

Lydia of Thyatira: The Lord Opened Her Heart

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

A. Lydia of Thyatira - Acts 16:12-15

1. Lydia of Thyatira is a woman in the New Testament is regarded as the first convert to Christ in Europe.
2. The name, "Lydia" is an ethnicon, a name that means "the Lydian woman" (Lydian with a feminine ending) indicating that she was originally from Thyatira in the province of Lydia in Asia Minor.
3. She was a "Purpuraria," or a guild member who sold purple dye highly prized among nobility and wealthy. It is not known whether she sold the dye or the fabrics treated with it
4. Tyrian purple (Greek, πορφύρα, porphyra, Latin: purpura), also known as Tyrian red, royal purple, imperial purple or imperial dye, is a bromine-containing reddish-purple natural dye. It is a secretion produced by a predatory sea snail Murex. Tyrian purple may first have been used by the ancient Phoenicians as early as 1570 BC. The dye was greatly prized in antiquity because the color did not easily fade, but instead became brighter with weathering.
5. It was one of the two dyes used by the Jews in coloring the fabrics used in the construction of the tabernacle; the other was a blue dye also made from sea snail shells called tekhelet
6. Tyrian purple was expensive; fourth century BC historian Theopompus reported, "Purple dyes fetched its weight in silver at Colophon and Philippi" in Asia Minor.
7. Lydia was most likely either a Greek proselyte to Judaism or a Hellenistic Jewess even though she lived in a Roman settlement.
8. Paul and his companions stayed with her until their departure to Thessalonica - Acts 16:40 - 17:1
9. Because first century women did not possess the same rights as contemporary women, it seems unusual that Lydia would be able to invite a group of foreign men to her house without a husband's consent. The fact that there is no mention of a man leads us to believe that she may have been a widow.
10. Considering the business she practiced and her ability to keep a large number of guests indefinitely, she must have been wealthy and rather influential. Lydia was an example of the comparatively independent position some women achieved in Asia Minor.
11. There is a chapel in Philippi which many consider to be built in Lydia's honor. A baptistery is located on the traditional site where Lydia was baptized in the Gangitis River by Paul near Philippi

I. WHAT KIND OF WOMAN WAS LYDIA?

- A. She was a woman of faith. Often business people are absorbed in financial matters and have little time for faith. But Lydia, in spite of secular obligations,

found time to worship. Daily she made her way to the riverside where prayer was made.

1. Although sincerely religious, Lydia was not yet a Christian. She did have a hunger for spiritual matters. Because her heart was open to the will of God, He opened it further with the Gospel of Christ
 - a. Matt. 5:6, 7:7-8; Psalm 119:18, 130; Luke 24:45
 2. Chrysostom wrote regarding Lydia: "To open is the part of God, and to pay attention that of the woman."
 - a. Her faith came through hearing the Word of God - Rom. 10:17
- B. She became a Christian woman. By her faith in Christ, she was baptized, and such was her enthusiasm that she immediately told her household what had happened, and they believed and were baptized
1. Lydia became the first European convert, the forerunner of most of us here today.
 2. Becoming a Christian did not make her less of a successful business woman, any more than being a devout believer in God made her so in the past.
- C. She was a hospitable woman. She was eager to give Paul and his preaching companions the hospitality of her home indefinitely.
1. Very likely, her home was where the church at Philippi met. In the beginning, there would be only Lydia and her household, the Philippian jailor and his family, and Paul and company, but the Philippian church quickly grew in number and became strong.
 2. When Paul and Silas came back to her home, bruised and battered after their discharge from prison, she was not ashamed of them
 - a. 1Tim. 5:10; Heb. 13:2; 1Peter 4:9
 3. If she had a poor moral reputation, Paul would not have risked his influence for Christ by staying in her home - Acts 16:15
- D. She was a consecrated woman. She would have received Paul's letter to Philippi, if the church was still meeting in her home - Phil. 1:1-7
1. She would have been one of those women who were fellow laborers with him in the Gospel - Phil. 4:3
 2. Because she was an affluent and successful businesswoman, she would very likely be one of the generous contributors who helped to support Paul - Phil. 4:14-19
- E. She was the woman with the open heart
1. Paul's Macedonia call is familiar to every Christian - Acts 16:9-10
 2. It is appropriate that the first person to benefit from the great Macedonian call was a Greek business woman, and the second person to receive the Gospel was a Roman soldier. Small beginnings and seemingly little returns on such a portentous summons, but it grew to fill the earth.
 3. The Gospel is for those whose hearts are open to God and truth
 4. Often women at that time were looking for the true God. They were disgusted and disillusioned with the evils of polytheism and heathenism,

and many turned to Judaism for an answer. They were prepared for the Gospel of Christ - Acts 17:12

5. Sooner or later, the world does not fill that emptiness inside, and one must look for truth

6. "What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself." (Blaise Pascal, 1670, *Pensées* VII p. 425)

a. In May 2002, a book was written by Tiffanie DeBartolo called *A God-Shaped Hole*, reiterating this point.

b. Acts 17:26-28

II. WHAT OPENED LYDIA'S HEART?

A. She heard Paul preach, and the Lord opened her heart to what he said

1. Acts 16:14

B. Specifically how the Lord opened her heart is not stated, she simply heard what Paul said - Acts 16:13-14

1. "Faith comes by hearing the word of God" - Rom. 10:17

2. The Gospel is God's power to save - Rom. 1:16

3. The Gospel tells of God's goodness that leads one to repent - Rom. 2:4

4. Lydia was willing "to heed the things spoken by Paul" - Acts 16:14-15

C. God is not going to reach down from heaven and open your heart apart from the means He has already supplied, the Gospel

1. If it gets through to your heart

a. It is because you were looking for truth

b. You were honest enough to recognize it when you heard it

c. You were humble enough to believe and obey it

d. And you were willing and dedicated enough to walk in it

2. You are the factor that determines whether your heart is opened by God