

Jesus' Seven Letters to the Churches

Part 4 Thyatira: Unholy Alliances and Toleration

18 And to the angel (messenger) of the assembly (church) in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, Who has eyes that flash like a flame of fire, and Whose feet glow like bright and burnished and white-hot bronze:

19 I know your record and what you are doing, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your recent works are more numerous and greater than your first ones.

20 But I have this against you: that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess [claiming to be inspired], and who is teaching and leading astray my servants and beguiling them into practicing sexual vice and eating food sacrificed to idols.

21 I gave her time to repent, but she has no desire to repent of her immorality [symbolic of idolatry] and refuses to do so.

22 Take note: I will throw her on a bed [of anguish], and 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.

23 And I will strike her children (her proper followers) dead [thoroughly exterminating them]. And all the assemblies (churches) shall recognize and understand that I am He Who searches minds (the thoughts, feelings, and purposes) and the [inmost] hearts, and I will give to each of you [the reward for what you have done] as your work deserves.

24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not explored and known the depths of Satan, as they say—I tell you that I do not lay upon you any other [fresh] burden:

25 Only hold fast to what you have until I come.

26 And he who overcomes (is victorious) and who obeys My commands to the [very] end [doing the works that please Me], I will give him authority and power over the nations;

27 And he shall rule them with a scepter (rod) of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, and [his power over them shall be] like that which I Myself have received from My Father;

28 And I will give him the Morning Star.

29 He who is able to hear, let him listen to and heed what the [Holy] Spirit says to the assemblies (churches). [Revelation 2:18-29 AMPC](#)

Portion for the Journey:

Christ loves His Church and longs for the churches to grow in their relationship with Him. He looks for the day that He will again be reunited with His precious bride. He nourishes and cherishes the Church. It is clear that the writer of these seven letters to the churches had an intimate knowledge of each one of them. He was clearly aware not only of the condition of their hearts but also their environment which presented their particular challenges and obstacles.

Each letter represents a “composite” picture of a particular church with application pertinent to all churches, and to each of us personally. Each letter also represents a prophetic panorama of the churches through history. Watchman Nee in viewing these letters from the historical approach felt that the first three churches will have passed away by the second coming of Christ but the last four would remain until His return.

- Ephesus representing the early apostolic church
- Smyrna representing the church in the second century of intense persecution;
- Pergamum representing the marriage of the Church with the state in the third century.
- Thyatira represented the Roman Catholic church system. The word “Catholic” means universally accepted. It can be used with reference to the teachings of the Church which are universal, foundational truths or it can refer to the Roman Catholic Church which believed itself to be the one true Christian church.
- Sardis means restoration and speaks of a time of revival in the Church.
- Philadelphia and Smyrna were the only church that had Christ’s full acceptance. The name Philadelphia name means church “of brotherly love.”
- Laodicea or “people’s rights” is called the apostate church, the one in which Jesus could find nothing for commendation. Watchman Nee noted that should Philadelphia fail to maintain its love, it would become “Laodicea” which means “the people’s rights.”

vs. 18 Address: “To the angel of the church in Thyatira write...”

This letter is the longest of the seven letters, addressed to the church that was considered to be the least important of all seven churches. Thyatira means ‘high tower’ or ‘continual or perpetual sacrifice.’ It was a city located about 34 miles southeast of Pergamum. It was founded about 300 BC. The area around Thyatira was very beautiful with abundant, fruitful crops. The city was set on the left bank of a tributary of the great Hermes river. It was guarded by an elite Roman military guard. Strategically, Thyatira was an armed garrison, manned by Macedonian troops, placed there to protect Pergamos. The problem was, Thyatira was not capable of any prolonged defense because it lay in an open valley and could not be fortified. This meant that in a prolonged conflict, defeat was inevitable.

Thyatira was a flourishing manufacturing and commercial city in Lydia on the site of what now stand the Turkish town of Akhissar” Or “the White Castle” with nine mosques and one Greek Orthodox church. Thyatira prospered under Vespian the emperor of Rome. Eventually, Thyatira was attacked and thoroughly destroyed. The remains that were rebuilt today covers only one city block.

There was no significant threat of persecution in Thyatira. Although they worshipped the emperor, the Thyatira war hero, Tyrimnos and the trade guild gods. The city appears to have been more materialistic based than religious. Thyatira was the headquarters for many ancient guilds, including potters, tanners, weavers, robe makers and dyers. Thyatira was especially known for the manufacture of purple dye used in the manufacture of a very expensive purple cloth. It is believed that Thyatira is where labor unions first originated. The guilds all worshipped their patron deities. For example, the bronze smiths worshipped the goddess of war, Pallas Athena.

It is unknown how the church was formed in Thyatira, but we do know that Lydia, whom Paul led to the LORD in Philippi was a seller of purple cloth from Thyatira. Lydia was a worshipper and a woman of prayer. God had given her a teachable heart that was open to listen and respond to the Word. She had a love for believers and opened her home to Paul and other disciples. [Acts 16:14-15; 40](#)

The threat to Thyatira came from within the Church rather than from the outside. This church was facing a tremendous temptation to compromise. Thyatira is believed to represent Romanism during the darkest ages of the Church from 590 AD to 1500 AD. The Roman Catholic church dominated religious life, falling ever deeper into false teaching and immorality. Initially the word “Catholic” meant the

universal church, orthodox, pure from heresy. This period marked a proliferation of false teaching. As believers sought to find unity through the doctrines of the church increasing animosity developed and the spirit of offense resulted in many church splits. The Catholic church sought to unify believers, especially regarding doctrine and fellowship. They believed it necessary to preserve and protect the Church from the heresy of the Gnosticism, Marcionites and Montanism. In their effort to protect the Church according to the purity of the Word and the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ they 1) sought Church leadership with direct connection to the disciples of Jesus or those in the early church directly taught by the disciples and 2) sought to assemble the documents containing the essentials of the Christian faith. Due to the perils of the false teachers, they felt justified to increase the structure and authority of the Church leaders. See handout: **NOTABLE ASPECTS OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM SLIDE AWAY FROM TRUE CHURCH**

vs. 18 Author: The author did not write with the intention of soothing or calming the soul. He reveals Himself as “Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze,” says this...” Jesus identifies Himself as the Son of God, an official title pointing to His relationship with the Father and His position before men. He is revealing Himself as a God of judgment. This description of Christ is similar [Rev. 1:13-15](#)

- **Son of God:** [Rev. 1:13](#) refers to Jesus as the Son of Man, identifying Him through His human lineage and identification with our human weaknesses. Son of God affirms His deity and authority to sit as the God of judgment. The Son of God is not only a title but a painting of the incredibly intimate relationship of Jesus with His Father. This name signifies He is the Messiah! [Ps. 2:7-12](#) See handout: **THE SON OF GOD**
- **Eyes of Fire:** Jesus’ eyes of fire speak of His ability to see all things and search out all things in the mind and heart. Jesus has piercing, penetrating gaze, giving Him perfect knowledge and insight into all things. This gaze strips all disguises away and He sees the thoughts and intentions of the heart. He is able to discern those who are sincere followers versus those who walk in lies. Fire speaks not only of judgement but also purification. [Isa. 66:15; Ezek. 18:23; 30:32; John 16:8; Rev. 1:14; 2:18](#)
- **Feet like burnished bronze:** Feet of bronze reveals the immovable power of the Risen Savior with His feet planted firmly in authority over all things. Burnished bronze is also referred to as “white brass.” This was a glowing brass that is distinguished for its brilliancy being described as being clear or white in color. Not only speaks of judgment, treading out the grapes of wrath, but also of His stability and firmness. We do not need to fear the judgment of God if we walk in the light. [Ezek. 1:7, 27; Dan. 10:5-7](#)

vs. 19 Commendation: *“I know your record and what you are doing, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your recent works are more numerous and greater than your first ones.”*

The Church in Thyatira was doing more in service to the LORD while the Church in Ephesus was doing less. To the believers in Thyatira, He begins by praising them for five things:

- 1) **Love (Charity):** This is agape love. Their works coming from a heart of true love and were genuine works producing fruit.
- 2) **Ministry of service**
- 3) **Faith Or Faithfulness**

- 4) **Perseverance or Patient Endurance** in days of darkness: patience, steadfastness and constancy to the LORD. The Greek word used here is ‘hupomeno’ which is defined as patient endurance in trials. Patience to endure under trials is extremely important in our faith. This same attribute is also mentioned in the letter to Ephesus. G. Campbell Morgan defines this patience as “peace under pressure.” Patience is the capacity to have stillness of heart when all around is tempest tossed. Peace under pressure is a fragrant aroma to the Lord.
- 5) **Works** that were greater at the last than at the first. The church of Thyatira was doing more in their service compared to Ephesus whose love was growing less. [James 2:18](#)

vs. 20 Criticism: *“But I have this against you: that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, 1) false prophetess who calls herself a prophetess [claiming to be inspired], 2) and who is teaching and 3) leading astray my servants and beguiling them into practicing sexual vice and eating food sacrificed to idols.”* It is interesting to note that the church in Thyatira was believed to be started by a godly woman and was in danger of being destroyed by an ungodly woman. [Revelation 2:20 \(AMP\)](#)

Interesting to note the Thyatira was initiated by a godly woman, Lydia, and was now being led astray by an evil woman. The sin of the church was that the **tolerated** the spirit of Jezebel. They raised no complaint against the operation of this spirit in their midst. Jezebel did not belong to Jesus but the Church incurred a terrible responsibility by tolerating her operations. The Church becomes responsible for what she tolerates. The wording in the Greek is clear. Jezebel was influencing the church from within. The church was rebuked because they “tolerated” Jezebel to continue in their midst, seducing and leading astray all who would partake of her wares. The word tolerated is ‘apheimi’ (G863) and has two parts 1) is “a” which is a negative pronoun indicating “did not...” and 2) phiemi meaning ‘to send away, divorce, let go, be alone, permit, hinder.’ The church did not have governmental power to stop the working of Jezebel, but they did have ministerial power to censure and excommunicate her. Since they did not seek to stop her, they became sharers of her sin. [2 Cor. 11:19, 20; Eph. 5:11; Ezek. 33:1-10; Prov. 24:25; Lev. 19:17; Titus 1:13; 2:15; Rev. 18:4; 1 Sam. 3:13](#)

This woman of Thyatira was called “Jezebel” named after Queen Jezebel This woman of Thyatira would have been a woman of power and great influence. Of all the women of the Bible, there is none so evil or unscrupulous as Jezebel. Many ancient versions of this script translate this “thy wife” instead of “the woman.” The belief is that she may have been the wife of the Bishop which would increase the criminality of the church to suffer her acts. She was set up as a prophetess and a teacher who taught the church to engage in fornication with false gods and to eat of the food sacrificed to idols. She used every opportunity to seduce the faithful onto a false path.

The influence of this woman over the church was considerable. Following the historical timeline, this woman would have introduced heresies into the church during the “catholic era.” During this time, a number of false teachings were introduced to the church. The worship of Mary as a female deity, the “Mother of God”, introduction of statues of saints for the purpose of prayer; false teaching regarding purgatory and all manner of corruption amongst the church leadership. During the Middle Ages countless faithful children of God who did not pledge their loyalty to Catholicism died at the hands of the Roman Catholic Church.

This reference to Jezebel would be to compare her to Queen Jezebel, wife of Ahab, who brought paganism to Israel and seduced the hearts of the people to turn to idol worship. She led Israel away from the worship of the one true God to join with pagans in the worship of Baal. She was a teacher and a prophetess with the power and influence to corrupt the hearts of Israel away from the One True God.

She also relentlessly persecuted and killed the prophets and those who remained faithful to God. Her influence impacted generations of kings and leaders throughout the history of Israel. [1 Ki. 16:31-33](#)

Baal was the god of fertility. The prominent symbol of Baal is that of a bull, the picture of male virility. In his book, *The Return of the Gods*, Jonathan Kahn noted that Baal worshippers prayed to him for rain and to make their crops grow. Baal promised fertility, fruitfulness, increase, gain and prosperity. Baal means ‘lord,’ ‘master’ or owner. Since Thyatira was a center for agriculture and commercialism, it is logical that they would be drawn to this false god. The worship of Baal in Israel became so prominent in the 9th century BC that those to join in his worship were persecuted, hunted down and killed. Baal was the chief god responsible for causing Israel to turn away from God and cease walking in His ways. [Judges 3:7; 2 Ki. 17:15-16](#)

In America, the bull has become the symbol of Wall Street. Jonathan Kahn describes the appearance of the massive eleven foot tall, sixteen-foot-long molten image in the form of a giant bull in December 1989. It has become a permanent landmark in New York City, given a place of honor in the financial district. The image is described as ‘a symbol of aggressive financial optimism and prosperity,’ The bull’s nostrils are flaring as if ready to attack. It is described as an angry, dangerous beast. We cannot forget the golden calf Israel created when their hearts turned away from the Living God!

Jezebel would have been content to allow the worship of Jehovah, if their prophets would have accepted Baal worship in addition to Jehovah. She slew the prophets of Jehovah and fed 450 prophets of Baal at her own table. Jezebel exerted a particularly evil influence over her husband, Ahab. A Jezebel spirit is characterized by control and manipulation, especially over weak-willed men. [1 Ki. 18:13,19](#)

One commentator said, “On the surface the church was strong and flourishing. Something essential was missing. Here is the warning, a church which is a hive of energy is not necessarily a real church. It is possible for a church to be crowded because its people come to be entertained instead of instructed, to be soothed instead of confronted and the fact of sin and the office of salvation may be a highly successful Christian club rather than a real Christian congregation.”

Specific accusations against Jezebel:

- *“... calls herself a prophetess [claiming to be inspired] ...”* She claimed to have special insight and revelation from God. It appears that she elevated her position in the church by claiming to be a special messenger of God. [Jer. 23: 18-22,27-32](#)
- *...and who is teaching and leading astray my servants...* The word for teaches is ‘didasko (G1321) which means to instruct or conduct oneself as a teaching with the idea of determining doctrines. Matthew Henry notes that she made use of the Name of God to oppose the truth of His doctrine. These false teachings were said to be walking in the depths of Satan. Ever since Satan’s deception of Eve, people have been led astray through the promises of secret knowledge. The implication is that God is withholding these secret things from us and we need to learn them in another way. This is a definition of occult. God’s people, on the other hand, are given the knowledge of the deep things of God, the mysteries of His Kingdom. [2 Cor. 11:3-4; Matt. 24:14](#)
- *...beguiling [seducing] them into practicing sexual vice...* Jezebel is often referred to as the wife of Baal. This spirit is associated with deviant sexuality and immorality. Jonathan Kahn describes

her as the “breaker of rules, the trespasser of boundaries. She is also the goddess of prostitution. She was a seducer, who captivated, allured and snatched away through carnality to lead God’s people astray. Baal caused his followers to turn away from God but Jezebel introduced total corruption into the society through prostitution, deviant sexuality and debauchery.

The word used for seduce is also translated ‘deceive.’ The Greek word ‘planao’ means to cause to stray, to lead astray from the truth, to cause to fall away from the truth and lead into sin and error. Jude describes deceivers as wandering stars, planets without a dependable fixed point. Throughout the Old Testament, infidelity to God was described as fornication or prostitution or adultery. His people are referred to as the Bride of Christ. Jezebel was teaching the church to compromise with the world and engage in forbidden practices. **Rom. 12:2; Matt. 6:24; Deut. 30:19; Josh. 24:15; Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:20; 2 Cor. 11:1-2; Eph. 5:24-28; Matt. 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:38**

- *...eating food sacrificed to idols.”* At the time this letter was written, it was the practice of pagans to make sacrifices to their gods. Only a small part of the sacrifice was burned and the rest of eaten in pagan gatherings and even sold in butcher shops. It was a continual issue that believers faced because to avoid eating meat offered to idols, they needed to avoid socializing with unbelievers. Jezebel was likely urging them they did not need to cut themselves off from pagans. **Acts 15:29** One of the ways believers were drawn into eating food offered to idols was the pressure to join trade guilds which demanded fellowship and socializing with the members. No merchant or trader could trade without being a member of a trade guild which required eating meat offered to idols. Abstention from guilds was commercial suicide. Freemasonry dates back to these days. People are drawn into freemasonry through the promise of the loyalty and support of the guild to make your business prosperous. At its base, it is a pagan form of worship. **Acts 15:29; Rom. 12:2; Matt. 6:24; Deut. 30:19; Josh. 24:15**

v. 21-23 Judgment: *“I gave her time to repent, but she has no desire to repent of her immorality [symbolic of idolatry] and refuses to do so. Take note: I will throw her on a bed [of anguish], and 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. And I will strike her children (her proper followers) dead [thoroughly exterminating them]. And all the assemblies (churches) shall recognize and understand that I am He Who searches minds (the thoughts, feelings, and purposes) and the [inmost] hearts, and I will give to each of you [the reward for what you have done] as your work deserves.*

Note He had given her time to repent but concluded she does not want to repent. Repentance means turning away from one’s course of conduct and to return but not necessarily to one’s starting point. It means turning to the Lord and His way. Note God’s ways in judgment is that He allows time for repentance and only after a refusal to repent do we know there is a certainty of God’s judgment. Judgment and justice are synonymous. As believers, we can take comfort that there is a time of accounting for the wicked. As we wait for this time, we are called to intercede and pray sinners will repent so He does not need to bring judgment. **2 Pet. 3:9; Rev. 9:20-21; Ps.106:23; Isa. 26:7-10**

v. 22 *“Take note: I will throw her on a bed [of anguish], and those who commit adultery with her...”* Those believers who do not separate from Jezebel will be judged along with her. We are called to come out from among them and be separate. **2 Cor. 6:17; Gal. 1:4; Col. 3:1; Titus 2:14; Lev. 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:16**

vs. 24-25 Instruction: *“But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not explored and known the depths of Satan, as they say—I tell you that I do not lay upon you any other [fresh] burden: Only hold fast to what you have until I come.”* Jesus said to those who had remained faithful and pure, that He would lay on them no other burden, “only hold fast what you have until I come.”

Hold fast:

- The Hebrew word for “hold fast” is “dabaq” (H1692) meaning ‘to cleave, follow hard after, keep fast, abide, to cling, adhere. Caleb is one who is said to have followed hard after God all the days of his life. Or to have followed God wholly. [Josh. 14:14](#)
- In the Greek, there are three words that are translated “hold fast.”
 - 1) “katecho” (G2722) meaning ‘to hold firmly, to possess, keep, seize.
 - 2) “krateo” is the Greek word used in the letter to the Church in Thyatira. This word means to hold, keep, retain, lay hold of, to use strength to seize, hold fast, to be strong, mighty, to prevail, hold firmly.’
 - 3) “tereo” (G5083) carries the connotation of keeping in one’s focus, meaning, ‘to watch, keep the eye upon, to keep watch and give careful heed.’ [Deut. 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20; Josh. 22:5; 23:8; Prov. 4:4,13; Hos. 12:6; Luke 8:15](#)

vs. 26-28 Promise to those who are faithful: *“And he who overcomes (is victorious) and who obeys My commands to the [very] end [doing the works that please Me], I will give him authority and power over the nations; And he shall rule them with a scepter (rod) of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, and [his power over them shall be] like that which I Myself have received from My Father; And I will give him the Morning Star.”*

Note in the first three letters to the churches, the call to overcome always follows with the words, “he who has ears, let him hear” but beginning with this letter to Thyatira, this order is reversed, indicating change in the nature of these churches from the first three.

- **I will give him authority over nations.** This is believed to be a promise of joining Him in His millennial rule. Jesus received power and authority from His Father and He promises to extend that authority and rule to us. [Ps. 2:8-9](#) is called the Messianic Psalm. [John 5:22; 2 Tim.2:12; 1 Cor. 6:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 3:21; 20:4,6](#)
- **He shall rule them with a scepter of iron...** the word ‘to rule’ is poimanei, which is also translated shepherd and refers to the shepherd’s rod that is used to guide and to protect. [Ps. 23:4 AMP](#)
- **I will give him the Morning Star.** Jesus is the Morning Star.

The symbolism of the morning star has several interpretations:

- 1) It is the first star to appear in the sky in the dawn as well as being the first star to appear at dusk. “One day, the Lord will be seen by the whole world, but those who see the Morning Star are necessarily awake much earlier while the vast majority of the world is still asleep.” (Watchman Nee)
- 2) The Morning Star is believed to be a symbol of the resurrection because as the morning star rises after the darkness of night, so shall the Christian rise after the night of death. Jesus is the first resurrected and His resurrection is a promise of our resurrection. This has been

referred to [Dan 12:3](#). There the promise is: "*and those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever.*" If that be so, the morning star is the glory which will come to those who are righteous and have helped others to walk in the paths of righteousness. ...these are very lovely and may all be involved in this promise; but we are quite certain that the correct interpretation is this.

- 3) The Revelation itself calls Jesus "the bright morning star" ([Rev 22:16](#)). The promise of the morning star is the promise of Christ himself. If the Christian is true and holds fast to the Lord, when life on earth comes to an end, he will possess Christ, never to lose him forever. [Rev. 21:23; 22:5, 16; Mal. 4:2](#)

v. 29 "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and heed what the [Holy] Spirit says to the assemblies (churches)."

What is the Lord Speaking to me?

Responding to the Lord: