



Before focusing on the church in Pergamos, let's summarize what we have covered so far.

We have been studying the works and attitudes of the seven churches in Rev. 2-3, not only as local conditions, but also as *prophetic descriptions* of what would happen to the overall Church until Christ's return. After all, Revelation deals with what would happen to the Church from John's day to Christ's arrival and beyond. Crucially, it is described as "the book of *this prophecy*" (Rev. 22:19). It was couched in symbols so its true meaning could be revealed only to the converted (Mt. 13:11; I Cor. 2:14).

Also the *progressive* nature of the descriptions of the seven churches is clear—it begins with the mention of apostles in the first church and ends with Christ's warning to the Laodicean church that He is "at the door," or about to arrive (Rev. 3:20).

In fact, Revelation can be divided into three main parts: (1) the description of the seven churches (Rev. 1-3); (2) the account of what happens to the Church *before* Christ returns (Rev. 4-18); and (3) what occurs to the Church *after* Jesus' arrival--all the way to when God the Father comes with the New Jerusalem to a new and renewed earth (Rev. 19-22).

Prophetically, in Rev. 12, we have a summary of Church history from the time of Jesus up to when He returns. Here, two major events are mentioned. First, the fleeing and hiding of the Church for 1,260 days (which prophetically, days can mean years--Num. 14:34; Ez. 4:6; Dan. 9:24-26). (Note: If *years* were mentioned instead of days, it would give away the fact that Christ's return would not come for at least 1,260 years and would demoralize the Church at that time.) Secondly, when Satan is cast to the earth after his rebellion, there is a literal three and a half year period when the Church flees to "her place" (Rev. 12:9-14). Then, Jesus will rescue His Church.

Now let's begin the account: "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: '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. 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. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. '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'" (Rev. 2:12-17).

Pergamos, or Pergamum (which means 'exalted'), was forty miles northeast of Smyrna in the Caicus valley and on the imperial highway running along the coast of Asia. It was built on a steep hill that rose one thousand feet above a fertile valley. Its Greek-style acropolis rivaled that of Athens and was filled with pagan temples, including Zeus' Great Altar and a temple to Asclepius, the serpent-god of healing.

Here, parchments, called pergamum, began to be made of animal skins and its library was second only to the one in Alexandria. It was the capital of the Pergamum kingdom under the Attalid kings (282 B.C.-133 B.C.) until deeded to Rome and it became the Roman province of Asia. From Pergamos, Caesar's orders were executed through the region.

Robert Mounce notes, "It was here that Satan had established *his official seat or chair of state*. As Rome had become the center of Satan's activity in the West, so *Pergamum had become his 'throne' in the East*" (*The Book of Revelation, Revised*, 1997, p. 79).

As we will see, "Satan's throne" not only means political, but more importantly, *religious* power.

As Taylor Bunch notes, "When Cyrus captured the city of Babylon, *the ancient seat of Satan's counterfeit system of religion*, the *supreme pontiff* of the Chaldean mysteries and his retinue of priests *fled from the city and ultimately made their residence in Pergamos* [see Barker & Ainsworth, *Lares and Penates, or Cilicia and its governors*, p. 232]. Here they re-established their Babylon worship and made the king of Pergamum *the chief pontiff* of their religion. When Attalus III, the last of the priest-kings, died in 133 B.C., he bequeathed both his royal and priestly offices to Rome as Pontifex Maximus of the

religion of the Empire" (*The Seven Epistles of Christ*, 1947, p. 150).

So when did the State and Church prophetically come together to form a "throne" where Satan can now use to guide this new type of government?

Halley comments, "Sylvester I was Bishop of Rome when, under Emperor Constantine, *Christianity was virtually made the state religion of the Roman Empire*. The Church immediately became an institution of vast importance *in world politics*. Constantine regarded himself as *head of the Church*. He called the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325), and *presided over it*, the first world council of the Church...The number of martyrs under Papal persecutions *far outnumbered* the early Christian martyrs under pagan Rome" (*Halley's Bible Handbook*, 1965, p. 769, 793).

In A.D. 381, Emperor Gratian gave up his title of Pontifex Maximus and ceded it to the bishop of Rome, Pope Damasus I. Thus *Pergamos* became the connecting link between *the two Babylons*, the ancient and modern, and where in the East, "*the woman* [Babylon the great] rode the Roman beast."

Then, Theodosius, the next emperor, declared the Catholic Church as the *official* religion of the Empire, and now, the once-persecuted Roman church becomes, under Constantine and his successors, the *systematic* persecutor of the true Church for over a thousand years. She would have to flee into the wilderness. It would be a 1,260 year period, believed to be from A.D. 325 to 1585, when Sabbatarians were finally able to emerge mostly in Elizabethan England and eventually establish churches in Rhode Island, where they could publicly worship God.

So Jesus tells the Pergamos Church He has a two-edged sword--a sword of judgment. He is concerned about the deteriorating spiritual state of this Church under the strong persecution and pressure to compromise. A prominent Church leader, Antipas, was martyred (the term "Antipas" can be a personal and a symbolic name, since it means, "against all").

It was now suffering from the Emperor's wrath and the "exalted" false church, again identified with the Nicolatians but using the tactics of Balaam to cause members to compromise on their beliefs. As Mounce notes, "...the Nicolatians are essentially the same group as the Balaamites. Both describe an antinomian group [those against God's laws] that

had accommodated itself to the religious and social requirements of the pagan society" (op. cit., p. 81).

Ivor Fletcher gives a good summary about the Pergamos church and these historical parallels in "*The Incredible History of God's True Church*." He writes, "Scholars recognize that the first Christians continued to observe the 'Jewish' Sabbath. By Justin Martyr's time (A.D.150), however, the large numbers of gentile converts coming into the church wrongly assumed that the Sabbath was a part of the ritualistic law of Moses. Genesis 2 shows that it was instituted long before the time of Moses.

"Soon a new 'gospel' began to be preached which extolled Christ and His virtues but denied His all-important message that He would return and set up the kingdom of God on earth. When the Roman or Latin form of Christianity became the state religion of the empire under Constantine, men saw less need for the return of Christ and sought to establish their own ecclesiastical empire, with Rome, not Jerusalem, as its headquarters.

"The 'little flock' which constituted the true Church of God were now classified as 'heretics' by Constantine's 'Christian' empire and, true to prophecy (Dan. 12:7; Rev. 12), were forced to flee into the wilderness or die as martyrs for their faith.

"To those who continued to keep the Passover, in the form that it was handed down to them from the apostles and their successors, Constantine wrote the following: 'Forasmuch, then, as it is no longer possible to bear with your pernicious errors, we give warning by this present statute that none of you henceforth presume to assemble yourselves together. We have directed, accordingly, that you be deprived of all the houses in which you are accustomed to hold your assemblies; and forbid the holding of your superstitious and senseless meetings...Take the far better course of entering the Catholic Church...' [Edict Against Heretics].

"Not only the Passover, but the Sabbath too, was to be abolished by the state, at the Council of Laodicea in A.D. 364. Those who wished to continue to keep the commandments of God were now forced to flee for their lives into remote wilderness areas beyond the reach of their persecutors. The new state religion, a bizarre blend of Christianity and paganism, now began to dominate Europe for over a thousand years, leaving the true Church in 'a place

prepared of God' (Rev. 12:6)—the remote mountains and valleys of central Europe....During the long, dark night of the Middle Ages...the church of God was driven by the persecuting power of the 'Holy Roman Empire' into the remote mountains and valleys of Europe, there to preserve the purity of the true faith. A variety of names were applied to God's people during this period: 'Paulicians,' 'Publicani,' 'Puritans,' 'Waldenses,' 'Vaudois,' 'Henricians,' 'Bogomils,' and several others. Names such as these, however, were generally used by those outside of the Church. In their own writings, church members normally employed the title, 'Church of God.' Church historians have been able to demonstrate that regardless of the differing names used, 'These branches, however, sprang from one common stock, and were animated by the same religious and moral principles' (Jones, *Church History*, p. 187).

"As the earlier 'Smyrna' era of the true church had been classified by the world as 'Ebionites' [or Nazarenes], so the members of the 'Pergamos' era came to be known [mainly] as 'Paulicians' ('the followers of the Apostle Paul'). This group of Christians became very numerous during the seventh century and were distinguished by their zeal, knowledge and simplicity of their lives.

"About A.D. 650, a well-educated man named Constantine of Mananali began to study portions of the Bible that he had received as a gift. Amazed by the truth which he found revealed, he began preaching in the regions of Cappadocia and Armenia. Several evangelists were trained to assist him in the ministry and soon tens of thousands were being converted to the truth. Constantine plainly taught that the Pope was not the representative of God, and perhaps because of this and other reasons, he was martyred in A.D. 684...[it is believed he was the one symbolically described as 'Antipas' in Rev. 2:13].

"Paulician doctrines, along with those of other groups, are described in a work entitled *The Key of Truth*...They preached the gospel of the kingdom of God, baptized believers by immersion, practiced the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Spirit, and observed the Sabbath, the Passover on the fourteenth day of Nisan and the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

"This era of the Church was not without its problems. A trend towards spiritual and moral

decline set in early; many who had associated with the Church were not really converted but simply cleaved to the true Christians with flatteries (Dan. 11:34). Others held to the 'doctrine of Balaam' (Rev. 2:14), that one could commit spiritual 'fornication' and coexist with sin and false doctrine. When these people were permitted to fellowship with local church congregations, the corruption only spread to many more members. In an attempt to correct His people, Christ allowed severe persecution to afflict them—multitudes perished but few repented....

"The Paulician faith eventually came to dominate large areas of Armenia and Albania, but with many, this was nothing more than an outward 'form' of religion; truly converted members were never numerous. Many reached a state of compromise with the dominant Catholic state religion. They conformed externally but followed Paulician teachings in secret. In time, the alternatives narrowed to apostasy or martyrdom. By the ninth century, most had drifted so far from the true doctrines that they were drawn to seek political or military solutions to their persecution problems. Anatolia, one of the earliest Paulician homelands, became a desolation and wilderness ravaged by decades of warfare; thus the 'Pergamos' era of the true Church came to its inglorious conclusion" (1984, pp. 131-132; 151-154).

Yes, Christ warned those members who compromised with the truth to repent or there would be a severe punishment. Yet, for those who remained faithful, He offered a great reward, "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" (Rev. 2:17).

The hidden manna refers to the flask of manna that was hidden away in the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 16:33; Heb. 9:4). Christ later used manna as a symbol of receiving eternal life (John 6:48-51).

Regarding the white stone with a new name, in those days, a white stone was used to signify acquittal from legal charges, or as a token of victory in Greek or Roman athletic games.

It means at the resurrection, we will have been acquitted from all sin and will be given a new name to go along--with our new and perfect spiritual character and body. What a great blessing!