



The REVELATION of Jesus Christ

Chapter 2:12-17

“Pergamum - The Worldly Church (A.D. 314 – A.D. 590)”

- Each of these seven churches may be framed with a historical reference:

(2:1-7) *Ephesus*- The Apostolic Church (1st Century)

(2:8-11) *Smyrna*- The Martyr Church (A.D. 100 – A.D. 314)

(2:12-17) Pergamum - The Worldly Church (A.D. 314 – A.D. 590)

(2:18-29) *Thyatira*- Church of the Dark Ages, “Romanism” (A.D. 590 – A.D. 1000- continues today)

(3:1-6) *Sardis*- The Protestant Church, “Reformation” (A.D. 1517 – A.D. 1800)

(3:7-13) *Philadelphia*- The Revived Church (A.D. 1800 to Rapture)

(3:14-22) *Laodicea*- The Apostate Church (Last Days & into the Great Tribulation)

~ There are 4 insights to this worldly church at Pergamum:

> Insight #1 - (v12) Jesus the COMMANDER has a sharp two-edged sword!

> Insight #2 - (v13) Jesus commends them for their COURAGE!

> Insight #3 - (v14-15) Jesus then corrects their CORRUPTION!

> Insight #4 - (v16-17) Christ tells Pergamos to CONQUER these false doctrines

with truth!

(2:12-17) The Church of Pergamos - “The Worldly Church” (A.D. 314 – 590)

- History of Pergamos – The city of Pergamos is commonly called Pergamum. Pergamum was approximately 100 miles north of Ephesus, with Smyrna located about halfway in between. Unlike Ephesus and Smyrna, Pergamum was not a port city but was located about fifteen miles inland from the Aegean Sea. Nor was it on any of the major trade routes. Yet, as its ancient capital, Pergamum was considered Asia’s greatest city. The Roman writer Pliny called it “by far the most distinguished city in Asia.” Physician Galen, second only in prominence to Hippocrates, was born and studied in Pergamum. Pergamum survives today as the Turkish city of Bergama.

The city was one of three royal cities in Turkey within the Roman Empire. These royal cities were Smyrna, the great *commercial center*. Ephesus the great *political center*, and Pergamum the great religious center. The Pergamum religious center could be called “paganism unlimited.” The name Pergamos means “married,” so the question arises, was this church married to Rome (the world), or married to Christ?

There was a temple built to Caesar Augustus in 29 B.C., which established Pergamum as a royal city. Augustus would stay in this city when the weather became cold in Rome. There was a healing spa there and it was a fortified city built to withstand the enemy. Pergamum was built on a mountain, and the acropolis dominated the whole region of the road plain of the Caicus.

Pergamum was a boast of great temples. There was massive altar to Zeus, a temple to the goddess Athena. There was a temple to Dionysius, which is the same as Bacchus, the god of wine and alcohol, the goat-god. There was also a temple for healing known as the Aklepios. This symbolism was a serpent on a pole.

Not only did Pergamum boast great temples, but it also had the greatest library of the pagan world. It was a library of over two hundred thousand volumes. In fact, the city got its name from the parchment (pergamena), which was used. This great library was that which Mark Antony gave to his girlfriend, Cleopatra. She lugged it off to Alexandria in Egypt, and that library was considered the greatest library the world has ever seen—and it originally came from Pergamum.

> *Insight #1 - (v12) Jesus the COMMANDER has a sharp two-edged sword!*

A sword is an offensive weapon against an enemy, cutting on the way in and the way out. The Bible refers to the “*Word of God*” as the “*sword of the Spirit*” in Ephesians 6:17.

- Let us read and understand Hebrews 4:12-13 - *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*

> *Insight #2 - (v13) First, Jesus commends them for their COURAGE!*

- Here we have FIVE observations:

(1) these Christians had *good works*;

(2) *Where Satan's throne is* - Where Satan has his throne—where he reigns as king and is universally obeyed. *This passage refers to the "mystery cults" of Babylon that set up their headquarters in Pergamos. It also includes the emperor worship that played a key role in this heathen city.* It was a maxim among the Jews, that where the law of God was not studied, there Satan dwelt; but he was obliged to leave the place where a synagogue or academy was established.

(3) they held fast to the name of Jesus Christ;

(4) they would not deny the faith;

(5) they were faithful even in times of persecution (*Antipas, the faithful martyr*).

> Insight #3 - (v14-15) Jesus then corrects their CORRUPTION!

- Warren Wiersbe gives insight to Satan's strategies against the Church at Pergamos, "Despite their courageous stand against persecution, the believers in Pergamos were not faultless before the Lord. Satan had not been able to destroy them by coming as the roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8-9 - *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.*), but he was making inroads as the deceiving serpent. A group of compromising people had infiltrated the church fellowship, and Jesus Christ hated their doctrines and their practices."

- This is similar to what Paul writes in regard to the latter times, which would be our time, according to 1 Timothy 4:1-4 - *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.*

- Two false doctrines are listed:

#1 - The Doctrine of Balaam – This doctrine is found in the Old Testament Numbers chapter 22 - 25.

- C.I. Scofield writes, "Balaam the prophet taught the wicked king Balak to corrupt the people of Israel by tempting them to marry women of Moab, defile their separation unto God, and abandon their pilgrim character. It is that union of the world and the church which creates spiritual unchastity, (James 4:4-5 - *Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*). Pergamos had lost the pilgrim character and was living where Satan's throne was, in the world."

- Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 - Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. *For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an*

unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

"I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate," says the Lord.

Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." 'I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.' Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

- Let us read the "way of Balaam" in 2 Peter chapter 2.

- Not only did Balaam promote idolatry, but he also encouraged sexual immorality, the Hebrew name Balaam also means "lord of the people."

#2 - The Doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate – This false teaching is very intriguing, Nicolaitans is broken down into Greek as – Nikao, "to conquer", and laos, "the people" or "laity"; a first century sect which anticipated Rome's priesthood by dividing God's people into an unscriptural clergy—laity relationship.

- One commentator writes, "Pergamos is seen as representing the imperial church after Constantine (A.D. 313-606), wherein the church ceased to be officially persecuted and obtained access to the portals for political power. Pergamos, it is alleged, means "married to power." It was during this time that the institution of the papacy had its inception. In A.D. 313, the Decree of Coronation made Rome ("where Satan's throne is") the center of Christendom. Like Israel in the days of Balaam, the church of this period was being seduced into immorality and the worship of idols through the rise of the papal system. Some who take this approach have suggested that *Antipas* does not refer to an individual, but to a class of men opposed (*anti*) to the popes ("papas"), which men were martyred in great numbers in Rome and Constantinople, Christ threatens to fight this institution with the sword out of His mouth—e.g., His Word."

- The church at Pergamum is symbolic of the many churches throughout history that have compromised with the world. That spirit of compromise was especially evident during the period from the fourth to the seventh centuries. In A.D. 313 the emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, granting religious freedom to Christians and ending two and a half centuries of savage persecution. He adopted Christianity and made it the favored religion of the empire.

That began the process by which Christianity merged with the Roman state. Heathen priests became Christian priests; heathen temples became Christian churches; heathen feasts became Christian festivals. Christianity was no longer a personal matter, but a national identity.

The church married the political system, so the worldliness was synonymous with the church. . . . The majority of the believers at Pergamum did not participate in the errors of either heretical group. They remained steadfastly loyal to Christ and the Christian faith. But by tolerating the groups and refusing to exercise church discipline they shared their guilt, which brought the lord's judgment.

> Insight #4 - (v16-17) Christ tells Pergamos to CONQUER these false doctrines! With truth – “Repent” – Change your ways and return to the truth of God's Word! If they do not repent, they will face the sword of His mouth (Rev. 19:11-16).

- If they overcome, they will partake of the “hidden manna” - This was the special food God provided in the wilderness (Ex. Ch. 16). Jesus said, *"I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. . . . As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me."* (John 6:48-51, 57).

- And if they overcome, they will receive a “white stone” – Revelation 2:16-17

In those days, a white stone was put into a vessel by a judge to vote acquittal for a person on trial. There was also a Roman custom of awarding white stones to the victor in athletic contests inscribed with the athlete's name. This award served as his ticket to a special awards banquet.

Both would certainly apply to the believer in a spiritual sense: he has been declared righteous through faith in Christ, and with feasts with Christ forever!

- Revelation 3:20 - *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.*

- Revelation 19:6-10 - *And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!” And he said to me, “These are the true sayings of God.” And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”*

In this view, Christ promises the overcomers entrance to the everlasting victory celebration in heaven!

- Let us be OVERCOMERS!

Paul exhorts us in– 1 Timothy 6:6-16 - *Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.*