

# The Grace of Wrath

Studies in the Revelation of Jesus Christ

Text

Chapter 2:18-29

Topic

Jesus warns the church in Thyatira that those who follow the teachings of a false prophetess He calls "Jezebel" can expect to be "killed with death"

Title

*"For Whom the Jezebel Tolls"*

## Introduction

Who would you put on a list of the Bible's bad girls?

**Delilah** was loved by Samson, Israel's physically strong but morally weak hero. Some Philistine leaders approached Delilah and offered her an immense sum of money to find out the secret of Samson's strength, so that they might defeat him. Three times she asked him, and three times he gave a false answer.

Eventually he told her that his strength resided in his hair. Delilah allowed the Philistines to shave his hair while Samson slept. When the Philistines attacked him, he could no longer defeat them, and was taken captive and made to work like an ox turning a millstone.

**Potiphar's wife** is unnamed, but she belongs on this list. Her husband was Egypt's executioner. She had a thing for one of the servants in their household, the young Hebrew Joseph, the son of Jacob.

After having made multiple unsuccessful sexual advances towards him, Potiphar's wife arranged a day on which to seduce Joseph, but he fled from her. Spurned, Potiphar's wife accused Joseph of an attempted sexual assault, and he was thrown into prison.

**Herodias** and her very young daughter, **Salome**, conspired to incite the passions of Herod by having Salome perform an NC-17 rated dance in order to soften him up to ask him to behead their moral nemesis, John the Baptist.

Delilah, Potiphar's wife, Herodias and Salome were bad; but perhaps the baddest of them all was **Jezebel**.

We'll talk about her this morning because, in the church of Thyatira, there was a Jezebel-like prophetess who was seeking to seduce the believers.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Jezebel Is In Church To Seduce You Into Spiritual Adultery & Sexual Immorality, and #2 Jesus Is In Church To Keep You From Spiritual Adultery & Sexual Immorality.

#1 Jezebel Is In Church  
To Seduce You Into Spiritual Adultery & Sexual Immorality  
(v18-23)

In Thyatira, a seduction was in progress. Jesus uses the words "seduce," "sexual immorality" (two times), and "adultery."

The believers in Thyatira were being seduced into committing both sexual immorality and spiritual adultery.

The seductress was "Jezebel." Just who was Jezebel? Was she a real woman or is this just a metaphor for the evil influence of some false doctrine?

Before we see just *who* or *what* Jezebel was, we need to meet the saints in Thyatira.

Rev 2:18 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:

"Angel" translates to *messenger*. It is the pastor of the church, who would be charged with the privilege and blessing of reading the Revelation aloud to the church.

You might recognize Thyatira from an episode in the Book of Acts. A famous female convert of the apostle Paul's was from Thyatira. Paul encountered Lydia at Philippi, but she was there on business from Thyatira.

Charles Spurgeon says of her,

Not only... was Lydia a sort of first-fruit for Europe, but she probably also became a witness in her own city of Thyatira, in Asia. We do not know how the Gospel was introduced into that city... Very likely Lydia became the herald of the Gospel in her native place.

Lydia was a seller of purple. Dyes were incredibly rare and expensive in the ancient world. They were produced from certain mollusks or snails. Purple was a royal Roman color, used to identify those with high rank and status.

Perhaps that is why this is the only time in the Revelation that Jesus calls Himself the "Son of God." He is Heaven's royalty, the one true God. No amount of purple dye could create a royalty that would compete with Him. Rome, and its emperors, would come and go; the Lord will reign forever and ever.

Jesus next described His gaze by saying His "eyes were like a flame of fire." It could be translated, "a blaze of lightning."

There's an X-Man, Cyclops, who emits powerful beams from his eyes. Jesus is like that, spiritually speaking. In a few verses He will tell us He is going to "kill" some people. It's as if He will look upon them, and with a blaze of lightning from His eyes, they will be killed.

I'm not saying beams will actually come from His eyes. His gaze is like that, in its inherent power. He can win any staring contest.

Then Jesus said His "feet [were] like fine brass." The brass feet of Jesus remind you of the first proclamation of the Gospel.

In the Garden of Eden God told the devil that when Jesus came He would "bruise your head, And you shall bruise [Jesus] heel" (Genesis 3:15).

We interpret the bruising of Jesus' heel as His suffering on the Cross. His suffering, and His death, defeated Satan; so we say He simultaneously bruised the devil's head.

*Now we see Jesus with indestructible brass feet.* They are His work boots. They are the feet that have walked on earth, in our place, up the hill to the cross at Calvary. Refined through His suffering on our behalf, they are the brass that have bruised and will finally crush the devil's rebellion.

Rev 2:19 "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.

It's interesting to compare Thyatira to Ephesus:

- Ephesus had works but not love.
- Thyatira had works *and* love, and was growing in both.

Their "love" is *agape* love. It is the self-sacrificing love that can only be produced in the heart of a believer by the presence of God in his or her life.

"Service" is the word from which we get the word *deacon*. It was used of waiters who would wait tables and be attentive to every need while remaining almost invisible.

They had "faith." We already know they were saved so this must mean *faithfulness*.

"Patience" is a word that indicates a hopeful waiting for Jesus Christ. Everything they did – all their works – was done with an eye toward the return of Jesus.

Rev 2:20 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.

It is doubtful that Jezebel was her real name. She was a woman attending the church at Thyatira who was similar in character and conduct to the notorious Jezebel of the Old Testament.

Jezebel appears in the Bible during the period of the divided kingdom, with Israel the name of the northern kingdom, and Judah the name of the southern kingdom.

In order to form an alliance with the Sidonians, King Ahab of Israel took for his wife Jezebel, the daughter of their King Ethbaal.

King Ethbaal was a priest of Astarte, who in mythology was either the sister or the companion of the pagan god, Baal.

Once enthroned as queen, Jezebel introduced the worship of Astarte and Baal to Israel. She persuaded Ahab to build a temple to Astarte in his capital, Samaria.

She supported four-hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and another four hundred prophets of Astarte. Meanwhile she systematically killed-off any true prophets of God she could get her hands on.

It was Jezebel's guys whom Elijah confronted in a kind of prophet cage fight. After defeating the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal by calling fire down from Heaven when they could not, Elijah "led them down to the Kishon Valley, where he killed them" (First Kings 19:40). For this, Jezebel vowed to hunt him down and kill him.

Fast forward about a thousand years. Thyatira was noted for its many trade guilds. You could not work if you did not belong to a guild representing your trade. Each guild was dedicated to and worshipped a pagan god or goddess. Each year you were invited to attend a feast to the god or goddess of your guild.

- At that feast, the food you were served was first openly offered as a sacrifice to the idol of the god in a pagan religious ceremony.
- At that feast, the god or goddess was honored by rituals that involved having sex with the temple priestesses. They were like X-rated bachelor parties, complete with prostitutes.

*Christians understandably had trouble with this. How far could or should they go as members of the trade guilds?*

As they were struggling to answer these questions a woman in the church claimed to receive prophecy from God that encouraged them that it was alright to partake of **all** the pagan practices.

"Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess...teach[es] and seduce[s] My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols."

Her so-called prophecy was seducing the saints away from God, to idols, leading them not just to commit sexual immorality, but spiritual adultery.

Rev 2:21 And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.

Jesus, Who can, in a sense, shoot lightning bolts out of His eyes and kill sinners, was longsuffering with her.

The Lord desires repentance from sin, because He knows the consequences of continuing in sin are so extreme.

The "time" He gave her put believers in *danger*, but they were not *defenseless*. They had His Word, and they had His warning.

Lots of terrible things happen every day. God remains longsuffering, not willing that any should perish eternally. It's dangerous out there but we are not defenseless.

- We have the Word of God to lead, guide, and strengthen us.
- We have the warnings of the Word, in which we are told to judge prophets and prophecies, to see if they line-up with the written Word.

The literal wording is *she does not wish to repent*. It was a conscious, free-will decision.

You **can** repent; it's up to you, aided by the grace of God by which He seeks to draw all men to Himself.



If you are not yet a believer in Jesus Christ, His grace is here, operating on your heart to free your will, so you can repent, and be saved. God takes the initiative for the purpose of bringing all people to salvation by calling all people everywhere to repent and believe the Gospel, and then by enabling those who hear the Gospel to respond to it positively in faith.

You **can** repent.

Rev 2:22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.

Rev 2:23 I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

Is "great tribulation" the Great Tribulation? I think not. I think what Jesus meant He explains when He says "I will kill her children with death."

After King Ahab's death, Jezebel continued to rule through her son Ahaziah. When Ahaziah was killed in battle, she exercised control through her other son, Jehoram.

Jehoram was killed by Jehu, who then confronted Jezebel in Jezreel and urged her servants to kill her by throwing her out a window.

They complied, tossing her out the window and leaving her corpse in the street where her dead body was eaten by dogs. Only her skull, feet, and hands were left.

The Thyatiran Jezebel's followers and advocates were considered her spiritual sons. They would be "killed with death." There are several references in the New Testament to folks being disciplined by God by being killed with death:

1. Ananias and Sapphira sold their land and then lied about the amount of the proceeds they donated to the church. God struck them dead, one after the other.
2. In First Corinthians eleven some of the believers were misbehaving at the Agape Feast that preceded the Lord's Supper. They were hoarding their food and getting drunk. Some of them were being disciplined by God by sickness and death.

It was apparently not uncommon for errant believers to be struck with sickness or death by God in the early church.

The effect of God killing believers was that "all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts." They knew that spiritual adultery cannot be hidden from Him; and that sexual immorality can never be condoned by Him.

Those who remain separate from spiritual adultery and sexual immorality are assured that a reward is awaiting them when Jesus "will give to each one of [us] according to [our] works."

Let's talk about us. It's obvious our culture is sexually immoral, and getting worse, not better.

Way back in 2004 a study from the Harvard School of Public Health found that a decade of what they termed "ratings creep" allowed more sexually explicit content into films, suggesting that movie raters have grown more lenient in their standards.

Rich Taylor, a spokesman for the Motion Picture Association, pointed out that the standards for judging acceptable depictions of sex in American society were constantly changing, and that it would not be surprising if that changed for movie ratings as well.

I'm not saying you can't go to the movies. I'm using it as an example. I'm saying that movies might be one seductress you should look out for, because of the ever-relaxing standards of sexual content.

More to the point, we should ask, "Is Jezebel in church?" She **is** to the extent we have "ratings creep" by tolerating sexual sin in the church.

We are called upon to "abstain from **all** sexual immorality." Last week I quoted Dr. William Welty, who says this of the Greek word translated "sexual immorality":

This all-encompassing word [contains] within its meaning **all concepts of non-marital homosexual and heterosexual behavior**, including within its definition sexual relations with individuals other than the spouse, sexual relationships with children, pre-marital seduction, rape, and even some forms of physical abuse of the spouse when the abuse is motivated by aberrant attitudes of sexual domination.

Maybe it's just me, but I think that because there are so many extreme sexual perversions out there that things like pre-marital sex and heterosexual adultery have become run-of-the-mill, and are too easily excused.

There may not be a Jezebel in church uttering prophecies she claims are from God, but there can be a Jezebel spirit that minimizes certain sexual sins.

Let's guard against it and "pursue holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

It's not a matter of having higher standards than the world. It's a matter of having and maintaining, and thereby proclaiming, God's standards.

With regards to sexual behavior, it is wisely and lovingly restricted by God to be enjoyed within a biblical marriage that is monogamous, heterosexual, and meant to last as long as you both shall live.

That's the biblical gold standard, and it will never change, no matter how Jezebel our culture becomes.

## #2 Jesus Is In Church To Keep You From Spiritual Adultery & Sexual Immorality (v24-29)

We saw in chapter one that Jesus walks in the midst of His churches on the earth. Sure, Jezebel was in church, spewing her false prophecies. But Jesus was there, too, to overrule her.

Rev 2:24 "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden.

Her prophesying was "the depths of Satan." Her source was not *divine* but *devilish*.

"As they say" refers probably to the Satanic label those who opposed Jezebel and her followers put on her teaching and ministry. Kudos to those in the church who were warning the believers about the evil in their midst.

Jesus promised them "I will put on you no other burden." This is the same Jesus Who promised, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." There **are** burdens to bear, but they need never be borne alone. Jesus wants to bear them with us.

It comforts me to realize that Jesus knows life can be a burden. Circumstances need not cancel out my joy or rob me of walking in victory; but there are times of burden as well as blessing, of being abased as well as of abounding.

[Rev 2:25 But hold fast what you have till I come.](#)

By holding fast to God's Word, and refusing to attend the feasts in their respective guilds, they would, at the very least, lose business, and with it their economic and social standing.

The things you can hold fast to till Jesus comes must therefore be spiritual blessings in Jesus Christ that can not ever be taken from you.

We are to consistently value the spiritual over the material.

[Rev 2:26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations -](#)

[Rev 2:27 'HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON; THEY SHALL BE DASHED TO PIECES LIKE THE POTTER'S VESSELS' - as I also have received from My Father;](#)

Overcoming these perils and pitfalls is the normal Christian life. Every believer has enough discernment and discipline to be an overcomer.

Falling prey to false teaching, of any kind, will distract and derail you from your "works."

We are not saved by works but after we are saved we are to discover the good works God has before ordained we should perform in His power.

The "end" is whenever you see Jesus face-to-face. Seeing Him will mark the end of all your burdens and the end of works in the sense you will receive your rewards for them.

The quote is from Psalm Two where God the Father promises His Son that He will one day rule over the nations of the earth.

We call it the Second Coming of Jesus Christ since in His first coming His physical rule over the earth was rejected. The Revelation builds up to it, taking us through the church age, then through the seven year Tribulation, to the Lord's triumphal return.

The promise to believers is that we will share the rule promised by God to His Son in Psalm Two. It is a promise that we will be returning with Him.

Why the rod of iron dashing the potter's vessels? Check any reference to ancient Thyatira and it will mention that, although there were many industries, pottery was one of its chief industries.

The Thyatirans who were in guilds, like the potters guild, were suffering persecution. But one day they would rule the earth with the Lord. Just as pottery cannot withstand being dashed with a rod, the nations – the nonbelievers – will not be able to withstand the righteous rule of Jesus and His resurrected followers.

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

First we need to identify the "morning star." In our everyday world, Venus is known as "the morning star," because when Venus rises, it means the sun will follow very soon, and a new day will begin.

In the Bible, "morning star" becomes a personal title. Interestingly, the first person to lay claim to the title is the devil.

In Isaiah fourteen we are introduced to "Lucifer." The Hebrew is *heylel* and means "light bearer," "shining one," or "morning star."

It is the only place in all the Bible Satan is called Lucifer. It describes him at the time of his fall into sin. **It therefore isn't really his name.** It describes his aspirations to be prominent in Heaven, and in the heavens.

In other words, his desire was to be like the morning star, and rise ahead of the sun. Instead of rising, he fell.

Later in the Revelation, we will read, "I, Jesus... am... the Bright and Morning Star" (22:16). Satan wanted to have this title, this name; but it doesn't suit him as a rebellious, lying murderer.

Jesus Christ's Second Coming coming will mean God's light is about to shine forever on the universe, making all wrongs right, wiping away all tears, first by establishing His Kingdom on earth for a thousand years, but ultimately with the creation of the new heavens and new earth.

What does it mean, "I will give [he who overcomes] the Morning Star?" It means we will be with Jesus when He appears in His Second Coming. He brings us with Him.

At the Second Coming, when we return, we will enjoy the long delayed Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Thinking about that event reminds us that, as the bride of Jesus Christ, we should keep ourselves from spiritual adultery, and from sexual immorality.

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

The Spirit talks to *every* church *everywhere* throughout history through the reading and studying of this letter. He talks directly to *every* believer, and *every* backslidden believer, and *every* nonbeliever who hears these words.

What has He said to **you** today - about the pursuit of holiness, and the seduction of Jezebel?