

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*."

Introduction

The first thing we notice in our Bibles is that the name of the city is translated differently, depending on which Bible version we use.

I usually use the New King James Bible. The translation here is "Pergamos". If I want to make things very simple for a non- native speaker I use the New Living Translation Bible, in this version it uses the word 'Pergamum'.

Q. Which is correct?

Actually both are correct. The newer translations prefer the word Pergamum which was more common with the local people.

Q. What do we know about this city?

It was a very historical city and had been the capital city for almost 400 years. It was built on a hill and there was a valley below where the river Caicus flowed into the Mediterranean Sea.

On a clear day you could see the sea from the city.

It was described in that day as a city, above all other cities in Asia.

It gave the impression to the traveller of a "Royal City".

Pergamum was a city of culture.

It was famous for its library which had over 200,000 parchment rolls.

It is interesting to note that the English word "parchment" comes from the name of the city. (Pergamum)

Pergamum was also one of the greatest "Religious" centres in Asia.

It had two famous shrines.

One of them stood 800 feet high on top of the hill. It smoked all day long with sacrifices to the false god Zeus.

Around the base of this great statue was something carved in wood.

It showed the battle of the god's of Greece being victorious over the giants of the barbarians.

It has been suggested by some scholars that this altar was Satan's seat.

The city was also famous for the worship of a god called "Asclepius"

It was known as the Pergamum god. This was the god of healing. People came from all over Europe to Pergamum in order to seek relief from their sicknesses.

The healing was partly the work of priests and partly the work of doctors.

It is interesting to note that a man by the name of Galen who was very famous in the ancient world's medical history, was born in Pergamum.

So it is clear that healing did take place in this city.

Some of it was undoubtedly the work of early doctors and some possibly the work of Satan, through demonic work.

We do not normally associate Satan with physical healing.

He is described a "Murderer" in the Bible.

We need to be very careful about visiting people who claim to have healing powers.

When I was at Bible College I did study a little about counselling people who had been influenced by the "Occult".

One thing that has always stuck in my mind was the testimony of a man who had a healing ministry. He was not a believer and people came to him for healing.

Some of these people were healed and they went away very happy.

One day this man repented of his sins and trusted in the Lord Jesus to save him.

The power of sin was broken in his life and he had peace and joy.

However, the moment he got saved, the illnesses of all the people he healed came back into their lives, instantly.

In Japan there are lots of people who offer many things, they will charge money to pray for your healing.

Don't go to them, only go to Jesus, He has the WAY, the TRUTH, and ETERNAL LIFE.

Although Jesus has the power to heal, He does not always choose to do this in people's lives.

There used to be a Christian man in Switzerland many years ago. He had a "Healing Ministry". People came from all over Europe to seek God's healing through him.

However he was genuine and always prayed the same prayer with everybody.

He prayed: " God if you will be more glorified by healing this person, please heal them, if not please give them the strength and the grace to continue as they are – Amen"

Lots of people were healed and lots of people were not healed.

The people who were healed were healed by God's almighty power through His Holy Spirit.

So now we have a background to this city, let us investigate the text.

There are a few things to note in these verses. The first is a description of what Jesus is holding.

1. Jesus has a sharp two-edged sword – v. 12.

The Roman governors at that time were divided into two classes. There were those who had the right of the sword and those who did not. Those who had the right of the sword had the power of life and death.

On their word a person could be executed immediately without any trial.

The person in charge at Pergamum who had the right of the sword might at any moment use his power to execute a Christian.

Jesus reminds the believers at Pergamum not to forget that the last word/final word of life and death is still with the risen Lord Jesus.

Jesus is still the person with the sharp two edged sword.

The power of Rome at that time was definitely satanically powerful, but the risen Lord Jesus has power that is greater than satan.

Our times are in the hands of God, not in the hands of man.

David declares in Psalm 31: v. 15 " My times are in your hand"

It is encouraging to know that God will decide when our time is up and we can be encouraged by that!!!

2. Commendation from Jesus - v. 13

Jesus commends this Church for not denying their faith even when "Antipas" was killed.

There is no other place in the New Testament which refers to this person called "Antipas". What is important is that he is called a "My Faithful Martyr". These are the words of Jesus to this person.

What we need to understand here is that the Greek word which is translated "Martyr" is the normal Greek word for "Witness".

In the early church to be a martyr and to be a witness were often the same thing.

Witnessing for Jesus often meant death.

This is a great challenge to many Christians who live in Muslim countries today. May we use our opportunities to witness wisely.

The commendation here for this man by Jesus is very strong because he gives him His own title.

See Revelation Chapter 1: v. 5 and 3:v. 14.

Rev. 1:5 ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,

Rev. 3:14 ¹⁴ “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:

This is very challenging to all of us. Pray for the strength to witness for Jesus in all circumstances.

3. Rebuke from Jesus – v. 14-15.

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There were two main errors in the Church at Pergamum.

They are described as the teaching of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

Although these two errors are connected we will deal with the Nicolaitans first.

The founder of this cult was a man named Nicolas.

His name means, “to conquer the people”.

There is very little about this cult in the Bible but early Church historians shed some light upon this heresy.

Most early Church historians identify this false teaching with one of the deacons of Antioch.

Turn with me to Acts chapter 6: v. 5

⁵ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch,

Although Nicolas was not a Jew, he was a Gentile who believed in the teaching of the Jews and later became a Christian.

The main error in his teaching was an abuse of grace and living a life of self-indulgence.

Let us turn to Acts 15: v. 22-29 – Quote this in the N.K.J.

²² Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. ²³ They wrote this *letter* by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings.

²⁴ Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “*You must be circumcised and keep the law*”^[b] —to whom we gave no *such* commandment— ²⁵ it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: ²⁹ that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.^[c] If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.

The conditions that the Jerusalem council made were the very conditions that the Nicolaitans broke. We can now turn to Galatians 5: v. 13.

¹³ For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

The Nicolaitans were using their liberty to satisfy the flesh.

They were trying to compromise with the world of their day.

We now come to the doctrine of Balaam.

Turn with me to Numbers 25: v. 1-5. & Numbers 31: v. 12-17.

Numbers 25: v. 1-5

Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. ² They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. ³ So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel. ⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the LORD, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." ⁵ So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor."

Numbers 31: v. 12-17

¹² Then they brought the captives, the booty, and the spoil to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the children of Israel, to the camp in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, *across from* Jericho. ¹³ And Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the congregation, went to meet them outside the camp. ¹⁴ But Moses was angry with the officers of the army, *with* the captains over thousands and captains over hundreds, who had come from the battle. ¹⁵ And Moses said to them: "Have you kept all the women alive? ¹⁶ Look, these *women* caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD. ¹⁷ Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man intimately.

The Israelites were seduced into joining up with Moabite women and making sacrifices to their gods. This act was attributed to the counsel of Balaam in Numbers 31: v.16.

Balaam in Hebrew history stood for an evil man who seduced the people into sin.

So what can we learn about the error of the Church in Pergamum?

It is clear that they had compromised their faith and were involved with the religious activity of the city and were involved in sexual immorality.

4. Warning from Jesus – v. 16.

Jesus tells the Church in Pergamum to repent or else He will fight them with the sword of His mouth.

The first thing to note is that Jesus says that He is going to fight against "them". He is not referring to the whole Church but only to those people who have compromised their faith.

Q. So what is the "sword of Christ"?

The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the word of God which is sharper than any two-edged sword. Hebrews 4: v. 12

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.

Paul speaks of the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Ephesians 6: v.17.

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

So the sword of Christ is the word of Christ.

Through the words of Jesus, there is conviction of sin.

Through the words of Jesus, people are confronted with the truth.

Through the words of Jesus, people are invited back to God.

They must first "Repent" and then turn to Jesus for mercy.

Acts 4: v. 12 tells us –

¹² Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

So there is no other way for these people in Pergamum to get right with God. It is only through Jesus.

It is the same with us too if we have compromised our faith in any way.

5. The Promise of Jesus – v. 17.

There are two wonderful promises in v. 17.

The first is that those people who overcome through Jesus will be given some of the hidden manna to eat.

There are two aspects to this promise.

When the children of Israel had no food in the desert, God gave them manna to eat from heaven.

(A bread like food)

Exodus 16: v. 11-15.

¹¹ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹² "I have heard the complaints of the children of Israel. Speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. And you shall know that I *am* the LORD your God.'" ¹³ So it was that quails came up at evening and covered the camp, and in the morning the dew lay all around the camp. ¹⁴ And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, *as fine as frost on the ground.* ¹⁵ So when the children of Israel saw *it*, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it *was*. And Moses said to them, "This *is* the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.

Later on a pot of this manna was put into the Ark and was positioned before God in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and later in the temple.

(Exodus 16: v.33-34. & Hebrews 9:4)

In Jewish thought at that time to eat of the hidden Manna meant to enter into the blessedness of the new world that would emerge when God's Kingdom came.

Jesus said in John 6: v. 31-35 that He was the bread of life.

If the hidden Manna and the bread of life are the same, it is a promise that those people who overcome and are faithful. Jesus will give Himself.

The second promise is a lovely one.

We are promised a "white stone" and a new name.

In the ancient world white and black stones were used for registering verdicts of juries.

The black stone was for condemnation and the white stone was for acquittal.

This means that the believer who overcomes is acquitted in the sight of God because of the work of Jesus.

We are also told that the overcomer will have a new name.

In the Greek this new name is like the pet name that a husband or wife might have for each other.

It is a deep and personal name and nobody else can use it in the same context.

I have a pet name for Wendy. If anybody else used that name it would not be appropriate.

So Jesus is saying here that he has a deep personal interest in all believers who overcome.

Jesus has a special name for you in heaven.

That is wonderful.

Some Applications

1. Jesus will decide when it is time for us to go to heaven. There is a lot of sadness in the world. Some people can die very young and some people seem to suffer for long periods of time before God calls them to heaven.

God always has a purpose for keeping us here on this earth.

I had a member in my last Church in England.

Most of the time he was in bed at home. He told me that he just wanted to die. I told him that he could have a wonderful ministry praying for people. He started with a small list of people. He also prayed for my ministry and I was blessed through his prayers. He lived for about 4 years after this and God encouraged him as he prayed. However difficult we find life, Jesus has a purpose for us here and now. Discover His purpose for you and follow it.

2. Witnessing for Jesus in Japan may be difficult but God will honour the steps we take to witness for Him.
3. We must never abuse the “Grace” of God in our lives.
If we maintain a daily walk with Jesus, reading His word and praying and being honest with Him, then we shouldn't abuse the “Grace” that God has poured into our hearts through His love. Grace is God's mercy towards us because of Jesus and His sacrifice for us. We do not deserve His love towards us.
4. No matter how hard it may seem, to compromise your faith will always lead to a barren Christian life.
Every Christian is at war with the world, the flesh and the devil. Perhaps the flesh is the hardest to conquer, but it is worth the effort. You cannot do it in your own strength, you must seek the help of the Holy Spirit.
5. We must never forget that we are loved deeply by God.

If we know that we are deeply loved by God, we should feel secure in Him and find ways of reflecting His love towards other people.

Here is a suggestion that you might like to try and apply in your life.

The Greek word for “One another” is just one word.

It is used 100 times in 94 N/T verses.

One third of these “One anothers” are directed to the Church as a whole and instruct them to be united.

1. Mark 9: v. 50
⁵⁰ Salt *is* good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.”
2. John 6: v. 43
⁴³ Jesus therefore answered and said to them, “Do not murmur among yourselves.
3. Romans 15: v.7
⁷ Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

Another third of these commands are connected with loving one another.

1. John 13: v. 34
2. Galatians 5: v.13
3. Ephesians 4: v.2.

15% of these commands stress humility – don't quote but list 3.

1. John 13: v.14
2. Romans 12: v.10
3. Philippians 2: v.3

The rest of the “One anothers” cover a variety of topics. You can discover them by using a concordance.

May God bless you as you apply the “One anothers” in your life.