

PERGAMUM & THYATIRA: THE SEVEN CHURCHES

The City:

- The official capital of Asia Minor.
- Pergamum was known for its library and was the first place where parchment (animal skin used as a writing surface) was used.
- In Pergamum was the original Augustan Temple. Pergamum had temples dedicated to "the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma" and to Asklepios (the god of healing, symbolized by serpents). It also had a large altar/temple dedicated to Zeus. One of the most famous altars in the world. Up on a ledge jutting out from the hillside - 800 feet up - sat the huge altar. Smoke ascended endlessly from the sacrifices offered there. "No one could fail to see it,' since 'it would look like nothing so much as a great seat or throne" (Barclay). Many believe this is the reference behind 2:13.
- All seven cities addressed in these letters were thoroughly pagan, but Pergamos was the worst.

The History:

- We're not sure. When both Jews and Greeks throughout Asia heard the word in Ephesus (Acts 19:10).
- Did Jews from Asia (Acts 2:9) carry the word back home?

Pergamum:

vs. 12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the **sharp two-edged sword**.

- The Romans carried a short broad-sword. When Romans were given governing powers, they were given power to inflict capital punishment. This was called "the right of the sword."
- Jesus is the Word (John 1:1). "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

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

- We've discussed the possible reference to the Temple of Zeus, etc.
- One legend says that Antipas was roasted to death in a brazen bull. We really don't know. He was a martyr.
- Persecution at Pergamos was promulgated by State persecutors. Christians were tried in the local provincial court and were confronted with the choice of conforming to the State religion or receiving an immediate death sentence. Prisoners were brought from almost all parts of Asia to Pergamos for trial. Many martyrs were tried and condemned there who were not residents of the city.

vs. 14-15 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

- Background: Numbers 22-25, 31:13-16.
- Joshua 14:22 "Balaam also, the son of Beor, the one who practiced divination, was killed with the sword by the people of Israel among the rest of their slain." 2 Peter 2:15 states Balaam "loved gain from wrongdoing."
- We've already discussed the Nicolaitans.

vs. 16-17 Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of My mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the **hidden manna**, and I will give him a **white stone**, with a **new name** written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.'

- Manna was to Israelites what Jesus was to Christians - the bread of life (John 6). They were already enjoying it, but it was a promise of continual spiritual nourishment.
- White which carries many beautiful ideas: purity, justice, nobility, victory and joy. They were used of acquittal in trial. They were rewarded to heroism, service, victory and acted as complimentary passes to the games or the theater. Friends also shared them with each other showing a guarantee of a warm reception anytime and any place they met.
- A new name? Jesus was also given a new name no one would know, yet in 19:13, we are told His name. So, perhaps the idea of "new" speaks to a new status. Abram to Abraham. Jacob to Israel. Simon to Peter. Others can know it, but they don't know it like you do. You know that Jesus is the Word, but you don't know that like He does. That's something personal that's delivered to the individual. That individual knows their story, sin and spiritual bankruptcy, trials and victories better than anyone else.

The City:

- Recognized as a garrison town. Had no natural fortifications, so it had to be well-built and well staffed with well-trained soldiers. It was a weak town which had to be and act strong!
- Thyatira was known especially for its trade guilds, metalworkers, and its dye-manufacturing facilities; after all, Lydia the seller of purple was from Thyatira (Acts 16:14).
- Pergamum was known for its library and was the first place where parchment (animal skin used as a writing surface) was used.

The History:

- Paul met Lydia (the seller of purple goods from Thyatira) in Philippi. Acts 16:14.
- When both Jews and Greeks throughout Asia heard the word in Ephesus (Acts 19:10).
- Did Jews from Asia (Acts 2:9) carry the word back home? Again, we're just not sure.

Thyatira:

vs. 18 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.'

- Eyes like flame and feet like burnished bronze - such images were familiar to Thyatiran metalworkers.
- Thyatira was very much a bronze town. The town guilds worshiped the god who worked in bronze.

vs. 19 " 'I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.'

- This group is opposite Ephesus - known for their love, but fell short on discerning and keeping the truth.

vs. 20-23 But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.

- The self-proclaimed prophetess who encourages idolatry and immorality resembles Jezebel the Sidonian. Jezebel married Israel's King Ahab and imposed Baal-worship in the kingdom (1 Kings 16:30-33; 19:1-2; 21:25-26).
- Take note of Jesus' rebukes. What kind of things gets Him upset? We need to be bold and clear.
- People live "life in the fast lane". We can get so technical and subtle on issues that God may or may not care about. We need to watch out for all forms of sexual sin: what we watch, how we conduct ourselves, yes . . . what we wear. It's still the LAW of liberty. Freedom from sin . . . not to acts sinful. The U.S. is struggling.

vs. 24-25 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come.

- Jesus recognizes the individual. There are some who didn't drink the cool-aid. They were told to hang in there.

vs. 26-27 The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.

- Jesus rules now. We're also said to rule with Him now (Romans 5:17; 1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

- Rule of iron would mean something to a metal worker. Potters would appreciate the reference to earthen pots as well.

vs. 28-29 And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

- The morning star is Christ (see 22:16). He is Israel's ruler and rescuer. Balaam predicted His rise (Num. 24:17).