

Thyatira

Thyatira was the location of one of the seven local churches in the book of Revelation. The city was founded by the Lydian kingdom and later captured by Seleucus, Alexander's general. It then served as a border settlement to preserve his kingdom from Lysimachus, his rival to the west.

After the kingdom of Pergamum was founded (282 BC), Thyatira became the borderline between Pergamum and the Syrians. The city was without natural defenses. It was not built on a hill and therefore was subject to repeated invasions. The strength of the city lay largely in its strategic location and also upon the fertility of the area surrounding it. Its inhabitants were descendants of Macedonian soldiers and retained much of their ancestors' militancy. They were formidable defenders of the city.

When Rome defeated Antiochus in 189 BC, Thyatira was incorporated into the kingdom of Pergamum, Rome's ally. Peace and prosperity followed. Under the Roman emperor Claudius (AD 41–54), Thyatira rose to new prominence and was permitted to issue its own coins. The emperor Hadrian included this city in his Middle East itinerary (AD 134), a hint of the importance of Thyatira in the second century AD.

Prosperity attracted many Jews to this area. Among the commercial activities of the city were textiles and bronze armor. The armorers were in a guild, like the silversmiths in Ephesus. The first known Christian convert in Europe was a businesswoman from Thyatira named Lydia (Acts 16:14–15, 40). She specialized in the costly purple garments

that were exported from Thyatira to Macedonia. Here the purple dye, from the madder root, offered a much cheaper cloth to compete with costlier garments dyed with the expensive murex dye from Phoenicia.

In the message to the church in Thyatira, the members are commended for their love, faith, service, and endurance (Rev. 2:19). But the influence of paganism is still reflected in the sharp rebuke of those who tolerate the heresy of which "Jezebel" was the leader. Their temptation was similar to that of the Corinthian believers who were uncertain about eating food that had been dedicated to idols (1 Cor 8:1–13). The trade guilds held periodic festivals in which food offered to idols was consumed. This was sometimes accompanied by licentious rites in which religion and sex were mingled. This church was condemned for its accommodation to these pagan practices. Immorality was so rife among the pagans that the early church, with its uncompromising attitude toward unchastity, stood in constant tension with the mores of the community. Superstition and devil worship were apparently a great temptation as well. The "deep things of Satan" (Rev. 2:24) is probably an allusion to one of the Gnostic sects that stressed "depth" and carried on secret rites in which only initiates participated. So serious was the temptation that the best hope was for survival of the remnant—hence, the exhortation "hold fast what you have, until I come" (Rev. 2:25).

Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). Tyndale Bible dictionary. Tyndale reference library (1256–1257).