

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

The Church Where Jezebel Placed Membership

Program #1050

Eddie Parrish & Mark Teske

EDDIE: Churches are made up of a lot of interesting people. There was one congregation of the Lord's church in the first century that had actually let Jezebel place membership with them. We're going to talk about that today on *The Truth In Love*.

EDDIE: We're glad to have you with us today on *The Truth In Love*. We are in the middle of a series of lessons on the seven churches of Asia from the first three chapters of the book of Revelation. Mark Teske is on the program again this week, and we are glad to have him. Mark, why don't you give us a little summary of where we've been so far?

MARK: Okay. We are halfway through the study. We've talked about three churches already. We started with the church at Ephesus, the church that had left their first love. They were doctrinally pure and had many good things said about them, but their lack of motivation and love was seen as a significant problem. Then we looked at the church at Smyrna who were anticipating the persecution and trials that were ahead of them. Other than that, there was no condemnation of the congregation, only the warnings about the things which were to come. Then we came to Pergamos, a church that had been persecuted in the past. Some had remained faithful, yet others had succumbed to the temptation and allowed some error and compromise to come into the church. That brings us to today's lesson, which is Thyatira.

EDDIE: Thyatira was a city located between Pergamos and Sardis. We will talk about the church at Sardis in coming lessons. The city was

nestled in a valley, and surrounded by gentle, sloping hills. There were a number of things for which the city of Thyatira had become famous, not the least of which was its purple dye and dyed garments. You might recall, if you're a good student of the New Testament, that there was a lady named Lydia mentioned in Acts 16, who was referred to as a seller of purple, and from the city of Thyatira. It was a large part of their business in that city. This city was known for its trade and manufacturing, and there were a lot of trade guilds or trade unions that were a part of the city. Also in the city of Thyatira was a congregation of the Lord's people. The interesting thing that we'll find about the church in Thyatira is how they had allowed a very influential, yet very evil woman to cause a lot of problems in the congregation there. And that's why I sometimes refer to the church at Thyatira as the church where Jezebel placed membership. Of all the people that you wouldn't want to be a member of a congregation where you are would be someone like Jezebel. We'll see what the Lord had to say about her as we proceed.

MARK: This letter starts the way all of them do with Jesus, as the Son of God, again referring to Himself. He uses that phrase here, "the Son of God," to describe Himself. He has used descriptions like "the First and the Last," (Revelation 2:8), "He who has the sharp two-edged sword" (Revelation 2:12) and other characteristics, but here He comes out straightforward and says "the Son of God," (Revelation 2:18). As a side comment here, many people claim that Jesus never referred to Himself as the Son of God. Here it is in black and white (or red and white), depending on what type of Bible you're reading.

EDDIE: Yes. That terminology obviously references His authority. On one occasion, when Jesus referred to God as being His own father in a special sense, the text says that the people sought all the more to kill Him because He "said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God," (John 5:18). When Jesus claimed to be the Son of God in that very special and unique sense, He was claiming a rank, or an authority that placed Him on an equality with God, a deity. And indeed, He was that. For that reason His word should be taken very seriously by the church in Thyatira because of this authority that He refers to just in using that terminology. He also refers to Himself as the One having "eyes like a flame of fire," something that we remember from chapter 1.

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EDDIE: That's right. As we try to wrap this up, I want for us to think about one important application, and that has to do with the fact that Jezebel was not guilty of completely quitting on the Lord and abandoning the church. She was just encouraging people to compromise on a few things and to do that to gain some kind of advantage. She was trying to teach people to hold onto God and hold onto the world. Jesus said you can't do that. "No one can serve two masters," (Matthew 6:24). Some people get the idea that as long as they're associated with the church in some capacity, then that's okay. They believe that as long as they don't completely and fully abandon Christianity, that's all right. But all a person has to do is make some compromises, and some people do in different areas, and they need to know it is enough to lose their soul.

MARK: Many times when someone is involved in compromise, it is hard to get their attention. Some people compromise in areas such as giving (especially the amount that we give), the way we dress, or our honesty in everyday life. People think of these as small sins, but they are the ones we really need to watch out for.

EDDIE: That's right. And God is at this present time giving you an opportunity to repent and turn from your sins, and we hope that you will. Continue to study the Bible and make a determination that you're going to obey God and be one of His children according to His plan of salvation, which you'll see on your screen in just a moment.

If you'd like to have a copy of today's lesson, we'd love for you to have it. We offer it in the form of an audiocassette, a CD or a DVD. And if you'll contact us and tell us what format you'd like that in, we'll give it to you free of charge. Our address is P.O. Box 865, Hurst, Texas 76053. Our e-mail address is requests@thetruthinlove.com and our website is www.thetruthinlove.com. You can order our materials any of these three ways. And we encourage you to do that. We have some written materials as well, a booklet called *From My Heart To Yours*, and *Salvation Simplified*. So if you'd like any of these materials, please let us know, and we'll be glad to send it to you at no cost or obligation. Thanks again for joining us this week, and we'll see you again next time.

MARK: Yes. There we have the penetrating vision that we see in chapter 1, and the analogy that we used to help illustrate that point was Superman's x-ray vision. But here, with the eyes like a flame of fire, we get a little different view. It's not only the insight that we see coming to the eyesight, but also the heat. There's something very penetrating, not only observing, but it is also affecting that which it's getting into.

EDDIE: Right. And His feet were like brass, also referring back to the chapter 1 reference, like "fine brass as if refined in a furnace," (Revelation 1:15). Some have talked about that whole idea or process where this metal comes out of the fire as being hot and glowing and able to trample anything underneath it. There's an Old Testament reference that talks about God trampling the wicked. "They shall be ashes under the soles of your feet," (Malachi 4:3). So this idea of the heavy metal and the purification process and the whole glowing, all seem to be some of the imagery that may be coming out of these pictures that John sees regarding Jesus the Messiah. He's made His point, just in identifying Himself, of how important it is for this congregation to listen to what He's about to say.

MARK: He references His deity, His strength and His effectiveness. And when we wrap that all together, we see Jesus as God ready to take some action here. And I think as we read through this letter, you'll see He's ready to do what He needs to do to make this situation right.

EDDIE: We're in Revelation 2:18-29. In verse 18, Jesus identified Himself with that terminology we just spoke of. Then He gives them His commendation in verse 19, the things that He sees about them that are worth being praised. Jesus has done that with other congregations in these chapters, as we've noted in previous lessons. But again like He does with each of these, He starts by saying, "I know your works." Jesus knows all about His congregations. He walks among them, as we noted from chapter 1 a few weeks ago. And He says, "I know your works, love, service, faith and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first," which is kind of interesting as you compare that with what He said about Ephesus, when He said you need to repent and do the first work.

MARK: Here we have the situation totally reversed. They're

improving in some ways. As we see the other positive characteristics, we see tremendous things that are said about this church. It would be great if we could stop in verse 19 and be finished with it. Then the reviews of the church here at Thyatira would be glowing, because they're praised for some very important things, including their agape love and their selfless giving for the benefit of others.

EDDIE: The strongest term for love that's used in the Greek New Testament is the word agape. Jesus says they have that love, and He knows their works, and knows that they are doing more now than they had been previously. He was well aware of their love and their service. This comes from the Greek word "diakonos," where we get our English word deacon which, of course, is a special servant in the Lord's church. Literally, that term in the original language comes from the idea of kicking up dust by means of activity. In other words, if somebody was so active that the dust is just flying around them because of their activity, that was where this term "diakonos" originally came from. It came to denote somebody who was very, very active in doing things and serving others. The Lord uses that term to describe their service as being that which is very active, and obviously would have been an outgrowth of their love.

MARK: He also commends them for their faith, again a very basic, important Biblical characteristic. Jesus knew of their faith, love and service. Faith, hope and love might be called the three basics. And here faith and love are both commended in this group. Again, when we talked about faith, we talked about "the faith," as we see in Ephesians 4:5, Jude 3, and many other passages. There is just one faith. And this church excelled in that matter.

EDDIE: He also mentions their patience. This is the word that we noted with one of the earlier congregations. It is the idea of endurance or staying power, and the ability to bear up under a load or under some kind of stress. If the word stubborn, which is usually a word that carries a negative connotation, could be used in a good way, that's what this word is. You're stubborn in the sense that it doesn't matter what life throws your way, you have the staying power. You're going to hang in there. All of these were the things that Jesus could look at in this congregation and essentially tell them they were doing a good job. And

EDDIE: And so with Jezebel, from a luxurious couch of sin, Jesus said she's going to be cast into a bed of affliction. That would be her punishment for the evil that she herself had committed and for the evil that she had enticed others to commit. So the result of the punishment that would be meted out against Jezebel would be that all of God's people in all of the churches (congregations) would know that nothing escapes the watchful eye of God. That's not just a lesson for a first century congregation a long time ago, but that's a lesson for everybody today.

MARK: As we consider the illustration that was given of Jesus walking among the lampstands (Revelation 1:12-13, 20; 2:1), just as He was back then, He is today. That illustration is for our benefit as well as it was for theirs. He still cares and is still interested in the details of what's going on, and He's right there. He's leading His church today just as much as He was around AD 96 when this was written.

EDDIE: That's right. Now, in verses 24-29, we find the promise that Jesus gives to His people in Thyatira, as He does to the other congregations as well. He tells those who are faithful that no other burden would be placed upon them. I think that's interesting for a number of reasons. He basically just tells them to hang on and stay the course, and no additional burden would be placed on them. Now, when you compare that with what he said to the church at Smyrna, who had already been persecuted, He then tells them more persecutions are on the way. Evidently Smyrna was a stronger group of Christians than maybe Thyatira was, from the standpoint that God said to Smyrna, that there are more persecutions coming. To Thyatira, He says no other burden is going to be placed on them at this time, which is very indicative of what Paul wrote in I Corinthians 10:13, about how God does not place upon us more than what we're able to bear, which is another indication of the mercy and grace of God.

MARK: As we remember back earlier in the letter, the commendation that this church was given was very positive. They're excelling in love, faith, service, and patience. These are all excellent qualities. There's character there in the church. Outside of Jezebel and her little group, there's some good things happening in this congregation.

the midst of all that sin and evil, the text also says Jesus said that she's been given plenty of time to repent. One of the things that tells us is a lot about the nature of God and how even though people are wicked, God still, in His patience and His mercy, gives people opportunity to come out of their sin and repent. And He did with Jezebel here.

MARK: Sometimes it's not good for us to go back and question the wisdom of God, but oftentimes as people who are trying to do what's right, when seeing a situation as grievous as what is described here, we want something done. We want it done today. We sometimes do not have the patience they had in Thyatira. We want it taken care of today. And we're going to demand that something be done right now. But God was willing and patient, giving her the opportunity to repent of that.

EDDIE: Right. Peter talked about that in II Peter 3:4, 8-9 specifically when he referenced that some people would eventually say, where's the sign of the coming of Christ? Everything continues to be the way it was since the creation of the world. And he basically debunks that whole idea and says God doesn't operate on our timetable. "God is not slack" (or slow) "concerning His promise," (the promise of Christ's return), "but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." The only reason why we are here today and not standing before God in judgment is because God is longsuffering. Because there are evil people in the world, He's still giving people the opportunity and time to repent. And with Jezebel, He says that He had given her time, but her time had run out. And that's the other lesson we don't need to lose here. Yes, God is long-suffering, but at some point His patience will run out. And when it does, there will be no more opportunities to obey. As one preacher used to say, there's not going to be any invitation songs that are sung on the day of judgment. When we reach that point, that's it. You don't get that opportunity at that time. And Jezebel had used up all her opportunity.

MARK: Yes. We need to pray that as we look at our own lives we are repentant. When somebody points out my shortcomings, they're doing me a favor by telling me that I have sin in my life and bringing it to my attention so that I may repent of it. There will come a time when there's no turning back, when either death or final judgment comes and we will not be able to have another chance to do it again.

they were doing more now than they were before. "I know your works, love, service, faith and your patience," (Revelation 2:19). As you said earlier, it would be good if you could end there. But He doesn't end there. He has some negative things to say as well, beginning in verse 20.

MARK: Yes. In verse 20, we read the word that we hate to hear in these letters to the churches of Asia: nevertheless. And here He's changing gears. "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."

EDDIE: This brings up one of the points that we've made in previous lessons about the idea of tolerance. This congregation was being very tolerant of sin among them, by this woman Jezebel. We'll say a little more about who that possibly could have been in a moment. But they were allowing things to go on in the congregation, relative to this woman, that they never should have been allowing to happen. It reminds me of I Corinthians 5 where the church in Corinth had somebody in that congregation who was living in an adulterous type of situation, and living in fornication. Paul said they had this situation among them, and they were proud of it. They were boasting in it, (I Corinthians 5:2). The last thing that people need to be proud of or boasting in is when they are tolerating sin. But this congregation in Revelation 2 was doing that, and the main perpetrator they were tolerating was the one He refers to as this woman Jezebel. There are a number of possibilities as to who that might have been. Some have said that she was a literal woman with that literal name. In other words, it was literally somebody named Jezebel. Some have said that it was maybe a sect within the congregation, that the word Jezebel was simply applied to this sect or division in the church there that was causing problems. And others have conjectured that this was literally a woman in the church there, but Jezebel was not her real name. It was just applied to her figuratively because of all the negative connotations that would come up when the name Jezebel was mentioned. Personally speaking, that's the view that I take on this. But historically, there's a lot about Jezebel that's important.

MARK: Yes. As we look at the Old Testament, Jezebel is a character

who shows up in I Kings 18 and 19. Specifically, she was a thorn in the side to Elijah, one of the great prophets. She had many idolatrous priests that she cared for. She fed these people, promoted this idolatry and caused her husband to sin on numerous occasions, such as the situation with Naboth's vineyard. She prompted her husband into wickedness. So we see her not only doing wickedness herself, but spreading an influence to others as well. And that's the characteristic we see that's very common here with this Jezebel.

EDDIE: Right. It says that she killed the prophets of God, (I Kings 18:4). Being a thorn in Elijah's side is certainly true. Right after the great victory that Elijah had on Mount Carmel in I Kings 18, you turn to chapter 19, and basically Jezebel says, what you did to those prophets (and he had killed hundreds of false prophets), by this time tomorrow you can expect the same thing to be done to you. She literally said that she was going to kill Elijah. So this was a very evil person. The name Jezebel has been passed down through history with all of that baggage attached to it. You don't find a lot of people today that are expecting children and while going through the possible names for a daughter say, "Let's consider Jezebel." That doesn't happen because of all the baggage. So it would seem natural that this would be applied to some wicked person in the church there. She had convinced people that she was some kind of a prophetess, which in reality she was not. Revelation 2:20 mentions that. She had convinced other people to commit sin by appealing to some kind of supposed prophetic abilities, something that is not just a phenomenon of a bygone age.

MARK: Right. That's something that we see among some today. They claim prophetic insight, and that God speaks to them today, yet they often contradict what He clearly said in His word. God is not the author of confusion. He doesn't do that. Anything that He says is consistent with itself. When we look at the totality of inspiration that is given to us within scripture, we see that it is indeed, all sufficient, and gives us everything we need for our life, "that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work," (II Timothy 3:17). An ongoing revelation is not something we need today because the faith was, indeed, "once for all delivered to the saints," (Jude 3).

EDDIE: Right. When John said, there are many false prophets that

have gone out into the world (I John 4:1), that was true then, and it's certainly true today. And you hate it that that's the case, but reality is what it is. This Jezebel had convinced others that she was some kind of a prophetess, but she wasn't. And like you say, Mark, there are a lot of people today that have done the same thing, who have convinced other people that they get prophetic messages from God, and they're getting nothing of the sort. But in continuing about what Jezebel did, she convinced others to engage in idolatry and pagan practices. When you think about some of the historical and cultural things that were going on, this probably makes a lot more sense. I mentioned earlier about the existence of these trade guilds or trade unions in Thyatira. They had unions for wool workers and leather workers and the people that worked with the dyes and things like that. And these guilds were associated with various gods. Each trade union or trade guild had its own god. If you wanted to do business with other people and do it well, you needed to belong to one of these guilds. But to belong to one of the guilds, you had to embrace the guild god, and embracing that often involved the worship of idols, as well as immorality. Many times with these false pagan gods, there was immorality and fornication that was associated with worship. So if you rejected the whole guild thing because of its association with idolatry and paganism, you were in dire straits. You had problems financially.

MARK: Also the ability to get a job was directly related to your religious practices. Were you willing to do these things? Oftentimes, they'd have these festivals where they would start with a sacrifice of an animal, they would feast on the animal, and it would end up in, for lack of a better phrase, a drunken orgy. And that was considered part of their religious beliefs. These were the type of practices that apparently this woman Jezebel, through claiming inspiration and claiming to be a prophet, was encouraging Christians to engage in. It's just amazing that somebody would do so, but, indeed, she did.

EDDIE: It's no wonder then that she'd be referred to as Jezebel, and as somebody that wicked, because it seems that's exactly what she had done. She claimed that she was a prophetess and convinced others to commit these immoral acts based on the fact that she evidently said, look, it's not only okay, this is God's message to you. Go ahead and engage in these things. And it was very evil, to say the least. But even in