

The Seven Churches of Revelation

Lesson 4
Rev. 2:18-29

Thyatira was a small city, with an estimated first century population of about 25,000. The city was located about sixty-five kilometres southeast of Pergamum. The importance of Thyatira came from its location on a major road making it a busy commercial centre. Many trade guilds or unions existed in the city for carpenters, dyers, merchants, tentmakers, wool producers, leather works, pottery, linen weaving, and bronze-smiths. Each guild had their own religious cult and their members would have been expected to worship their god. It would have been impossible for the Christians to fully participate in the guild while being faithful to Christ. This would have caused the Christians great hardship and difficulty in earning a living.¹

The Church at Thyatira *"The Accomodating Church"*

The letter to the church at Thyatira is the longest of the seven letters. While we don't know who started the church it is possible that Lydia, a seller of purple, and the first convert in Philippi could have been involved. Acts 16:11-15 tells us that Thyatira was Lydia's hometown.

Jesus describes himself in three ways in this letter. First, he is the **Son of God**. This stresses his deity. The patron god of the city was Apollo-Tyrimnos who was called the son of Zeus. Jesus says, I am the one who is truly the Son of God.

Description Christ gives himself to the church at Thyatira

"the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze." (Rev. 2:18)

Second, he **has eyes like a flame of fire**. This indicates his penetrating vision of all that happens. The fire would indicate his burning anger toward sin.

Third, his **feet are like burnished bronze**. This is the only place in Greek literature that the word translated as "burnished bronze" is found. This word probably had technical significance to the bronze-smiths in Thyatira. The metaphor stands for the power of Jesus to trample sin under foot and execute punishment when necessary (Revelation 14:19-20). His feet show his steadfastness and stability. His eyes to see and feet to punish are needed in this most corrupt of the seven churches.

1. What impresses you most about this description of Jesus?

¹ <https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/revelation/thyatira-the-worldly-church>

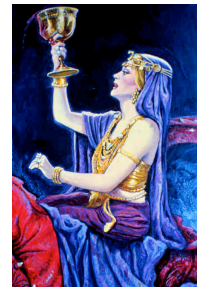
Commendation to the Church at Thyatira

Jesus commends the church at Thyatira church for their works of love, faith, service, and patient endurance. In addition to all these positive attributes, Jesus said, **“your latter works exceed the first.”** They were a church that was growing which is the hope of every congregation. A person who observed the the church at Thyatira could not help but be impressed with the bustling activity that was taking place. The members of the church were working, serving, enduring, and growing. This stands in contrast to the church at Ephesus whose love was decreasing.

2. How is it possible for a church to be active, service oriented, and growing while harbouring terrible sin in its midst?

Rebuke to the Church at Thyatira

The rebuke to the church at Thyatira was the longest and harshest received by any of the seven churches to this point. The first complaint is that the church tolerated a woman referred to as Jezebel. She called herself a prophetess and seduced Christians into sexual immorality and in eating food sacrificed to idols. She seemed to be unusually influential, so that she could convince God’s people that fornication and idolatry were good (2:20).



It has been suggested that the false doctrines of the Nicolaitans, Balaam, and Jezebel could be different designations for the same group or movement.² Whether or not they were the same, they all taught that it was acceptable to assimilate with the culture of the day and to accomodate worldliness to get along.

3. How do you answer those who say that Christians must be realistic about the world in which we live and that we must make accomodations in our thinking in today’s world?

Almost certainly this woman’s real name was not Jezebel, but she was reminiscent of wicked queen Jezebel, wife of king Ahab, in the Old Testament who tried to lead Israel into the worship of Baal.³ The worship of Baal included gross immorality and unrestrained sexual practices with both male and female temple prostitutes.

This Jezebel calls herself a prophetess indicating she claimed to be a spokesperson for God. Most likely she was teaching that Christians (perhaps in order to earn a living) could participate in the trade guilds which included pagan festivals, meeting in pagan temples, libation to the gods, eating meat that had been offered to idols, and the sexual promiscuity that took place in the pagan temples.

² Fair, Ian A. *Conquering With Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2011, p. 133.

³ 1 Kings 16:29-2 Kings 9:37.

Engaging in sexual immorality and idolatry are linked in both Pergamum and Thyatira. The reason is that one leads to the other. When a person disobeys God's teachings on sexuality, they deliberately rebel against God. In practice this places someone or something ahead of God. When something becomes more important than God it is an idol.



The Coming Punishment

Jezebel and all who followed her were to face severe punishment. She had been given time to repent, but refused. She knew what was right, but instead of repenting she willingly rebelled against God. Now her time was up and she would be thrown onto a sickbed. The analogy seems to be that she had participated in a bed of fornication or adultery. Now she would find herself in a bed of suffering. The exact nature of the suffering we don't know, but God has the power to bring physical illness or any other calamity he chooses.

4. What punishment did the Old Testament Jezebel face? (2 Kings 9:30-37)

Besides Jezebel, her followers (those who commit adultery with her) would face punishment described as great tribulation unless they repented. The nature of the tribulation is not stated.

When Jesus says that Jezebel's children will be stuck dead he is not referring to her physical children, but perhaps those who she had trained and who serve and teach with her. She was their spiritual mother. Certainly these "children" would die spiritually, but also they would be struck down physically.

These clear and decisive actions of Jesus severely punishing Jezebel and her followers would demonstrate to all the churches that Jesus ***"searches mind and heart."***⁴ Jesus wants to stress that he knows and sees the entirety of a person; even how they think and feel. Nothing, even those things done in secret evade his notice. The Lord expects faithfulness and not worldly accommodation from his people.

5. Why was it important for Jesus to take such quick and decisive action against this Jezebel and her followers?

6. Does Jesus still punish in these types of ways today? If so, have you ever witnessed this? If not, why not?

⁴ The Greek word translated in our English Bibles as heart is *nephros* which literally means kidneys. In Jewish culture the mind was the seat of thinking and the kidneys the seat of feeling or emotion. The idea is that Jesus sees and knows every single thing a person thinks or feels.

Jesus says to the church that he will ***“give to each of you according to your works.”*** Salvation cannot be earned, it comes only from God’s grace through faith. Punishment and reward, however, will be given in a measure dependent upon the deeds one does.

A Warning to the Faithful

There were some; perhaps even a majority in Thyatira who did not hold to the teaching of Jezebel and who did not believe in ***“what some call the deep things of Satan.”*** Jezebel claimed to be a prophetess of God, but her words came from the devil himself. Her teachings may have been an early form of gnosticism which taught that in order to fully understand the glory of God’s grace, one must understand and participate in the depths of sin and the realm of Satan.

Beyond avoiding the false teachings of Jezebel, Jesus lays no other burden. What Jesus expects of his church is found in Scripture. John wrote in **1 John 5:3**, ***“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.”***

Jesus says, ***“Only hold fast what you have until I come.”*** This exhortation urges the Christians in Thyatira to hold on to what they have been taught. This coming (as with each of the seven churches) may refer, not to the Second Coming, but the coming of Jesus in judgment on the churches. If he is referring to the Second Coming the meaning of the instruction would not change.

It’s Time to Hear

Jesus makes two promises to the Christians in Thyatira. First, he says, ***“The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken into pieces even as I myself have received authority from my Father.”***

Jesus partially quotes from Psalm 2:8-9 and will do so again in Revelation 3:21 and 20:4. The one who conquers and is obedient to the end (of his life or when Jesus returns) will reign with Christ and have power over the nations. Jesus has been given all authority (Matt. 28:18) in some way Christians will share in this rule of Christ.



The world will face judgment. Those who reject God’s message of truth face punishment; described here as earthen pots which are broken into pieces.

Revelation 19:15 speaks of Jesus and says, ***“From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.”*** Judgment on the nations comes as a response to their rejection of the Word of God.

Those who conquer will share in the power of Christ who even now sits at the right hand of the throne of God in heaven. "Believers sit at the side of Jesus as he subdues all enemies. Thus they share in Christ's glory and power."⁵

The word rule literally means "to play the part of a shepherd."⁶ This is not the tyrannical rule of a dictator, but the leading of a loving shepherd. The rod of iron is the shepherds rod which had an iron tip to strike animals that would attack the sheep while providing protection for those who belong to him.

Jesus is the morning star (Revelation 22:16). Those who are faithful to the end share in the radiant beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Promise #5 to the Churches

"To the one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations."

Promise #6 to the Churches

"To the one who conquers ... I will give him the Morning Star."

Questions for the Upcoming Week

1. In what ways do modern day Jezebels attempt to seduce God's people?
2. Am I tempted in any way to fall into immorality or any other type of idolatry? Are there any areas in which I need to repent?
3. Do you ever feel that the commandments of Christ are burdensome? Why or why not?
4. What steps are you taking to "hold fast?" What more might you do?

⁵ Smith, James E. Behold! The Revelation of Jesus. Lulu, 2008, 63.

⁶ Ibid. p. 63.