**THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA**

**Revelation 2:18-29**

(Version 1 was from *A Glimpse of Glory,* Ronny Wade)

(Version 2 has been significantly updated)

Introduction

The seven letters to the seven churches form a chiasmus.

A chiasmus is a literary device that is common in the Bible, named after the Greek letter “chi” because it mirrors around a central point, just like chi (and our “X”).

A. Ephesus - Lost first love

B. Smyrna - Not criticized, persecuted by the Jews

C. Pergamum - Have the doctrine of Balaam

X. Thyatira - Tolerate Jezebel

C’. Sardis - Dead, ready to die

B’. Philadelphia - Not criticized, persecuted by the Jews

A’. Laodicea - Lost their love of Christ

Difficult letter to interpret, I approach with humility. Please consider my thoughts, think critically and decide whether I am correct.

Thyatira was a wealthy city located in the northern part of Lydia near the border of Mysia on the Lycas River, some forty miles southeast of Pergamum. The city had been governed by Rome since 190 B.C., being a part of the province of Asia. The city lay in a Valley surrounded by gently sloping hills. Even though there was no temple to the emperor, there were at least three temples dedicated to various other gods or goddesses. The city was noted for its trade and manufacturing capabilities, especially its purple dye and dyed garments. It was also noted for its trade guilds, which may have formed some of the basis of the problems found in the church. The guilds were made up of workers from various sectors such as linen, wool, tanners, leather, dyers, bakers, slave dealers, and bronze smiths.

This is the longest of the letters to the seven churches, no doubt because of the seriousness of the problems existing here. We know nothing of the origin of this church, its only mention in scripture being here. We are first introduced to this city and one of its residents in Acts 16:11-15 when Paul converted Lydia, a seller of purple. She was baptized in a river just outside the city of Philippi. Some believe that upon her return home, she became the driving force behind the beginning of the church in that city. This may well be, but there is no evidence to back up such an assertion.

**TEXT (18) (NKJV)**

*"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:*

This is the only place in the book of Revelation that describes Jesus as the “Son of God”. This, coupled with the other descriptions, reminds us of the book of Daniel.

**Daniel 10:5-6 (NKJV)** I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist *was* girded with gold of Uphaz! **6** His body *was* like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude.

Remember the description of Jesus earlier in Revelation:

**Revelation 1:15 (NKJV)** His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters;

The furnace reminds us of the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego:

**Daniel 3:24-25 (NKJV)** Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste *and* spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." **25** "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

Jesus is the Son of God that stood with His people because they did not compromise. This foreshadows the theme of this letter: compromise.

It is the "Son of God" who speaks. His eyes penetrate the corruption existing in the church and His feet are ready to trample and burn to ashes all who yield to the seductive teachings of the wicked Jezebel.

**TEXT (19), (NKJV)**

*"I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.*

As has been affirmed in the other letters, nothing is hidden from Him who walks among the lamp stands: all is open before His eyes. Works, both good and bad, do not escape His notice.

What a commendation to receive from Jesus! He knew all the good that they had done and continued to do, ESV: “and that your latter works exceed the first.”

Note the contrast with the Ephesian letter:

**Revelation 2:4 (NKJV)** Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.

The Thyatiran brethren were growing where the Ephesians were regressing.

**TEXT (20), (NKJV)**

*Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because 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.*

“Nevertheless”: what a chilling word that must have been to the Thyatiran brethren!

“Because you allow”: while the brethren were working, loving and growing, they were showing *too much* tolerance and patience.

“Who calls herself a prophetess”: her claims weren’t being tested or refuted by the brethren.

Notice that they had the opposite problem to the Ephesian brethren.

**Revelation 2:2 (NKJV)** "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;

The Ephesians were commended for their discernment but condemned for their lack of love.

The Thyatirans were commended for their love but condemned for their lack of discernment.

**Philippians 1:9-11 (NKJV)** And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, **10** that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, **11** being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Jesus expects His followers to being loving AND discerning. They should not compromise on the truth.

Who was Jezebel?

**1 Kings 16:30-31 (NKJV)** Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who *were* before him. **31** And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him.

It was considered the epitome of sinfulness to have married Jezebel. Why?

**1 Kings 21:25 (NKJV)** But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up.

Ahab was sinful enough by himself; more than all who were before him. Jezebel “stirred him up” to be even more sinful!

The Thyatiran “Jezebel” was perhaps (but I’m not dogmatic about this) a group in the congregation that could be characterised by the description of the Old Testament Jezebel. Notice that elsewhere in Revelation a single person symbolises a group of people of similar type.

* Revelation 2:14 - False teachers in Pergamum are characterised by Balaam
* Revelation 12:1 - A beautiful woman represents God’s people who brings the Messiah into the world
* Revelation 17:1 - A Harlot who seduced the people into spiritual adultery represents Rome

Q: What was the problem with the Thyatiran Jezebel?

A: The same as the original Jezebel - a spirit of compromise.

The problem with the original Jezebel was not that she banned the worship of the true God but that she taught and seduced Israel to compromise and worship false gods in addition.

Notice her tactics: “to teach and seduce”. This follows the pattern of Satan later in the book of Revelation:

* **The Beast:** Terror
* **The False Prophet:** False Teaching
* **The Harlot:** Seduction

It seems only logical that Jezebel's teaching would be readily received in this city consisting of many guilds, each of which had its own social festival, embracing various pagan religious elements. This presented a special problem for some Christians. In order to keep his employment or advance his business, it would seem advantageous to maintain membership in the guild of his particular profession. Could this be done and still maintain loyalty to Christ? It is probable that Jezebel taught a compromising position here, leading people to believe that one could maintain membership without becoming involved in the religious and social activities of the guild. Many, however, found this neither practical nor easy. Faced with this dilemma, they compromised their faith, giving in to temptation, and sinned against the Lord.

The fornication may have been physical since such often accompanied pagan festivals. However, it would seem probable that "fornication" here should be understood as spiritual fornication or idolatry, especially when we consider the similar imagery that is used with the harlot of Revelation 17. Whether physical or spiritual, it is the consequence of Jezebel's teaching and influence upon the church. The tragedy of this situation is that the church "suffered” or allowed it to continue unchallenged and unabated. The lesson is clear. It is not enough to just refrain from such activities. We must oppose them. Teach against them and condemn their existence.

**TEXT (21), (NKJV)**

*And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.*

God is kind and long suffering. He wants all to come to repentance. It appears here, however, that God's patience had run out. The obstinate resistance of this woman was as flagrant as her sin. Often people mistake time given them to repent as a sign that all is well.

***Ecclesiastes 8:11 (NKJV)****Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*

So it was with Jezebel; “…she refuses to repent“ (ESV) …she does not want to repent” (NASB).

**TEXT (22), (NKJV)**

*Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.*

A failure to repent leads to judgment. This woman would be cast into a bed of pain and affliction. Those who had shared in her wicked teachings and practices would suffer the same fate reserved for her. The idea is that the bed into which they are cast is a bed of great tribulation. There is still hope, still time to repent. "Repent of their deeds” refer to the works that originated in this woman's evil teaching. Unless the church repented of sharing in that teaching or failing to oppose it, they would share in the inevitable judgment facing her.

**TEXT (23), (NKJV)**

*I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.*

Three groups are considered:

1. Jezebel, the source of the teaching,
2. those who follow her teachings and participate in adultery with her; and
3. future generations that will perpetuate her sinful ways.

Each group will suffer the same judgement albeit described in three different ways:

1. A sickbed
2. Great tribulation
3. Death

Each of these refer to eternal punishment in hell.

“All the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts”: this is where we come back to our chiasmus. This is the only place in the seven letters that Jesus refers to all the churches. Thyatira seems to be in the centre of the chiasmus at least in part to emphasise the point that all churches need to hear and apply the lessons that Jesus is giving to specific churches.

**Revelation 2:29 (NKJV)** "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

Jesus has the “eyes like a flame of fire” and searches our minds (thoughts) and hearts (emotions). Nothing is hidden from Him. Thus He is perfectly qualified to judge each of us “according to [our] works”. We are not judged as a group but as individuals. We are individually responsible for our actions and inactions.

The important lesson for all is that God does not condone sin, neither can we. He does not tolerate it, and those who do will suffer grave consequences because of their spineless disposition.

Notice how the message becomes personal. "I will give unto each one of you." Each of us stands alone before God. We are responsible for our inner person as well as our outward behaviour. God knows all and will deal with us individually. Every person in Thyatira had to account for himself as to his relationship to this terrible woman and her ungodly teaching.

**TEXT (24), (NKJV)**

*"Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden.*

This seems to be a reference back to the “angel” or “messenger” who was to read the letter to the congregation.

**Revelation 1:3 (NKJV)** Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near.

Those who did not participate in the adultery (spiritual or otherwise) had no other burden than to deal with the problem in their congregation.

**TEXT (25), (NKJV)**

*But hold fast what you have till I come.*

The Christians are encouraged to hold on to the moral life required of them as the children of God. "Till I come" does not refer to the "second coming" but rather a coming to aid or judge the church.

**TEXT (26), (NKJV)**

*And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—*

The addressed are those who overcome the Jezebel threat and keep the faith by doing the commandments of God. "Until the end" just means that there is no place to slow down or quit in serving the Lord. One can never give up. That is not an option and should not be in our vocabulary.

**TEXT (27), (NKJV)**

*'HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON; THEY SHALL BE DASHED TO PIECES LIKE THE POTTER'S VESSELS'—as I also have received from My Father;*

The idea is that God raised Christ to sit on the throne. To the Son was given the nations over which He should rule with a rod of iron (Psalms 2:7-9). Here, those who overcome, and keep His works, are said to share that rule with Him. The rule is spiritual through the gospel or revealed truth.

The Christians in Thyatira, the most insignificant city out of the seven, would rule with the King of kings and Lord of lords.

**TEXT (28), (NKJV)**

*and I will give him the morning star.*

**Numbers 24:17 (NKJV)** "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel, And batter the brow of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult.

**Revelation 22:16 (NKJV)** "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."

Jesus promises to give the faithful Himself.

Hailey says, "The meaning seems to be that as the morning star, one of the brightest in the heavens, heralds the approach of dawn and a new day, so Christ here promises that He will give to the conqueror a new day; the night is almost over." These Christians should take heart. Victory is ahead for the faithful.

**TEXT (29), (NKJV)**

*"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '*

While the letter is to the church at Thyatira, Jesus invites all to hear and apply what He says to the churches.

**Conclusion**

Jesus invites us to examine ourselves and examine the congregation that we are a part of. Do we repeat some of the same mistakes as the Thyatirans? If so we should apply the teachings and learn the lesson so we obtain the same reward. Otherwise we will face the same condemnation.

1. Jesus sees all.
2. He will tolerate no compromise.
3. If there is false teaching in the church, He expects that to be corrected