

Desirable! Fragrant! Faithful!

The first three churches of Revelation

An exposition of Revelation
Chapter 2: 1–17

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Ephesus

The church desirable to God

Revelation 2:1-7

Ephesus

Background

To the angel of the church of Ephesus write ...

The first of the seven churches of Revelation was called Ephesus. This church was chosen because its name and condition was a fitting representation of the first period of the Christian church. *To the angel in the church* is the original reading. This alludes to the leader or elder.

Meaning of Ephesus

Ephesus means *desirable* and this was a true description of the early church during most of the first one hundred years of its existence. The time period extended to approximately 100 AD and corresponds with the white horse of the first of the seven seals. However, the seven churches do not necessarily correspond with the other periods of the seven seals.

Significance of Christ's title

...who holds the seven stars...and walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands...

Why does Jesus depict himself in this way to the early church? The early Christians faced a hostile pagan world in fulfilling Christ's gospel commission. They were the pioneers of the faith. To know that Jesus in heaven held them as it were in his very own right hand - the hand of power and authority - was a tremendous comfort to them and gave a serene sense of security. As Jesus had previously promised,

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow Me...they shall never perish [eternally] neither shall any man snatch them out of my hand... and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. John 10:27-29

This promise is for every servant of God of every age. It also reminds God's servant that everything he accomplishes is due to Christ who upholds and empowers him. Failure to realize this can cause a religious leader to become a "fallen star".

...wandering stars, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. Jude 13

...and walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands...

The word *walk* denotes ministry, care or watchfulness in regard to his servants. In the Old Testament tabernacle the priests walked to and fro in their daily ministry. Likewise Jesus Christ as our great high priest walks to and fro in the spiritual temple on earth caring for his faithful servants.

...I know your works

This is stated for each of the seven churches of Revelation, denoting Christ's perfect and complete knowledge of his people.

...all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account Hebrews 4:13

Jesus notices every mark of loyalty as well as every mark of compromise. He recognises every act of love even though no one on earth may detect it.

Christ's commendations

I know your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil...

The word *labour* involves labour with weariness. The early Christians did not make great professions, they were people of action. *The love of Christ urged them on 2 Corinthians 5:14*. This was graphically illustrated in the Book of Acts under the power of Pentecost. *They went everywhere preaching the word Acts 8:14*

In the Roman Empire alone over six million people were won to the faith by 100 AD ie in 69 years. Edward Gibbon declared,

*There is the strongest reason to believe that before the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine, the faith of Christ had been preached in every province and in all the great cities of the empire*¹

The word *patience* denotes persevering endurance; not passive but brave and persistent endurance. The early Christians did not give up nor give in.

The gospel...which was preached to every creature under heaven...
Colossians 1:23

The feats of the early Christians comprise one of the greatest events of history. From 120 people (Acts 1:15) to over six million in 69 years is testimony to the persevering labours of those early believers.

...You cannot bear those who are evil...

Christ commends the intolerance of the early Christians. He still calls for intolerance of evil people within the church. We are counseled to *bear one another's burdens* (Galatians 6:2) but we are to *abhor that which is evil (Romans 12:9)*. This is in striking contrast to the usual attitude of most Christians. Under the guise of love we tend to tolerate evil in the church with the excuse that such people need our help and sympathy. Jesus gave clear instruction on this matter.

After efforts to bring such a person to repentance

... if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be unto you like a heathen and a tax collector. Matthew 18:17

This means that such a person must be separated from church membership and viewed as one who needs to be won to Christ. The church of God should be publicly seen to be intolerant of evil.

I will set no wicked thing before my eyes: I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me Psalm 101:3

*No man loves God truly who cannot hate evil.*²

¹ Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Vol 2* (London: Strahan & Cadell, 1776 – 1789), 65

² Charles Ellicott, *Ellicott's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House 1971), see Revelation 2

*We must show all meekness to men but we must show a just zeal against their sins.*³

This attitude is the sign of a spiritually healthy church. Tolerance of evil confirms people in their sin. The rebuke of evil can lead to repentance of sin and is a safeguard to the church, especially for the weaker members.

...you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars. v2

The early Christians tested all who claimed to be apostles, teachers, etc. They knew that they were engaged in a spiritual warfare with the great enemy of Christ and so were alert to the attempts of false teachers to influence the church. They therefore investigated, examined and checked every person who claimed to be an apostle etc. The apostle Paul had specifically warned the Ephesian elders of the dangers to be guarded against:

Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God...For I know this, that after my departure shall savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember... Acts 20:28-31

The early Christians did watch and remember.

*Zeal for pure doctrine characterized the Ephesian church*⁴

Who were the false apostles whom true believers found to be liars? They were a group of Jewish believers called *Judaisers*. The apostle Paul called them *false brethren Galatians 1:7; 2:4* He warned:

Beware of dogs [backbiters], beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation. Philipians 3:2

The mutilation refers to the Judaisers who demanded that Gentile believers be circumcised and keep the ceremonial law of Moses.

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." Acts 15:1

The Judaisers were a trial to the early church but the leaders tested and rejected them. This should always be the work of faithful leaders of the church.

You have persevered and have patience and have laboured for my name's sake and have not become weary. v3

The early Christians could not bear those who were evil but they could bear persecution and sufferings for Christ's sake. In their remarkable labours in extending the gospel they certainly did not faint. For example, notice the exploits of the apostles themselves:

James
Philip

Son of Zebedee. Executed by Herod Agrippa 44 AD.

Preached the gospel in Upper Asia. At Heliopolis in Phrygia he was scourged, imprisoned and crucified in 54 AD.

³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), see commentary on Revelation 2.

⁴ Ellicott, *Ellicott's Bible Commentary*, see Revelation 2

Matthew	Laboured in Parthia and Ethiopia where he was martyred in the city of Nadabah 60 AD where he was killed with a halberd.
James the Less	A brother of Jesus and an overseer of the early Jerusalem church. At 94 years he was stoned by his fellow Jews and his brains were dashed out by a fuller's club.
Matthias	Replaced Judas Iscariot the traitor. Stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded.
Andrew	Peter's brother. Laboured in many Asiatic nations. On arrival at Edessa, Syria, he was crucified.
Mark	Laboured in Egypt. At Alexandria he was dragged to pieces by a mob of idolators.
Peter	Peter laboured mostly for the Jews. Finally at Rome he was arrested during Nero's reign and crucified upside down.
Paul	The chief apostle to the Gentiles who laboured incessantly in promoting the gospel. He was beheaded by Nero about 68 AD.
Jude (Thaddeus)	Crucified at Edessa, 72 AD.
Bartholomew	Laboured in several countries. Finally in India he was cruelly beaten and crucified by a mob of idolators.
Thomas	Laboured in Parthia and India. He was martyred by Hindu priests by being thrust through with a spear.
Luke	Laboured with St. Paul in various countries. Tradition says he was hanged from an olive tree by pagan priests of Greece.
Simon Zealotes	Laboured in Mauretania, Africa and Britain where he finally was crucified 74 AD.
John	Laboured in Asia Minor. Arrested and sent to Rome where at Domitian's command he was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil. He was miraculously preserved where upon the emperor banished him to the lonely isle of Patmos.
Barnabas	It is claimed he was martyred in 73 AD
Nicodemus	Suffered death at Rome under Domitian.
Timothy	Laboured in Ephesus until 97 AD when he was clubbed to death by pagan people. ⁵

Every apostle except John died a martyr's death, but through their endeavours the world of that day was turned upside down. The church of the period of Ephesus truly laboured for Christ's sake and did not faint. As Dr. Vaughan declared:

*There is total patience and abhorrence of evil and discernment and again patience and endurance and unwearied exertion. What can be wanting here?*⁶

But finally the early church did begin to falter. What was the problem? It was not sinfulness or heresy or compromise.

Christ's complaint

Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. v4

This represented a decline in the zeal of God's people of this period. When did this commence? probably after the death of the apostles. Saint Paul had warned

⁵ Forbush (Ed), *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (London: republished by John Day 1868), 2-7

⁶ Edward B Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ (5th Edition)* (London: Seely, Jackson & Halliday 1862), Ch 2

...after my departure...from among your own selves men will rise up speaking perverse things. Acts 20:28-31.

Paul was martyred about 68 AD. John wrote Revelation about 95 AD and in his day some false leaders were already in the church (3 John 9-10). It appears that after about fifty years the decline commenced.

*Little by little a change came*⁷

Zeal began to wane. Coldness crept into the church. Piety was rapidly waning.

*She became selfish and ease-loving. The spirit of worldliness was cherished.*⁸

Christ's warning

Remember therefore from where you have fallen, repent and do the first works; or else I will come to thee quickly and I will remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent. v5

Here is depicted God's method of true revival in the church of God.

Remember from whence thou art fallen...

Christ calls the believer to recount his past experience of how he loved Christ; to remember the original standards and his labours in the hope that he will realize how far he has fallen – to see how love of self has replaced love for Christ.

...repent...

Seek for a change of mind or attitude which the Holy Spirit will surely give if it is sought for with all the heart.

...return (or reform) ... do the first works...

Let love be demonstrated by positive action. Love is the fulfilling of the law. Love is full-hearted obedience. To encourage repentance and reformation Christ warns of the consequences of non-repentance and commends them for their attitude to false teachers.

...else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place...

The lampstands in the sanctuary were the light bearers. The removal of the lampstand indicated that it was no longer disseminating the light. So with a church - the spiritual lampstand in the spiritual sanctuary now on earth – if it loses its love, it loses its light. Light and love are closely allied..... *God is love; God is light.*

Therefore if a church fails to return to its first love it will have no light and it will be removed from the spiritual temple. It may continue as a professing church of God but it is not recognized as such by heaven.

The study of church history sadly reveals that every church through the centuries, if it has not disappeared through martyrdom, has ultimately had its candlestick removed. Faith in Christ is not inherited and the natural tendency of the human heart is self-love.

Jesus said

⁷ EG White, *Testimonies for the Church Vol 8* (California: Pacific Press Publishing Assn, 1948), 26

⁸ Ibid.

He who endures to the end shall be saved. Matthew 24:13

Another commendation

You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. v6

Christ did not hate the people but the things they did. Similarly with the early church - they loved the sinner but hated the sin. Three of the early Church Fathers record the existence of a sect called the Nicolaitans in the second century AD. The Nicolaitans are also named under the Pergamos period. There they are described in detail.

Christ's appeal to all believers

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches... v7

In verse 1 it is Christ who speaks to the church but here it is the Spirit. What is the significance? The Holy Spirit is Christ's representative on Earth. He is the one and only Vicar of Christ.

When the Comforter has come... he will testify of me. John 15:26

*...when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak on his own authority; but whatever he hears (from me) he will speak...
John 16:13*

Believers should heed not only the lessons from Ephesus, but the lessons from all the seven churches. What Christ reveals concerning each church is important instruction for every saint and for every other church of every age.

Main lessons from the Ephesus church letter

- God holds his true servants firmly in his hand.
- God takes note of our labours for his cause.
- God takes note of our attitude toward evil.
- The danger of declining love and the growth of self love.

These words (Revelation 2:4-5) are applicable to... churches in their present condition. The love of God has been lost and this means the absence of love for one another. Self, self, self is cherished and is striving for the supremacy. God rebukes his people for their sins that he may humble them and lead them to seek his face⁹

⁹ EG White, "The Call for a Spiritual Revival and Reformation", *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Feb 25 1902

Promise to the overcomer

To him who overcomes I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. v7

What must the believer overcome? In the Ephesian period it meant responding to the call to remember, repent and return to one's first love. This meant the denial of self - which is the biggest battle for every believer of every age. The saint who gains this victory is regarded by God as having attained to perfection of character. As one author of great spiritual discernment wrote

*The sanctification of the soul by the working of the Holy Spirit is the implanting of Christ's nature in humanity....When self is merged in Christ, love springs forth spontaneously. The completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within.*¹⁰

This is to be the aim and the daily prayer of every true believer.

...eat of the tree of life...

This means immortality or deathlessness. Originally in Eden the Lord declared

And now, lest he [Adam] put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever. Genesis 3:22

God only (alone) has immortality. 1 Timothy 6:16

Therefore in the kingdom in order to maintain immortality the saved will need to continually eat of the tree of life.

Blessed are they who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life... Revelation 22:14

...on either side of the river (of life) was the tree of life which bore twelve fruits, each (tree) yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing (service) of the nation. Revelation 22:2

..which is in the midst of the paradise of God...

In the original paradise the tree of life was also in the midst of the garden (Genesis 2:9). Is the original paradise of Eden the same as the paradise of the future that is promised to the saints? This is answered in the exposition of Revelation 21 and 22. One thing is certain – the human race in Adam and Eve was banned from paradise and the tree of life. However in Christ, the last Adam, all who believe and follow him will be restored to paradise and to the tree of life and immortality.

¹⁰ EG White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assn 1900) 390-391

Smyrna

The church fragrant to God

Revelation 2:8-11

Smyrna

Background

And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things says the First and the Last, who was dead and came to life: v8

Meaning of Smyrna

Smyrna means *sweet smelling*. It is derived from myrrh, the Arabian herb, a source of aromatic ointment. When myrrh was crushed, it gave forth a beautiful fragrance. This was a perfect picture of the saints of the Smyrnan period. The saints were crushed in martyrdom but in their dying they rendered a testimony to their faith in Christ which was so impressive it was like beautiful fragrance to the multitudes. As a result millions were convinced and accepted Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

Myrrh was also used to embalm the dead (John 19:39). In this period the church passed through an experience of death in which the church appeared to be weakened and effectively destroyed. But in fact the death experience actually preserved the church. It purged out corruption and selfishness enabling the church to give forth a sweet-smelling fragrance in its expression of true Christian virtues.

Significance of Christ's titles

...the First and the Last...

As shown in Revelation 1, this title was drawn from the Old Testament ¹¹ and represented Jesus Christ as being in complete control. He is the victorious one. He is the first on the battlefield and he will be the last on the battlefield, indicating complete victory. He is the one who is with his people amid the fires of martyrdom.

...who was dead and came to life

This expression reminded the saints in this period that what was befalling them had also befallen Jesus. He already had passed through a similar experience of death and fully understood their sufferings.

Christ's commendations

I know your works, tribulation and poverty (but you are rich) v9

Smyrna represented the period of persecution under the pagan Roman Caesars. As the gospel spread throughout the then-known world the bastions of paganism began to crumble. This brought furious reactions. The surrounding nations resisted the gospel and martyred those who accepted it.

In the Roman empire the rulers finally turned upon the Christians and millions sacrificed their lives for Christ. The sites of the many martyrdoms can still be seen today, including the Circus Maximus, the Coliseum, St Peter's Square and other places in Rome. Often Christians were sacrificed in the arenas. Some were tied to poles around the perimeter, smothered with pitch and set alight. Then wild beasts were released upon the remainder of the Christians in the arena.

¹¹ Refer to the author's publication, *Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega*

The remarkable poise, courage and steadfastness of the Christians were a telling demonstration of the power of Christ. As a result, multitudes were influenced to accept the gospel and the saying was coined

*The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church*¹².

This was because wherever martyrdoms occurred new believers sprang up as a result.

*I know your ... **poverty***

The earthly possessions of believers were usually confiscated by the state. Many Christians were forced into hiding and worshipped underground in the catacombs. Others were driven out to distant parts. They suffered *the spoiling of their goods Hebrews 10:34 AKJV*. They were *destitute, afflicted, tormented Hebrews 11:37*.

*...but you are **rich**...*

The Smyrnians were not materially but spiritually rich. By their self-sacrifice they laid up treasure in heaven. No wonder God permits persecution. Today the church is materially rich but spiritually it is *poor and blind and naked Revelation 3:17*. This is one of the great lessons of church history. When the church is in adversity it is spiritually rich, when the church is affluent, it is spiritually poor. This is generally true also of individual Christians. This explains why the church to be translated at the Second Advent must first pass through a time of trouble in order to be fit for translation.

...I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. v9

This could apply to the literal Jews in their relentless hostility toward the gospel of Christ. But these Jews are not *Jews* in the New Testament meaning of the term. Originally the Jews were those of the tribe of Judah. The word Jew means *praise*. However, the New Testament shows that since Calvary, the term has a spiritual connotation and applies only to true believers in Christ.

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision (the mark of the literal Jew) that which is outward in the flesh, but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God. Romans 2:28-29

This indicates that the true, spiritual Jew is the one who has the praise of God.

If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. Galatians 3:29

The term *Jew* is a deeply religious term but Satan has led the Hebrew people, especially their leaders, to bring the term into disrepute. The Jewish synagogues were *fountains of persecution*¹³. This expression was coined by Tertullian in that very period because it was in the synagogues that the Jewish leaders hatched the slanderous plots against the innocent Christians. In the Book of Acts the reader may discern the slanderous lies of the Jewish leaders who fomented the persecutions of the early Christians.¹⁴

¹² Tertullian of Carthage, "Apology", Chapter 50 in TG Bunch, *The Seven Epistles of Christ* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assn, 1947)

¹³ Tertullian of Carthage (early church father), *Scorpiace Vol 3* (Translated by S Thelwell 1869), 643, in *SDA Bible Commentary Vol 7*, 746

¹⁴ Acts 13:45; 14:2,19; 17:5,13; 18:5,6; 21:27

The Jewish leaders inspired others to resist the gospel and they have continued to do through the centuries. By vicious lies they instilled fear in the minds of the pagan peoples concerning the Christian faith. They led the populace to blame the Christians for the natural calamities that fell upon society. The persecution of the apostle John by Emperor Domitian was due to the false accusations by the Jews to the emperor. In the martyrdom of the saintly Polycarp, the Jews played a leading role.

*Even though he was to be burned on the Sabbath – the Jews were so anxious for Polycarp’s death that they came in large numbers to the stadium bringing faggots for the fire in which Polycarp so magnificently died.*¹⁵

Satan is the instigator of lies and slander (John 8:44). Therefore the synagogues were where the lying slanders against the saints were conceived and given birth. They truly were a *synagogue of Satan*. v9

Christ’s admonition

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer...

The initial reaction to this admonition is that this is expecting the impossible. The thought of suffering and martyrdom naturally rouses one’s fears. The instinct for self-preservation creates apprehension. But when God calls a saint to martyrdom the Holy Spirit takes away his fear and gives supernatural courage. One of the astonishing characteristics of the martyrs was their courage in facing death. They unflinchingly faced the lions.

...they did not love their lives unto the death. Rev 12:11

Tertullian wrote to the Roman leader

*Kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to dust... the oftener we are mown down by you the more in numbers we grow; the blood of the Christian is seed*¹⁶

...Indeed the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested and you will have tribulation ten days...

Thirteen Roman emperors initiated or supported the persecution of the Christians and ten of these predominated.

¹⁵ Edwin Thiele, *Outline Studies in Revelation* (California: Pacific Press Publishing Assn 1990), 48

¹⁶ Tertullian, “Apology”, Chapter 50

Roman emperors who persecuted Christians

98-117 AD - Trajan

There were many popular tumults against the Christians. Trajan issued an edict making perseverance in Christianity a capital offence. There were many martyrs including Simeon, Bishop of Jerusalem and Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch.

117-138 AD - Hadrian

The populace at the games and shows clamored for the killing of Christians. Hadrian decreed that Christians must be tried and convicted before execution.

138 -161 AD - Antoninus Pius

Magistrates accused the Christians of impiety. In Asia-Minor Christians were held responsible for the numerous earthquakes and were violently attacked by the people. Polycarp, the saintly Bishop of Smyrna, was martyred in 156 AD. Before the fire was lit, the judge called on him to renounce Christ and save his life. Polycarp replied

*Eighty and six years have I been his servant and he hath done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my King, who hath saved me?*¹⁷

Fifteen hundred Christians were slain on one occasion and eight hundred on another.

161-180 AD - Marcus Aurelius

The philosophers falsely accused the Christians of horrible crimes such as incest and feasting on the flesh of murdered children. As a result there were furious outbursts against the Christians producing one of the most terrible periods of persecution. Many were martyred. Churches were destroyed at Lyons and Vienne. Numbers of apologies were written on behalf of the Christians including by Justin Martyr, Athenagorus and Tatian.

180 -192 AD - Commodus

During Commodus' reign persecution, suffering and deaths of Christians continued because of their renunciation of paganism.

193 -211 AD - Septimus Severus

Numerous Christians were killed in the provinces. Presidents were permitted to persecute Christians whenever they pleased. Laws were enacted forbidding the propagation of the Christian faith.

222-235 AD - Alexander Severus

There were several instances of persecution during this period even though Alexander Severus indicated that Christianity should be tolerated.

235 -238 AD - Maximus

Maximus incited the people and the magistrates to attack the Christians. Many atrocities were perpetuated.

¹⁷ Author unknown. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, from the works of the Apostolic Fathers recorded by Eusebius (AD 263-399) and translated by Charles H Hoole, 1885

249-251 AD - Decius Trajan

Decius Trajan issued severe edicts against Christians and commanded the governors to utterly exterminate the Christian faith. This was the worst of the martyrdoms to date.

251-253 AD - Gallus

Persecution continued with Christians being blamed for the various calamities and pestilences.

253-260 - Valerian

Christians were forbidden to meet together – many martyrs.

270-275 AD - Aurelian

Aurelian issued persecuting edicts against the Christians.

284-305 AD - Diocletian

Diocletian became so puffed up with pride because of his success as ruler that he commanded that he should be worshipped as God. He claimed that he was brother to the sun and moon and, adorning his shoes with gold and precious stones, he commanded the people to kiss his feet¹⁸

Diocletian's demand introduced the fiercest period of persecution under the Caesars and this continued for ten years from 303-313 AD. This period can be understood as the fulfillment of the prediction that the Smyrian church would have tribulation ten days.

Because this prophecy employs symbolic terms, any time period mentioned should be interpreted as symbolic time.¹⁹ This would represent ten years on the basis that in symbolic prophecy a day represents a year.²⁰

Prior to 303 AD there had been a period of peace and tranquility for the Christians and the faith flourished. Some of the emperors were even favourable towards Christianity. Many in responsible civil positions were Christians. Relatives of the emperors accepted the faith. There were huge congregations in almost every city.

Soon however signs of degeneracy appeared. Rivalry and contention among the bishops was prevalent as well as among the church members.

*Fraud, malice and envy prevailed in every congregation*²¹

Undoubtedly the unconverted were numerous in the church. To save it, God intervened. He permitted the rise of Diocletian who beset the church with fierce persecution. He

- issued decrees to overthrow Christian temples throughout the Roman empire.
- issued a decree for the burning of the Christian scriptures.
- issued edicts for the replacement of Christians who occupied positions of responsibility, such as magistrates, etc.
- ordered that elders and bishops be cast into prison and tortured in order to force them to engage in idol worship.²²

¹⁸ Clarke, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, 34

¹⁹ See Appendix re the symbolism of these names

²⁰ Refer Ezekiel 4:6 and Numbers 14:3-4

²¹ Gibbon, *Decline & fall of the Roman Empire*, Ch 16

Examples of the faithfulness of the Christians

Several thousand Christians at one place assembled to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The temple was surrounded and locked. The Christians were called upon to offer incense to Jupiter or else be burned alive. The answer came from within: *We are all Christian. Christ is our only God and King. We will worship him and his Father and the Holy Ghost and we are now ready to be offered to God.* What was the response? The temple was set alight and thousands of men, women and children were burned alive.

The emperor sent an edict to a certain city in Phrygia commanding the citizens to worship idols. The mayor and other leaders confessed that they were Christians with all those in the city. What was the result? The whole city and its inhabitants were burned alive.

Eustratius of Arabrace witnessed the endurance of the martyrs. He was so affected that he himself thirsted for martyrdom. He openly professed his faith in Christ. The pagans rebuked him for his madness and vanity. He was arrested, cruelly beaten and burned alive.

Some ancient authorities claimed that in Britain under Diocletian's persecution, *all the Christians were utterly destroyed.*²³

In Portugal a beautiful maiden of noble birth became a sincere and devout believer. She turned her back on worldly pleasures. When persecution fell upon her fellow Christians, she took a bold stand. Through much prayer she was given a remarkable spirit of resistance to her persecutors. Her parents moved to the country in order to save Eulalia from martyrdom.

However Eulalia was so moved by the Holy Spirit that she stole away by night, traveling through thorny bush and darkness until she reached Emerita, the city from whence her parents had fled. She confronted the tribunal and rebuked them for their slaughter of good people. She said

I am one of the Christians, an enemy of your devilish sacrifices. I spurn your idols under my feet. I confess God Omnipotent with my heart and mouth. Isis, Apollo, Venus! What are they? A thing of naught – the works of men's hands...The emperor falls down and worships a stone...go to therefore, burn, cut and mangle these earthly members. It is easy to break a brittle substance, but the mind thou shalt not hurt.

In fury the judge decreed

Hangman, take her! Pull her out by the hair of her head and torment her to the uttermost.

Then, sensing her youthful beauty, he changed his attitude and said

Wilt thou kill thyself, so young a flower? Does not the glittering and golden pomp of a bridal move you? Behold, the instruments prepared for thy terrible death. Either you shall be beheaded with this sword, or else with wild beasts pulled to piece or be cast into a fiery furnace and be consumed to ashes.... If you will take with your fingers a little salt and incense and put it into the censors, you shall be delivered from punishment.

²² Clarke, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, 34

²³ *Ibid*, 30

Eulalia did not reply, but instead threw down the idol and spurned with her feet the incense. Her executioners took her, pulled her joints from the other and with talons tore her side to the bones. Through it all Eulalia praised God with singing

Lord I will not forget thee. What a pleasure O Christ to remember your triumphant victories.

She continued singing without lament or weeping but full of cheer. Her executioners gored her flesh with an iron grate and hurdle and then burned her on every side of her body with flaming torches. When the flame reached her head, she expired in peace.²⁴

In Gaul, a Roman legion comprising 6660 men was totally Christian. It was led by a Christian called Mauritius. The legion was ordered by the emperor to attack the Christians. The legion refused. The emperor executed every tenth soldier. They committed themselves to God *with great joy* encouraged by their leader Mauritius.

He was summoned to the emperor and in his defense declared

*We are your soldiers, but also the servants of God. We will rather obey him than you. We offer our hands against any other enemy, but to defile our hands with the blood of innocents, that we may not do. Behold we cast down our weapons and resist not, for we would rather be killed than kill; and die guiltless than live guilty. We are ready to suffer fire and sword and any other torments. We confess ourselves to be Christians; we cannot persecute Christians, nor will we sacrifice to your devilish idols.*²⁵

The emperor ordered another tenth of the legion to be executed. When the remainder still refused to murder their fellow Christians, Caesar ordered the whole army to destroy the Christian legion. The Christian legionnaires made no resistance. They yielded their lives to their persecutors and were slain.

What a telling testimony was borne by the early Christians! As the John the Revelator declared:

They overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Revelation 12:11

It is abundantly clear that the saints were inspired to martyrdom by the Holy Spirit. So often they appeared to deliberately invite death. This is not normal and some authors have made the mistake of claiming that the martyrs were overzealous and that many died needlessly.²⁶ The truth is that the martyrs were given supernatural boldness and courage and supernatural deliverance from pain.

In vain were Satan's efforts to destroy the church of Christ by violence. The great controversy in which the disciples of Jesus yielded up their lives did not cease when these faithful standard-bearers fell at their post. By defeat they conquered. God's workmen were slain, but His work went steadily forward. The gospel continued to spread and the number of its adherents to increase. It penetrated into regions that were inaccessible even to the eagles of Rome... Thousands were imprisoned and slain, but others sprang up to fill their places... Their living example and dying testimony were a constant witness for the truth; and where least

²⁴ Ibid, 37-38

²⁵ Ibid, 36-37

²⁶ Stephen N Haskell, *Seer of Patmos* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assn, 1906), 52 -"The tenderness of the father causes him to lose sight of the fact that death was sought... The overzealous oft times suffer when there is no need of suffering, yet God reads the motive of the heart"

expected, the subjects of Satan were leaving his service and enlisting under the banner of Christ.²⁷

We believe that in the future when God allows martyrs He will inspire men, women and children in the same manner, who will boldly testify to the point of inviting death and even challenging their persecutors to martyr them. As in the past God will use such witnesses to save many that are still in spiritual Babylon.

Promise to the overcomer

...He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death. v11

What were the believers of the Smyrnian period to overcome or conquer? Without doubt it was the fear of suffering and death for the sake of Christ. The reward is that if they overcame they would not be *hurt by* (or experience) the second death. Scripture speaks of several kinds of death. There is spiritual death and literal death. Spiritual death is the lack of spiritual life. *Dead in trespasses and sins Ephesians 2:1* is the lot of all who are not born again in Christ.

Literal or physical death is the cessation of physical life. There are two kinds of physical death. The first death is the result of the sin of Adam, the father of the race.

...in Adam all die... 1 Corinthians 15:22

Therefore just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin; and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned - Romans 5:12

The first death is temporary. From it all will return.

Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. John 5:28-29

Everyone comes back from the tomb – we have no say, no choice; all return from the dead.

However we do have a choice as to when we come back. There are two main resurrections: the first resurrection and the second resurrection; the resurrection to life or the resurrection to damnation (or judgment or punishment). We have a choice about which resurrection we will participate in. Those who are faithful to Christ return in the first resurrection, to eternal life.

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power... Revelation 20:6

But those who return in the second resurrection return for punishment, and this punishment will be *the second death*. This resurrection transpires at the close of the one thousand years of Revelation chapter 20 and the death that ensues is destruction in the lake of fire. From this death there is no recovery. It is annihilation.

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God... And the dead were judged according to their works ...and Death and Hades (grave) were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone found not written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:12-15

²⁷ White, *The Great Controversy*, 41-42

*...the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.
Revelation 21:8*

The final fate of the unsaved is not eternal life in torment but cessation of life in destruction. The destruction is *everlasting destruction* 2 *Thessalonians 1:9*.

Thus the promise to the overcomer of the Smyrnian period of the church and to Christians of all periods is that they will have part in the first resurrection and on them the *second death will have no power*. They will be impervious to the forces of destruction. Nothing will ever hurt them again. What a comfort to the martyrs as they faced their executioners. As Jesus counseled

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul (or character), but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28

Pergamos

The church faithful amid
popularity

Revelation 2:12-17

Pergamos

Background

And to the angel (leader) of the church in Pergamos write... v12

Pergamos represents the period of the church when Christianity became popular. The church was exalted by society. This period undoubtedly commenced with the reign of Constantine the Great around 320 AD.

At this time Satan changed his form of attack upon the church. Up until this time he had used persecution. However this only served to purify, strengthen and enlarge the church. He was therefore compelled to employ different tactics. He now made the church popular and in this was great peril.

Meaning of Pergamos

The name Pergamos means *height* or *elevation*. The city of Pergamos was located on a one thousand foot high hill, making it ideal for defense.

Significance of Christ's title

...He who has the sharp two-edged sword: v12

As indicated in the author's exposition of Revelation 1:16 this title denoted the power of Christ's word, especially in the execution of judgment.

For the word of God is...sharper than any two-edged sword...and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart...all things are naked and opened to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:12-13

Popularity breeds corruption and Christ's title suggests that in this period when corruption would pervade the professed church, he would be all-discerning in regard to the condition of his professed people and would deal with them in judgment.²⁸

Christ's commendation

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.... v13

In spite of the fact that believers were in a perilous position of popularity, Christ declares that they were faithful. The role of the city of Pergamos in Satan's strategy in opposing the cause of God is used to illustrate the problems of the saints in this period. What was Satan's seat or throne? Pergamos was a thriving and powerful centre of paganism. It contained renowned memorials to idolatry. These were:

- The huge altar to Zeus, commemorating the Pergamene's victory over the invading Gauls, the remnant of whom were the Galatians
- The famous shrine and temple of Aesculapius, the serpent god of medicine

²⁸ The Pergamene period may correspond with the period of the Black Horse of Revelation 6. The rider is pictured as having balances in his hand. One application of *balances* in Scripture is *Judgment* (see Daniel 5:27)

- The centre of worship for Dionysus, the bull god
- A prominent centre for the worship of Bacchus and Venus
- A great temple to Athena
- Temples to the Roman emperors Augustus, Trajan and Severus to whom were given divine honours.

Above all Pergamos was the then seat of Babylonian sun worship - the source of all idolatry, astrology and occultism. In 487 BC, fifty years after the Persians conquered Babylon, the Chaldean system of sun worship was compelled to flee from Babylon because of Persian hostility. They moved westward and established their centre in Pergamos, independent of Persian control.

*The defeated Chaldeans fled to Asia Minor and fixed their central college at Pergamos and took the palladium of Babylon, the cubic stone, with them. Here independent of state control, they carried on the rites of their religion.*²⁹

The original seat or throne of Satan was in Babylon (Isaiah 14:4,12). Satan was Babylon's invisible king. In 487 BC Pergamos became his earthly seat. The Pergamene kings embraced the Babylonian religion and assumed its leadership under the Babylonian title of Pontifex Maximus or Chief Pontiff. It was the state religion. In 133 BC, Attalus III bequeathed the kingdom of Pergamum to Rome with all its offices, political and religious. This is how Satan's throne was transferred to Rome.

Julius and Augustus Caesar were the first to assume the title of Pontifex Maximus. Later the Christian emperor Gratian (380 AD) rejected the title, whereupon it was assumed by Pope Damasus and has ever since been one of the official titles of the bishops of Rome. Pergamos therefore was the connecting link between the two Babylons.

The church of Pergamos represents Satan's change of tactics in the third period of Christian history. He now attacked the church, not from without but from within. He transferred his throne from paganism to the Christian church. Instead of confrontation he resorted to infiltration. This was in exact fulfillment of the Apostle Paul's prediction in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8.

Let no one deceive you by any means: for that day (Second Advent) will not come unless the falling away (or apostasy) comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God (the Christian church) showing himself (or posing) that he is God. 2 Thessalonians 2:3-5.

The power that fulfilled this prediction has been identified through the centuries as the church at Rome. As one author has written

*This compromise between paganism and Christianity resulted in the development of "the man of sin" foretold in prophecy... That gigantic system of false religion is a masterpiece of Satan's power - a monument of his efforts to seat himself upon the throne to rule the earth according to his will. The church... was induced to yield allegiance to the representative of Satan - the bishop of Rome... The same claim urged by Satan in the wilderness of temptation is still urged by him through the Church of Rome, and vast numbers are ready to yield him homage.*³⁰

²⁹ William B Barker, *Lares and Penates* (London: Ingram, Cooke and Co, 1853), 232-233

³⁰ EG White, *The Great Controversy* (California: Pacific Press Publishing Assn, 1888), 50

Pergamos was the period of the visible formation and establishment of the apostate church or predicted Antichrist. In this period commenced the great cleavage among Christians resulting in the withdrawal of the loyal minority believers.

...you hold fast to my name and, did not deny my faith...

Barker continues

After a long and severe conflict, the faithful few decided to dissolve all union with the apostate church if she still refused to free herself from falsehood and idolatry. They saw that separation was an absolute necessity if they would obey the word of God. They dared not tolerate errors fatal to their own souls and set an example which would imperil the faith of their children and children's children. To secure peace and unity they were ready to make any concession consistent with fidelity to God; but they felt that even peace would be too dearly purchased at the sacrifice of principle. If unity could be secured only by the compromise of truth and righteousness, then let there be difference, and even war.³¹

The Pergamos period undoubtedly began with the accession of Constantine the Great, the first so-called Christian emperor, and concluded with Justinian in 538 AD. This was the period of amalgamation of church and state. But this apostate church was not the church addressed by Christ under the name of Pergamos. The true church of Christ was the separated faithful minority that held fast to Christ's name and who, unlike their compromising brethren, did not deny the faith of Christ.

...even in the days when Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. v13

Who was Antipas? There is a tradition that Antipas was the martyred bishop of Pergamos.³² Probably the name has a symbolic application, just like Balaam and Jezebel in the Thyatira period. Antipas is formed of two words

Anti - in the place of, instead of, meaning a substitute or one against or in opposition. *Pas* - an abbreviated form of *pater* or *father*.

The use of the term *Father* in the religious realm savours of authoritarianism and is contrary to the spirit of Christ.

But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and all you are all brethren. Do not call any man on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.... And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Matthew 23:8-12

With the development of the apostasy in this period there entered the unchristian spirit of authoritarianism. It developed markedly with the bishops of Rome and spread among other church leaders. Finally it infected the pastors and leaders of local churches. Antipas can be seen to represent the faithful believers who stood firmly against the exercise of *kingly power* in the church and as a result were symbolically slain among the people. They were stigmatized, berated, and defamed. They suffered character assassination and were forced to become social outcasts. The faithful few decided to dissolve all union with the apostate church.

³¹ Ibid, 45

³² See SDA Bible Dictionary on *Antipas*

Christ's complaint

...you have there those who hold to 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. v14

This is a reference to the experience at Baal-peor as recorded by Moses in Numbers 25.

Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel. Numbers 25:1-3

And Moses said to them: Have you kept all the women alive? Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD. Numbers 31:15-16

Baal worship is sun worship. It is the worship of the principle of fertility and expressed itself in sexuality. This had a powerful attraction for the natural impulses of man and this is why Israel was so frequently led into Baal worship.

The Revelator draws on this experience to picture what was taking place in the Pergamene period with many of God's professed people. Ancient Israel was led into literal whoredom and idolatry through Balaam's counsel. Spiritual Israel in the Pergamene period was led into spiritual whoredom by the counsel of certain false brethren within the church. These, it appears, advocated friendship and compromise with the apostasy of the day. God's unequivocal counsel in this was clear:

*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?... And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?... Therefore "come out from among them and be separate. Do not touch what is unclean and I will receive you."
2 Corinthians 6:14-18.*

The Pergamene church tolerated among them those who advocated compromise with false worship. This was the popular trend of the times and the church was lax in its stand. These false brethren were designated as Nicolaitans.

Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. v15

A number of manuscripts render the clause *which thing I hate* as *in like manner*, suggesting that the Nicolaitans held the doctrine of Balaam.³³

The words *Nicolaitan* and *Balaam* have almost identical meanings –

Nicolaitan is Greek comprising *niko* (conqueror) and *laos* (people) = conqueror of the people

Balaam is Hebrew and comprises *belang am* (destroyer of the people)

The Nicolaitans are first mentioned in the Ephesian church letter.

³³ The Syriac, Vulgate & 3 oldest MSS render the clause *which things I hate* as *in like manner*
See also Ellicott's Commentary on Revelation 2:15

...you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Revelation 2:6.

But in the Pergamene period these same people were now right inside the church. This reveals the snare of tolerance. It is important for believers to learn what can be tolerated in the church and what should not be. To tolerate what God hates is grievous to Him and will injure the church.

What were the deeds and doctrines of the Nicolaitans? The Nicolaitans could be likened to the liberals of the early church. They abused the Apostle Paul's emphasis of God's free grace. They misinterpreted *not under the law* to mean *not under the standard or direction of the law* instead of *not under the condemnation or curse of the law*. As a result, they adopted a false freedom which led to licentiousness or sexual freedom. As Peter declared:

having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls... They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness... 2 Peter 2:14-16

For certain men have crept in unnoticed... ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness (sexual freedom) and deny the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.... Jude 4

Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and have perished in the rebellion of Korah. Jude 11

The Nicolaitans according to some scholars were Gnostics.

*The Nicolaitans were a Gnostic sect who mistakenly traced their origin back to Nicholas, one of the seven deacons (Acts 6:5). They held certain impure doctrines and lived impure lives... They held to the pernicious principle that the lower passions were subdued by indulgence.*³⁴

Christ's warning

Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. v16

What was the church of Pergamos guilty of? Pergamos tolerated the teachings and practices of the Balaamites or Nicolaitans. How often has the church of God needed this same warning? How often has the church become too tolerant? How often has it compromised? Today the church under the label of love tolerates false doctrine, worldliness and commandment breaking. Those who protest are branded as trouble makers, intolerant and lacking in Christian love. But who does Christ commend? Christ commends those who like Antipas lift up their voices in protest against spiritual declension in the church. However like Antipas they often suffer character assassination and their reputations are destroyed.

...I will come to you quickly...

This appears to mean that Christ will come to Pergamos in judgment and remove its lampstand if it does not repent. (See the author's exposition of Revelation 2:5)

³⁴ Dr Edwin Theile, *Outline Studies in Revelation* (California: Pacific Press Publishing Assn, 1990), 39.

...will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

This refers to the Nicolaitans or Balaamites. The expression appears to be borrowed from Moses' account of the experience of Israel in Numbers 25, where those who led Israel astray were literally slain with the sword.

So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Every one of you kill his men who were joined unto Baal of Peor." And indeed one ... presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and....all the congregation... who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle... Now when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar... saw it, he rose... and took a javelin... and thrust both of them through ... So the plague was stopped... And those who died in the plague were twenty four thousand. Numbers 25:5-9.

This is a graphic warning to spiritual Israel. All who persist in compromising with the world, which is spiritual adultery (James 4:4), are to be dealt with by the spiritual sword of the Spirit – the word of God – and severed from among God's people. This is what will stay the plague of the judgments of God upon spiritual Israel.

Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, was rewarded for his zeal by being granted the covenant of an everlasting priesthood.

...Phinehas...has turned back my wrath from...Israel, because he was zealous with my zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in my zeal... 'Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace... the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel. Numbers 25:10-14

In spiritual Israel those who zealously resist the spiritual Balaamites or Nicolaitans, likewise will be rewarded by being granted a spiritual priesthood for eternity. They will be made *kings and priests unto God. Revelation 1:6.*

Promises to the overcomer

"...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". v17

The *hidden manna* is an allusion to the pot of manna preserved inside the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies of the sanctuary. Exodus 16:31-35. It was *hidden manna* because no one could see it in the ark except possibly the High Priest, and then only once a year.

The manna was incorruptible. It was preserved in the ark for forty years in the wilderness and for over eight hundred years in the Promised Land until approximately 586 BC when the ark and its contents were hidden by the prophet Jeremiah in a secret cave east of Jordan.³⁵

Manna was food from heaven. It was all-sufficient. It gave life and it kept the eater free from disease. It represents the spiritual food of the believer (John 6:48-63), the Word of God. This Word is described in scripture as hidden:

*Your word I have hidden in mine heart, that I might not sin against You.
Psalm 119:11.*

³⁵ 2 Machabees 2:4-8 (from The Apocrypha) in EG White *Prophets and Kings*, (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assn, 1958), 453.

I have food to eat of which you do not know. John 4:32

I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food. Job 23:12.

...your life (spiritually) is hidden with Christ in God. Colosians 3:3

This promise to the overcomer represents the fact that in the Kingdom the essentials to maintain life and health will be provided throughout eternity.

...a white stone...

This is an allusion to the Urim stone – a glittering diamond upon the breastplate of the high priest. Urim means light, which implies *white* in colour. On the Urim a secret name of God was written. The Urim stone was provided for special communication between the high priest and God. When the priest made an inquiry of God, if the answer was in the affirmative, a bright light would illuminate the Urim.

...in the stone a new name written...

In the Old Testament the giving of a new name represented the bestowal of honour, promotion and elevation. When Joseph was elevated to be prime minister of Egypt, his name was changed to Zaphnath-Paaneah, *The man to whom secrets are revealed* (Genesis 41:45). When Daniel was elevated to stand in the king's house, his name was changed to Beltshazzar (Daniel 1:7). When Jacob was elevated to be a prince with God, his name was changed to Israel (Genesis 32:27-28).

To the overcomer this is a promise that he will be elevated to a distinguished position in the kingdom and that he will enjoy an especially close relationship with the Godhead – an access that is intimate and special. When one contemplates the multiplied millions of beings who surround the Father, such a promise is deeply significant. Because of their close and intimate relationship with the Godhead, overcomers will obtain the hidden manna – they will share a spiritual feast.

In this earthly realm, to be invited to share an intimate meal with the king or queen or president of the nation, would be a special privilege. How much greater a privilege it will be in the Kingdom to be granted an audience with the Father, knowing that He loves you and will enjoy your company. What anticipation! While in the Kingdom we will have literal, visible fellowship with our heavenly Father, we have this privilege already in a spiritual sense through in secret prayer.

Appendix A

The false prophet Balaam is typical of the apostate church in the period of Pergamos (refer to Numbers 25).

Balaam	Apostate church
Balaam was once true to God.	The professedly Christian church was once true to God.
Balaam was overcome by the spirit of covetousness	The church was overcome by the spirit of popularity, covetousness – wealth and power.
Balaam was offered a rich reward by Balak, king of Moab, to ruin Israel.	The church leaders were offered rich rewards by Constantine if they compromised, thereby ruining the church
Balaam finally was enticed by the reward and united with Balak	The church compromised and accepted the support of the civil power thereby uniting church and state
Balaam was warned by a special messenger but to no avail	The church leaders were warned and opposed by a loyal minority (Antipas) but to no avail.
Balaam was counseled to lure Israel by an idolatrous feast and immoral pleasure	Church leaders lured members from Christ by compromise with paganism which is spiritual adultery
Those who led Israel astray were slain with the sword.	Christ will fight against those who lead spiritual Israel astray <i>with the sword of his mouth.</i>
Those who refused to eat things sacrificed to idols etc were saved and continued to eat of the manna from heaven	Those who rejected the spiritual food of the spiritual Balaamites were saved from spiritual death and continued to eat of the hidden manna, the pure word of God

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