

Revelation Chapter 2:18-29 the Message to Thyatira

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Thyatira was the fourth church in the mail route... of Revelation 2-3



Overview on the message to the churches from ESV Study Bible:

Rev. 2:1–3:22 Revelation 2–3 consists of seven “letters” or royal edicts. Each follows a pattern:

- (1) The royal author describes himself in terms from ch. 1.*
- (2) “I know” introduces the church’s condition, both positive (except for Sardis and Laodicea) and negative (except for Smyrna and Philadelphia).*
- (3) Comfort and commands come from the diagnosis.*
- (4) The churches are commanded to hear and obey all of the letters.*
- (5) A blessing is promised to “the one who conquers.”*

Thyatira is praised for its growing love but is criticized for its lack of discernment and for allowing false teaching. The city was a commercial center. Its main industries were metals and fabric (Acts 16:14).

Acts 16:14 ESV - One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

From Hastings Bible Dictionary article on Thyatira:

THYATIRA.—There is a long valley extending northward and southward and connecting the valleys of the Hermus and Caicus. Down this valley a stream flows southwards, and on the left bank of this stream was Thyatira. An important road also ran along this valley, the direct route between Constantinople and Smyrna, and the railway takes this route now. Thyatira was also in

the 1st cent. A.D. a station on the Imperial Post Road (overland route) from Brundisium and Dyrrhachium by Thessalonica, Neapolis (for Philippi), Troas, Pergamum, Philadelphia ... to Tarsus, Syrian Antioch, Cæsarea of Palestine, and Alexandria. In its connexion with Pergamum this road had always a great importance. Thyatira was built (in the middle of the valley, with a slight rising ground for an acropolis) by Seleucus, the founder of the Seleucid dynasty, whose vast kingdom extended from W. Asia Minor to the Himalayas.

The city was founded between B.C. 300 and 282 as a defence against Lysimachus, whose kingdom bordered that of Seleucus on the N. and W., and the colonists were Macedonian soldiers. In 282, Philetæus revolted from Lysimachus and founded the kingdom of Pergamum. After the death of Lysimachus, Thyatira was a useful garrison to hold the road, in the interests first of the Seleucids and afterwards of the Pergamenians. The latter were safe from the former if they were in possession of Thyatira. The relation between Pergamum and Thyatira was thus of the closest. The city, though weak in position, was a garrison city, and had to be carefully fortified, and everything was done to foster the military spirit.

The character of the city's religion is illustrated by the hero Tyrimnos, who is figured on its coins. He is on horseback and has a battle-axe on his shoulder. This hero is closely related to the protecting god of the city, whose temple was in front of the city. He was considered the divine ancestor of the city and its leading families, and was identified with the sun-god. He also had the title Pythian Apollo, thus illustrating the strange mixture of Anatolian and Greek ideas and names which is so common a feature in the ancient religions of Asia Minor. In conformity with this, he was represented as wearing a cloak fastened by a brooch, carrying a battle-axe, and with a laurel branch in his right hand, symbolizing his purifying power.

(It is certain that the place was inhabited before the time of Seleucus, but merely as a village with a temple.) The city had Pythian games on the model of those in Greece proper, and in the 3rd cent. A.D. the Emperor Elagabalus was associated with the god in the worship connected with them, showing the closer relation which had been effected between the popular and the Imperial religion. It is probable that Seleucus i. had settled Jews in Thyatira, as he certainly did in some of the cities of Asia. Lydia of Thyatira (Act_16:14) had come within the circle of the synagogue, possibly in her native place.

Little is known of the history of the city. It surrendered to the Romans in B.C. 190. It was occupied by Aristonicus during his revolt in B.C. 133–2. It must have suffered severely and repeatedly during the fighting between Arabs and Christians, and Turks and Christians, in the Middle Ages. Its situation demands that it be captured and re-fortified by every ruling power. In Roman times it had been a great trading city, dating its greatest period of prosperity from about the time when the Seven Letters were written.

*There is evidence of more trade-guilds there than in any other Asian city: wool-workers, linen-workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather-workers, tanners, bronze-smiths, etc. Lydia probably belonged to one of those guilds. **The purple in which Lydia dealt must have been a product of the region of Thyatira, and the well-known Turkey-red must therefore be meant. It is obtained from madder-root, which grows abundantly in that region.** The name 'purple' had a much wider meaning among the ancients than among us. The bronze work of Thyatira was also remarkably fine (cf. Rev_2:18).*

The letter addressed to the Church at Thyatira (Rev_2:18-29) is the most obscure and difficult of all the seven, as we know so little of local conditions. It is remarkable that the city, which was the least of all the seven (with perhaps the exception of Philadelphia), should be promised strength and power. The exact nature of the Nicolaitans with their prophetess cannot be precisely determined. The principles they represented were regarded by the author as subversive of true Christianity.

From Barclay's Daily Study Bible

What, then, was the problem in Thyatira? We know less about Thyatira than about any other of the seven cities and are, therefore, seriously handicapped in trying to reconstruct the situation. The one thing we do know is that it was a great commercial centre, specially of the dyeing industry and of the trade in woollen goods. It was from Thyatira that Lydia, the seller of purple, came (Act_16:14). From inscriptions discovered we learn that it had an extraordinary number of trade guilds. These were associations for mutual profit and pleasure of people employed in certain trades. There were guilds of workers in wool, leather, linen and bronze, makers of outer garments, dyers, potters, bakers and slave-dealers.

Here, we think, was the problem of the Church in Thyatira. To refuse to join one of these guilds would be much the same as to refuse to join a trade union today. It would mean to give up all prospect of commercial existence. Why should a Christian not join one of these guilds? They held common meals. These would very often be held in a temple and even if not, they would begin and end with a formal sacrifice to the gods, and the meat eaten would be meat which had already been offered to idols. Further, it often happened that these communal meals were occasions of drunken revelry and slack morality. Was it possible for a Christian to be part of such occasions?

Here was the problem at Thyatira; the threat came from inside the Church. There was a strong movement, led by the woman addressed as Jezebel, which pled for compromise with the world's standards in the interests of business and commercial prosperity, maintaining, no doubt, that the Holy Spirit could preserve them from any harm. The answer of the Risen Christ is unequivocal. With such things the Christian must have nothing to do.

Revelation 2:18 NKJV - "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:

From David Guzik's Enduring Word Commentary:

These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:

a. These things says the Son of God: Jesus first describes Himself with a title that emphasizes His deity. In Jewish thought, to be the son of a thing meant you had the nature of that thing. The sons of the sorceress (Isa_57:3) had the nature of the sorceress. The sons of thunder (Mar_3:17) had a nature like thunder. So the Son of God has the divine nature, the nature of God.

b. Who has eyes like a flame of fire: Jesus chooses this description of Himself from the presentation in Rev_1:14 to emphasize the idea that His eyes look with a penetrating judgment.

c. His feet like fine brass: Jesus chose this description of Himself from Rev_1:15 to emphasize His purity, because brass is pure, and highly refined in the fire. It also emphasizes His steadfastness, because brass was the strongest known metal in the ancient world, and feet like fine brass would be strong and unmovable.

From Barclay's Daily Study Bible:

The letter opens with a description of the Risen Christ which has a threat in it. His eyes are like a flame of fire and his feet like burnished bronze. The description is taken from that of the angelic messenger in Dan_10:6 : "His face was like the appearance of lightning, and his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze." The flaming eyes must stand for two things, blazing anger against sin and the awful penetration of that gaze which strips the disguises away and sees into a man's inmost heart. The brazen feet must stand for the immovable power of the Risen Christ. A message which begins like that will certainly be no soothing tranquilizer.

Revelation 2:19 NKJV - "**I know your works**, love, service, faith, and your patience; and [as] for your works, the last [are] more than the first.

They were doing some things right:

- **Works** = G2041 = ἔργον **érgon**, er'-gon; from a primary (but obsolete) ἔργω érgō (to work); toil (as an effort or occupation); by implication, an act:—deed, doing, labour, work.
 - Matthew 5:16 KJV - Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works,[G2041] and glorify your Father which is in heaven.
- **Love** = G26 = ἀγάπη **agápē**, ag-ah'-pay; from G25; love, i.e. affection or benevolence; specially (plural) a love-feast:—(feast of) charity(-ably), dear, love.
- **Service** = G1248 = διακονία **diakonía**, dee-ak-on-ee'-ah; from G1249; attendance (as a servant, etc.); figuratively (eleemosynary) aid, (official) service (especially of the Christian teacher, or technically of the diaconate):—(ad-)minister(-ing, -tration, -try), office, relief, service(-ing).
- **Faith** = G4102 = πίστις **pístis**, pis'-tis; from G3982; persuasion, i.e. credence; moral conviction (of religious truth, or the truthfulness of God or a religious teacher), especially reliance upon Christ for salvation; abstractly, constancy in such profession; by extension, the system of religious (Gospel) truth itself:—assurance, belief, believe, faith, fidelity.
- **Patience** = G5281 = ὑπομονή **hupōmōnē**, hoop-om-on-ay'; from G5278; cheerful (or hopeful) endurance, constancy:—enduring, patience, patient continuance (waiting).

More at the end than at the beginning, contrary to Ephesus that let their love wane.

Revelation 2:20 NKJV - "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, **because you allow** that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

First we see God & Christ were upset that this was allowed. The indication is that it needed to be dealt with and stopped.

Second, she had appropriated the title of prophetess. Was she doing this to mirror the female oracle that Thyatira had that people came to seek advice from?

Third, she was teaching and seducing... convincing the church that it was okay to be sexually immoral and commit idolatry.

The comparison to Jezebel would indicate she was similar to the Jezebel can also be explored

From Barclay:

*All the probability is that **Jezebel was teaching that a Christian ought to accommodate himself to the world**; in other words she was urging on the Church a spiritual infidelity which was bound to issue in physical fornication. It is in the mercy of God that the teaching of Jezebel and her like did not become the view of the Church. If that had happened, the Church would have become a kind of pleasant paganism. On this Paul said: "**Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind**" (Rom_12:2). And Jesus said the last word on the matter: "**No one can serve two masters.... You cannot serve God and mammon**" (Mat_6:24). The old choice is still the new choice: "Choose you this day whom you will serve" (Deu_30:19; Jos_24:15).*

Revelation 2:21 NKJV - "And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.

God gives time for repentance!

She did not want to change. She was insistent her way was right. But it was not! Jesus does NOT want to see compromise enter into His Church

Revelation 2:22 NKJV - "Indeed I will **cast her into a sickbed**, and those who commit adultery with her **into great tribulation**, unless they repent of their deeds.

Revelation 2:23 NKJV - "I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

Jeremiah 11:20 NLT - O LORD of Heaven's Armies, you make righteous judgments, and **you examine the deepest thoughts and secrets**. Let me see your vengeance against them, for I have committed my cause to you.

There are consequences for sin. When sin is pointed out God expects repentance. If not repentance and acceptance of God's way, the long term alternative is the second death.

Matthew 18:15 KJV - Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

Matthew 18:16 KJV - But if he will not hear [thee, then] take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

Matthew 18:17 KJV - And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell [it] unto the church: **but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican**.

Romans 6:23 KJV - For the wages of sin [is] death; but the gift of God [is] eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

David repented for his sin with Bathsheba.

2 Corinthians 6:14 NLT - Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness?

2 Corinthians 6:15 NLT - What harmony can there be between Christ and the devil? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever?

2 Corinthians 6:16 NLT - And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: "I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

2 Corinthians 6:17 NLT - Therefore, **come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them, says the LORD. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you.**

2 Corinthians 6:18 NLT - And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."

This teaching was well known by the churches and by Jezebel! She was defiant.

Revelation 2:24 NKJV - "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do **not** have this doctrine, who have **not** known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden.

Revelation 2:25 NKJV - "**But hold fast what you have till I come.**

Revelation 2:26 NKJV - "And he who overcomes, and **keeps My works until the end**, to him I will give power over the nations--

Revelation 2:27 NKJV - 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'--as I also have received from My Father;

Revelation 2:28 NKJV - "and I will give him the morning star.

Revelation 2:29 NKJV - "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

Observations for us today:

1. V19 God knows our works - both good and bad.
2. V20 God does not want ANY compromise with HIS way. He wants us fully committed to Him!
3. V21 God gives time for repentance, but there is a limit. He expects and desires repentance.
4. V22-23 There are consequences for sin - serious consequences. Tribulation & death.
5. V25-26 Hold fast to the truth! Stay faithful until the end.

Additional Resources:

UCG Beyond Today Program: Thyatira: Seek First the Kingdom of God

<https://www.ucg.org/watch/beyond-today/beyond-today-television-program/thyatira-seek-first-kingdom-god>

UCG Bible Study Series on the Churches of Revelation: Thyatira - The Corrupt Church

<https://www.ucg.org/course/churches-revelation/churches-revelation-thyatira-corrupt-church>

UCG United News Article: Message to Pergamos and Thyatira- Don't Compromise

<https://www.ucg.org/members/united-news/united-news-may-2002/message-pergamos-and-thyatira-dont-compromise>

From Barclay's Daily Study Bible:

Thyatira, The Source Of The Error (Rev_2:18-29 Continued)

(2) The source of the trouble in Thyatira centred round a woman whom the letter calls Jezebel. A variety of answers have been given to the question of her identity.

(i) We begin with an answer which is very interesting, although it is doubtful if it is possible. The King James Version calls her: "that woman Jezebel." Moffatt translates "that Jezebel of a woman." The Greek is: ten (G3588) gunaika (G1135) lezabel (G2403). A few manuscripts have after gunaika (G1135) the word sou (G4675), which means "your." The noun gune (G1135)--the nominative of the word of which gunaika (G1135) is the accusative form--not only means "woman" but also "wife"; and if with these manuscripts we read ten (G3588) gunaika G1135) sou (G4675) lezabel (G2403), the phrase will mean: "your wife Jezebel."

Early on we saw that the angel of the Church may be the bishop of the Church. If, then, the letter is addressed to the bishop of the Church and there is a reference to your wife Jezebel, it means that the cause of all the trouble is the bishop's wife! That would be an interesting sidelight on the early Christian congregations and it would not be the last time that the wives of church officials were the sources of trouble in a congregation. But this interpretation must be rejected because the evidence for inserting sou (G4675) is not good enough.

(ii) One of the few claims to distinction which Thyatira possessed was an oracle called the Sambathe, a woman fortune-teller. The Greeks made great use of oracles. The oracle at Delphi was world famous and the expression a Delphic utterance has become proverbial. It may be that this oracle was a Jewess, for the Jews in the ancient world went in largely for this business of fortune telling. There are those who see in the Sambathe the evil influence which was threatening the Church at Thyatira; but this, too, must be rejected, for it is quite clear that Jezebel was a member of the Church and her influence was being exerted from within.

(iii) Some, on no grounds whatever, have identified Jezebel with Lydia, the seller of purple from Thyatira, whom Paul met and converted at Philippi. It is suggested that she came back to Thyatira and became an evil influence in the Church because of her wealth and her business interests. That theory is merely a slander on Lydia.

(iv) The only reasonable conclusion is that we have no idea who Jezebel was, although we can with certainty trace the kind of person that she was.

That she claimed to be a prophetess is not so very surprising. It is true that Paul would have nothing to do with women speaking in the Church (1Co_14:34). But it is also true that in both the Old and the New Testaments there are prophetesses. In the Old Testament there are Miriam (Exo_15:20), Deborah (Jdg_4:4) and Huldah (2Ki_22:14); and in the New Testament there are Anna (Luk_2:36), and the four virgin daughters of Philip (Act_21:9).

This woman is called Jezebel and, therefore, her character must be discovered in the original Jezebel than whom few women have acquired such a reputation for wickedness. She was the

daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon, and the wife of Ahab (1Ki_16:31). When she came from Sidon, she brought her own gods and caused Ahab and his people to worship Baal. It was not that she would have wished to banish the worship of Jehovah, if the prophets of Jehovah would have accepted Baal in addition to Jehovah. She slew the prophets of the Lord and at her own table supported four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal (1Ki_18:13; 1Ki_18:19). She was Ahab's evil genius; in particular, she was responsible for the murder of Naboth in order that Ahab might enter into the possession of the ground where his vineyard stood (1Ki_21:1-29). And she left behind her a name for "harlotries and sorceries" (2Ki_9:22).

All this must mean that Jezebel of Thyatira was an evil influence on the life and worship of the Christian Church. It must be clearly understood that she had no wish to destroy the Church; but she wished to bring into it new ways which were, in fact, destructive of the faith.

(1) Thyatira, The Teaching Of Jezebel (Rev_2:18-29 Continued)

(3) This Jezebel of a woman is accused of teaching two things--eating meat offered to idols and committing fornication.

(a) One of the great problems of the Christian Church was that of meat offered to idols and it was one which met the Christian every day. When a man made a sacrifice in a Greek temple, very little of the meat was burned on the altar. Sometimes all that was actually burned was a few hairs cut from the forehead of the animal. The priests received a share of the meat of the animal as their perquisite; and the worshipper received the rest. With it he did one of two things. He might hold a feast of his friends within the temple precincts. A common form of invitation to a festal meal ran: "I invite you to dine with me at the table of our Lord Serapis." Or he might take the meat home and hold a feast in his own house. Here was the Christian problem. Could a Christian, in a temple or anywhere else, eat meat which had been consecrated to idols? Paul discusses this very problem in 1Co_8:1-13; 1Co_9:1-27; 1Co_10:1-33.

The problem was complicated by the fact that even the meat in butchers' shops might well have been offered to idols previously. The priests in the temples could not possibly consume all the meat which fell to them and therefore, sold much of their share to the butchers' shops. Such meat was the best meat. What was a Christian going to do about that?

The Church had no doubt as to where a Christian's duty lay. Abstention from things offered to idols was one of the conditions on which the Gentiles received the right of entry into the Christian Church (Act_15:29).

The prohibition of meat offered to idols had one far-reaching consequence. It came near to cutting off a Christian from all social fellowship with non-Christians; there were few social occasions, and almost no banquets, which he could share with the heathen world.

This had another consequence which, as we have already said, we think was at the back of the situation in Thyatira. It meant that the Christian could not join any trade guild for all the guilds had a common meal as a central part of their practice which might well be held in a heathen temple and would largely consist of meat offered to idols. His abstention from guild membership was equivalent to commercial suicide.

Here is where Jezebel came in. She urged upon the Christians that there was no need to cut themselves off from society or abstain from the guilds. When she did so, she was not

proceeding on grounds of principle but was simply trying to protect her business interests. Jezebel is to be counted amongst those to whom the claims of commercial success speak more loudly than the claims of Christ.

(2) Thyatira, The Teaching Of Jezebel (Rev_2:18-29 Continued)

(b) The other part of Jezebel's teaching is not so clear. She is said to teach the people to commit fornication (Rev_2:20); she is urged to repent from her fornication (Rev_2:21); and her paramours and her children are threatened along with her (Rev_2:22-23). Is this reference to be taken literally or in the metaphorical sense which is so common in Scripture to sexual immorality or to spiritual infidelity?

(i) There is no doubt that in Scripture infidelity to God is expressed in terms of fornication and adultery. Israel is the Bride of God (Isa_54:5; Jer_3:20); and in the New Testament the Church is the Bride of Christ (2Co_11:1-2; Eph_5:24-28). Again and again in the Old Testament the Israelites are, therefore, said to "play the harlot after strange gods" (Exo_34:15-16; Deu_31:16; Hos_9:1). In the New Testament the age which is unfaithful to Jesus Christ is an "evil and adulterous generation" (Mat_12:39; Mat_16:4; Mar_8:38). Is the fornication which Jezebel's teaching inculcated a spiritual infidelity to Jesus Christ? If that is the meaning, her paramours (Rev_2:22) will be those who are flirting with this kind of teaching and her children (Rev_2:23) those who have accepted it.

It may well be that the teaching of Jezebel was that the Christians did not need to be so exclusive in their worship of Jesus Christ and, above all, that there was no need for them to refuse to say, "Caesar is Lord," and to burn their pinch of incense. If the Christian Church as a whole had accepted that form of teaching, the inevitable consequence would have been that Christianity would have become nothing more than still another of those religions of which the Roman Empire was so full. The claim of Christianity is not that Jesus Christ is one of the Saviours nor even the chief of Saviours; but that he is the only Saviour.

(ii) One thing in the letter militates against that view. We read that the followers of Jezebel claimed to know the depths of Satan (Rev_2:24). Some scholars think that this is the Risen Christ's contemptuous description of the false teaching. The real Christian knows what Paul called the deep things of God (1Co_2:10); what Jezebel and her company know is the deep things of Satan. But that will not do, for the letter unmistakably speaks of "the deep things of Satan, as they call them." This is quite certainly a reference to a kind of belief that was not uncommon among the heretics. Some of them held that it was a plain duty to experience every kind of sin. The real achievement was to allow the body to wallow in sin and to keep the soul unaffected. Those who knew the deep things of Satan were those who had deliberately plumbed evil to its depths. Jezebel may well have been teaching that it was a duty to sin.

It seems to us that in this case all the threads tie up and there is no necessity to make a choice between views. All the probability is that Jezebel was teaching that a Christian ought to accommodate himself to the world; in other words she was urging on the Church a spiritual infidelity which was bound to issue in physical fornication. It is in the mercy of God that the teaching of Jezebel and her like did not become the view of the Church. If that had happened, the Church would have become a kind of pleasant paganism. On this Paul said: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom_12:2). And Jesus said the last word on the matter: "No one can serve two masters.... You cannot serve God

and mammon" (Mat_6:24). The old choice is still the new choice: "Choose you this day whom you will serve" (Deu_30:19; Jos_24:15).