

REV. 2:18-29 CHURCH AT THYATIRA – THE DARKEST YEARS

We will now cover the fourth church, Thyatira. The first thing to focus on is what Colin Hemer says, "The longest and most difficult of the seven letters is addressed to *the least known, least important, and least remarkable of the cities*" (*The Letters to the 7 Churches of Asia in their Local Setting*, 1986, p. 110).

So one question that comes to mind is, why are its works mentioned as if it was doing a significant "work" on its own? It was the smallest of the seven cities and quite distant from the busy coast. This is another reason why it makes more sense to consider Christ's evaluation also prophetically describes a Church era, here in its *fourth historic stage*. This is more reasonable than limiting His evaluation in such an important prophetic book as Revelation to just dealing with some momentary local problems in a small church while John was exiled in Patmos.

As John Walvoord relates, "Many expositors believe that in addition to the obvious implication of these messages, the *seven churches* represent the *chronological development of church history viewed spiritually*. They note that Ephesus seems to be characteristic of the *Apostolic Period in general* and that the *progression of evil climaxing in Laodicea seems to indicate the final state of apostasy* of the church...The order of the messages to the churches seems to be divinely selected to give *prophetically the main movement of church history*" (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 1989, pp. 51-52).

So Christ begins by commending them: "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: 'I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, *the last are more than the first*'" (2:18-19).

Historically, Thyatira was named after a daughter born to Seleucus I in 290 B.C. and means "daughter." The city was 40 miles east of Pergamos and smaller than those already described. Situated in the fertile Lycus River valley, it was a merchant town, but not politically important. It was noted for its agriculture, bronze work, guilds, Chaldean oracle, and purple dye. Incidentally, from Acts 16:14 we learn Lydia was "a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira."

Expositor's notes, "Associated with its commerce was an extensive trade guild or labor union network which must have played a prominent role in the

social, political, economic, and religious life of the city. Each guild had its own patron deity, feasts, and seasonal festivities that included sexual revelries." This likely caused some members to compromise.

So Christ presents Himself as having "eyes like a flame of fire," symbolic of His wrath toward sin and His keen discernment, for He "searches the minds and hearts" (vs. 23). His feet being like fine brass indicates having a solid base to pass judgments.

He does praise them for their dedicated labor of love, service, faith and perseverance, prophesying the last stage of their works would be greater than the first. Again, this sounds like it is talking about a lengthy period of time and not just a few years.

Christ continues, "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. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 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. 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" (vs. 20-24).

The Pulpit Commentary states, "He who condemns the 'synagogue of Satan' at Smyrna, and the 'throne of Satan' at Pergamum, here condemns the 'deep things of Satan' at Thyatira." As the Nicolaitans had mixed pagan beliefs at Pergamos, so this prophetess taught sexual laxness and eating of foods sacrificed to idols, in other words, clear violations of God's laws found in the Jerusalem decree of Acts 15.

Now "Jezebel," just as *Balaam* is also a symbol of a false religion operating outside and inside of God's church. This group, headed by her, was teaching "the depths of Satan." Meyer states, "'The woman Jezebel' is manifestly represented as a teacher of a Balaamite or Nicolaitan character." In fact, there was a famous Chaldean shrine there, just like the one in Pergamos, but this one had a false prophetess in charge, called

the Sibyl Sambathe, overseeing the Babylonian mysteries—or the depths of Satan. Gill notes, “The deep things are those which are hidden from view, as of things which are far underground; and hence the word is used to denote mysteries, or profound designs and purposes.” So through a false prophetess posing as a Christian, some were mixing their beliefs with this pagan mystery religion and committing “spiritual fornication,” just as it would occur in the later ages primarily by the papacy.

In fact, Paul said “the mystery of iniquity” was very active in his day. John himself mentioned about “antichrists” infiltrating the churches. He warned, “...even now many antichrists have come...They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us” (1 Jn. 2:18-19).

So if we situate this era as beginning around A.D. 1000, it would start when the Paulicians and Bogomils, with their work in Turkey extinguished by Byzantine persecutions, relocated to the Balkan area and began a work in Europe, especially in northern Italy and southern France. It would place it within the period called the Dark Ages, roughly from A.D. 1000-1585. This fourth stage would cover some of those middle centuries, between the Church’s initial stages and the latter ones. It would be one of the cruelest periods for the Church, which included resisting ‘the depths of Satan,’ when mostly immoral Popes reached absolute power, unleashing bloody Crusades and initiating the horrifying Inquisition.

Ivor Fletcher relates, “By the ninth century, most [Paulicians and Bogomils] had drifted so far from the true doctrines that they were drawn to seek political or military solutions or military solutions to their persecution problems. Anatolia (in Turkey) one of the earliest Paulician homelands, became a desolation and wilderness ravaged by decades of warfare; thus the ‘Pergamos’ era of the true Church came to its inglorious conclusion.

“The next era of the Church of God—‘Thyatira’ (Rev. 2:18-29)—began to conduct a work of some significance around A.D. 1000. Although having its ...center of operations in the mountains and valleys of northern Italy and southern France, the work rapidly spread through large areas of Europe and even into Britain. The names most commonly

applied to these people were ‘Vaudois,’ or ‘Waldenses.’ ‘The Waldensians,’ says [historian] Popliner, ‘spread not only through France, but also through nearly all the European coasts, and appeared in Gaul, Spain, England, Scotland, Italy, Germany, Bohemia, Saxony, Poland and Lithuania’ (*Variations of Popery*, p. 52). [Historian] Crosby records that: ‘For in the time of William the Conqueror (A.D. 1070) and his son William Rufus, it appears that the Waldenses and their disciples out of France, Germany and Holland...did abound in England. The Berlingarian, or Waldensian heresy, as the chronologer calls it, had, about 1080, generally corrupted all France, Italy, and England” (*The Incredible History of God’s True Church*, p. 154-155).

The first leaders in this age were Peter of Bruys and his disciple Henry. “The Paulician and Bogomil evangelization of the Alpine region,” says Fletcher, “led to a fruitful harvest of conversions; so much so, in fact, that the Pope [Urban II] in 1096 described the Valley Louise in Dauphiny, France, as being infested with ‘heresy.’ It was in this regions, at Embrun, that Peter of Bruys, about 1104, began to preach a message of repentance from sin...Peter rejected infant baptism; only persons old and mature...were baptized...After Peter was seized and burned at the stake [in 1126], his disciple, Henry, took over his position as an apostle, and continued the work. They were charged by the Catholic Church with remaining faithful to the whole law of God, *including the observance of the Sabbath*...Henry was burned at Toulouse in 1147; some sources, however, state that he died in prison in 1149” (p. 157).

Tragically, this period includes the bloodiest attacks against God’s church, with the Pope and Emperor now working together under the Holy Roman Empire. The papacy had maximum power, even humbling an emperor (Henry IV at Canossa in 1077). So it had destroyed most of the “works” of the first 150 years of this Church era, but next comes the likely fulfilment of Christ’s prediction that “the last [works] were greater than the first” (Rev. 2:19).

Peter Waldo now appears on the scene, probably the most dynamic Church leader in hundreds of years. “It was at about this point in history [1160],” says Fletcher, “that Peter Waldo, perhaps the most important leader in this Church era, began to preach. A successful and wealthy merchant of Lyons, France,

Waldo was shocked by the sudden death of one of his friends. This traumatic experience prompted the question, 'If I had died, what would have become of my soul?'...Little is known of the early stages of Waldo's ministry, but he is known to have gone, along with a group of his followers, to Picardy, in northern France. After suffering persecution in that area, they moved into Flanders and the Netherlands. By 1182, many converts from those regions had joined their cause. Everywhere they went, the Waldenses took their translation of the Bible with them...A school or college was established for the training of qualified ministers and other laborers in the expanding work of God...Articles and small booklets were written and copied by hand and provided free of charge" (pp. 161-162).

Waldo's influence gained so many converts that Pope Innocent III began a Crusade against them, called the Albigensian Crusade (1209-1229), a 20 year war against non-Catholic Christians in southern France. The Pope used the king of France to carry out the violence and virtually wiped them out in that region. Nevertheless, Waldo's work continued, for Waldensian preachers eventually reached England, where they were called Lollards, after the Waldensian preacher Walter the Lollard established a powerful work in 1315. It appears they knew they were *the fourth era* of the Church, for their seal had a candlestick highlighting *the fourth candle*.

"The 'Thyatira' era of the Church had major internal problems relating to compromise with false doctrine" adds Fletcher. "In the ancient Waldensian *Book of Antichrist* [1120], we find that *the 'Jezebel'* of Bible prophecy was *equated with the Roman papacy*. The Roman church during the Middle Ages used various means, including the threat of persecution, to induce the Waldenses to participate in Sunday services and the Catholic mass. Many allowed themselves to compromise and commit spiritual 'fornication,' some even allowed Catholic priests to 'baptize' their infant children. Generations of coexistence with sin led the Thyatira Church to gradually depart from its doctrines. By 1380 many members no longer had the faith to rely on God for protection and began to use military force to resist their persecutors. This was in spite of the fact that God, on several occasions, had caused a wall of dense fog to separate the Waldenses from their

enemies...Most, by the fifteenth century, had forgotten that the Church of God is a holy and spiritual nation, using spiritual rather than carnal weapons (1 Pet. 2:9)...The Sabbath seems to have been rejected by the Waldenses at about this date, or perhaps earlier...At the Synod of Angrogna [1532], the Waldenses declared solidarity with the Swiss Calvinists and the Protestant Reformation. From this time they copied more and more of the ways of the Protestant churches. The later history of the Waldensian movement is dominated by persecution. This period must surely be ranked as one of the blackest episodes in the entire history of man's inhumanity to his fellow human beings. God appears to have permitted the mass slaughter of multitudes of these people, perhaps in order to induce them, by means of these severe trials, to repent and return to their former true doctrines and godly way of life" (p. 166).

Christ ends the letter saying, "But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—'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; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:25-29).

According to their records, there are still some 45,000 Waldenses living today. Samuel Bacchiocchi, the famous SDA historian, came from a Waldensian church in Italy. It seems some in the end time, shaken by the earth-shattering events, will return, as in the past, to keeping all the commandments of God, including the Sabbath and Holy Days.

To those who overcome, Christ promises they will govern under Him in the Millennium. The Gk. term "to rule" means *to shepherd*, and indicates *lovingly* ruling those future cities, and yet, also having the shepherd's rod of iron, ready to punish those that rebel and attack God's people, likely at the beginning of the Millennium and in the end (Ez. 38-39, Rev. 20:9). Regarding giving us the "morning star," it's a reference to the brilliance of the planet Venus as it rises right before dawn. It is the brightest object after the sun and moon. Christ is described as being such in Rev. 22:16. Similarly, the saints will shine in their glory when resurrected (Dan. 12:3, Mt. 13:43).