

Tour of the Holy Lands - Thyatira



From Pergamum, we're going to head for the next city, which is Thyatira (thie-a-tie'ra). It's only 38 miles away -- and it's not a great city. In fact, we don't know much about it. Of the seven cities, Thyatira is the smallest and least important. Yet, interestingly, the Apostle John wrote the longest letter to the church there. That tells us this city had an important role to play in early Christian times. Let's find out why.

Thyatira was located on the major highway to Pergamum, the capital of the province. It was a road crowded with many businesses owned by potters, weavers, bakers, tanners, shoemakers, bronze workers, and others.

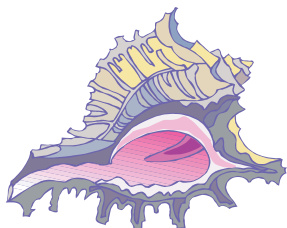


Many of these businesses had their own trade guild. The tanners joined the tanners' guild, the coppersmiths joined the coppersmiths' guild, the dyers joined the dyers' guild, etc. Guilds were supposed to protect the standards of each business, and they provided opportunities to meet other businessmen. The guilds would hold banquets at pagan temples where sacrifices were held and leftover meat was served. This sort of activity was not allowed in the Jewish or Christian religions.

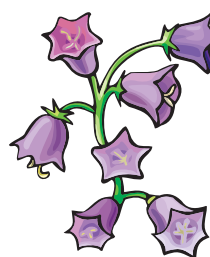


Lydia was a businesswoman in Thyatira, a dyer. Hers was a special business because she sold purple dyes and purple fabric. The color purple was only to be worn by the rich and by kings and queens. The dyers' guild probably made rules about the quality of purple dyes. Her purple could have been gathered drop-by-drop from a special seashell called the murex; or it could have come from the madder root.

Lydia may have been a member of the dyers' guild. But, after she discovered the God of the Jews, she no longer worshiped idols. Even though Lydia lived in Thyatira, she was not mentioned in John's letter. We know she must have played an important role in Bible times, however, because she is mentioned in the book of Acts from Thyatira (Acts 16:14).



MUREX SHELL



MADDER ROOT



Another woman is mentioned in John's letter, but not by her real name. She is called "Jezebel" (jez'a-bel) because she and her church friends are acting like the Jezebel of the Old Testament. You might remember the story from (I Kings 16:31), where Jezebel brings gods and goddesses with her when her new husband, King Ahab, takes her from Phoenicia (fn-ee'sha) to live in Israel. Jezebel, the new queen, tries to get all the Jews to turn from the God of Israel and to worship her gods, instead.



From the outside, the Thyatira church looks strong and growing. But, the people come to church to be entertained rather than to learn about God and the Christ or to grow spiritually. The church is more like a club than a Christian church. Jezebel tries to tell the members that it's okay to serve more than one god. She says it's just fine to join their guilds and attend the banquets. They can enjoy the party without eating the meat or drinking the wine.

Jezebel would probably say, "Join your guild. Go to the dinners. You don't want to be different. You don't want to be cut off from your friends. You don't want to lose customers. There's no reason why you can't join. Enjoy yourselves. Meet the world halfway."



Jezebel calls herself a prophetess, one who speaks for God. But John declares that the Christ sees right through her false words. Jezebel is warned to stop lying to the church. But, she ignores the message and continues to assure the members that it's okay for them to break the commandments.

John points out that the Christ leads the church along right paths. The members who refuse to listen to Jezebel's evil temptations or to have anything more to do with her are to be praised. "Hold on to what you have," writes John. Do not be swayed or led astray by false prophets. His words ring true for all of us!



Whatever happened to Lydia? She packs up her family, her household, her servants, her business, and her faith in God, and leaves Thyatira. She sails to Macedonia. Although she hasn't found Christianity yet, she will, and her story will be an inspiration to all who yearn to keep themselves pure and pass along their love of God to the world.