

# THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

## LESSON THIRTEEN = *The Church in Pergamum*

*Bible Class Series by Ray Reynolds (3/27/11)*

Introduction: Each of the congregations in the New Testament had unique features and characteristics. They all had qualities we can learn from and use to better our own congregations today. In this lesson we are going to consider the church in Pergamum. Let's study together . . . . .

Discussion:

### **I. *The Geography of Pergamum***

Pergamum (also called Pergamos/Pergamon) is located in modern-day Turkey .

The ruins of this ancient city are located 16 miles (26 km) from the Aegean Sea.

Pergamum is on the north side of the Caicus river and rests on a cone shaped hill which had a beautiful view of the river and the valleys.

Today, the main sites of ancient city are to the north and west of the modern city of Bergama. Like Ephesus and Smyrna it held a growing community and a unique culture.

### **II. *The History of Pergamum***

The name Pergamum literally means "marriage" or "elevation."

\* It's name (*pergaminus* or *pergamena*) was given to parchment paper.

\* This is where it was created, so it bears its name.

The city became a capital city during the Hellenistic period (Attalid dynasty 281–133 BC).

\* It was only be a remnant of its greatness after the collapse of the Kingdom of Thrace.

The Attalids, the descendants of Attalus, came to power in 281 BC.

\* The people were among the most loyal supporters of Rome in the Hellenistic world.

\* The Attalids ruled with intelligence and generosity.

In Paul's day it would have been a beautiful city with much trade, tourism, and military strength.

\* Like most of these cities we have covered in this series they were affluent and pagan.

\* Like Philippi it had a lot of military there and it was a fortified settlement.

The city was overrun by the worship of many Greek idols.

\* Local Roman rulers were unable to cope with the multitude of religious differences in the city, so demanded the cooperation/compromise from all the groups.

\* Two of the most prominent religions were the worship of Bacchus and Asclepius.

The city held many amazing works of art, temples, and public facilities.

\* The "Great Alter of Pergamum" (**Revelation 2:13**) was dedicated to Zeus.

\* The Hellenistic Theater could hold over 10,000 people.

\* The Library on the Acropolis (Athenaeum) held over 200,000 volumes.

\* You could visit the temples of Trajan, Athena, Dionysus, Asclepius, Demeter, Hera, Attalus, Eumenes, Asclepius, Telephorus, and various other Greek, Roman, and Asian gods.

There were many public baths and arsenals in Pergamum.

The city also housed a Roman theater and schools of the arts and sciences.

\* This was also because of the worship of the gods of Dionysus and Asclepius.

There was a great temple to the Egyptian gods known today as the "Red Basilica."

\* The church met in this facility in the first century.

\* Can you imagine the compromises that took place during this time?

### **III. The Beginning of the Church in Pergamum**

There was a small Jewish population in this region (as in Ephesus, Smyrna, etc.). We are unsure who founded this congregation, and when, but there are theories. How did the church begin in Pergamum?

- \* The church could have been established after Pentecost (**Acts 2:5-12**).
- \* The church could have been established after great persecution of Saul (**Acts 8:1-4**).
- \* The church could have been established by Paul or his students in Ephesus (**Acts 19:10**).
- \* The church could have been established by the apostle John (**Revelation**).

They were strong in the first century but founded during difficult time in Christian history. Christians were confronted with cultic practices and the symbol of the devil all over town.

### **IV. The Work of the Church in Pergamum**

The book of Revelation refers to the city as the place of Satan's home on two occasions. According to Christian tradition, Antipas was martyred there in 92 AD (**Revelation 2:13**). The book of Revelation reveals that the seven churches were affected by Satan's work. As one of the seven great churches of Asia they would have witnessed so many changes.

### **V. The Letter to the Church in Pergamum**

*And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, "These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."* (**Revelation 2:12-17 - NKJV**)

### **VI. The Dilemmas of the Church in Pergamum**

The church had no trouble compromising with the world.  
The church was assaulted from the outside  
The church was assaulted from the inside.  
The church struggled with spiritual elitism.

### **VII. The Maturity of the Church in Pergamum**

The congregation benefited from John's correspondence. Jesus saw that the church could have a future.

- \* What Did Jesus Say?

Commendation: Steadfast and held the faith.

Criticism: They tolerated immorality, idolatry, and heresy among the membership.

Command: Repent.

Compensation: They would be given hidden manna, a white stone, and a new name.

- \* They needed to focus on steadfastness and truth.

The congregation grew because of great leadership.

**Conclusion**: God clearly blessed the church in Pergamum. We can see that history shows the wisdom and providence of God throughout the New Testament. We should trust Him to provide direction for the church today. It is my prayer that by studying about these wonderful congregations of the Lord's people that we will see our place in the kingdom. Next week we will begin our study of Thyatira.