

Being an Overcomer #4 – The Doctrine of Balaam

Church #3: Pergamos – the Penetrated Church Rev. 2:12-17

KJV says “Pergamos”, but elsewhere you will see references to “Pergamum” or “Pergamom”. It is the same thing.

Jesus describes himself as “he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.” Heb. 4:12 says “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

Commendations to the church (2:13):

1. He acknowledges their works, and that they live where Satan’s seat is. Pergamos had many major pagan temples. Today it is nothing but ruins, but there is still the foundation of what was called “Satan’s seat”, the Great Altar of Zeus. The altar itself went to Berlin in 1930 to a museum (a fitting location, with Hitler’s rise).
2. “thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.”
Tradition says Antipas was the bishop of Pergamos and was blamed by the rulers there of driving away the spirits. He was martyred in 92 AD by being roasted alive in a big bronze bull on the Great Altar of Zeus.

Even in this satanic stronghold, and while experiencing such heavy persecution, they continued to honor and hold fast to the name of Jesus, and would not deny the faith.

Rebukes:

The church of Pergamos was obviously strong and couldn’t be defeated directly, but it had become wounded; penetrated by two pernicious doctrines – the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.

The Doctrine of Balaam – Rev. 2:14

What do we know of Balaam? Num. 22-24 shows him to be a heathen prophet who was hired by a Moabite king (Balak) to curse Israel. While in the end Balaam did not curse, but rather bless Israel, it was evidently by God’s constraint which overcame Balaam’s greed and desire for reward. His prophecies of Israel are quite notable and true (even Messianic – 24:17), but are no evidence of a godly character in Balaam. In fact as the story shows, God can speak through anybody, even a donkey, if He pleases.

Truth *can* come through an ungodly instrument, but the source is God, not their own heart.

- Balaam’s ass
- Balaam himself
- Saul prophesied even when he was actively trying to kill David
- Caiaphas the high priest was plotting against Christ, but prophesied that one man should die for the nation (Jn.11:49-52).
- The damsel with a spirit of divination (Ac. 16) – in this case it was not God, but a demon, which was merely acknowledging the truth of Paul and his message).

Yet we should consider this the exception. If we know that a man or woman is of seriously compromised character or doctrine, we should not sit under their teaching or influence.

Num. 31:16 and Rev. 2:14 show that Num. 25 was also the result of Balaam’s activities. He counselled Balak to fight Israel *indirectly*, by tempting Israel to pollute themselves by committing whoredom with Moabite women and worshipping their false gods. The result was the death of 24,000 Israelites in a plague of judgment.

Balaam’s motivation is made even more plain by 2 P. 2:10-19. It says there are in the church, deceivers, covetous and adulterous, like Balaam, “who loved the wages of unrighteousness”. They forsake the truth to beguile unstable church members. The catalog of sins there is numerous and broad, but the common thread is a desire to ensnare the weak, to lay a stumblingblock. Secret sin is bad enough, but how much worse when the design is to bring others into a snare? We need to be on guard against seducers, flatterers, false teachers, and worldly influences.

It has been commonly quoted (Lincoln, Eisenhower, and even Nikita Krushchev, among others) that America will not be defeated by an external attack, but only from within. This is true of the church also. Satan has tried direct attacks, but has had more success by the introduction of heresies, factions, worldliness, unbelief, etc.

The purity and influence of the church was damaged, not by the persecutions of the first 3 centuries, but by the influx of unbelievers into the church after Constantine, who legalized and rewarded "Christianity" in the Roman empire. The new church "'members" were not really believers and brought all their pagan ways with them into the church. Instead of maintaining the purity of the faith, the church "Christianized" those pagan practices.

Examples of Satan working against the church from the inside:

- Heretical teachings

- "Higher Criticism" to destroy faith in the Bible

- Modern "translations" that try to force the Bible into politically correct thinking

- Pastors that seduce, or are seduced by church secretaries (just a common example)

- Youth pastors that prey on the youth

- Seminary professors who introduce doubt, skepticism, and unbelief to their students

- Unbelieving pastors who sneak modernistic principles into the church

- Getting the church sidetracked in political or social activism

- Evolution, humanism, moral relativism, communism, the green movement

- Yoga, Transcendental Meditation, and other eastern religious practices

- Evil music used as worship

- Thinking that the church must become like the world to attract new members

There are also many examples of people using the church for personal enrichment and reward:

- Radio and TV preachers

- Temple-like church buildings

- Production of special study Bibles or versions (there is no money to be made in versions no longer under copyright)

- Embezzlement

- Selling water from the Jordan, or portions of a preacher's necktie, etc.

For a fairly good picture of the doctrine of Balaam, read the short book of Jude. Its advice to us is:

- v.3 – earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints

- v. 20-21 – ... building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost. Keep yourselves in the love of God. looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.