



## **07. Revelation 2:12-17 – The Letter to the Church at Pergamos.**

### **Revelation 2:12-17**

This letter reverts to the themes of Commendation, Complaint and Correction. The Church in Pergamos was also living in the midst of adversity. But this time instead of portraying Himself as the One holding the seven stars in His right hand and walking among the Churches, or even as the First and the Last, the One Who died and came to life again, Jesus portrays Himself as having a sharp, double-edged sword in His hand.

The sword in this description was a heavy and long Thracian sword symbolising divine judgment. So why does Jesus use such a simile when He writes to a suffering Church? Some commentaries remind us of the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, **Hebrews 4:12 AMP**. This message to the Church was the Word of Jesus, so of course it is going to be in line with the Word written in the Book, God never contradicts Himself. The whole point of the Word is that it is alive and full of power, making it active and operative; in other words, energising and effective in our lives. As Christ wields the two edged sword in our life it penetrates to our very soul (mind, will and emotions) and divides it from our spirit (our Christ life). This means it reaches into the very deepest parts of our nature, exposing, sifting, analysing and judging the very thoughts and purposes of our hearts. The Holy Spirit constantly encourages us to allow the Word to have this activity in our hearts so He can change us and draw us closer to the Father. We must not choose to look into the Word just to acquire more knowledge. We need to pray asking Him to show us what we should be dealing with through this Word and pray for the strength of the Holy Spirit to obey the Word. This was the Word of Him to the Pergamos Church.

The sword also highlights God's future separation of Believers from unbelievers, **Matthew 25:31-32**. Jesus is constantly reminding us that a day is coming when our behaviour and use of our gifts and talents will be judged, **1 Corinthians 3:13**. This encourages us to keep focused on our life purpose, not to loose our cutting edge in sharing the Gospel. Our behaviour should separate us from the people who are pretenders and imposters just as Jesus can see this in the Church at Pergamos.

The City of Pergamos was at the place where the modern City of Bergama is located, on the top of a conical hill in North West Turkey, then the Province of Asia. Jesus knew all about the situation and physical location of that Church and its Believers, just as He knows our address, our availability and our spiritual state today. The spiritual state of the Church in Pergamos did not take Jesus by surprise, but He took this opportunity to give His Word to those Believers. Pergamos was the place that was the centre of Emperor worship in that part of the Roman Empire. Jesus said that Satan had his throne there. As a created being he can only be in one place at a time and as 'he is the prince of the power of the air' (**Ephesians 2:2**) he does not have a throne in the heavenlies but is the 'prince of this world' (**John 12:31**), so Jesus warned the Believers at Pergamos through John that Satan's seat of power was there. This was a very dangerous place to be holding up the name of Jesus but actually His Name was the strongest weapon they had to use to be overcomers in this battle. Satan ruled from this earthly stronghold of Pergamos and tried to exert his authority over the Believers, but they remained true to the Name of Jesus. Satan loathes and detests the Name of Jesus; it torments him and highlights his weakness and powerlessness when faced up with a simple Name. Remember this!

Even under such pressure exerted by Satan over these Believers, it is appropriate to ask ourselves whether we, in our comparatively calm, quiet and accepting society stay true to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? Perhaps we might even ask ourselves what Jesus would write to our Church, and to us in particular. The Believers in Pergamos did not renounce their faith in Jesus, even under the most fierce of onslaughts by Satan.

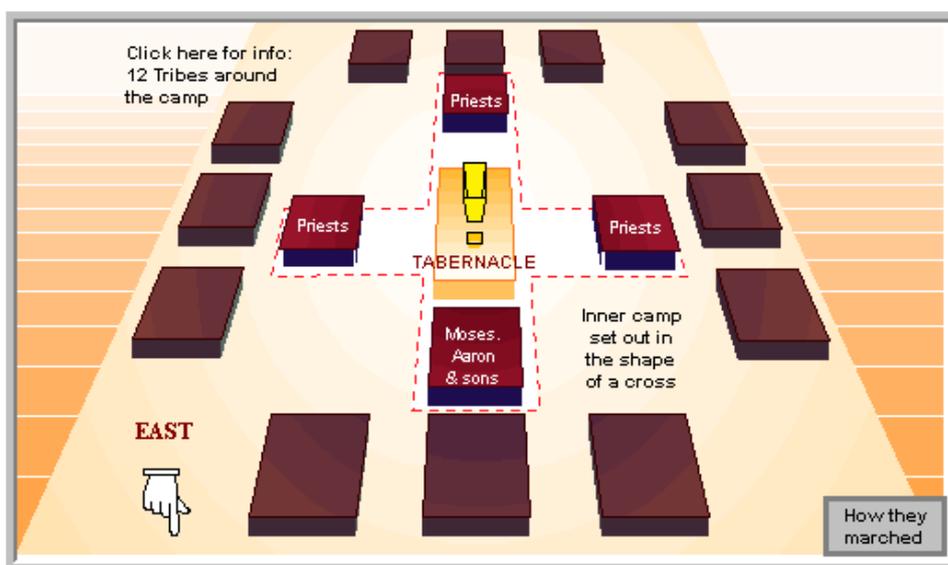
It was in this City that Antipas, who was the first martyr in Asia, was put to death. According to tradition, he was locked in a bronze kettle and slowly roasted to death. Jesus describes Antipas as a faithful witness. We wonder how we would stand up to that sort of persecution. We believe that, just like Stephen who was stoned to death (**Acts 7:54-60**) he would have seen Jesus and like Stephen, he would have been received into Heaven with Jesus standing welcoming him. There would have been a martyr's welcome for him at his death. Even under this pressure, these Believers did not succumb to Satan but stood firm.

So these Believers were to be commended for their faithfulness, and for their perseverance under extreme persecution. Despite this, Jesus has a few things against them. What were these things in such an apparently faithful Church? **Revelation 2:14-15**

### Teachings of Balaam

Jesus did not say that He hated the people; He said that He hated their sin. He hated their doctrines, their false teaching which they were spreading among God's Believers. The error that these people were spreading was divisive and weakening as it was the place where Satan's power was at its strongest, which resistance more difficult for the Believers. It is the same for us today. God hates our sin, but He loves us and longs for us to repent so that we can be restored to fellowship with Him.

Balaam was a Midianite, a pagan diviner with an international reputation. He had a remarkable grasp of the truth with a clear knowledge of the character of God and deep insight into the future of Israel. He had two fatal passions, women and wealth. He was hired by Balak, the King of Moab to overcome the Israelites as they progressed towards the Promised Land following their exodus from Egypt. (**Numbers Chapters 22 to 25**). God prevented Balaam from cursing the Israelites. He caused Balaam's donkey to speak to him, identifying an angel blocking the way. Balaam had been paid to curse the Israelites, so Balak insisted that he try again, but each time he was taken up into a mountain overlooking their camp, God gave him His messages to speak over the Israelites. One was of blessing; the other was prophetic of the victory that they would exact over the Moabites.



Each time that Balaam looked down over the encampment of the Israelites, all he could see was the figure of a cross, for that was how the Israelites camped, with the Ark of the Covenant at the centre.

Even though Balaam could not curse the Israelites, he did manage to teach the Moabites how to attack their spiritual lives and corrupt them. He taught them to entice God's people by befriending them, asking them to join in their pagan festivals by eating food sacrificed to idols; when they discovered that nothing

untoward appeared to happen, they befriended the Moabites and began to have sexual relations with their women.

Today, our society thinks nothing of having sex with women or men outside of marriage. It appears to be just the way life is, yet this is not God's plan. God's design is for marriage, where one man and one woman give themselves to each other in a secure and God-given relationship. The two become one flesh and they are united in spirit. A unique bond is forged. Anything other than this is not God's plan. In His mercy, He works around our disobedience, but this does not negate His best for us. It was true even in the days of Balaam, who was responsible for causing many of them to miss out on God's best for them. Obviously, Satan himself, the master of disguise was behind Balaam and Balak.

So the doctrine of Balaam is summarised here as:

- The worship of the world – idolatry is any object that comes between us and God and is an abomination to Him
- The wisdom of the world – abuse of the Grace of God.
- The wickedness of this world – sexual immorality, both private and public.

### Teaching of the Nicolaitians

The Nicolaitans were also compromisers and whose doctrine Jesus says 'I hate'. These people are also mentioned in the Church at Ephesus. They had worked out a formula enabling them to be Christians while

dabbling in the practices of Emperor Worship. They thought that they had the best of both worlds, after all they were being friendly with those who cared nothing about Christianity. Perhaps they even justified their actions by saying that they were 'reaching the lost', whilst at the same time going to church and encouraging their Christian friends to compromise just as they had done.

Some think that the word 'Nicolaitan' is derived from two roots 'nikao' meaning 'to conquer' and 'laos' meaning 'the people' or 'laity' so some churches are divided into clergy and laity instead of the 'brotherhood' of all believers. Is that the way we could so easily be entrapped today?

It is interesting that the doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitans were complimentary errors; one denying the headship of Christ and the other defiling the members of the body.

### **The answer.**

Whichever group an individual Christian in the Church in Pergamos fell into, there was but one solution: Repent! Failure to repent would mean judgement using the sharp double-edged sword of the Word of God, wielded by Jesus. No sin can withstand that judgement, neither can any sinner. It would be better to repent! If we fall into either of the categories of sin which are attributed to those in the Church at Pergamos, then the message is for us also today: **Repent!** The Church belongs to Jesus, and He knows who are His. Those who are defiling it He will disown, be warned.

The one who listens to God's Word and places it first in his life is an Overcomer. He obeys the direction of the Holy Spirit and because he refuses to eat the food offered to idols, God gives him hidden manna. The hidden manna is heavenly food, in contrast to the food offered to idols. The manna was like angel food poured down from heaven on a daily basis. It was always fresh, all that was needed for each day and was provided for the children of Israel during the entire wilderness journey.

This can be symbolic of the food prepared for us as we feed on Christ in the secret place, when we overcome the temptation to enter into idolatry in the world today. It is better by far to be alone with our Lord and Saviour, tasting all the spiritual food He has for us. How about being on such intimate terms with Jesus that He feeds us Himself in a private place? He says these words:

"He who is able to hear, let him listen to and heed what the Spirit says to the assemblies (churches). To him who overcomes (conquers), I will give to eat of the manna that is hidden, and I will give him a white stone with a new name engraved on the stone, which no one knows or understands except he who receives it."

**Revelation 2:17**

"And He rained down upon them manna to eat and gave them heaven's grain" **Psalms 78:24**

How much better to suffer persecution and to be supplied by God Himself, rather than to compromise with the world, whose insufficient secular ways will never feed our spirit.

The white stone would have perhaps entitled the owner access to the Heavenly Banquet, the Marriage Feast of the Lamb – and the new name known only to Jesus and the Believer herself.

And the nations shall see your righteousness and vindication [your rightness and justice--not your own, but His ascribed to you], and all kings shall behold your salvation and glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord shall name" **Isaiah 62:2AMP**

The white stone with a personalised new name was such a contrast to all those who were living in immorality and partaking in the loose living cult of the day. It represented purity and was a sign that the owner had chosen the way of purity, and the changeless purity of Christ Himself. If we receive the white stone it is a sign we have entered into such a close, personal, intimate relationship with Christ and He has given us a new name that only He and we know. What about a 'pet' name from Jesus!!? How precious that would be?!

Let us choose at this time in history neither to participate in any immorality, idolatry, or unfaithfulness to our precious Father and Saviour Jesus Christ, nor to join with any of the worldly practices that surge around us on a daily basis. Let us be overcomers by the power of the Holy Spirit, using the power in the Name of Jesus and hate all the works of Satan, in any form we see and discern them.

## 7. Revelation 2:12-17– The Church at Pergamos – Challenge Questions

1. **Read the Notes and the Bible Verses** referred to in them. Highlight the points that 'speak' to you. Be prepared to share in your group.
2. How would you behave if Jesus asked you to move to a place where Satan had a centre of operations? How could you be protected?
3. How would you describe 'hidden manna' 'a white stone' and 'a new name'? How do you see them happening to you?

### **Read Revelation 2:18-29 – The Letter to the Church in Thyatira.**

4. Why does Jesus describe Himself as having eyes like blazing fire and feet like burnished bronze? Remind yourself of the other description in **Revelation 1:13-16**.
5. Write down the good things that Jesus knows about the Church at Thyatira. Do you think these things are written about the Church corporately or individually?
6. What does Jesus have against the Church at Thyatira? Who is Jezebel, and was she a prophet? What two things were wrong about her teaching? **1 Kings 16:30-31; 1 Kings 19:1-3; 2 Kings 9:30-37**
7. What did Jesus say He would do to her for teaching such things? If unsure read in the Amplified Bible.
8. Did Jezebel listen to Jesus' warnings to her? What did Jesus say that He would do to her? Who else did Jesus say would suffer for her behaviour?

9. Did everybody in the Church at Thyatira succumb to the teaching of Jezebel? Why not?
10. What would have helped them not to fall into her trap? Can you identify things in our Christian lives that would help us stay away from such troublesome situations?
11. What would the churches see and recognise about Jesus as a result of the judgement on Jezebel?  
**Revelation 2:23; Jeremiah 17:10**
12. Can you think of any resemblances between the state of the Church in Thyatira and the state of Churches today? Do you believe that every Church is open to sexual sin described here?
13. What promise did Jesus give to those who rejected the teaching?
14. What would happen to those people who were the Overcomers, those who were victorious? Who would give them authority and over whom or what would that Authority be given?
15. How can you and I as Christians identify that someone is teaching erroneous things to the Church? Can you give an example of an occasion when you identified such an error, and what did you do about?
16. Give a warning and an encouragement that you have received from the letter to the Church at Thyatira.