

Letter to the Church At Pergamos
(Rev 2:12-17)

(Lesson 5)

I. What we know about the city of Pergamos.

- A. Pergamos was located about 55 miles north of Ephesus, 20 miles inland from Smyrna.
1. Like Ephesus and Smyrna, it was a wealthy city that was filled with wickedness.
 2. It had temples for the worship of four false gods as well as emperor worship.
 - a. Athena - Greek Olympian goddess of wisdom, warfare, and handicrafts.
 - b. Asclepius - Greek god of medicine, healing, and rejuvenation. (Snake God)
 - c. Dionysus - Greek god of wine, ritual madness, fertility, theater, and religious ecstasy.
 - d. Zeus - supreme deity in ancient Greek mythology, ruling as king of the gods.
 3. Pergamos was considered the regions center for Emperor worship.
 4. It was the first city to receive permission to build a temple to Augustus. (A.D. 29)
 5. It was famous for it's university and a library of 200,000 books that rivaled the one in Alexandria Egypt.
 6. They were also famous for developing a product that became known as parchment, a writing material made from animal skins.
 7. The proconsul of Pergamum had been granted the rare power known as "the right of the sword" meaning that he could perform executions when needed.

II. The Letter is once again directed to the angel or messenger of the church. (v12)

- A. As pastor, he is the under shepherd of the church of God.
1. He was responsible to feed, guide and protect the flock.
 2. He was to receive the message and lead the church to make the needed corrections.
- B. Jesus is portrayed as the one with the sharp two-edged sword.
1. The sword is a symbol of power and authority.
 2. While the city recognized the authority of Rome, the church is reminded that the ultimate authority rests with God.
 3. The sword is the word of God that can bring enlightenment and, if needed, judgement.
 4. Heb 4:12 – tells us, it is quick and powerful and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

III. The Lord once again first commends the church for their faithfulness. (v13)

- A. He knew exactly what they were going through.
1. He knew that they lived amongst immorality and evil all around.
 2. Between the temples to the false gods as well as temples to the roman emperor, they were faced with challenges every day.
 3. Satan had a stronghold in the city of Pergamos.
- B. The church had remained steadfast in their commitment to Christ and the Christian faith.
1. The church as a whole resisted the temptation to compromise.
 2. Even in the midst of constant pressure and persecution.
 3. Not much is known about Antipas, other than his commitment to Christ cost him his life. Commentators believe he was martyred because he stood against compromise.

IV. Jesus warns the church in regard to the danger of compromise. (v14-15)

- A. While the church had stood strong in the past, there was concern for the future.
 - 1. Evil men and imposters had slipped into the church.
 - 2. They were encouraging the church to compromise to more effectively reach people.
 - 3. This is a danger that churches still deal with today.
- B. Satan's opposition can come in many different ways.
 - 1. Sometimes it is an all-out attack of persecution.
 - 2. Other times he is more subtle in his attack, much like in the garden of Eden.
- C. The church at Pergamos found themselves being attacked both from without and within.
 - 1. Those promoting the doctrine of Balaam encouraged the church to accept intermarriage with non-believers.
 - 2. As in the book of Numbers chapters 22-25, this would ultimately lead to involvement idol worship and participation in pagan feasts.
 - 3. Forsaking the straight and narrow way would ultimately bring God's judgement.
 - 4. The Nicolaitans also believed that Christians were free to join in the heathen feast and participate in sinful conduct. They led lives of unrestrained indulgence.

V. The church receives a strong rebuke from the Lord. (v16-17)

- A. They were to repent from tolerating those that were promoting false doctrine.
 - 1. What had been mentioned as deeds in Ephesus, has become doctrine in Pergamos.
 - 2. Compromising truth will always bring moral and spiritual decay.
 - 3. The warning is, if the church did not deal with the wicked, Jesus would.
- B. The promise to true overcomers was that they would partake of the hidden manna.
 - 1. We know God gave Israel manna for a period of 40 years.
 - 2. This was the food that sustained them through their wilderness wanderings.
 - 2. Hidden manna refers to Jesus; He is the bread of life. (John 6:35)
- C. They would also receive a white stone with a new name. (v17)
 - 1. There are a number of different interpretations in regard to the white stone.
 - 2. It was a token of acquittal in a legal case. If one was found guilty he would receive a black stone.
 - 3. It was a symbol of victory in a variety of athletic contest.
 - 4. It was an expression of welcome given by a host to his guest.
 - 5. In all of these it seems to be a token of acceptance.
- D. Debate continues as to the meaning of the new name.
 - 1. In ancient times, white stones were given to people (with their names written on them) as invitations to special banquets.
 - 2. If this is what Jesus was alluding to, the white stone with the new name could very well, signify an open invitation to His wedding feast.
 - 3. Others believe that it will be a name given to the believer that speaks of their character or position in eternity. (A name change much like that of Simon to Peter)

Note: The message to the church of Pergamos is a warning against compromise in morals or teaching that opposes the truth of scripture.