

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA MINOR

Thyatira

Revelation 2:18-28

It is odd that the longest of the letters to the Seven Churches was written to the church in the smallest and least important of the seven towns.

- Virtually the only redeeming fact about Thyatira was that it was positioned at the mouth of the valley that connected the Cairus and the Hermus rivers.
- This made the town a significant trade center since it allowed freight to come down from the mountains, and into the water of one or the other of the rivers, and on into the Sea.

It was also a military center.

- It was the gateway to Pergamos which was an important city that was exposed in such a way that it was very vulnerable to attack.
- Historically, Thyatira was a repository for the military who would defend the approach to Pergamos until it was ready, supplied, and enforced to fight.

Thyatira had no real religious significance.

- It has only two temples: one to Apollo and one to Artemis, but they were not remarkable in any way.
- This was not a Caesar-worship center.

Thyatira had one redeeming feature – it was a significant commercial center because of a bush that grew in plenty and a fish that inhabited the waters of the river. The bush is called the “purple plant,” and the fish is called the *murex* (both pictured below). These were used to harvest purple dye used to dye wool. This was, therefore, a significant textile dyeing center.

THE PURPLE PLANT IN THYATIRA

Close up of a plant, the roots of which were used to make purple dye. This type of plant is called the "madder" plant.



This type of plant grew in the area of Thyatira and Sardis and was processed for sale throughout the Roman world. Lydia, a convert of Paul in Philippi, was from Thyatira, and was a seller of purple fabrics (*Acts 16:14*).

This is the tiny seashell fish call the *murex*. From the throat of this animal it was possible to extract one drop of purple die that had a market value of a thousand denarii. One denarius was an ordinary working man's pay for one day's work.



JOHN WROTE TO THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA:

"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write : The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this : 'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.

'But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 'I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. 'Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 'And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts ; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

24 'But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan,

as they call them-I place no other burden on you. 25
'Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.

26 'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end,
TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS ; 27
AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE
VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also
have received authority from My Father ; 28 and I will give him
the morning star.

I. THE LORD INTRODUCES HIMSELF

"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write : The
Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His
feet are like burnished bronze, says this : 'I know your
deeds, and your love and faith and service and
perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than
at first.

1. The Lord has introduced Himself to Ephesus as” the one who is walking among the churches (lampstands)”
2. To Smyrna, as the one who is the: first and the last, who was dead and is now alive.”
3. To Pergamum, he is “the two edged sword.”
4. Here, He has eyes like flames of fire, and feet like shined bronze. (Flames are cleansing agents and brass always symbolizes refined metal – Brass is always a symbol of the wrath of God or the judgment of God.)
5. The central theme of the letter is the judgment of God on the false priestess.

The beginning of Christ’s introduction is that He is the “Son of God.” This is a specific repudiation of Jezebel, who He later rebukes. Jezebel is claiming to be the “oracle of God.” This is to say that she is the voice of God. She speaks for God in her assertion.

- o This Jezebel is claiming to be “an infallible oracular prophetess.”
- o To respond to this, Jesus identifies Himself as “the Son of God” thereby being God Himself.
- o Jezebel calls her work “the deep things of God.”
- o Jesus calls them “the deep things of the Devil.”

II. WHO IS JEZEBEL?

'But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit

acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 'I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. 'Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 'And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts ; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

1. Her name immediately takes us back to Israel. (I Kings 16:31)
2. Ahab, the king, married a daughter of the King of Sidon whose name was Jezebel.
3. When she came to live in the capital city of Samaria she brought with her heathen gods, and she introduced Israel to the worst time of apostasy it experienced.
4. She so totally slew the prophets of God that she swept Israel off its religious feet.
5. She so totally subverted the worship of the one true God that Elijah himself was brought to his knees as he fled from her and prayed that he might die.

This is clearly NOT the same Jezebel, but certainly a model of her behavior. *It is said of this Jezebel that she so seduced the Christian Church from the worship of the one true God that they became callused to the notion that committing fornication and eating things sacrificed to idols was bad behavior and unacceptable for a Christian.*

- A. In Revelation 2:20 she is called “that woman Jezebel.”
 - a. In the Greek, the word for wife and woman is the same word. (γυναίκα wife) (γυναίκα woman)
 - b. Therefore, the verse could mean “that woman Jezebel” or “your wife Jezebel.” The translation would make a considerable difference in how you would interpret the passage.
 - If the meaning is the second, this would suggest that the woman who is causing so much trouble in the church is the wife of the “angel” or messenger at the church.
 - This seems perfectly logical as the leader of the church’s wife would surely have significant implied authority as a result of the relationship with the evangelist, or even elder.
 - Prophetesses is not a foreign Biblical position:
 - Philip, you will remember, had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses (Acts 21:9)
 - Luke talks about Anna who was a prophetess (Luke 2:36)
 - It is very possible that this Jezebel is a real woman with real influence over the church by some means—attrition, or marriage.
- B. Some believe that this Jezebel was identified with the famous local oracle called the *Sambathe*

- a. Sambathe was a sooth-sayer, or fortuneteller, or astrologer. Not unlike the Witch of Endor that brought down King Saul.
 - b. The use of these people to foretell the future is strictly forbidden in Scripture and represents the direct opposite of “living by faith.”
 - c. If the Christians were allowing the Sambathe to have power in the church, it is easy to see that the church could be drawn astray.
- c. The third possibility of who this Jezebel was is the one that appears to most exactly match the facts actually stated in the text and secular history recorded by Pliny the Elder. (famous Roman historian and father of Pliny the younger)

BECAUSE OF THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY AND THE INDUSTRIAL BASE IN THE CITY, THERE WERE MANY GUILDS OR UNIONS.

- 1. These guilds or unions wielded enormous power.
 - a. They extracted dues from all the workers.
 - b. They placed domestic demands on all of the workers that included participation in sexual orgies and drunken celebrations sponsored by industrialists.
 - c. The business social demands on conduct and actions inspired by the unions were not Christian, but were attractive enough that the Christians were willing to compromise their beliefs for social acceptance.
 - d. The people were *not* prohibited from worshipping God, they were basically told to worship God and also participate in the immoral activities.
 - e. They produced a significant spiritual conflict and challenge for the Christians in Thyatira.

Taking this position would mean that the name Jezebel would have been a figurative name inspired by the Jezebel of the Old Testament used to describe the behavior that was being propagated in the church.

III. THE REWARD FOR STAYING FAITHFUL

'Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.

'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS ; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father ; and I will give him the morning star.

- A. Vs. 23: He searches the reins and the hearts
 - a. In Hebrew, the reins (*nephrol*) are the kidneys (הכליות = kidneys)

- i. It was believed that the kidneys were the seat of the emotions.
 - b. The heart (*kardia*) is the seat of the thoughts (הלב = heart)
 - i. This simply says that God sees our thoughts and our actions. None are ever hidden from Him.
- B. Vs. 24: acknowledges that the people in Thyatira have been exposed to the works of the Devil.
 - a. They are not children in their faith.
 - b. Their faith has been tested in the fire.
- C. Vs. 26: promises victory and fidelity for a long time – till the end.
- D. Vs. 28: gives the ultimate assurance that we will receive “the morning star.”
 - a. That must surely be the promise of the resurrection
 - b. In Revelation 22:16 the Risen Christ says of Himself: ***“I am the bright and morning star.”***
 - c. We get that for remaining faithful.