

The Letter to the Church at Thyatira – Revelation Ch. 2 vs. 18 – 29

Bible Study Notes on the Letter to the Church at Thyatira

Thyatira – History

Thyatira was originally a Lydian town bearing the name of Pelopia, then Semiramis (see below) and then Euhippia. The Kingdom of Lydia existed from about 1200 BC to 546 BC.

At its greatest extent, during the 7th century BC, it covered all of western Anatolia. In 546 BC, it became a province of the Persian Empire, under Cyrus – seven years before he conquered Babylon.

It was later captured by Alexander the Great in the 3rd century BC, and it ultimately passed into the possession of Lysimachus, one of Alexander's four generals. In 301BC Lysimachus was defeated by his rival Seleucus I (Nicator) and it thus became part of his Syrian empire.

Nicator named it Thyatira (Greek: *thygater*...for daughter) on being informed that a daughter had been born to him.

Thyatira - Geography

Thyatira is 42 miles (67km) from the Aegean Sea and 47 miles (75km) southeast of Pergamos and 37 miles (59km) north of Sardis.

Thyatira in New Testament times was a small town which stood at the juncture of three roads that led to Pergamos, Sardis and Smyrna – hence an important frontier town

It is the modern day city of Akhisar – population about 100,000

Near the centre of Akhisar, the archaeological remains of Thyatira are located in a fenced off rectangular city block. Among the ruins is a public building (basilica) dating from the 5th or 6th century AD. In places it is preserved to a height of 16 feet.

See Supplementary Note 16 'Thyatira Maps'

Thyatira – Commercial Trade

- An important centre for powerful trade guilds
 - Membership compulsory
 - Each guild was under the patronage of some pagan deity
- Thyatira was known for its dyes – particularly its purple (perhaps scarlet)
 - It derived from the madder-root which is prolific in the area
 - Lydia was a wealthy sales rep. for Thyatira, a seller of 'purple', dwelling in Philippi (*Acts 16: 14-15*)
- From coins found, it is evident that guilds of bakers, bronze smiths, wool workers, potters, linen weavers and tanners were active in the city. Such guilds would often hold banquets which included the eating of food offered to idols and participation in immoral sexual acts (cf. *Revelation 2:20-24*)

Semiramis (A Previous Name of Thyatira) – Babylonian Legend

- Tammuz (son) born to Nimrod and Semiramis
 - Associated with the sun god: he ‘dies’ at the winter solstice (~Dec. 22) and is ‘resurrected’ as the days get longer
 - His ‘death’ is celebrated by the burning of a ‘yule’ log (‘yule’ in Chaldean means infant), replaced by a trimmed tree the next morning (*Jeremiah 10: 1-5*)
 - Also celebrated by mistletoe (fertility); wassail, etc
(Hislop: The Two Babylons)

- Nimrod founded the original Babylonian religion
 - Virtually identical to Phaethon, or Aesculapius, it eventually develops into the worship of his (Nimrod’s) widow Semiramis and his posthumous son, Tammuz...(legends replicated in different traditions):
 - Semiramis & Tammuz of Babylon
 - Ashtoreth & Tammus of Phoenicia
 - Isis & Horus of Egypt
 - Aphrodite & Eros of Greece
 - Venus & Cupid of Rome

Alexander Hislop

See Supplementary Note 17 ‘The Pagan Chronicles’ by James Herschel Lyda

The Apostle Paul and Silas might have visited Thyatira during Paul's second or third journey, although the evidence is entirely circumstantial.



Modern Day Akhisar



Thyatira Ruins 5AD/6AD



Thyatira Ruins 5AD/6AD
(Jenny in centre of the group)



Thyatira Ruins 5AD/6AD

The Letter to Thyatira – Revelation 2: 18-29

V 18 The Address and Sender

This is the longest of all the seven letters – twelve verses, though it was probably one of the lesser of the churches

To Whom is the Letter Addressed?

‘To the Angel of the Church of Thyatira’ - clearly the ultimate recipient is the Thyatira church itself. However it will be read by all the seven churches – and by churches down the ages.

The Name of the Church – Thyatira is word which means daughter

The clue to its spiritual significance is that one of Thyatira’s former names was Semiramis (the consort of Nimrod, mother of Tammuz) – the root is the pagan Babylonian mysteries.

Thus the Babylonian legend is a common root in Pergamos and Thyatira.

See notes on Semiramis on pages 32-33.

Who is the Letter From?

It is from 'The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass'.

It is from Jesus Christ, from Yeshua.

Titles of Christ

'The Son of God' and 'who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass' – His titles are from Chapter 1.

Why does Yeshua use the title 'Son of God'?

'The Son of God' – the only time this title of Jesus is used in the book of Revelation. In Chapter 1, verse 13, John sees 'in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man' which he would have known to be a title Yeshua often used of Himself. This title of Christ is in contrast to the theme of the letter (Jezebel – the Queen of Heaven).

What does the Title 'Who has eyes like a flame of fire and His feet like fine brass' tell us?

'It is a title of Christ's from *Chapter 1, verses 14-15*

'His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace'
Revelation 1: 14b-15a

The word 'like' indicates these are similes.

Eyes like a flame of fire – the eyes of inspection and of judgement.

Feet like fine brass – feet indicate the spiritual walk and brass is used (levitically) to speak of judgement (because brass can sustain fire).

Christ is coming to this church in judgement.

V 19 Commendations from Yeshua

How does Yeshua Begin His Commendations?

He says 'I know your works' – as He did to Ephesus (v.2) and to Smyrna (v.9) and to Pergamos (v.13).

Yeshua knows what is (really) going on in the church – he is fully aware.

For What does Yeshua Commend this Church?

Their works which Yeshua commends are:

- Their Love: the Greek word used is 'agapē' ...sacrificial love,
- Their Service: the Greek word used is 'diakonia', from which we get the word deacon,
- Their Faith: the grace which actuates all works for the Lord,
- Their Patience: the Greek word used is 'hupomonē' which means cheerful endurance.

Also commended for their latter works being greater than the first – as far as their works are concerned they are improving!

V 20 Concerns (criticisms) of Yeshua

What is Yeshua's concern in regard to this Church?

Tolerance of a False Prophet and Teacher - Jezebel

'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'

What is it Yeshua dislikes concerning Jezebel

She calls herself a prophetess! Those who self-proclaim their 'gifting' are rarely so gifted by the Lord.

She teaches – contrary to Paul's teaching based on God's divine order.

'And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve.'

1 Timothy 2: 12-13

False Teaching

Sexual immorality (fornication) is used throughout scripture not only of sexual acts but also of idol worship (having intimacy with a false god) – both were part of Thyatira's 'guild culture'.

Eating food sacrificed to idols was also linked to the guild culture where feasts involved worship of the guild's sponsoring deity.

Yeshua warned about false teachers:

'For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand.'

Matthew 24: 24-25

Paul warned about false teachers and 'itching ears':

'For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.'

2 Timothy 4: 3-4

Peter warned about false teachers and 'destructive heresies':

'But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.'

2 Peter 2: 1-2

Why is the Church criticised for what Jezebel is and does?

The problem here is not simply Jezebel, but that the church is condoning (allowing) Jezebel to be a false prophetess and teacher – they have exercised neither godly order nor discernment.

The question is not whether you ever hear the voice of false teachers. You do – probably every day. The question is whether you can discern which messages are false.

They have ignored Yeshua's instruction:

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them."

Matthew 7: 15-20

What is the Significance of the name Jezebel?

Jesus is using 'Jezebel' as an idiom in the letter to Thyatira

- I will kill her with death (as Jezebel was judged)
- All the churches will know 'I Am He' – as Israel saw on Mt Carmel that the 'The Lord, He is God'
- He will judge according to their works (as with Ahab and Jezebel)

Jezebel

- Daughter of Eth-Baal, King of Sidon, Priest of Astarte (Hebrew: *Ashtoreth* – goddess of fertility, sexuality and war)
- Married King Ahab to seal a profitable trade alliance between Israel and Phoenicia
- She sought to exterminate the prophets of YHWH (*1 Kings 18: 13*)
- She brought pagan worship into Israel: She was a worshipper of Baal and Astarte (originated in Babylon) and with King Ahab ushered in the worst period, spiritually, in the Old Testament (*1 Kings 16: 30, 33*)
 - Ashtoreth worship (*Judges 2: 13, 10 16; c.f. 1 Samuel. 31: 10; 1 Kings 11: 5, 33*)
 - The Groves (phallic symbols) (*Deuteronomy 6: 21*)
 - The Abomination of the Sidonians (*2 Kings 23: 3, 6-7; Ezekiel 36: 15*)
 - 'Queen of Heaven' – a Babylonian concept (*Jeremiah 7: 18, 44: 15-30*)

Elijah on Mt Carmel *1 Kings 18:17-40*

- Elijah goes to Ahab to confront Israel's worship of Baal
- Before all Israel, the Lord is revealed as God
- Elijah slays the prophets of Baal, incurring Jezebel's fury

Naboth's Vineyard *1 Kings 21*

- King Ahab desires Naboth's vineyard
- The concept of 'inheritance' – the land could not be sold permanently
- Queen Jezebel arranges an Inquisition (echoes of the Spanish Inquisition)
 - The false witness of the children of Belial (death worshippers)
 - Naboth is condemned; he and all his heirs were killed (*2 Kings 9: 26*) – so there would be no claim on the land
 - Ahab takes possession of the vineyard
- Elijah, at the Lord's command, rebukes Ahab and pronounces judgement on him and his male heirs, and also on Jezebel
- Ahab repents and the Lord defers judgement

Jehu and the Lord's Judgement *2 Kings 9: 30 - 10: 11*

- Jehu and his captain, Bidkar, were witnesses to what happened to Naboth, being in the service of Ahab at that time (*2 Kings 9: 25-26*)
- Jehu witnessed also the death of Ahab in battle (*1 Kings 22: 29-40*)
- Elijah's prophecy concerning Jezebel (*1 Kings 21: 23*) is fulfilled
- The judgement on Ahab deferred to his sons is fulfilled (*2 Kings 10: 1-11*)

VS 21 & 22 Actions of Yeshua

What action has Yeshua already taken in regard to Jezebel?

Yeshua has given her (Jezebel) time to repent, but she has not
Opportunity for repentance, restoration and renewal is given, but if declined then
judgement follows

What action does Yeshua say He will take in regard to Jezebel?

Yeshua says he will cast her (Jezebel) into a sickbed (implies a bed in hell).

What action does Yeshua say He will take in regard to Jezebel and her followers?

Yeshua says those who commit adultery with (along with) her, He will cast into great
tribulation – unless they repent.

Still Yeshua gives opportunity to repent in the face of identified judgement.

What is the implication of Yeshua speaking of ‘Great Tribulation’?

‘Great Tribulation’ – a significant reference (see *Matthew 24: 9, 21 and 29*) – the first
use of this phrase in the book of Revelation – if they don’t repent they will go into the
great tribulation.

The implication of this phrase is that if they do repent then they will not go into the
great tribulation; i.e. they will be caught up in the harpazo (the rapture).

V 23 The Judgement of Yeshua

What is Yeshua’s Judgement on Jezebel’s Adherents?

Yeshua says he will “kill her children with death” – her children being those who
follow her teaching. The reason for such judgement is to be a warning to other
churches – God has perfect, intimate knowledge of every human heart; no evil can be
hidden from Him.

*“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? **I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.”** **Jeremiah**
17: 9-10*

Human works are always the basis for future judgment

*“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then **He will reward each according to his works.”** **Matthew 16: 27***

VS 24-25 Exhortations from Yeshua

To Whom is Yeshua’s Exhortation addressed?

Yeshua’s exhortations are to the faithful remnant!

To the rest of those in Thyatira – implies a faithful remnant

To those who have not this doctrine (the teaching of Jezebel)

To those who ‘have not known the depths of Satan’ – implies the secrets of the
initiation rites of the guilds in Thyatira.

This unbelievable libertinism and license was the fruit of pre-Gnostic
teaching that one was free to engage and explore the sphere of Satan and
participate in evil with the body, without harming the spirit.

What Exhortation does Yeshua give this Church?

Yeshua puts on them ‘no other burden’ – there is a play on words in Greek: depths (*bathos*), burden (*baros*)

‘But hold fast to what you have till I come’ – **the first explicit reference in these letters to Yeshua’s second coming**

What they already have – true faith – is sufficient to gain salvation and eternal life

Perseverance is a key attribute of faith that is fruitful

*‘But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, **add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** **2**

Peter 1: 5-8

VS 26 - 28 Promises to the Overcomer

According to John's own definition, to be an overcomer is to be a Christian

*‘For **whatever is born of God overcomes the world.** And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. **Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*** **1 John 5: 4-5**

The first two Promises are Millennial

- Power over the nations – the context implies this was the ambition of Jezebel
- Ruling with a rod of iron and dashing to pieces like a potter’s vessel – there are echoes here of Psalm 2: 9 – hence ‘as I have received from My Father’
- Clearly, for believers, there is work to do for the Lord in His millennial rule

I will give him the morning star – Christ himself is the morning star (*Revelation 22: 16*)

- Just as the morning star appears in the heavens before the sun rises, so Christ will appear as the Morning Star to rapture His church to heaven before He appears as the Sun of Righteousness to reign over the earth (*1Thessalonians 4:13-18; Malachi 4:2*)

These promises are further references to the Lord’s second coming

V29 The Common Phrase

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

What is different about the common phrase in this letter compare to the first three?

For the first time this phrase is not in the body of the letter

In each of the last four letters of the seven, this phrase finishes the letter and the promise to the overcomer is in the body of the letter

Why this difference between the first three letters and the last four?

The explanation for the position of the Common Phrase probably has to do with the Prophetic Application and the Prophetic Profile of the Churches

The seven churches divide into two groups:

The first three – Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamos

The Promise to the Overcomer is a postscript to the letter – it comes after the ‘common phrase’

There is no reference to Christ’s second coming

The implication is that these three churches are not ‘present’ in the days when Christ comes again (The Apostolic Church, the Early Persecuted Church and the Church Married to the State/World)

The last four – Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea

The Promise to the Overcomer is in the body of the letter – the ‘common phrase’ finishes the letter

There is specific reference to Christ’s second coming in these letters

The implication is that these four churches are in some way ‘present’ in the days when Christ comes again

Thyatira is warned it will go into the tribulation if they do not repent

Philadelphia is promised to be kept out of the tribulation

Applications of this Letter

Local Application

What was the Application to Thyatira...and what has happened?

Abhor false teaching, do not tolerate or condone it

Abhor pagan living and practices, be separate (holy)

Hold fast to true doctrine and righteous living until Jesus comes

Today all that remains of Thyatira is an ancient site in the city of Akhisar

Admonitory Application (to all churches)

What is the Application to Churches Generally (including today)?

Abandon pagan practices – there are many in the church

Many pagan practices in the church came in when the church married the world (see Pergamos)

- Day of worship – Sunday is not the Sabbath! But note Paul’s counsel in *Romans 4: 5-6*
- ‘Christian’ festivals, e.g. Easter and Christmas, have pagan roots
- Many ways in which the church adopts the ways or values of the world

Personal Application

What is the Application of this letter Personally?

Do not tolerate, or condone even by silence, false teaching – or women teachers

Flee pagan practices – don’t adopt the ways or values of the world (spiritual compromise)

Beware of prophets or teachers who teach contrary to scripture and who seduce into the ways and values of the world (worship of false gods)

Prophetic Application

Thyatira is prophetic of the Medieval Church – principally the Church of Rome, its western arm centred on Rome (the Catholic Church), and its eastern arm (the ‘Orthodox’ churches).

The Medieval Church is the ‘Daughter’ (Thyatira’s meaning) of the Married Church (Pergamos)

The meaning of ‘the depths of Satan’ (v.24) is relevant prophetically

The Depths of Satan

- The esoteric mysteries of the Babylonian cults
- In 378AD, Damasus, the Bishop of Rome, completed the absorption of Babylonianism into the Roman Church when he took on the office of Pontifex Maximus (high priest) of the Babylonian religion, which had previously been the prerogative of the Roman emperor – thus combining the ‘Christian’ church with pagan religion

The Papacy and the Roman Catholic Church

- Responsible for the bringing of pagan doctrines and practices into the Christian church
- Exalted the power of the clergy, and particularly the Pope, over the church through doctrines such as Papal Infallibility and practices such as the Inquisition and burning of so-called heretics
- Responsible for a struggle for both spiritual and temporal power over all men and their affairs
- Responsible for the murder of huge numbers of men and women of true faith
- A vast history of immorality, corruption and abuse of power

See Supplementary Note 18 ‘History of the Papacy’

Matthew 13

There are seven ‘Parables of the Kingdom’ in Matthew chapter 13

The Thyatira Church is reflected – in the parable of the Woman and the Leaven

The ‘Daughter’ Church of the Married Church – it is in the Medieval Church that sin and false doctrine have permeated (through a type of the woman Jezebel)

Paul’s Epistles

Paul’s letter to the Galatians, probably written from Jerusalem sometime before the council meeting in Jerusalem (Acts 15), is a call out of religious externalism emphasising justification by faith and walking in the Spirit.

Paul says that ritual (e.g. circumcision) avails nothing, but only faith working through love – a message that would be appropriate to a corrupt (medieval) church not living or walking by the Spirit. It is by grace through faith that we are saved, not by law keeping

‘Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes

*circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. **You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.** For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.*

Galatians 5: 1-6

Yeshua's 2nd Coming

There are explicit references to it in this letter (vs.25-27)

The implication is that these Thyatira and the three final churches are in some way 'present' in the days when Christ comes again – certainly the Catholic and Orthodox churches are present today – daughters of the church that married the state/world.