

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

4. The Church in Pergamum



Introduction

We have been studying the messages given to the 7 churches by the Lord Jesus. In this study we will look at the Church that was in the city of Pergamum and see how important it is to overcome compromise and worldliness.

Scripture Reading: Revelation 2:12-17

The city of Pergamum was 50 miles north-east of Ephesus and was the capital of Asia during Roman times. It was a centre of world learning, and had a famous library of 200,000 books. However Pergamum was also the centre of pagan worship, and had an altar to Zeus on the hillside where the city was built, that looked like a throne. This infamous landmark may have been what Jesus referred to in verse 13a.



What commendation did Jesus give to the church in Pergamum? V13

(They had remained true to His name and they had not renounced their faith.)

Like Smyrna, the residents of Pergamum were compelled to offer incense to Caesar and confess him as 'lord'. Jesus commended these believers for not renouncing their faith in Him, and specifically mentions Antipas who was martyred for refusing to do so.



Sadly though, there were things in this Church that were not right. What were they? V14-15

(There were those in the church who held the teaching of Balaam, and others who held the teaching of the Nicolaitans.)

What was the teaching of Balaam? When the Children of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land they had to pass through Moab. The Moabites were terrified and the King of Moab called Balaam, a prophet to curse Israel. God would not allow him to do so, and finally he blessed Israel. Balaam resorted to another means – he advised the people to seduce or lure the Israelites into breaking their covenant with God. See Numbers 25:1-5, 31:16. The teaching of Balaam then compromised God's standards and led people into worldliness.



In what way is the church, where you live, in danger of compromising and becoming worldly? Discuss.



Let's consider our own lives. In Romans 12:1-2 and 1 John 2:15-17 it urges us not to be conformed to this world. What area do you struggle with most?

Jesus also mentioned in His rebuke the teaching of the Nicolaitans. There are various opinions as to what this teaching was. Some believe they taught that a priestly order should rule over the 'laity', while others believe it was similar to the teaching of Balaam. We will not spend time on this, but just mention it in passing.



Why did Jesus tell the whole church to repent, even though only some followed the corrupt teaching? See Revelation 2:16 Why is it important to deal with false teaching in the church? 1 Timothy 1:3, 2 Peter 2:1-2 Discuss.

(Jesus told the church to repent as they were compromising their devotion to Him by allowing these ones to teach such things in the church. If false teaching is not dealt with other members will be affected.)



What wonderful promises were given to those who overcome? V17 What do you think this means?

*(They would be given hidden manna and a white stone with a new name on it. The hidden manna was 'heavenly food' rather than the food offered to idols in v14. Jesus Himself is the true Heavenly food. John 6:50, 51
The white stone could refer to several things these Christians would understand:-
- At the end of a trial the jurors gave an accused person a white stone if he was innocent or a black one if he was guilty.
- A white stone was used as an admission to a special gathering.
The new name could refer to either the name of Jesus or a new name that He will give us that reflects our character and authority.)*

Conclusion

The name 'Pergamum' means 'married'. Sadly the church in Pergamum was like that – it was a church married to the world. As God's children let's guard our hearts and minds so that we will not be conformed to the world, but totally devoted to Jesus. The promises He gives of hidden manna and a white stone are symbolic of the eternal blessings we will receive when we do so.