

THE CHURCH OF THYATIRA—REVELATION 2:18-29 (THE PAPAL CHURCH 476-1453)

(SOME FEEL THAT THIS PERIOD WILL RUN SIMULTANEOUS WITH THE REST OF HISTORY THROUGH THE TRIBULATION PERIOD)

The city of Thyatira was founded by Alexander the Great approximately 300 years before the birth of Christ. Located in the heart of Macedonia, it was a wealthy city noted for its outstanding *color dyes*. Some believe that this city was presented the Gospel by the Ephesian church or by Lydia, Paul's first convert in Philippi. (Acts 16:14)

Because Pergamum was such a city of political power and extravagant wealth it had many enemies who would desire to invade from the east. Pergamum's defense against this potential attack was to build a military city in the east – Thyatira - It was a massive military outpost. Since the military had to be sustained it was a very strong trade center. It had "**trade guilds**" (unions) that employed workers and it was very important to have a great reputation when it concerned your work.

However, in every "trade guild" there was a patron "god" that was worshipped. They initiated every "guild" meeting by getting on their knees and worshipping. It was usually filled with heavy drinking and became an orgy. If you did not participate you would be blacklisted and not allowed to work. This created great conflict for the Christians in the city.

The main characteristic of this church was its "**works**" toward people rather than its doctrinal belief. We find this to be true as Jesus condemned the church for allowing a false teacher to spread heresy.

From a historical perspective, this church produced what is known as the "**Papal Church**" or the "**Dark Ages**." When paganism and Christianity merged under the church at Pergamum, it led to a *dark* period of church history. This dramatic *Dark Age* lasted until a revival in the days of the Reformation. As we continue our look at the history of the church, we follow where Pergamum left off. As you will notice, during this period, there were drastic changes in church **DOCTRINE** that have their sources in paganism.

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- A.D. 607 – Boniface III made the first Pope
 - A.D. 709 – Kissing the Pope's foot
 - A.D. 786 – Worshiping image and relics
 - A.D. 850 – Use of "holy water" began
 - A.D. 995 – Canonization of dead saints
 - A.D. 998 – Fasting on Friday's and during Lent
 - A.D. 1079 – Celibacy of the priesthood
 - A.D. 1090 – Prayer beads
 - A.D. 1215 – Transubstantiation
 - A.D. 1220 – Adoration of the wafer
 - A.D. 1229 – Bible forbidden to lay people
 - A.D. 1414 – Cup forbidden to people at communion

- A.D. 1439 – Doctrine of Purgatory
 - A.D. 1534 – Jesuit order founded
 - A.D. 1545 – *Tradition* granted equal authority with the Bible
 - A.D. 1870 – Infallibility of Pope
 - A.D. 1950 – Assumption of Mary
 - A.D. 1965 – Mary proclaimed *Mother of the Church*
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Thyatira comes from two words meaning “*sacrifice*” and “*continual*,” this introduces the central heresy that produces most false doctrine. This heresy basically denies the deity of Christ by propagating that *continual sacrifice* or penance and sacrifice unto God. All of this is good and sometimes necessary; however, our best sacrifice is but a “filthy rag” unto God! The plain truth of the matter is that Jesus is the only sacrifice acceptable to God, and his substitutionary work alone places us in right standing with God. (Eph. 2:8-9) You see, heresy falls into one of two categories. It is either a false concept of the personal **deity** of Christ; or it is mixing **works** with faith for salvation. Again, works are important; and, every true believer will produce his/her share. Works, however, will never be sufficient propitiation for our sins. Only Jesus holds that lofty place!

During this period of church history, the Church of Rome believing in *continual sacrifice* implemented sacraments, praying for the dead, burning candles, etc. Unfortunately, most of these practices and many others were borrowed from Babylon. For example:

- **Penance:** Such things as crawling on hands and knees over hundreds of yards of concrete in an effort to punish oneself and prove piety.
- **Mystery:** Parents, standing in front of a glass-enclosed form representing a dead saint, believe that rubbing the casket and placing an offering in a provided slot gave them the ability to rub blessing on the forehead of their infant children and other loved ones.
- **Mary the Central Figure:** Large picture of Mary is usually placed in the most prominent place of the cathedral, while the statue representing Christ is usually off to the side.

A. **Commendation:** Rev. 2:19

- i. **For “Deeds”** – Many stayed faithful to Jesus Christ and served Him vigorously
- ii. **For “Love”** – In ancient-times, hospitals and sanitariums were usually the work of the church. This church had a love for human kind.
- iii. **For “Faith”** – Although it was not given prominence, it was a characteristic of this age.
- iv. **For “Service”** – Means ministry
- v. **For “Perseverance”** – Means *endurance* and speaks of the long time period of this church.

The Church of Rome is very well known for its charitable deeds; and Christ commends this expression of faith. Please understand that we are not against the Roman Church. There are many

beautiful believers who love God and love His work. Beloved, we have this confidence—God knows who are His!

B. Condemnation: Rev. 2:20-21

i. **Jezebel (False Prophetess)**

- 1) Jesus reaches back to the Old Testament for a woman who was responsible for bringing Baalism into Israel. He uses her as a point of comparison for those who brought paganism into the church.
- 2) Bible interpretation seems to point out that when a woman is used as a symbol to convey a religious teaching, she always represents a false religion. (Matthew 13:33-35)
- 3) This false prophetess seems to have taught two primary things:
 - a. Sexual immorality
 - b. Idolatry (food sacrificed to idols)
- 4) Christ offers her an opportunity of repentance; but, it seems from the judgment that he foretells that she did not take His offer. No one can know for sure the specifics of this woman names *Jezebel*. If you view Christ as speaking to the condition of this church and this period of church history, however, you receive a very interesting insight into the possible symbolism of this church. It seems that there is a judgment to come on this papal whore!

In verse 22 the judgment of this church is that they are cast upon a bed of suffering and into **great tribulation**.

Could this be the **false** church of the Great Tribulation? Yes, I believe it is. Knowing that thousands will ridicule me for this stance, I feel that the Papal Church of Rome will be the church of the tribulation period found in Revelation 17. We will look at this possibility in greater detail when we come to that chapter.

C. Counsel

- i. His counsel seems to be directed to the faithful individuals within that church who reject Jezebel's doctrine and are holding tightly to the faith.

D. Challenge

- i. The **overcomer** will receive a position of leadership and authority during the Millennial Age.
- ii. The overcomer will receive a "Morning Star" – Rev. 22:16
- iii. Who is the overcomer? 1John 5:1-4