

Revelation Five

11/03/2024

Hymns: 12 I'll Fly Away
There's a New Name Written Down in Glory Thy Word

Scripture: Psalm 33:1-12

Big idea: Deception in Pergamum

Parchment – what is it? Does anybody have any idea? Many of the oldest manuscripts of the Bible were written on parchment. It's a fairly durable writing medium. It actually comes from taking skins from sheep or other animals such as goats or calves and stretching the skin, removing the hair, processing it, and so on to end up with a nice, durable surface for writing.

Have you ever heard of parchment paper used for cooking? Parchment paper is not parchment. Parchment paper is made from wood pulp. Its just standard paper with special processing to make it most suitable for cooking. In today's study we encounter parchment. It's a writing surface, but it is not parchment paper.

If you recall, we're continuing our **trip** through the fascinating book of Revelation. We learned that this final book of the Bible sometimes called *the apocalypse* unveils or reveals Jesus **not** in His humanity as shown in the gospels but instead it reveals Him in His glory. The imagery of Christ in the first chapter of Revelation describes a person of great majesty and power.

Yet despite Jesus having this frightening appearance, His demeanor towards His own is tender and gracious. We learned that we who know Him will receive a perfect, immortal body like His that can float through the air, pass through walls, materialize, dematerialize, and even fly through the clouds and beyond.

So far, we've visited the cities of Ephesus and Smyrna. First century Ephesus boasted a large, prosperous port and transportation hub and featured the temple of Diana, the pagan goddess of fertility. While that church did many good deeds, its heart was not right. It had lost its first love of the LORD and was **just** going through the motions. The irony of this was that that a city obsessed by *sensual* love would have a church whose prime weakness was its *spiritual* love.

Last time we moved on in our travels to Smyrna, a city that lies 30 to 40 miles to the north of Ephesus on the western tip of what is now Turkey. The large, prosperous city today, called Izmir, engulfs the ruins of ancient Smyrna making them seem to be almost an afterthought as the development around the site overshadows what seems more like a city block. Many of the ruins remain buried and may never be excavated. Others are stacked carefully still awaiting organization and re-assembly.

Unlike all but one other of the seven churches, Jesus had only commendation and encouragement for them to persevere. He had no words to them of condemnation or dictates to repent. He assured them that their days of persecution were numbered and would pale in comparison to the glorious future awaiting them in eternity.

Today we're moving on to the third of the churches addressed by Jesus named Pergamos. Located

about 60 miles north of Smyrna and inland about 20 miles from the sea along the Caicus River, the city contains extensive ruins of ancient Pergamos. The city was built on a hill that rises over 200 feet between two tributaries that feed the Caicus river. That hill is called an acropolis. It too had a large amphitheater that seated over 10,000, a library, and agora (marketplace). On this acropolis stood many monuments and temples. While Ephesus was a commercial center, and Smyrna became a political center, Pergamos was a religious center.

After the time of Alexander the Great, Greek princes constructed a residence there that surpassed all other buildings in Asia Minor for its splendor. Also on the acropolis, the Greeks built beautiful buildings – making Pergamos a city of great beauty. Among the structures built there were temples to the Greek gods Zeus (the king of gods), Dionysus (pleasure), Athena (goddess of wisdom and war), and Asklepios (healing). People came from far and wide to find healing at this place. A school of medicine and a library containing 200,000 volumes along with three neokoros added further grandeur to this city. These three temples were dedicated to specific Roman emperors to be worshiped as gods. In 133 B.C. the ruler of Pergamos gave his dynasty to the Roman government. Mark Antony gave the library volumes as a gift to Cleopatra.

Herr Hermann of Germany in 1879 through 1886 discovered one of the most famous ruins of Pergamos called the altar of Zeus. This altar rose to 40 feet in height. The base of the altar remains today while the ornate upper workmanship resides in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, Germany.

Ancient Pergamos produced pottery, ointments, and parchment. Parchment was created by stretching and processing skins of animals. It served as a competing medium for writing with Egyptian papyrus. Today chief exports from the city include fine carpets, wool, cotton, and leather. The modern city of about 100,000, now called Bergama, is built among the extensive area of ruins.

With that, let's move on to what Jesus said to the church at Pergamos:

Revelation 2:12-17

[12] And to the angel

Recall *angel* means *messenger*.

of the church in Pergamos write;

*These things sa[ys] he which ha[s] the sharp **sword** with two edges;*

This mini-letter begins by identifying Jesus as the one with a sharp two-edged sword. What does that mean exactly? The Bible uses that image elsewhere even more graphically.

Revelation 1

*[16] And he had in his right hand seven stars: and **out of his mouth** went a **sharp twoedged sword**: and his countenance was as the sun shine[s] in [its] strength.*

If we skip forward in this letter (v. 16) it elaborates that this sword comes from Jesus' mouth as well. No, Jesus is not a sword swallower, and He's not holding a sword in His teeth. From elsewhere in the New Testament we learn what's really going on.

Hebrews 4

*[12] For the **word of God** is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

Revelation 19

[15] And out of his mouth goe[s] a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: ...

And after casting the ringleaders of the tribulation into the Lake of Fire Jesus uses the sword of **His word**, meaning he merely speaks the word, to finish off the rest of those who dare oppose Him:

*[21] And the remnant were slain with the **sword of him** that sat upon the horse, which **sword proceeded out of his mouth**: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.*

*[13] I know y[our] works, and where [y]ou dwell[], even **where Satan's seat is**:*

According to this verse, Satan had located his base of operations there. The city had a lot going for it from Satan's point of view. It contained temples to Roman Emperors who demanded being worshiped as gods. It also filled itself with idol worship and built temples to four Greek gods. The god of healing Asklepios even had a serpent on a pole associated with him.

Of course, millennia before that false god was imagined, Moses used a serpent on a pole for the Israelites to just look upon to receive protection from poisonous snakes. Jesus told us that that symbol pointed to Him on the cross (John 3:14). God the Father placed our sin on Jesus who bore our punishment that we might be healed from death and saved to eternal life (I Peter 2:24). And of course the serpent personifies Satan in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:2; Ezekiel 28:13) and later in this book of Revelation 12:9.

and [y]ou

*hold[] fast my **name**, and*

*ha[ve] **not** denied my faith, even in those days where[] Antipas **was** my **faithful martyr**, who was slain among you, **where Satan dwell[s]**.*

There's a second reference to where Satan dwells. Little is known about Antipas other than what is said here. It's noteworthy that Jesus calls him by name, and He knows each of us by name also. Antipas was a faithful martyr. He personified those in the church in

Pergamos who held strong to their true faith despite the evil that surrounded them.

[14] *But I have a few things against [you], because [y]ou ha[ve] there them that hold the **doctrine of Balaam**, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed []to idols, and to commit fornication.*

You may recall back during our study of the book of Joshua (Joshua Fifteen, June 4, 2023), we looked at the story of Balaam in detail . Balaam was a prophet of the LORD who used his gift of prophesy for personal gain. Balak king of Moab enlisted the prophet Balaam to curse the Israelites so he could defeat them.

Balaam was never able to do that, but he understood that the Israelites could never be defeated as long as the LORD was on their side. Therefore, he advised King Balak to turn the hearts of the Israelites from worshiping the LORD to worshiping the false gods of his land and committing both physical and spiritual adultery using the women of Moab to seduce them.

[15] *So also [you have] them that hold the **doctrine of the Nicolaitans**, which thing I hate.*

Recall this doctrine of the Nicolaitans was mentioned also in Revelation 2:6. The Bible does not tell us what this doctrine is, but **in** both references the LORD says he hates it.

[16] *Repent; or else I will come unto [you] quickly [or suddenly], and will fight against them with the **sword of my mouth**.*

There's that second reference to the **sword of His mouth**. Jesus, the one who spoke creation into existence (Psalm 33:6; Hebrews 11:3; 1:2; Isaiah 45:12), needs only speak the word to bring judgment.

[17] *He that ha[s] an ear, let him hear what the Spirit sa[ys] []to the churches;*

This phrase appears at the end of each of the seven letters to the churches. It emphatically says to pay attention to this mini-letter.

To him [who] overcome[s]

Jesus also repeats this phrase to each church to introduce **heavenly** blessings that His bride will receive when she joins Him in glory. Recall the previous two churches were promised food from the Tree of Life and escape from the second death. What else does He promise here?

will I give

*to eat of the **hidden manna**,*

The hidden manna refers to intimate communion with Jesus (John 6:35). This concept is completely hidden to the world as it was to the Jews of His day, but it is revealed to us.

*and will give him a white stone, and **in** the stone a new name **written**, which no man know[s] [except] he that receive[s] it.*

So what is this white stone? Scripture does not tell us. We have to refer to practices of that time. One is that an athlete was given a white stone with his name written on it as an invitation to a special banquet in the honor of the victors. (MacArthur Bible Commentary p. 217).

The purpose of the new name is also not revealed except that it is known only to the receiver. The LORD knows our name as He did Antipas, and it's touching that He has a secret name for each of us as well.

Application

If you were paying very careful attention today, you may have noticed the emphasis Jesus placed on His **Word** and its power. The church at Pergamos permitted people who ascribed to evil **doctrine** to be admitted to their fellowship. Pergamos means **parchment** – a medium for recording the written **word**. Pergamos famously served as a key provider of parchment to the world. It's not surprising then that Pergamos of that time boasted the world's largest library.

Jesus' warning to Pergamos rings true to us today. Especially during these days of instant information much of which is untrue, we need to know the truth given in His Word in order to keep our lives free from the evil that surrounds us and to confront it head on when it assaults us. His word also gives us great comfort that He is waiting to receive us to Himself and we will forever celebrate His abundant grace to us.

Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen (Revelation 22:21).