

30th May 2024

“And to the angel of the Ecclesia in Pergamos write: These things saith he having the sharp two-edged longsword. I have observed thy works and where thou dwellest, in which place is the throne of the Satan; but thou holdest fast my name, and deniedst not my faith even in the days in which Antipas was my faithful witness, who was put to death with you where the Satan sojourns.

“But I have against thee a few things; that thou hast there men holding the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat idol-sacrifices and to fornicate. So hast thou also men holding the teaching of the Nikolaitans, which thing I hate.

“Change thy mind; but if not, I come to thee quickly, and will fight against them with the longsword of my mouth.

“He having an ear let him hearken to what the Spirit saith in the Ecclesias. To him that overcometh I will give to him to eat the manna that has been hidden; and I will give to him a white pebble, and upon the pebble a new name that hath been engraved, which no one knew except the receiver”. Translation from Eureka by Dr Thomas.

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Jesus reminded his hearers that he wielded the sword of the spirit. He had no need of a literal weapon but was prepared to utilise weapons in the spiritual wars that arose because of false teachings and practises in the first century. It did not take long after the preaching of the Apostles for corruption to emerge.

Facing open persecution from the political and religious authorities of the day, the eldership remained faithful. The city was a bastion of false religion. The throne or seat of the Satan was said to be there. Just as Satan is not a literal person but is

representative of all those who stood in opposition as adversaries to the One Body in the first century, so too the throne of Satan was not literal but was indicative of a centre activities contrary to the Truth as it was in Jesus. Those who believe in a literal Satan have no problem refusing to accept the literal throne of Satan being found inside a provincial Roman city in Asia Minor, but this wresting of scripture is typical of those who have their own agenda. Satan only sojourned at Pergamos. The KJV has "*where Satan dwells*" which is translated differently by Dr Thomas in Eureka, as noted above. The Greek word is the same as for "*where thou dwellest*" earlier in the same verse.

That Antipas "*was put to death with you*" speaks of certain of the Angel eldership (you is plural, thou is singular) also having suffered martyrdom at that time. This would equate with the persecutions under various Roman Emperors who used violence to suppress the popularity of this new religion. That many of those who were killed in these extensive persecutions were those who only nominally accepted Jesus Christ but refused to embrace all his actual teachings is a sad reminder that the Truth was never going to convert the entire world, but only call out some from that world to form Ecclesias from those who were called out. That is what the term Ecclesia means. The Truth holders were not exempt from the violence slaughter against the Name of Jesus, they also died.

An issue that translates from a consideration of the message to this ecclesia to any other, is what to do with those who hold false teaching. There is no stated action except the need to repent of this. The repentance is not from the Angel eldership who do not seem to have espoused the teaching directly but who tolerated those who did hold false views.

If the evidence is reviewed objectively there is little doubt in the matter. It is always important to see what is said and also to consider what is not said. In the absence of any direct instructions

either way, as in this case, reference must always be made to other scriptural passages which speak on a similar theme.

- 1 The repentance was necessary for those who tolerated the teachings not those who held these teachings. Accordingly, it is a sin to tolerate such.
- 2 These holders of false doctrines were not said to be teaching these doctrines but holding them was sufficient concern, even without there propagation.
- 3 These false doctrines were of those which Christ hated. There is therefore no room for compromise with such.
- 4 If there was a refusal to repent, Jesus says nothing of fighting against the erroneous eldership but instead he clearly promised to fight against the holders of these false views. He passed no comment about the eldership themselves. Are unrepentant sinners brethren of Christ? No, they are not his brethren but are as heathen men and publicans, Matthew 18v. That Jesus is silent about them means that their fate is left in abeyance. Jesus promised not to leave the holders of false doctrines undisturbed. Action will be taken if not by the eldership if they repent, then otherwise.

Did this happen in the history of the Truth? Pergamos today is not a Christian city in any sense of the word. It is Turkish and Moslem and is far removed from the religion of Christ. Pergamos lost the Truth soon after the Book of Revelation was given.

Pergamos is an example of an Ecclesia which has compromised itself about what to tolerate within their own membership. Sadly, there are many Ecclesias who fall into this category. It is however a category of truth. The emergence of holders of false doctrines within an ecclesia does not therefore immediately separate them

from the fellowship of Christ. This Ecclesia was one of the seven golden candlesticks, Christ walked in their midst. It is a sin to knowingly tolerate such people and if this is not repented of then ultimately actions needs to be taken against them.

It should be noted that Jesus was not saying that he would directly return from heaven, where he sits at the right hand of the Father, and literally fight with those men himself. The action that would follow any lack of repentance would be indirect. As the epistle was sent to all of the Ecclesias and indeed the message has been communicated further afield, Christ could work through motivated and faithful disciples in the first century. He is not saying that they should be left indefinitely amidst the other believers who did not hold such views themselves and did not tolerate it. If there were none of that calibre present in Pergamos it would have been a very poor Ecclesia indeed, and already outside the bounds of acceptable status. It is often the case that the eldership has a different stance from the wider membership, as proved to be the case in 1885 when the Birmingham meeting split over the Inspiration of the Bible and Robert Roberts found that the majority of the Arranging brethren did not agree with him over that issue. It was left to the majority of the actual membership to stand firm with him and remain with the Temperance Hall meeting.

The actual false teachings which some in Pergamos held were both the teaching of Balaam, and also the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Balaam taught that, not only could you prophesy for hire, and that you could curse the nation of Israel with impunity (which nation is without fault?), but that you could openly fellowship and share offerings with blasphemers and heretics and the uncircumcised. There are several chapters in Numbers 22-24 which illustrate the extent of the problem, and this false prophet is also mentioned in both 2 Peter 2v15 and Jude v11 with negative criticism of his unfaithful stance. He is the epitome of those who try and compromise with pretending to be true when

obviously walking contrary to the narrow way. The followers of such are the spiritual fornicators of any age. Sadly, indulgence in such is the pursuit of pleasure at the expense of truth, they are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God!

Those called Nicolaitans are they who believe in dominating the common people. The wider membership is ordered about and told what to do. Those who embrace this philosophy believe themselves to be superior to the membership. They are the experts and others should defer to their greater knowledge not because they exhibit greater knowledge as such but because they claim to know more. This is a false appeal to a misplaced status and a wresting of respect from what it should be.

The word literally means – “victory over the people”. There should be no such hierarchy in the Truth. Those who have higher status are respected because of their application and diligence in handling the Word, wisely and for the benefit of as many as possible. Sometimes more need milk than meat, but both milk and meat need to be continually produced. Teachers also need to be taught.

As with all seven of these epistles, Jesus reminds the reader that the specific message to Pergamos is also directed at all. *“Hear what the spirit saith unto the Ecclesias”*. A reward is promised to those who overcome. They will receive the hidden manna, described as angels’ food in the Old Testament. Jesus is the bread from heaven and is now hidden from general view. They will also receive a white stone and a new name written thereon. There is then a multitude of blessings to be received in the Kingdom, not just the gift of Eternal Life but also many other accompanying blessings. Jesus listed many of these in the Sermon on the Mount, but the white stone speaks of receiving approval. That a new name is also added speaks of the personal nature of that blessing. It will be framed in harmony with the assessment of the judge of all the earth and will, no doubt, be in keeping with their character and witness.

A Voice from the Altar

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