

## **Look! Listen! - And Overcome!**

### **The Revelation of Jesus Christ**

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

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**Look! Listen! – And Overcome!**

### **"Holding Fast in Satan's Territory"**

**Lord's Day Morning**

**October 7, 2007**

**Pastor Jeff Crippen**

*"If Satan dared to use Scripture for the temptation of our Lord, he will not scruple to use it for the delusion of men." Donald MacLeod*

*"Nowhere perhaps is the devil so active as in a congregation of gospel-hearers." J.C. Ryle*

### **Introduction – The City**

We come this morning to the third epistle of the risen Lord – this one addressed to His church in the Asian city of Pergamum. And once more it is very profitable for us to take some time to understand the setting of that particular city in which our brothers and sisters in Christ lived so many centuries ago. A place where Christ says – *Satan's throne is – where Satan dwells*. What do we know about Pergamum (or "Pergamos" as the KJV translates it)?

Here is the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia's entry -

#### **1. HISTORY:**

Pergamos, to which the ancient writers also gave the neuter form of the name, was a city of Mysia of the ancient Roman province of Asia, in the Caicus

### **Sermon Text: Revelation 2:12-17**

*"The devil entangles youth with beauty, the miser with gold, the ambitious with power, the learned with false doctrine." H.G. Bohn*

*"If God were not my friend, Satan would not be so much my enemy." Thomas Brooks*

*"Satan commonly stops the ear from hearing sound doctrine before he opens it to embrace corrupt." William Gurnall*

*"No sooner is a temple built to God, but the devil builds a chapel near by." George Herbert*

valley, 3 miles from the river, and about 15 miles from the sea. The Caicus was navigable for small native craft. Two of the tributaries of the Caicus were the Selinus and the Kteios. The former of these rivers flowed through the city; the latter ran along its walls. On the hill between these two streams the first city stood, and there also stood the acropolis, the chief temples, and theaters of the later city. The early people of the town were descendants of Greek colonists, and as early as 420 BC they struck coins of their own. Lysimachus, who possessed the town, deposited there 9,000 talents of gold. Upon his death, Philetaerus (283-263 BC) used this wealth to found the independent Greek dynasty of the Attalid kings. The first of this dynasty to bear the title of king was Attalus I (241-197 BC), a nephew of Philetaerus, and not only did he adorn the city with beautiful buildings until it became the most wonderful city of the East, but he added to his kingdom the countries of Mysia, Lydia, Caria, Pamphylia and Phrygia. Eumenes II (197-159 BC) was the most illustrious king of the dynasty, and during his reign the city reached its greatest height. Art and literature were encouraged, and in the city was a library of 200,000 volumes which later Antony gave to Cleopatra. The books were of parchment which was here first used; hence, the word "parchment," which is derived from the name of the town Pergamos.

Of the structures which adorned the city, the most renowned was the altar of Zeus, which was 40 ft. in height, and also one of the wonders of the ancient world. When in 133 BC Attalus III, the last king of the dynasty, died, he gave his kingdom to the Roman government. His son, Aristonicus, however, attempted to seize it for himself, but in 129 he was defeated, and the Roman province of Asia was formed, and Pergamos was made its capital. The term Asia, as here employed, should not be confused with the continent of Asia, nor with Asia Minor. It applied simply to that part of Asia Minor which was then in the possession of the Romans, and formed into the province of which Pergamos was the capital. Upon the establishment of the province of Asia there began a new series of coins struck at Pergamos, which continued into the 3rd century AD. The magnificence of the city continued.

## **2. RELIGIONS:**

There were beautiful temples to the four great gods Zeus, Dionysus, Athena and Asklepios. To the temple of the latter, invalids from all parts of Asia flocked, and there, while they were sleeping in the court, the god revealed to the priests and physicians by means of dreams the remedies which were necessary to heal their maladies. Thus opportunities of deception were numerous. There was a school of medicine in connection with the temple. Pergamos was chiefly a religious center of the province. A title which it bore was "Thrice Neokoros," meaning that in the city 3 temples had been built to the Roman emperors, in which the emperors were worshipped as gods. Smyrna, a rival city, was a commercial center, and as it increased in wealth, it gradually became the political center. Later, when it became the capital, Pergamos remained the religious center. As in many of the towns of Asia Minor, there were at Pergamos many Jews, and in 130 BC the people of the city passed a decree in their favor. Many of the Jews were more or less assimilated with the Greeks, even to the extent of bearing Greek names.

## **3. CHRISTIANITY:**

Christianity reached Pergamos early, for there one of the Seven Churches of the Book of Revelation stood, and there, according to Revelation 2:13, Antipas was martyred; he was the first Christian to be put to death by the Roman state. The same passage speaks of Pergamos as the place "where Satan's throne is," probably referring to the temples in which the Roman emperors were worshipped. During the Byzantine times Pergamos still continued as a religious center, for there a bishop lived. However, the town fell into the hands of the Seljuks in 1304, and in 1336 it was taken by Suleiman, the son of Orkhan, and became Turkish.

The modern name of the town, which is of considerable size, possessing 15 mosques, is Bergama, the Turkish corruption of the ancient name. One of its mosques is the early Byzantine church of Sophia. The modern town is built among the ruins of the ancient city, but is far less in extent. From 1879 to 1886 excavations among the ruins were conducted by Herr Humann at the expense of the German government. Among them are still to be seen the base of the altar of Zeus, the friezes of

which are now in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin; theater, the agora, the gymnasium and several temples. In ancient times the city was noted for its ointments, pottery and parchment; at present the chief articles of trade are cotton, wool, opium, valonia, and leather.

*E. J. Banks*

And then further – listen to John Stott

*"I know where you live" says Christ. He is aware that His people are surrounded by a non-Christian society, and are exposed on all sides by the presence of the world's standards and values...In no place was this more true than in Pergamum, which has been described as a strong center of paganism. Here a pitched battle was being fought, in which the combatants were not people but ideas. The issue was not between good and evil, but between truth and error.*

*Pergamum was about 55 miles from Smyrna and as due north of it as Smyrna was of Ephesus. But it was some 15 miles from the Aegean coast and a mile or two from the River Caicus, in whose valley it was situated. No travelers could visit Pergamum without being impressed by its welter of temples and altars. The acropolis of Pergamum crowned a steep hill that rose one thousand feet above the plain. Near the summit stood an immense altar to Zeus, erected by Eumenes II to commemorate the victory won by his*

*father over the Gauls; and at a short distance from this altar there was an elegant temple of Athena.*

*More important still was the well-developed cult of Rome and Caesar which seems to have thrived in Pergamum. Back in 29 BC permission had been granted to the citizens of Pergamum to erect and dedicate a temple to Augustus. This was the first provincial temple to be built in honor of a living emperor. Smyrna's came three years later in 26 BC. The imperial cult had thus its center at Pergamum." [What Christ Thinks of the Church, John Stott]*

One more brief background comment from Dennis Johnson –

*"Pergamum had once been the capital of the Roman province of Asia, but Caesar Augustus had made Ephesus the center of the financial and administrative functions for the province. The city had a temple dedicated 'to the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma' (built in 29 BC). Another temple and related medical college dedicated to Asklepios the Savior (patron god of healing, symbolized by a serpent) – ie, the modern symbol of the American Medical Association – and an enormous altar to Zeus the Savior on the city's highest point. Any of these*

*idolatrous monuments – certainly the three in combination – would justify Jesus' pronouncement that this church dwells 'where Satan's throne is...where Satan dwells.'*" [Triumph of the Lamb, Dennis Johnson]

Alright then, with this background information, listen now as we read Christ's letter to the church at Pergamum –

NKJ Revelation 2:12 " 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*."

### **I. The Sharp Two-Edged Sword**

This letter is going to require more than just one Sunday to complete. As you can already see, we are going to have to go back to the OT book of Numbers and review the account there of Baalam and Balak if we are going to be able to properly understand *the doctrine of Balaam*. So we will take our time and not rush over these verses.

Notice that in this letter we see a church which –

- Had held fast to Christ's name in the face of intense attacks from outside the church,
- Had not done so well in the face of more subtle attacks from inside the church.

There is at least then a two-fold lesson for us here in respect to Satan's strategies and our defense against those attacks. We should not be surprised that attacks from within are normally more dangerous than is persecution from the world outside the church.

Christ comes to this church at Pergamum as –

*"The One who has the sharp two-edged sword..."*

Remember, these characteristics are being drawn from that vision of John's back in chapter 1 – special emphasis to a particular aspect of the vision being selected and applied to each of the seven churches. In this case, it is the sword –

NKJ Revelation 1:16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.

What then is the meaning of this sword?

First, we must always understand that the vision of Christ in chapter 1 is not given as a literal description of Him. That is to say, Christ does not literally have a sword coming out of His mouth – *but the thing the sword symbolizes*

*about Him is literally true.* What, then, does the sword symbolize? What message is it given to convey to us? The sword appears again in the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter –

NKJ Revelation 19:15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16 And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. 17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, 18 "that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all *people*, free and slave, both small and great." 19 And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. 20 Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who

worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. 21 And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

The sword is obviously Christ's offensive weapon with which He strikes down His enemies. But what is this weapon? What does the sword represent?

There is Old Testament background here, as well as other New Testament parallels –

NKJ Isaiah 11:4 But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.

NKJ Isaiah 49:2 And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, And made Me a polished shaft; In His quiver He has hidden Me."

NKJ Ephesians 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

NKJ 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.

See the common thread? It is all quite consistent with the fact that *this sword is not held in Christ's hand, as a sword normally is, but it proceeds from His mouth.* Plainly, the sword is His Word. He speaks and His enemies are destroyed. It is, therefore, Christ's powerful Word that He emphasizes to these believers at Pergamum and which, if there is a lack of repentance, He will use to make war against these heretics in the church.

AND, it is this mighty sword which is designed to give comfort to those at Pergamum who are remaining faithful to Christ. They live where Satan's throne is – *where the sword of Rome had already killed Antipas and which threatened them still with death.* But Christ here reminds them that there is really only one sword they need fear, and if there is repentance from the error among them, this sword is on their side.

This, then, is the sharp two-edged sword proceeding from Christ's mouth – *His powerful Word.* He speaks and it

is done. He speaks and His enemies are consumed.

*of the congregation."* [Anthony Hoekema]

*"The sword denotes the power and authority of the One Who walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks to execute judgment and to destroy the evil-doers by the Word of His mouth. He is Judge supreme, and he rules also against the evil men in His own church, destroying them by the sword that proceeds out of His mouth. That sword is His sovereign and powerful Word, executing judgment. An earthly judge can pronounce a verdict of guilty and announce the sentence of punishment; but his word has no power; it has not the power to inflict that punishment and to enforce his sentence. Not so, however, with the Word of Jesus. If He, as the mighty King-Judge, expresses a sentence upon anyone, the very word of the sentence IS the power that inflicts the punishment and realizes the judgment expressed. It is the sword that executes the sentence. In this light then, as King-Judge in the midst of the church, He announces Himself to the congregation at Pergamos. She has in her midst evil men, who aim at the destruction of the church by their evil doctrine and practice. And these men must be rooted out from her midst. Hence, His appearance with the sharp two-edged sword proceeding from His mouth is in accord with the condition*

## II. "I Know Where You Live" (vs 13)

NKJ 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.

Here is this wonderful, assuring commendation of Christ to the saints at Pergamum. Once more we hear His words to His church – *I know...*". He is in the midst of His people, walking through it all with them –

NKJ Isaiah 43:1 But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.

And these believers were indeed in the flame and in the waters. They lived

where Satan's throne was – where Satan dwelt. Still, they *held fast Christ's name and did not deny His faith*. They had done so even in the terrible days when one of their own – Antipas – was killed because he did not love his life even to the death. Antipas is described by Christ as *My witness, My faithful one*. Antipas had overcome, and so had the church.

They *held fast Christ's name*. They refused to deny Christ no matter what Rome threatened. They confessed Christ as Lord, come what may. They knew that the sword of Rome was nothing to fear – only that Sword of swords that proceeded from Christ's mouth. Christ knew all this. He had been and still was present among them in the fire and flood.

### **The Reality of the Devil & His War Against Christ's Church -**

This is the second time now in The Revelation that we have met *the devil*. His attacks are really evident in every single one of the 7 letters, but in several *he is actually named*. This must not be lost upon us. The Lord Jesus repeatedly identifies Satan as the enemy of Christ's church and exposes his diabolic schemes –

**Smyrna**

NKJ Revelation 2:9 "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan. 10 "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

### **Pergamum**

NKJ 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.

### **Thyatira**

NKJ Revelation 2:24 "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden.

### **Philadelphia**

NKJ Revelation 3:9 "Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of



Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie -- indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.

Even the church at Ephesus has evidence of Satanic attack in that evil men, false apostles had come to try to deceive the saints there. It is perhaps notable that ONLY two of the seven churches show perhaps no overt evidence of Satanic attack – the church at Sardis that was asleep, and the church at Laodicea that was nauseatingly lukewarm.

There are significant lessons for us in these things that we dare not miss. Once more, take careful note. *These letters are from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who is present among us.* And He is telling His church over and over again that Satan is also present – particularly in churches that are alive and at least worthy of some commendation from Christ.

- Satan sends his emissaries. We must test such men and not be naïve.
- Satan establishes his own "churches" that parade as Christian churches but are really synagogues of Satan. Their true nature is betrayed by their opposition to the gospel and even persecution of Christ's flock.

- Satan uses his age-old methods of persecution and imprisonment, often utilizing civil authorities as his instrument.
- There are particular locales where Satan's hold is especially strong and persecution the greatest.

### Repent – Or Else (vs 16)

Are you beginning to notice that with the exception of Smyrna and Philadelphia, all the other churches receive a command from Christ to *repent*? To fail to heed this call in obedience is to invite Christ's discipline or even His removal of a church from His presence. It should be our earnest prayer – constantly – that the Lord would show us where we need to repent – and then we must be quick to do so.

In the case of Pergamum, Christ says –

NKJ Revelation 2:16 'Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

There is something very interesting here. The command to repent is in the second person singular, as is the pronoun you. And yet it is a plural "them" that Christ will fight against with the sword of His mouth if He

comes. How is this to be explained? You would think that the natural flow of the wording would have been *Repent, or else I will come to you and will fight against you*. But not so.

Let me suggest that Christ is addressing each of these churches in the singular as a single corporate body. As such, He is *holding the entire church accountable for the heresies held by some among them* –

"...But I have a few things against you [singular] because you [singular] have there SOME [plural; literally "the ones who are holding fast to] the teaching of Balaam..." 2:14

And again in verse 15 –

"So you [singular; note, this "you" is intensive, as if to say "YOU, I am talking to YOU"] also have SOME [plural]..."

Understand what is happening then? Christ is addressing the entire church, calling upon them to repent *of their toleration of those among them who are holding to these heresies*. The entire church does not embrace these false doctrines, but the entire church is guilty for permitting those who do to continue among them, having failed to call them to repentance. The church must repent of its negligence, initiate

proper church discipline, and let those in error know that Christ Himself is going to come against them to fight against them and strike them with the sword of His mouth – His powerful Word – unless they repent. In other words, Christ is saying –

*"You repent and deal with these people among you, or else I am coming to you and I will deal with them Myself."*

Let's conclude then with several very sobering applications –

- Christ walks among us. He sees and He knows – the good and the evil.
- It is the duty of the church to exercise biblical church discipline against sinning, erring members.
- Christ regards a failure or refusal to administer such discipline as *sin*, of which He considers the entire church guilty.
- In dealing with unrepentant, sinful members, the church must remind them of the dangerous position such unrepentance places them. Christ sees them. Christ knows them. Christ will, if they harden themselves, come against them in power and judgment. When He does, they will not have a last-minute second chance – *"or else I am coming to you quickly..."*.

What does this mean? It means that Christ may choose to literally strike them down now –

*"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent."* [Rev 3:19, Letter to Laodicea]

*"Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds."* [Rev 2:22, letter to Thyatira]

NKJ 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 had done this at Corinth (1 Cor 11:30).

It may mean that the Sword of Christ comes as the Word of Christ, exposing the sin of those who will not repent, exposing and defeating their heresies, and taking them out of His church – giving them over to Satan for chastisement.

This is how to hold fast even while living in Satan's territory.

But it surely means that, for those who persist in unrepentance, one day they will be struck with the sword of Christ's final judgment as He speaks, and they are lost forever and ever away from His presence.

I need to know these things. We need to know them as a church, and I need to know them for myself. When I am tempted to sin, I need to be reminded that Christ knows, Christ sees, and that if I were to persist in sin, refusing to repent, He may well "come quickly" because –