The Book of Revelation

Zanesville, OH | Wednesday/Sunday Bible Study

**Letters to the Seven Churches**

* These letters form an integral part of the message of the book. The command to John given at the end of chapter 1 to write what he sees now comes to fruition in the immediate messages to the seven churches. There is a common structure observed in all 7 letters:
  + **Command to write to an angel of each church**
  + **Description of Jesus corresponding to the *“Son of Man Vision”***
  + **Acknowledgement of positive deeds**
  + **Accusation of some form of sin or wrong doing**
  + **A call to repent with warning of judgment**
  + **Encouragement to know the truth**
  + **A promise made to those who overcome**
* These seven elements are not present in every single church (Smyrna, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Sardis). As such, it is not to be taken as an iron clad rule but a general one observing the elements composing the message of each letter to each church. It should be noted that what is said to each of these churches is specifically with concern to their situations. However, it is also relevant for the universal church today.
* The seven churches may fall into three distinct groups. The first and last churches (Ephesus and Laodicea) are in danger of losing their lampstand altogether. They are in danger of losing their identity as Christians because of their sin and misdoings. Therefore, Jesus urges them to repent and return to do the deeds that will allow them to live before it is too late.
* The second and sixth churches (Smyrna and Philadelphia) are pictured as being faithful to Christ despite their trials, persecutions and temptations. They have not compromised nor denied Jesus even in the face of some devastating situations. Jesus commends them for this and encourages them to excel still more.
* The third, fourth and fifth churches (Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis) complete the chiastic structure and they are described as having some who are faithful but some who are not. They exhibit characteristics of compromising the faith but they are admonished to make changes and improve before it’s too late.

**Chapter 2**

* **2:18-29– Letter to Thyatira**
* The fourth letter is addressed to the church in Thyatira. Thyatira, located about 40 miles SE of Pergamum, was situated on the south bank of the Lycus river. According to Mounce, *“Thyatira was founded by Seleucus I as a military outpost to guard one of the approaches to his empire. Since it possessed no natural fortifications, it would draw heavily upon the spirit of its soldier-citizens to make up for its vulnerability. In 190 B.C. the city fell to the Romans and became first part of the kingdom of Pergamum and then part of the Province of Asia”* (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*).
* Thyatira, under Roman rule, became a major center for manufacturing and marketing wealthy items including its famous purple dye. The biblical narrative supports the idea of Thyatira being known for its purple since Lydia, a native of Thyatira, travelled to Philippi to sell the well-desired material (Acts 16:14).
* William Ramsay suggests that various archaeological inscriptions mention, *“woolworkers, linen-workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather-workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave-dealers and bronze-smiths”* (Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*). Tyrimnos was considered the divine guardian of the city. It is said by some that he was considered “a son of god” portrayed by rays of light and brass feet.
* Mounce says concerning the religious implications for the saints, *“It would appear that Thyatira’s market extended across the Aegean Sea into Macedonia. Since the trade guilds were inseparably intertwined with local religious observances, they posed a special problem for the economic well-being of Christians”* (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*).
* **Verse 18**– This description of Jesus is drawn from the vision in chapter one and in particular 1:14-15 (cf. Dan 10:6). It suits this letter for several important reasons. Firstly, the description of Christ stands in stark contrast to that of Tyrimnos. Jesus is the true Son of God since He is the resurrected Christ.
* Later in this letter (v. 27) an allusion to Psalm 2 is made which is known as a clear reference to the Messiah who is the Son of God. Beyond that, Christ rules all the nations with a rod of iron and every single soul will bow before Him. Tyrimnos is seen on coins on a horse with a double-headed battle ax. His ax is no match for Christ’s rod of iron.
* Secondly, this description of Christ speaks of His penetrating insight into all things that take place and in this case He is well-aware of the evil taking place in Thyatira. In the midst of economic and spiritual hardship, the description of His feet being like that of burnished bronze is appropriate since it indicates permanent stability, strength and purity.
* **Verse 19**– Jesus, having eyes like a flame of fire, knows of all the deeds the saints at Thyatira are involved in. He commends them for their love, faith, service and perseverance which was not so great at first but at the time of John’s writing, has grown significantly (cf. Col. 3:14; 2 Thess. 1:3).
* **Verse 20**– The next 5 verses are spent on noting the negative deeds of the church. Christ denounces those who hold to the teaching and tolerance of a woman called Jezebel who is teaching and leading the saints to idolatry and sexual immorality. Jezebel is probably not her actual name but it is used as an epithet to draw our attention to Jezebel of the OT.
* Jezebel, wife of Ahab, led her husband and all Israel to the idolatrous worship of Baal (1 Kings 16:31; 21:25). She incited her husband to commit idolatry and in turn the entire nation turned to immorality and idolatry. This woman in Thyatira is exhibiting the same spirit in leading God’s saints away from Him.
* Her teaching and influence is closely connected to that of Balaam and the Nicolaitans (2:6, 14-15; Num. 25:1-3; 31:16). It seems that some of the saints here at Thyatira are in the habit of tolerating her practices and influences evidenced by the fact that some have become deeply involved in these things.
* It would have been a great temptation to compromise with these things due to the economic hardship they faced. Some of the saints may have deemed eating foods sacrificed to idols as a trivial thing which could ease their hardships/persecution. These pagan feasts were well-known to be connected with acts of sexual immorality (1 Cor. 10:18-21).
* **Verse 21**– Jesus, in His great love and mercy, has offered her time to repent (2 Pet. 3:9) but she has chosen to refuse His offer. Although she is involved in great acts of evil and immorality, Jesus is not first inclined to destroy but rather to save if she is willing to repent (Rom. 2:4-5; 9:22; 2 Pet. 3:15; Rev. 9:20-21).
* **Verse 22**– Because of her unwillingness to repent, Jesus now states the punishment she will face because of her sin. She will be thrown onto a bed of sickness and those who commit adultery with her (compromising saints/associates) will experience great tribulation unless they repent. Jezebel’s punishment is nothing new in the scriptures of one who has done as she has (Ezek. 16:37-41; 23:29). Her punishment fits the crime (9:5-6).
* **Verse 23**– Furthermore, Jesus adds that He will kill her children with pestilence (cf. 9:18). The *“children”* here may not be referring to her literal offspring but those who have willingly and happily accepted her ways as their own and made it a part of their identities. The punishment Jezebel and her followers receives is pictured as overwhelming because their sin is so great.
* The punishments administered by Jesus are such that all the churches will without a doubt recognize that He is God and He is the one who has penetrating oversight of all the nations and all His people (eyes like a flame of fire) and He judges accordingly (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Chron. 28:9; Psa. 44:21; Jer. 17:10; Jn. 2:24-25; Acts 5:1-11; Rom. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:10; Heb. 4:13).
* **Verse 24**– Jesus speaks to the rest of the saints at Thyatira who have not held to the teaching and influence of Jezebel. He refers to these things (idolatry and immorality) as the deep things of Satan. Christ may be emphasizing that idolatry and immorality and the like are the epitome of Satan (cf. Eph. 6:11-12) and who he is and it is not associated in any way whatsoever with God and His holy practices.
* **Verse 25**– The end of v. 24 and v. 25 seem to go together. The saints who have not compromised and who have not gone in the way of error are encouraged to hold fast to what they have (v. 19) until He comes. Jesus’ presence will be manifested in judgment against His enemies (1:7) and if these are found faithful they will escape His wrath.
* **Verses 26-27**– The overcomer and the faithful saints are given a promise by Jesus that they will have authority over the nations and they will rule them with a rod of iron. This is clearly a reference to Psalm 2:8-9 which is a Messianic passage used to speak of Christ’s sovereignty and rule over all nations (Rev. 12:5; 19:15).
* Jezebel’s children receive death because they follow her, but the followers of Jesus receive authority and rule like Him. There could not be a more powerful contrast between what Jesus has to offer and what Jezebel (Satan) has to offer. This is yet another instance in which the scriptures denote that the saints will be like Christ (Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 6:3-4; 1 Jn. 3:2; Rev. 5:10). Those in rebellion and opposition are shattered by Christ and His people (Psa. 2:1-3, 9, 12).
* **Verse 28**– There are a variety of suggestions as to what this promise means. Some suggest it is the Holy Spirit while others say it is eternal life or a way of speaking of the peace and comfort to be had in God in Heaven. Jesus proclaims later in this book (22:16) that He is the bright morning star. Jesus could simply be saying that the faithful overcomers will have complete access to Him.
* **Verse 29**– Beginning with this fourth letter and the proceeding ones, the commendation to listen is stated at the end of the promises rather than before (cf. 2:7, 11, 17). The one who has ears cannot put it to better use than to heed the words of the Spirit and by acting upon them before it is too late (cf. Matt. 7:24-25).