

The Book Of **REVELATION**

THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS *Revelation 2:12-17*

Introduction

Structure of the Book

- **Revelation 1** *things which you have seen*
- **Revelation 2-3** *things which are*
- **Revelation 4-22** *things which will take place*

Four Approaches To Understanding The Seven Churches

- PROVINCIAL Seven literal churches that existed at the end of the first century
- PARTICULAR Seven types of church that can exist at any point in history
- PROPHETIC Seven general periods of overlapping church history
- PERSONAL Seven types of Christian

Structure

- Destination *"To the angel of the church in..."*
- Description of Jesus
- Commendation *"I know your deeds..."*
- Condemnation / Criticism *"But I have this against you..."*
- Counsel / Exhortation *"He who has an ear..."*
- Challenge / Promise *"To him who overcomes..."*

Postcard From Pergamos

Guide Book

Location

- 16 miles from the Aegean Sea
- 60 miles north of Smyrna
- Modern site of Bergama in Turkey

History

Hellenistic Period

- Time between the death of Alexander the Great and the emergence of the Roman Empire
- The territory of the Greek Empire was divided between Alexanders four generals
- One general, Lysimachus ruled Thrace and Asia Minor (wherein lies Pergamos)
- Upon his death, one of Lysimachus' lieutenants, Philetaerus, took control of Pergamos in 282BC
- This is the beginning of the Attalid Dynasty / Kingdom of Pergamos

Philetaeus ruled the city for 40 years

- He built the temple of Demeter on the acropolis of Pergamos (goddess of harvest / fertility)
- He built the temple of Athena (Pergamos' patron deity – goddess of war)
- He built the first palace
- He added to the fortifications

Roman Empire

- One of the most influential cities in the Roman Empire
- Capital of Roman province of Asia (later transferred to Ephesus)
- Political centre
- From here that rulings were made which affected the whole of Asia

Features

Parchment

- Pergamos is the root for the word, parchment
- Papyrus / Parchment / Paper
- Papyrus came from Egypt, but supplies were stopped by Ptolemy Epiphanes
- Eumenes II developed parchment made of calf skins (vellum)
- Having invented parchment, a thriving parchment industry followed
- This led to the creation of the second largest library in the ancient world

The City

Acropolis modelled on and rivalled Athens

- Literary Centre - Second largest library in ancient world (200,000 books, Plutach)
(Marc Anthony presented it to Cleopatra as a wedding present)
- Centre for the arts - Ampitheatre, seated 10,000 people
- Religious Centre - Temples to Athena, Demeter, Dionysus (god of wine and fertility), Hera (goddess of marriage) Zeus, Trajan
- Medical Centre - Built the world's first psychiatric hospital

Shrine to Asclepius (Asclepeion)

Asclepeion

Built in honour of Asclepius (god of healing / medicine)

- Cross between hospital, health spa and temple
- Most famous healing centres in Roman Empire (over 300)
- Frequented by Emperors
- Priests of Asclepius were the Doctors of Greece
- Hippocrates known as an Asclepiad
- Galen, second most famous doctor after Hippocrates, born in Pergamos
- Galen was personal physician to Emperor Marcus Auerlius

Treatment

- Enter through an underground corridor or 'sacred way'
- Bathe in the water of the sacred spring
- Drunk a sedative (opiate)
- Spent the night in dormitories (temple sleep)
- Non-poisonous snakes crawled around all night
- Snakes carried healing power of Asclepius (blessed if they crawled over you)
- Serpent god would speak to them and give them a diagnosis
- Patients would tell the priest/doctors their dreams
- From this a treatment would be deduced
- Clay models of the body part to be healed would be made and offered to Asclepius

The Church

Destination

Revelation 2:8a

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write,

Pergamum

- Pergamos (feminine)
- Pergamon (neuter)
- Elevated/Heightened Marriage
- Pergos Citadel, elevated, high tower
- Gammos Marriage (e.g. polygamy or monogamy)

Mixed or miss-matched marriage

- Faithful believers and compromised believers
- Miss-matched alignment with pagan religion

Description of Jesus

Revelation 2:12

These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:

Drawn from **Revelation 1:16**

- Repeated in **Revelation 2:16**, when it is seen coming from Jesus mouth
- Image of Jesus coming in the form of Judge
- To execute both justice and punishment
- This is an encouragement, that the churches persecutors will be punished
- This is a warning, to the compromising Christian's in the church

Hebrews 4:12

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.

The word of God brings division

- Divide between the faithful believers and the unfaithful
- Divide between the Biblical and the Pagan

In a city famed for its literature

- The many words of its 200,000 volumes
- Jesus will bring the supreme/definitive word (the word of God)

Commendation

Revelation 2:13

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.

I Know Your Works

I know your works...

Jesus words are divisive

- For some they bring comfort, encouragement and solice
- For others they bring discomfort, conviction, and challenge

For the faithful believers, he says, "*I know your works...*"

- I know... the opposition you face
- I know... how difficult it is to be my witnesses
- I know... the danger you encounter
- I know... I'm there, I'm with you, carry on

For the unfaithful believers, he says, "*I know your works...*"

- I know... how you have compromised
- I know... that you have looked to your ease
- I know... your betrayal of Me and you fellow brethren
- I know... I'm not with you, I'm against you

Satan's Throne

I know...where you dwell, where Satan's throne is

- In Smyrna, Satan had a synagogue (a gathering)
- In Pergamos, Satan has a seat (a throne)

As time passes, he becomes more established

- Both in his external opposition of the church
- But, more dangerously, in his internal corruption of the church

Question: What does it mean, Satan's Throne?

Answer: Three possible answers

1. Religious

- Religious centre
- Seat of religious power opposed to Biblical Christianity
- Home to temples for at least seven foreign deities (pagan gods)
- Asclepius was symbolised with a serpent (identified with Satan)

2. Political

- Political centre
- Temples to at least two Roman Emperors
- Seat of power from which rules and law from the Roman Empire were dispatched
- The pressure to pinch incense to Caesar was greater here

3. Geographical

- Reference to the Altar of Zeus (Great Altar of Pergamos)
- Height 35m (116ft) x Depth 33m (109ft) x Width 20m (65ft)
- Base decorated with freeze depicting fight between gods and Greeks
- Where human sacrifice was made
- Now located in Berlin Museum

Hold Fast

And you hold fast to my Name, and did not deny my faith

The believers are commended for

- Holding fast to the name of Jesus
- Not denying the faith
- In the face of persecution

Holding fast to the name of Christ

- Not taking a pinch of incense, and declaring, "Caesar is Lord"
- Not caving to pressure in the light of the martyrdom of Antipas

Later in Revelation, "*holding fast to my Name*" is manifested by not receiving the mark of the beast

Antipas

in the days in which Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

Who was Antipas?

- An elder at the church
- Appointed by Apostle John

What do we know?

- Pagan priests complained that the prayers of Antipas were driving their spirits out of the city
- Roman governor ordered Antipas to offer sacrifice to statue of Roman Emperor
- Antipas refused, and was sentenced to death on the Altar of Zeus

Antipas was killed using an extreme form of torture – the brazen bull

NASB

Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you

How precious to be called by Jesus

- My witness
- My faithful one
- Both titles of Jesus

Condemnation

Revelation 2:14

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. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

A Few Things Against You

But I have a few things against you...

Despite the faithful stand in the face of persecution

- The church was not beyond the criticism of our Lord
- The church had compromised by allowing people with bad doctrine to infiltrate the fellowship
- Jesus opinion of the teaching and the compromise is clear – He say, “*which thing I hate*”

Society views tolerance as the supreme virtue

Jesus views tolerance as sin and something He hates

Satan was unsuccessful in destroying the church

- When he came as the dragon with persecution
- Then he came as the serpent with deception

There are two issues the Lord raise with the church in Pergamos

1. Doctrine of Balaam
2. Doctrine of the Nicolaitans

Doctrine of Balaam

Account of Balaam

Numbers 22-24

- Balaam was a prophet, hired by Balak to curse Israel
- Balaam’s attempts were confounded by God and he blessed Israel instead
- Balaam advised Balak to encouraged the women of Moab and Midian to seduce Israel
- Seduction was both sexual and spiritual
- Resulted in a curse on Israel
- Balaam’s motivation was financial gain

Church & Balaam

Within the church there were those who compromised with

- The spiritual and sexual corruption in the city
- Buying meat sacrificed to idols
- Participating in some of the pagan rituals
- Permitting sexual immorality
- Intermarriage with pagans (Pergamos means mixed marriage)

Doctrine of Nicolaitans

Question: What is Nicolaitanism?

Answer: Two views

First View

- Nicolas of Antioch (a proselyte)
- One of the seven deacons appointed in **Acts 6**
- Unnecessary to obey law of Moses
- To a degree that licentiousness was acceptable

Second View

Niko - conquer or subdue

Laos - the people

- Two class system of clergy and congregation
- Hierarchy in church – political structure

Against You

Thus you also have those...

We see these issues today in our churches...

Balaamism

A spirit of compromise has entered many churches

Christians may not be asked offer incense at the altar of Caesar
But they are asked to offer incense at the altar of

- Female Bishops and leaders
- Homosexual Vicars
- Multifaith representation
- Unmarried couples living together
- Same-sex marriage
- Transgender ideology

Nicolaitianism

- Licentiousness that is tolerated and allowed
- Much of the established church has a two-tier hierarchy that is unbiblical
- Vicars and the congregation
- Priest and the laity
- Apostles and Prophets
- Touch not God's anointed
- All believers are priests (some appointed to roles of authority, some to roles of submission)

Counsel

Revelation 2:16

Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Jesus is clear and uncompromising in His counsel, "Repent!"

- Turn around
- Change your thinking
- Change your behaviour

There is no room in Jesus for

- Allowing the world into your life
- Allowing paganism into your life
- Allowing sexual immorality in your life

*I will come to you quickly
the sword of my mouth*

Jesus Second Coming in judgement at the end of the Tribulation
Jesus as the Judge at the time of His Second Coming

If there is not a change in the Pergamos' conduct

- They will face the Jesus of **Revelation 1:16**
- If they do not repent and cast away the compromised believers
- At the time of judgement the church will be found on the wrong side of Christ (goats not sheep)
- It implies a mixed-marriage will corrupt the church to degree where it will die
- Subsequent generations won't know Christ

Challenge

Revelation 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 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.

The promise given to the believer who overcomes

- Who answers the challenge
- Who repents of the sin of Pergamos
- Who holds fast to Jesus name
- Is threefold

Hidden Manna

This is the food provide for Israel by God

- Having departed from Egypt
- Having departed from its idolatry

If the believers in Pergamos depart from

- The paganism of Pergamos
- Sexual immorality
- Food sacrificed to idols

God will sustain them, and feed them

- The path to following Jesus is into the wilderness
- It is tough, but there you learn of His provision

White Stone

Twofold Meaning

- A person found innocent in a trial (symbol of acquittal)
- A person received in private membership of a club (a symbol of acceptance)

An overcomer will be

- Acquitted of the guilt and sin of the Pergamos Church
- Accepted and received by the Lord

A New Name

Many believers received a new name at a turning point in their life

- Abram/Abraham, John/Mark, Saul/Paul

A new name would be awarded to those who overcome the sin of Pergamos

- A sign of significant spiritual progress

Closing Thoughts

Prophetic Approach

Historic Change

The Seven Churches can be understood to represent seven general periods of overlapping church history

AD30-100	Ephesus
AD100-313	Smyrna
AD313-600	Pergamos

After two centuries of Christian persecution under the Roman Empire

- AD306 Constantine became Emperor
- AD313 Edict of Milan (tolerance towards Christianity)

Consequences

- Christianity became the state religion
- State and religion had a "heightened marriage"
- This resulted in spiritual fornication and idolatry

Balaam

People, from all over the empire, were baptized into the church regardless of personal faith

- Many pagans entered the church bringing their pagan practices with them
- This gave rise to idolatry
- Laid the seeds for what would become the Roman Catholic Church

Nicolaitian

It was during this age that

- A clear distinction between clergy and laity arose
- With different rules for each class
- I.e. Nicolaitanism

The compromise led to age of darkness

- Where the church became totally corrupt
- When Roman Catholicism came to dominate the world
- This period of history is covered in the next church, Thyatira