

THE SEVEN CHURCHES

THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMOS

**"And to the messenger of the Assembly at Pergamos write."
-Rev. 2:12.**

Per is an article of emphasis, frequently equivalent to very. Ga or gee [g hard] is earthy. Thus the name Perga [Acts 13:13] very earthy. Pergamos means earthy height or elevation. It was the name given to the citadel of Troy.

The Pergamos of John's day, and to which literally the message is addressed, was a celebrated city of the Roman province of Asia. Here parchment was first perfected. It had a library of 200,000 volumes; also a famous temple of Esculapius, the mythological deity who presided over medicine.

The Pergamos period dates from the time that Constantine professedly embraced Christianity; which, being thus popularized, soon became the nominal religion of the people. The church of this period was exceedingly exalted, but only from an earthly point of view; she was "exalted in the earth."

Persecution having ceased, the policy of the Emperor became the policy of both priests and people; and the nominal Christian church soon filled with the popular time-serving crowd. Masheim tells us that while the great zeal of many good men, the purity of their lives, the many translations and expositions of the Scriptures made at this time, and the intrinsic beauty and value of Christianity as contrasted with Paganism must have had their influence; yet it is evident that a desire to please the great emperor and his successors, and to be on the popular side, were the chief reasons for the sudden and great increase of the nominal church.

Many pagan philosophers finding that it would be policy to join the ranks of the rising religion, set about paving an easy way to it by trying to discover correspondencies between Christianity and Paganism, and so to blend the two together. They succeeded only too well. Many sought "to form to themselves a middle kind of religion, between the ancient theology and the new doctrine that was now propagated in the empire; and they persuaded themselves that the same truths which Christ taught had been for a long time concealed by the priests of the gods under the veil of ceremonies, fables, and allegorical representations." [Masheim.] As the old theology had a number of chief gods, with many demi-gods of both sexes, the Pagan-christians [if we may coin a word] set themselves to reconstruct the list for the new theology. At this time, therefore, the doctrine of three Gods was invented – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Also the Goddess Mary. To make the list as respectable in numbers as the long line of pagan deities, they canonized the dead apostles and an unlimited number of martyrs, angels, etc., real or imaginary.

Masheim says of this period: "The public processions and supplications by which the Pagans endeavored to appease their gods, were now adopted into the Christian worship, and celebrated in many places with great pomp and magnificence. The virtues which had formerly been ascribed to the heathen temples, to their lustrations [ceremonial cleansings by water, etc.], to the statues of their gods and heroes, were now attributed to Christian churches – to water consecrated by certain forms of prayer, and to the images of holy men."

"The propensity of rude and uneducated converts [?] from Paganism to cling to the festal rites of their forefathers proved to be invincible, so that it seemed to be necessary to adopt the old usages to the new worship, rather than to abolish them altogether." [Encyc. Brit.]

We feel safe in asserting that all the vile doctrines that have saturated the papal church, and that still permeate Protestantism had at least their origin in this period.

The philosophy of Plato was engrafted, a parasite upon the Scriptural stock. This vile fungus, planted by Satan in Eden [Gen. 3:4], watered by the Egyptians, and brought to an increase by a pseudo-christianity, has borne an abundant harvest of errors, and exhaled an influence more deadly than the repas tree. Purgatory, Eternal Sin, Eternal Torment, Mariolatry, Saint Worship, Transmigration, Mohammedanism, Swedenborgianism, and Mormonism are some of its legitimate fruits, which could not have existed without it.

The Pergamos message opens in the words, "These things saith He who hath the sharp sword with two edges." The speaker is Christ himself. It seems as if the little company of faithful ones, beset on every side by the enemy, were earnestly looking amid all the noise and strife for their Leader, when, suddenly, the great Captain appears by their side, and waiving his sword on high, shouts, Attention! Company!

The two-edged sword is the Word of God. [Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12.] This weapon is formed both for offensive and defensive warfare. It is sharp, and while one edge is presented toward the enemy, there is another toward him who wields it. Christ has given it to the church to be used in his service: woe to him who handles it unskillfully. Our Lord's words are a warning to those of that age who were exercising this spiritual weapon.

"I know thy works." They were many. The faithful of this period were very zealous, and were hard workers against much opposition.

"And where thou dwellest, where Satan's seat is." The home and stronghold of Paganism; which, in course of time, with a change of little else than name and names was rechristened Papacy.

"Thou holdest fast MY NAME, and hast not denied my faith." Their fidelity is more particularly noted because of their adverse surroundings. At this time there were many teachers, and more controversy than ever before. Light was darkened by words, and truth with sophistry. During this period also arose the old dispute of "who should be greatest?" The bishops, or Patriarchs, as they preferred to be called, of Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, and Constantinople, had acquired a degree of pre-eminence over the others, and there was a long-continued rivalry between them; the supremacy being finally divided between Rome and Constantinople. The nominal church was split in two, chiefly over the question of image-worship; the idolaters ranging under the bishop of Rome, who received the name of Pope [Latin, papa – the father], while the image-breakers, as they were called, formed the Greek Church under the Patriarch [chief father] of Constantinople. A remembrance of this controversy will help us to understand the passage which follows:

"Thou holdest fast MY NAME... even in those days in which ANTIPAS was my faithful witness; who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." Anti, in Greek, means opposite or against; papas is father. In the usual manner of forming words, Anti-pas would evidently mean against the father, or opposed to the Pope or Patriarch; as we use the name anti-christ, the opponent of Christ. It is clear, then, that our Lord here commends the faithful hand who, "holding fast" the endearing name of our "Father," in obedience to the command, "Call no man Father," opposed the development and establishment of the Papacy, with its attendant heresies of a class of holy [?] and Rev. [?] fathers [Matt. 23:9], who, being called by the church – or the almighty dollar – or the love of honor and ease, as the case may be, profess a superior sanctity, privilege, and authority for the exposition of God's Word. "But I have a few things against thee. Thou hast there them that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-

block before the children of Israel, to eat things offered to idols, and to commit fornication."

Num. 22 and onward tells the story of Balaam. The kings of Midian and Balak, king of Moab, found themselves unable by force of arms to subdue Israel. They hired Balaam to curse God's people. He found it impossible, but knowing why they had the Lord's favor and protection, he advised Balak to lead them into sin; which succeeding, brought upon them a plague which destroyed 24,000 of them.

From what has been said, the spiritual meaning of the Balaam teaching should be easily seen. The blasphemous doctrines of eternal torment, and the endless existence of sin and sinners; also the fiction of the short line from the death-bed to heaven, and kindred fancies, have always been a "stumbling-block" to the church. The homage given to pagan rites, ceremonies, festivals, etc., Christianized [?] such as prayers to the dead, sacred places, days, and persons; union with earthly powers and with those who do such things, would in our opinion be Baal-am service.

The doctrine of the Nicolaitans, noticed in the Ephesus message, found its development in this age; and has been a burden to the church ever since. Nicolas means a conqueror of the people. In the church of Rome the laity or people are as much the subjects of the Pope, both in spiritual and temporal things, as any of earth's conquerors ever dreamed of demanding. This, in the face of Christ's plain statement that there is but one Lord, one Master, one Father, "and all ye are brethren." [Matt. 23:8-12.] The command "Search the Scriptures," was intended for every one; the commission to "preach the good news" to all who have received the Spirit; and if any one has not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His, and can only be a blind leader of the blind.

"Repent, or else I will come unto THEE quickly, and will fight against THEM with the sword of my mouth." Notice thee and them in this passage. The words are evidently used like you and them in 1

Thes. 5:1-4. The Lord speaks directly to his church as thou or you; but of the world, as they or them. He came to his own, and [R360 : page 3] in a sense delivered them out of Babylon; bearing them up on eagles' wings [Rev. 12:14], and carrying them into the wilderness; "into her place, where she is nourished." ... from the face of the serpent, Satan. To them – Babylon, he comes with the sword, and by the sword they are cut into two – the Roman and Greek churches.

"He that hath an ear, let HIM hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

"To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna." The manna recalls the story of Israel in the wilderness. Hidden would point as an index finger to the golden bowl full of manna laid away in the Ark of the Covenant as a memorial of the faithfulness of Jehovah, who led and "nourished" his people in the wilderness. It is a pledge to the Pergamos church that he who watched over literal Israel in their journeyings would care for them in the weary march that was about to begin.

The manna, of course, typifies spiritual food, the word of God. Perhaps some were enabled to see a deeper meaning, that it referred not only to the written word, but to the living Word; the true Bread of Life who came down from heaven to give life to the world. [John 6:47-51.]

It was a promise in the face of desolation and death, of a life that should be hid – from all the power of persecution – with Christ, in God.

"I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name engraved, which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it."

What a blessed assurance to the church during those 1260 years of trial, outcasts from the world, branded as heretics by the church, to

realize that God's seal was upon them; to remember that "the Lord knoweth them that are his."

The signet or seal – evidently referred to – was the emblem of authority. See Gen. 41:41-42; 1 Kings 21:8; Esther 3:10-12; 8:2-8, etc. To present any one with the signet ring was to invest them with all the power and authority of him who owned it. This is, therefore, one of the exceeding great and precious promises of joint heirship with Christ, given only to the overcomers.

The color of the stone would indicate the purity of the reign. "A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." However precious the jewel, it was made much more so on account of its use; it was therefore the symbol of that which was most highly esteemed. See Haggai 2:23; Sol. Song 8:5-6.

The name on the seal is significant. We believe it is the name assured by our Lord on taking unto him his great power and beginning his reign. A name now revealed to the members of his body, since the reign has begun. [See article of Bro. Jones in March No. ZION'S WATCH TOWER, page 4.] A name peculiarly comforting to the persecuted saints during the reign of Anti-christ – the name of our beloved

KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

W. I. M.