

3. THE CHURCH OF PERGAMUM – REVELATION 2:12-17 (STATE CHURCH 312-606)

Pergamum was the capital city of Asia until the end of the first century. This city was steeped in the worship of many different Greek idols. Because of this worship of many idols, Roman rulership demanded a **cooperation** of all religious groups. History reveals that the two most prominent religious systems of the day was the worship of Bacchus (God of Revelry) and of Asclepius (God of Healing).

Revelation two remarks that this city was the place where “Satan’s seat is.” It is not understood what this actually means; but it is safe to say that **Satan must have had a spiritual dominion in this city because of its strong idolatrous religions.**

After Diocletian was unsuccessful in his persecution of the church, Constantine succeeded him as the emperor of Rome. Constantine was very attracted to Christianity. Believing that God had given him a vision of conquering by the cross, Constantine supposedly embraced Christianity. Many feel that because of this that Constantine was a Christian. I personally believe, however, that he was not a Christian. At the very least, he had a very distorted view of Christianity.

When he became the emperor of Rome, Constantine issued an edict of toleration for Christianity and began to give favors to the Christian church (the government provided money for the operation of the church). From this edict many pagan temples were taken over by Christians and to please the new emperor the leaders adopted customs originating in pagan practices.

This influence of **paganism** on the church slowly increased over the years. The church began to shroud itself in mystery and ritualism, losing its fire and evangelistic fervency. When we study, we find that this ritualism was actually birthed out of Babylonian mysticism. Here are a few examples:

- The Chaldean tau (an elevation of a T on a pole) Later was changed into the sign of a cross
- Celibacy of priests and nuns – This has absolutely no scriptural verification --a counterpart to the “vestial virgins” of paganism
- Prayers for the dead – 300 A.D.
- Worship of saints and angels – 375 A.D.
- Worship of Mary (prayer) – 431 A.D.
- Priest began dressing differently than laity – 500 A.D.
- Doctrine of purgatory – 593 A.D.

From 312 A.D. the church became more Roman and less **Christian**. The truth of the matter is that the Roman Catholic Church is hard pressed to trace its origin beyond 312 A.D. Until that time the church was a collection of local churches working together! As the church became accepted, rich and powerful, it was suggested that the world was getting better and that Christ’s kingdom had been ushered in. Many thought this to be the Millennial Reign. Because of this misconception, a great heresy spread through the church: REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY! Many believed that because of Israel’s unbelief that they had been “cast off;” therefore, all of Israel’s promises were now

given to the church. Unfortunately, it would be 1,400 years later before the coming of Christ would be re-emphasized!

A. Commendation

- i. I Know Where You Live (Rev. 2:13)
 - 1) We have already seen the evil of this city
 - 2) Satan's seat was there
- ii. You Still Remain Faithful (Rev. 2:13)
- iii. Many outstanding leaders were produced at Pergamum - You Did Not Deny My Faith (Rev. 2:13)

B. Condemnation

- i. The Doctrine of **Balaam** (Rev. 2:14; Num. 22-31)
 - 1) Balaam could not curse the people of God; so, he devised a plan to remove them from the protective hand of God—mix them with the world!
 - 2) Pergamum was a church that had remained faithful, yet became worldly by accepting and adapting some of its pagan practices!
 - 3) This church can be best described by a coin that resides in a museum in London. It was stamped during the early days of Constantine's reign. One side has Christian emblems. The other side has emblems of heathen gods!
 - 4) During the time when Christians took over some of the pagan buildings, the pagan names were chiseled off of idols and the names of Christian saints were inscribed.
- ii. The Doctrine of **Nicolaitans** (Rev. 2:15)
 - 1) Though the Ephesian believers rejected this doctrine, Pergamum fell into its trap!
 - 2) Again, Nicolaitanism is the doctrine of strong **Ecclesiastical** hierarchy ruling over the laity. (For more details, see page 12-13) 3. Counsel
- iii. Repent or be Judged (Rev. 2:16)

C. Challenge

- i. Hidden Manna (Rev. 2:17)
 - 1) Hidden manna is a symbol for the spiritual food provided by God in His Word!
 - 2) This is an individual feeding, just as the Israelites had to go out daily and individually gather their manna.
- ii. White Stone (Rev. 2:17)
 - 1) To understand this symbolism, we must look at an ancient custom.
 - 2) White is a symbol for purity or righteousness.

SPECIAL NOTE; PERGAMUM MEANS “MARRIAGE” AND “ELEVATION.” AS THE CHURCH BECAME MARRIED TO WORLDLY AUTHORITY AND ELEVATED TO A PLACE OF ACCEPTANCE, IT DECLINED IN POWER!!!

- In ancient time, a white stone meant acquittal. For example, if a man was tried in court, the jurors would signify their verdict by laying down a white stone indicating their decision to acquit the man of the crime.
- Acquittal = The judgment of a jury that a person is **not guilty of a charge!**
- We are guilty; but, when Christ died guiltless for us, He ascended to the Father and laid a white stone on the throne of God, turning the judgment seat into a mercy seat.

A GREAT LESSON CAN BE GLEANED FROM THE STUDY OF THIS CHURCH AND THE PERIOD. MANY ASPECTS OF THIS CHURCH EXIST EVEN IN THIS FINAL PERIOD OF CHURCH HISTORY. ECCLESIASTICISM AND WORLDLINESS HAVE A STRONG GRIP ON THIS MODERN DAY ORGANIZATION. REPENTANCE IS THE ONLY KEY TO OVERCOMING THIS STRONG DULLUSION. THERE IS ONLY ONE PERSON WHO WILL USHER IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD. THAT PERSON IS THE KING OF THAT KINGDOM—JESUS CHRIST!