

STUDY 3 - LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN PERGUMUM (Rev 2:12-17)

After preparing the church in Smyrna to suffer, The Lord Jesus Christ turns his attention to the church in Pergumum. This city was a little further north, but rivalled Smyrna for the title of the second most important city in the area (after Ephesus). It was a city famous for politics, and the procursol of the province lived there. It was also well known as a centre of learning. It housed a famous university and a large library.

As Jesus begins to speak to this church he reminds them of who he is. Like with the other letters he draws attention to a particular feature of the vision John had seen. This time he reminds them that he has "the sharp double edged sword". This takes us back to 1:16, where John sees this sword coming out of his mouth. It is a picture of the judging rule of Christ, a role he carries out by speaking. It is an encouragement for the believers in Pergumum that he is the one they should fear - not the political rulers (who had the sword as their symbol).

Again, like previous letters Jesus continues by stressing what he knows about this church. "I know where you live" may not sound very insightful, but the next statement expands on this. "Where Satan has his throne". Pergumum was a pagan cathedral city. On a hill in the city was a huge altar to Zeus. It was the place where pagan pilgrims travelled from the places around to attempt to get healed. For the church this was a very oppressive environment. Jesus tells them he knows that, and that the opposition they face is Satanic. Jesus repeats this twice, at the beginning and end of verse 13.

This is made even clearer as verse 13 continues. Persecution in Pergumum was one stage further on than in Smyrna - Christians had already begun to be martyred. According to tradition Antipas was a pastor of the church, and was slowly roasted to death in a bronze kettle. Yet despite all this the church had remained faithful, trusting Christ "true to my name...you did not renounce your faith in me". It is important to see that this statement is genuine praise from Christ to his church. It also explains the cause of the persecution. The reason Christians were persecuted then was because they refused to worship any other God than the Trinitarian God of the Bible, they refused to trust in anyone other than Christ. They could have easily escaped suffering by worshipping the emperor as well as Christ. The world will not hate us if we worship Christ and what they worship. It is when we trust in Christ alone, and preach Christ alone that suffering comes.

As we see this it is important to remember what we saw in the introduction evening to these letters. As Revelation continues John will see visions of Satan attempting to destroy Christ and his people. But those are not visions of what will happen at some point in the future. Most what we read from chapter 4 until the end of the book are pictures of what is going on now (and until Christ comes again). Satan is carrying out his terrible work of opposition against Christ by trying to destroy the church - and Pergumum are on the front line.

In Revelation 13 we see a picture of two beast's intent on destroying God's people. One beast wages war against the saints (symbolising persecution, see 13:7), while the other beast impersonates the saints and deceives them (13:13, 14). Although the church in Pergumum are being strong against Satan's first line of attack (persecution), the warning Jesus brings shows that they are worrying blind to Satan's second, more subtle line of attack.

In 2:14 we see that in the church there are those who have starting believing false teaching. This is described in Old Testament terms, as "the teaching of Balaam". You can read about Balaam and Balak in Numbers 22-25, and 31. Balaam doesn't try to fight against Israel, but he tries to seduce them by advising Midianite women to lead them astray. The story is a warning to the church of how we can be destroyed just as much by deception as from persecution. The church in Pergumum have not learnt that lesson, and seem to be weak here (as well as holding to the teaching of the Nicolaitans - no one really knows what that is, but it seems to be some kind of false teaching).

Jesus is warning here that we need to stand against both persecution and false teaching. He says to this church that if they will not stand against what is wrong he will come and fight. He will judge - and when false teaching completely takes over a church this may mean closing down the church.

The letter closes with the call to hear (verse 17), and some great promises. "The hidden manna". Jesus will feed his people like he fed his people in the wilderness. "White stone oth a new name on it" might be a reference to the fact that white stones were used as tickets of admission in those days - Jesus gives us his name, and by having his name we enter his heavenly kingdom and banquet. **Nu 25:1-2, 31:16, Acts 15:19-21**

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

What does Jesus remind this church about himself? Why is that significant? Where does his sword come from - read Rev 1:16, [Hebrews 4:11-13](#), [Rev 2:16](#)

What is so important about where this church lives? (Verse 13) Why would it have been so comforting to the church to hear that Jesus knew that?

What have they been through recently? How have they responded to that?

"Yet you remained true to my name". This is both praise from Jesus, and it also tells us why they were persecuted. What are some of the pressures we face not to be "true to Jesus' name"?

Read Rev 13:5-7, and 13:11-14. How many beasts are there? How are their tactics different?

How have the church in Pergumum not fought against Satan inside the church? What has been his tactic?

Why is it that we can sometimes be stronger when we are standing against persecution but weak when standing against false teaching?

What does Jesus call the church to do? What does he promise to do if they don't?

What does Jesus promise to those who overcome?