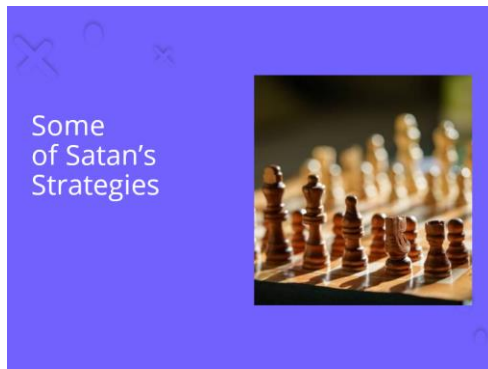


“Some of Satan’s Strategies”

(Revelation 2:12–17)(10.24.21)



Revelation 2:12–17 (NIV84) *To the Church in Pergamum*

¹² “To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. ¹³ I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

¹⁴ Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught

Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. ¹⁵ Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight 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, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.”

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.



Photo by Nolan Kent/Unsplash/Creative Commons

Study: Attendance hemorrhaging at small and midsize US congregations

October 14, 2021 by Yonat Shimron

Title: “Some of Satan’s Strategies”

INTRODUCTION:

I enjoy doing chess puzzles. Knowing the purpose of a chess puzzle makes it a lot easier to solve. Are you looking for checkmate? Are you trying to win material? Are you trying to find a draw? When you don’t know the goal, the solution is harder to find. Sometimes knowing the solution depends on whose move it is. So, whose move is it?

Imagine a 1,000 piece jig-saw puzzle of abstract art and you don’t have the top of the box. You don’t know what the jig-saw puzzle is supposed to look like when it is done. How difficult would it be to assemble?

According to the website, scienceofstrategy.org, Sun Tzu writes in the book, *The Art of War*: “Know yourself and know your enemy.

You will be safe in every battle.

You may know yourself but not know the enemy.

You will then lose one battle for every one you win.

You may not know yourself or the enemy.

You will then lose every battle.”

In an article published on October 14th, Yonat Shimron writes,

“A new survey of 15,278 religious congregations across the United States confirms trends sociologists have documented for several decades: Congregational life across the country is shrinking.

The survey, fielded **just before the coronavirus lockdown**, finds that half of the country’s estimated 350,000 religious congregations had 65 or fewer people in attendance on any given weekend. That’s a drop of more than half from a median attendance level of 137 people in 2000, the first year the FACT survey gathered data.”

We don’t yet have the data for today, 19 months after the lockdown. From anecdotal evidence, other articles, and personal experience, I expect we could reduce that number by half again. That would be in the low thirties.

My friends we are in a battle for the survival of the Church here in the United States of America.



Revelation 2:16 (NIVS4)
“Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

BODY:

Jesus describes himself as “Him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.” This PowerPoint graphic has the Book of Hebrews as the backdrop. Hebrews 4:12 (NIV84) For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

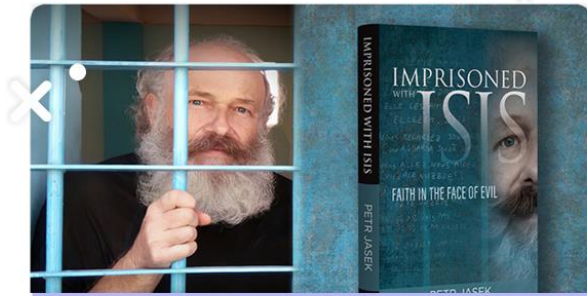
Jesus, in the Gospel of John is described as the Logos, the Word of God who was with God in the beginning and is God. The Word became flesh and lived among us. We think and understand through language. We gain an understanding of God through the thoughts of God, expressed through Jesus, and also through the Holy Spirit inspired scriptures.

In this message to the angel of the church in Pergamum, a short message, Jesus references this sword. It is part of His identity and it is a weapon with which to do battle against the Enemy. I know that this may be a little confusing. Jesus is a warrior and equips us for battle too.

There is another way that sword is relevant. It is the most common weapon mentioned in scripture. There is the material world perspective here too. Pergamum was the capital city of the Province of Asia. E.F. Palmer explains:

“The Romans expressed the authority of governors of provinces in terms of the “right of the sword.” The sovereign decision by which God provided for the possibility of cosmic evil to will against His will—hence the devil—has a counterpart reality within the created order of our human history. Hence, the throne of Satan has a two-fold application. The city of Pergamum had a temple dedicated to Caesar.”

The city also had a temple dedicated to Aesculapius, the god of healing, whose insignia was the entwined serpent on the staff. And the serpent is also representative of Satan. It is not hard to see the intertwining of the symbolism.



Revelation 2:10 (NIV84)
"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Jesus was quite clear in these messages that persecution was to be expected. This recently released book is a testimony of one Christians experience in an ISIS prison – Faith in the Face of Evil by Petr Jasek.

Revelation 2:10 (NIV84)

¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown

of life.

Galatians 3:22 (NIV84)

²² But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

Luke 4:18–19 (NIV84)

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,

because he has anointed me

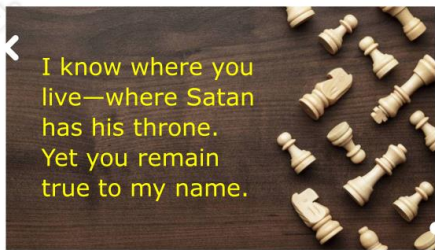
to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners

and recovery of sight for the blind,

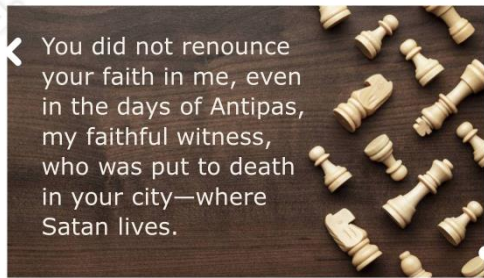
to release the oppressed,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."



I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name.

Our God is well aware of what we face today just as Jesus told those at Pergamum. He will not leave us or forsake us. He knows better than we do what we are up against. And yet, we are encouraged to remain true to His name, no matter the cost. It is not just our lives at stake, but the eternal souls of each generation.



Preacher C.N. Hall made this observation in a sermon titled, “Christian Victory:”

“It is not so easy to fight this fight as some suppose. It is not a true faith merely, an evangelical creed, a scriptural church, a comfortable sermon once or twice a week, a little Sabbath-keeping, an agreeable pause in your pleasures, giving to them a new relish—it is not this which constitutes Christianity. You that think religion so very easy a thing, have a care at least, lest when too late, you find that you know not what true religion meant.”



Numbers 25:1-3 (NIV84)

While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor. And the LORD's anger burned against them.

Numbers 25:1-3 (NIV84)

25 While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, ² who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. ³ So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor. And the Lord's anger burned against them.

Jesus clearly blames the prophet Balaam for this. His story takes up three full chapters in Numbers. You could say his

name is one that lives on in infamy.

2 Peter 2:15 (NIV84) They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.

“In Jewish thought, Balaam was the symbol of all that led men to obscene conduct and the forsaking of God.” (Palmer) Why is that? Let me try to summarize three chapters into a few sentences. Balaam started as a legitimate prophet. King Balak feared the nation of Israel and called upon Balaam to curse them. Though Balaam was enticed, he could not bring himself to curse The Chosen People. Then Balak upped the ante – increasing the prestige and wealth offered.

The bait was too strong for Balaam to resist. Although he could not openly defy God's will, he engineered the circumstances where Israel would fall prey to temptation. Instead of leading the people to righteousness, he led them to ruin. God became angry and tens of thousands were killed. Balak rewarded Balaam, but so did God. Balaam was killed by the sword.

Jesus says that people within the Pergamum church held to the teaching of Balaam. They dabbled with idolatry and committed sexual sin. Jesus immediately afterwards says there are those in the church following the teachings of the Nicolaitans. Remember that in the message to Ephesus they were commended for hating the practices of the Nicolaitans because Jesus also hates their practices.

The Baker Encyclopedia says, "Since the 19th century it has been common to view the name, [Nicolaitans], as a translation into Greek of the Hebrew name Balaam. This is in accord with the allegorical, symbolical nature of Revelation and the apparent linking of the two names in the letter to Pergamum (2:14, 15)."

My friends, there are Nicolaitans in the church today.

About a month ago, I preached John 15. You heard Jesus undeniably link loving God to obeying God. It is incontrovertible. Being obedient to God is an imperative.

The first churches were nearly all Jews who became Christians. As the gospel expanded into the rest of the world, there was debate and confusion. Should these new Christians have to become Jews first and follow Jewish laws like the circumcision requirement. The Apostle Paul went to Jerusalem and he explained why this was not in alignment with the gospel.



Acts 15:22–29 (NIV84)

The Jerusalem Council's Letter to Gentile Believers

²² Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to

Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers. ²³ With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers,

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

²⁴ We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. ²⁵ So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. ²⁸ It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following

requirements: ²⁹You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

The shortness of time does not allow me to explore why God is so adamant about idolatry and sexual morality. Maybe we can discuss it at Bible Study on Tuesday.

Cosmic Connection between Spiritual and Material World

- + Angels
- + Satan
- + Jesus
- + Book of Revelation



Remember the angel with the sword in the picture of Balaam riding his donkey?

Jesus is the staircase for angels ascending and descending between heaven and earth.

Some of Satan's Strategies



- + Hides
- + Imprisons
 - Isolates
 - Addiction
- + Deceives & Dissembles
- + Lies
- + Kills
- + Death by a thousand cuts
- + Rules by exception
- + He uses demons
- + He uses sin-sick people
- + Did God really say?
- + You will be like God
- + Infiltrates
- + Sedates

Satan infiltrates – you will find him in the schools, in the seminaries, and even in the sanctuaries. History and current events prove that Satan and his minions have infiltrated secular government.

In Every Message

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



Where you able to hear today?

Again from Christian Victory:

In Every Message

Overcomers



“Easy?” When Jesus says it is a “strait gate,” and that if we would enter we must “strive,” bidding us “take up our cross daily, deny ourselves and follow him”? Ah! it is no soft flowery meadow, along which we may languidly stroll, but a rough, craggy cliff that we must climb.

“To him that overcometh!” It is no smooth, placid stream, along which we may dreamily float, but a tempestuous ocean we must stem. “To him that overcometh!” It is no easy lolling in a cushioned

chariot, that bears us on without fatigue and peril. The trumpet has sounded to arms; it is not peace, but war, war for liberty, war for life, on the issue of which our everlasting destiny depends! If we are to be saved, we must “overcome.””

Rewards

Come to Bible Study



Jesus promises rewards for those that overcome.

CONCLUSION:

My D.L. Moody devotional for October 23rd:

Proverbs 11:30 (NIV84) The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.

“IF we have known Jesus Christ for years, and have not been able to introduce an anxious soul to Him, there has been something wrong somewhere. If we were full of grace, we should be ready for any call that comes to us. Paul said, when he had that famous interview with Christ on the way to Damascus, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” Isaiah said, “Here am I, send me.” No man can tell what he can do until he moves forward.

If we do that in the name of God, instead of there being a few scores or hundreds converted, there will be thousands flocking into the Kingdom of God. Remember that we honor God when we ask for great things. It is a humiliating thing to think that we are satisfied with very small results.”

Amen and amen. Let us pray.