

11. PERGAMOS THE EPOCH OF STATE RELIGION

AND TO the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things said He which bath the sharp sword with two edges. I know thy works, and where thou dwells, even where Satan's seat is. And thou boldest fast My name, and has not denied My faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against thee, because thou has there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

“So has thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches. To him that overcomes 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 knows saving he that receives it.” Revelation 2.12-17.

Pergamos, or Pergamum, was located about forty miles northeast of Smyrna in the Caicus valley and on the imperial highway running along the coast of Asia. Pergamos was fifteen miles from the Aegean Sea on the banks of the little river Caicus, a branch of which, the Selinus, flows through the present city of Bergma, or Bergama, which has a population of more than 13,000. The city of Pergamos was built and named by the Aeolian Greeks soon after the fall of Troy in the twelfth century before Christ, making it one of the oldest cities of Asia and of the world. Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos were rivals for first place among the cities of the province and also of Asia Minor.

The city was named for the lofty hill on which the ancient city was built. The name therefore means tower, height, or elevation, and carries with it the idea of exaltation. It was the exalted city. The name also indicates a union as through marriage. The lofty hill on which the ancient city was built and from which it took its name was an immense rock rising one thousand feet abruptly out of the broad and fertile valley. The walls of the elevation * were almost perpendicular, except on one side, where there was a steep and narrow passageway to the top, which was easily fortified and guarded. Because of its natural defenses the city of Pergamos was considered an impregnable stronghold. The only way it was ever captured was by stratagem. In Pergamos, Lysimachus deposited his treasure, valued at \$10,000,000, because he considered it the safest place in his kingdom.

A Famous City

Pliny called Pergamos the most illustrious city of Asia. It was the educational center of Western Asia. There Homer, one of the earliest poets, and Herodotus, “the father of history,” studied and wrote, because of the great library, which it according to Plutarch contained 200,000 volumes. It was second only to the world-famous library of Alexandria. These libraries caused a long and bitter rivalry between the two cities. Egypt, in order to curb the growth of the Pergamum library, withheld shipments of papyrus, the ancestor of paper. To meet the emergency the Pergamenians dressed the skins of animals, on which to do their writing, calling the new writing material Pergamus, and later, parchment. The rivalry between the two cities ended when Mark Antony removed the Pergamum library to Alexandria as a gift to the Egyptian queen, Cleopatra, with whom he was infatuated.

“A royal city,” exclaimed Sir William Ramsay as he viewed the ruins of the ancient city of Pergamos. He said: “Beyond all other sites in Asia Minor it gives the traveler the impression of a royal city, the home of authority: the rocky hill on which it stands is so huge, and dominates the broad plain of the Caicus so proudly and boldly.” (Page 281.) It was indeed “a royal city” and a royal residence. The history of Pergamos can be traced back into the fifth century before Christ. Its superiority and leadership in Asia began in 282 BC. It was the capital of the kingdom of Pergamum under the Attalid kings. Attalus III bequeathed his capital and kingdom to the Romans in the year 133 BC, and they formed it into the Province of Asia.

For 250 years Pergamos was the official capital of the province. It was also the seat of the Commune of Asia. From Pergamos the decrees of the Caesars were executed throughout the province. This gives force and meaning to Christ’s introduction to the church of Pergamos: “These are the words of Him who wields the sharp sword with the double edge.” (Moffatt.) The broad double-bladed Roman sword was known as “the cut and thrust sword.” It was the emblem of the highest official authority, carrying with it the power of life and death, and this power was vested in the proconsuls of the province, who lived at Pergamos. The governor wielded the sword of Rome from this impregnable fortress.

According to Pliny, Pergamos was also the seat of a Roman supreme court. To this city prisoners were brought for trial from all parts of the province, and were sentenced by the power that ministered life and death to all. Therefore the sword that proceeded out of the mouth of Christ is a symbol of His judicial authority. He too wields the power of life and death to all who hear His message. His Word “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 discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12. The One who has all power and authority speaks to the church located in the city where official authority and power dwells.

Throne of Satan

Jesus said to His people in Pergamos, “I know where you dwell. Satan’s throne is there” (Weymouth), or “Where Satan sits enthroned” (Moffatt). “Throne” is a better rendering than “seat,” for the same original is translated “throne” in Revelation 1:4 and 3:21. The capital of the province was also the headquarters of the pagan religion of the province, for in all ancient nations church and state were united. The ruler of the state was also the head of the religion of the state. Satan is called both “the prince of this world” and “the god of this world,” and he attempts to pattern all earthly kingdoms after his own. He has ruled the world through human governments, which he has controlled by means of his false and counterfeit system of religion.

When Rome ruled the world, the capital of the empire was also the throne of Satan. In Revelation 13:2 we are told that “the dragon,” or Satan, gave the beast “his power, and his seat, and great authority.” He offered this throne and world ruler ship to Christ in exchange for His worship and obedience, but the offer was spurned by the Son of God. The same offer was later accepted by the one who falsely claims to be the vicar of Christ on earth. Caesar, who ruled the world as the human agent of Satan, was also the “Pontifex Maximus,” or supreme pontiff, of the pagan Roman religion. He was “the protector of the Roman gods.” What was true of the empire was also true of each province, the capital being the headquarters of the provincial religion. Politics and religion seem to mix successfully only when the religion is false and pagan.

Pergamos was a city of heathen temples and a pantheon of pagan deities. Jupiter was said to have had his origin there, and to him and other Greek and Roman gods were erected many

beautiful and costly temples, giving it the name of “the city of temples.” It was the metropolis of heathen deities. Temples were built and dedicated to Jupiter, Zeus, Athena, Dionysius, and Aesculapius, the Greek god of medicine, and also called “the god of Pergamum.” It was also the center of emperor worship. In AD 29 a great temple was erected to the worship of Augustus Caesar, who was to be prayed to as “Lord Caesar.” Domitian decreed that all peoples should address him as “Our Lord and our God.” Pergamos contained a sacred grove called “the glory of the city.” The city was known as the “temple-keeper” and “temple-warden” of the gods of paganism. It was the seat of the imperial church and the symbol of “rampant paganism.” (Swete, Page 35.)

The Temple of Zeus was the most celebrated of all the temples of Pergamos, and was dedicated to Aesculapius, “the serpent god” or “god of healing.” It was also known as the Temple of Aesculapius, who was called “the Great Physician” and “the Savior.” He was also given other titles showing that he was a counterfeit of Christ. In this temple a living serpent was kept and worshiped. Serpent worship was so universal in Pergamos that many coins have been found with a picture of a serpent entwined around a pole. It is unfortunate that this pagan emblem of healing has become the caduceus of the modern medical profession. In the Temple of Zeus many miracles of healing were supposed to have been performed. In connection with this temple was also a famous school of medicine.

Satan is known in the Scriptures as “that old serpent,” doubtless because the serpent was his agent in bringing about the fall of man. The symbol of poison and sin and death became the god and emblem of healing and life in Satan’s false religion, and thus it remains to this day. The Temple of Zeus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the ruins of which are still visible. They have been excavated by archaeologists. The temple was built on a stone foundation 16 by 114 by 124 feet. Its altar was made of black marble 40 feet high, and was covered with beautiful carvings. A replica of this altar has been placed in the Museum of Berlin. Bacchus, the god of wine, and Venus, the goddess of lust, were also worshiped in Pergamos. There paganism reigned supreme, with all its impure and licentious rites. Satan’s throne was there.

When Cyrus captured the city of Babylon, the ancient seat of Satan’s counterfeit system of religion, the supreme pontiff of the Chaldean mysteries and his retinue of priests fled from the city and ultimately made their residence in Pergamos. Here they re-established their Babylonian worship and made the kings of Pergamum the chief pontiffs of their religion. When Attalus III, the last of their priest-kings, died in 133 BC, he bequeathed both his royal and priestly offices to the Romans. A century later Caesar became both emperor of Rome and Pontifex Maximus of the religion of the empire. He was given divine honors, which he handed down to his successors. These were later assumed by the popes, the supreme pontiffs of ecclesiastical Rome. Thus Pergamos became the connecting link between the two Babylons, the ancient and the modern. The papal system is patterned after that of Babylon and Rome. This is another reason for the statement of Jesus that Pergamos was the place “where Satan dwells.”

Jesus recognized the evil environments under which the members of the local church of Pergamos lived. There was a maxim among the Jews that where the law of God is not obeyed, there Satan dwells. The Christians of Pergamos lived at the very headquarters of Satan, “the man of sin” and lawlessness whose religion is “the mystery of iniquity.” The fact that they were in such close proximity to Satan was no excuse for failure or defeat, for “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” The place of our birth and the circumstances under which we live are taken into consideration in the judgment. (Psalm 87:4-6.) There is no use attempting to escape

entirely from the environment of evil in this rebel world. God often places His people under very unfavorable conditions that they might be shining lights among those who sit in darkness. The local church of Pergamos could not escape the situation without an ignominious retreat, and Satan refused to surrender his stronghold.

The Pergamos Period

Not only does Pergamos carry the meaning of power and exaltation, but it also indicates union through marriage. The Greek word gamos means marriage. During the Pergamos period the church was exalted to royal power and kingly authority through a union, or marriage, with the state. Satan had failed to crush the church and destroy Christianity through persecution, and he therefore changed his policy. Christianity had won in its great struggle with paganism, and Satan, as it were, joined the church in order to ruin it from within through amalgamation with the world and union with the state. When Satan failed to accomplish his purpose through violence, he corrupted the church through worldly alliance. Rome boasted of her ability to assimilate anything that contributed to her strength. In the person of Constantine, the church mounted the throne of the Caesars and reigned as queen. The church that was “espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ” was united in marriage to pagan Rome. The Pergamos period covered about 250 years, from the so-called conversion of Constantine to Justinian the Great, whose decrees made the popes the successors of the Caesars.

During the Pergamos period the transition between pagan and papal Rome took place, and the church became “that great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.” (Revelation 17:18.) Seiss speaks of “the Pergamile period, in which true faith more and more disappeared from view, and clericalism gradually formed itself into a system, and the Church united with the world, and Babylon began to rear itself aloft.” (Page 143.) Constantine was the human agent used by Satan to bring about the union of church and state.

The historian Gibbon declared that “the gratitude of the Church has exalted the virtues and excused the failings of a generous patron, who seated Christianity on the throne of the Roman world; and the Greeks, who celebrate the festival of the imperial saint, seldom mention the name of Constantine without adding the title of equal to the apostles.” (Volume 2, Chapter 20.) As an outward evidence that the name and worship of Christ stood triumphant above prostrate paganism, Constantine placed on his coins the labarum, with the monogram of Jesus above the conquered dragon.

During this period Paul’s warnings applied and his prophecies were fulfilled. (Acts 20:29, 30:2 Thessalonians 2:2-7.) Pagan beliefs and practices were brought into the church, and Christianity was so changed by heathen influences that it virtually became “baptized paganism.” During this time Isaiah 2:2,3 was fulfilled, and the church was established in “the top of the mountains” or government of Rome, and “above the hills, or smaller states, where she dictated the laws of the land and became so popular that “all nations” flowed into it. The Bishop of Rome assumed the title of pope and became the supreme pontiff, or Pontifex Maximus, of the new semi pagan religion, “controlling kings, dictating laws to ancient monarchies, and binding the souls of millions with a more perfect despotism than Oriental emperors ever sought or dreamed.” - JOHN LORD, Beacon Lights of History, Volume 5, Page 96. Isaiah’s prophecy will again be fulfilled just before the end, when the message to the church of Pergamos will again be applicable and meaningful.

Commendation

During this period of compromise and apostasy Christ had loyal followers who held fast to His name without denying the faith, even though they lived “where Satan dwells.” Jesus commended these faithful disciples. Antipas, one of the saints who suffered martyrdom in the city of Pergamos, is set forth as a symbol, or representative, of all the faithful of that period. This is the only mention of Antipas in the New Testament, but no other reference is necessary to make him a real character. He was doubtless a prominent leader in the local church, and probably the bishop or pastor. According to tradition he was bishop of Pergamos, and was martyred during the persecutions of Domitian by being shut up in a brazen bull which was heated till it was red hot. He ended his life with praises and thanksgiving to God.

Some believe that Antipas means “against all,” and indicates that he stood out against all that was taking place in connection with the licentious rites and ceremonies in Pergamos, and for this reason he was martyred. Like Luther at the Diet of Worms, Antipas stood against all compromise with the world and sealed his faith with his blood. This was the fate of millions who stood out against the paganizing of Christianity during the period of amalgamation with the world and marriage with the state. There is no authority for the assumption that Antipas means antipapal.

The Reproof

Jesus asserted that He had some things against the Pergamos believers, chiefly because they were accepting the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. The language indicates that worldliness and apostasy were rapidly gaining ground. In the Ephesian period Christians refused to tolerate evildoers, and they hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans; now they not only tolerate them in their midst but listen to their teachings. “Some that cling to the teaching of Balaam.” (Weymouth.) Balac was the king of Moab, and Balaam was the prophet of God who turned traitor to secure worldly gain and kingly favors. He is definitely symbolic of the compromises of the Pergamos period, when believers turned traitor to the cause of genuine Christianity to gain the favor of Roman officials. Josephus and Philo declare that Balaam showed Balac how to set a trap for the children of Israel so as to entice them into the twofold sin of idolatry and fornication, which always go hand in hand. (Acts 15:20.)

Idolatry in any form is disloyalty to God. “Balaam is here represented as the prototype of all corrupt teachers.” (Charles, Page 63.) (Numbers 25:1, 2; 31:15, 16.) Just as Balaam bartered his religion for wealth and honor, so the priests of the paganized Christian church bartered religious rites, ordinances, relics, and indulgences for worldly gain, and making the church of God “an house of merchandise.”

Nikalaos means “those who conquer the people,” or the laity. The forces were working that finally conquered the church and turned it into a semi pagan system in which the officials exalted themselves to kingly power and royal authority over the laity. It is said that Balaam in the Hebrew language has practically the same meaning as Nicalos, or Nikalaos, in the Greek. Thus the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans are mentioned together here because of their similarity. There were not necessarily two different groups in the church who were apostatizing.

As Israel of old was deceived, entrapped, and corrupted by the doctrines and practices of Balaam, so also were the Christians of the Pergamos period being contaminated by the teachings and practices of the Nicolaitans, the antitype of Balaam. These more modern Balaamites had

refused to obey the decision of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:20, 29) condemning idolatry and fornication, but rather encouraged a return to the lax moral standards of the pagans. Irenaeus declared that “they make no scruple about eating meats offered in sacrifice to idols, imagining that they can in this way contract no defilement. Then, again, at every heathen festival celebrated in honor of the idols, these men are the first to assemble.” The writer then adds that “others of them yield themselves up to the lusts of the flesh with the utmost greediness.” (Against Heresies, Book 1, Chapter 6, Section 3.)

The Warning

“Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth,” was the warning, or threat, of the Author of the epistle to the church of Pergamos. The entire church was called upon to repent, indicating that all had been affected by the developing apostasy. The threat, however, was against those who had accepted and were teaching the false doctrines. “I will contend with such men with words that will cut like a sword,” is the Twentieth Century New Testament translation. There must be no delay in the work of repentance and reformation. They must 49repent at once.” (Weymouth.) Jesus virtually said: “If you do not repent and reform at once, I will fight these apostates and compromisers with the sword of My mouth.”

It was with a drawn sword that the Lord withstood Balaam to thwart his evil purpose against Israel of old. So Christ here represents Himself as standing before the church of Pergamos with a drawn sword threatening all who refuse to take heed to His cutting message with the fate of the ancient false prophet who was slain by the sword of Israel, which was in reality the sword of the Lord. While the minister and the church in general are responsible for prevailing conditions, Christ does not say, “I will fight against thee,” but “against them,” that is, the guilty ones in the church. “Or else” implies that if the minister and officials failed to perform their duty, the supreme Head of the church would visit the apostates with judgments. It was the duty of the pastor to do such faithful reproofing that “he would either recover them for the truth, or else drive them wholly from the communion of the church.” (Trench, Page 131.)

The Promised Reward

As an incentive to repent, Christ offers access to the hidden manna and also a white stone containing the overcomer’s divinely given new name describing his new character. A pot of manna was placed in the ark of the covenant in the most holy apartment of the earthly sanctuary as a pledge that all who obey the law will be fed. (Hebrews 9:3, 4.) This became known as the “hidden manna,” because it was hidden from all except the high priest. Christ declared Himself to be the real manna or “bread of life.” (John 6:26-63.) He said that only those who eat of the living Bread that came down from heaven can have eternal life.

In the same wilderness where Balaam, tempted ancient Israel, the Lord fed His people with “angels’ food,” or the “corn of heaven.” This bread of heaven was secretly provided during the night. The promise is that all who resist the temptations of the evil one will enter “the secret place of the most High” and experience a close and lasting fellowship with the “Bread of Life.” Just as the manna was hidden in the unapproachable holy of holies of the earthly sanctuary, and Christ is hidden from our view in the heavenly sanctuary, so the heavenly manna, the Word of God, when hidden in the secret chambers of the heart, gives spiritual nourishment and protects from evil. “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee,” said the psalmist. The Jews believe that the ark of God and all its contents, including the pot of manna,

were hidden in a secret cave when the temple was destroyed, and will be discovered and revealed when the Messiah comes.

Reference to the “white stone” is doubtless borrowed from one or more of several well-known customs in which white stones or pebbles were used. Sir William Ramsay wrote: “The truth is that the white pebble with the New Name was not an exact reproduction of any custom or thing in the social usage of the time. It was a new conception, devised for this new purpose; but it was only a working up into a new form of familiar things and customs, and it was therefore completely intelligible to every reader in the Asian Churches. It had analogies with many things, though it was not an exact reproduction of any of them.” (Page 304.)

Trench declares that “ ‘White’ is everywhere the color and livery of heaven.” (Page 135.) All who lived in Pergamos, the capital of the judicial system of the province, were acquainted with the custom of judges in using white and black stones, or pebbles, in making their decisions, the white standing for acquittal and the black for condemnation. Dryden the poet speaks of this custom in the following lines:

“A custom was of old, and still remains, which life or death by suffrages ordained.

White stones and black within an urn are cast, the first absolves, but fate is in the last.”

The Masonic and other lodges still use white and black balls in balloting for candidates for office. The divine promise is that Christian victors will be given the decision of acquittal by the supreme court of heaven.

White stones also were given to gladiators who were victorious in athletic contests in Greece and Rome. The name of the victor was inscribed in the white stone, and this entitled him to special privileges, including maintenance at public expense the remainder of his life. This stone was called “the pebble of victory.” Such stones were also used as tickets and badges of friendship, and were called “tessera.” White is the color of innocence, purity, joy, and victory. The white stone given to the overcomer not only is symbolic of victory but also indicates a pledge of an eternal friendship with Christ.

It was also the ancient custom to give to the person who was initiated into the mysteries a white stone with the secret name of his god, which he learned for the first time, engraved on the stone. The name must be kept secret under pain of death. Trench suggests that the illustration is borrowed from the Urim and Thummim worn by the high priest. He believes this was a white diamond. None but the high priest knew the name that appeared in this stone. The promise indicates that the victor over sin will be given a passport to heaven because he has been absolved from all guilt; that he will be given a new name to describe his new character; and that he will be given angels’ food, and have right to the tree of life. Taking into consideration all the implications of the hidden manna and the white stone, this is one of the most precious promises contained in Holy Writ, and should be a great incentive to repent and accept all the counsel of the mighty Counselor. This “exceeding great and precious” promise is just as verily for us as for the members of the church of Pergamos.

12. THYATIRA THE CHURCH OF THE MIDDLE AGES

AND UNTO the angel of the church in Thyatira write; .A These things said the Son of God, who has His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass. I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works. And the last to be

more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou suffers that woman Jezebel, which calls herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce My servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

“Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am He which searches the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which you have already held fast till I come.

“And he that overcomes, and keeps My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of My Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches.” Revelation 2:18-29.

City of Thyatira

Thyatira was located about twenty-five miles southeast of Pergamos, and according to Strabo was a little to the left of the main road. The city was founded by Seleueus Nicator, one of the generals of Alexander. It was a garrison city built on the plains, with no natural fortifications, and was captured, destroyed, and rebuilt many times. On coins found in its ruins the city is represented by a horseman bearing a double-bladed battle-ax indicating that it was a cavalry post. The name is said to signify “sweet savor of labor,” or “sacrifice of contrition.” Sir William Ramsay says that the name indicates “weakness made strong” (page 316), and other writers give the meaning as “never weary of sacrifice.” The present population is about 12,000.

Thyatira at the time of this epistle was an important manufacturing city, its citizens being mostly poor and humble laborers, just the opposite of those in Pergamos. They were made contrite by sacrifices, and their lives were made fragrant by the blessings of labor. The workmen of Thyatira were organized into labor unions, or “guilds.” The two leading industries were the manufacture of instruments of brass, bronze, and other metals, and the manufacture and dyeing of cloth, especially of the royal purple. Homer speaks of the dyeing of red and purple cloth as being characteristic of the city. Several inscriptions mentioning dyers and their guilds have been found. Agents traveled far distances selling Thyatiran cloth. Over in Philippi of Macedonia the apostle Paul brought the gospel to “a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira.” Acts 16:12-14. It is believed that the local church of Thyatira owed its origin to the labors of Lydia after she returned home. Large quantities of purple and scarlet cloth are still shipped from Thyatira to Smyrna. It is significant that purple and scarlet are the chief colors worn by the popes and cardinals of the ruling church of the Middle Ages, the Thyatira period of the universal church. (Revelation 17:3-5.)

Christ introduced Himself to the church in Thyatira as “the Son of God, who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass.” “Eyes like flaming fire” and “whose eyes flash like fire and whose feet glow like bronze,” are other translations. This language was very familiar to a people who labored in foundries with their flaming furnaces, where fine brass, bronze, and other metals were manufactured into all sorts of articles for the market. During this period Jesus traveled everywhere and saw everything. Nothing escaped His piercing, penetrating gaze, and there was a great deal to see that made His eyes blaze with righteous indignation. His

eyes searched “the reins and hearts” of all who professed His name. His feet trod down His enemies and broke them to shivers like a potter’s vessel. The symbols represent the Son of God as searching out every evil deed, and trampling in judgment upon the doers of iniquity.

This is the only time the title “the Son of God” is used in the seven epistles or in the entire book. During this period the place and authority of the Son of God were usurped by symbolic Jezebel, representing an apostate religious system. The backsliding and apostatized church failed to recognize His priestly service and sovereign authority, and assumed prerogatives that belonged alone to the “Son of God.” To Thyatira was sent the longest of the seven letters, and it covers the longest of the seven periods of church history, embracing titan a thousand years, or half of the Christian Era.

The Middle Ages

It is appropriate that the church in the middle of the seven should be symbolic of the church of the Middle Ages. The Thyatira period of the universal church covers the period of papal supremacy after the church was elevated to kingly power. McCarrell says this period began with the first pope in the sixth century. (Page 37.) And Philip Mauro remarks, “Our view is that in this letter to Thyatira we are given to see the inception of that masterpiece of satanic deception, that monstrous heresy, whose fullest development has been manifested in Romanism.” (Page 106.)

Of this period Seiss says: “Then came the Thyatiran period—the age of purple and glory for the corrupt priesthood, and of darkness for truth. The age of effeminacy and clerical domination, when the Church usurped the place of Christ, and the witnesses of Jesus were given to dungeons, stakes and inquisitions; the age of the enthronement of the false prophetess, reaching to the days of Luther and the Reformation.” (Page 143.) If an exact date were chosen for the beginning of the Thyatira period it would be AD 538, when the decree of Emperor Justinian and the arms of Belisarius elevated the Bishop of Rome to sovereign power.

The bitter controversy over the papal throne between Vigilius and Silverius, ended with the death of the latter and the enthronement of the former, in 538. Cardinal Baronius, a noted Catholic historian, declared that during the reign of Pope Vigilius an idol was erected in the temple of God, that the abomination of desolation stood in the holy place, that the son of perdition occupied the papal chair, not as the vicar of Christ, but as the predicted antichrist. He referred to the Papacy under this notorious pope as the imperial Jezebel of the Revelation.

B. Holzhauser, an eminent Catholic commentator on the Apocalypse, whose explanations are regarded by Roman Catholics as being almost divinely inspired, says: “Thyatira, the fourth age of the church, began when the downfall of pagan Rome was accomplished, and the devil was chained up for a thousand years. The body of the church, freed from the tonic of persecution, fell away from its high calling, and embraced luxury. This message reveals the interior condition of the church of the Middle Ages, which extended from the sixth to the sixteenth century. If we apply this letter to the fourth, it may be said to coincide with it from the historic point of view in a remarkable manner. For both the church and the world speak of this period as the ‘Middle Ages.’ In this it may be said that we built better than we knew: for Thyatira is the middle church of the seven, and consequently stands as the symbol of the church of the Middle Ages.” Apocalypse, Volume 1, Page 155, 158.

It is interesting to note that the Reformation expositors were almost unanimous in their conclusions that imperial Rome fulfilled the prophecy of the fourth beast of Daniel 7, and that papal Rome met the specifications of the little horn of the same prophecy, the man of sin predicted by Paul, the beast of Revelation 13, the mystic Babylon of Revelation 17, and Jezebel the false prophetess of the Thyatiran letter.

The False Prophetess

Some believe that Thyatira is equivalent to Thyatira, meaning “a daughter,” and indicating feminine oppression; that the local church was led into apostasy by a woman who claimed to be a prophetess; and that this false prophetess was an adulteress. Of the Jezebel of this prophecy, A. T. Robertson says: “This woman was not a real prophetess, but a false one with loud claims and loose living. One is puzzled to know how such a woman had so much shrewdness and sex appeal as to lead astray the servants of God in that church. The church tolerated the Nicolaitanes and this leader whose primary object was sexual immorality (Charles), and became too much involved with her to handle the heresy.” (Page 30g.)

Spiritual Jezebel was the tempter to the church of Thyatira as was literal Jezebel to Ahab and Israel of old. Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon, who married Ahab, king of Israel. She brought with her the pagan religion of the Phoenicians and led all Israel into idolatry. We are told that as the result of his marriage with this heathen woman, Ahab “did sell himself to work wickedness” and “did very abominably in following idols.” (1 Kings 21: 25, 26.) Ethbaal was not only king of Sidon but also priest of Astarte, and Jezebel was probably a priestess and prophetess of Baal worship.

Jezebel soon became the dominant power over the king and kingdom of Israel. Her will was supreme. She hated the prophets of God and persecuted them. To supplant the worship of Jehovah she imported 850 prophets of Baal, the Sun god and chief deity of the Phoenicians, and made that heathen system the supreme religion supported and enforced by the state. From the time of Jezebel’s marriage to Ahab the apostasy of Israel became general, and finally assumed such proportions that all but seven thousand of the millions of Israel were bowing their knees to Baal. Likewise from the time the church married the state, during the Pergamos period, the apostasy that began in the latter days of the apostles became so universal that the church and the world were led into the Dark Ages. In corruptness, Jezebel is compared to Semiramis and Cleopatra.

The Scarlet Woman

The symbolic woman of Revelation 17 is doubtless identical with the Jezebel of the Thyatiran letter. There she is pictured as being “arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.” She is said to be “drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.” In her “forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTIL”

Purple and scarlet were the predominant colors manufactured in Thyatira. Both of these symbolic women are declared to be harlots, being guilty of spiritual fornication. Jehu told Joram,

the son of Jezebel, that there could be no peace “so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many.” (2 Kings 9:22.) Whether or not the local church was deceived by a literal woman who claimed the prophetic gift, Jezebel certainly is an appropriate symbol of the semi pagan religious system that dominated the world (luring the Middle Ages. “The deeper the church penetrated into paganism the more she herself became heathenish; this prepares us for the expressions ‘harlot’ and ‘Babylon,’ applied to her afterwards.” (Auberlen.) “For such Protestant expositors as see the Papacy in the scarlet woman of Babylon, the Jezebel of Thyatira appears exactly at the right time, coincides with the Papacy at its height, yet at the same time with judgment at the door in the great revolt which was even then preparing.” (Trench, Page 248.)

Spiritual Jezebel “calls herself a prophetess.” This is the claim of the church of which she is symbolic. The office of it prophetess being a religious one proves that the Jezebel of our prophecy is symbolic of a religious system. It is a well known fact that the Papacy claims divine inspiration and guidance even to the extent of infallibility. She terms herself “the oracle of God.” Catholics themselves symbolize their church by a woman, speaking of her as “Mother” or “Holy Mother.” The Papacy designates herself “The Mother of Christendom.”

It is believed by some that Thyatira means “unwearied about sacrifices,” or “never weary of sacrifices,” which is in keeping with the never-ending ritualism of the papal religion, centering in the sacrifice of the mass. “It suggests continuous, public, formal and spiritually shallow ritualism.” (McCarrell, Page 37, 38.)

Jezebel was swift to shed the blood of the prophets of God. During her relentless persecutions the seven thousand of Israel who did not worship Baal, had to flee to the mountains and hide in the caves of the earth. A price was set on the head of Elijah, the great reformer of ancient Israel. The period during which spiritual Jezebel dominated the earth was likewise a time of persecution for the people of God. During this period the following prophecies were fulfilled: Daniel 7:21, 25; 8:10-13, 24; 11:11; Matthew 24:21, 22; Revelation 12:6, 14; 13:5-9; 17:6.

The undisputed role of Jezebel continued three and a half years, which was a time of spiritual drought and darkness. It was the “Dark Ages” of Israel’s history. It ended in a reformation led by Elijah, Elisha, Jehu, and others. This reformation, however, came to a standstill and was not completed till apostolic times, when the church was brought all the way back to the faith of Abraham and Moses. Spiritual Jezebel ruled the world and persecuted the saints for three and a half prophetic years—a time of spiritual drought and darkness. During this time God’s loyal people had to flee to the mountains and remain in hiding. Millions suffered martyrdom because they refused to join the great majority in doing obeisance to an apostate power.

Joseph A. Seiss says of spiritual Jezebel: “And in all history there is not another character which so completely represents the Papal system—its character, works and worship as the unclean wife of Ahab, the Jezebel of these Epistles. She was a heathen, married to a Jew; and such is the character of the Papal system in its main elements—Paganism joined to an obsolete Judaism. She is described as calling herself a prophetess, and as undertaking to be the teacher of God’s servants; and Popery claims and professes to be heaven’s only infallible teacher of God’s truth. She was a persecutor and murderess of God’s prophets and witnesses; and the Papacy is marked by nothing more than its severity towards such as stood out against its impious pretenses, and its public and secret tortures and butcheries of the saints.” (Pages 194, 195.)

Unfaithfulness to God is called fornication because throughout the Scriptures the covenant relation between God and His people is represented by marriage. Christ represented Himself as the Bridegroom and His church as the Bride. Any transgression would therefore be a form of spiritual adultery, harlotry, or fornication. This would especially be true of any union between the church and the state or the world.

Threatened Judgments

An opportunity was given spiritual Jezebel to “repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Through Elijah, Jezebel was warned and threatened and given ample opportunity to repent before she met her doom. Likewise spiritual Jezebel was given time to repent and reform. All through the long Thyatiran period call after call to repentance was made through messages of rebuke and warning delivered by men in and out of the church who sensed the need of revival and reformation. Among these reformers were cardinals, priests, monks, and other church officials. Popes were charged by church leaders with being the predicted antichrist in the temple of God, which they believed was evidence that Christ’s return was near at hand. The long delay of retribution did not indicate that the Lord was overlooking and winking at sin, as many seem to believe. (Ecclesiastes 8:11.) It rather indicated the patience and long-suffering of a merciful God.

Jezebel is threatened with sore judgments if she does not repent and reform. I “will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and I will severely afflict those who commit adultery with her.” (Weymouth.) “I will lay her on a sickbed, and bring her paramour into sore distress.” (Moffatt.) The bed of sin would become the bed of sickness and suffering. The place of her sins would become the place of her punishments. This is the fate of all harlots and adulterers. Disease and suffering are the reward of their immorality. Jezebel is charged with spiritual adultery. Her lovers, or paramours, are “the kings of the earth” who have committed fornication with her. (Revelation 18:1-5.) The unlawful union of church and state will eventually bring terrible retribution to both church and state. The testimony of history proves that the predictions concerning spiritual Jezebel were literally fulfilled. Ethbaal means “with Baal” or “in coalition with Baal.” Jezebel, like her father, was an ardent and loyal supporter of Baal worship. Under her reign church and state were united. Israel joined in unlawful union with a pagan system of religion, and was therefore guilty of spiritual fornication. Terrible were the consequences.

The weapons of Jezebel were turned upon her own head. Elijah the prophet said to her: “In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even your.” 1 Kings 21:19. Jezebel was so eaten by ravenous dogs that “they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands.” 2 Kings 9:35. In Revelation 19:17, 18, we are told that modern Jezebel, or Babylon, will be devoured by birds and beasts of prey. The fate of Jezebel was foretold by “His servant Elijah,” and the fate of her antitype was predicted by “His servant John.” The execution of the terrible threat against Jezebel is pictured in chapters 17 and 18 of the Revelation. Here is described the bed of torment into which spiritual Jezebel will eventually be cast. Babylon will be rewarded on the basis of her treatment of the saints of God. She will be recompensed according to her works.

The Jezebel Family

“And I will kill her children with death,” or “her children I will exterminate” (Moffatt), is the judgment threatened upon the family of Jezebel. Ahaziah, Jezebel’s son, became a cripple

from a fall, and spent the remainder of his life on a bed of anguish and affliction. The entire family was finally exterminated, as the Lord decreed. The two sons who became kings were slain, and the agents of Jehu “took the king’s sons, and slew seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent them unto him to Jezreel.”

Spiritual Jezebel and her family will also be utterly destroyed. In Revelation 17:5 the “children” are described as the “daughters” of the harlot “mother.” Papal Rome calls herself “mother,” and continually speaks of Catholics as her “children.” The Protestant churches are sometimes spoken of as wayward children who will someday return home, and when they do a hearty welcome awaits them from the “mother church of Christendom.” Jesus declared that the judgments upon the Jezebel family would be open and manifest to “all the churches.” “The doom of the offenders was to be known as widely as the scandal had been.” (Charles, Page 72.)

“I will kill her children with pestilence” is the note in the Revised Version. Although this doubtless has reference to the seven last plagues in which is “filled up the wrath of God” against Babylon and her family, it may also have an application to the plagues and pestilences which swept Europe between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries. Besides the pneumonic plague which destroyed millions of lives, there was the terrible plague known as The Black Death. It was reported to Pope Clement at Avignon that throughout the East, with the exception of China, 23,840,000 people had died of the plague. Many other millions died in China. Heeker estimates a total of 25,000,000 deaths in Europe, and this is considered conservative. These terrible visitations were at the time considered judgments from God because of the corruption that existed in the church and among the nations.

The judgments upon Jezebel would reveal the fact that the One who “searches the reins and hearts” and gives to every one according to his works is indeed “the Son of God.” This constitutes a promise to those who remained faithful to Him during this trying period, and a threat to those who united with the apostate church. The language indicates a time of investigative judgment before the execution of the sentence decreed. The threatened judgments included the “children” as well as the mother. Here we have the verdict of Christ upon Romanism and the semi papal religious establishments that grew out of, and have retained many of the objectionable features of, the semi pagan mother system. Jezebel and her family include all the religious systems or churches that separated from the Papacy but still cling to her doctrines and practices and who commit spiritual fornication with kings and nations by uniting with them when opportunity presents itself.

Under the reign of Jezebel the religion of Israel was paganized. Just so the “falling away” produced the semi pagan papal church of the Middle Ages. “Roman Catholicism is a God-dishonoring mixture of Judaism, Paganism and Christianity. Protestantism increasingly follows in its train.” (McCarrell, Page 41.) Of this combination, Seiss says: “Pagan life was transferred in Christian veins, heathen pomp and ceremony commingled with Christian rites and sacraments, and the professed Bride of Christ transformed into a queenly adulteress, the harlot mother of a harlot household.” (Page 194.)

In Thyatira was a great temple dedicated to Apollo, the sun-god and chief deity of the city, in which was an altar to a goddess who was the high priestess of Apollo. Baal was the sun-god of the Sidonians, and under the reign of Jezebel became the chief god in the apostasy of Israel. Jezebel was the high priestess and spokesman of Baal. Sun worship is the foundation of all pagan

religions, and has been perpetuated in the papal system. The Papacy forsook the Sabbath of Jehovah, the memorial of creation and the sign of true worship, and adopted the sun's day, or Sunday, as the day of worship, and almost all Protestant churches follow her example without a particle of Biblical evidence for the practice.

The Reformation

It is believed that the Reformation is referred to in verse 19, where a change for the better is to take place toward the close of the period. "I know that of late you have toiled harder than you did at first" and "I know that your life of late has been better than it was at first" are other translations. Martin Luther and his fellow Reformers, through the power of the Word in the hands of the Spirit, broke the power of spiritual Jezebel and brought an end to the three and a half prophetic years of drought and darkness. Luther was the Elijah of the sixteenth century. It is regrettable that the Reformation, like that begun by Elijah, came to a standstill, and is still incomplete. It will be finished when the final warning message "in the spirit and power of Elias" the prophet lightens the earth with its glory.

"But to you I say, to the rest that are in Thyatira" (RV), indicates that the remainder of the epistle is addressed to those who espoused the cause of the Reformation, and have not known "the deep things of Satan" (RV). "The deep mysteries of Satan" is another rendering. Satan's religious system is called "the mystery of iniquity," and his church, "Mystery, Babylon the Great." The Catholics boast of having adopted and Christianized paganism in order to defeat Satan with his own religion. Thus paganism with its "mysteries" and "the deep things of Satan" became the religion of the church during the Thyatiran period.

The Gnostics of the second century and onward spoke of their knowledge as "the depth" or "the deep things of God" or "the deep things of depth," in contrast with the simple faith and doctrines of the primitive church. The expression "the depth of knowledge" is a quotation from the great Ephesian philosopher, Heraclitus, of the sixth century. His ideas were so obscure and mysterious that he was called "Heraclitus the Obscure." What the Gnostics called "the deep things of God," the Lord called "the depths of Satan." They boasted of their superior wisdom, especially regarding the mysteries or "deep things of God." Christ "thus intimates with a severe irony what was the real character of those 'depth' into which they profess to have entered, and into which they sought to guide others." (Trench, Page 154.)

"None other burden" was to be laid upon the faithful of the Thyatiran period except to keep themselves unspotted from, and to continually protest against, the Jezebel abominations. Abstinence from those evil things that are divinely forbidden is called a "burden" in the decree of the Jerusalem council recorded in Acts 15:28, 29. The Gnostics misapplied Paul's teachings on justification and the law, and made him say that the law was abolished as the rule of life and conduct in order that they might be freed from its strict requirements, just as so many of their successors of the modern religious world have done. The law is rejected by many as if it were an intolerable burden. No other burden, or duty, was to be required of God's people during this evil period than to hold fast to what they already possessed till Christ came to bring them more light during the coming Reformation. Only hold fast to that you have received until I come, is the admonition given. With the giving of additional light during the Reformation, more responsibility would be enjoined. All men are held responsible in proportion to the light received or the truth that is available.

“Till I come” must include the promise of the Second Advent, which would soon follow the reign of spiritual Jezebel. Paul declared that the “falling away,” or great papal apostasy, would end with a great reformation and the coming of Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:3-8.) This is the first of the seven epistles that mentions the return of Christ, and indicates that the Thyatiran period would reach to the near approach of that great event, to the time when the Second Advent message would be due the world. God’s people were to hold so fast to what they had of sound doctrine and spiritual experience that none could wrest it from them, till the coming of Christ would bring an end to the long and painful struggle between truth and falsehood. “Ever and ever in Scripture, not the day of death but the day of the Lord Jesus, is put as the end of all conflict.” (Trench, Page 156.)

The Promised Reward

Jesus declared that the overcomer who “keeps My works unto the end” would be given power over the nations, which he would rule with a rod of iron, and that He would give them “the morning star.” “He who conquers and is careful to live My life to the end” or “who obeys My commands to the very end” or “who lays to heart what I enjoin,” are different translations. The works of Christ are here contrasted with the works of Jezebel. To the disciples Jesus said of the one who would believe on Him: “The works that I do shall he do also.” The works of Christ are such as He can approve of, works that are in harmony with His Word and law.

“Unto the end” doubtless has special reference to the end of the Christian race, or “the end of the world.” (Matthew 24:13-14. Revelation 3:10,11.) It is not the beginning but the end of the race that determines the prize. To conquer is not enough; the victorious experience must be maintained to the end of the conflict. “I will give him authority over the nations” (Moffatt), is the promise to those who get the victory over sin. The tables will turn, and the saints who have been persecuted pilgrims and strangers in this rebel world will inherit and rule over the earth, as was God’s purpose in the beginning when He gave the dominion to Adam. The royal power and authority of Christ will be shared with His victorious saints, who constitute His bride and queen. (Matthew 19:27, 28; Revelation 3:21.)

Verse 27 is a quotation from Psalms 2:9, which is a prophecy of the Messiah. The Hebrew word for “break” is rendered “rule” in the Greek Septuagint. It literally means, “shepherd.” Shall be their shepherd” is the Septuagint. “Rod” is better rendered “scepter” as in Hebrews 1:8. The rule of Christ will be as absolute as that of an Oriental shepherd over his sheep, or a potter over the vessels he makes and then breaks in pieces in order to make better vessels. The breaking in pieces “as the vessels of a potter” probably has reference to the destruction of the wicked nations, an event that must precede the absolute and everlasting reign of Christ as the Shepherd of His people. (Daniel 2:32-45.)

The new order of things must be preceded by the breaking up of the old. The Master Potter breaks the old so He can reconstruct the new. Christ breaks in pieces all the wicked nations so that He might restore the dominion of Adam and the kingdom of David with Himself as the King of kings and Lord of lords. The statement, “As I received of My Father,” is doubtless also taken from Psalms 2:7-9. Satan offered the throne and kingdom of this world to Christ, but He spurned the offer because of the conditions imposed and the fact that Satan was a usurper with no real right to the earthly principality. (Luke 4:5-8; 22:29; Revelation 11:15.) The cross as the only pathway to the crown was appointed by the Father.

The Morning Star

“I will grant him to see the Morning-star” (Moffatt) was the climax of the promise. Star in the Apocalypse is symbolic of one in authority. Christ promises to share not only His throne but also His kingly authority and glory. He will clothe His victorious soldiers of the cross with the glory of the brightness of the stars. (Daniel 12:3; Matthew 13:43.) The redeemed will reflect the glory and brightness of Christ, and shine with Him in the kingdom. Jesus is the royal Star that arose out of Jacob. He is the “Day Star” that brings the “day (lawn)” to those who take heed to the “more sure word of prophecy.” He is the “bright and morning Star” who is to reign over the throne of David forever. (Num. 21:17; Matthew 2:2; 2 Peter 1:19, Revelation 22:16.) The morning star rises during the darkest part of the night just before the dawn, which is ushered in by the rising sun. Christ is the Sun of Righteousness, and will bring with Him the dawn of eternal day.

The promise of the morning star indicates that a night, or period of darkness, was coming a close. The morning star is the sign and promise of greater light. It does not disperse the darkness but is a sign that the soon-rising sun will scatter the darkness of night and usher in the dawn of day that will be followed by the “perfect day” of noontide glory. Wycliffe in the fourteenth century and Savonarola in the fifteenth were morning stars of the Reformation. They and others were beacon lights heralding the coming dawn of a new day of light and truth and liberty, when the morning stars would give place to the Sun of Righteousness. The Thyatiran period would be followed by the Reformation, which would prepare the church for the coming of Christ. The epistle of Christ to the church of Thyatira takes us through the apostasy of the Middle Ages and brings us to the Reformation period.