

## The Church at PERGAMUM (3)

Revelation 2:12-17

*"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'these things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: 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. 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. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. 17 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes 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.'"*

After a pleasant ride of sixty-five miles to the north of Smyrna (Izmir) surrounded with beautiful groves of olives and figs you come to the city of Bergama or Pergamum. The present name is corrupted form of Pergamum. It is eighteen miles inland and situated on the north bank of the Caicus River. The ancient ruins of Pergamum are situated on top of a steep hill, 1,000 feet above the plain, where the modern city is located.

There are three ways of saying the name of this city in the Bible:

PERGAMOS KJV, NKJV and Derby. The origin of this spelling comes from the Tyndale Version of 1526.

PERGAMUM used in NASB, NRSV, RSV, NIV and in most modern versions.

PERGAMUS Douay-Rheims

The name means height, elevation or tower of strength.

### HISTORY

Pergamum was the ancient capital of Asia before Ephesus. The exact date of its establishment is not known. According to mythology the name of Pergamum goes back to the Trojan wars. Following the burning and destruction of Troy, which is north of Pergamum, Andromache, the wife of Hector was enslaved by the Achaeans and married the son of Achilles whose name was Neptolemus. She had three children and the one called Pergamos is known to be the founder of the city of Pergamum.

Pergamum It is not on any of the great roads as Ephesus and Smyrna were, but historically it was the greatest city in Asia according to Barclay. Strabo called it "an illustrious city" Strabo (c. 63 BC c. AD 24), was a Greek geographer and historian, born in Amasya, Pontus (now in Turkey). He travelled on expeditions and is reported as writing 43 books of great historical importance. Only a few fragments now remain, while Pliny called it "by far the most famous city in Asia" Pliny the Elder (c. 23-79), Roman writer and encyclopaedist, who was the foremost authority on science in ancient Europe.

It is known that by 560 BC the whole region came under the rule of Kroisos, the king of Lydia, but a few years later the Persians defeated Kroisos and started to rule Anatolia. (Turkey) The Persians divided Anatolia into four main satrapies i.e., counties: Ionia, Hellespont, Cilicia and Lydia. Pergamum was included in the province of Mysia in the Lydian satrapy. During the Persian rule Pergamon, like the other cities, enjoyed complete freedom in its internal affairs but had to pay heavy taxes and supply soldiers to the Persian army when requested.

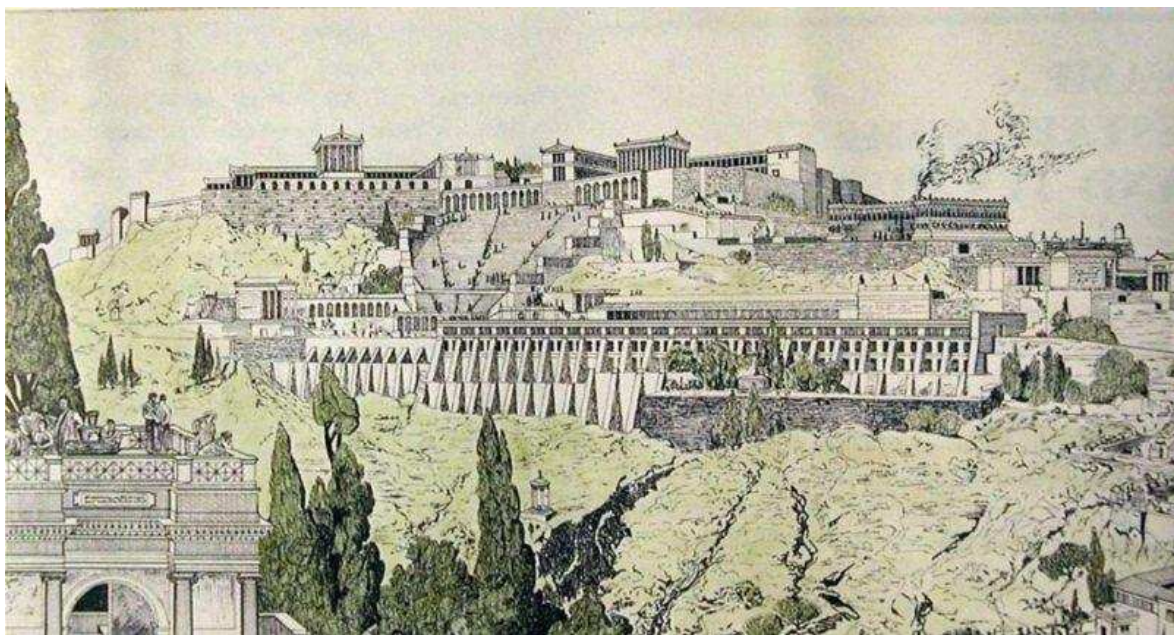
In 334 BC Alexander the Great who was King of Macedoni crossed the Dardanelles and came to Anatolia. He fought the Persian King Darius II and defeated him. Thus, western Anatolia came under his rule. Upon the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC the empire was divided amongst four of his generals. Daniel has an interesting observation which may well fit into this scenario.

*“Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven.”*  
*Daniel 8:8*

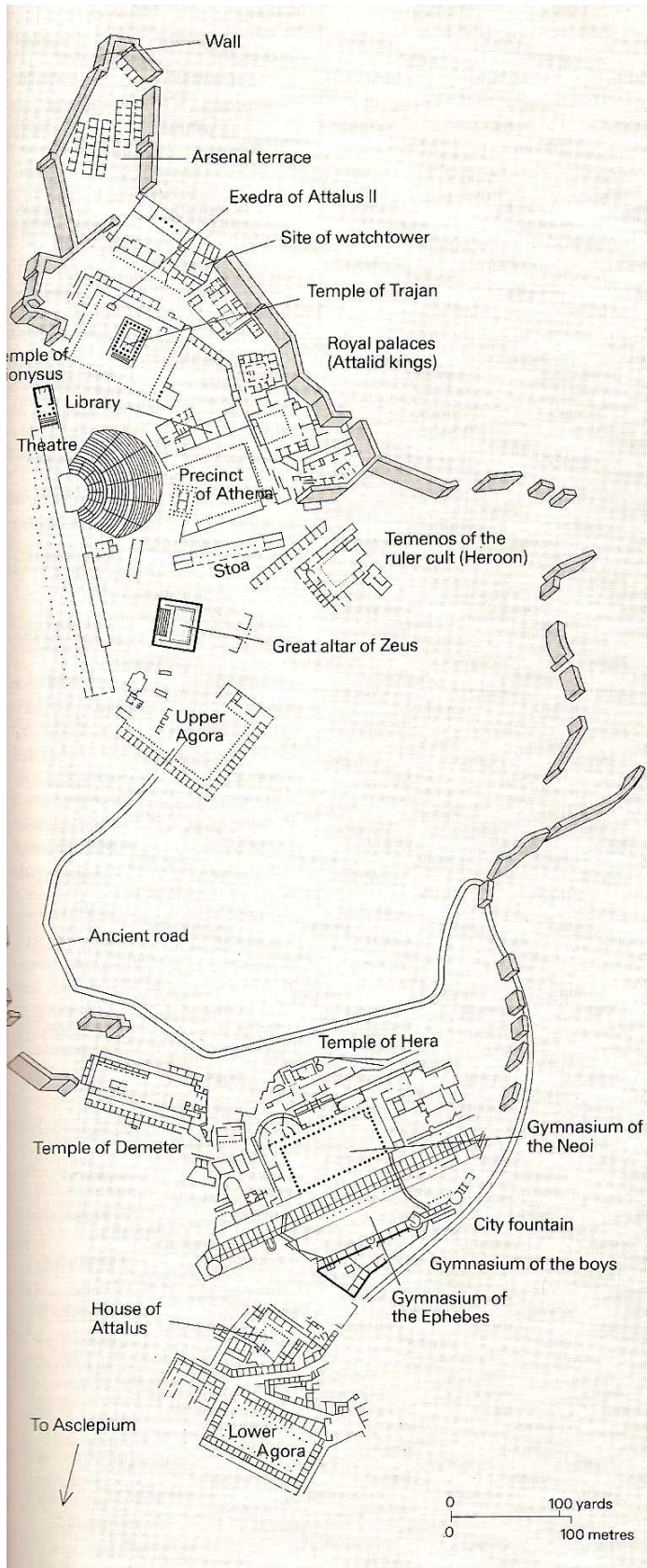
Today they would be known as Greece, Turkey, Syria and Egypt. Out of one of these four divisions of the Grecian Empire (some Bible scholars say) will come the little horn or future antichrist. But which one?

General Lysimachus received southern and western Anatolia and realising the strategic location of Pergamum turned it into a military base and maintained his superiority. He also decided that it was a good place to store his riches so he deposited 9,000 talents of gold.

The city grew in size and beauty. Its beautiful buildings distinguished it as the most beautiful city in the east. Art and literature were encouraged and it boasted a library of 200,000 volumes.



Pergamum as it once appeared



These two drawings show the splendour of Pergamum at its height of its existence. The grandeur of its buildings perhaps surpasses even Ephesus. The city could be seen for miles and from the top of the mountain the Mediterranean could be seen 15 miles away.

Taking centre stage would have been the altar to Zeus the god of all gods.

Note: the word *parchment* is derived from the word Pergamum. In the ancient world parchment is derived from pergamene Charta or the Pergameme sheet.

For many hundreds of years ancient rolls were written on papyrus, a substance made out of the pith of bull-rushes. This was pressed into sheets and dried. A brown paper substance arose and was smoothed for writing. In the third century a Pergameme king called Eumenes was very anxious to make the library of the city supreme. In order to do so he persuaded Aristophanes of Byzantium to agree to leave Alexandria and come to Pergamum. Ptolemy of Egypt, enraged at this seduction of his outstanding scholar, promptly imprisoned Aristophanes and by way of retaliation put an embargo on the export of papyrus to Pergamum. The scholars of Pergamum gave the problem great thought and came up with animal skins, smoothed and polished called vellum or parchment. Parchment became the more acceptable medium for writing eventually throughout the world.

It is little realised that all Acts of Parliament in the United Kingdom have been written on parchment for a thousand years and is still undertaken today.

King Attalus 1 (269-197 BC), Became king of Pergamum in Asia Minor, in succession to his cousin Eumenes I (241 BC). He is



probably the most important person in the history of Pergamum. He won an historic victory against the Galatians, who having migrated from Gaul (France) were foreigners in Anatolia. A ruler with a vision, he realised fully the rising fortune of Rome and aligned himself closely with the Romans. Following his victory over the Gauls he took the title saviour implying that he was the protector of the Asiatic Greeks against all barbarians. Rome gave him free movement in all western Anatolia so his kingdom spread to the Mediterranean coast. At this time his kingdom included within its realm all of the seven cities that we are looking at in these studies. He made Pergamum the most important state in Asia Minor, in control of all the Seleucid lands except Cilicia. These conquests, commemorated by the Pergamum triumphal monuments and by his titles of "Soter" (or "saviour") and of King. The last of the Attalus Kings, Attalus 111 (159 - 133 BC) on his death-bed bequeathed all the movable assets of his empire to the Romans. This was misinterpreted as meaning all of his possessions, including his whole kingdom. Thus, the Romans inherited a country of 66,750 square miles.

Pergamum became a Roman judiciary district of proconsular Asia. It was the chief city of authority until Augustus declared Ephesus to be the capital of the province of Asia. It was during this time that Mark Antony gave all the parchments of the library to Cleopatra.

### **PERGAMUM WAS ONE OF THE GREAT RELIGIOUS CENTRES.**

Pergamum regarded itself as the great custodians of the Greek way of life. In memory of a victory of 240 BC the great altar of Zeus was built in front of the temple of Athene which stood eight hundred foot up on Pergamum's conical hill. Forty foot high it stood on a projecting ledge of rock and looked like a great throne on the hillside. It burnt offerings all day long and the smoke could be seen all around. Around its base was carved one of the greatest achievements in the world of sculpture, the frieze which showed the battle of the giants, in which the gods of Greece were victorious over the giants of the Barbarians. Pergamum was the religious centre of the province and it boasted many temples. It also had the great altar of Zeus



The Zeus Altar was constructed by Eumenes II (197-159 BC) as a memorial of his victory against the Galatians. The altar had the shape of a horseshoe and was over 100 feet long on both sides. It was composed of four parts, the most striking of which are the high reliefs depicting the war between the giants and the gods. The photograph to the left is all that is left after the Zeus Altar was taken from Pergamum in 1871 and carried to Germany by the

German engineer Carl Humann. It is now exhibited at the Museum of Pergamum in Berlin. The photographs on the next page show the sheer splendour of this religious building with its columns and ornate finishes. Although the Turkish authorities have been trying for years to have it returned to Turkey, the altar has been preserved perhaps in a better state than left in its original place.



Pergamum was also famed for its medical science and had a temple dedicated to Asclepius, the god of healing, whose insignia was the entwined serpent on the staff.

### Temple and Centre for the god Aesclepium



The god of healing, Aesclepius received worship in cultic centres around the Greek and Roman world. This large complex at Pergamum was originally constructed in the 4th century B.C. and became an official centre in the 3rd century. In the 2nd century. A.D., Hadrian further developed the centre and it was added to the list of "wonders of the world."

The Great Establishment of Aesclepium was built around a sacred spring and sick people from all over the world flocked to this centre of healing, both in the Grecian

and Roman periods. Pergamum was known as the Lourdes of today. The emperors, Marcus Aerialus and Cara-calla sought healing there. Those that benefited from the ministry in Pergamum received help from priests, partly by the work of doctors, Galen; second only to Hippocrates was born in Pergamum.

The symbol for this temple was a snake. This is still a medical symbol today shown on many coat of arms and symbols of the medical profession in the UK.

As we know Satan is likewise symbolised as the serpent. Here are a few Scriptures that indicate this fact.

*"But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." "But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity {of devotion} to Christ." 2 Corinthians 11:3*

*"So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." Revelation 12:9*

*"He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;" Revelation 20:2*

We also see the serpent in the Garden of Eden causing man's fall. God told Moses to erect a bronze serpent on a pole and if a serpent bit a man, he had to look at the bronze serpent to live. (Numbers 21; 5 - 9) The Lord used this Old Testament event to describe His own crucifixion and that any sinner who looked on Him upon the Cross would find salvation. (John 3:14 - 15)

Pergamum was one of the five hundred cities and towns of Asia which benefited from the gospel as it was spread all over the province during the apostolic outreach. Christ's message to the Church started with the remark:

### Temple of Trajan



Pergamum as a centre of worship had many temples the one shown below illustrates impressive remains of this 2nd century A.D. marble temple dedicated to the emperor have been restored. It sits next to the library which housed 200,000 volumes and was the second largest in the ancient world after Alexandria.





## Theatre

This theatre is one of the steepest ones preserved in Turkey today. It sits on the edge of the city's acropolis. It was built in the Hellenistic period and altered in the Roman period. Seating capacity of this theatre is estimated at 10,000 people.

Pergamum has a long idolatrous history. In 29 BC the city built the first temple in Asia Minor in honour of Augustus and Rome. This is the place where emperor worship was initiated. This shortly became the

state religion. Later, the temple of Trajan was added and the city was named; 'Twice Temple Warden of the Augusti.'

By the time the epistle was written to the Church in Pergamum, the city had been well established in this satanic teaching for over 100 years and because of this Christ referred to it as "the seat of Satan". There are no Christians in Pergamum today!

## The Bible Text

### Revelation 2:12

*"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'these things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:*

*Sharp two-edged sword.*

Jesus gives the Church another illustration of himself. This time he is the sharp double-edged sword - this phrase is chosen from the description in Rev 1:16 probably to suggest the presence of power to expose and condemn the followers of the new Balaam. Let us look also at 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."*

This statement would be well known to the Christians in Pergamum. Those Romans who ruled in Pergamum and in the wider Roman Empire were divided into those who had the *ius gladii*, the right of the sword, and those who had not. Those who had the sword had the power of life and death. On their word, instant execution could be carried out. The power of civil authority over a certain level was known as the power of the sword. This is why Herod could order the immediate execution of John the Baptist (Mk 6:27).

Jesus however, is declaring that he has the ultimate power of the two edged sword. Christ has the absolute authority in His hands and everything is subject to Him. He has the power of life or death. The purpose of a two-edged sword is that it is used for defence and attack. Another symbol of the sword relates to the Word of God.

*"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit" Heb 4:12.*

When the Holy Spirit convicts a person within their very spirit it cuts away all excuses and defences and reveals sin and darkness. In turn it allows the person to repent and turn to God and become a new person. Its effect is to strip away all defences and allow God to minister his grace into the life.

### **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, and where you dwell..."*

Christ understands just where you live and what problems you have to face. He has marked the place. You may feel that Satan has his throne where you are or where you work of the district you live in. God has taken note and will go through with you in that testing. Did not Satan find out where Jesus was in the wilderness? Like him we are encouraged to use the Word of God against the Devil. It is good that Jesus knows all our works in the local church. He knows of our commitment and it really does not matter if the church acknowledges that or not. He knows and that is the most important point. Even feel unappreciated? He appreciates you! He knows also if you live in an ungodly home or work situation. You may feel all alone but he says, "I know where you dwell" therefore you are not alone.

*"Where Satan's throne is..."*

This is the only place in the Bible where it says this. Not only do we have the Throne but also where Satan lives. So are we may be looking at two different places in the city.

If I can explain it this way but this is only my view: - where does the Queen of Britain live and where is the crown of Britain kept? She lives normally in Buckingham Palace. Her crowns however are kept in the Tower of London. So, I believe that we are looking at two different places in Pergamum. Where Satan lives and where Satan has his throne.

Many commentaries and authors say that Satan's throne is one of the many temples. Could it be the temple of a Roman emperor, the fake worship of man with political power or could it be the altar of Zeus? Interestingly the Turkish Government for years have been trying to have the temple returned to them from Berlin. The local mayor confided to a journalist some years ago that he wanted it returned so that Satan worship may be restored! Others believe it was the worship of the healing god Asclepius that John was referring to. Yet a third theory was that Pergamum was the seat of pagan worship and healing by all sorts of magical means. People from all over the world were attracted to it. It gave them false hope in the gods. It is obvious that Satan was everywhere in



this pagan city but his throne we can only speculate. Whatever it was it was clear that satanic influence was at work and Jesus knew it.

*"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. "*

It was hard to be a Christian in such an idolatrous city. It was easier to escape than to remain where they were and successfully witness for Him. All citizens were expected to acknowledge Caesar as 'Lord' and pay homage to him. To refuse to do this showed great courage and conviction. From the text the Church had suffered an execution of one of its members called Antipas. The word martyr has an interesting interpretation because it means 'witness.' Nothing is known of this man but it does show the enormous pressure Christians were under to renounce their faith or practice in private. Again Jesus reminds the Church that he knows that all this activity is because of Satan dwelling amongst them.

Satan's church began officially at the tower of Babel. (Genesis 11:1 - 19) nearly 24 centuries BC It was here that devil worship began after the flood. The first full time minister of Satan was Nimrod who was Noah's grandson. (Genesis 10: 8 - 10). Secular history and tradition tells us that Nimrod married a woman who was as evil and demonic as himself. Her name was Semerimus. She knew about God's promise of a Saviour and she brazenly claimed that her first son Tammuz fulfilled this prophecy. Semerimus therefore instituted a religious system which made both her and her son the object of divine worship. She herself became the first high priestess. So began the mother-child cult which later spread all over the world. From Babylon it spread to Phoenicia under the name of Ashteroth and Tammuz and then to Pergamum. In Egypt the mother-child cult was known as Isis and Horns - Greece knew them as Aphrodite and Eros - Rome knew them as Venus and Cupid.

Semerimus taught that she herself was the way to God and she adopted the title of queen of heaven. She alone could administer salvation to the sinner through various sacraments such as the sprinkling of holy water. It is said that her son Tammuz was tragically slain by a wild boar during a hunting trip and that he was resurrected from the dead forty days later. Each year after this the temple virgins of this cult would enter into a forty day fast as a memorial to Tammuz's death and resurrection. After the forty day fast there was a joyful feast called Ishtar and at this feast coloured eggs were exchanged and eaten as a symbol of this resurrection. An evergreen tree was put on display and a yule log was burned. Finally, hot cakes marked with the letter T were baked and eaten to remind everyone of Tammuz.

It does make one wonder if these symbols taken over by the Christian Church are appropriate ones to display at Christmas and at Easter. It will also give some understanding to the Roman Catholic Church's teaching on the Virgin Mary and Jesus!

About 2000 BC God called Abraham away from all of this (Joshua 24: 2 - 3) and led him to the Promised Land. But by the ninth century BC Israel had returned to this devil worship under the influence of Jezebel. (1 Kings 16: 30 - 31) At this time the cult was worshipped under the name of Baal. Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah warned the people against this evil. "There he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was towards the north, and behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz"(Ezek 8:14) See also Jeremiah 7:

By the time of Christ, this cult had influenced Roman life to the extent that the Caesars were not only crowned as emperors of Rome but also bore the title Pontifex Maximus, which means "high priest". They were high priests of the Babylonian satanic church.

Coming back to the altar of Zeus (throne of Satan) we look at where it is today. It is still in Germany and since it has been there, there have been two world wars and the genocide of 6 million Jews. After the Second World War the Russians moved it to the Soviet Union and then began the cold war with the West. At the same time millions of people were killed in the iron curtain countries under communism. It was returned to East Berlin by the communists and the German communists tacked to the edifice of the altar, a praise of thanksgiving to the Soviet communists, for rescuing the altar from the ravages of war. The presence of this heathen temple, with this written on was used as a suitable medium to promote communism.

Religion in any form is big business with Satan as there were so many pagan temples in Pergamum. Satan is not in hell but is prince of this world, controlling kingdoms and going up and down the earth as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

Against all this opposition they remained true to the cause of Christ. In today's secular society to maintain a Christian witness is still very easy as compared with those in this satanic city. We should take heart that the Lord is with us in every situation.

#### **Revelation 2:14**

*"Nevertheless, I have a few things against you; you have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality"*

In spite of the faithful community of believers in Pergamum, all was not well with the Church. Infection similar to that which marred the testimony at Ephesus had invaded the Church at Pergamum. These are the two items for condemnation: The first the doctrine of Balaam and secondly the doctrine of the Nicolaitans

#### *1. The doctrine of Balaam*

By understanding the story of Balaam it will help us to interpret this group of infiltrators more accurately. - Balaam was a true prophet who prostituted his gifts in order to earn money from King Balak. The King hired Balaam to curse the people of Israel. If we read Numbers 25:1-9 we will be able to note the error of Balaam. When Balaam could not curse Israel he told Balak that by sending the Moabite women into the camp of Israel he would bring about fornication and the introduction of idolatry into the homes through mixed marriages.

The men of Israel succumbed to this temptation and corruption set in. God's judgement fell and 24,000 suffered punishment through plague. So we can deduce from the comparison that those claiming to be spokesmen for God in Pergamum were leading people astray.

We have to be aware of false teachers. We are required by God to test all who claim to speak in Jesus' Name.

## *2. The Doctrine of the Nicolaitans*

The meaning here may be, either that, in addition to those who held the doctrine of Balaam, they had also another class who held the doctrine of the Nicolaitans; or that the Nicolaitans held the same doctrine, and taught the same thing as Balaam. If but one class is referred to, and it is meant that the Nicolaitans held the doctrines of Balaam, then we know what constituted their teaching; if two classes of false teachers are referred to, then we have no means of knowing what was the uniqueness of the teaching of the Nicolaitans. The more natural and obvious construction, it seems possible that the inference is that the Nicolaitans taught the same things which Balaam did-to wit, that they led the people into corrupt and licentious practices. Some commentaries suggest that one of the seven deacons of the Early Church was the founder of this movement. See Acts 6:5 [Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch]

*"Eating food sacrificed to idols"*

Paul recognises the possibility that the liberty he claims to have might become a stumbling block to others who are weak. (Acts 15: 29 1 Cor 8: 9 - 10)

*"Sexual immorality"*

Most marriages fail for one of two reasons irrespective of the century we live in financial mismanagement or/and deteriorating personal or sexual relationships. Check both in your life. No Christian is immune from its problems

### **Revelation 2:15**

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

This is a reference again to false teaching as mentioned previously but now the word hate comes into the argument. It is important that in the day when ministers only talk about the love of God that there is a judgement side to God and he hates false doctrine that leads people astray.

### **Revelation 2:16**

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

The exhortation to repentance addressed to the Church infers an invitation to deal with these false teachers, as the Church at Ephesus had done. The only cure is repentance. (1 John 1: 9). Here the sword is mentioned again. The cutting edge of the Word of God will deal with false teachers if ministers are true to the scriptures and the oversight of a church have a prime responsibility to protect the flock from the wolves of false doctrine. If they do not take action then Christ is still the Head of the Church and He warns the Church at Pergamum that He will quickly exercise discipline by the " Sword of His Mouth ". Evil will not continue unpunished. His Word is powerful even as a two edged sword...

### **Revelation 2:17**



*"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes 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."*

***"He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit Says to the churches.***

Obviously there were those who heard and did not understand.

*"To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna."*

God gave the children of Israel manna in the wilderness when there was nothing else to eat. Exod 16:11-15. These Christians could not sit down with their workmates or friends because all meat had been offered on one of the many pagan altars. They felt deprived. But God had promised them heavenly food. One day they would feast on the finest food - heavenly food, just keep faithful. Jesus said, I am the Bread of Life". John 6:31-35. When we are oppressed feed upon the very life of God. The finest hidden manna, that which comes from heaven itself.

*"I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it"*

**WHITE STONE** - suggests a symbol of purity. In the courts of justice when a vote was taken as to the guilt of an accused person, a white stone signified acquittal and a black one, condemnation. Also, in ancient times a white stone was given to the conquerors in the public games with their name written on it.

Another idea is that an athlete carried an amulet or charm. Written on it was the name of his god. His god was supposed to exercise power in him when required. Christ is in us the hope of glory.

**NEW NAME** - the promised gift of Christ is the new name which here, as elsewhere in the Bible, stands for a new character. (Genesis 32: 28 Matthew 16:17 - 18) Abram became Abraham, Jacob became Israel, Simon became Peter and Saul became Paul. The Lord will put into His faithful servants' hearts the Name which is above every name, the Name before which every knee must bow and with that He will give them the new nature; the character conformed to the image of Christ which is the key to the true heaven.

Such promises are for all the saints who may be similarly tested today.