

REVELATION

Seeing, Knowing and Serving Jesus Christ
Today at the Edge of History

Chapter 2:18-29 (2:1-3:22)

Text: Revelation 2:18-29 - To the Churches: Thyatira

To the Church in Thyatira

¹⁸ "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. ¹⁹ I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

²⁰ Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. ²² So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely,

unless they repent of her ways. ²³ I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. ²⁴ Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-

called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): ²⁵ Only hold on to what you have until I come.

²⁶ To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—

²⁷ 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery'—

just as I have received authority from my Father. ²⁸ I will also give him the morning star. ²⁹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.



The City of Thyatira

Less archaeological evidence is available for this city, located forty-five miles southeast of Pergamum on the road to Sardis, than the other six, but there are some interesting clues that have been uncovered regarding Thyatira. It was apparently an important center for the worship of the god Apollo, also known as helios, the god of the sun. In Thyatira Apollo was seen as the "guardian of the city" and the Emperor of Rome was honored as "Apollo in human form." In this city Apollo and Caesar were each hailed as the "son of Zeus" ("son of the high god"). The Emperor Domitian (81-96 A.D.) named his son "son of

god" and minted coins showing him holding seven stars in his hands.

Thyatira was also apparently a very important and prosperous commercial center in its day and so housed an unusually large number of trade guilds. Ancient inscriptions indicate the presence of guilds for woolworkers, linen workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leatherworkers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave dealers, and bronze smiths. It is worth noting that the woman named Lydia, the Apostle Paul's first convert in Philippi, was from Thyatira and had come to Philippi to sell her city's famous purple cloth (see Acts 16:14).

Revelation's prophetic critique is of the churches as much as of the world. It recognizes that there is a false religion not only in the blatant idolatries of power and prosperity, but also in the constant danger that true religion falsify itself in compromise with such idolatries and betrayal of the truth of God.

- Richard Bauckham,
Theology of Revelation,
p. 162

Read & Reflect - 2:18-29

First Reading/First Impression: Check the box that best describes this church for you.

- Thyatira Church is a happening place!
 - Thyatira? Man, that church is headed for trouble!
 - Wow! The opportunities for Christians in Thyatira are awesome!
- It's a crucial moment for Thyatira Church! What they decide now will have powerful and lasting effects.
- Other _____

Second Reading/Main Thought: What piece of advice would you give to the woman identified as "that woman Jezebel" and her group in Thyatira.

"We should not minimize the importance of problems confronting first-century Christians, for it was economic suicide to reject the minimum requirements for guild membership... Every generation of Christians must face the question; how far should I accept and adopt contemporary standards and practices?"

- Bruce Metzger, Breaking the Code, p.37

Search

Verses 2:18-29 - Fill in the chart below from the contents of the Thyatiran Letter.

Church	How Jesus Presents Himself	What Jesus Knows	What Jesus Has Against Them	What Jesus Calls Them To Do	Warnings	Blessings
<i>Thyatira</i>						

Apply - 2:18-29

1. Why do you think Jesus is so uncompromising about loyalty to him with the Thyatirans? Are things different today?

2. What kinds of compromises might a "jezebel" type false prophet be calling followers of Jesus to accept today?

3. How do we best fight such negative influences on our faith today?

"The biblical image of hope is the morning star. The morning star often appears between two and three at night, when the darkness is complete and the faintest sign of morning is not yet visible. So small that it threatens to vanish, the star seems unable to vanquish the overpowering darkness. Yet when you see the morning star, you know that the night has been defeated. For the morning star pulls the morning in behind it just as certainly as Jesus pulls the Kingdom in behind Him."

- Bob Goudzwaard,
Idols of Our Time, p.98

Notes on Revelation 2:18-29

Introduction: There are those who see this letter as central to the group in more than simple literary or geographical terms. The chiasmic structure suggested for the seven letters (see back page) points to the innermost as one to pay special attention to. The problems of the Thyatirans may be the central issue for all the churches, indeed for every church since that time. And what is that central issue? It seems to have something to do with what is called "Syncretism" which is the silly idea that we can worship and serve the One True Living Creator God *and* any other gods that look good to us at the same time. It has been a problem for God's people since the beginning. It was a problem, apparently, in 1st-century Thyatira. It is a problem, clearly, still today.

v.18 - **"Son of God"**... This is the only place in the book where this title for Jesus is used. It may be in bold response to Emperor Domitian's designation of his own son (see p.1)...

v.19 - **"I know... you are now doing more than you did at first."** This is one of the most glowing commendations in all the letters. Much different than Ephesus that was told it was going backwards, this church is moving forward, making progress... but...

v.20 - **"Jezebel"**... Probably not the real name of the prophetess who was opposing John and leading the church astray... The name refers to the phoenician wife of King Ahab in the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the mid-9th century B.C. (see I Kings 16:31, II Kings 9:22-37), and denotes a prominent woman who undermines faith in God by advocating tolerance of pagan practices and immorality... The church's big problem is that they are tolerating her!

v.21 - **"immorality"**... Probably a way of referring to errors of faith rather than physical transgressions...

v.23 - **"I will repay each of you according to your deeds"**... This kind of teaching is found elsewhere in the words of Jesus. He respects our free will. If we choose to serve other gods, we will reap what we sow. If we choose to serve Him, we will reap what He has sown! "This is not justification by deeds. It's just that our deeds emerge from our hearts revealing our true allegiance. We can recite the creeds and sing the hymns on Sunday, but the real proof that we believe in Jesus Christ is in the way we live Monday through Saturday... Our checkbooks are the clearest revelation of the God we serve." (Johnson, *Discipleship*, p.94)

v.26 - **"and does my will to the end"**... This phrase is added on to the usual "To him who overcomes." It indicates that perseverance in the life of faith is important... "my will" (which they are to continue in) contrasts with "her ways" (v.22)--from which Jesus commands them to repent)...

v.27-28 - **"authority over the nations... the morning star"**... These are the rewards promised to those who persevere with Christ and so overcome... to share in His place of glorious ruling is good, but the other is better! The "morning star" refers to Jesus Himself (see Rev. 22:16 & quote above). Those who keep going get Him!



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Trade Guilds and the Spirit of Jezebel

The woman identified as the significantly misleading false prophetess troubling the Christians in Thyatira is called "Jezebel." Thus, she is identified with the woman we meet in I and II Kings in the Old Testament (see notes on p.3). She was a strong-willed foreigner who married King Ahab of Israel and saw to it that he built altars to Baal the fertility god and his love-goddess consort Asherah (the Assyrian/Canaanite equivalent of the Greeks' Aphrodite and the Romans' Venus). The

essential argument Jezebel made, at least in public, was that worship of Baal and of Yahweh could co-exist and that both must be accepted in her religiously progressive kingdom. To promote her views she employed some 850 pagan prophets and sent them out.

The truth was, though, that Jezebel was a devoted worshipper of Baal and had no interest in submitting to Israel's Lord. Prophets of Yahweh who spoke against her and her ways, she had executed. In her own heart and by her own practices she understood and promoted what the prophets like Elijah also knew: You can't have it both ways. *"How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."* (I Kings 18:21)

So there in Thyatira was another woman advocating compromise, saying "Go ahead and do the same as everyone else. It doesn't have to affect your faith in Jesus. Join the trade guilds. You have to if you want to survive around here, don't you? And if once in a while you have to participate in drunkenness or an occasional act of indecency, Jesus will understand and look the other way..."

The spirit of Jezebel was alive and well. Strong as ever. Wrong as ever... And here in our city? Is the spirit not with us in power today?... "We'd like you to offer a prayer for us, but please don't use the name of Jesus. It offends some people... Yes, the company party is famous for its abundance of alcohol and subsequent immorality, but if you want to get ahead around here you better be there... Maybe gambling is immoral or at least harmful to people, but God knows a job is a job. And besides that it helps our schools, and also the casinos give us good room rates for our Presbytery meetings!..."

"The prophets of Baal," says Darrell Johnson (Discipleship, p. 91), "get their clues about right and wrong from nature *as it is* instead of from what it *ought to be*--from nature as it was before sin and will be after sin is taken away. Basing your life on *the way things are* is the spirit of Baal worship. It is the fallacy of thinking that because I have certain desires and drives they must be right--simply because they are."

Jesus comes to the Thyatiran believers, and through them to us, and says: *"No. Absolutely not. There are things that ought not to be, and one day I will see to it that they are no more. Don't be misled by the spirit of Jezebel. Reject compromise where I am concerned. Look! Look at Me! There is no other God to save you. Hold on to what you have in Me. There is no other Bright Morning Star for this dark world."*

A Suggested Chiastic Structure for the 7 Letters of Revelation 2 & 3:

(Note similar words and ideas)

1. Ephesus (2:1-7)

"hear/overcome"
concern for love
promise is to eat from the tree of life
warning is sever (take away your lamp)

2. Smyrna (2:8-11)

"hear/overcome"
"I have this against you" section is missing
little in wealth, poor and afflicted
"synagogue of Satan, Jews who are not Jews"
encouragement for coming "suffering"

3. Pergamum (2:12-17)

"hear/overcome"
"you have people there who..."
"white stone... new name"
"I will soon come to you"

4. Thyatira (2:18-29)

"overcome/hear"
problem: lack of loyalty to
Jesus Christ, toleration:
- of "Jezebel"
- of compromised faith
- of "both/and" beliefs

5. Sardis (3:1-6)

"overcome/hear"
"you have a few people" who...
"dressed in white... his name"
"I will come like a thief"

6. Philadelphia (3:7-13)

"overcome/hear"
"I have this against you" section is missing
little in strength
"synagogue of Satan, Jews who are not Jews"
protection in coming time of testing

7. Laodicea (3:14-22)

"overcome/hear"
concern is love
promise is to eat with Jesus
severe warning of expulsion (spit you out)