

## April 2005 Broadcast Notes

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-- Seminar #214:11, 12, 13

**Title:** Revelation Commentary - The Seven Churches - Part I  
[Verses 1:20 through 2:24](#)

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### Begin Text:

The March 2005 study ended with Revelation 1:20 and I would like to refresh your thinking with this verse because it is important in today's study:

Rev 1:20 The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The **seven stars** are the angels of the seven churches, and the **seven lampstands** are the seven churches.

The imagery used here is pretty easy to understand. The "right hand" of Jesus after His departure from Earth was His church. This is why the seven angels and the seven churches are found in His **right hand**. The number **seven** indicates completion, fullness and perfection. Christianity is represented as seven candlesticks because the Church had displaced the nation of Israel as the light of the world.

You may recall how a single lampstand seen in Zechariah 4 represented the nation of Israel. After Israel rejected Jesus, Jesus established His Church. To ensure its success, Holy Spirit power was given to believers in Jesus at the Feast of Pentecost in A.D. 30. This wonderful event (Acts 2) signaled the inauguration of the Church. The Christian Church had been selected to be **the trustee** of the gospel because... Israel's lampstand had been removed and Israel's appointment as trustee of the gospel had been revoked. This is why Jesus was seen standing **among** the seven lampstands (the seven churches).

What about the seven angels?

Because of the Father's love for Christ's church, the seven angels (or seven spirits) that stand before the Father have been assigned to Jesus. They were to carry out His commands as He directed His church from Heaven. For the past 2,000 years, the most powerful angels in Heaven have helped Christians fulfill their mission and purpose.

The seven messages to the seven churches are addressed to the seven angels because they are "ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation." Hebrews 1:14

Let's get into an A.D. 95 context:

Jesus had been gone for about 65 years when this vision was given to John. Tradition says that all of the disciples, with the exception of John, were probably dead. The apostle Paul had been dead for 30 years. The city of

Jerusalem had been in ruins for 25 years. There was no central authority for Christians nor unified Christian organization. There were few widely respected Christian leaders. As a religious body, Christianity was fracturing and most vulnerable.

With the pioneers of the Christian movement gone, Christianity was fast mutating according to the "baggage" of its recent converts. Of course, there were more than seven Christian churches on Earth in A.D. 95. However, the seven churches in Asia Minor were selected by Jesus because (a) they were physically close to Patmos so, copies of this vision could be sent to them and (b) these seven churches collectively faced and represented the problems that all Christian churches have.

These seven churches in Asia Minor existed simultaneously and they do not represent seven periods of church history as some people claim. They are not prophetic. They are didactic - examples used for purposes of illustration.

The seven [a complete number] churches of Asia Minor were selected by Jesus to represent the whole of Christianity at any given time. The point here is that the words of Jesus to the angels of the seven churches are timeless. His words are universal. They are just as applicable today as they were 2,000 years ago.

The seven messages to the seven churches are highly important. Here's why: Every Christian will find himself in one of the seven churches if you understand their condition. Your "membership" in a particular church is determined according to your spiritual condition. In other words, if you are experiencing the victory or the problem that Jesus identified in the Church of Ephesus, then you are a "spiritual" member of the church of Ephesus.

If you discover that you have the same problems experienced in two churches, then you need to wake up and repent because you are slipping out of the church of Christ - although your membership at your local church may be quite honorable!

If after studying the seven churches you discover that you have all of the problems associated with six churches, you need to know that you are no longer a Christian. You have drifted away from Christ and His church. I realize these are strong words, but these are not my words!

Notice that Jesus speaks to the seven angels assigned to the seven churches instead of the churches because each angel is empowered to help members in each church overcome their failures.

### **The Church at Ephesus:**

Rev 2:1 "To the angel [assigned to work with people who have the Ephesus experience for the next 2,000 years] of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of [Jesus] him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands:

Rev 2:2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men [in your church], that you have tested those who claim to be [my] apostles but are not, and have found them false.

Rev 2:3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Rev 2:4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.

Rev 2:5 Remember the height [of joyous faith and devotion] from which you have fallen! Repent and [out of love] do the things you did at first. If you

do not repent, I will come to you and **remove** your lampstand from its place [I will abandon you as I abandoned the nation of Israel].

Rev 2:6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the [subtle, but evil] practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Rev 2:7 He who has an **ear**, let him hear what the Spirit says to the [seven] churches. To him who overcomes, I will give **the right** to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

**Commentary:**

What causes a Christian to lose his **first love** for Jesus?

Answer: The resurrection of the carnal nature.

A transformation of the heart has occurred when the direction of our love changes. A Christian loves in an **outward** direction whereas a pseudo-Christian loves himself, he loves in an **inward** direction. This is a critical point because every Christian faces two deadly forces each day that can kill our "first love" for Jesus.

Our first enemy is our carnal nature and the second enemy is the devil. Our carnal nature is our natural nature. It is a selfish **self-resurrecting** monster and it begs for **gratification** every day. This monster within us never stops yelling, "**make me first.**" The devil knows this. Our carnal nature constantly asserts itself and the devil preys upon our selfish inclination through our eyes and ears.

Paul said that he had to put his carnal nature to death every day. "I die every day I mean that, brothers just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:31)

The only way our carnal nature can be put to death is through God's power. He has to give us the power -- He has to fill us and **renew** us with His divine love every day. When a Christian does not drink in God's Word and receive the power of the Holy Spirit, he loses touch or communion with God. He loses the marvelous power of agape love and as it evaporates, the power of the carnal nature becomes stronger.

When a Christian becomes too busy to meditate and pray about the stressors and temptations of life, he or she becomes weak in agape power. We begin to see things **subjectively** instead of **objectively**. Our feelings become sensitive and we become critical of others. The carnal nature is mean because it cares most about self.

Our carnal nature screams out:

Me First,  
Me Best,  
Me Now,  
Me wants gratification right now!

The message sent to Ephesus is a **timeless and universal** message from Jesus to every Christian: If we lose our first love, we lose Jesus. Jesus said to the Ephesians, "But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

Nicolas, of Alexandria, Egypt, was a very bright philosopher of that time and he skillfully merged some of Jesus' teachings into the popular philosophies of Gnosticism. Gnosticism is a philosophy that displaces the wisdom of God with mysticism. Gnosticism defines right and wrong, good and evil through so-called "higher human knowledge."

First century A.D. gnostics robbed the Word of God of its clarity and simplicity by treating the Scriptures as though they were an allegory -- having many shades of meaning. Because Lucifer is a million times more intelligent than a human being, they were able to twist the teachings of Jesus so that His harsh rebukes and condemning truths about sin and sinful behavior were softened and disguised. Even though various schools of thought existed within Gnosticism, Gnostic philosophy is nothing more than a series of clever justifications for godless living and sinful behavior.

Today, Gnosticism is called "moral relevancy." Moral relevancy is a type of reasoning that is man based. It rejects the higher authority of God and even worse, it diffuses man's accountability to God and His law. Many so-called Christians are gnostics and this is proven by their reasoning and behavior.

Many Christians reject the idea that sexual immorality is an abomination to God. They think that God is love, and as such, He accepts everyone as they are -- even if we choose to live in sin. How did this point of view develop? Simple.

The devil has diminished the simplicity of God's Word. We have come to the place where a plain "thus saith the Lord" is meaningless. A confused group of some 250 Christian denominations have shown the world that the Bible "is a matter of interpretation." Therefore, sexual immorality is a matter of interpretation.

This manner of thinking is called moral relativism-- that is, man "interprets" what is moral - what is good and evil. We do not know specifically which philosophies of Nicolas the church at Ephesus rejected. However, Jesus commended the church for preventing their subtle invasion.

Jesus closed His remarks to the church at Ephesus saying, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

The phrase "He who has an ear . . ." means there is a message hidden in His words that most people will not understand. The hidden message for those who overcome the loss of their first love is this: Jesus will enormously reward everyone who overcomes the temptations and cravings of the carnal nature.

Overcomers will be given the right to eat from the tree of life. God did not permit Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of Life after they sinned because the fruit of this tree perpetually sustains life. (Genesis 3:23,24)

All who have the right to eat from this tree will be sustained forever. Even more, the promise of Jesus indicates that overcoming the loss of first love is possible. Through the renewing and indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, we can limit the clamor of the carnal nature and keep it submissive to the spiritual nature which calls for constant communion with God!

#### **The Church at Smyrna:**

Rev 2:8 "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last [the Alpha & Omega], who died and came to life again." (See Rev 1:8)

Rev 2:9 I know your afflictions and your poverty -- yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Rev 2:10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer

persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Rev 2:11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death."

Commentary:

Many first century Christians were converts from Judaism. Remember, this message was given to the church at Smyrna in A.D. 95. As such, Judeo-Christians saw themselves as the new Israel of God - the 12 tribes - which had been called out of apostate Israel.

James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

James 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

James 1:3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

James 2:1 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.

However, in Smyrna, a contest arose between converts. Some Jewish converts insisted on maintaining certain Jewish customs. Gentile converts refused. Jesus recognized the contest between the two Israel's by calling one group, "the synagogue of Satan." "...I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."

In terms of theology, there is a world of difference between a synagogue and a church. A church consists of believers in Christ whereas a synagogue consists of believers in Jehovah. (Isn't this an amazing paradox since Jesus is Jehovah? But, that's another topic.)

Jesus well understood the conflict between Christianity and Judaism for He had been condemned to death by Jewish authorities. The conflict in Smyrna was intense because Christianity declares Judaism obsolete. The obsolescence of Judaism was a very hard thing for Jewish converts to accept. To think that suddenly their entire religious system and culture had been terminated by Jesus.

The differences are significant and painful. Christians did not have a high priest on Earth, they did not need animal sacrifices, they did not need to attend feasts or participate in temple services, they did not need circumcision, they did not need anything that Judaism offered. This freedom from Judaism was an endless source of conflict in Smyrna because some of the Jewish converts wanted to "be Christian" and yet observe their Jewish traditions. (This conflict was so great during the first century A.D. that God raised up a brilliant Jew (the apostle Paul) to address the controversy that came with converting from one religion to another.)

Next, Jesus identified Himself to the church at Smyrna as "the First and the Last, who died and came to life again." Jesus described Himself as "the First and the Last, the One who died and came to life again" because this means there is nothing that He has not first experienced. In A.D. 95, Christianity was an illegal religion in some parts of the Roman empire. The evil emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96) put many Christians to death before he was murdered.

Then, Nerva (A.D. 96-98) ascended to Domitians's throne but he soon died within two years of illness. Then, Trajan (A.D. 98-117) came to power and even though he did not actively seek out Christians to kill them, he mandated

that if a Christian should be found, he must be arrested and executed unless he immediately renounced his faith.

The **ten days** of persecution mentioned by Jesus evidently refers to an upcoming purge of Christians in Smyrna. **Loyalty tests** and purges were frequently used by Roman governors to maintain control over their subjects, for no governor wanted to be charged with treason against Caesar and lose his own head.

Jesus warned the Christians in Smyrna of an upcoming purge and He encouraged them to remain faithful "even to the point of death" because those put to death for His sake would, like Him, come to life again. Last, Jesus added, "He who has an **ear**, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the **second death** [the death that ultimately matters]."

There is a hidden message of strength in this phrase. Overcoming the fear of torture and death is **not** a normal human instinct. We instinctively do everything possible to protect ourselves from harm (that is, after adolescence). The hidden message that comes through the Spirit is this: **God will give a martyr's** courage when a martyr's courage **is required**. In other words, overcoming the fear of death is possible through God's grace because God's grace is more powerful than any fear!

So, Jesus said, "be firm in your stand for truth and remain loyal to me even to the point of death and you will not be **hurt** at all by the second death."

This is good news because the second death is a death for which no "martyr's grace" will be given nor will there be any recovery or resurrection!

Revelation 20 tells us that at the end of the 1,000 years, all of the wicked will be resurrected to receive God's judgment and then they will be burned to death. This coming event is the second death. (Revelation 20:15)

#### **The Church at Pergamum:**

Rev 2:12 "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the [**deadly**] sharp, double-edged sword [**that comes from His mouth**].

Rev 2:13 I know where you live where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city **where Satan lives**.

Rev 2:14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the [**lies**] teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to **entice** the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.

Rev 2:15 Likewise you also have those who hold to the [**lies**] teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Rev 2:16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them [**who teach these things**] with the sword of my mouth.

Rev 2:17 He who has an **ear**, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."

#### **Commentary:**

When Jesus spoke these words, Pergamum was the cultural and religious center of Asia. Pergamum was an old, highly respected city. At one time, Pergamum had been the Roman capital of Asia. Worship of the Roman emperors began at Pergamum. The city had many pagan temples and Eastern Mysticism was very popular in Pergamum. Pergamum was a big city and had a large class of educated and wealthy people.

In His message to the church at Pergamum, Jesus twice said that [Satan had his throne in Pergamum](#) because as a city, Pergamum was the undisputed queen of false religion. Pergamum was the ivory tower of false religion for Asia and naturally, its citizens hated the followers of Jesus who condemned their carnal ways.

Jesus noted this hatred when He mentioned the death of faithful Antipas. The hatred toward Christians explains in part, why some Christians in Pergamum were willing to make so many compromises with the devil. The Christian church at Pergamum had members who saw nothing wrong with sexual immorality nor the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

Jesus referred to Balaam because Balaam was an Old Testament prophet who agreed to put a curse on Israel for a tidy sum of [money](#). However, when Balaam attempted to speak curses, God put blessings in his mouth instead. Finally, an exasperated Balaam told King Balak (the enemy of Israel who had hired Balaam) that Israel could only be defeated if Israel offended God. This could be easily done by enticing the young men of Israel into sexual immorality.

After hearing this, King Balak invited the young men of Israel to "party." He sent scores of beautiful whores into Israel bearing gifts and through them, he enticed the young men of Israel into eating food offered to idols, and then into sexual immorality. (Numbers 25) God's wrath broke out on Israel and 24,000 Israelite men were killed. Balaam didn't have to kill a single person. The parallel here is that the devil brought "a truck-load of sexually immoral" people into the church at Pergamum to rob the church of its Godly connection and thus, its strength. The devil knows that when our connection with Jesus is broken through sin, we have no power to overcome his sophistry. (1 Corinthians 5:11)

You may recall that the apostles had imposed four specific rules upon Gentile converts at the first general conference of the Christian Church in A.D. 49. At that meeting the apostle James said, "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood." (Acts 15:19,20)

When Jesus spoke to the church at Pergamum, He affirmed the Spirit-led decision of the apostles by threatening to destroy the sexually immoral church in Pergamum unless they repented. The words of Jesus are not fuzzy and they leave no wiggle room. Jesus forbade sexual immorality and the eating of food offered to idols. Eating food polluted by idols was a superstitious ritual which was supposed to give the consumer the powers of the God who had blessed the food.

Today, this is not a big problem. But, in ancient times, it was a big problem. The devil had merged this superstitious pagan practice with the words of Jesus to create a distortion of the Lord's supper. (Keep in mind that it wasn't necessarily the food that was the problem, it was the superstitious beliefs that went with the food that was the problem. 1 Cor 8:4)

When Jesus was on Earth He said, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my

blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." (John 6:54-58)

Jesus made these remarks within the context of eating the Passover feast. The Passover Lamb (the flesh) eaten at the feast represented "the spotless life" that was given up to pay the penalty for sin. The wine represented His blood, and the bread represented His broken body. (Luke 22:19)

Thus, the observance of the Lord's supper became corrupted, mingled with the common practice of eating food offered to idols. The devil used superstition to distort the words of Jesus to justify eating food offered to idols. Very clever.

Jesus also mentioned that some Christians in Pergamum had accepted the teachings of Nicholas. This should not come as a surprise because Pergamum was a very influential center for Gnostic training. The Gnostics treated Scriptures as though they were allegorical. In other words, the Gnostics put a layer of "fuzzy logic" between the Word of God and its obvious meaning so that ordinary people could not be confident about the meaning of God's Word (that is, it became difficult or impossible to know right from wrong).

This has been (and continues to be) one of the devil's best tools for leading Christians astray. How many times have you heard it said, "The Bible does not mean what it says?" Or even worse, how many times have you heard a Bible passage quoted out of its context? When lay people begin to believe the lie that "ordinary people cannot understand God's Word," the devil has gained control of the church.

There is no substitute for "a plain thus saith the Lord." Jesus was furious with the clergy in Pergamum because they had accepted the lies of Nicholas. Leaders who had the respect and trust of the laymen were leading the laymen astray. Jesus said, "Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against "the clergy" with the sword of my mouth."

In His closing remarks to Pergamum, Jesus offered a special reward to those who would overcome the devil's deceptions. Jesus said, "To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna [pure food]. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."

Currently, manna, the food of angels is not available to us. The term "hidden manna" probably refers to the pot of manna that was kept hidden in the Ark of the Covenant. Unlike ordinary food, manna is a perfect food, full of vitality.

The white stone Jesus promised will be a very precious stone indeed because it will have the inscription of a secret God-given name on it. This secret name will serve as a password enabling the overcomer to enter into God's throne room. Think about it. Every overcomer will be able to enter into God's awesome presence to hear truth-full answers to his questions.

Contrast this privilege with the Gnostic's pursuit of so-called "higher knowledge" that leads to darkness and separation from God. The secret password on the white stone will open the door to light and truth. I cannot think of anything better than having the privilege going before the Father's presence to personally ask a few questions!

### **The Church at Thyatira:**

Rev 2:18 "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

Rev 2:19 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

Rev 2:20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

Rev 2:21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.

Rev 2:22 So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways.

Rev 2:23 I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

Rev 2:24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you):

Rev 2:25 Only hold on to what you have until I come.

Rev 2:26 To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations--

Rev 2:27 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' -- just as I have received authority from my Father.

Rev 2:28 I will also give him the morning star.

Rev 2:29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

### **Commentary:**

Jesus spoke to church members at Thyatira with words of comfort and condemnation - comfort for the believers who were doing right and the threat of death, death for those who were doing wrong. The BIG problem in Thyatira (as in Pergamum) was sexually immoral leadership.

Jesus was angry with church leaders at Thyatira because they tolerated a woman named Jezebel in their church! (See also 1 Corinthians 5:11.) The devil is particularly gratified when an immoral person holds a position of religious authority because they can do so much damage to the mission of Christianity. (See Ezekiel 36:20-23.)

The numerous child abuse cases that have recently surfaced have made this point painfully clear. Catholic priests and in fact, the Catholic Church, have lost a lot of respect in recent weeks because of sexual abuse charges. In Thyatira's case, a prominent woman named Jezebel was leading the church into evil.

**Note:** The Jezebel in Thyatira should not to be confused with Jezebel, the rebellious wife of King Ahab who lived about a thousand years earlier.

Jezebel in Thyatira must have been a very bright and capable woman. She called herself a [prophetess](#), but she was not a prophetess of Jesus. She prostituted the teachings of Jesus by leading others to do the very things that Jesus condemned! She justified sexual immorality through Gnostic logic and philosophy. Jezebel taught that sex was not limited to the confines of marriage and she freely engaged in sexual activities, herself.

She also endorsed the popular belief that eating flesh offered to idols insured the blessings of those Gods to whom the meat was offered. The Bible does not reveal everything that Jezebel taught, but we can determine why Jezebel was successful in a Christian church!

She promoted and endorsed ideas that gratified the sensual passions of carnal members. It is amazing what lay people will do (or will not do) when someone presuming to speak for God defines right and wrong for them! In many cases, it seems as though the Bible does not even exist. For example, after the founder of the Worldwide Church of God, Herbert W. Armstrong died in the early 1990's, his successor informed the church that several core doctrines of the church were wrong.

In just a few months, most of the lay members agreed and the church imploded. Today, Armstrong's church has all but disappeared. How could this happen? Were the members of the Worldwide Church of God following a religious leader or the teachings of Jesus? Did the Bible suddenly change when Mr. Armstrong died? (Incidentally, the implosion of the Worldwide Church of God parallels the coming experience of all religious systems during the Great Tribulation. God is about to separate people who love truth from those who play "follow the leader.")

Jezebel skillfully merged contemporary pagan thinking and practice with Christian ideals. This made the threshold for Christian converts so low that pagans could join the church at Thyatira without having to give up their pagan ways! This is an area where Christians have particular vulnerability. In fact, many Christians today teach that Jesus will unconditionally accept any person that believes in Him. This understanding is false because it is not completely true. (Ezekiel 14:6-8)

The Bible [does teach](#) that Jesus will unconditionally accept any repentant sinner that comes to Him IF the sinner is repentant. The key word here is "repentant." A repentant sinner is a sinner who is deeply sorrowful for his sin. A repentant sinner will (a) loath the sin and (b) do whatever is humanly possible to "make it right" and (c) will cease from repeating the sin again.

The devil believes there is a God and he trembles, but he has not stopped doing evil nor repented of his evil deeds. (James 2:19) Because Jezebel lowered the threshold into the church of Thyatira, church members were not required to forsake their pagan ways. Thus, false teachings found little resistance and lower standards of behavior allowed the church to grow and prosper. Membership swelled and the church was packed, but the church did not grow in sanctification. The members in Thyatira became more like the devil instead of becoming more like Jesus.

Jesus condemned Jezebel for using "the mysteries of religion" (Satan's so-called dark secrets or superstitions) to manipulate and control an uninformed laity. The "mysteries of religion" is a catchall phrase that describes many meaningless rituals and traditions (I call it "religious bamboozle").

Religious leaders have used religious bamboozle for millenniums to sway and control the laity. Invariably, television documentaries about primitive tribes show a witch doctor conducting a meaningless, but grossly expensive ritual to invoke the blessings of the tribal gods.

Do not laugh at the poor heathen; similar rituals occur in Christianity today. For varied reasons, lay people do not study their Bible to understand God's truth for themselves and they end up playing "follow the leader." Since religious bamboozle does not make sense to the laity, this lack of understanding makes the mysteries of religion sacred and beyond question.

This is so sad. Religious leaders have exerted authority and dominion over their subjects for thousands of years using religious bamboozle and Jezebel was no exception. Jesus condemned Jezebel for four reasons:

- a) She led others to commit sexual immorality;
- b) She led others to eat food sacrificed to idols;
- c) She was defiant; and
- d) She used bamboozle or Satan's "deep secrets" theology.

Jezebel had been confronted with her errors, but she refused to repent and the religious leaders of the church were not willing to throw her out of the church. So, Jesus revealed Jezebel's true condition to the church. Jesus said He would turn her bed of pleasure into a "bed of suffering."

Jesus also promised to inflict great suffering on her followers who followed her example. In fact, Jesus promised to strike her children dead. Whether the children mentioned in verse 23 were biological offspring or her spiritual offspring, the Bible does not say. In either case, Jesus left no wiggle room: Death to all who participate in sexual immorality. (See also Colossians 3:5,6 and Revelation 22:15.)

The devil is a master at gradualism. In fact, most people do not perceive his stealthy efforts. However, over time the separation between truth and tradition becomes great. Jesus closed His remarks to the church at Thyatira saying, "To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations.\* He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

\*This occurs when the saints reign with Christ for 1,000 years. To be discussed when we get to Rev 20.

Jesus encouraged the church at Thyatira with two wonderful promises for those who have ears for what the Spirit says. First, overcoming sin is possible through repentance and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 6) People who endure and fight the fight of faith will reign with Jesus! They will share in His awesome authority and at an appointed time, the redeemed will sit in judgment on those who harmed them. (1 Corinthians 6:1-3; Revelation 20:4)

Second, Jesus says every overcomer will be given "the Morning Star." The Morning Star is Jesus Himself. (Revelation 22:16) Jesus offers every repentant and faithful sinner Himself. With Jesus we receive a God of love, a Savior who was willing to die in our place, and a Savior who offers us His perfect righteousness. (Romans 1:17)

What could be better? There is no God like the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**End Text:**