

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 21:10:2003

Reading: Revelation 2:12-17

## EXPLORING THE FUTURE

### 5. LIVING AT HELL'S HEADQUARTERS

*" A special edition of Time Magazine, entitled, " Beyond The Year 2000, What To Expect In The Next Millennium," gives us a glimpse into the near future. As TIME'S editors and sociologists projected into the future, the view was not a very pretty one. What will our culture look like ? Where are we headed as a society ? Now although this article was written primarily for the American public there is no doubt that the things that were spoken of us will affect us in the United Kingdom as well. Here is the picture.*

**(1) MULTIPLE MARRIAGES:** *' The family as we know it will soon die,' they predicted. Replacing it will be marriages, or what will soon be ' serial monogamy.'*

**(2) WIDESPREAD DIVORCE:** *' Divorce will be so common as to be considered normal."*

**(3) WOMEN LIVING TOGETHER:** *' Many women will live with other women.'*

**(4) MULTIPLE PARENTS:** *' Children will live with a bewildering array of relatives .... mothers, fathers, multiple stepmothers, multiple stepfathers etc.'*

**(5) INCEST:** *' The taboo against incest will weaken. The fractured family will consist of relatives, non-relatives and former relatives, breaking down the obsolete prohibition against intimacies at home.'*

**(6) CHILDLESSNESS:** *' The trend toward childlessness will accelerate. There will be more older people and fewer children than ever before.'*

**(7) CHILD ABUSE:** *' Children will be routinely victimized and will be bounced from home to home as families splinter and reform and splinter and reform.'*

**(8) SEXUAL EXPLOSION:** *' Paediatricians will teach children about the use of family planning at the time of their vaccinations against disease.'*

**(9) ATHEISM:** *' Theology, the study of God and the Bible will soon die.'*

**(10) FEMINISM:** *' The triumph of feminist religion will cause many to shun references to God in personal masculine terms. No more Heavenly Father.'*

## **(11) ABORTION:**

*Now this is what these socialists see in the future. Not a pretty picture. Begin with multiple marriages, divorce and lesbianism. Throw in incest, childlessness, and child abuse. Add sexual promiscuity, and abortion. Stir well with atheism.*

*That's the world in which we will find ourselves. So*

*says Time Magazine."* And those editors may be right which is cause for concern. Undoubtedly, we have entered an era in which the culture is becoming increasingly hostile to biblical values and morality. We are now living at Hell's headquarters. We have set up church at the gates of hell. How should we then live ? What should be the church's strategy ? What counsel does Christ have to offer ? Now, more than ever, we must hear what Christ said to a little church in Pergamum.

It was a church that lived at hell's headquarters. They occupied the same neighbourhood as the devil. They served under the dark shadow of Satan's throne. Pergamum as the Greeks called it wasn't an easy place to live, yet that's where God planted this church. Pergamos was situated about 55 miles north of Smyrna. Unlike Ephesus and Smyrna Pergamum was not a port city but was located about fifteen miles inland from the Aegean Sea. Nor was it on any of the major trade routes. Yet as its ancient capital, Pergamum was considered Asia's greatest city. It survives today as the Turkish city of Bergama. It was **Renowned for its Library:** it had one of the most famous libraries in the world. The library grew to 200,000 volumes before it was shipped to Egypt by Cleopatra. It was **Respected for its Authority:** it was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia Minor. Here the Roman Governor had his seat of residence and he was the one man who had what the Romans called " *the power of the sword of life and death.*" It was **Remembered for its Idolatry:** A 1,000 foot high hill overlooked the city and was covered with pagan temples, shrines and altars. Zeus, Athena, Dionysious and Asclepias each had temples built there. A huge altar to Zeus, the greatest of all Greek deities, had been built there in the form of a throne.

Moreover, Emperor worship had its strongest grip here. So deeply entrenched in idolatry was Pergamos that they had their own god named Asclepias the god of healing. Worshippers would come into the temple of Asclepias to be healed. Snakes roamed wild throughout the temple. Worshippers were encouraged to lie down on the floor and allow these snakes to crawl over their body. Healing power was believed to be in the touch of these vipers. In fact do you know what the symbol of the medical profession is ? A twisted serpent, which represents this god of healing, Asclepias. Now here is where this church found itself. Living at hell's headquarters. Serving next to Satan's throne. Here is divine instruction which is most timely for our generation given the drift of our culture toward greater godlessness.

## **(1) THE FAITHFUL SAINTS**

The Risen Lord begins with a word of encouragement. "*I know.*" ( 2:13 ) Christ is saying, "*I know exactly where you're living. I know what you're going through. I've been there.*"

*And I highly respect and value your faith in Me.*" The Risen Lord **knew** what living at hell's headquarters meant. From the time of His birth, Satan began nipping at His heels. After forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, the Lord Jesus fought Satan head to head. All the artillery of hell was levelled at Christ. All the way to the cross, the Devil opposed and stirred up persecution against Christ. Now the Risen Lord says to the church at Pergamos, "*I know.*"

### **(a) CHRIST KNEW ALL ABOUT THEIR LOCATION:**

He says, "*I know .... even where Satan's seat is.*"

( 2:13 ) That word "seat," is throne. Satan had his throne in Pergamos. The Devil is not Omnipresent. As a created being he can be in only one place at a time. He is "*the prince of the power of the air,*"

( Eph 2:2 ) and as such no doubt he has a throne somewhere in the heaven lies. He is also "*the prince of this world,*" ( Jn 12:31 ) and as such he has a throne somewhere on earth. In John's day it was at Pergamos ! "*Satan's throne,*" means the place where his evil authority is most exercised. Now why was Pergamos "*Satan's throne ?*"

(1) A large altar to Zeus, the greatest of all the Greek deities had been built there in the form of a throne. Many Bible scholars feel that "*Satan's throne,*" refers to this. Certainly at that time, this was the most famous pagan altar in the world.

(2) Pergamos was the centre of worship of *Asclepias*, the snake god. Asklepios was depicted as a snake, and non-poisonous snakes roamed freely in his temple. Worshippers seeking healing either slept or lay down on the temple's floors, hoping to be touched by one the snakes, symbolically representing the god himself and thereby be healed. Of course, all such superstitious idolatry was demonic.

(3) Pergamos was the *regional centre of Emperor Worship*. In other cities the citizens gave public testimony to Caesar's deity once a year. But here, a pinch of incense burned in worship of the Emperor was an every day occurrence. Would you liked to have lived for the Lord at Pergamos ? The place where Satan exerted his greatest power and influence ? Now do you see that word "*dwellest,*" it is interesting. When the New Testament speaks of a Christian "*dwelling,*" anywhere in this world it uses a Greek word ( *paroikein* ) which describes a temporary residence in contrast with a Permanent Residence. This word is used of a "*stranger and pilgrim.*" But that's not the word that is used here. ( *katoikein* ) The word that is used here speaks of "*residence in a permanent and settled place.*" What Christ is saying to these believers is "*You're living in at hell's headquarters and you have to go on living there, you*

*cannot pack your bags and move off to some other place where its easier to be a Christian. In Pergamos you are, in Pergamos you must stay.*

My .... where do you live ? Work ? Serve ? Are you living in an unsympathetic home ? Are you working in a hostile environment ? What about the place where you serve the Lord ? Do you feel its dominated by the “ *powers of darkness* ?” Are you studying in some place where Christ is humanised and man is deified ? Do we live in place where the power of Satan is rampant ? It would be easier to move, but the Lord of the Lampstands says, “ *I know.*” (a)

### **(b) CHRIST KNEW ALL ABOUT THEIR LOYALTY:**

They were living at hell's headquarters and that meant they had to be faithful and they were. They had been tempted to give in but they had stood firm. They were loyal to the *Person of Christ*: “ *thou holdest fast my name.*” ( 2:13 ) His name stands for Himself. It is the revelation of Who Christ is and what Christ has done. It represents the Fullness of his Divine Human Person and Saving work. In a city where there was there much to prise them loose they had firmly held to the conviction that Christ is both LORD and SAVIOUR and they never let go. They were loyal to *the Precepts of Christ*: “ *And hast not my faith.*” ( 2:13 ) They would not deny *His Virgin Birth*, *His Virtuous Life*, *His Vicarious Death*, *His Victorious Resurrection*, *His Visible Return*. In the midst of a city which proclaimed False gods, they declared the true God. The cry of the citizens of Pergamos was “ *Asclepias is the Saviour*, but the cry of the saints was “ *Jesus Christ is Saviour.*”

My .... do these early believers not challenge us ? Here they were living in a hostile city yet they were bold in their witness for Christ ! We live in favourable surroundings yet often we're tongue-tied when it comes to speak for Christ. In that place where you the name of Christ is met with contempt are you ashamed to confess Him ?

### **(c) CHRIST KNEW ALL ABOUT THEIR LOSS:**

“ *Even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr.*” ( 2:13 ) The name Antipas means “ *against all*,” and that's precisely what he did. In his defence of the faith, he stood against all. This one man maybe the pastor of the church refused to yield to the “ *political correctness*,” of the day. Christ said, Antipas is “ *my faithful martyr.*” It cost him dearly. He “ *was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.*” ( 2:13 ) Legend tells us that he was killed by being roasted to death in a brazen bull. What issues are worth giving your life for ? In what do you believe so strongly that you would be willing to lay down your life ? A wise Christian knows which battles are worth fighting. A faithful Christian will do so. (c) Do

you know something ? The Lord knows all about your loss ! Could it be in recent days that you have experienced loss ? My .... He knows, cares, understands ! Now if you look at ( 2:14 ) you'll notice the tone changes !

## (2) THE FLAGRANT SIN

Despite their steadfastness, sin had slipped in undetected. Their real danger was not with *Persecution from without but it was from Perversion from within*. If Satan can't defeat a church he'll join it. Error had crept in and the Risen Lord was concerned for the **truth**. The Risen Lord *Loves the truth, Speaks the truth and He is the truth*. ( Jn 8:31 14:6 18: 37 ) It seems at Pergamos most were continuing to walk in the truth but some had wandered into the by-path of error and the Chief Shepherd was grieved both by the *Waywardness of the Minority and the Indifference of the Majority*. While many in the Christian realm today, make light of doctrine, and biblical and theological error are viewed as unimportant, that is the not the perspective of the Lord of the church. My .... our Lord holds it against any in His church who hold to error. Now what was this sin about ?

### (a) **DOCTRINAL IN ITS ESSENCE:**

Some were holding the " *doctrine of Balaam*."

( 2:14 ) The New Testament refers to Balaam on three occasions. It speaks of

(1) THE WAY OF BALAAM: ( 2 Pet 2:15 ) His way was covetousness Balaam's services could be readily bought.

(2) THE ERROR OF BALAAM: ( Jude 11 ) He wrongly supposed that a Holy God would be forced to curse sinful Israel.

(3) THE DOCTRINE OF BALAAM: ( 2:14 ) He rightly concluded that if you cannot curse them then corrupt them through Idolatry and Immorality. Who was Balaam ? What did he teach ? During the time of Israel's wilderness wanderings, Gods chosen people defeated the Ammonites, and Moab looked to be the next to fall. When Balak, the King of Moab received a report that the Israelites were advancing his way, he knew there was no way his army could defeat Israel. In desperation Balak called on Balaam for help. The King said, " *I've got a job for you. I want you to curse these people. And I'll make it worth your while.*" So Balaam sold his gift for profit.

Three times he tried to curse the people of God. But each time only blessings .... not cursing's came out. ( Num 22-24 ) So he devised an ingenious plan. If he could not *Curse* them, his only hope was to get **God** to do so. So he hatched a plot. The plot was *Women*. ( Num 25:1-3 31:16 ) The word " *stumbling block* "



( *skandalon* ) ( 2:14 ) is interesting. It means a trap set with a bait. Balaam instructed Balek to place sensuous women before the marching Israelite army. He did and they wilted. Before they knew they lay down with dogs and got up with the devils fleas. Soon they went to church with these heathen women and worshipped their idols. The result ? God slew 24,000 Israelite men. You see, the teaching of Balaam is to Compromise with the World. Its the mixing of holy things with unholy things. Its having one foot in the church and one foot in the world. This small group in Pergamos was threatening to destroy the whole church. In addition, the Risen Lord addresses another dangerous sin. " *The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.*" ( 2:15 ) Scholars are divided as to what this was. Some think it was an immoral teaching. Others feel it was the beginning of the distinction between clergy and laity. The teaching of Balaam encouraged believers to engage in ***Idolatry and Immorality.***

What is idolatry ? Its anything or anyone in your life that is more important to you than God. It is loving anything more than God. Fearing anything more than God. Serving anything more than God. Desiring anything more than God. Do you recall what John says, " *Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*" ( 1 Jn 5:2 ) Immorality is ( *porneia* ) That's all-encompassing word that includes all forms of sexual perversions. Adultery. Premarital sex. Homosexuality. Lesbianism. Pornography. Common-law living together. The whole stinking mess. My .... churches are now sanctioning the ordination of homosexuals into the ministry. They are condoning people living together. This is the ***IMMORAL*** teaching of Balaam. And the church must not and cannot condone these perversions rather we must wield the shapr, two-edged sword and remove them from the church. You see, Gods Word has not changed one bit. " *Thou shalt NOT commit adultery.*" ( Exod 20:14 ) " *Flee fornication.*" ( 1 Cor 6:18 ) " *For this is the will of God even your sanctification.*" ( 1 Thes 4:3 ) " *But fornication and all uncleanness let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints.*" ( Eph 5:3 ) The Risen Lord says, " *There's a small group in your church that's teaching compromise with the world, deal with it.*" What about us ? Are we leading double lives or we keeping ourselves pure ?

### **(b) SATANICAL IN ITS SOURCE:**

The source of this error was Satan. Satan's throne was at Pergamos. The implication is clear. Satan was the *Source* of the errors to which some of these people had succumbed. The Devil hadn't been able to *Destroy* them by coming as the Roaring Lion ( Antipas was proof of that ) so he *Deceived* them through false teaching. Someone has said,, " *there are two means by which the influence of the church may be defeated and her distinctions obliterated. The one is Persecution, the other is Amalgamation. The World may destroy the church by slaying its members or by making them worldlings.*"

### **(c) PROPHETICAL IN ITS OUTLOOK:**

We can look at the churches *Prophetically* ( 1:3 ) and Pergamos suggests to us that period between 315-590 AD. Pergamos means "*Marriage*," And then the church and state were wedded together. One of the key individuals during this period was Constantine. He was made Emperor in 306 AD by his dying father and the Roman troops. In 313 AD he signed the edict of *Toleration* which granted freedom to Christians. It then became fashionable to join the church. He promised gold pieces and white robes to all converts. Soon pagans had joined the church by thousands bringing with them their heathen practices. The church then became so *Worldly* and the world so *Churchy* that no difference could be seen. It was during this time that many unscriptural doctrines were introduced.

- (1) SAYING PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD: ( 300 )**
- (2) MAKING THE SIGN OF THE CROSS: ( 300 )**
- (3) THE WORSHIP OF SAINTS AND ANGELS:  
( 375 )**
- (4) THE INSTITUTION OF THE MASS: ( 394 )**
- (5) THE WORSHIP OF MARY: ( 431 )**
- (6) THE DOCTRINE OF PURGATORY: ( 593 )**

During this period in the church's history the world infiltrated the church and the church became wedded to the world. What about us today ? Has the teaching of Balaam not affected us ? Hoaratus Bonar said, "*I looked for the church I found it in the world, I looked for the world I found it in the church.*"

### **(3) THE FINAL SUMMONS**

#### **(a) TO EXERCISE DISCIPLINE:**

The entire church is called upon here to "*repent*," either of holding to this heresy or of allowing it to be spread. The Risen Lord does not say, "*Its okay. I've got unlimited grace and unending forgiveness, so it doesn't matter how you live.*" Christ says, "*Repent or else.*" ( 2:16 ) His Coming here is not the *Rapture*. He's talking about a *Rupture*. This is a threat. A warning to heed. This does not refer to His Second Coming, but to a special coming in judgment to this particular church. Such a judgment fell on Balaam ( Num 22:23 31 25:5 31:8 ) And such a severe discipline will come against the Balaamites in this church. The church must deal with sin, or Christ will come and deal with the church. We are to be *Guardians of the Truth*. We are to maintain the *Purity of the Church* and how are we to do that ? "*With the sword of His mouth.*" The Word of God. Like some in Pergamos are you struggling with sin and worldliness ? Are you slipping down its slope right now ? In what areas are you compromising ? Doctrine ! Marriage ! Business ! Repent !

### **(b) TO EXPERIENCE BLESSING:**

*" To him that overcometh 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 knoweth saving he that receiveth it." ( 2:17 )* That is to all who withstand false doctrine and walk uncompromisingly in Gods sight, the Risen Lord promises three things. Hidden manna, a white stone, and a new name.

**HIDDEN MANNA:** Now Christ is the true manna, the living bread that comes down from above

( Jn 6:35) This speaks of our fellowship with Him. Here believers are promised sweet communion with Christ forever.

**A WHITE STONE:** White stones were often given in the first century as a symbol of appreciation and acceptance, or specifically as a means of admission to a special event. Christ promises all true believers that in overcoming, they will be rewarded with eternal acceptance and admission into His presence.

**A NEW NAME:** A new name indicates a new identity. A new standing. It reflects a believers new status in Christ. These three all fit together. One day each of us will be accepted ( the white stone ) into the presence of Christ to enjoy sweet fellowship ( the hidden manna ) according to our new status in Christ. ( the new name ) The

### **(c) TO EXPOUND TRUTH:**

This is the theme of this letter. The Risen Lord is deeply concerned that the truth be *Preserved and Proclaimed*. He reveals Himself to this church as

*" He which hath the sharp sword with two edges."*

( 2:12 ) In Roman culture a sword was the symbol of power and authority. In that day Rome had the power of the sword. Whatever Caesar determined became the law of the land. And he backed it up with the sword. Here the Lord Jesus is pictured as the unrivalled Lord of His church with power over life and death. His word is final. His law is binding. His rule is absolute.

This church was tolerating false teachers and they needed to be reminded that there is an unchanging standard .... the two-edged sword .... the Word of God by which God measures all truth. They must defend and declare sound doctrine. What an age we are living in. In this era we are told, " Let us drown our doctrinal differences in the ocean of brotherly love. It does not matter what you believe, lets hold hands, and build bridges."

Well, to such who say that it does not matter what you believe as long as you live well and love all, would you read, mark, learn and inwardly digest this letter. You see, the



Lord of the Lamp-stand's does not share the lack of doctrinal concern which is exhibited by such people. My .... we have seen that the first mark of a true and living church is Love. ( Ephesus ) The second mark is Suffering ( Smyrna ) and the third is Truth ! Love becomes sentimental if it is not strengthened by truth and truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love. My .... we need to preserve the balance of the Bible which tells us to hold the truth in love. ( Eph 4:15 )

Living at Hell's Headquarters ! Is that where you feel you live ? Do you feel surrounded by the forces of evil ? Are you therefore defending and declaring the truth ? In 1917 the Russian Orthodox met in Petrograd. The agenda ? The church's leadership deliberated in deep debate and heated argument .... are you ready for this ? The colour of their liturgical garb. All the while, just a few streets away the godless Communist revolution was breaking out and spilling Russian blood in the streets. While the Russian Orthodox Church met, hell's headquarters .... just streets away, commenced the takeover of a nation. Does this not picture the church in our land this .... ? While Satan and his legions are pushing forward across our land, we are often deliberating behind closed doors, where we trivialise the essentials and debate the trifling.

But if we are going to be faithful to Christ, we must penetrate this world with God's Truth. Indeed no matter we live, hell's headquarters may be just a short distance away. The forces of hell are closer than ever before. But the opportunity for the church today has never been greater either. Will you grasp that opportunity, even though you live at hell's headquarters ?