

- The Letter to the Church at Thyatira – The Meaning of the Name: “Perpetual sacrifice” or “continual offering”

Revelation: *The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze. Jesus Christ who is able to see and judge all things.*

Commendation: *I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.*

Criticism: *But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 'And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. A woman with the name of Jezebel cannot be identified with the Church in any literal sense; however her identity can be discovered on a spiritual level by using information from the Bible concerning her. The woman is Empress Irene of the Eastern Roman Empire who led the Church to worship graven images. In history books the events surrounding image worship are called The Iconoclastic Controversy. (See the separate article on - **Jezebel** - following)*

Instruction: *But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them-- I place no other burden on you. 'Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. Keep doing what you were doing and don't become involved in this teaching.*

Penalty: *Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 'And I will kill her children with pestilence; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. Christ will make her a whore (to be used by the nations) and those who have relationships (agree) with her will suffer great tribulation and their children will be killed by plagues.**

* Beginning in the 1340's, the Black Death (Bubonic Plague) hit the continent of Europe decimating between 30 to 60% of its population, which dealt the Roman Catholic Church a devastating blow. An estimated 75 million people died in that pandemic alone. Yet there were to be more than 100 other plague epidemics, which would sweep over Europe within the next 400 years.

Promise: *He who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. I see what you are doing and will reward you according to your deeds, do the deeds that I did because they honor the Father. If you overcome, I will give you a day on which you will rule and reign over the nations because all power and authority has been given to Me by My Father.*

- The Medieval Age - 787 – 1517 AD

The Medieval Age began at the seventh and last General Ecumenical Council, which was held at Nicea in 787 AD. It ended when Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic priest nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church igniting the fires of the Protestant Reformation in 1517 AD. Historians refer to this period of history as the “Dark Ages”, during which the Church became corrupted from within and the corruption came in **three** parts: worship, doctrine, and leadership.

The Medieval Age is associated with “parable of the leaven.” In the parable a **woman** hides **leaven** in **three** parts of a measure until all of it is changed. Before continuing with this Church “age” we need to know more about leaven.

Leaven is a corrupting agent that **changes the nature** of the substance it is put into. In the parable, leaven was put in three portions of meal. The three portions represent the whole thing that was leavened. The Hebrew standard whole unit of dry measure is the ephah and it takes three seahs to equal one ephah. By this, Jesus is indicating that every human being consists of **three** parts: spirit, soul, and body. So when leaven is introduced into each of the parts, **the entire nature of the person will be changed**. But more importantly we must know what the spiritual **equivalent** of leaven is. Jesus said it was **teaching!** *And Jesus said to them, “Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the **teaching** of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (Matthew 16:6 & 12)* Most Christians associate leaven with sin however, it depends on the leaven’s (teaching’s) **source** as to how it will affect the substance (human being); is the leaven (teaching) from God, the world or the devil?

The Ruins of Thyatira



The Church that was in Thyatira also represents the Medieval Age. The name, Thyatira means “Perpetual sacrifice” or “continual offering” The city itself is located about 40 miles ESE of Pergamum connecting the Hermus and Caicus valleys lying on the trade route from Pergamum to Laodicea. Thyatira was a center of manufacture; dyeing, garment making, pottery, and brass- working are among the trades that known to have existed there. The principal deity of the city was Apollo, worshipped as the sun god under the surname, Tyrimnus. Lydia, Paul’s first convert at Philippi was from Thyatira. Today this city is named Akhisar.

- Corruption of Worship -

The changes that were made in the worship of God during this period of time were stupendous both in their nature and quantity. Ritualism was in vogue ... as pagan teaching, ceremonies and practices entered the Church.

Images were placed in churches in violation of the Second Commandment under the pretense that it was enhancing the worshipper's experience. Christians knelt, prayed to and burned candles before them just as idol worshippers in pagan religions had done before them. Seven sacraments²⁴ replaced the two that Jesus had commanded which were baptism and communion. The rosary, which was of Hindu origin made its appearance in 810 AD and was Christianized.

And the simple “breaking of bread” or “communion” became a ritual all of its own, called the “Mass”, officiated over by a group of people known as the clergy. The Mass centers on a priest who offers Christ as a sacrifice at each service and then supernaturally changes bread and wine into Christ’s body and blood, which the congregants partake of. This repeated offering of Christ as a sacrificial victim at each Mass is a violation of Scripture. *So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him. (Hebrews 9:28) For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit. (1 Peter 3:18)* No wonder Jesus sent his message to the Church that was in Thyatira whose name, “Perpetual **Sacrifice**” or “continual offering”, fits so perfectly.

- Corruption of Doctrine -

Using Augustine’s book, City of God as their basis the popes set up the Holy Roman Empire and crowned its first king, Charlemagne in 800 AD. Upon conquering his enemies, Charlemagne would give them a choice of baptism or death.

In 1075, Pope Gregory VII issued the decree “*Dictatus Papae*” that contained 27 statements of powers ascribed to the Pope. Among them are: “The Roman Pontiff alone is rightly to be called universal. He alone can depose or reinstate bishops. The Pope is the only one whose feet are to be kissed by all princes. He may depose Emperors. He himself can be judged by no one. The Roman Church has never erred, nor ever, by the witness of Scripture, shall err to all eternity.”

²⁴ Sacraments are holy rites or ordinances.

In 1223 AD, Pope Gregory IX set up the Inquisition to enforce papal doctrine on the people. Anyone who did not conform had to recant his beliefs or he was tortured and put to death. For example, John Wycliffe (1320-1384 AD) taught that all tradition, including Church council decisions and doctrines, must be tested by the Bible. “Holy Scripture,” he said, “is the highest authority for every Christian.” He applied that principle by working to have the Bible translated into his native English. Wycliffe was considered to hold heretical beliefs and sentenced to death because he would not recant. Protected by English kings he died a natural death. However, by order of the Council of Constance (1414-1418 AD) his body was exhumed and publicly burned.

In 1302 AD, Pope Boniface VIII issued the papal bull, *Unam Sanctum*, which stated that both the temporal and spiritual swords are ultimately in the pope’s hands, and therefore secular rulers rule only with papal approval.

- Corruption of Leadership -

Church leadership became more and more involved with secular power as evidenced with the formation of the Holy Roman Empire. Nicolas I (858-867 AD) was the first Pope to wear a crown and used the Pseudo Isidorian Decretal to support the power and authority of the popes since the beginning of the Church. It was found that these were forgeries and that Nicolas had lied about them yet were still used to a large extent in the development of the Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church.

The division of the Church followed the pattern of the Roman Empire with its last schism (division) beginning in 869 AD and completed in 1054 AD. This period of time is also referred to as the **Midnight** of the Dark Ages as its popes were full of bribery, corruption, immorality and bloodshed. In history the period from 904-963 AD is called the “Rule of the Harlots”. The popes after this period sold their offices and robbed Christians. The Bishop of Orleans, referring to John XII, Leo XIII, and Boniface VII, called them, “monsters of guilt, reeking in blood and filth; Antichrist sitting in the Temple of God.” Most bishops and priests had paid for their offices, for it gave them a chance to live in luxury.

From 1095 - 1248 AD the popes ordered seven crusades to the Holy Land to regain it from the Muslims. They all eventually ended in failure at the cost of thousands of lives.

Innocent III (1198-1216 AD) was the most powerful of all the popes. He claimed to be the “Vicar of Christ”, “Vicar of God”, and “Supreme Sovereign over the Church and the World”. In addition he:

- Decreed transubstantiation.
- Confirmed auricular confession.
- Declared that no pope could ever depart from the catholic faith.
- Declared papal infallibility.
- Condemned the Magna Carta.
- Forbade reading the Bible in the vernacular (common language).
- Order the extermination of heretics.
- Ordered the massacre of the Albigenes.

From 1303-1377 AD the papal palace was removed from Rome and moved to Avignon, France. This period is known as the “Babylonian Captivity” of the popes. Then in 1377 AD a schism (division) developed in the papacy where there were two sets of popes each hurling curses at one another. The division was healed in 1417 AD. Pope John XXIII (1410-1415 AD) is called by some the most depraved criminal who ever sat on the Papal Throne.

Many other popes had concubines, mistresses and illegitimate children. They sold and granted indulgences to sin, sold offices, and decreed that money would deliver souls from purgatory.

- Other Events -

Not all things during this period of Church history were so bleak and especially in the latter part of the period when the cries for reform were heard. Several monastic orders came into existence from 910-1225 AD that became centers of learning and provided an evangelistic outreach. They produced some of the leaders of reform movements.

Francis of Assisi (1182-1224 AD) gave up his middle class life and began to pattern his life after his newfound master, Jesus Christ. He stands as a great shining star in the middle of one of the darkest periods in history. St Francis took to the road sharing the life of the poor and preaching the good news of God’s love. He started the order, which bears his name, the Franciscans. He tried to close the gap that existed between clergy and laity by exemplifying the ideal of the priesthood of all believers. Francis resigned from his own order because it had become too complex and didn’t observe the simple rule of faith. Later the popes used his order to persecute Protestants during the Reformation.

Scholasticism was the order of the day from 1033 - 1350 AD. The intent was to help people discover God through philosophy and reason. Anselm (1033-1109 AD) provided us with an understandable basis of God’s atonement for our sins. Some of the later scholars attempted to force worldly philosophical views into the Church. One of their major opponents was Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153 AD) who believed that since God’s ways don’t necessarily coincide with human reason, we can’t simply ally revelation and reason. Furthermore, he rejected the idea that reason gives greater certainty of faith, teaching instead that certainty comes through mystical union with Christ and through humbly following the Holy Spirit’s leading.

Reforming a corrupt Church was in the heart and minds of many and groups like the Waldensians, Lollards and Hussites led the way.

Peter Waldo, a businessman asked the Church if he could preach Christ and was denied, so he preached anyway and was excommunicated. His group, the Waldensians believing that only personal faith was necessary for salvation, attacked the Church’s whole sacramental system. They rejected as extra-Biblical the cult of the saints, prayers for the dead, and purgatory. They affirmed the Bible, especially the New Testament, as the sole source of authority and translated the Bible into the people’s language.

Bernard of Clairvaux tried to reform the Church from within. He practiced and preached humility, which struck home against papal wealth and splendor. He criticized papal political activities asking for a return to the spiritual function of the office. His emphasis on divine grace as the motivating power to salvation was of special importance for the later Protestant Reformers.

Two theologians, an Englishman, John Wycliffe (1320-1384 AD) and a Czech, John Huss (1374- 1415 AD) lit the fires of the reform movement literally, when their bodies were publicly burned. Both of them not only challenged papal authority but the very sacramental structure and theology of the Church. Wycliffe’s group became known as Lollards and Huss’ group the Hussites.

The coming reformation of the Church was to be mightily assisted by two events that occurred within 90 years of the burning of Wycliffe and Huss. In 1453 Gutenberg began printing Bibles on the first moveable printing press in Europe and in 1492 Christopher Columbus discovered America.

- Jezebel -

Perhaps no other Old Testament character has had such a profound impact upon the people of God as Jezebel. Her leadership plagued the people of Israel in her time. And Jesus in the book of Revelation even warns the Church not to tolerate her. She epitomizes evil and has become a symbol of all that is detestable from a moral standpoint.

The first mention of Jezebel is in 1 Kings 16:31 on the occasion of her marriage to King Ahab of Israel in the year 889 BC. Jezebel is not an Israelite, one of God's chosen people. She is a foreigner, a pagan and an idol worshipper. Jezebel is the daughter of Ethbaal (which means "with Baal"), king of Tyre and Sidon.

There is a spiritual clue here for us. In Ezekiel 28, God speaks against the king of Tyre. According to the text, the King of Tyre is really Satan, the anointed cherub. By association, Jezebel is the daughter of Satan. The daughter of Satan marries the leader of Israel in order to corrupt God's people. Satan's master plan is and always has been the destruction of God's people. And Satan knows that God will destroy His own people if they turn away from Him.

After becoming queen of Israel, Jezebel instituted the worship of Baal, had an altar and temple built for him and erected Asherah. She tried to have Elijah killed when he confronted her prophets in 879 BC. In order to obtain a vineyard she had a man named Naboth killed by forging her husband's signature on some documents and then using the king's seal to make it official. After her husband's death in 870 BC she continued on as Queen Mother until her own demise. In 857 BC, Jezebel was thrown out of an upper window by her own men, then trampled by horses and had her body and blood consumed by dogs. Jezebel was no ordinary woman!

More than nine hundred years later her character reemerges in the apocalyptic writings of the Apostle John. In the Book of Revelation chapter 2, verses 18 through 29, Jesus instructs the Apostle to write a letter to the angel of the Church in Thyatira. That letter points out that the Church is tolerating the woman Jezebel, describes her role, what she is teaching and calls on the

Church to repent. Verses 20 and 22 hold the crux of the matter and reads as follows: *"But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 'And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.'"* This Jezebel is certainly no ordinary woman either. She has infected the entire Church with false teaching and immorality. Which woman has ever had that much power and influence?

My intent is to identify the woman and compare her attributes with that of the original Jezebel. In order to do that your mindset may have to be tweaked a little. Since Jesus' death until now there has only been one

Church, one Body of which we are all members. Oh sure, we all go to our own church. And there is the church in Denver and the church in London and so on. But the fact remains that in God’s eyes there is only one Church and Jesus Christ His Son is building it.

Jesus states that Jezebel is in the Church. So that is where we must find her. She will have the characteristics of the original Jezebel including her power and influence. Throughout history only one woman matches those qualifications, Empress Irene of the Eastern Roman Empire.

1. Jezebel was not an Israelite. Irene was not a Christian.

2. Jezebel married Ahab, the king (ruler) of Israel.

In 769 AD, Irene married Leo IV, who became Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire from 775 - 780 AD.

Note – During this period of history the power of the Roman Empire had been diluted and the control of it centered in two locations: Rome, Italy and Constantinople, now modern day Istanbul, Turkey. The Church split along these lines as well. The bishop of Rome headed the Church in the west and the bishop of Constantinople the Church in the east. Each side called their own bishop, the Pope. Eventually the infighting between the two sides erupted into a final full-blown schism occurring in the year 1054 AD. The western branch of the Church was called Roman Catholic and the eastern branch, Greek Orthodox. In the eastern branch of the Church (Greek Orthodox) the authority of the emperor over both Church and State affairs wasn’t seriously challenged. In fact, some have referred to the Eastern Church as caesaropapist: the emperor (Caesar) also acted as pope (papa).

3. Jezebel’s husband Ahab was a corrupt king, who ruled over God’s chosen people.

Irene’s husband, Leo IV was a worldly king who ruled over Christ’s body, the Church.

4. Jezebel was a Baal worshipper and sacrificed at the Asherah, a wooden symbol of a female deity.

Irene venerated (worshipped) idols (icons ... images).

5. Jezebel considered herself a prophetess. A prophetess is one who hears what God says concerning the truth and declares it to others. She influenced her husband to erect an altar to Baal and set up Asherah.

Upon her husband’s death in 780 AD, Irene became the **first** woman Emperor. She considered herself a prophetess when she, immediately issued a papal (royal) decree that image worship was acceptable in the Church. Leo III had strictly banned image worship in 726 AD.

6. Jezebel ruled over the prophets of Baal.

Irene ruled over the Church bishops and in 787 AD called the Second Council of Nicea to officially permit the worship of images, which it did.

7. Jezebel led the Israelites astray.

Irene's actions have caused the Church to pray, adore and give thanks to statues and pictures that are representations of human beings such as the Saints, Joseph, and the Virgin Mary. Doing these things amounts to spiritual adultery and immorality. God has specifically commanded this not to be done.

"You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

8. After Jezebel's husband, Ahab, died she lived 12 more years before she was thrown out of her window by her own men.

Irene reigned for 22 years before her men threw her out of her own kingdom by exile in 802 AD. She died the next year.

9. God gave Jezebel 22 years to repent, from the time that Elijah defeated her prophets until she died.

God gave the Empress Irene 22 years to repent from her initial approval of image worship until she died.

The Rest Of The Story - In 813 AD, Leo V again made it illegal to worship images, however in 843 AD **another woman**, Empress Theodora, convened the Council of Constantinople in order to secure image worship again. Image worship was approved and still stands today. The western or Roman Church, which had fought so hard to prevent the veneration of images eventually, succumbed to the practice itself. Altogether the Iconoclastic Controversy spanned about a 120- year period of Church history.