

## Cutting Straight the Word of the Truth on Revelation 2:12-17

### **What Really Was the Lord's Blessing and Reward to Antipas?**

Lately, an article in the internet entitled "*Rebels Versus Antipas*" asserts that Antipas was the "*the recipient of the Lord's blessing by way of much spiritual fruits for Christ's multiplication and God's glory.*" Does the Bible really show us that Antipas bore much spiritual fruits for Christ's multiplication and God's glory?

Brother Nee taught us that there are two sides to the truth: objective and subjective. Before we can experience and apply the truth, we must get the objective facts straight first. Brother Lee also taught us that to expound God's Word, we need to first do so literally, then spiritually. It pays for us to be attentive to the details in the Word, because not one iota of the Word shall pass away (Matt. 5:18). God's Word does not return to Him empty (Isaiah 55:11).

Getting into the Word, we find that the name Antipas appears only once in the Bible, in Revelation 2:12-17, "And to the messenger of the church in Pergamos write: These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name and have not denied My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, that you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat idol sacrifices and to commit fornication. In the same way you also have some who hold in like manner the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore; but if not, I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war with them with the sword of My mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give of the hidden manna, and to him I will give a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knows except him who receives *it.*"

From this passage it is evident that there is no record in the Bible as to who Antipas was, and what he did for the Lord, other than his being a martyr and his keeping the Lord's name and not denying His faith. Certainly there is no record in the Scriptures of him having borne much spiritual fruits. This is not to say that he may not have borne much spiritual fruits, because the Scriptures is silent on this, but that for us to assertively teach that he definitely did so is to add something foreign to the Word of God. Moreover, this portion of the Word clearly shows us that the reward to Antipas is not "much spiritual fruits" but the "hidden manna" and a "white stone".

As we delve into the subjective truth behind Antipas and the situation of the church in Pergamos, we see many lessons we can learn from the exposition of brothers Nee and Lee.

This passage is especially related to the circumstances of the churches. According to church history, the church at Pergamos represents the state of the church beginning in the fourth century. At the beginning of the fourth century, A.D. 313, Constantine, the emperor of the Roman Empire, embraced Christianity as his religion, causing the church to become very great. By the marriage of the Roman Empire with the church, the church increased greatly in both numbers and popularity. Before that time, Satan had persecuted

the church, but had accomplished nothing. Instead, the persecution has led to tremendous growth! Eventually, Satan realized his tactic was ineffective. So he subtly changed his tactic from persecuting to embracing. Constantine embraced Christianity into the Roman Empire. The result was that many unbelievers were baptized into Christianity, causing Christianity to become a great tree full of false ones (Matt. 13:31-32). Formerly, it was a mustard herb, small and good for food. But from the third century it became a great tree containing many evil things, evil persons, and even evil spirits. Many evil things come to lodge in the branches of the great tree. Pergamos refers to the development of the great tree, because Pergamos means “high tower” and “marriage”. Literally it means marriage, and symbolically it means high tower. In the church in Pergamos we see the church in a marriage union with the world.

The world is the place where Satan reigns (1 John 5:19; John 14:30). The Lord says that Pergamos dwells where Satan's throne is. This indicates that the church in Pergamos is in the world. Under these circumstances the Lord boasts in His martyrs. The name Antipas means “against all”. He took the lead to fight against the worldly church, and paid with his life for it. The Lord expects His children to be like Antipas, faithful unto death. He wants them to hold fast the Lord's word and not deny His faith even at the point of death. He wants them to be witnesses to His life.

May we be the overcomers in the churches to overcome worldliness. Antipas was such a faithful witness among those in Pergamos. He stood against all the worldliness and died as a testimony to the Lord. To Him and other faithful witnesses like him the Lord promises a reward: the hidden manna, signifying the hidden portion of Christ, and the white stone, signifying the secretive name which only those who receive it from the Lord will know. This promise is divided into two parts: first is the hidden manna, typifying Christ, and second is the white stone, typifying the Christian, in a most touching exchange of love.

## Conclusion

The story of Antipas as recorded in Revelation 2 shows us a person who was not work-centered, but testimony-centered. In fact, there is no record of him doing any work of propagation or shepherding. While the Bible did not record many details about him, it records one most important and crucial characteristic of Antipas: being opposed to anything that is against the testimony of Jesus. Like him, today, we should be the “anti-witness” and “anti-testimony” to anything that deviated from the testimony of Jesus.

Our two brothers presented to us the significance of Revelation 2:12-17, but neither related Antipas to “much spiritual fruits” as the writer of the captioned article on the internet did. In fact, what Bible scholars always take note of is that while he was mysteriously unknown, yet he was a martyr who was known to God and God alone.

Using the Berean test, we realize that the article and writer did not handle the Word of God carefully and faithfully. We should not modify the facts in the Bible in order to suit our own end. To do so would be to deform the Word of God. Regarding those whom we follow, Brother Witness Lee cautions us with these words:

“To deform the truth is simply to change it a little or add something....  
Do not cut off anything from the truth, and do not add anything to it. Take the

truth as it is. If you do not take the truth as it is, you may say that you are not twisting the Scriptures. Yes, you may not twist them, but you are deforming them. Concerning one whom you follow, you must check how he handles the truth.” (W. Lee, *A Word of Love to the Co-workers, Elders, Lovers, and Seekers of the Lord*, p. 60, LSM)

## **Excerpts from the Ministry**

The many lessons we can learn from Revelation 2:12-17 regarding Antipas are clearly presented to us in the ministry of brothers Nee and Lee:

### **His Person**

#### **He is a Martyr**

“This testimony was with Antipas. In verse 13 the Lord says, ‘You hold fast My name, and you have not denied My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.’ In Greek, the name Antipas means ‘against all.’ This faithful witness of the Lord stood against all that the worldly church brought in and practiced. Hence, he became a martyr of the Lord. In Greek the word *martyr* is the same word as *witness*. As an anti-witness, Antipas bore an anti-testimony, a testimony against anything that deviated from the testimony of Jesus. It must have been through this anti-testimony that in his day the church in Pergamos still held fast the Lord’s name and did not deny the proper Christian faith. Antipas took the lead to fight against the worldly church, pioneering the way for us to fight against the worldly church today. Whatever the worldly church was, had, and did, Antipas fought against it.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Revelation, Chapter 12, Section 3, LSM*)

#### **He is the Lord’s Faithful Witness**

“The Savior admitted that the circumstance was difficult. He knew that the place where the church was was dangerous. Sin and idols were everywhere. He realized the predicament facing the church. That is why He said: ‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is.’ The Lord Jesus glories in His martyrs. This is why He said: ‘Antipas, My witness, My faithful one’ (Rev. 2:13). Neither the Bible nor history mention the name Antipas. However, this is the name of one who truly suffers for the Lord. Although man does not know him, the Lord mentioned His name specifically. He mentioned His faithfulness. What a commendation this is! How precious is the death of the saints in the eyes of the Lord! The Lord knows those who are His. He knows who has passed through difficulties and sufferings for His sake. Although man does not know Antipas, the Good Shepherd knows the name of His sheep. What a comforting thought this is! Although there was loneliness, although man’s eyes did not see him, although persecution persisted until death, although he had nothing left behind in the world, and although historians would not even save a space for his name, the Lord’s eyes saw and His heart remembered; He praised and commended. This is truly ‘A garden inclosed...a spring shut up, a fountain

sealed' (S.S. 4:12). The world could not touch him for he was the apple of the Lord's eye. It was not easy for him to give anything to the world. He only knew the Lord and sought only to please Him. He is a lonely martyr, one whom the Lord praised. We thank and praise the Lord that He never forgets any of His nameless, hidden servants. Everyone who suffers for Him, whoever he may be, is known by Him. He puts all of them in His heart. Lord, how numerous are Your thoughts toward me! In the coming kingdom, all those who suffer for the Lord will receive glory. The life that we lose now will be gained back in the future. This is not only true for Antipas alone but for all the unnamed heroes who are martyrs for the Lord in life or in death. They will all shine as the sun." (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 04: The Christian (2), Chapter 5, Section 2, LSM*)

### **He is "Against Everyone"**

"But here was an Antipas. The meaning of his name is 'against everyone.' He, like Stephen, sealed the witness he bore with his own blood. He is one who refuses to keep silent. Neither the power of hell, nor the persecutions of the world, nor the danger of life can stop him from opposing everyone. Where are those witnesses today who will testify faithfully for the Lord and who will not love their life unto death?" (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 04: The Christian (2), Chapter 5, Section 2, LSM*)

### **He is in Opposition to All Things**

"The Lord recognizes the difficulty of Pergamos's situation. Since she dwells in the very place of Satan's throne, it is rather difficult for her to maintain a testimony. Here is a person who is very special, that is, 'Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you.' We cannot find his name in history; therefore, since this is a prophecy, we must discover the meaning from the name itself. Anti means 'against'; pas means 'all.' Antipas is a faithful man who is against all; he opposes all things. This does not mean that he intentionally creates troubles regardless of the situation, but that he stands on the side of God to oppose all things. Of course, this person must become a martyr. History does not know his name, but the Lord knows." (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 3) Vol. 47: The Orthodoxy of the Church & Authority and Submission, Chapter 7, Section 1, LSM*)

### **He is Faithful unto Death**

"In the church in Pergamos, where Antipas was about to be killed, there was one who was 'faithful unto death.' The Lord praises Antipas as 'My witness, My faithful one' (2:13). It is interesting that for two thousand years, no one has known of this Antipas. His name is not mentioned in any other place in the Bible nor in history. But the Lord knows him and mentions him by name. A man who completely passed the notice of the worldly church was noticed by God. Man can ignore such a one, but the Lord never forgets. He speaks of him by name and points out his faithfulness. How precious is the death of the saints in the eyes of God! How the Lord cares for the martyrs who are martyred for His name's sake. The prefix anti means 'against,' and the root pas means 'all

men.’ In other words, when everyone was against the Lord, Antipas set himself against everyone. A martyr is one whom the Lord reckons to be faithful. We have to tell new believers that the Lord has shown us this fact: All believers should be ready to sacrifice their life for the Lord. Every believer should not only believe in Him but also expect to sacrifice his life for Him.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 3) Vol. 60: Miscellaneous Records of the Kuling Training (2), Chapter 29, Section 1, LSM*)

## **His Works**

### **He Testified Against the Worldliness of the Church**

“Antipas was faithful in his anti-testimony, even unto death. Because of his testimony against the worldliness of the church, he was killed and became a martyr. To testify against the worldly church we need the spirit of martyrdom. We need to be faithful for the Lord’s testimony against the worldliness of the church even unto death.... Today, we in the Lord’s recovery are also an anti-testimony.... We are standing here for the testimony of Jesus. We must be today’s Antipas.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Revelation, Chapter 12, Section 3, LSM*) [Emphasis added]

### **He Testified Against the Apostasy of the Roman Church**

“The saints are those who are separated, sanctified, unto God, living a holy life for God even unto death. The witnesses are those who are a living testimony of the Lord Jesus, faithful also unto death. The witnesses of Jesus are also the saints; however, the saints may just live a separated and holy life, not complying with the apostate church; yet they may not stand out to testify against the apostasy of the Roman Church as did witnesses like Antipas (2:13). The woman is drunken with the blood of both the saints and the witnesses.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Revelation, Chapter 51, Section 4, LSM*)

### **He Crippled the Kingdom of Satan with His Faithful Testimonies**

“‘In the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.’ To be a witness, one who is true, who stirs up the wrath of Satan, and who cripples the kingdom of Satan, will necessarily bring out the enemy’s persecution. Unless a witness can cripple Satan, he is not a true witness. A true witness will surely stir up the wrath of the enemy. However, at times, even when we witness, we will not be killed. Antipas was not only a witness but a faithful witness. All those who witness faithfully will be persecuted. Satan is not afraid of our empty words. What he cannot stand is a faithful witness. To be a witness alone does not seem to require much price, but to be a faithful witness requires one to risk his own life. The price is here. Who is willing to pay it?” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 04: The Christian (2), Chapter 5, Section 2, LSM*)

### **He Held Fast the Lord’s name**

“In these seven epistles, no other believer’s name is mentioned except that of Antipas. From this we can see that Antipas is very important. Why was Antipas killed? Because he held fast the Lord’s name and refused to forsake the Lord’s word. He was killed because he was faithful to the testimony. ‘And you hold fast My name and have not denied My faith.’ While Antipas was alive he faithfully stood alone, yet this caused the entire Body to stand up also. But after he was killed, the entire Body was shaken.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 16: Study on Revelation, Chapter 3, Section 6, LSM*)

### **He Had Not Denied His Faith**

“Regarding this faithful man who is slain, in verse 13 the Lord said, ‘You hold fast My name and have not denied My faith.’ Two matters are mentioned: the Lord’s name and the Lord’s faith.... He also said, ‘You...have not denied My faith.’ The word ‘faith’ here in Greek is *pistin*. The meaning of this word is ‘belief.’ It is not an ordinary belief, but the unique belief, the belief which is distinct from all other beliefs. The Lord said that Pergamos had not denied His unique faith. The church is not something of philosophy, natural science, ethics, or psychology. These are not things of the church. The church is something of belief, something of faith. ‘You...have not denied My faith.’ What does this mean? This means, ‘You have not denied believing in Me.’ The children of God must maintain this belief. Our belief in the Lord Jesus must not change at all. This faith is what separates us from the world. So ‘You hold fast My name and have not denied My faith’—these two points are the things for which the Lord praised her.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 3) Vol. 47: The Orthodoxy of the Church & Authority and Submission, Chapter 7, Section 1, LSM*)

### **His Reward**

#### **The Hidden Manna**

“Revelation 2:17: ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give of the hidden manna, and to him I will give a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knows except he who receives it.’ Here are two promises given to the overcomers: (1) ‘To him I will give of the hidden manna.’ Manna typifies Christ (John 6:49-51). The open manna was possessed by all the Israelites, but the hidden manna was kept for Canaan (Exo. 16:33). All believers receive the salvation of Christ, but only the overcomers enjoy the hidden portion of Christ, a portion which the common people cannot enjoy.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 16: Study on Revelation, Chapter 3, Section 6, LSM*)

“Verse 17: ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ Here the Lord Jesus is again calling those who have spiritual ears to learn the lesson taught by the Holy Spirit. ‘To him who overcomes, to him I will give of the hidden manna, and to him I will give a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knows except he who receives it.’

We should pay special attention to the Lord's promise to the overcomers in Pergamos. We have seen that the condition in Pergamos is not merely an ancient event but the current condition. Not only are the teachings and warnings of this letter related to us, even its promises directly affect us. Actually, it should affect us more today than in those days because we are living in the age when the sinful teachings of those days are ripening, maturing, and increasing.

Although the condition of the church as revealed in this letter is most corrupt and gloomy, the promise it contains is full of life and light. When circumstances are particularly trying, the overcomers will have particular rewards. According to the preordained course, if we want to gain our possession, we must pass through sufferings, trials, and battles. The Lord's word here is for the comfort and encouragement of those who are still on the way. But the distant view unfolded in these words seems to take one beyond the battlefield into the possession of one's hope already! This promise is divided into two parts. First is the manna, which typifies Christ. It shows how the believers long after Christ. Second is the white stone, which typifies the Christian. It shows how the Lord longs after the Christian. This exchange of love is most touching! All those who trust in the Lord, who honor His name and would not deny this name, will be rewarded according to their faithfulness.

Before we go on to the spiritual significance, we first have to mention one important point. We have to realize that this promise was meant to be literal. Although there are spiritual meanings to the Lord's promises, we should not consider the spiritual significance first and ignore the literal facts. In the interpretation of God's word, we should know that other than the parables, the prophetic symbols, and the signs, everything should be expounded literally. However, this does not mean that we should annul all spiritual meanings. We should not annul the literal meanings by the spiritual meanings. One should first expound literally, then spiritually. By this, the word of God will be made rich. As to the first half of this promise, we know that there were people who had eaten manna before. Hence, it is not impossible for man to eat manna again in the future. In the future, we will have a resurrected body. We will be like the Lord Jesus, being able to eat and drink as before. The manna was the people's food in the wilderness. Yet the hidden manna promised by the Lord is not for every believer but for the overcoming ones among all the believers." (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, The (Set 1) Vol. 04: The Christian (2), Chapter 5, Section 13, LSM*)

## **The White Stone**

“To him I will give a white stone.’ At the apostles' time, elections were carried out by placing pieces of white stone into a jar with names written on them. Although the overcomers lose the opportunity to be elected in the world, the Lord will give them a white stone on which a new name is written, a name not known by others. This shows the Lord's approval of us.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 16: Study on Revelation, Chapter 3, Section 6, LSM*)

“I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows except he who receives it’ (2:17). Both the hidden manna and the white stone refer to the individual hidden experiences, but the former points to how the believers love the Lord, while the latter points to how the Lord loves the believers. In the ancient times, when the people supported and elected a person, his name was written on a white stone and placed in a jar. This was the ancient method of voting. In the same way, the Lord's beloved believers have their names written on a white stone. Hence, the white stone speaks of the Lord's love and devotion to the individual believers. The two things are related and cannot be separated. The basis of the Lord's love for the believers is the believers' love for Him. We have seen the secretive nature of the hidden manna. In the same way, the white stone is also secretive in its nature because the name written on the stone is a new name, ‘which no one knows except he who receives it.’ Hence, this secret is strictly guarded. Only two parties know of this name, the Lord and His believer. Other than the giver and the receiver, no one else can put his hand on this. This is a personal secret between the Lord Himself and His faithful believers. It is not known to outsiders. This holy and private love can only be enjoyed by the lovers of the Lord alone and cannot be touched or understood by outsiders. Men like Antipas, who were faithful witnesses unto death, were true overcomers and were undoubtedly the ones who will receive the white stone. Many times we are weak because we do not have the confidence that we will receive the Lord's reward. Those who are close to the Lord and who have tasted the hidden manna will know the Lord's mind and will receive the white stone. This promise enables every sincere lover of the Lord to testify faithfully for the Lord in the face of all oppositions and temptations.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 04: The Christian (2), Chapter 5, Section 17, LSM*)

“Let us consider the second half of the promise. What is the white stone? We know that the manna and the white stone are both objects taken from the Aaronic priesthood. As Pharaoh of old gave Joseph a new name and a ring, in the same way Christ will give to His overcomers a new name and a white stone. This name is now kept secret. Only the overcomers will know the secret of this heavenly name, and only the overcomers will inherit this name. As the name of Antipas was unknown to man, in the same way, the name of the overcomers will be unknown to the world. We believe that in the future there will be literal manna to feed our resurrected bodies. We also believe that in the future we will receive an actual precious white stone. This is the literal side of these words. However, besides the literal meanings, there are still many profound spiritual meanings. Now we want to consider the spiritual side of these words.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, The (Set 1) Vol. 04: The Christian (2), Chapter 5, Section 13, LSM*)

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