

Bread of Angels

Tessa Afshar

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With its resourceful, resilient heroine and vibrant narrative, Bread of Angels offers an engrossing new look at a mysterious woman of faith.

Tessa Afshar's *Bread of Angels* broadens the biblical account of Lydia into a novel of love, betrayal, determination, and the power of faith.

Lydia, spoken of in Acts 16, is recounted as the Apostle Paul's first European convert to Christianity, as well as being a seller of purple cloth. Her journey to eventually being baptized by Paul is one of setbacks and ultimate triumph, most notably her hard-earned success as a female merchant during the Roman Empire.

Though rich with detail, *Bread of Angels* does not become weighed down by its historical breadth. When the novel begins, Lydia is in her late teens, an industrious young woman devoted to her father and to running a workshop that produces beautifully dyed cloth. Originally from Thyatira, Lydia's father Eumenes has invented a method of dyeing fabric so that it becomes resplendently and enduringly purple. Purple, a color of royalty and prestige, is highly sought after at the time—as are Eumenes's coveted secret dye formulas.

After her father's death and the loss of their business to scheming Romans, Lydia feels that the gods she grew up with—deities of Greek mythology—have failed her. Heartbroken and wrongfully disgraced, she travels to Philippi in Macedonia, determined to succeed as a cloth merchant on her own.

Another young woman, a Jew named Rebekah, accompanies Lydia on her new adventure. Rebekah's faith and spirit are almost luminous, and though she too has been through many trials in her short life, she advises Lydia to pray to the true God and watch how the sustaining "bread of angels" will always appear in some form, even when all seems lost.

Rebekah, along with female physician Agnodice, Lydia's father Eumenes, and the handsome rogue-actor Leonidas, are memorable in *Bread of Angels*, while the evil Antiochus and strong but compassionate Marcus add drama and romance to the plot. The charismatic Saint Paul is especially captivating, a "short, wiry man with unruly hair" and an "air of intensity about him, like a storm held back."

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