

Jezebel: A Christian Church Leader?

What if I told you that the name “Jezebel” means chaste and free from carnal connection? (1)
That’s how *Faussett’s Bible Dictionary* defines it.

However, the Biblical character Jezebel differs vastly from this literal definition. No doubt you attach a meaning to her name in agreement with the description of Jezebel in the Bible. It portrays her as a ruthless, godless tyrant who slaughtered anyone who dared oppose her. One even gets the feeling of a wanton woman of sexual promiscuity.

What if I told you that an adulteress like Jezebel became a leader and Bible teacher in a first century Christian congregation? The reality of her position prompted Jesus to write a letter to that assembly in Thyatira.

Before we get to her story, we need some background information on that assembly in Thyatira. According to *Logos Bible Software Factbook*, Thyatira, situated in western Asia, now Turkey, became a center for the wool trade. (2) It held a world-wide reputation for its dyes and fabrics.

Bible scholar Dr. Marvin Vincent describes it as a wealthy city, known for its artisans, and home of one of Paul’s converts in Philippi, Lydia, the seller of purple (one of its most famous dyes). (3)

Although no Biblical record describes the formation of the Christian congregation there, it no doubt came into existence through the ministry of Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla and other members of the Ephesian assembly while Paul ministered at Ephesus. (4)

The Christian Congregation In Thyatira

Revelation of Christ

Christ began His letter to these believers with a revelation of Himself. In Revelation 2.18, He called Himself the Son of God. This disclosure mirrors the same one recorded in Revelation 1.14-15. Centuries prior to this announcement, the Psalmist wrote in Psalm 2 that God described the coming Christ as His Son, the Son of God, the King Who would rule the nations. (5) At the trial for His crucifixion, Christ declared Himself as the Son of God. (Luke 22.70)

Without apology or explanation, Christ claimed His rightful position: the Son of God, Deity, and thus Sovereign over all things. Therefore, He wrote to the believers in Thyatira, described Himself to them, and explained His plans and purposes for them.

In addition, Christ revealed His glorious appearance. He possessed eyes like flames of fire, exposing His anger, wrath, and indignation at their sin, despite His longsuffering of it (See “Rebuke.”). (6) The holiness of Christ contrasted their sinful behavior. His feet shined like fine brass, refined in fire. What a sight to behold.

In Revelation 2.19, Jesus further revealed Himself to the believers in Thyatira. He told them, “*I know...*” He knew all things concerning them, their good features as well as their sins. That knowledge resulted from these other attributes of Christ: His omniscience (all knowledge) and omnipresence.

Because of His omnipresence, Christ had first-hand knowledge of their lives and deportment. His omniscience brought praise and rebuke to these believers.

Because of His nature, Christ alone deserved total, prompt, and joyful obedience and worship from the Christians in Thyatira.

Recognition of character

Then, Christ recognized the excellent character of the congregation in Thyatira. In Revelation 2.19, He itemized 6 praiseworthy features:

1. Works;
2. Charity;
3. Service;
4. Faith;
5. Patience; and

6. Humility.

These characteristics identify a congregation that served one another. Their Christian uprightness brought praise from Christ Who encouraged them to continued faithfulness. Their love for Christ expressed itself in deeds for others as well as faith towards Him.

Rebuke for sin

It hardly seems possible that a Christian assembly that possessed such exceptional attributes would need rebuke for sin. Yet, Christ detected a disastrous sin among them. Revelation 2.20-23 details it. The congregation allowed a false prophetess to teach among them.

Jesus called her Jezebel, after the infamous wife of King Ahab in the Old Testament. (7) Among other evils, the original Jezebel seduced Israel to worship Baal, leading them into spiritual and actual adultery. In similar fashion, this false prophetess deceived her fellow members of the congregation to worship idols.

Known for its idolatrous culture, Thyatira proclaimed feasts to idols. Like the history of Israel, this false prophetess seduced people in the Christian congregation to participate in these pagan feasts leading them to worship idols and often into sexual immorality. Far from orthodox doctrine, this false teacher led her followers into the depths of satan. (8)

Christ admonished the believers for permitting her to teach but also for their participation in the idolatrous behavior of their city. One cannot mix worship of Christ with idolatry.

Repentance for sin

In another example of Christ's nature, in mercy and longsuffering He gave "Jezebel" time to repent from her sin. Yet she continued unabated. To her and her followers, Christ pronounced a severe warning: repent or else. If the false prophetess and her followers failed to repent of their sin, Christ promised severe judgment upon them: suffering from great tribulation, anguish, persecution, and pressure.

Further, Christ promised death to the unrepentant followers of "Jezebel". Their continued sinful behavior would result in final and eternal judgment in accordance with their evil works. (9) Christ had previously stated that He gave her time to repent, but she failed.

Christ's longsuffering ended with a promise of impending judgment. Repent or else.

Reward for faithfulness

To the faithful ones in Thyatira, Christ promised great reward. He encouraged them that He required no additional commands from them except those they already obeyed. He encouraged them to hold fast to their present obedience to Him. (10)

To those who overcame the evils in their congregation and culture, Christ promised they would share in His authority over the nations. (11) After His resurrection and ascension, Christ received from the Father supreme authority over every rule, dominion, power, and authority, including all authority over the body of believers. (12) Christ said the Thyatira overcomers would participate in His authority, too.

Finally, Christ promised that the faithful ones would experience His glory. (13) Scripture describes Christ as the Morning Star. (14) Those in the Christian congregation in Thyatira who overcame the evils around them and remained faithful to Christ would enjoy His glory.

In grace, Christ pledged great rewards to His faithful followers.

Purpose of Christ in this message to Thyatira

Why did Christ send this letter to the believers in Thyatira?

- In the revelation of Himself, Christ confirmed His character: sovereign; holy; merciful; longsuffering, omniscient; and omnipotent. He revealed Himself in a manner that humans understand so we can know Him.

- In His recognition of the believers' character, He commended the value of their ministry to others, their faithfulness, and Christlike virtues.
- In His rebuke for their sin, He convicted believers and unbelievers of their true nature inherent in all of them. All humans inherit sinful natures from Adam and Eve. Thus, all mankind needs repentance from their sins from a loving Savior. No one can know God without it. Further, no one can bridge the chasm that sin creates between God and humans. In addition, these believers needed to resist the evil culture in which they lived and to discern the false prophetess among them and to reject her messages. Christ provided these essentials to His own and enlightened His children of His commands and the requirement for holiness in life.
- In His demand for repentance, Christ corrected them from sin.
- In His reward to them, Christ comforted them and confirmed His faithfulness to His covenant promises to those who trust Him.

Correlation to you and me

What correlation does this account have to your life and mine? All that was true then is true now. I will note several similarities between that first century congregation and our day.

Many Christian assemblies and individual believers exist today that feature the good characteristics of the Thyatiran believers. These believers give generously to the needs of others, practice good works, resist the culture, and remain faithful to Christ. Perhaps this describes you, too. Christ sees, knows, and rewards His faithful servants.

At the same time, some congregations, even among the faithful ones, permit and even encourage sinful behavior from its leaders and congregants. False prophets abound in the professing Christian assemblies. They hold positions of leadership, and influence many to follow their heresies.

Christ sees it and does not condone it. We characterize His mercy and longsuffering for approval. But Christ desires a holy body of believers and rejoices when they discern and reject false prophets. As the body of Christ, and especially as individual believers, we need to identify and refuse to follow heretical teachers and their heresies.

The cultures of our day embrace the same sins that tempted the believers in Thyatira. Idol worship, both actual and figurative, proliferate among us. The attendant demonic activity attempts to fool all of us. Sexual immorality, the prominent companion of idol worship and demonic activity, thrives in the professing Christian congregation as well as the world. We must identify it and repent of it.

Christians today will do well to emulate the faithful ones in Thyatira. Christian assemblies and individuals fail because they reject Christ's call for repentance.

Implications

Therefore, what implications does this message to first century believers in Thyatira have for you and me? The observed correlations between then and now challenge us.

Believers

For example, suppose that you trust Christ as Lord and Savior. You find comfort in Christ's praise of believers in Thyatira. Perhaps those same characteristics describe your life, too. Great. Christ will give you the same encouragement He gave them: keep it up. Remain obedient and faithful to Christ.

However, the searing examination of some of them might describe you. Where has the Holy Spirit convicted you of similar behavior? Idol worship? A false prophet or you follow one? Sexual immorality as part of conformity to culture's evils?

To you, Christ's message echoes the one in Revelation 2.18-29: repent or else. Christ does not condone sinful behavior in the child of God, even though His mercy entices us to think He does. He demands holiness in life and brings judgment upon all who fail to repent.

Therefore, I pray that the Holy Spirit will convict you and bring you to repent of your sin(s). You will experience forgiveness from a loving Father. Do not delay until tomorrow what Christ urges you to do today. You can experience freedom from the bondage of sin now.

Unbelievers

Some of you who followed this message realize that you do not trust Christ. You experience no interest in God or religious matters. That does not surprise me. You live in accordance with the sinful nature that inhabits you.

Every person born since Adam and Eve inherits Adam's and Eve's sinful natures that resulted when they ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden in Eden. When they sinned, a chasm developed between them and God. Since we all inherit a sinful nature, we, too, experience a chasm between us and God.

That sinful nature controls our thoughts, desires, interests, even our wills. Selfishly, we satisfy our own desires. Because of that inherited sinful nature, it renders us incapable, unable, and disinterested in bridging that chasm between us and God.

We cannot please God and make ourselves pleasing to Him. Nor do we have any desire to please Him. We are sinners, not because we sin. We sin because we are sinners in need of help.

Therefore, you need divine help to forgive your sins and to reconcile you to God. Hear God's word to you today. God in His infinite grace made provision for people like you and me who need divine help. He gave His Son, Jesus Christ, as a substitute for sinners like you and me. Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life in complete obedience to God's law and commands.

The life He lived qualified Him for the death that He died on the cross. Thus, He provided Himself as a sacrifice to God on behalf of sinners like you and me. God judged and punished Christ in His death on the cross, not for His own sin(s), but as a substitute for sinners like you and me.

God accepted the sacrifice of Christ. God promised that He accepts, forgives, and reconciles to Himself everyone who comes to Him by faith in Jesus Christ as their Substitute Savior.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will come to you today and give you this new life in Christ. I pray that He will enable you to call upon Christ as your Savior and to trust Christ for this wondrous gift of new life. I pray that He will help you to turn from your selfish life to believe God's provision for people like you. Then, you, too, will experience God's forgiveness, relief from the bondage of sin, and reconciliation with God.

I pray that God will give this new life to you today.

References

01. *Bible Analyzer Bible Software*, v. 5.4.1.17: Timothy S Morton; *Faussett Bible Dictionary*, "Jezebel,"; 2019.
02. *Logos Bible Software*, v.9.3 SRI 9.3.0.0049: Faithlife Corporation; "Factbook," "Thyatira," 2000-2021.
03. IBID: "Vincent," and "ISBE."
04. See Acts 18-19.
05. Psalm 2.7-9.
06. *Logos*: Dr. Marvin Vincent.
07. 1 Kings 16.31-32; 2 Kings 9.22, 30-33.
08. Revelation 2.24.
09. Revelation 2.23.
10. Revelation 2.24-25.
11. Revelation 2.26-27.
12. Ephesians 1.15-23.
13. Revelation 2.28.
14. 1 Peter 1.9; Revelation 22.16.