

## THE THINGS PRESENT, REVELATION, 2:1-3:22

### INTRODUCTORY NOTES

- Thomas Constable, *Thyatira was the smallest and least significant of the seven cities addressed, but it was the one that received the longest letter.*
- John Walvoord, *The church was small, but it was singled out for this penetrating letter of rebuke.*
- Kendell Easley, *A false teacher was leading many Christians of Thyatira to embrace open immorality but an all-knowing, all powerful Lord will punish her followers severely.*

### THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA, REVELATION 2:18-29

#### A. Destination - Thyatira (2:18a), **And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write:**

##### 1. Background

- a. Thyatira was a city in western Asia Minor on the borders of Lydia and Mysia, founded in 300 B.C., about 30 miles southeast of Pergamum. Its modern name is Ak-hissar, Turkish for “white castle.”
- b. An important road ran through Thyatira, connecting Constantinople and Smyrna.
- c. It was a center for the wool trade and purple dye. Note Lydia in Acts 16:14-15.
- d. There were more trade guilds in Thyatira than in any other Asian city. D. Magie notes, *There were trade guilds for clothiers, bakers, tanners, potters, linen workers, wool merchants, slave traders, shoemakers, dyers, and coppersmiths.*
- e. Warren Wiersbe, *Wherever guilds were found, idolatry and immorality—the two great enemies of the early church—were almost always present too.*

##### 2. Progress of the Gospel

- a. Commercial prosperity attracted a large Jewish minority to Thyatira.
- b. There is little known of the development of the church in Thyatira.
- c. Paul may have preached at Thyatira based on Acts 19:10, *This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.*
- d. John Walvoord, *The church in Thyatira may have first heard the gospel from Lydia, converted through Paul’s ministry (Acts 16:14–15).*
- e. The primary issues raised in Revelation surrounds toleration of pagan practices which led to idolatry.
- f. It appears that the strong trade guilds in Thyatira were a reason for toleration.
  - 1) E. M. Blaiklock, *It was difficult to abstain from the guild festivities without losing one’s business and social acceptance. To conform meant exposure to the licentious background and pagan ritual that marked the guild dinner.*
  - 2) William Barclay, *To refuse to join one of these guilds would mean to give up all prospect of commercial existence. Why should a Christian not join one of these guilds? They held common meals. These would very often be held in a temple; and, even if not, they would begin and end with a formal sacrifice to the gods, and the meat eaten would be meat which had already been offered to idols. Further, it often happened that these communal meals were occasions of drunken revelry and slack morality. Was it possible for a Christian to be part of such occasions?*

#### B. The Lord (2:18b), **The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.**

##### 1. Son of God

- a. Charles Ryrie, *The Lord represents Himself to the church as the divine one (“Son of God”) . . .*
- b. Thomas Constable, *The title Son of God emphasizes Jesus Christ’s deity and His right to judge. This is the only use of this title in Revelation, though it is practically equivalent to Messiah (cf. Ps. 2:12; Luke 4:41; John 1:34, 49; 3:18; 5:25; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 20:31).*
- c. John Walvoord, . . . *He is called the Son of God rather than the Son of Man. The situation required reaffirmation of His deity and His righteous indignation at their sins.*
- d. According to William Ramsay, a local god in Thyatira was Tyrimnas who was considered a son of the gods. He was pictured on city coins as riding a horse and wielding a doubled-edged battle axe in judgment.

2. *eyes like a flame of fire*
  - a. John Walvoord, *The reference to His eyes being “like blazing fire” and the brilliant reflections of His feet emphasize the indignation and righteous judgment of Christ.*
  - b. Thomas Constable, *Flame-like eyes suggest piercing and discerning judgment (cf. 1:14; Dan. 10:6).*
  - c. William Barclay, *The flaming eyes must stand for two things. They must stand for the blazing anger against sin in the eyes of the Risen Christ; and they must stand for the awful penetration of that gaze which strips the disguises away and sees into a man’s inmost heart.*
3. *feet are like burnished bronze*
  - a. Charles Ryrie, *trampling His enemies under His feet . . .*
  - b. Thomas Constable, *Burnished (highly reflective) bronze feet, in this context, picture a warrior with protected feet (cf. 1:15; Dan. 10:6).*
  - c. William Barclay, *The brazen feet must stand for the inflexible, immovable strength and power of the Risen Christ. A message which begins like that will certainly be no soothing tranquilliser.*
4. Comments
  - a. Kendell Easley, *In the vision of Christ in chapter 1, his eyes represented his all-encompassing knowledge (“omniscience”), while his feet symbolized his all-encircling power (“omnipotence”). His knowledge is fully expressed as he describes in detail their sin and its consequences. Christ’s power is fully shown in his treatment of “Jezebel and her children.”*
  - b. Grant Osborne, *The two images here of Christ’s eyes and feet from 1:14–15 (with Dan 10:6 the source) are both military and center on Christ as Judge. In this serious situation, with false religion running rampant, the church in Thyatira must be made aware that the exalted Christ sees all, and judgment is imminent.*

C. Commendation (2:19), ***I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.***

1. Thomas Constable, *In many particulars some believers in this church were praiseworthy. They were strong in good deeds, love for others (not mentioned in the other letters), trust (faith) in God, service of their Savior, and patient endurance (perseverance) in trials. Moreover they had become even more zealous recently . . .*
2. John Walvoord, *Though much was wrong in the church at Thyatira, believers there were commended for their love ... faith ... service, and perseverance (cf. 2:2). And the Thyatira Christians were doing more as time went on (in contrast to the Ephesus church which did less).*
3. Warren Wiersbe, *The believers in Thyatira were a busy lot! They were involved in sacrificial ministry for the sake of others. What’s more, their works were increasing and characterized by faith, love, and patience; so the church was not guilty of mere “religious activity.”*
4. Kendell Easley, *They are known for their love ... faith ... service and perseverance (note the presence of “love,” missing at Ephesus). These four virtues are probably meant to be paired. The first two are motives; the second two are deeds. Love for others had produced service; faith in Christ had assured perseverance in their commitment to him.*
5. Grant Osborne, *When love and faith characterize a church, the result will always be an excess of service and endurance.*

D. Condemnation (2:20-23)

1. Strong disapproval of a church member (20), ***But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.***
  - a. A woman claiming to be a prophetess seduced the church at Thyatira.
    - 1) Charles Ryrie, *The church is rebuked for permitting the false teaching of a prophetess who openly advocated apostasy.*
    - 2) She is called Jezebel in Revelation.
      - a) Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab of Israel, 1 Kings 16 - 2 Kings 9.
      - b) She led her husband and the people of Israel to worship pagan gods.
    - 3) Warren Wiersbe, *No amount of loving and sacrificial works can compensate for tolerance of evil.*

- b. Jezebel in Thyatira taught the acceptance of sexual immorality and idol worship.
- 1) Grant Osborne, *The “Jezebel” here claimed her message was directly from God, possibly not in the form of systematic teaching but via oracles and pronouncements.*
  - 2) She encouraged believers to join the local trade guilds which were required for tradesmen who wanted to work in Thyatira.
  - 3) Kendell Easley, *The criticism Christ has is severe. All their growth in love and faith was overshadowed by the success of a pernicious teacher code-named “Jezebel.”*
  - 4) Warren Wiersbe, *The church was permitting a false prophetess to influence the people and lead them into compromise . . . The seductive teaching of Jezebel was similar to the “doctrine of Balaam” that the Lord condemned in the church of Pergamos (Rev. 2:14). She taught believers how to compromise with the Roman religion and the practices of the guilds, so that Christians would not lose their jobs or their lives.*
  - 5) Robert Mounce, *With her Nicolaitan orientation the prophetess could suggest that since ‘an idol has no real existence’ (I Cor 8:4), believers need not undergo the privation which would follow from unwillingness to go along with the simple requirements of the trade guild.*
  - 6) J. Ramsey Michaels, *Like the Nicolaitans at Pergamum, she was urging sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols (v. 20; compare 2:14), in other words, the violation of the decree of the Jerusalem Council [note Acts 15:29].*
  - 7) John Walvoord, *What was acceptable to that local society was abhorred by Christ.*

c. Comments

- 1) William Barclay, . . . *we have no idea who Jezebel was, although we can with certainty trace the kind of person that she was . . . It must be clearly understood that she had no wish to destroy the Church; but she wanted to bring into it new ways which were, in fact, destructive of the faith.*
- 2) Warren Wiersbe, *The Ephesian church was weakening in its love, yet faithful to judge false teachers; while the people in the assembly at Thyatira were growing in their love, but too tolerant of false doctrine. Both extremes must be avoided in the church. “Speaking the truth in love” is the biblical balance (Eph. 4:15). Unloving orthodoxy and loving compromise are both hateful to God.*
- 3) Grant Osborne, *There continue to be many “Jezebels” in our day, people who deliberately teach falsehood to gain money and power. These false teachers establish their own cults and prey upon the gullible to win their allegiance and steal their money. People are looking for something to give them stability and hope, and too easily they fall under the influence of these religious hucksters.*

2. Judgement for her and her followers (21-23)

- a. She refused to repent (21), ***I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.***
- 1) Thomas Constable, *God had not brought judgment on her previously so that she might repent (2 Pet. 3:9).*
  - 2) Grant Osborne, *Still, even with Jezebel, God is full of mercy and has given her time to repent of her immorality (2:21), probably both spiritual adultery and sexual immorality. She has refused to accept his offer, and the time is almost up.*
- b. She and her followers would be judged unless they repented (22), ***Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works,***
- 1) Thomas Constable, *Since she refused to change her ways, God would judge her and her followers, unless they did repent of her deeds. She might experience a fatal illness (cf. 2 Kings 1:4; 1 Cor. 11:29–30) and her followers might experience great tribulation. Some interpreters have taken this to be a reference to the seven-year Tribulation. But it seems more likely to refer to severe divine discipline similar to what is coming during the Tribulation.*
  - 2) John Walvoord, *Christ promised sudden and immediate judgment, called her sin adultery and promised that all who followed her would suffer intensely.*
  - 3) Warren Wiersbe, *Idolatry and compromise are, in the Bible, pictured as fornication and unfaithfulness to the marriage vows (Jer. 3:6ff; Hosea 9:1ff). Jezebel’s bed of sin would become a bed of sickness!*
  - 4) Grant Osborne, *She threw herself at pagan gods and lay on a bed of debauchery. Christ would now throw her into illness and pain, and she would lie on a sickbed of suffering. She would taste the bitter fruits of her folly. Note the progression of intensity in the punishments—from illness to intense suffering to death. Even here there is an opportunity to escape the punishment, for Christ adds, “unless she (her followers are also implied) repent of her ways.” This is always the case with divine justice in Scripture . . . Divine judgment in this world is redemptive more than it is punitive; its purpose is to wake people up and bring them back to God.*

- c. Jesus would *strike her children dead* (23a), **and I will strike her children dead.**
- 1) John Walvoord, *He also promised, I will strike her children dead, meaning that suffering would extend also to her followers.*
  - 2) J. Ramsey Michaels, *As for her 'children' that is, anyone who perpetuates her teaching, they will be struck dead by a plague (v.23).*
  - 3) Grant Osborne, *Three groups are mentioned in 2:22–23: Jezebel, those who commit adultery with her, and her children. There is debate as to whether the second and third are one group or two. Many believe they are simply two different ways of describing her followers—they have joined her in sin and become part of her "family" in the cult. However, the second group still has a chance to get right with God ("unless they repent"), while the third does not, and God is about to take their lives. The second group could be church members who have been drawn into her syncretistic teaching but have not yet become full followers, while the third group has completely joined Jezebel in her unwillingness to repent.*
- d. Jesus' judgment is righteous (23b), **And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.**
- 1) John Walvoord, *The judgment would be so dramatic that all the churches would know that Christ is the One who searches hearts and minds.*
  - 2) Warren Wiersbe, . . . *the Lord threatened to use this assembly as a solemn example to "all the churches" not to tolerate evil.*
  - 3) Thomas Constable, *The allusion to Jeremiah 17:10 is significant because in Jeremiah it is Yahweh who searches the hearts and minds, while here is it Christ who does so (cf. Matt. 9:4; John 2:25; 4:29, 39; 16:30; 18:4; 21:17). Prophets had insight into the hearts and minds of people, which this prophetess Jezebel probably claimed to have, but it was really the Lord who had this ability.*
  - 4) Grant Osborne, *Christ in his omniscience knows exactly how we feel and what we think. Nothing can be hidden from his scrutiny, so all the churches and the members of those churches had better examine themselves carefully and stop rationalizing their cherished sins!*
- E. Exhortation (2:24-25), **But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. 25 Only hold fast what you have until I come.**
1. A call to those who had not accepted false teaching.
    - a. Charles Ryrie, *The exhortation to those who had not trafficked with Jezebel was 'no other burden' than that they should themselves keep from immorality and idolatry. The phrase is an echo of Acts 15:28-29.*
    - b. Thomas Constable, *Jesus Christ exhorted the faithful in the church to hold fast to their present good conduct (v. 19). He would soon purge the wicked ones from their midst . . . This may be the first mention in Revelation of the Lord's coming for the church, the Rapture (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13–18).*
    - c. John Walvoord, *After His condemnation, Christ extended a word of exhortation to the godly remnant who existed in the church in Thyatira, implying that the rest of the church was apostate . . . He imposed one simple instruction: only hold on to what you have until I come. Perhaps because the church was small, Christ did not command them to leave it but to remain as a godly testimony. Judgment on Jezebel and her followers would come soon and would purge the church. In modern times Christians who find themselves in apostate local churches can usually leave and join another fellowship, but this was impractical under the circumstances in Thyatira.*
    - d. Warren Wiersbe, *Not everyone in the assembly was unfaithful to the Lord, and He had a special word for them. They had separated themselves from the false doctrine and compromising practices of Jezebel and her followers, which Christ denounces as "the depths of Satan" (note the contrast in 1 Cor. 2:10). The Lord had no special demands to make; He simply wanted them to hold fast in their resistance to evil.*
    - e. Kendell Easley, *Throughout the New Testament, believers are urged to remain faithful to the simple truths and moral standards of the gospel. There is no need to look for some fanciful new teaching.*
    - f. Grant Osborne, *To hold on to this means to keep a tenacious hold on truth as well as on the Christian way of life that is the outworking of truth. We are dealing here with right doctrine and right practice. Until the return of Christ, believers must both teach the truths of God and oppose those who fail to do so.*

2. Comments on *the deep things of Satan*
  - a. Michael Wilcock, *Interpreters differ over the phrase in verse 24, 'the deep things of Satan,' for a small town Thyatira had a remarkable number of trade guilds, and many of the Christians there would have been involved in membership of them, with the attendant problems of conscience . . . Some therefore hold that 'Jezebel' recognized these idol feasts as Satanic temptations, but taught that Christians should be strong enough in spirit to be able to explore 'the deep things of Satan.'* It is equally possible, however, that 'Jezebel' taught what she simply called 'deep things,' and that it is Christ who brands them as Satanic.
  - b. Thomas Constable, *Apparently this woman claimed that her teaching that Christians can indulge the flesh with impunity was deeper than the apostles' teaching. But it was, of course, the depths of Satanic doctrine.*
  - c. Grant Osborne, *As a false prophet, Jezebel's teachings are satanic at the core, and her followers are steeped in the ideas of the evil one. In addition, she foolishly teaches her followers that they can best triumph over the idolatry and immorality of the guilds and the Roman world by immersing themselves in those practices, that is, experiencing the depths of paganism in order to show their mastery over it, like the heretics of 1 John 1:8–10; 3:9. Such rationalization is deadly.*
  - d. William Barclay, *There is every likelihood that Jezebel was teaching that Christians ought to accommodate themselves to the world; in other words, she was urging on the Church a spiritual infidelity which was bound to result in physical adultery.*

F. Promise (2:26-29)

1. Jesus' promise is for conquerors (overcomers) (26a), ***The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end,***
  - a. Thomas Constable, *Some believers evidently will receive greater authority for being faithful than others who have not been as faithful (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10). While not all Christians will remain faithful to the Lord (2 Tim. 2:12), Christ evidently described believers as faithful (v. 19) in order to motivate them to remain faithful.*
  - b. George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *This is the nearest we have in the seven letters to a definition of the conqueror. He holds fast the traditions of faith and life delivered to the Church till the coming of Christ (v. 25), and he keeps Christ's works till the end (v. 26)—whether that 'end' be the Lord's parousia or his own death.*
  - c. Grant Osborne, *The only way to overcome is to maintain a firm grasp on Jesus' words (2:25) and works (2:26). Once more, orthodoxy is incomplete until it results in orthopraxy; true belief must lead to right living . . . The only way to overcome is to maintain a firm grasp on Jesus' words (2:25) and works (2:26) . . . true belief must lead to right living.*
2. The promises
  - a. ***authority over the nations (26b-27), to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.***
    - 1) Charles Ryrie, *The faithful are promised association with Christ in His millennial reign (cf. Ps.2:9).*
    - 2) Michael Wilcock, *For the 'authority over the nations' which is given to Christ in Psalm 2, and to the church here, is authority to proclaim the rule or kingdom of God. He who rejects that rule will perish; but he who accepts it will live (2 Cor. 2:15, 16; Jn. 20:23; Lk, 24:47).*
    - 3) Thomas Constable, *The prize for faithfulness was the privilege of reigning with Christ in His earthly kingdom (cf. 1:6; 12:5; 19:15; Ps. 2:8–9; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4–6). The idea that the people of little Thyatira, of all the seven cities, would one day rule the nations would have been almost unbelievable to the original readers.*
    - 4) John Walvoord, *The word in verse 27 translated "rule" (poimanei) means "to shepherd," indicating that they will not simply be administering justice but will also, like a shepherd using his rod, be dealing with his sheep and protecting them as well.*
    - 5) Kendell Easley, *The full establishment of the kingdom of God, after Christ returns to earth, will require all forces of evil, all hostile powers to be completely subdued. The Father granted Christ the authority to rule the nations because of his willing death (Phil. 2:6–11). Christ, in turn, wills to share that ruling authority with those who overcome. (Matt. 19:28 and 1 Cor. 6:2 also teach the role of saints as judges.)*
    - 6) Grant Osborne, *The risen Lord has two promises for the victor, and they are great indeed. The first is a remarkable paraphrase of Psalm 2:8–9, a passage understood messianically in the first century. This is the only place in the New Testament where it is applied to the saints rather than to the Messiah, which makes it all the more powerful.*

- b. Receive *the morning star* (28), ***And I will give him the morning star.***
- 1) Michael Wilcock, . . . *to the church which is a faithful gospel-lamp in the dark night of this world Christ also promises himself as the morning star (22:16), the assurance of the coming dawn, when lamplight will be swallowed up in the light of eternal day.*
  - 2) Kendell Easley, *A further reward of the overcomer is to receive the morning star . . . The key for interpreting this is Revelation 22:16, where Christ is called the bright Morning Star. The reward is Christ himself, who will end the long night of sin’s rule in the universe.*
  - 3) Warren Wiersbe, *The compromising people in Thyatira were following “the depths of Satan,” which would lead to darkness and death. God’s overcomers, on the other hand, would share the Morning Star!*
  - 4) Grant Osborne, *The second promise to the victor is the gift of “the morning star” (2:28). This is another symbol in the visions with multiple proposals for its possible connotation . . . The best option is probably a combination of two: First, an allusion to Numbers 24:17 (Balaam’s prophecy, saying “a star will come out of Jacob”), which refers to Christ as the “morning star,” preparing for its further use in Revelation 22:16; second, Venus, the morning star in the sky, was carried on the banners of many Roman legions as a symbol of Roman sovereignty. The point would be that true sovereignty and power lay with Christ and his followers, not with Rome and its armies.*
  - 5) William Barclay, *Revelation itself calls Jesus ‘the bright morning star’ (Revelation 22:16). The promise of the morning star is the promise of Christ himself. If Christians are true, when life comes to an end they will possess Christ, never to lose him.*
3. The confirmation (29), ***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.***
- a. Thomas Constable, *Christ may be speaking to the churches through His Spirit, or the identity of the Spirit with Christ may be implied.*
  - b. Kendell Easley, *Verse 29 repeats the regular invitation to hear and heed the message.*
  - c. John Walvoord, *Unlike the earlier letters, this exhortation follows rather than precedes the promise to overcomers, and this order is followed in the letters to the last three churches.*

<b>CONCLUSION</b>
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- Warren Wiersbe, . . . *like Thyatira, our love can be increasing yet lacking in the kind of discernment that is necessary to keep the church pure (see Phil. 1:9–11).*
- Grant Osborne, *God demands that his communities exemplify two characteristics to be a truly biblical church: a deep, abiding love in the relationships in the church (contra Ephesus) and a deep commitment to biblical and doctrinal truth (contra Pergamum and Thyatira). Failure to exemplify either one will bring divine displeasure down upon the church. However, when both are at the heart of a church, it is already successful, whatever its size and influence, for then it pleases God deeply.*