

Daily Bible Study

“Seven Letters ~ Thyatira”

Revelation 2:18-29

March 9 – March 15, 2014

MONDAY – As we progress in our study of the letters to the seven churches of Revelation we have seen the loveless church of Ephesus, the persecuted church in Smyrna, the compromising church in Pergamos, and now the corrupt church in Thyatira. Interestingly, the longest of the seven letters is written to what we be understood as the least important of the seven cities. But like all the instruction we have seen so far to these churches, the problem which faced Thyatira and the danger that threatened are the same universally of all Christians not only in Asia but everywhere. The sins in this church at Thyatira, like those at Pergamum, are immorality and compromise with idol worship. We can take them literally but they also picture the spiritual adultery of which God’s people through the ages have often been and still are guilty. The biblical metaphor is that the true God is Israel’s husband and the false gods are her lovers (**Jeremiah 3, Ezekiel 16, Hosea 2**). Jezebel, like Balaam, was an outsider who seduced God’s bride into this kind of unfaithfulness (**1 Kings 16:31, 2 Kings 9:22**). Satan works differently in different situations but all for the same outcome and effect. As we have already seen, he sometimes uses the pressures of the world to squeeze believers into the world’s mold (**Romans 12:2**). He attempts to discourage and attack believers with persecution but he knows that sometimes the most damage can be done to the church not by pressure from without but by poison from within. So in Thyatira a particular woman with evil character (like Jezebel) calls herself a prophetess (like Balaam), and begins to teach and seduce the servants of God to sin. We will see shortly that Thyatira was a huge commercial center with trades and work guilds and the threat to the church here is from the inside where it seems the woman referred to as Jezebel led a movement teaching people to compromise with the world’s standards in the interests of business and commercial prosperity. As Barclay comments, she was “maintaining, no doubt, that the Holy Spirit could preserve them from any harm”. History tells us that these work guilds would have meetings and meals that became occasions of drunken revelry and immorality. The risen Lord Jesus Christ’s answer to this issue is that Christians must have nothing to do with sinful behavior such as this and as usual, God has the situation under control and He will deal with Jezebel and her corrupt compromisers. Read: **Revelation 2:18-29**: ¹⁸ *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:’* ¹⁹ *“I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.”* ²⁰ *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. ²¹ *And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.* ²² *Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.* ²³ *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.* ²⁴ *“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.”* ²⁵ *But hold fast what you have till I come.* ²⁶ *And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—²⁷‘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; ²⁸and I will give him the morning star.* ²⁹ *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”* ’

Suggestion for Prayer: God, teach me this week that You called me to be faithful and hold fast to the true teaching of Sacred Scripture. Protect me from falling prey to the Jezebels here today who won’t submit to Your Word and are seducing and teaching false doctrines.

TUESDAY – Revelation 2:18: ¹⁸ *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:’* Thyatira was located in a long valley through which a railway runs today and its geographical position gave it importance. It was on the road which connected Pergamum with Sardis and then went on to Philadelphia and Laodicea also linking up with both Smyrna and Byzantium. It was the road that the mail travelled and the city was a commercial one crowded with commerce. We know that it was involved in the dyeing industry and the trade of woolen goods and it was from Thyatira that Lydia “the seller of purple” that we find in **Acts 16:14** came. Thyatira was the gateway to Pergamum, which was the capital of the province and Thyatira was armed with a company of Macedonian troops who were there as an outpost to defend Pergamum. The difficulty was that Thyatira was not capable of any prolonged defense because it was in the open valley and it had no high places for fortification. All that Thyatira could ever hope to do was to fight and delay the enemy until Pergamum could prepare. Religiously, Thyatira had no special significance. It was not a center either of Caesar or Greek worship. Its “local” hero god was called Tyrimnus, and he appears on its coins on horseback armed with battle-axe and club. A notable thing about Thyatira from a religious point of view is that a fortune-telling shrine was located there, presided over by a female oracle called the Sambathē. Jesus appears here speaking as the *Son of God* which may mean that Jesus addresses those in Thyatira who rejected his divinity and he also informs this pagan society of the day that regarded both Caesar and Apollo as “sons of gods” that there is only One Son of God and He is the Creator and Savior whom God has appointed heir of all things and He Himself has purged the sins of His people. Jesus

is the one and only Son of God, who is above all other gods. He appears with *eyes like a flame of fire, and feet like fine brass*. With eyes of flaming fire nothing escapes him, as He Himself says; He searches the hearts and minds (**verse 23**). Into Jesus' holy presence nothing sinful can enter or be hidden and He dispels darkness and burns away impurities. All of this description including His feet of brass is an allusion to **Daniel 10:6** showing Jesus' heavenly origin. It is also possible that it was used because Thyatira was also famous for its bronze wares. Brass is durable, stable, and firm and it attracts attention when polished and brilliant and people will all one day take notice of Jesus' presence.

Suggestion for Prayer: Thank You Jesus for seeing all things and that nothing escapes You. Thanks for dying for my sins and bearing my judgment on Yourself. Help me listen to You.

WEDNESDAY – Revelation 2:19-20: ¹⁹ “I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.” ²⁰ “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.” As we have heard before, Jesus says here again that he knows the works of the church of Thyatira. Obedient to the first and second commandment, their works include love which they have shown to God and to their neighbors. Remember that that Jesus summarized the Law in these two commandments: *to love the Lord God with heart, soul, and mind; and to love the neighbor as oneself* (**Matthew 22:37–40**). Paul emphasizes the second of these saying they sum up the others and James calls it the “royal law” (**James 2:8**). The Christians in Thyatira visibly demonstrated love to their neighbors and faith and trust in God. Their service to others and their *patience* were exemplary. And as the text continues we read the incredible comment and compliment that any church would be overjoyed to hear from Jesus; *and as for your works, the last are more than the first*. This means that their works of love, faith, service, and patience were constantly increasing. In a stark contrast with respect to love, Thyatira received words of commendation, while Ephesus received words of condemnation. Remember Jesus said to the Christians in Ephesus: “*But I have this against you, that you have left your first love*” (**2:4**). After such wonderful comments we now suddenly see the praise move to rebuke. Even though these believers had done so much to follow and obey Jesus they had tolerated a terrible and sinful influence in the church. This influence would spread and destroy the spiritual health of this congregation if left alone. The church at Thyatira tolerated false and deceptive teaching within the congregation and this was being led by a woman the text calls *Jezebel*. The name Jezebel refers to the wife of King Ahab. Jezebel urged Ahab to worship the pagan god Baal and the goddess Asherah, and to construct a temple and a sacred pole (**1 Kings 16:31–33, 21:25, 2 Kings 9:30–37**). The woman in Thyatira is referred to by the name of the wife of King Ahab and called herself a *prophetess*. This woman in some way was being *allowed...to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols*. Apparently she persuaded the church to engage in illicit sexual relations at

the pagan temples and there to eat the food that had been offered to an idol. Jezebel in the OT persuaded Israel to worship Baal, the god of fertility, and Asherah, the goddess of fertility. Under the pretense of religion, the people fell into the sin of sexual immorality with all its consequences. The “seller of purple” business woman Lydia was an influential member among the people here in Thyatira and the woman called Jezebel may have had a business interest in Thyatira as well. The intent of the followers of Balaam (**vs. 14**), the Nicolaitans (**vs. 6, 15**), and Jezebel is the same: to deceive God's people by persuading them to adopt a lifestyle that would allow them to be accepted in the world and to continue membership in the church. What was acceptable to that local society was abhorred by Jesus. By accepting and practicing the lifestyle that a business guild required, the church members didn't have to fear being ostracized. But the Lord says, “*No one can serve two masters*” (**Matthew 6:24**) and James adds, “*Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God*” (**James 4:4**). The choice was theirs and is ours to make. A final observation is that God's mercy and patience as well as His justice are evident in these verses as he bears with men giving them time to repent (**Romans 2:5**).

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me to remain faithful to You in works, love, service, faith and patience. Protect me from the sinful, seducing spirit of this age and help me to listen intently to Your Word and remain a light of Your wonderful gospel in this dark world.

THURSDAY – Revelation 2:21-25: ²¹ “And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.” ²² “Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.” ²³ “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.” ²⁴ “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.” ²⁵ “But hold fast what you have till I come.” As mentioned, we find the mercy and patience of God here as He warns and waits for people to obey His commands. Yesterday we talked about the seducing of God's people through teaching that appeals to our fallen sinful minds and reasoning yet runs contrary to the revealed Word of God. Many false deceiving teachers like *Jezebel* have so taught with pretend “revelations”; when these so called revelations are divorced from what Scripture has already revealed they are a very horrible thing. History shows the voice of seduction can be “louder” when people are being challenged by and hearing the Word of God truly taught. One for instance, as the Reformation gathered momentum, John of Leyden proclaimed himself Messiah at Münster. Presently we find that as modern young people are being called to be Godly, Christian parents are dismayed to find their kids being encouraged to abandon their home ties. Commands such as “*Honor your father and mother*” are said to be dull traditionalism and old fashioned according to the seducing, exciting voice of the “new prophets.” That this is to be expected in the church is no excuse for allowing it to go

unchecked, challenged or confronted. Jesus comes in His glory with flaming eyes and brass feet and *searches the mind and heart* of His church (**Psalm 7:9, Proverbs 24:12, Jeremiah 11:20**). The judge will bring about retribution (*Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed...I will kill her children with death*) *unless they repent of their deeds. He gave her time to repent...and she did not repent.* Those who won't repent Jesus threatens with suffering and death, certainly in a spiritual sense and possibly also (with the sins of **verses 20, 21**) in a physical sense. After this graphic and serious rebuke, Jesus closes by telling His true believing children that amidst persecution, heresy and apathy they need to *hold fast what you have till I come.* Jesus is coming back. This is the hope and encouragement of every generation of Christians.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, please help me to repent when You convict me of my sin and thank you also that You will punish evil and evildoers who subvert Your Word and voice.

FRIDAY – Revelation 2:26-29: ²⁶ *And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—*²⁷ *‘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;*²⁸ *and I will give him the morning star.*²⁹ *‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’* The good news is that those who will repent, he promises a great reward. **Verse 27** is a Greek adaptation of the Hebrew of **Psalm 2:9**; the first half of the verse is ambiguous (open to several possible interpretations) in both languages, but the curious wording which results here does express the double effect of the preaching of the gospel. For the “*authority over the nations*” which is given to Christ in **Psalm 2**, and to the church here, is authority to proclaim the rule or kingdom of God as Jesus speaks of in **Matthew 28:18-20**. He who rejects that rule will perish; but he who accepts it will live (**2 Corinthians 2:15, 16, John 20:23, Luke 24:47**). The second promise to the overcomer is the gift of *the morning star*. The church is a faithful gospel-lamp in the dark night of this world and Christ promises the *morning star*, the assurance of the coming dawn if you will when lamplight will be swallowed up in the light of eternal day. The term *morning star* appears once more in Revelation, where Jesus applies it to Himself (**22:16**). How does Christ present this star to his faithful follower, *he who overcomes*? There is a connection between the reference to **Psalm 2:8-9** and an allusion to **Numbers 24:17**, where Balaam prophesies, “*A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. And batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult.*” We see that Numbers passage alludes to David’s victory over the Moabites (**2 Samuel 8:2-14**) but also to the conquests of Christ which were yet to come (**Colossians 2:15, 1 Corinthians 15:25**). This is a symbol of victory, conquering and the royalty that the believer shares with Jesus. The saints rule with Christ and shine brightly *as morning stars*. This letter closes with the very familiar call admonishing all the churches including us here to listen carefully to the message the Holy Spirit is communicating.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me remember that I will overcome as I stay looking to Jesus and trust in Him. Help me believe Your Word will conquer and souls will be saved.