

The Time of the End – Part 6.3

A Series on the Book of Revelation

Adapted from Arlen Chitwood's book
by Jeanne Alley

12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: 13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality. 15 'Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 'Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. 17 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

1). The third of the seven overcomer's promises is given in the message to the Church in Pergamos, a Church located in a wealthy city where pagan worship flourished. Pergamos was a religious center filled with pagan cults, housing temples and shrines dedicated to the false gods of the Gentiles.

a) Pergamos, at this time, was a center for the Roman government in Asia; and Satan, who ruled the earth through the Gentile nations (and continues to rule in this same manner today), was said to have his throne in Pergamos (v. 13). This isn't the *actual* location of his throne, for his throne would still be located *in the heavens* at this time, not on the earth. It's a reference to a hub, if you will, where his authority (via human government) strongly emanated from.

b) Satan's throne will not actually be upon the earth until he, along with his angels, is cast out of the heavens near the middle of the Tribulation period (Rev. 12:7-12). It will then be established in Babylon, Satan's earthly capital; and his throne will then be occupied by Antichrist, the last king of Babylon preceding its destruction.

c) Aside from the nation of Israel, the Roman Empire was the great persecutor of early Christianity. Christians, as the Jews, were monotheistic; and they fixed their eyes upon the one true God, not upon Caesar. And if this period of persecution is to be associated in a historical sense (if we were to view the seven letters here in Revelation as a

chronological history of the Church dispensation) with that which is stated about any one of the seven Churches in Revelation chapters two and three, it would seemingly have to be the Church in Smyrna (2:8-11).

d) Numerous Christians during this period of Roman persecution were imprisoned, tortured, and killed. But the more widespread this persecution became, the more Christendom flourished and grew. This is what led Tertullian, one of the early Church fathers who lived during that time, to say, "*The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.*"

2). Along with a Satanic persecution from without during this period, there was also a Satanic corrupting work from within. Very early in the dispensation, as seen in the fourth of seven parables in Matthew chapter thirteen (v. 33), leaven was placed in three measures of meal, which would have to do with the Word of the Kingdom and Christendom (the subject throughout these parables). And this resulted in a corrupting work *from within*, which paralleled the persecution *from without* (ref. the author's book, MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM, Chapter VI, reprint edition).

a) In relation to leaven placed in the three measures of meal in Matt. 13:33, "leaven" in Scripture is spoken of as *a corrupting substance*, and the number "three" in Scripture is the number of *Divine perfection*. This number shows *Divine perfection within that which is in view – Divine perfection within that which is being corrupted with the leaven.*

b) "Three measures of meal" – three measures of ground grain, used to make bread – are in view. The reference is to *the Word of God* (Matt. 4:4; cf. Isa. 55:1, 2), though not the Word in a general sense.

c) Rather, the reference, contextually, is to *the Word in a specific sense, a specific part of the Word, a specific teaching in the Word*. And *a corrupting agent is seen being placed within that which is perfect.*

d) We can know this because the subject at hand leading into this fourth parable in Matthew chapter thirteen has to do with *the Word of the Kingdom*. It has to do with how the message surrounding the coming kingdom of Christ would begin to be proclaimed in Christendom and how this message would progressively change because of something (*a corrupting agent*) placed within the message (cf. Matthew 13:19-24, 31, 33).

e) Thus, during the first several centuries of the dispensation, there was not only a Satanic work *from without* but one *from within* as well. Then, at the beginning of the fourth century, Satan brought matters *together* in his efforts to destroy Christianity. His efforts *from within* (the working of the leaven through several centuries of time) had

produced such corruption within Christendom that he could merge these efforts with those *from without* (persecution by the Roman Empire). To bring this to pass, Satan brought Roman persecution to an end and simply merged a corrupt religious system with a pagan political system.

f) The Roman emperor Diocletian, coming into power near the end of the third century, was the last of the persecuting emperors. His persecuting edicts were repealed during the opening years of the fourth century by Constantine the Great after he had come into power, and Christianity was then regarded as simply *another religion in the countries over which Rome ruled*.

g) This move by Constantine set the stage for a succeeding move having far-reaching ramifications: The day came when Constantine (for reasons upon which historians differ) embraced Christianity, an act subsequently followed by his efforts to force Christianity on the Empire as its *one and only* religion. These efforts by Constantine began a sequence of events which, toward the end of the fourth century, ultimately resulted in *a complete merger of Church and State*.

h) Then, in the year 380 A.D., Theodosius I issued an edict that made Christianity *the exclusive state religion*, and in the year 395 A.D., Christianity was finally recognized as *the official and only religion* of the Roman Empire. Christianity then found itself completely enmeshed within a world power in the sphere of governmental authority over which Satan exercised control, *completely out of line* with God's plans and purposes for *the new creation* "in Christ."

3). If the message to the Church in Pergamos has to do with a particular period in Church history, it would have to be this period, where a merger of Church and State occurred. This is the period which followed the Roman persecutions; and the names "Smyrna" (which is the Church who received the second letter in Revelation chapter 2) and "Pergamos," in this respect, would themselves be significant in pointing to these periods.

a) "Smyrna" is a transliterated Greek word meaning *myrrh* (a resinous gum used for embalming), which could possibly point to the martyrs under Roman persecution during the first several centuries of the Church's existence. "Pergamos," on the other hand, comes from the Greek word *gamos*, meaning "marriage"; and this word could possibly point to that period in Church history, beginning with Constantine, when the Church was wed to the world.

b) This entire matter is depicted in the parable of the mustard seed in Matt. 13:31, 32. The mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, would, through natural growth, germinate and become "the greatest among herbs." However, the mustard seed

in the parable germinated and, after a period of time, experienced an abnormal growth, becoming a “tree.” The very next and last thing stated in this parable is the fact that once the herb had become a tree, “the birds of the air” then came and lodged in its branches.

c) A “tree” in Scripture symbolizes *a national power* (Judges 9:8-15; Dan. 4:10-12, 20-22), and the “birds” in Matt. 13:32 are associated with *Satanic activity* (cf. vv. 4, 19). The mustard seed germinating and experiencing natural growth portrays the Church during the early years of the Christian movement; and the herb subsequently experiencing abnormal growth, producing a tree, allowing the birds of the air to lodge in its branches, portrays that which Christianity became during and following the reign of Constantine. The Church merged with the state, becoming a tree, a world power; and Satan with his agents simply moved in and began accomplishing that which, under Roman persecution, had not been accomplished.

d) Where *the pagan*, persecuting emperors seemingly failed, the first so-called *Christian* emperors succeeded. And out of this condition in which the Church found itself arose two major problems: 1) There were those in the Church in Pergamos who held to the “doctrine of Balaam,” and 2) there were those in this Church who held to the “doctrine of the Nicolaitanes” (note also the “deeds of the Nicolaitanes” in the message to the Church in Ephesus [2:6]).

e) These two doctrinal problems crept into the Church early in its history, but they are not at all peculiar to the historical state of the Church as seen in Revelation chapter two. The intermingling of Christians in the affairs of the world (governmental, and other affairs) is something from which the Church has never really withdrawn, and the same problems produced by conditions of this nature in the fourth century are still with us today (cf. II Tim. 2:3, 4).

f) Rather than Christianity converting the world, the world converted Christianity; and the lasting effects of this unholy relationship – very evident in the closing days of the Laodicean period in which we live – is what led Andrew Bonar, over a century ago, to say, “I looked for the Church and found it in the world. I looked for the world and found it in the Church.”

4). DOCTRINE OF BALAAM

Jude 11 records “the error of Balaam,” II Peter 2:15 records “the way of Balaam,” and Rev. 2:14 records “the doctrine of Balaam.” All three of these are used in passages referring to Christians entering into a state of affairs within Christendom which not only defiles their high calling but which also dishonors the Lord who purchased their salvation with His Own blood.

a) *The error and way* of Balaam appear in companion portions of Scripture and would seem to refer basically to the same thing. *The error* of Balaam is associated with “reward” in Jude, and *the way* of Balaam is associated with the “wages of unrighteousness” in II Peter. Thus, *the error* and *way* of Balaam have to do with “monetary gain”; and, according to the Old Testament account, monetary gain derived through this means is acquired through one’s willingness to compromise the principles of God and proclaim things contrary to the revealed Word of God (though Balaam was prevented from doing this and could only utter that which was in accord with the revealed Word of God).

b) *The error and way* of Balaam can be found in Numbers chapters twenty-two through twenty-four. Balak, king of the Moabites, hired Balaam to come into his land and pronounce a curse upon the children of Israel. Balak had seen that which Israel had done to the Amorites; and knowing that this nation would soon be passing through his country, he was afraid because of the exhibited power which Israel exercised through the nation’s God.

c) Balak knew that the only way Israel could be defeated was through severing this power. Thus, Balak hired Balaam to come into Moab and pronounce a curse upon the Israelites, incurring God’s wrath upon them in order to ultimately bring about their defeat at the hands of the enemy.

d) However, once in Moab, on three separate occasions, only blessings proceeded from the lips of Balaam. Balak was angered by the turn of events and sent Balaam out of Moab to his own country.

e) *The doctrine* of Balaam though was different than his *error and way*. His *doctrine* had to do with that part of his teaching which was contrary to the revealed Word of God, and it is seen in Scripture following the account of his error and way.

f) PAST TEACHING

Scripture surrounding the doctrine of Balaam and its tragic results is given in Num. 25:1-3:

“And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.”

The Israelites, after coming into Moab, began to commit fornication with the “daughters of Moab,” eat meat sacrificed to idols, and bow down and worship

the false gods of the Moabites. In order to put a stop to these sins and stay the hand of God's judgment upon the entire camp of Israel, Moses was instructed to slay every Israelite who had "joined himself unto Baal-peor." Because of their sins, twenty-four thousand Israelites perished under God's judgment.

g) What caused the Israelites to depart from the one true and living God Who had delivered them from Egypt and begin serving false gods and following the idolatrous ways of the Moabites? The answer is given in Num. 31:16:

"Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord."

h) As previously seen, Balaam could not curse Israel. Only beautiful prophecies filled with blessings flowed from his lips when he was called into Moab by Balak. But Balaam did succeed in leading the Israelites astray through *his counsel*. The Israelites, through *the counsel of Balaam*, were led to commit fornication, eat things sacrificed to idols, and bow down before other gods. And because of these sins, the judgment of God fell upon His people.

i) *The counsel of Balaam* – i.e., "the doctrine of Balaam" – had to do with the sins committed by the Israelites in view of their covenant relationship with God. Briefly stated, this doctrine had to do with the fact that the Israelites were the covenant people of God, this covenant could not be broken, and consequently the Israelites could sin with immunity.

j) However, such was not the case. It was true that the covenant established between God and Israel could not be broken; it was also true that Israel's position as firstborn could not be changed; but it was not true that Israel could sin with immunity. God's wrath was manifested because of the sins of His people, and the thousands of Israelites who succumbed to the counsel of Balaam were overthrown in the wilderness, short of the goal of their calling.

k) PRESENT TEACHING

The doctrine of Balaam is one of the most widely taught doctrines in the Church today. Christians know – as their counterparts in the Church in Pergamos – that they have been saved by grace through faith, and nothing can alter that which has been brought to pass through the birth from above. They now possess spiritual life, which can never be taken from them; and, because of the unchangeable nature of the life which they presently possess, they reason that they can conduct their lives in any manner which they choose, and it will make no difference.

l) However, as in the case of the Israelites, so in the case of Christians. Christians, as the Israelites under Moses, have been saved for a specific, revealed purpose. Every Christian is enrolled in a race (I Cor. 9:24-27); every Christian is engaged in a conflict (Eph. 6:10-18; II Tim. 2:4, 5). And the goal set before every Christian is to win the race, be victorious in the conflict.

m) God has made provision for Christians in order that at the end of the race they might say with Paul, "I have fought a good fight [I have strained every muscle in the good contest']. I have finished my course [race'], I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness..." (II Tim. 4:7, 8).

n) The enemy, Satan, on the other hand, is doing all within his power to bring about defeat in the lives of Christians. Satan's main objective in the present warfare is to prevent Christians from qualifying for crowns and thus positions of rulership with Christ in His coming kingdom.

o) God is presently bringing into existence a new order of *sons* to replace the order now ruling in the heavens; and the incumbent rulers – Satan and his angels – are doing all within their power to retain their present governmental control over the earth.

p) The main facet of the doctrine of Balaam which is being promulgated in Churches today is the teaching that future blessings and rewards have been set aside for every Christian solely on the basis of Christ's finished work on Calvary and the Christian's positional standing "in Christ." In this respect, all Christians – regardless of their conduct during the present time – will receive crowns and positions of power and authority with Christ in the kingdom.

q) However, that which is clearly taught throughout the Word of God is to the contrary. The Israelites did not sin with immunity, and neither can Christians. Sin in the camp of Israel resulted in the Israelites being overthrown in the wilderness, short of the goal of their calling. And it will be no different for Christians.

"...and I took the crown that was upon his head" (II Sam. 1:10; cf. Rev. 3:11).

5). DOCTRINE OF THE NICOLAITANES

Outside of Revelation, chapter two, there is no known sect in Church history (Biblical or secular) referred to by the name "Nicolaitanes." Some early writers tried unsuccessfully to connect this group of individuals with *Nicolas of Antioch*; and others, following in

their steps, try this even today. However, such a connection cannot be established, which leaves one with a *sole* method of identification — *the meaning of the word itself*.

a) The reference can only be to a sect in the Church in Pergamos (known also to those in Ephesus) whose practices and doctrine are *selfexplained by the term* which the Spirit of God used to identify them. Apart from this means of identification, *nothing* can be known about the Nicolaitanes.

b) The word “Nicolaitanes” is a transliterated, compound word from the Greek text (*nikolaites*), derived from *nike* (“a victor,” “a conqueror”) and *laos* (“people”). Thus, the word simply means, “to be victorious over the people,” “to conquer the people.” Using the meaning of the name itself after this fashion, the Nicolaitanes would have to be identified as individuals (leaders) in the Church who had subjugated the remaining Christians to their self-imposed authority — individuals comprising a ruling, priestly class (the clergy over the laity), *something condemned by Scripture in no uncertain terms*.

c) *Authority* within the Church must *always* be based *solely* upon “service.” Those occupying positions of leadership (elders, deacons) must *always* minister (serve) within this sphere of activity, which is to bear no relationship whatsoever to authority exercised by those in the world (*cf.* Matt. 20:25-28; I Cor. 16:15, 16). “Nicolaitanism” is simply *a corruption of delegated authority within the Church, exercising this authority after a forbidden pattern — after the pattern set forth by those in the world*.

d) Nicolaitanism, being introduced in the message to the Church in Ephesus, was apparently in existence very early in Church history; but it would only appear natural that this doctrine coming into full bloom awaited that period covered by the Church in Pergamos. Nicolaitanism patterns itself *after the structure set forth in worldly governmental systems*; and it was through the actions of Constantine and others in the fourth century Roman Empire, during the period covered by the message to the Church in Pergamos, that the way was opened for an already-existing world system in the Church to follow this pattern to a level heretofore unattained. Once the union between Church and state had been established, worldly practices in the Church could only become commonplace.

e) Since the Church has never really separated itself from the position which it began to assume during the days of Constantine, one can only expect to find Christendom saturated with the “doctrine of the Nicolaitanes” from the fourth century right on into the present day and time. In fact, viewing the matter from this perspective, while looking upon it within the framework of the leavening process in Matt. 13:33, the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes would have to be considered a false teaching which would undoubtedly *increase with time*; and this would make it *even more prominent in the Church today*, near the end of the dispensation, than at any other time in history.

f) The leaven which the woman placed in the three measures of meal *can only* progressively continue its deteriorating work throughout the dispensation. And this leaven *can only* do its most damaging work near the end of the dispensation, during the time in which we presently live.

g) The “doctrine of Balaam,” viewed within the framework of the same perspective and same leavening process, would have to be looked upon after an identical fashion in relation to *time*. This is a doctrine which will undoubtedly, as the “doctrine of the Nicolaitanes,” be more widely proclaimed in the latter days than at any other time in the history of the Church. And the “doctrine of Balaam” will, in many instances, be proclaimed by those holding to the “doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.” Such can only be *the ever-increasing, degenerate state of teaching* emanating from the lukewarm Laodicean Church during the closing years of the present dispensation, immediately preceding Christ’s return for the Church.

6) THE OVERCOMERS

Contextually, the overcomer’s promise in Rev. 2:17 will be realized by those Christians who conduct their affairs in a manner separate from the widespread teachings of the “doctrine of Balaam” and the “doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.” It *does* make a difference how one lives after he has been saved; and the Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, rather than man, *must* be recognized as one seeks to live a life pleasing unto the Lord. The beliefs and practices of those holding to the “doctrine of Balaam” and the “doctrine of the Nicolaitanes” have completely permeated the Churches, such beliefs and practices are part and parcel with those of the world, and to the victor *alone* belongs the promise which God has given. The overcomer *alone* has been promised that he will be allowed to partake of *the hidden manna* and will be given *a white stone with a new name* in the stone, which no man will know other than the one receiving it.

a) THE HIDDEN MANNA

“Manna” is found in both the Old and New Testaments, but the “hidden manna” is found only in the third overcomer’s promise in the Book of Revelation. The Israelites were provided manna during their pilgrim journey between Egypt and Canaan; and Christians, in like manner, have been provided Manna during their pilgrim journey between the antitype of Egypt (the world) and the antitype of Canaan (a heavenly land, wherein Christians will realize an inheritance). And any teaching concerning the future “hidden manna” must be drawn from past and present appearances of the manna as a provision for God’s people.

b) (The fact that the future provision for God’s people is presently “hidden” may be an allusion to the manna which was kept “before the Lord” in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle. This manna was placed in a “golden pot” within the ark of the covenant, *hidden* from the people but *visible* to God [Ex. 16:14-35; John 6:48-54; Heb. 9:4]. So it is

with the hidden manna during the present time. It is *hidden* from the people but *visible* to God.)

c) The manna given to the Israelites during the wilderness journey was a provision for their physical needs. This manna was a special food, prepared by God, containing everything necessary for the sustenance and well-being of the physical body. It was provided fresh day-by-day, and the Israelites were to gather and eat the manna after the fashion in which it was given. No supplementary food was provided or required.

d) The “manna” which the Israelites were given in the wilderness typified *Christ*, “the living bread which came down from heaven”; and this “living bread” is the provision which Christians have been given for their wilderness journey. Christians “eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood” (John 6:48-54) through the assimilation of the Word of God. This Word is a special food, prepared by God, containing everything necessary for the sustenance and well-being of the spiritual life.

e) The Spirit of God will render this food fresh day-by-day; and Christians are to partake of the Living Word through the Written Word, after the manner in which it has been given. No supplementary food has been provided; nor is any required.

f) The “manna” upon which Christians presently feed has been given to properly prepare and equip them for *the wilderness journey*, and the “hidden manna” can only be a parallel provision for *things beyond the wilderness journey*. The overcomers will be allowed to partake of the hidden manna to properly prepare and equip them as they rule and reign in the kingdom. The provision is “manna” *now* and “hidden manna” *yet future*, both given to equip Christians during particular periods for particular areas of service.

g) The hidden manna in the third overcomer’s promise and the tree of life in the first overcomer’s promise would have to be integrally related in this realm. Both are set forth as provisions to properly equip Christians as they rule and reign, both point to Christ (the true Manna, the true Tree of Life), and both together will form God’s complete provision for the rulers in the kingdom. However, a distinction must be drawn between the two, viewing each in the sense of a different facet of this provision.

h) Since partaking of the tree of life will provide that special wisdom and knowledge necessary to judge in equity, justice, and righteousness, it can be safely assumed that partaking of the hidden manna will apparently constitute God’s provision to properly prepare overcoming Christians in all other realms of life. Such could possibly include physical needs as well as spiritual needs.

i) Not that much has been revealed about the resurrection body. Christ partook of food in His resurrection body (Luke 24:41-43; John 21:5-14; cf. Matt. 26:29), but the reason for His partaking of food or details surrounding the matter are not given. If the resurrection body requires sustenance for the rigors of the office Christians are to hold, the hidden manna will apparently provide that sustenance, along with any other requirements for sustenance which Christians may possess.

7) THE WHITE STONE, NEW NAME

During the days in which the Book of Revelation was written, and days prior to that time, giving one a white stone meant that the person had been charged with some offense but had been acquitted; he had been shown as justified. Since works alone will be reviewed at the judgment seat, justification shown by the white stone must emanate out of a judgment of works.

a) Justification on the basis of Christ's finished work at Calvary cannot be in view at all, for overcomers and nonovercomers alike would receive such a stone if that were the case. A white stone will be given to every Christian whose works endure the fire, revealing justification on the basis of that coming under judgment — *works emanating out of faithfulness*.

b) A white stone was also given to the victor in a contest or battle, which is exactly what is in view through overcoming. Christians are presently in a battle, a warfare, against "principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world ['age'], against spiritual wickedness in high places ['against the spirit forces of wickedness in the heavenlies']" (Eph. 6:12). And Satan and his angels use the world and the flesh in their never-ceasing efforts to bring about a Christian's defeat. It is *the victor* — the one overcoming *the world, the flesh, and the Devil* — that the promised white stone will be given.

c) With the preceding in mind, understanding the white stone, along with the new name in the stone, can possibly best be seen in Joseph's exaltation by the Pharaoh of Egypt. Joseph, because of his faithfulness to God, was, through Divine providence, brought into a position of such favor with Pharaoh that he found himself exalted to the throne. Pharaoh took his own ring and "put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck." He then positioned him as "ruler over all the land of Egypt," and bestowed upon him a new name — "Zaphnath-paaneah" (Gen. 41:39-45).

d) The white stone will identify the overcomer as the one shown justified, victorious in conquest, and elevated to noble rank. As Joseph in the type, he will be placed in the position of a ruler and be given a new name. Joseph was placed over *all Egypt*, and the overcoming Christian will be placed over *all the earth* ("Egypt" is always a type of *the*

world in Scripture). He will then be given “*a new name...which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*” Such is the present prospect set before Christians, as given in the overcomers’ promise to the Church in Pergamos.

8). CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

When overcoming Christians go forth to rule with Christ in the kingdom, everything will be in a state of readiness. Through the provision of *the tree of life, the hidden manna, the white stone, and the new name*, Christians will be properly equipped for every facet of life in the kingdom as they rule the nations with Christ. They will be given *wisdom and knowledge* to rule in equity, justice, and righteousness; they will be provided with the necessary *sustenance* (physical and/or spiritual) to equip them for the office which they are to hold; they will be given *identifying stones*, showing their victory over the world, the flesh, and the Devil; and the One with Whom they are to rule as co-heirs will know them by *a new name*.

a) Through God’s provision, *a perfect rule* will issue forth when man is once again brought back into the position for which he was originally created. All authority in that day will emanate from *one throne* (cf. Rev. 2:26, 27; 3:21), and nothing short of *an absolute rule* will suffice.