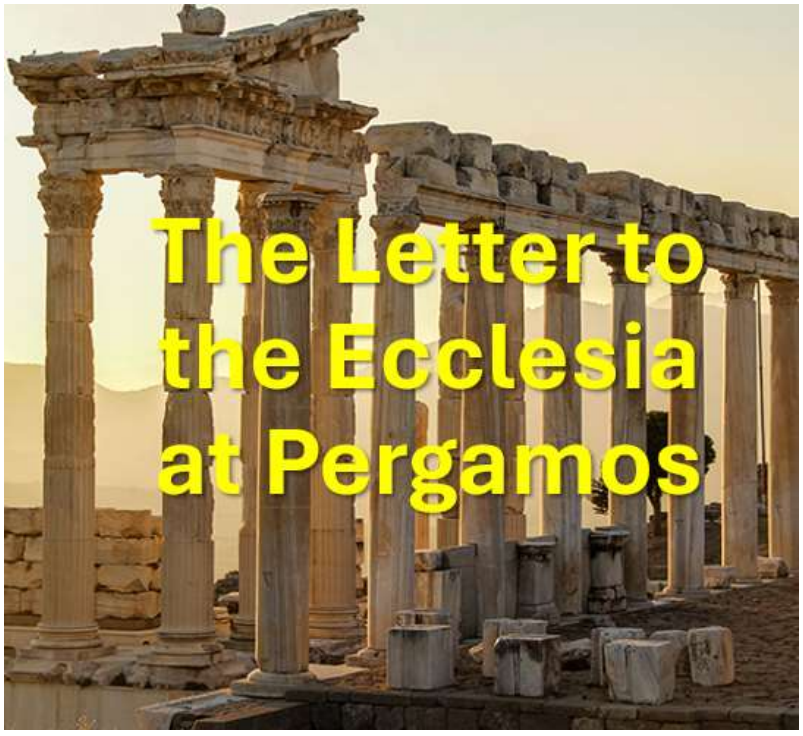
Thursday Bible Class 30th May 2024

Letter to Pergamos **Revelation 2:12-17**



Thanks to Brother Derek for the Introduction which has already been posted.

This, the third letter to another Ecclesia. The letter follows a similar structure as the previous letters, firstly praise, but then condemnation, advice and instruction. As before, the author makes sure the readers of the letters know full well the authority of the writer. The address includes the title of the sender, which refers the reader to the introduction of the Revelation in chapter 1.

12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

In every letter, the Lord Jesus addresses his remarks to the angel of the ecclesia…. Did every Ecclesia have a designated angel in heaven to loo after them? If so why did Jesus write to them, when he could just talk to them? It is not referring to that at all. Angel in Greek simply means messenger. Who were the messengers of each ecclesia? It was those appointed to be elders and representatives of each ecclesia In the days of the Apostles, this role was not just decided by the election by the

members of the Ecclesias themselves, but elders were often appointed by the Holy Spirit – see Acts 20:28 *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, …*and Ephesians 4:11 *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;* The elders were chosen by the Spirit to ensure the best start in order to fulfil the will of God. After the Holy Spirit gifts were withdrawn, it was no longer possible to ensure the eldership was chosen in this way. Each Ecclesia chooses their members to serve in offices, in the way they think best. Often it is decided to do so by electing, and allowing the voice of the ecclesia to speak in this way, influenced by the Holy Spirit of the Word.

Jesus described himself in this letter *as he which hath the sharp sword with two edges…*Again this takes the reader back to the Introductory vision in chapter 1. – Verse 16: *And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.* Of course this connection is designed to remind the Ecclesias, that they belong to him. He is in charge. He is the Head of the Body – he is amongst the seven lampstands, and has the seven stars in his hand.

Being a book of sign, this two edged sword speaks of judgement, but particularly that of the sharp piercing penetrating and perceptive Sword of the spirit as Brother Derek reminded is described in Hebrews 4: 12. But also in Ephesians 6:17, members of the Ecclesias were also strongly advised to be in possession of it as well: If they did, and knew how to use it, they would not have to fear the use of it by the Lord Jesus. 17 *And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:*

As in the letters to the previous Ecclesias, The Lord Jesus reveals his deep concern and intimate knowledge of the affairs of each Ecclesia. Nothing has changed. He still does. *I know thy works…* this is the praise. Sometimes it seems the good works we do are not noticed, but

mistakes always are! Galatians 6:9 *But let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*

I know thy works and where you live, even where Satan's seat [or throne] *is: and you hold fast my name, and have not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan lives.*

Brother Derek suggested that the phrase Satan's seat refers to the apostacy those mentioned in the next couple of verses. It seems this is likely the best way of looking at it. There is another way of looking at it, which is the political situation with the city at the time. Pergamos was the most important in the province, and was one of the first to follow the Roman imperial cult worship. The local aristocracy continued to reach the highest circles of power there in the 1st century AD, like Aulus Julius Quadratus who was consul in 94 and 105 who was a close personal friend of the Emperor Trajan, who honoured him as an *amicus clarissimus* [most brilliant friend]. We may well know that Trajan caused many persecutions to fall upon Christians. So Pergamos which had two imperial cult temples was not a welcome place to be a Christian in those days, and was a centre for Roman pagan worship. Therefore it is possible that the city is referred to a Satan's seat for this reason as well.

The Lord Jesus praised the Ecclesia despite obvious challenges and difficulties. You hold fast – or continue to cling to (as it can be understood) my Name. This is an exhortation often given by the Apostles in their letters for example : Hebrews 10:23: *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised;…* Having a loose grip, being casual, and not being particularly bothered, when trouble come along, people will soon just let go – Hebrews 2:1: *Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.*

Of course, in those days having a tight grip on the gospel in doctrine and practice was even more commendable, as persecution would often rip believers from the comfort and complacency. You *have not denied*

my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan lives. Antipas means "against all" or others say "like the father". For this reason Antipas can refer to a class of people and not just an individual, and are described as my Faithful Witness – martyr means witness in this verse.

The Lord Jesus warned his faithful disciples of the uprise in persecution which would engulf so many of the early believers in the first century. Matthew 24:9: *Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of <u>all nations</u> for my name's sake*. Luke 21:17 *And ye shall be hated of <u>all men</u> for my name's sake.*

Antipas – against all. The Ecclesias witnessed against all – especially in these Pagan super cities like Pergamos, where even Jews were against them. They were faithful many of them – like the martyr Stephen even unto death. But The Lord Jesus continued in his letter, as it was not all good …

It seemed they became tolerant of a class of people who were deceitful like Balaam, sneaky, pretending to be an enthusiastic supporter of the Ecclesia, but operating within for entirely the wrong reason. Balaam is mentioned by two Apostles: in 2 Peter 2:15 *Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;* and Jude 1:11:*Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.*

These people were motivated by money. Perhaps it was because some of them were poor, and they realised that if they joined this religious group in Pergamos they would get lots of help, but in return they paid back kindness with introducing false doctrines. This is something which can easily happen today, we must be on our guard. They bring in a spirit of compromise - *, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.* This is referring to specific ritual pagan practices at the time. In other words they were mixing pagan customs with that of Christianity. They must be no compromise, and no surrender of the

sound doctrine and Apostolic practice to the convenience of fitting in with the vile world in which we find ourselves.

After further warnings, the Lord Jesus concluded with a challenge and the promise of reward*:*

17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; Again showing that this was an open letter to be sent to all Ecclesias, in all locations in all ages.

To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knows saving he that receives it.

The hidden manna does not refer to the manna from heaven in the wilderness. That manna had to be eaten and not stored. If it was kept overnight, it would breed maggots and would stink. It referred to the pot of manna which was laid up within the ark of the covenant and which did not corrupt. This spoke of the bread of life which would never perish which Jesus referred to in John6: 27 *Labour not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.*

To eat of the hidden manna, is to partake of the everlasting life of Jesus Christ – to live with him now and for ever.

Jesus also soke in symbol, that he would award a white stone with his name written on it.

There are many ways to understand this. White here is the Greek *leukos* which means bright or brilliant, and could be referring to the jewels in the high priests breastplate which had the tribes of Isarel inscribed upon them. So in the same way believers who endure to the end would be engraved upon the heart of the Lord Jesus. The Greek word for stone here is *psephon* which is actually a pebble. A smooth stone from the brook. Like what David killed Goliath with. The little stone power, which destroys the image. Another way to look at it is that in those days there was a Roman custom of awarding white stones

to the winners of athletic games. The victor was rewarded a white stone with his name inscribed on it. This enabled him to sit down at a special banquet. There could be more ways. But in all these ways, the depth, breadth of understanding the scripture assists in seeing the reward held out to the Faithful witness in so many colours, that it can become real, and worth enduring for, and holding fast even to the end.

Brother Terry