the exoneration of an accused person and black stones were cast to condemn him. A white stone could mark the Christian’s acquittal at the Judgment. **2.** Buildings in Pergamum in John’s day were made out of dark brown stone. Inscriptions in these buildings were cut into blocks of white marble. Hemer observes, “Honorific decrees of the city repeatedly stipulate that the record of its benefactors shall be engraved on [white stone].” The objection to this possibility is that the Greek word *psēphos* in the text means “pebble,” not “stone.” **3.** The breastplate of the high priest had twelve stones, each of which had the name of a tribe written on it (**Exodus 28:21**). Similarly, a white stone with the name of the individual believer written on it is always in God’s presence near to His heart. **4.** The stone may be a translucent precious stone like a diamond on which the name of Christ is written. The name of Jesus is written on the foreheads of the saints (**3:12, 14:1, 22:4**). In the context of Revelation, number 4 seems to be the strongest and best possibility and receives support from other passages. The name of Jesus Christ means that the saints belong to him. Already we know that here and now believers are known as Christians for as followers of Jesus Christ we walk as He did (**Acts 11:26**).

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me to hear and obey Your Word and remember that Jesus has overcome the world. Thank You for declaring me just in Your sight because of Christ and for placing me in Him, blessing me in Him and feeding me in Him by faith.