

# Lydia, the Generous Hostess

Devotional Reading: James 2:14–26

Background Scripture: Acts 16:11–40

Today's Scripture: Acts 16:11–15, 40

## I. Encouraging Encounters Acts 16:11–15

**11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;**

**12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.**

**13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.**

**14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.**

**15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.**

11. Having received the vision of a man from Macedonia in the verse just before this one, Paul sets out *from Troas* across the Aegean Sea with Silas and Timothy. The first-person plural pronoun *we* suggests that Luke, the author of the book of Acts, accompanies them.

*Samothracia* (also spelled “Samothrace”) is a small island-city off the eastern coast of Macedonia. It is about 50 miles northwest of Troas. The prevailing winds in the northern part of the Aegean Sea are from the northeast, so the ship makes good time to *Neapolis*, about 70 miles from Samothrace. Neapolis serves as the port city for Philippi, which is about 10 miles inland.

12. *Philippi* is a city with a rich history. Named after Philip II, the city came under Roman control in 168 BC. Philippi is located on a major Roman highway, resulting in significant trade traffic across the region. Therefore, it is an important Roman commercial and administrative center in the heart of the Greco-Roman world. Philippi is populated with retired Roman soldiers and not many Jews.

The ministry of Paul and his companions lasts a period of *certain days*, which may mean a stretch as short as a week.

13. Paul's usual pattern is first to go to the local synagogue when beginning a ministry in a new city. In Philippi, however, the procedure is different. Given Philippi's history as a Roman colony, it is possible that not enough Jews live there to call for a synagogue. By Jewish tradition, it takes at least 10 Jewish men to constitute a proper synagogue.

First-century Jewish religious practices

seem to necessitate running water for ritual cleansing practices. Therefore, if no synagogue was present in Philippi, then a location *by the river* would be ideal for Jews to gather for *prayer* and worship. The *river* in question may be the Gangites River, about a mile from town.

In first-century Macedonia, *women* experience more independence than they do in other ancient Greco-Roman contexts. In Philippi, in particular, women held leadership roles in various places for pagan and cultic worship, especially in the temple of Artemis located there.

Historians of the period report that a significant number of Gentile women converted to Judaism or were drawn to worship alongside Jewish women. Therefore, it is not surprising that Paul would interact with both Jewish and Gentile women. At this riverside, Paul meets a woman who would become a key member of the forthcoming church in Philippi.

14a. The name *Lydia* is notable because it is also the name of a district in the Roman province of Asia Minor. Some commentators suggest that this *certain woman* may have been formerly enslaved, as it was common for enslaved individuals to be named after their homeland.

Lydia's hometown, *Thyatira*, is the capital of the district of Lydia and is located on the other side of the Aegean Sea, about 100 miles southeast of Troas. The city is known for producing dyed textiles, with *purple* being especially prominent. The process of creating purple dye in the first century was unpleasant and often smelly, as it involved extraction from the murex snail. Consequently, purple cloth was typically the most expensive textile, reserved for the wealthy and often worn by royalty. As a *seller* or trader of this dye, Lydia is likely a woman of significant financial means.

14b. The description of Lydia as someone who worships *God* has three possible

interpretations: (1) she is Jewish, (2) she is a convert to Judaism, or (3) she is a God-fearing Gentile, similar to Cornelius. The third option is the most likely.

Despite her independence and wealth, Lydia's *heart* is ready for the message of Christ. After hearing Paul's teaching, she does not spend the upcoming week reflecting on the message. Instead, as *Paul* speaks the word of God, her heart is *opened* by the *Lord*, perhaps indicating that He removes any misconceptions that may prevent her from accepting a crucified Messiah. This event echoes the events described in the conclusion of Luke's Gospel. During a post-resurrection appearance to His disciples, Jesus "opened . . . their understanding that they might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:45).

15a. Lydia's decision of faith is followed by her baptism. The text gives the impression that this happens quickly, possibly on the same day. Throughout the book of Acts, faith and baptism are often mentioned together. For example, the Samaritans who listened to Philip's preaching believed and were baptized (Acts 8:12). The Ethiopian eunuch, after hearing Phillip's proclamation of the gospel, immediately expressed his desire to be baptized (8:35–38). Likewise, the Philippian jailer and his family were baptized (16:31–33). The Corinthians who listened to Paul's preaching also believed and were baptized (18:8). Lydia's conversion follows the same pattern.

This is the first mention in the book of Acts of a *household* receiving baptism. The text does not provide details about the composition of Lydia's household. Since her household follows her lead in baptism, she may be a widow, thereby the head of the household with authority over those in it.

Lydia is no longer merely one who "worshipped God" (Acts 16:14, above). She

experiences a shift in identity that leads her to be *faithful to the Lord*. This change leads her to make a proposal that must not be overlooked. The book of Acts often describes the heart of the person after baptism. In the case of the Ethiopian, he left rejoicing (Acts 8:39). The Philippian jailer is filled with joy but also brings the missionaries into his house and prepares a meal for them (16:34). In this case, part of Lydia's response after her baptism is her insistence that Paul and his companions come lodge at her *house*—a response full of generosity and hospitality.

Such an invitation may be a dangerous arrangement for Lydia. There is potential resistance from her surrounding community that may be opposed to the gospel—like the mob in Ephesus. Lydia can invite the missionaries to stay in her home. But she cannot guarantee what the reaction of the neighbors will be. Her invitation, more than just an inconvenience to her busy schedule, is an act of courage.

Additionally, accepting her invitation would be courageous for Paul and his companions. Although Lydia had been worshiping and praying with Jews in Philippi, she is likely not Jewish. Consequently, it is unlikely that her household adheres to Jewish purity laws. Paul's acceptance of her invitation to hospitality implies that he, a Jew, agrees to stay in the home of a Gentile. The decision to stay in the house of a Gentile would have caught the attention of any other Jews in Macedonia.

## II. Heartfelt Hospitality

### Acts 16:40

**40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.**

A dangerous situation resulted in Paul and Silas facing time in *prison*. While

still in Philippi, Paul encountered an enslaved woman who possessed a spirit of fortune-telling. She followed Paul and his companions around town, proclaiming their movements and intentions (Acts 16:16–17). Annoyed by her presence and actions, Paul eventually cast out the spirit from her (16:18). This act angered her owners, who were upset about the loss of income caused by the removal of the spirit. They mobilize the townspeople and the authorities against Paul and Silas (16:19–20). Consequently, the two were beaten and thrown into jail (16:22–24).

That night, Paul and his companions experience a miraculous release when an earthquake breaks their chains (Acts 16:26). Rather than retaliate against the jailer, they convert him and his household to faith in Christ (16:28–32). The following morning, after Paul proclaims his Roman citizenship, the authorities escort him from the prison and request that he and his companions leave Philippi.

40b. Before departing from Philippi, Paul and Silas feel compelled to stop again at *the house of Lydia* to rest and recover after being released from prison. Their upcoming travels will lead them to Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth. Thus the gospel will spread despite (or because of) persecution.

Once again, Lydia's hospitality takes center stage. This stop also gives Paul and Silas a chance to see and comfort *the brethren* of Christ-followers. For these meetings to occur, a suitable location is needed, and Lydia's home serves this purpose. Lydia's house is not only open to the missionaries but also welcomes other members of the first-century church in Philippi, suggesting that her home is quite spacious by the standards of that era. Despite the potential risk from pagan neighbors, Lydia shows hospitality to those who travel to preach the gospel of Christ.

# Involvement Learning

## Lydia, the Generous Hostess

### Into the Lesson

Write a definition of *hospitality*.

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Write a definition of *evangelism*.

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How are Christian hospitality and evangelism related?

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What is the role of the believer in each?

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Lydia's hospitality resulted from Paul's evangelism. In turn, that hospitality provided an excellent opportunity for more evangelism.

### Into the Word

Read Acts 16:11–15, 40.

What was Lydia's source of livelihood?

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What city was Lydia from?

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Who comforted whom when Paul and Silas were finally released from imprisonment?

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Where did people assemble for prayer in Philippi?

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What did Lydia and others in her household do when they accepted Jesus?

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What kind of sailing weather did Paul encounter from Troas to Neapolis?

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After Neapolis, where did Paul travel?

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### Key Text

When [Lydia] was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

—Acts 16:15

### Into Life

Lydia demonstrated hospitality as a characteristic of her faithful witness to the transforming power of the gospel. The New Testament encourages us to follow her example and extend hospitality to others.

List ways believers can show hospitality as a characteristic of their faithful witness.

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### Thought to Remember

God grows the church through our hospitality.

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