



8. Revelation 2:18-29 – The Letter to the Church in Thyatira

Read Revelation 2:18-29

Thyatira is the site of present-day Akhisar. It was founded by Seleucus I (311 – 280 BC) as a military outpost. It was noted for its many trade guilds. Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, who became a Believer while Paul and his companions were at Philippi, was from Thyatira. She and her whole household were baptised at that time and it is believed she started the first Church in her area, **Acts 16:13-15**

Read Revelation 2:18

There is no mistaking Who sent this message to the Church in Thyatira. Jesus Himself, Who is the Head of the Church, which is His Body. We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love, **Ephesians 4:14-16**

Jesus is speaking to His Church and to nobody else. The words that Jesus speaks to His people are powerful, forceful and exceptional. It was He Who created the entire Universe, Who is jealous for His Church, Who wants every member of that Church to achieve the purpose for which he or she was created. His penetrating eyes reflect the vivid insight and knowledge He has of every Believer. He knows us thoroughly; He knows what we are doing; He understands what we are thinking; nothing is hidden from Him, and we cannot deceive Him!

His appearance including the feet like burnished bronze, remind us of Daniel's description of Him.

'His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude', **Daniel 10:6**. His description of His feet as burnished bronze shows us the immovable power of the risen Christ.



Read Revelation 2:19

Nothing is hidden from the One Who created those Believers who belonged to the Church at Thyatira. He wanted to reveal that to them, just as He wants us to understand that He knows us intimately, **Psalms 139**. Just as He knew the deeds of the Believers at Thyatira, so He knows ours today. Just as He knew of their love for Him and the faith of the Believers there, so He knows of our love for Him, how much or little that is and how we exercise the faith that is ours by right, **Hebrews 11:6**.

He also knows of our service and perseverance just as He knew theirs at the end of the first Century. He has called us to serve Him. We are not automatons; we have choice and can choose to do what He asks or not. If we choose to serve Him, then we enter the realms of opposition from Satan and his army of demons. The more we serve Jesus, the more Satan will oppose us because as we become more effective in our service, the more Satan's kingdom becomes threatened. Men and women who have been deceived for their entire lives and are bound in spiritual darkness will be set free from the prisons in which they find themselves, both physical, mental and spiritual. Satan will oppose us at every turn.

However there is a higher law at work here! The harder the opposition, the more we need to persevere to win through. The more we persevere, the stronger and more mature we become and the greater danger we present to Satan! **James 1:2-4 MSG**

Jesus knew that the Believers in Thyatira were operating in love, faith, service and perseverance, and He also knew that they were stronger now than they were at first. In fact the Church at Thyatira looked like a fine Church – one that was growing in strength and authority, but Jesus Who knew them all intimately also knew their problems. He wanted them to be stronger and to be overcomers, so he pointed out their weaknesses to them.

Read Revelation 2:20

The Church at Thyatira had a great reputation, and the Lord knew of it. But He also knew of the problems the Believers had with Jezebel. They had allowed false teaching into their Church. The Word of God does not say that Jezebel **was** a prophetess, it says that she **called herself** a prophetess. Jezebel had brought erroneous teaching into the Church at Thyatira. This had not only been permitted by the Elders, but neither had the false doctrine been identified by the body of the Church.

Every Believer has a responsibility to study and to learn the Word of God for herself. It is good to be taught the Word of God, but it can never replace private reading and study. After all, God cares for us so much that He left us a legally binding document – the Bible - one that is legally binding on Him. It contains the terms of the Covenant under which we are to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven and the Eternal Life that goes with it. It describes the way in which we were redeemed from the curse of the Law, under which the entire world system operates together with worked examples of those who did, and those who did not, receive the free gift under the Covenant. We have to pay nothing; everything has already been paid by the Lord Jesus. The Bible also describes the problems which we will face and gives us the answers to them by teaching us the way to triumph over them and the method of overcoming Satan. Using the Bible's instruction, we will be able to overcome Satan every time. This is not a game of chance where sometimes we will win, and sometimes we won't, this is a Covenant of Certainty. There is no room for doubt although one of Satan's ploys is to try to make us do exactly that – to doubt God's Word. There can only be one result to properly using the Word of God, and that is entire, not partial, success. The choice as to whether to operate under the terms of the Covenant – the New Testament – is all ours, just as it was the choice of the Believers of The Church at Thyatira.

Jezebel's teaching was not to non-Christians, it was to the Members of the Church. We need to be cautious of those among us in the Church whom we do not know and whose teaching we do not know. If we choose to listen to them, remember to discern their teaching carefully and measure it against the only true measure – the Word of God. If part of their teaching is in error, step away from all of it. We should not change our views to accommodate theirs. The only basis for error to exist is if truth is perverted. Remember that so-called teachers like Jezebel resemble good and sound Bible teachers and so are able to deceive others. They appear to be spiritual and always claim to have insight into the Word of God, but they themselves are deceived! 'Jezebel' will always attempt to single out the weakest of the Church members. How can she do this? Simply by observing those who do not really know what their Bible contains, quietly getting alongside them, to plant ideas and thoughts in their minds. The battlefield is always in the mind. Once an idea takes root it can be nurtured and fed. Before long the idea becomes strong enough and difficult enough to be removed that others in the Church are equally deceived by it.

In the case of the Church at Thyatira, Jezebel misled the Believers into thinking that sexual immorality amongst themselves and with those who were not Christians was acceptable and that eating food sacrificed to idols presented no problem. The error was easy to sow into the lives of new and immature Christians because they had not listened to (or perhaps the Leaders of the Church had not told them of) the teaching that had come to them by letter from James and the Apostles at Jerusalem.

In **Acts 15**, we can read of the specific results of the first Council of Jerusalem where the matter of the Gentile Christians behaviour regarding the Law was concerned. Some Jewish Believers were preaching that all Gentile Believers should not only be born again, but that they must also adhere to the Jewish Law. This stated that they must be circumcised and keep the Mosaic Law with all of its 600+ conditions. A specific letter was drawn up by the Apostles of whom James (Jesus' brother) was the chief. It stated this:

"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹ You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell". **Acts 15:22-29**

Now this instruction is quite plain, and the Believers at Thyatira should have known about it. Clearly some did and some did not (or chose to ignore it). Whose fault was it that they did not follow this instruction which, after all, came from the Apostles? Well, ultimately it was the fault of the individual Believer, just as it is today. A Christian cannot rely on the claim that she did not know that sexual immorality is wrong, or that compromising with cults is not God's direction for their lives. The Word of God is clear and unmistakable.

If we do not study our Bibles but rely on what we hear people say without checking out the instruction for ourselves, then we can **easily** fall into error.

Read Revelation 2:20 - 23

Jesus did not simply allow Jezebel free reign in the Church. He had shown her that what she was teaching was wrong and it was leading Believers astray and He had given her time to repent. The problem was that she thought she was having too good a time. She believed her own publicity – that she was a prophetess – and refused to repent. Often when we are following after our flesh, we feel as if we are really free and happy. It does not take long before we realise our life is so empty and we feel very lost and lonely. When a person goes out to deliberately mislead those in a Church, God does not stand idly by. He warns that person then, as in this case, He deals with that person and her followers.

Reading the Message version of this passage is acutely clear in its up-to-the-minute presentation:

"But why do you let that Jezebel who calls herself a prophet mislead my dear servants into Cross-denying, self-indulging religion? I gave her a chance to change her ways, but she has no intention of giving up a career in the god-business. I'm about to lay her low, along with her partners, as they play their sex-and-religion games. The bastard offspring of their idol-whoring I'll kill. Then every church will know that appearances don't impress me. I x-ray every motive and make sure you get what's coming to you".

Revelation 2:20-23.

We need to be aware that the lesson that God will teach these erroneous prophets and teachers will be felt and understood by all Churches everywhere. Those who dabble in immorality and liberal theology in the Church do so at their own risk. They see God as approving because He does not strike them down immediately, so they multiply their false teachings amongst those who are weak-willed and ungrounded in the Word of God, **2 Timothy 3:6**. One day, however, after He has given them all ample opportunity to repent and to change their ways, He will deal with them severely, just as He promised to do to those at Thyatira who refused to repent. He said that He would repay them according to their deeds.

We must believe that when God says that He is going to do something, He will. Churches in many of our Western Nations today have grown into lazy, spoon-fed children who are open to almost any wind of false doctrine that blows. The Believers refuse to study the Word of God for themselves, relying on the voices that say what they want to hear from the front! God takes the immorality that has infiltrated the Church today very seriously and we should raise a standard that tells sinners that He will not go on being accepting forever. He gives us plenty of time to repent.

If we are not tempted by sexual sin and it is not a problem to us we should not stand in judgement on others who do find that difficult. Rather we should make it a priority to show love, compassion and forgiveness remembering how much we ourselves have been forgiven. All sin has been placed under the same blood of Jesus. If we each recognised the amazing Love of the Father; would we really choose to commit sexual sin, knowing that we are really hurting the One who loves us so passionately and Who would never refuse to allow us to do anything that would do us good? Do we really believe that extra sexual activity would benefit us in the long term? Entering into pornography today is an ever-increasing Christian activity. The research data of the number of Christians looking at pornography is very high. It is a 'secret activity' especially among the young who are being hooked, with no knowledge of how to break Satan's control over their thought life.

Remember the Word:

"those who commit adultery with her [her paramours] I will bring down to pressing distress and severe affliction, unless they turn away their minds from conduct [such as] hers and repent of their doings." **Revelation 2:22 AMP**

Jesus is saying here to not only repent of the sin but to 'turn away our minds' from sexual sin. This is very hard as the images can remain in our memory long after the activity has ceased. We need a Divine touch of healing after a real choice of repentance and a humble recognition that we desperately need the grace of God to release us from this bondage and give us His freedom only found in Jesus Christ, **Psalms 51:1-17; Ezekiel 18:23, 31-32; 1 John 1:9**.

This is the predicament that Churches in our nations find themselves in all the time as false teachers whisper the soft, sweet lullaby of success into the ears of those who wish to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season

and to pay for them later. Do not be misled, God will not be mocked and will repay each according to their deeds; only when they are placed under the blood at repentance do we **not** have to receive all we deserve.

Read Revelation 2:24-25

But in Thyatira, there was a group of Believers who did not adhere to the deceptive and sin loving teachings of Jezebel. They took God at His Word and were prepared to stand for their faith. To this group of people Jesus says this: "The rest of you Thyatirans, who have nothing to do with this outrage; who scorn this playing around with the devil that gets paraded as profundity, be assured I'll not make life any harder for you than it already is. Hold on to the truth you have until I get there". **Revelation 2:24-25 MSG**
In other words, stay strong, remain in My love. Listen to Me, read My Word and do not listen to the lies of the enemy! Why mess around with the devil when you have the Truth in your Bible? One day Jesus will return, or perhaps some of us will die and meet Him before He returns. How will we face Him? Will we be able to say that we have held on to the Truth, that we have trusted Him and that we have persevered, that our faith is stronger now than it was at first and that we love Him above all others?

Read Revelation 2:26-28

To the Overcomers, to those who are victorious in this fight against the powers of darkness orchestrated by Satan, Jesus has this to say:

"Here's the reward I have for every conqueror, everyone who keeps at it, refusing to give up: You'll rule the nations, your Shepherd-King rule as firm as an iron staff, their resistance fragile as clay pots. This was the gift my Father gave me; I pass it along to you — and with it, the Morning Star!" **Revelation 2:26-28 MSG**

So the question that we must answer individually is this: 'Am I an Overcomer'? If we can each say we are then, the promise is that 'We will rule the nations, firmly and with the Word and Authority of God.' Between now and when Jesus returns, we shall have opportunities to stand firm for what we believe, more precisely what Jesus stands for. Do we know what that is? Do we know how to teach others and to encourage them in studying the Word?

In the Western World, we do not understand what it is like not to be able to take a Bible from the shelf and read it when we want to. In many third world and Arab Countries, owning a Bible is slightly more problematic. Many pastors and teachers only own a New Testament and in some countries, it is considered a privilege to own a single page from a Bible.

We must consider how God wants us to be involved in spreading His Word in written form to those who can read, and in audible form to those who cannot. In this way all may be able to benefit from understanding the contents of the New Covenant, which can also be described as the Last Will and Testament of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can all be informed in order to pray, some may be called to go so we can support them. We and all other Believers, past, present and future, are, or will be beneficiaries under that Will!

Suggested web site www.releaseinternational.org; also Gospel for Asia www.gfa.org for further encouragement for present day overcomers from all over the world who continue to love Jesus, even after unbearable treatment and through very tough circumstances.

8. Revelation 2:18-29 – The Letter to the Church in Thyatira – Challenge Questions

Do not be concerned about getting answers 'wrong'. Everyone will learn something from these sessions.

- 1. Read the Notes and the Bible Verses** referred to in them. Highlight the points that 'speak' to you. Be prepared to share in your group.

- 2.** What do you think about the promiscuity and wide ranging use of pornography in the Church today? Have we got any ideas or suggestions for the answer in our own Church?

- 3.** Have you researched any web sites about the persecuted Church? Can you share any encouraging stories that you have

Read Revelation 3:1-6 – The Letter to the Church in Sardis.

- 4.** How does Jesus describe Himself in the first verse?

- 5.** What reputation did the Church at Sardis have? Why is this such a damning criticism?

- 6.** Are there any Churches like this today? If so could you describe what you think they may look like today?

- 7.** Could you give any reasons why they are like this?

- 8.** How had Jesus found the deeds of this Church? Whose fault was the state of the Church at Sardis?

- 9.** Was there a solution to this situation? What was it?

10. What was to happen if the people in the Church did not respond to Jesus?

11. Read **Matthew 12:35-40**. What was Jesus telling His disciples about in this passage? How does it relate to **Revelation 3:3**?

12. In **Matthew 24:43-47**, Jesus asked His disciples who was the faithful and wise manager. Can you relate this parable to our present day situation?

13. Can you describe the activities of a man who is a faithful and wise manager in the Church situation today?

14. Read **Revelation 3:4-6**. Can you describe the character of those men and women in Sardis who had not soiled their clothes?

15. Explain why this portion of the letter to the Church in Sardis specifically applies to people in a church-related environment throughout the ages.

16. What three things would happen to those described as Overcomers or victorious?

17. How would you describe victorious people in the Church today? Do you have any examples to share today?

18. Can you write a short sentence to sum up the challenge of the Church in Sardis?