

- ***READ Revelation 1:4-8*** It is so important for us to remember that the book of Revelation was primarily written to seven churches in Asia Minor that were full of real people who had been set free from their sins by the blood of Jesus. They were people who had been brought into the kingdom of God and made priests of this great kingdom of Christ. These were disciples who needed to be prepared for the coming judgment of Jesus.
- We would hope that each of these churches and disciples were presently adequately prepared for this judgment from Jesus, but we know from even just the first three of these churches that we have considered that the health of each of these churches was different. Ephesus had some good qualities, but they also were lacking at points. Smyrna was a faithful church that was trying to withstand the attacks of the world around them. Pergamum had stood strong against their own persecutions, but they were failing in keeping the church pure from false teachings & evil influences.
- However, it seems to be the case that each of these first three churches were predominately faithful with only a few among them that were falling short in various areas. There was a little leaven that needed to be purged in order to preserve the integrity of the church as a whole. Unfortunately, once we arrive at the message to Thyatira...we find a church where the majority is embroiled in sin and difficulties among to the point that we might very well even be able to refer to this church as the corrupted church of Asia. Let's look at some of the historical background of this city, and then we will dive into the text to examine the issues that were present in Thyatira.

I. Historical Background Of Thyatira

A. Located about 40 miles southeast of Pergamum.

- Much further inland than Pergamum, Thyatira was located in a flat river valley and was without any sort of notable natural landscaping.

B. Originally founded as a military garrison that had a pattern of being destroyed and rebuilt.

- Being located on the road to the capital city of Pergamum, Thyatira was to serve as a speed bump in the road for those armies that might be marching on Pergamum during the days of the Greek empire. The idea is that Thyatira would be able to hold and weaken the army enough for the forces in Pergamum to prepare of an attack on their own city. This type of purpose led to Thyatira having a very up and down history. They did their job well, but this came at the cost of continual destruction and rebuilding throughout its history before coming under Roman control.

C. Once under the control of Rome, Thyatira (the smallest of the 7 Asian churches) thrived in commercial industry...not particularly strong religiously.

- While it used to once suffer for being on the way to Pergamum, things changed for Thyatira to the point that it began to greatly benefit from being on the same route as the capital city. The commercial industry caused Thyatira to boom, and it became a hotbed for industry of all sorts.

D. Trade guilds dominated the city, and finding business success without belong to one was difficult.

- The greatest industry within the city was that of fabrics and specifically the dying of fabrics. Purple dye was the staple color of this city which might bring to your minds the God-fearing woman named Lydia who Paul met in Philippi in **Acts 16:14** who was *"a dealer of purple cloth from the city of Thyatira."*
- This was only but one of the many industries within Thyatira, but each of these industries was dominated by trade guilds which were similar to our modern-day labor unions. In order to really be successful in any of these industries, you would need to belong to a guild. This might not seem all that difficult, but for a Christian it would have been because each of the guilds had there own patron god that was claimed, celebrated, and worshipped at various

times with feasts and celebrations. We would expect for Christians, who only recognized the God of heaven as only being real and powerful, to not participate in such things, and therefore they were not all that successful when it came to business income. It was a difficult place for disciples to live successfully and thrive economically.

E. Not certain as to the origins of the church. Could be another case of Paul's word in Ephesus, or someone associate to Lydia could have founded it.

- We don't have any recording of Paul visiting this city to establish a church, but it could be like other places where there were some who were visiting Ephesus and Paul was able to teach them the Gospel that they took back home to Thyatira. It could also be that Lydia or someone associated with her brought the Gospel to Thyatira to establish the church.

F. Now modern day city of Akhisar, Turkey.

- Those visiting Akhisar can actually visit the ruins of the ancient city which is protected on a single block that can be found within the city.

II. Jesus's Message To Thyatira

A. His opening to this church is much more intense than those to the other churches. (2:18)

1. As you probably have caught onto as we have progressed through these messages to these seven churches, each of the openings is borrowed from the vision that John saw as he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day on Patmos. This message begins with the strong statement of these being the words of the Son of God denoting that these words most especially needed to be heard since they are divinely given words.
2. Additionally, Jesus describes Himself as being *"the one whose eyes are like a fiery flame and whose feet are like fine bronze."* To say that He is the one with fiery flaming eyes is to say that He is the one who has perfect knowledge and insight into what is going on within His churches. He knows not only the deeds, but He also knows the inner thoughts and motivations. This same idea is echoed later on in **v.23**, *"Then all of the churches will know that I am the one who examines minds and hearts..."*
3. Then concerning His feet, Jesus states that they are like *"fine bronze."* **1:15** adds the detail that they are *"like fine bronze as it is fired in the furnace."* This language gives the idea that Jesus's feet are glowing red hot, and considering the content of this message...He is ready to exercise His authority and judgment by trampling out the sin that is pervasive within this church. A similar picture is painted in **19:15** where it is stated, *"He will also trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God Almighty."* More than any of the other openings prior, this opening is extremely intense and full of language that warns the reader that what is coming isn't going to be pretty. Jesus was well aware of this church and her failings, and He is ready to render judgment upon her.

B. He was aware of those who were remaining faithful & growing. (2:19)

1. But not everything in this letter is negative, for Jesus begins with words of commendation towards the small portion of the church that is giving great effort to remain faithful in a terrible environment. Jesus was aware of their *"love, faithfulness, service, and endurance."* While there was much in this church that was left to be desired, they at least had a small leg up on Ephesus for their love for God was being sustained.
2. Additionally, Jesus notes the fact that this small portion of the church had actually been growing in their faith. *"I know that your last works are greater than the first."* Again, this is completely opposite of what was going on in Ephesus. Their love was currently worse that it was to begin with, but this church seems to have been putting effort into growing in areas of their faith, and Jesus wants them to know that He is aware and appreciative of their efforts. However, the words of commendation come to a screeching halt at this point.

C. Yet, He was also well aware of their tolerating of "Jezebel" and her evil influence on the church. (2:20)

1. The big issue facing this church was its toleration of "*the woman Jezebel*" and the horribly wicked influence that she was having upon the church that was in Thyatira. Let's note a few things concerning this "Jezebel."
 - a) First, her name was probably not actually Jezebel, but Jesus is using this name to denote just how wicked of a woman this was. We don't exactly see a large of young ladies running around with the name Jezebel because the Biblical character who had that name is easily one of the most evil and wicked people to be found within the Scriptures. Ahab was also an extremely wicked individual, and his reign over Israel is highlighted by a number of evil acts in **I Kings 16:30-33**. "*But Ahab son of Omri did what was evil in the Lord's sight more than all who were before him. Then, as if following the sin of Jeroboam son of Nebat were not enough, he married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and then proceeded to serve Baal and bow in worship to him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he had built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole. Ahab did more to anger the Lord God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him.*"
 - b) Jezebel's response to Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal was, "*May the gods punish me and do so severely if I don't make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow!*" I can not think of a positive thing to say about this woman, and the death she suffered showed just how much God disdained her for her evil ways. **II Kings 9:30-37** tells of her being thrown down a wall, trampled underfoot, and then eaten by dogs. This was all to fulfill the word of the Lord that was spoken by His prophet Elijah.
 - c) Therefore, for Jesus to describe this woman with the same name as that evil woman is a definite sign of the level of her wickedness and depravity. This evil woman's sins included calling herself a prophetess of God, teaching God's people to commit sexual immorality, and deceiving them into eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols.
2. There are a number of issues that were evident with this going on within the church. Whereas others churches seemed to be predominately faithful with a few bad influences, this church seems to have been dominantly by this woman, her sins, and the sins she had influenced others to participate in. Some seemed to simply tolerate her while others seem to have been fully engaged in her wicked practices. She had led God's children to stumble which was a direct violation of **Matthew 18:6,7** concerning Jesus's warnings about causing any of the little ones to stumble and the consequences of doing such a thing.
3. It is worth noting that we are not told specifically what Jezebel was teaching that led to these things being done by members of the church in Thyatira. It could be that she was holding to an early form of *Gnosticism* which was a dualistic philosophy that is addressed in a number of New Testament letters. The issue with this philosophy is that it separates our bodies and our spirits as two completely different entities. Gnostics believed that the physical universe was inherently evil while the spiritual world was good. As long as a person had a particular knowledge and belief then it didn't matter what they did within their bodies. This surely doesn't sound too dissimilar to what we hear a lot in our day concerning being saved through "easy-believism." As long as I believe the right things then I can do what I want. Again, we don't know for certain, but this could have been her teaching.
4. Another possibility is that she was teaching what is known as *antinomianism*. Antinomians were known to believe that Christians didn't have to worry about God's laws on morality because His forgiveness and grace were complete and covered not only sins you had committed but also sins that you would commit in the future. They would have been people who would have fully agreed that we should continue to sin so that grace would multiply. (**Romans 6:1**)

5. These two systems of false teaching might have been at the center of Jezebel's evil influences among the disciples in Thyatira, but let's not overlook the fact that this was a woman who seems to have taken over the controlling influence of this church. That in and of itself was something that was forbidden in Jesus's design for His church. **(I Timothy 2:12)** All of this simply plays into the fact that this church was in deep trouble because of the pervasive influence of this woman and her evil ways. She was able to persuade these disciples that the extremely immoral practices of the pagans around them were acceptable behavior for disciples of Jesus to participate in. Maybe she cloaked all of it in the guise of this allowing the Christians to be more successful in their personal lives through being able to participate in different trade guilds. We can't say for certain besides that Jesus was fed up with her actions.
- D. Jesus had given her time to repent, but she refused and for that she and those who followed her would suffer the consequences of their unfaithfulness. (2:21-23)**
1. The fact that Jesus notes that Jezebel refused to repent tells me that this woman was willfully engaging in these actions while recognizing that what she was doing was wrong. She was well aware of the wickedness of her actions, and yet she refused to repent and turn from them. Because of this prideful and arrogant refusal to yield to Jesus, our Lord plainly states that judgment was on the way for not only her, but also for those who chose to follow her.
 2. For Jezebel, Jesus says that she would be thrown into a sickbed. Notes in the NET Bible state the Greek source language as literally meaning "onto a bed", so nearly every translation is taking context clues to come to the conclusion that this was not going to be some comfortable or relaxing bed for her. This was going to be punishment in the form of some sort of affliction that we can't nail down for certain. Maybe she was going to contract an actual illness. Maybe she was going to be persecuted in some way. Maybe this is Jesus speaking of the future when she and all of those who followed her would be thrown into hell for all eternity.
 3. We simply don't know for certain, but we can definitely understand that she was going to be punished for her wicked influence upon the church. And yet she was not the only one who was going to be punished. Jesus also states that those who committed adultery with her would also suffer great affliction. He goes so far as to say that *"I will strike her children dead."* We can probably safely assume that Jesus is referring to those who have been following her false teachings and not literal children, but we can't know for certain whether Jesus is being literal in saying He would strike them dead. Again, the original language is pretty straightforward as it literally states that Jesus says, *"I will kill them with death."* Literal death seems a possibility.
 4. Now, this wouldn't be anything we haven't seen before. The Lord struck down Ananias and Sapphira for their sin in **Acts 5**, and it should be interesting to note the result of what the Lord did in that case. *"Then great fear came on the whole church and on all who heard these things."* **(Acts 5:11)** What was to be the result of what Jesus did in this instance in Revelation? *"Then all the churches will know that I am the one who examines minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you according to your works."* **(Revelation 2:23)** This punishment of judgment by Jesus would send shockwaves throughout His churches for them to know that He would not stand for those who sought to corrupt His people.
- E. He encourages the few who have remained faithful to "hold on to what you have until I come." (2:24,25)**
1. For those two who have been trying to remain faithful to Him, Jesus seeks to encourage them. He compliments them for not having known *"the so-called secrets of Satan."* While He was ready to burden the rest of the church with punishments and tribulations because of their sins, Jesus wasn't going to burden those who would strive to be faithful.

2. The church situation in Thyatira wasn't like what we have today where we can simply go join another church that wasn't engaged in false teaching and sin. These were the only Christians within this ancient Roman city, and Jesus desired for them to simply, *"hold fast until I come."* He knew of the corruption that was present within this church, but He was also well aware of those who were remaining faithful. He saw their deeds and simply wanted them to hold on.
- F. Those who conquer and keep His works would be rewarded with *"authority over the nations"* & *"the morning star."* (2:26-29)
1. If they were willing to trust in Him and remain faithful to the end, then Jesus promises that they would be rewarded with *"authority over the nations"* and *"the morning star."* Concerning **vv.26,27**, there can be no doubt that Jesus was drawing on the words of **Psalm 2:7-9**. *"I will declare the Lord's decree. He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your possession. You will break them with an iron scepter; you will shatter them like pottery."*
 2. This Messianic Psalm speaks of the coming King who would be given the nations and rule over them with absolute power. This ultimate victory will be realized when Jesus returns and judges the world. At that moment, Jesus will have all of the power and authority not only over men but also over death and every evil force. He will stand over them in final victory, and we will be right there with Him in victory. We will be the victors with Jesus for we will have conquered this world through the power of Jesus and nothing will be able to stand before us.
 3. But it is so important to notice that this is only done through the power of Jesus. We have to be a people who keep His works, and in doing so we will receive the *"morning star"* which I believe to be a reference to Jesus as is seen in **Revelation 22:16**. *"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to attest these things to you for the churches. I am the Root and descendant of David, the bright morning star."* Through the spirit of Jesus dwelling within them, these brethren could overcome and conquer. Yes, the environment was awful with Jezebel and her evil coworkers wreaking havoc in the church, but these brethren could overcome and persevere with the help of the Lord Jesus.

The horrible situation that was present in Thyatira sadly isn't out of the realm of possibility for churches today. There can be times when evil and wicked tyrants can come in and influence the Lord's local churches to buy into false doctrines that lead to all sorts of wickedness and immorality. For those who do such things, they best beware because the Lord will come in judgement against them just as He was prepared to do in Thyatira. He might wait until the very end to do so, but they would receive their just punishment. For those who are willing to fight to remain unstained by such evil influences, may God strengthen them and encourage them through what is found here in **Revelation 2**. Though wicked people might have the upper hand at the moment...their time of reckoning will come. This is true in every respect, and may the Lord help us to be reminded of such as we go throughout the rest of this week striving to avoid being corrupted by instead remaining pure and unspotted by the world.