

Sunday February 23rd 2020
The Word of God
A Survey of the Bible – Lesson 18G
'I Know Your Works....'

1). Re 2:12 *“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: 13 “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.*

We have seen from a previous study that the church in Pergamos may represent that period of church history when the church and the world system under Satan became one. When instead of persecution assimilation became the order of the day.

a). And this may be further borne out through Pergamos being described as the place ‘where Satan’s throne is’. Now at the time when the Revelation was written, as is the case today, ‘Satan’s throne’ was and is located in the heavens and it is representative of his present rule. Satan’s throne was not literally in Pergamos.

b). However, Pergamos was a major regional center of Gentile world power, both before and during Roman Empire in the 1st and 2nd centuries. And as such it was a primary location for pagan religion. And so, as Pergamos was a major center of Gentile world power under Satan, and home to false, pagan religions, we can understand why it was described as the place ‘where Satan’s throne is’. It was the place where his power was exercised through earthly rulers and pagan priests. And

we can see the transition from the days of Antipas the persecution of Christians to assimilation through the doctrine of Balaam.

c). And contrasted with Satan's influence in v13 we have commendation for those in this church who, *hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*

Here then is persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire showing Satan's attempt to eradicate the body of Christ, so that the Bride could not be formed. These were 'the days' which continued until Christianity and the world system became one.

d). This provides the historical setting for what we see in this church. Now, let's trace the persecution described here at Pergamos back to the previous church, Smyrna – Re 2:10 *Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.* 11 *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."*

Those called upon here to 'be faithful until death' provide a direct link with Antipas the faithful martyr, killed at Pergamos during the days of persecution, but the reference to those in Smyrna having 'tribulation ten days' must take us beyond the historical setting to what must be the experience of all Christians throughout this dispensation; tribulation for a complete period of time – 2 Ti 3:12 *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

Acts 14:22 *strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."*

Ro 5:3 *And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance [patient endurance]; 4 and perseverance [patient endurance], character; and character, hope.*

And that said to the Christians in Smyrna, 'be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life' remains true for us also. We must be faithful to the end of our physical life, or until the trumpet sounds. It is unlikely that during that time we would have to experience being a martyr like Antipas, but let's be in no doubt that suffering death for the age to come at the hands of our enemy remains a very real possibility.

e). And the means by which that death can be inflicted we had seen last time and have read again just now - *you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.*

The doctrine of Balaam, which is companion to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, we have seen to be a teaching that promulgates a half truth, which then becomes no truth at all. Christians it would say, after a similar fashion to the counsel of Balaam to the sons of Israel, are completely and irrevocably saved; that every Christian therefore is already a part of the Bride of Christ and every Christian will be rewarded at the Judgment Seat, so no matter how we may choose to live it makes no difference to this outcome. This teaching is also nuanced by those who will teach that if you are not living a 'righteous' life once saved then you weren't really saved in the first place. Either, if we live after the flesh it doesn't matter or if we live after the flesh, we were never really saved perpetuate the lie, 'You will not surely die'. Both strands of teaching corrupt and pervert the truth of Scripture. Such is the doctrine of Balaam.

2). Re 2:18 *"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: 19 'I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.*

As the Lord begins His letter to the church in Thyatira, we see that He again draws from the description of Christ as Judge from Chapter 1, and again we find commendation for some in the church there.

a). Those commended are those Christians who have remained faithful. Those who had not left their first love seen through the church of Ephesus, those who had been faithful until death seen through the church in Smyrna and those who hold fast to His name and do not deny His faith, in the midst of those proclaiming the doctrine of Balaam, seen through the church in Pergamos.

b). Throughout the history of the church there have always been those Christians who have heard the Word of the Kingdom and remained true to the faith because of it.

c). But there are also those Christians who haven't, those who instead have believed and embraced 'the doctrine of Balaam'.

d). And here, through that pictured in Thyatira, we find where adherence to the doctrine of Balaam inevitably leads –
Re 2:20 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

We have already seen through the Lord's reference to Balaam how He has reached back into the events of Jewish history to provide an example that will teach us great spiritual truth, and this is exactly what He is doing again in through the reference to Jezebel.

e). There was a literal self-professed prophetess teaching in the church in Thyatira, whose actual name may or may not have been Jezebel, it really doesn't matter. The important thing is to recognize the association being made with the Jezebel of the OT, so that we can see that which the Lord would teach us through her.

f). Following the division of the kingdom after the death of Solomon there were a succession of kings who ruled over the northern 10 tribes of Israel who continued to do evil in the sight of the Lord, and we would have to see this as the legacy of the 'counsel of Balaam' from the days of Moses.

g). The counsel that Balaam gave didn't just disappear over time but was rather an essential tool in the box of tricks the enemy has used to overthrow God's firstborn son throughout the centuries.

h). And in the same way we can see that 'the doctrine of Balaam' introduced into the church at the beginning of the dispensation has not

disappeared either and through looking at the account of Jezebel in the OT we can see where adherence to 'the doctrine of Balaam' inevitably leads.

3). 1 Ki 16:25 *Omri did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all who were before him..... 30 Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him. 31 And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him. 32 Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. 33 And Ahab made a wooden image. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.*

Not only was Ahab more wicked than his father, Omri, becoming the most wicked king in Israel's history, but he also married Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Sidonia who was devoted to Baal worship.

a). And as a result of this union Baal worship became the accepted practice of those who were the chosen people of the living God.

b). And what is significant about this is not just the extent of Ahab's wickedness, but that Ahab, through the ministrations of Jezebel, caused God's chosen people to sin right along with him. God's firstborn son joining himself to the one he had been brought into existence to replace.

c). And this is just what is said to the church in Thyatira - *you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.*

This then takes us beyond Christian involvement in the things of the world, to the corrupt and perverse practices of the world being brought into, accepted and normalized within the church, causing Christians to join themselves to the one they are supposed to replace. The very thing the Lord has shown us through the Matthew 13 parables –

Mt 13:31 *Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, 32 which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater*

than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

That which is at stake for Christians in this is the same as that which was at stake for Israel in the days of Jezebel, the rights of primogeniture [the rights of the firstborn].

d). To be ruler of the household, under and for the Father; to exercise the office of priest in the family and to receive a double portion of the Father’s inheritance.

e). To embed the practices of the world system under the god of this age within the church forming a union with him, is to give up the rights of the firstborn and therefore to despise them, just as Esau did. And this is something God won’t countenance – Heb 12:16 *lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.*

And this has been graphically pictured in the account of Ahab and Jezebel- 1 Ki 21:1 *And it came to pass after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel, next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. 2 So Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, “Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near, next to my house; and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it. Or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money.” 3 But Naboth said to Ahab, “The Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!”*

This whole incident concerning Naboth’s vineyard is about inheritance. Ahab, being here a type of Satan, wants to take Naboth’s vineyard, the inheritance of his fathers. To take the inheritance of a man whose name means ‘fruits’, whose vineyard is located in a place with a name that means ‘God sows’.

f). And I wonder if we might find a parallel here with the parable of the sower? Mt 13:23 *But he who received seed on the good ground is he*

who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

It would be the inheritance promised to those producing fruit that our enemy would want to take from them, and he might even offer the whole world in order to get it.

g). And perhaps in Naboth’s determination not to give up his inheritance to the wicked Ahab we can find those Christians we have already seen today who were called upon to be faithful until death – 1 Ki 21:13 *And two men, scoundrels, came in and sat before him; and the scoundrels witnessed against him, against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, “Naboth has blasphemed God and the king!” Then they took him outside the city and stoned him with stones, so that he died.*

And if we back up a few verses in 1 Kings 21 we will see that it was Jezebel who orchestrated Naboth’s death in an attempt to take his inheritance from him - 1 Ki 21:8 *And she wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who were dwelling in the city with Naboth. 9 She wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; 10 and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, You have blasphemed God and the king. Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die.*

And perhaps we can find another parallel with another parable the Lord gave in relation to Israel’s religious leaders and His inheritance, at His first advent, just prior to declaring that the Kingdom of the heavens had been taken from them - Mt 21:33 *“Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. 34 Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. 35 And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. 37 Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 38 But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among*

themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.'
39 So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40
"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those
vinedressers?"

And it was of course through the testimony false witnesses that the Son was killed in the attempt to take His inheritance – Mt 26:59 *Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, 60 but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward 61 and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'* "

And as Naboth was taken outside the city and stoned, so the Lord was taken outside Jerusalem and crucified.

h). But what of the attempt to take Naboth's vineyard, his inheritance? What was the outcome for those involved? – 1 Ki 21:23 *And concerning Jezebel the Lord also spoke, saying, 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.'* 24 *The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Ahab and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field."* 25 *But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up.*

Exactly that which the Lord had said would come to pass – 2 Ki 9:8 *For the whole house of Ahab shall perish; and I will cut off from Ahab all the males in Israel, both bond and free.*

2 Ki 9:33 *Then he said, "Throw her [Jezebel] down." So they threw her down, and some of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses; and he trampled her underfoot. 34 And when he had gone in, he ate and drank. Then he said, "Go now, see to this accursed woman, and bury her, for she was a king's daughter." 35 So they went to bury her, but they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands.*

2 Ki 10:1 *Now Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. And Jehu wrote and sent letters to Samaria, to the rulers of Jezreel..... 7 So it was, when the*

letter came to them, that they took the king's sons and slaughtered seventy persons, put their heads in baskets and sent them to him at Jezreel.

And in the death of Ahab's 70 sons we find a parallel type with the sons of Haman in the Book of Esther – Es 9:13 *Then Esther said, "If it pleases the king, let it be granted to the Jews who are in Shushan to do again tomorrow according to today's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows."* 14 *So the king commanded this to be done; the decree was issued in Shushan, and they hanged Haman's ten sons.*

And what about Israel at the Lord's first advent, whose religious leaders had sought to take the Lord's inheritance? The fate of the religious leaders and the nation swayed by them came from their own mouths – Mt 21:40 *"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?"* 41 *They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."* 42 *Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes'?"* 43 *"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.*

Lk 21:22 *For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.* 23 *But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people.* 24 *And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*

And what about those Christians seduced by 'Jezebel' into despising their inheritance as pictured in Thyatira? – Re 2:21 *And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.* 22 *Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.* 23 *I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the*

minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

To be wedded to the world system under Satan has only one outcome – death for the age to come. We would have to be blind not to see it.

i). And yet in v22 this death is not inevitable because repentance is still possible until the day the trumpet sounds.

j). And for those Christians who are not seduced and those who choose to repent – Re 2:24 *“Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. 25 But hold fast what you have till I come. 26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—27 ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—as I also have received from My Father;28 and I will give him the morning star.29 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’*

For those who overcome then there is the promise of rulership over the nations and the promise of being given ‘the morning star’ –

Re 22:16 *“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.”*

Jesus Himself is the Morning Star and for Christians to be given the Morning Star can only be a reference to the overcomers’ unique relationship with their Lord as a joint heir during the Millennial Kingdom.

k). If we turn to the natural world, we will find that the morning star always appears before sunrise.

l). For the overcoming Christian at the Judgment Seat then we see the Morning Star. And for repentant Israel following the Tribulation – Mal 4:2 *But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves.*

We will pick this up again next time – if the Lord is willing.