

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Revelation: 2:18-3:6 | Session 6 | Notes

Unto the Seven Angels of the Seven Churches (Chapters 2 and 3)

- Angels = (Seven stars are the seven messengers) Not angelic beings here, but rather human leaders, *messengers of the congregation* (see session 4). The Greek word *Angelos* means messenger.
- Churches = Not the church as we understand it today. These are Jewish assemblies or synagogues.
- The churches may have existed at the time of John's writing but are future Jewish congregations living during the Tribulation but may also represent all of Israel during that time.
- The three letters thus far are addressed to the leaders of the congregation in:
 - Ephesus: Revelation 2:1-7.
 - Smyrna: Revelation 2:8-11.
 - Pergamos: Revelation 2:12-17.



As we continue to look at the seven assemblies in this session, Thyatira and Sardis, we have assumed that they are future Jewish synagogues that are in the midst of the seven years of tribulation. It might be prudent to ask; If the letters are not intended for the future, what practical worth would there have been to include them in a book that is "prophetic" (1:3)? Or, stated another way, if the book of Revelation is about the future, how would the events of letters written 2,000 years ago and already fulfilled be of any value for prophetic events?

While these letters are sent to the seven assemblies, they are addressed to the leader of each assembly, as noted by the singular pronouns. It appears the burden of *good works* within the synagogue falls upon the leader and each assembly is condemned or praised due to his actions and leadership.

To the Angel of the Church of Thyatira (2:18-29)

Verse 18—

Unto the angel, we have identified as the *leader of the Jewish synagogue*. **Thyatira** is modern-day Akhisar in western Turkey (as are all the seven churches in Revelation). This city is mentioned in Acts 16:14, where Lydia, a seller of purple, was from. **These things saith** the speaker to the angel is now identified as the **Son of God** for the first time. In the previous three letters, the speaker was not described by name. *These things he saith that holdeth the seven stars... (2:1, Ephesus); These things saith the first and the last... (2:8, Smyrna); These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges (2:12, Pergamos).*

But the Son of God is also described with symbols of judgment, as the one **who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire**; when Jesus Christ returns, He is not coming back in grace; instead, he will be seated upon a white horse, he will judge and make war with fire in his eyes directed toward his enemies. When the Lord returns, He will “Bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will manifest the counsels of the heart” (1 Corinthians 4:5).

And his feet like fine brass, at his Second coming judgment Jesus Christ will trample his enemies under his feet. Isaiah 63:1-6 describes the extraordinary return Of Christ to set up his kingdom with the imagery of grapes being stomped on to make wine.¹ The fulfillment of this prophecy is in Revelation 19:13-15.

Verse 19—

I know Jesus Christ knows exactly what is happening in these assemblies. What does he know? **Thy Works** and they have some good works that he commends; **charity** (agape), **and service, and faith, and thy patience**. All indicative of the kingdom gospel of works, not grace. Their latter **works** will be greater than their **first**. Works and patient endurance are necessities in the Tribulation, and this assembly is doing some good things.

Verse 20—

Jesus also corrects this assembly. In the church of Pergamos (2:14), the congregation's leader allowed the false doctrine of Balaam to creep into the assembly. In Thyatira, there is a **woman named Jezebel**.²

³ The leader, note the pronoun **thou**, has **sufferest** (permitted) her to **prophecy, teach, and seduce** the

¹ This passage alone should convince us that we are not setting up God's kingdom in the world today. We are not “kingdom builders.” Jesus Christ alone has the power to do it. He will trample the enemy with feet like unto polished brass, and there will be no stopping him. (See also Malachi 4:3).

² Aptly named after the Jezebel wife of King Ahab in 1 Kings 21:25; she *stirred up* the king to *work* wickedness

³ A good woman can elevate a man to his greatest potential, a bad woman can bring him down!

servants of Jesus within the assembly to **commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols**.

Whatever this apostasy she will bring in the assembly of Jews, it will not be challenged by this synagogue's leader.

While women have a Biblical role to play in a Jewish assembly and a church in the dispensation of grace when it comes to the office of overseer or that of the pastor-teacher, there is a limitation that God has set up. The office is to be only filled by a man. That goes against the grain of our society completely, but society doesn't determine God's order in the church. Paul wrote to Timothy about this exact issue in 1 Timothy 2:11-14 (If you have a problem with this, you'll need to discuss it with God, because I didn't write it, I'm just the messenger),

"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."

This does not mean women are less important than men, that they don't play a crucial role within a church, or that they are not as valuable as men. So why this admonition from Paul? The only answer I can give is that as a general rule, there must be something in the DNA, or the emotional makeup of a woman, that makes her more open to spiritual deception than a man. But this only applies to the oversight of the church. Are there some women who *can* lead better than some men? Certainly, but these are God's rules; a woman is not to be a pastor, and she is not to exercise any authority in the church over men through preaching or teaching. And, as we can see clearly, the Church in general today is in a great mess because this rule is being violated, and that will happen during the Tribulation in Thyatira. The leader has allowed the **woman** named **Jezebel** to usurp his leadership, and they are paying the price for doing so.

In the letter to the angel in Ephesus, we saw the opposite. The *angel* of that assembly *could not bear them, which are evil*. This type of apostasy or corruption will be the norm of what is happening during the days of the Antichrist. The fornication and sin we are seeing today in our day will pale at what will happen during the Tribulation.

Verse 21—

I gave her space to repent...and she repented not. Although we live in the *dispensation of grace* (for salvation), God's grace permeates all of Scripture, beginning in the garden of Eden. We see a hint of God's grace in Revelation, where John records several times when people will have a chance to repent but will not. Here Jesus gave this woman time to repent, but she didn't want to. For further study, see 9:20, 21; 16:9, 11.

Verse 22—

Cast her into a bed, a bed of what? Jezebel of the Old Testament faced judgment. In the account (2 Kings 9:33-37), she was cast out of a window, *"So they threw her down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses...."* This is likely a **bed** of judgment of some kind meted out according to her works.

Verse 23—

Her children could be her biological children, but likely these are those who follow her. **Kill...with death** seems redundant. Some say *kill with pestilence*, but the word death doesn't mean *pestilence*. It could mean *strike down with death*. Whichever, they are going to die **according to their works**.

I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts. The word **reins** in Greek is "nehpros," which means *kidneys*. If you have a kidney removed, it is called a nephrectomy. The Greek word heart is "*kardia*," which we always translate as the heart. The idea is that Jesus says he searches the "inner man." He can't be faked out. What is inside the inner man is what will come out in his life. Jesus warned **every one of you** in the assembly.

Verse 24,25—

We may look at our society today and think things certainly cannot get any worse. The world has not yet seen the **depths of Satan** that will unfold during the Tribulation. Many will give in, but some in Thyatira will not succumb to the false **doctrine**. Some would not compromise. Jesus tells those who **hold fast till I come** that there will be no judgment, so keep doing *good works*.

Verse 26,27—

He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him, I will give power over the nations. And he shall rule them with a rod of iron. This is where many Christians get the idea that "we" will rule in the kingdom of God. Here is one example. When Bible commentators use the word *believers*, they most likely mean believers like you and me who have believed by grace through faith. We have already determined that will not be possible during the Tribulation. The word *believe* is not found in the book of Revelation. For example:

"Christ promises believers who are faithful that they will join him in his millennial **rule**."⁴

The promise here is to the **overcoming** Jew who **keepeth my works unto the end**. To the *overcomer*, *he will give power over the nations*.

Verse 27 is a quote from Psalm 2:8,9; "*Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.*" Here is a promise to Israel, and Jesus confirms that it will happen in verse 27. Many Christians today claim this verse in Psalms for us. If we ask God, then we can win the nations for Christ! But look at the second part of that psalm,

"Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

That is a verse you will never see a missionary society quote as their mission statement.

This prophecy of Jesus to Thyatira is for the Jews who overcome there.

Verse 28—

And I will give him the morning star. This is difficult to interpret, but it could be connected with Numbers 24.17, "*I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: There shall come a Star*

⁴ Walvoord, John F., and Roy B. Zuck, Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985. Print.

out of Jacob, And a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, And shall smite the corners of Moab, And destroy all the children of Sheth."

In Revelation 22:16, Jesus says, *"I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star."*

All of verse 28 deserves more study.

Verse 29—

Jesus repeats his often-used formula, **He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.** The prophetic testimony spoken by Christ Himself, or the other prophetic testimonies spoken by John, angels, etc.

To the Angel of the Church of Sardis (3:1-6)

Let's keep in mind that the Greek word *angelos* means messenger. An *angelos* can be an earthly messenger or a heavenly messenger. The context should help us decide. Hebrews 1:7 tells us that angels are also *spirits and ministers*. Quoting from the book of Psalms, 104.4, The *"Lord God...maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire."*

Verse 1—

These things saith he that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars. We saw in chapter 1 that the seven spirits are not another name for the Holy Spirit⁵. The plain sense is that they are some sort of servants of God (created angelic beings). Whatever or whoever the seven spirits are (and we will discover more about them in future chapters), they are separate from the **seven stars**. Jesus Christ possesses them both, not as attributes but having them in his possession to accomplish his work.

I know thy works that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. The works of this messenger are known to Christ, He may have a reputation of being (spiritually) alive, but he is (spiritually) dead. There is nothing worse than a spiritually dead pastor, a pastor who does not know the Lord. These men (and unfortunately, women) abound in many evangelical churches.

In the dispensation of grace, it is impossible to be spiritually dead. A person might be walking in the flesh and not by the spirit; he might be immature in this knowledge of the word of God, but his faith is not dead. The book of James says, "Faith without works is dead," but I would argue James is speaking to Jews under the Law, not to the Body of Christ, since James contradicts the apostle, Paul. Paul says, speaking to the Body of Christ, *it is by grace, not of yourselves, and not of works. All who believe are alive in Christ* because of individual belief (1 Corinthians 15:22). Likewise, speaking of those who believe (Ephesians 2:5), *When we were dead in sins, God made us alive together in Christ, (by grace are ye saved).*

Verse 2—

⁵ See Session 2, page 4.

The **works** of the messenger of the assembly of Sardis are not **perfect** (or complete) **before God**. Maybe there are some **things** (works) **which remain** in his ministry and life **that** are not dead yet but **are ready to die**, that can be saved if the messenger is **watchful and strengthens** them. How can he do this?

Verse 3—

Remember, therefore how thou hast received and heard (the Gospel of the kingdom, Matthew 24:9-14), **and hold fast, and repent**. He is a dead man walking but can be saved by repenting. If the messenger does not **watch**, Jesus will **come upon** him as a **thief** at an unknown **hour**. For a believer saved by grace through faith, we are not in darkness, and we will not be overtaken by a thief (1 Thessalonians 5.2).

Verse 4,5—

Has this messenger given up? Jesus reassures him **Thou hast a few names...which have not defiled their garments. They shall walk with me in white; that** is purity. This is not the *Body of Christ* language. **They are worthy** to enter the kingdom because they have not defiled themselves. We are worthy to be forever with Christ because of Christ alone and not of ourselves; these in Sardis are worthy because of their own merit. The whole scene we see with the assembly of Sardis is found in Revelation 16:15 and 19:7-9. “Those who have not defiled their garments are those who have not worshipped the Beast, or received his mark, or partaken in his idolatrous obscenities.”⁶ **And I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.**

As for the **book of life**, precisely what it is and what it means is difficult to determine. In the New Testament, the phrase is used once in Philippians 4:3 without any explanation and at least six times in the book of Revelation, which we will see later in our study. Is it a book of everyone who has ever been conceived or ever lived? Psalm 69:28 mentions *the book of the living*. Is this the same book? If one experiences the *second death* (cast into the lake of fire), is he blotted out of the book of life?

Because of its ambiguity, we would be wise not to make a doctrine around the book of life. But we should take heart that those who are saved by grace through faith. There is no hint in Paul’s epistles of a believer’s name being blotted out. Paul says, “*There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” And, “*nothing shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” (Romans 8:1,39). Only in the post-grace dispensation do we find this statement of being blotted out.

Verse 6—

The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy (Revelation 19:10)—spoken by Christ himself. Listen up! Next week we will look at the final two assemblies; Philadelphia and Laodicea.

⁶ Bullinger, E.W. Commentary on Revelation. Kregel Publications. 1984.