

THE REVELATION

MARCH 10, 2024

Chapter 2:12-29

C. Pergamum – The Perverted Church (2:12a)

Rev 2:12a "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

Gaius, to whom this John addressed his Third Epistle, was the pastor of the Pergamum Church according to the Apostolic Constitutions (vii, 46). The town of Pergamum had been affected by the same earthquake that hurt Smyrna in 178 AD; however, it suffered much less damage and continued for hundreds of years. In 1336 AD, the Ottoman Turks captured the city and Christianity was outlawed. Islam was the only religion allowed. At that time, the pastorate seat of the Church (St. Sophia) was removed and its doors permanently shut. In 1398 AD, the old church of St. Sophia was converted into a mosque.

1. The LORD's Identification (2:12b)

Rev 2:12b The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

To Pergamum, the perverted Church, the LORD identified Himself as “The One who has the sharp two-edged sword.” We have already discovered that the original wording for this sword indicated that it was more like a bayonet used in hand-to-hand, bloody combat. That was the intention of the LORD for the city in which this Church rested. The LORD purposefully intended to bring death to His enemies in this city.

2. The LORD's Oracle to Pergamum

a) The LORD's Acknowledgment (2:13)

Rev 2:13 "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."

Satan's throne was not truly in the city of Pergamum because his place was still before the LORD where he constantly, even to this day, accuses the brethren who belonged to the LORD. But there in Pergamum, the city had built a building that was literally called *The Great Altar of Pergamum* and known as *Satan's Throne*. When the LORD said, “I know where you dwell,” He understood the predicament the Church was in by living in a city of such evil influence. He also knew that, in spite of the Church's surroundings, He could say, “you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.” The word for “hold fast” is *krateo* and it means *to be strong*. In other words, despite the city's Satanic temple, Pergamum's Church was still *holding strong* to the holy name of Jesus. It would not “deny” its faith even when it saw the arrest and martyrdom of one of the Church's most upstanding members, Antipas. No doubt, he was hated by the city's people because of his testimony concerning Jesus.

Satan's Throne, the Great Altar of Pergamum is now in the *Museum of Berlin*, moved there by Adolf Hitler. The base of this altar was not moved but remains on the upper part of the *Acropolis* in Pergamum. This altar is believed to have been dedicated to Zeus. Other notable structures still locatable on the upper part of the Acropolis include:

- The Sanctuary of Trajan (also known as the Trajaneum)
- A Theater with a seating capacity of 10,000
- The Sanctuary of Athena
- The Royal Palaces
- The Haroon - a shrine where the kings of Pergamum worshipped
- The Temple of Dionysus
- The Upper Agora
- The Roman bath complexes

In 29 AD, Pergamum became the first city in Asia to establish a temple for the worship of Augustus (Octavia Caesar). Hence, Pergamum was the center of emperor-worship.

b) The LORD's Complaint – Some Idolaters (2:14-15)

Rev 2:14 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. ¹⁵ 'So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

The LORD's complaint for the Church at Pergamum replicated the LORD's complaint about Balaam found in Numbers 22. In that Old Testament story, Balaam, a true prophet of the living LORD God, had been called by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse the Nation of Israel as it made its track up the east side of the Jordan River to prepare to enter and take the Promised Land. Balak took Balaam to three locations on three mountain peaks to show Balaam the vast expanse of the Nation of Israel as it camped next to the Jordan River. At each location, Balaam instructed Balak to build seven altars and sacrifice seven bulls. Twenty-one rams and twenty-one bulls were sacrificed while Balaam sought counsel from the LORD. What was wrong with that? The answer is interesting. Balak built all those altars and sacrificed all those bulls and rams to Baal or Beelzebub (Satan), not the LORD. Balaam worshipped his LORD but did not direct Balak to worship Him too. That was Balaam's sin. Balaam was focused on his salvation but not that of the Moabites who were the cousins of the Israelites. Just as Balaam should have directed the worship of Balak to the LORD, Pergamum should have re-directed the worship at *Satan's Throne* to the True and Living LORD, but they did not. Worship of Beelzebub included acts of sexual immorality and the eating of food offered in praise and worship of Satan. For that, the LORD had Balaam killed. For that, the Church of Pergamum would be vacated. Had it only said, "Stop! Worship the One LORD God Almighty!" But it did not. It kept to its own worship and allowed the Satanists to continue in their sin.

The Church in Pergamum also faced another problem within its walls, the Nicolaitans. "So, you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans." They were counterfeit Christians who had taken charge in Pergamum and were including immoral acts in their worship practices and were guilty of putting stumbling blocks in front of non-believers to lead them astray so that they would not believe the true Gospel of Jesus. They needed to repent.

c) The LORD's Warning (2:16)

Rev 2:16 "Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth."

It was most important to the LORD that the Church change its attitude about its tolerance of the evil worship in the city and its acceptance of the Nicolaitans within its congregation. He said, "Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth." The Church did not repent; therefore, the LORD sent the sword of Islam to end its existence in 1336 AD.

d) The LORD's Charge (2:17a)

Rev 2:17a "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The LORD's charge to Pergamum was not different from the charge to all seven Churches. We can say it this way, "Perk up your ears and listen to Me and hear what the Spirit is telling you to do!"

e) The LORD's Gift – Manna and Stone with New Name (2:17b)

Rev 2:17b "To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it."

Within the walls of Pergamum's Church, some were faithful to the LORD in every way. For them, as well as the saints of all the seven churches and every believer of all time, manna will be given in heaven for them to eat and each one will receive a white stone with a special name on it, a name known only to the LORD and the believer. Manna fed the Nation of Israel for forty years while they were living in the wilderness after leaving Egypt (Exodus 16:35). In his Gospel, John compared "manna" to the bread of heaven that gives eternal life (John 6:30-58). Isaiah prophesied the "New Name," with the new city of Jerusalem in his prophecy as a gift to the righteous at the coming of the LORD (Isaiah 56:5; 62:2; 65:15).

D. Thyatira – The Promiscuous Church (2:18a)

Rev 2:18a "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write:"

Thyatira would be the home of a Christian community until 1922 when the members of the Christian Orthodox church were deported, and the Church in Thyatira ceased to exist. The Muslim Turks were the reason for the deportation, and this coincided with the same struggle that brought the church of Smyrna to an end the year before.

1. The LORD's Identification (2:18b)

Rev 2:18b "The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:"

The LORD identified Himself as "The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze." Therefore, He introduced Himself as the second Person of the Trinity and attached the title "The Son of God" to Himself.

In the Church at Thyatira, there was enough wrong to make His eyes "flame like fire." All the sins of excess were found in this city and it had crept into the Church. She was modern in every way for that day. The town was famous for the production of purple cloth. Lydia, of Philippi, whom Paul

had encountered, was from Thyatira. She dealt in the sale of purple cloth from her home city. The women of Thyatira produced the cloth; they also ran the sales force of exporting the same. No doubt, this enterprise had slipped into the Church. “His feet are like burnished bronze,” with bronze being a symbol of *judgment* throughout the Holy Writ. His eyes and his burnished bronze were focused on the Church there in Thyatira.

2. The LORD’s Oracle to Thyatira

a) The LORD’s Acknowledgment (2:19)

Rev 2:19 'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.'

Deeds and service have to do with works! Works are perfectly fine when completed with a proper heart, attitude and intention. That was not the case with Thyatira. The statement “deeds of late are greater than at first” reminds us of the issue that Jesus had to correct with Mary and Martha when He visited their home. Mary was anointing Him with oil. Martha was cooking in the kitchen. Mary’s work seemed unimportant in the time sensitive moment. Martha’s work seemed like it should have been the priority. Martha had it all wrong. Anointing Jesus for His death was paramount at that time and in that place. In Thyatira, something had changed just a little bit; they were doing a little better; but they were not doing well enough. Heresy had come to the Thyatira Church.

b) The LORD’s Complaint – Immorality (2:20)

Rev 2:20 'But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.'

In the LORD’s complaint we have found the heresy. It had been caused by the teaching of a woman named Jezebel. Her teaching was off base, and it caused the LORD’s bondservants to go “astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.” Mark this on your heart and remember it in your mind. Any acts of immorality or association with idols were and shall ever be heresy! No wonder the LORD’s eyes were burning, and punishment was on His feet. His eyes showed His temper, His feet showed His desire.

c) The LORD’s Intent (2:21-23)

Rev 2:21 'I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. ²² 'Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. ²³ 'And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.'

Longsuffering is an eternal attribute of the LORD. But do not misconstrue the fact that the LORD will wait and be patient with heresy forever. The LORD has never attacked evil at the moment it comes into view. The LORD will give individuals time to recognize the evil, repent and please the LORD. But Jezebel would not! All the disciples of this woman were to be punished in public as an example. Paul says, “Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.” (1 Timothy 5:20). On the other hand, the LORD says, “I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.” Some in the congregation were not following

this Jezebel. The LORD knew who they were, and He would not allow them to feel His wrath like the others.

We can only wonder how Jezebel had obtained such a position in this church. Perhaps she was attached to or married to one of the Nicolaitans who taught immorality and other heresies. Meat in the ancient world was dedicated to the gods at the pagan temples before it was sold in the public markets; many Christians refused to eat such meat sacrificed to idols. Thyatira was known for its trade guilds, which would hold banquets in the pagan temples. After eating and drinking, the diners often engaged in sexually immoral acts on the couches. Jezebel and the Nicolaitans apparently condoned such behavior because of a false understanding of freedom in Christ. The fate of Jezebel was simply doomed by the Lord.

d) The LORD's Salute (2:24-25)

Rev 2:24 'But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. ²⁵ 'Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.

Jezebel did not hold all the congregation under her spell because the LORD says, “the rest who ... who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, ... I place no other burden on you.” In other words, those who rejected Jezebel's teaching were guilt and sin free. Yet, they still needed to “hold fast,” or, as those words mean, *stay strong*, until the coming of the LORD. Pause here and consider this. It matters not whether the LORD comes to accompany a believer to heaven at the moment of earthly death, or, if He comes to earth at the time of His Second Coming. The point is this. He wanted the believers in Thyatira (as well as all believers throughout all generations) to be free from the Jezebels of this world until He comes for each of them individually.

Evidently, the Thyatira Church received and understood the LORD's message because shortly after receiving this letter, Epiphanius reported that the Church had corrected the problem and we also find that, by the beginning of the third century almost all citizens of Thyatira were Christian. Among the pastors of Thyatira were Seras in 325 AD, Fuscus in 431 AD, Diamonius in 458 AD, and Basilus in 878 AD. In 1336 AD, the Turks took over the area, built a town by the ruins and changed the name of Thyatira to that of Ak-Hissar.

e) The LORD's Gift – Authority to Rule and Morning Star (2:26a-28)

Rev 2:26a 'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS;²⁷ AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received ~~authority~~ from My Father;²⁸ and I will give him the morning star.

For as long as the Church in Thyatira existed as a true and faithful Church, the LORD had a special plan for those who had overcome the influence of the city and the sinners within the Church. He would give to them “AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON,” (Psalm 2:8-9; Revelation 3:21; 12:5; 19:15; 20:4). What does that mean? It means a job in His kingdom where He is the King of kings and the LORD of lords. Heavenly power from the LORD! The Father had given the LORD His power and the LORD had the authority to pass it on to His believers. Notice also that Jesus warned that “THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER

ARE BROKEN TO PIECES,” (Isaiah 30:14; Jeremiah 19:11). Not to get too far ahead in the story line of REVELATION, at the LORD’s Second Coming, the mighty band of the heavenly host called the Bride will have been given jobs during the marriage and the authority to enforce those jobs during the 1,000-year kingdom of the LORD here on earth. At the Second Coming, called the Day of the LORD throughout Scripture, all the evil people of the world who have followed Satan, the first beast and the second beast will be “broken to pieces” by their Creator and His Bride.

But the believers, untainted by the evil of the world, will also receive “the morning star.” This star is the power in heaven, from the LORD, from the Father. It is no other than the LORD Jesus Christ Himself (Revelation 22:12). Just as Joseph’s brothers had to learn that their 12 stars and 12 sheaves of the dream would ultimately bow down to Joseph in Egypt, so too, all people will bow down before the *Bright and Morning Star*. At the beginning of Jesus’ last week here on earth, He left the city of Jerusalem and looked back at her from the Mount of Olives and said something like this. *Never again will you say “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD” until I come again.* When He comes, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is LORD.

f) **The LORD’s Charge (2:29)**

Rev 2:29 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

The charge has not changed for this church or any of the others. If you have heard the LORD’s message, it is from the Spirit and it is for all believers to hold on to and guard. Regardless of the age or generation, the promise of the LORD applies to every Church.