

PERGAMUM: ATTALIC KINGS

“The sumptuousness of the Attalic princes had raised Pergamum to the rank of the first city of Asia as regards splendor. It was a sort of union of pagan cathedral city, a university town, and a royal residence, embellished during a succession of years of kings who had a passion for expenditure and ample means of gratifying it.” (Unger Bible Dict., pg.844)

At the end of last week’s lesson, there was a request for a lesson the Attalic kings of Pergamum. This lesson will study SEVEN aspects of the history of the Attalic kings who brought Pergamum into Greek history.

1. In Persian time, Pergamum was one of the small city-states ruled by half-Greek tyrants, descendants of a certain Gongylus.

In 205BC, a half-Greek from Tius, Philetaerus son of Attalus, to whom Lysimachus (Macedonian general and King of Trace) had entrusted the fortress of Pergamum containing part of his treasure amounting to 9000 talents, betrayed his master and went over to Seleucus (Macedonian general of Alexander the Great and ruler and conqueror in Babylon and Syria).

2. Philetaerus was succeeded by his nephew and adopted son, Eumenes I who broke with Seleucus and allied with Egypt and won their independence.

3. Attalus I assumed title of king defeating the Galatians. He changed it from a dynasteia to a Hellenistic basileia or kingdom. He allied with Rome and was rewarded the greater part of Asia Minor.

“As soon as the dynasts became kings in Asia Minor, they introduced into Pergamum all the familiar forms and settings of the Hellenistic basileia.” (Caesar and Christ, pg.591)

The kingdom of Attalus I was the smallest of the Hellenistic kingdoms of its day, and even that of Eumenes II and of his successors embraced any one portion of the great Seleucid Empire. And yet in our history of Greek civilization the insignificant Attalids loom larger than the greatest Seleucids.

4. The Attalic kings great passion was to make their own city not only one of the most beautiful cities in the world but also one of the greatest centers of Greek civilization. And they spent their money lavishly in achieving it.

They made Pergamum one of the capitols of Hellenistic civilization.

5. Asia Minor paid heavily for the privilege of becoming a Roman province, but Hellenism was saved, and it was protected and spread by the Romans perhaps even more efficiently than by the Attalids.

6. By the effort of Eumenes II, the citadel and the acropolis became a sequence of beautiful religious and public buildings.

They made Pergamum a prosperous manufacturing center of parchment, silver and copper products, and perfumes, and agriculture. It was famous for its curtains and its cloths woven with gold when in former Times had been a specialty of Lydia, especially of Sardes.

7. The Attalids had a predilection for mystic religions and mystic cults because of their half-Anatolian character.

Attalus I sent the *Magna Mater (black stone of goddess Cybele)* to Rome from Pessenus. The black stone, believed to be the incarnation of the Great Mother, was shipped to Ostia, where it was received with impressive ceremony by Scipio Africanus (Roman general).

It was served by self-emasculated priests. It was celebrated every April at the Feast of the Great Goddess. Cybele was a vegetation deity and legend told how her son Attis, symbol of autumn and spring, had died and gone to Hades, and then rose from the dead. They would cut their arms and drink their own blood as communion. On the last day of the feast, the black stone was carried in triumph through the crowds and hailed the Great Mother, *nostra domina, our lady*, at Rome.

The *white stone with a new name* to the overcomer of the church of Pergamum may have had greater importance to them because of the history of the famous black stone.

“In the context of a messianic banquet the white stone was probably for the purpose of admission. *new name*. The name of the victor (Isa.62:2; 65:15).” (NIV, Rev.2:17)

Here is the doctrinal point to this lesson.

God controls human history according to His divine plan (Gen.15:16; 19:25; Psa.2:4; Gal.4:4; Col.1:15-20; Eph.1:19-23; Heb.2:5-10).

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.” (Psa.46:1-3 NIV)