

REVELATION

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Revelation 2:18–29

2:18 “To the messenger of the church in Thyatira, write: The Son of God, whose eyes are like flames of fire and whose feet are like glowing bronze, says:

Jesus, the Son of God, whose eyes appeared as flames of fire and whose feet resembled refined brass issued the fourth message to the church of Thyatira.

Of the seven churches mentioned in the Book of Revelation, the longest letter was addressed to the church in Thyatira. However, less is known about this city than any of the other six cities. Thyatira was located inland about forty miles east of Pergamum.²⁷ After the death of Alexander the Great, his empire was divided among four of his generals, two of whom were Seleucus and Lysimachus. These generals often engaged in military excursions against one another. Seleucus I founded Thyatira as a military strategy to guard one of his empire’s main routes against Lysimachus.²⁸ After the death of Alexander the Great, Lysimachus was appointed to govern Asia Minor.²⁹ Thyatira was perhaps best known for its thriving trade guilds, which included

bronze smiths, potters, bakers, tanners, and various garment workers.³⁰ Lydia, mentioned in the Bible as a seller of purple-dyed garments, was a Jewish citizen of Thyatira (Acts 16:14).

2:19 I know what you do. I know your love, faith, service, and endurance. I also know that what you are doing now is greater than what you did at first.

The labor of the faithful believers in Thyatira was praiseworthy. Their love for God and their service to Him were motivated by their abiding love for Jesus Christ. With much patience, they remained faithful to Almighty God despite the ungodliness that surrounded them. Furthermore, the mention of their later works being greater than their earlier works indicates that their acts of service progressed in both quantity and quality.³¹

2:20 But I have something against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. She teaches and misleads my servants to sin sexually and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

Most scholars agree that the description of “that woman Jezebel” is an allusion to the Old Testament character by that name. Jezebel was a wicked queen who promoted the worship of Baal, the storm god that the Canaanites believed was responsible for rain and fertility.³² So strong was Jezebel’s hatred toward Almighty God that she commanded the execution of His prophets throughout the land and promoted the idolatrous, sensual rituals associated with her pagan religion (*1 Kings 18:1–4*).

In His address to the church in Thyatira, the Lord exposed an individual whose heretical teachings had apparently been allowed to continue within the church without opposition. Considering the gender reference, it seems likely that this teacher was a woman because other allusions could have been made if such was not the case. Furthermore, this woman must have attained some status within the church, perhaps due to her claim of being a prophetess, since some within the church were eager to follow her teachings.³³ Nevertheless,

according to verse twenty-four, there were clearly several who saw through her apostasy.

Some commentators actually attempt to specifically identify this person.³⁴ While this was obviously a specific person, solid evidence does not exist to corroborate such claims, so we must instead pay attention to the reason this person was singled out, the reason being that she taught and seduced God's servants "to sin sexually and to eat food sacrificed to idols."

2:21 I gave her time to turn to me and change the way she thinks and acts, but she refuses to turn away from her sexual sins.

The Lord afforded this woman gracious opportunities to repent of her adulterous ways, but she refused. Her lifestyle was her personal choice and she would be punished for it. However, her effort to get others to join her by disseminating her perversion among the rest of the believers was particularly abhorrent to the Lord. Therefore, because of her lack of repentance, the Lord would no longer permit her obstinacy.

2:22 Watch me! I'm going to throw her into a sickbed. Those who commit sexual sins with her will also suffer a lot, unless they turn away from what she is doing.

The judgments explained refer to the physical consequences that could be expected by this woman and all who followed her teachings. The Lord would turn what the woman perceived as a bed of carnal pleasure into a bed of sickness. The woman's promiscuity would probably lead to a debilitating sexual disease that would bring her to the point of death. If this was a sexually transmitted disease, then it is perfectly understandable that her consorts would likely contract the same disease and suffer the consequences of their infidelities.

2:23 I will kill her children. Then all the churches will know that I am the one who searches hearts and minds. I will reward each of you for what you have done.

The spiritual consequences awaiting those who indulged themselves in this fornication were severe. Some commentators contend that the phrase “her children” refers to this false teacher’s followers.³⁵ Although this may be the case, the phrase may also allude once again to the Old Testament Queen Jezebel and the violent death that she and her descendants suffered due to the gravity of her transgressions (*2 Kings 9:7–10*). Furthermore, some scholars argue that the phrase “kill her children” refers to the second death spoken of in Revelation chapter twenty.³⁶ However, as indicated by the common Hebraic use of the phrase, which means “to slay utterly,” perhaps it describes an unusually brutal death. Whatever the case, the severity of God’s punishment will reveal that God was the source of this judgment. Witnessing God’s judgment was motivation enough to alert the rest of the church that God was not always patient, and that His judgment was swift and sure.³⁷

Christ alone possesses the power to search the minds and hearts of every individual and to know the motive behind every deed. Whereas the Lord addressed the entire church in Thyatira, He also offered assurance that every believer within that church would not be condemned for the exploits of a few but would be judged on an individual basis (*Romans 2:5-9*).

2:24–25 ²⁴*But the rest of you in Thyatira—all who don’t hold on to Jezebel’s teaching, who haven’t learned what are called the deep things of Satan—I won’t burden you with anything else.* ²⁵*Just hold on to what you have until I come.*

The Son of God spoke more gently to those in Thyatira who had not accepted the doctrine of Jezebel. He promised these believers that they would not encounter any additional burden. This did not mean that they would never experience other struggles or tribulations but that they would not share in the consequences of those who embraced this heretical teaching. The Lord Jesus Christ encouraged those believers who had not known “the deep things of Satan” to persevere until His

return. The meaning of “the deep things of Satan” is ambiguous, and its interpretation varies widely, but in the very least, it denotes the difficulty of escaping the snares of Satan’s deceiving ways. A particular encouragement to this church is not only to those who overcome but also to those who remain faithful in the midst of the struggle. The Lord encouraged these believers to persist or “hold on” to the faith that had been given to them, looking forward to the glorious return of the Lord (*1 John 3:2–3*).

2:26–28 *²⁶I have received authority from my Father. I will give authority over the nations to everyone who wins the victory and continues to do what I want until the end. ²⁷Those people will rule the nations with iron scepters and shatter them like pottery. ²⁸I will also give them the morning star.*

These verses are a direct reference to a psalm that proclaims the Messiah’s authority. “⁴⁸Ask me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance and the ends of the earth as your own possession. ⁹You will break them with an iron scepter. You will smash them to pieces like pottery” (*Psalms 2:8–9*). Though this promise is believed to refer to Christ’s first advent, it is also traditionally interpreted to refer to His victorious second coming.³⁸ It seems that those who receive their victory through Jesus Christ will also be given some level of authority to rule with Christ.

The concluding promise of “the morning star” has also received varied explanation. The most defensible interpretation of this phrase contends that it refers to Jesus Christ Himself.³⁹ “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give this testimony to you for the churches. I am the root and descendant of David. I am the bright morning star” (*Revelation 22:16*). Using this explanation, this promise parallels the promises to the other churches in which Christ assured His redeemed people of everlasting life in His presence in heaven.

2:29 *Let the person who has ears listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.*

Once again, the Lord Jesus encouraged all believers, all those whose perceptions have been changed by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, to listen to the message of this letter and to heed the warnings and discern their significance.

Notes/Applications

The church at Thyatira had commendable traits. Jesus spoke well of the people of the church regarding their deep and abiding love for their Lord. Their lives openly reflected a living testimony of the transforming power of Jesus Christ. Their conduct displayed “love, faith, service, and endurance.” In fact, the Lord openly testified that the church portrayed a greater Christian maturity during their latter years than at the beginning.

Such a witness from the mouth of the Lord Himself is an indisputable evidence of the continuing growth of the church. However, Jesus saw a terrible blight within this community of believers. There were chronic compromises within the church resulting in sexual immorality and pervasive debauchery. There was a woman of some importance within the church who was leading some of the flock down the wrong pathway to open contempt. She was much like the woman Jezebel whose story is recorded in 1 Kings.

Baal, the fertility god of the Sidonians, was Jezebel’s god. The followers of Baal practiced sexual immorality and other depraved activities in the belief that such rituals would bring fertility to their land. Much like the Jezebel of Israel during the reign of Ahab (*1 Kings 16:29-33*), the prominent woman in Thyatira, also identified as Jezebel, seduced members of the church to indulge in sexual immorality and in eating food sacrificed to idols.

Jesus indicted the church at Thyatira for tolerating such blatant corruption and for worshiping a false god, forsaking the God Who created them and redeemed them for Himself. Jesus dispensed His judgment, condemning the woman and her followers to a bed of sickness and death. Jesus’ swift judgment confirms to all, especially

believers, that sin cannot evade judgment because Jesus is the One Who searches the hearts and minds (*verse 23*).

One wonders how such a growing, maturing, faithful church could tolerate such blatant contempt toward God. However, we do not have to look very far to find the answer to this question. Even though the redeemed continue to live in the security of God's saving grace, the battle between the dying sin nature and the growing new man continues to rage in the heart of God's children. Therefore, the old Adamic nature, still functioning as a source of corruption and contempt in all mortals including believers, continues to exert its subtle influences to undermine the godly predispositions of the believers as well as the entire body of Christ. Like all believers across the ages, the conduct and demeanor of the Christians in Thyatira were profoundly influenced by their sin nature. They failed to discern the error of their ways when they accommodated the ungodly behaviors of those who are divisive as well as those who are apathetic toward God's truth. Such misapplication of Christian love and godly compassion will certainly lead to a life of ungodly tolerance, practically recasting the commitment of the redeemed to a position where they support sin.

Christians, having experienced the salvation that Christ brings into their lives, many times tolerate false gods in their Christian communities who lead them down the path to their own destruction by over-extending their ministry of love and compassion beyond the line of godly care. This passage helps today's Christians understand that Jesus is coming again to judge the wicked and reward His saints. He sees everything, knows everything, and judges everything. His eyes are like "flames of fire" and His feet are like "glowing bronze". Let us not fall prey to the seduction of Jezebel, or worship false gods, or tolerate those in our midst who do.