

**THYATIRA: HARD-WORKING  
BUT TOERLANT OF IMMORALITY**  
**Revelation 2:18-29**

**I. BACKGROUND**

**A. BEGINNINGS**

1. ORIGINALLY—MACEDONIAN COLONY
  - Established as defensive position with military fort
  - Originally named Pelopia, then Euhippia
2. RE-FOUNDED BY SELEUCUS I NICATOR
  - Seleucus I—was founder of the Seleucid Empire after Alexander’s death
  - He founded Antioch—named for his son Antiochus—in 300 BC
  - Ten years later—290 BC—Seleuces re-founded Thyatira
  - He may have named the city for his daughter Thugater
  - Her name meant—‘odor of affliction’
3. MORE PROBABLE SOURCE OF NAME—OF ANCIENT LYDIAN ORIGIN

**B. LOCATION**

1. CRITICAL DEFENSIVE POSITION
  - In long Lycus valley
  - Between Nermus and Caisus Rivers
  - Guarded invasion route from central Anatolia
2. HALF-WAY BETWEEN PERGAMUM AND SARDIS—going southeastward
  - Fourth (and middle) city of the seven—clockwise and northeast of Ephesus
  - About equidistant from Smyrna and Pergamum—both to the west
  - 50 miles inland
3. NEAR MODERN SITE OF TURKISH TOWN ‘AKHISAR’
  - Turkish name means—‘white hill’—or ‘white fortress’ [for nearby castle ruins]

**C. ECONOMY**

1. WEALTHY COMMERCIAL CENTER
  - a. Textiles and dyes—especially indigo [blue]—were key products
  - b. Widespread market
    1. Lydia—seller of purple cloth—**Acts 16:14**
    2. She had business as far away as Philippi—in Macedonia!
2. INFLUENTIAL COMMERCIAL GUILDS
  - a. More guilds here than in any other city in Roman province of Asia

- o Wool-workers
- o Linen-workers
- o Outer garments
- o Dyers
- o Leather goods
- o Tanners
- o Potters
- o Bakers
- o Slave-dealers
- o Bronze-smiths

- b. Tied to worship of pagan gods
- c. Observed pagan feasts, rituals and celebrations

### 3. CITY DAMAGED IN EARTHQUAKE

- During reign of Augustus (so before 14 AD)—possibly as late as 20 AD?
- Rebuilt with Rome's help

## D. GEO-POLITICS

1. Possible earliest settlement of area by Hittites
2. Persian occupation began around 500 BC
3. Alexander conquered it about 300 BC
4. Then came under Seleucid Rule
5. Finally—in 133 BC—came under Roman control

## E. RELIGION

### 1. GRAECO-ROMAN PAGANISM

- a. Main god was Zeus
- b. Other gods worshiped
  - o Apollo
  - o Aesclepius
  - o Bacchus
  - o Artemis (Diana)
  - o Cybele
- c. Cybele
  - o Mother of Apollo and Artemis
  - o Ecstatic male followers ritually castrated themselves and donned female attire
  - o Priestesses led immoral, drunken ceremonies with wild music, drumming, dancing

## 2. EGYPTIAN CULT

- Archaeological evidence there of temple to Serapis

## 3. CHRISTIANITY

- a. Arrived probably during Paul's two-year stay in Ephesus—Acts 19:10
- b. During *his* Third Missionary Journey

## II. BIBLICAL TEXT

**18** *And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: 19 'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. 20 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. 21 I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. 22 Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 23 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. 24 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. 25 Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. 26 He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, 'to Him I will give authority over the nations; 27 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; 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

## III. EXPOSITION

### A. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

**18** *And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:*

#### 1. PARALLELS TO REVELATION 1

- a. 'Son of God'
  1. Phrase not found in **Revelation 1**

- Revelation 1 identifies Christ as ‘Son of **Man**’—**1:13**
  - It emphasizes His full **humanity**
  - Imagery there is—Christ coming to **judge** humankind
  - He will come as the **Human Judge**—who identifies with humans
2. ‘Son of God’ emphasizes—the other dimension of Christ
- Christ is fully **divine!**
  - His attributes here in **2:18**—are similar to those in **Rev 1**
  - Imagery here is also—Christ coming to **judge** humanity
  - But emphasis is—Christ the **Divine Judge**—who identifies with God
3. ‘Son of God’ imagery—also used in **Daniel 3**
- a. Background of Daniel is important for other references in this letter
  - b. Correlation here—Son of God delivered Daniel’s 3 friends from the fiery furnace
    - The fourth person in the fire with them
    - He was “*one like a son of the gods*”—**Dan 3:25**
  - c. In the same way—the ‘Son of God’ will deliver the faithful in Thyatira
4. Christ will come as the ‘Son of God’—in two roles
- a. As Divine Judge of humanity
  - b. As Divine Deliverer of the faithful
- b. “Eyes like a flame of fire” and “feet are like burnished bronze”
- Exact imagery used in **Rev 1**—to describe the Son of Man
- **1:14**—*His eyes were like a flame of fire*
  - **1:15**—*His feet were like burnished bronze when it has been made to glow in a furnace*

## 2. PARALLELS TO OLD TESTAMENT

- a. OT apocalyptic imagery in the 7 letters
  - 1. Already—in the letter to Smyrna
    - ‘Ten days’ of tribulation—**2:1**
    - Similar to ‘ten days’ of trial—endured by Daniel and three friends—**Dan 1:12**
  - 2. Here—in the letter to Thyatira
    - a. Here—**v18**—imagery similar to **Daniel 3, 7, 10**
    - b. End of letter—**v 27**—imagery similar to **Psalm 2**
    - c. Important Note: Jews connected imagery in **Daniel** with **Psalm 2**
- b. Fiery imagery—in **Rev 2:18**

1. Used in **Daniel 3**
  - o Daniel's three friends were thrown into **fiery furnace**
2. Used in **Daniel 10**—to describe the Son of Man
  - o Who has—*eyes like flaming torches*
  - o Who has—*feet like polished bronze*
- c. 'Son of God' and 'Son of Man' imagery—in **Rev 1:13** and **2:18**
  1. Jewish tradition linked these two images together—used titles interchangeably
  2. *Within* the book of **Daniel**
    - o They linked 'Son of God' in **Dan 3**—with 'Son of Man' in **Dan 7** and **10**
  3. *Between* **Daniel** and **Psalm 2**
    - a. Jews linked 'Son of God' in **Daniel**—with 'Son of God' in **Psalm 2**
    - b. **Psalm 2** imagery—'Son of God'
      - **v7**—*I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord; He said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.*
      - **v12**—*Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way.*
- d. Bond between these letter and **Psalm 2**—is reinforced at the end of the letter
  - **Rev 2:27**—quotes **Psalm 2:9**
3. 'SON OF GOD' AND 'BURNISHED BRONZE'—APPLICATION TO THATIRA
  - a. A local products of Thyatira was bronze—or brass—**καλκολιβανον**
    - Same term found in **1:15** and **2:18**
  - b. The guild associated with this industry was devoted to Apollo
    - Apollo—the son of god Zeus
  - c. Coins of Thyatira [and Rome] depicted the emperor seated with Apollo
    - So it could also be associated with emperor worship
  - d. Polemical importance
    1. This is the only place in **Revelation** that the term 'Son of God' is used
    2. Key point: the *true* Son of God—with burnished bronze feet—is Christ!
    3. Those who worship Apollo and the emperor—will be judged as idolaters!

## B. COMMENDATION

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

### 1. FOUR DEEDS

a. Another translation makes this clear

o 'And' = **even**—I Know your deeds, **even** [these] →

b. These deeds are → love—faith—service—perseverance

### 2. COMPARISON OF DEEDS

| <b>Ephesus</b>   | <b>Thyatira</b> | <b>Sardis</b> | <b>Philadelphia</b> | <b>Laodicea</b> |
|------------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| +Toil            | +Love           | (-) False     | +Kept my word       | (-) Lukewarm    |
| +Perseverance    | +Faith          | Reputation    | +Not denied         |                 |
| +Reject evil men | +Service        |               | My name             |                 |
|                  | +Perseverance   |               |                     |                 |

### 3. THYATIRA HAS MOST EXTENSIVE LIST OF GOOD DEEDS

### 4. OPPOSITE SITUATION TO EPHEBUS

a. Ephesus has **lost** its first **love**—*declined* in passion

b. Thyatira—the faithful have *increased*—in doing right

### 5. WHAT ARE THESE DEEDS ABOUT?

a. Main emphasis = **being faithful witnesses** to the Gospel

b. 'Love'

1. Ephesus has lost its first love—[implied] → desire to share the Gospel

2. Thyatira has increased in this deed—love—[implied] → desire to share the Gospel

c. 'Faith' and 'endurance'

o Often in Revelation—these traits are associated with being faithful witnesses

d. Positive comparison with Pergamum

1. Some in Pergamum—have remained faithful witnesses—**2:13**

2. Also some in Thyatira have excelled as faithful witnesses

## C. REBUKE

**20** *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. 21 I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality.*

## 1. NEGATIVE COMPARISON WITH PERGAMUM

- a. Some in Pergamum have been unfaithful—**2:14**
  - o Following the teachings of Balaam
  - o Eating food offered to idols
  - o Committing immorality
  - o Following the Nicolaitans—with similar practices
- b. In Thyatira—the situation is the same—**3:20**
  - o Following prophetess Jezebel
  - o Eating food offered to idols
  - o Committing immorality

## 2. THE PROBLEM IN BOTH PLACES

- a. Indulging in—compromising on—or tolerating—pagan practices
- b. In order to fit into trade guilds—that required participation in pagan rituals
- c. So they would not be ostracized from the business community
- d. Result:
  - o Probably some were participating in pagan feasts/rituals
  - o Rationalizing—as Christians they were impervious to the ill effects
  - o Rationalizing—they could participate as long as they did not believe in the gods

## 3. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THYATIRA AND PERGAMUM

- a. There is active false prophecy [of Jezebel]—in Thyatira—but not in Pergamum
- b. Problem is more deeply rooted in Thyatira
  - o She had been doing so for a while—she has had time to repent!
  - o She has succeeded in leading *others* astray—even ‘My bondservants’
  - o In Thyatira—the complaint is against just ‘a few things’—**2:14**

## 4. THE DANGER OF JEZEBEL—THE DECEIVING FALSE PROPHETESS

- a. She ‘leads astray’—like the ‘Land Beast’ marked with ‘666’

**13:14**—*And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the [first] beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image of the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life.*
- b. She ‘leads astray’—like the Beast throne into the lake of fire

**19:20**—*And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast*

*and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.*

## 5. FUTURE DANGER

- a. If Jezebel is not stopped
  - o Her teachings/followers will infect the church
  - o They will undermine the church from within
  - o This depicts invasion by the world order—Babylon (**Rev 18**)—into the church
  - o **Rev 18:4**—commands: *“Come out of her, my people so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues . . .”*
- b. Parallels between Thyatira and Babylon (**Rev 18**)
  1. Thyatirans commit **immorality**—in **chapter 18**, with a harlot figure—**vv 3, 8-9**
  2. Thyatirans are led **astray**—in **chapter 18**, deceived by sorcery—**v23**
  3. Thyatiran **merchants** compromise—in **chapter 18**, rich merchants lose all—**vv3,11-12**
  4. Thyatirans **warned** not to participate—in **chapter 18**, to ‘come out’—**v4**
  5. Thyatirans will be **judged** by deeds—in **chapter 18**, paid back *double*—**v6**

## D. JUDGMENT

*22 Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 23 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.*

1. THE MERCY OF THE LORD
  - a. He has already given Jezebel (and her followers) opportunity to repent—**v21**
  - b. He will *still* give them some time to repent—punishment is still conditional
    - o **v22**—punishment will come—*unless they repent of her deeds*
2. THREE CONSEQUENCES
  - a. **Sickness**
    - o Jezebel—will become sick—*I will throw her on a bed*
    - o She will be incapacitated—rendered helpless—incapable of doing more damage
    - o Possibly implied—sickness unto death—the beginning of her end
  - b. **Great tribulation**



1. This ‘tribulation’ has already begun
  - **1:9**—John himself has endured it with other Christians
2. Other Christians have endured it and remained faithful
  - **2:9**—In Smyrna
3. An ‘hour of testing’ is yet to come—**3:10**
  - Implies that things will get worse
  - But Christ will preserve/keep those who are faithful
4. Those who endure it will be dressed in white robes of righteousness—**7:14**
5. Warning to Thyatira
  - a. Those who are immoral/faithless with Jezebel—He will not protect
  - b. Instead—He will *throw* them into the tribulation!
  - c. Implied—they will not be preserved/kept—but will be lost

c. **Death** [by pestilence]

1. Literally—“*I will kill them with death*”
2. Logical consequence of first two results: sickness → tribulation → death
3. But *not* just an indirect and natural consequence of behavior/actions
4. Instead—the result of *divine* judgment—**I will kill**—says the Lord!

3. REASONS FOR PUNISHMENT

- a. To **preserve/protect** His church—from idolatry and disobedience
  - o There are still faithful ones that have not been infected—**vv 24-5**
  - o All the *churches* will know about this—[and take appropriate action]—**v 23**
- b. So the **Lord will be recognized** for who He is
  - o He is the Divine Judge
  - o He sees/knows the truth as it *really* is—*I am He who searches the minds and hearts*
  - o Because His gaze is burning/piercing—*his eyes like a flame of fire*
  - o He is infallible—and He will be fair
  - o But He *will* judge!
- c. So everyone will know—**there are consequences** for actions!

- a. God expects sincerity and obedience
- b. One cannot serve both the Lord and Jezebel
- c. God will not tolerate hypocrisy
  - o Thyatirans who say they serve God and follow Christ
  - o But tolerate/indulge idolatry—for monetary gain [in the guilds]!
- d. We *will* reap according to our deeds
  - Not just singular ‘deeds’—not a legalistic tabulation
  - But committed lifestyle of disobedience or obedience

#### 4. OLD TESTAMENT PARALLEL SITUATION

- a. In Jeremiah’s day—Jews profited financially by supporting idolatry—**Jer 11** and **17**
- b. God pronounced judgment on them—in the very same way

*Jer 17:10—I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.*

#### E. EXHORTATION

**24** *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.*  
**25** *Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.*

##### 1. SIMILARITY WITH SARDIS

- a. Some in Sardis—have not “soiled their garments”—**3:4**
- b. Some in Thyatira—have not followed Jezebel and her teachings—**2:24**

##### 2. TWO MARKS OF FAITHFULNESS

- a. They had not—followed “this teaching”—of Jezebel
  - o Teaching—Christians could participate in pagan rituals without harm
- b. They had not—“known the deep things of Satan”
  - 1. This could mean different things
  - 2. Maybe—they had not participated in secret rituals of mystery cults
  - 3. Maybe—they had not descended into ‘Satanic depths’ by committing idolatry
  - 4. Maybe—they had not been fooled by Satan’s deception through Jezebel’s teaching

##### 3. HOLD FAST UNTIL I COME

- a. “Hold fast” = κρατέω
  1. Meaning—“grip this with all your might!”
  2. Same exhortation given to Philadelphia—“hold fast what you have”—3:11
  3. Compare to situation in Pergamum
    - a. Some in Pergamum ‘held fast’ to His name—2:13
    - b. But others in Pergamum ‘held fast’ to wrong teachings
      - Of Balaam—2:14
      - Of the Nicolaitans—2:15
    - c. Two parties—either or—are in the grip of God—or grip of idolatry!
  4. Application in Thyatira
    - a. Some have followed Jezebel—and her teachings—and practices
    - b. Others who have been faithful—“do not have this teaching”—εχω
      1. Language is not as strong— as that describing the faithful in Pergamum
      2. It does not say—they “hold fast” to anything—such as ‘My name’
      3. Instead, they simply “have” their beliefs—εχω—v 25
      4. Possibly—they are susceptible to wavering in between!
      5. So he exhorts them—“grip what you have with all your might”

## F. THREE PROMISES

*25 ... until I come. 26 He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, 'to Him I will give authority over the nations; 27 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;*

1. FIRST PROMISE—THE LORD IS COMING
  - a. “until I come”—is not just a warning—but a promise
  - b. Promise/warning given elsewhere
    1. Ephesus—I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand—2:5
    2. Pergamum—repent; or else I am coming to you quickly—2:16
    3. Sardis—if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief—3:3
    4. Philadelphia—I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have—3:11
2. SECOND PROMISE—CHRIST’S FOLLOWERS WILL RULE WITH HIM

- a. Similar promises in Seven Letters
  1. Smyrna—*I will give you the crown of life*—**2:10**
  2. Philadelphia—*Hold fast what you have, so no man will take away your crown*—**3:11**
  3. Laodicea—*I will grant to him [Overcomer] to sit down with Me on My throne*—**3:21**
- b. **Rev 22:5**—*and they will reign forever and ever*
- c. Continuation of promise in **Luke 22** (above)—also in **Mt 19:28**

**Lk 22:28-30**—*You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*
- d. Continuation of prophetic promise in **PSALM 2**

**Ps 2:8-9**—*Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, you shall shatter them like earthenware.*
- e. Two Interpretations
  - o Masoretic Text says—“**smite/break** them with a rod of iron”
  - o Septuagint Text says—“**shepherd** them with a rod of iron”
- f. Possibly—Double Application
  - o A shepherd’s rod can be used to punish/discipline
  - o It can also be used to guide/lead/rescue
- g. Double meaning in Revelation
  1. **ποιμαίνω** = to shepherd
  2. To Rule/Discipline
 

**Rev 19:15**—*From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will **rule** them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.*
  3. To Shepherd/Guide
 

**Rev 7:17**—*for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will **guide** them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes*
- h. Application
  1. The Lord is coming to rule/discipline—and to shepherd/guide

2. We should do the same in church—discipline—and shepherd—the flock
3. THIRD PROMISE—THE MORNING STAR
  - a. Symbol—those who receive it will participate in Christ’s coming Messianic Rule
  - b. Fulfillment of OT Prophecy

1. By Balaam [ironically]

**Nu 24:17**—*I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; a star shall come forth from Jacob, a scepter shall rise from Israel*

2. By Isaiah

**Is 11:1**—*Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.*

- c. Two prophecies brought together in Revelation

**Rev 22:16**—*I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.*

## G. CLOSING

**28** *and I will give him the morning star.* **29** *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

## VII. APPLICATION

1. GOD SEES US FOR WHO WE REALLY ARE AND WHAT WE REALLY DO
2. GOD IS MERCIFUL—THE GIVER OF THE SECOND-CHANCE
3. BUT—SECOND CHANCES RUN OUT—IN THE END HE WILL ALSO JUDGE
4. HARD WORK IS NOT ENOUGH—GOD WANTS OUR LOYALTY TOO
5. TEACHING MATTERS—IT INFORMS OUR ACTIONS
6. THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES FOR OUR ACTIONS
7. HAVING IS NOT ENOUGH—GET A GRIP ON WHAT WE HAVE
8. SHEPHERDING MEANS BOTH TO DISCIPLINE AND TO CARE FOR THE FLOCK