

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 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. ¹² From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

¹³ On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. ¹⁵ When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded 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.

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 *several 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 (see Acts 13:14; 14:1; 18:4). 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.

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 *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 *dealer* or trader of this dye, Lydia is likely a woman of significant financial means.

14b. The description of Lydia as a *worshiper of 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 (see Acts 10:2). The third option is the most likely. The Greek word translated *worshiper* is the same term used to refer to the Gentile converts who follow God.

Despite her independence and wealth, Lydia's *heart* is ready for the message of

Christ. After hearing *Paul's message*, 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 minds so they could 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 Philip's proclamation of the gospel, immediately expressed his desire to be baptized. Likewise, the Philippian jailer and his family were baptized. The Corinthians who listened to Paul's preaching also believed and were baptized. Lydia's conversion follows the same pattern.

This is the first mention in the book of Acts of a *household* receiving baptism. The second instance occurs shortly thereafter (Acts 16:33). 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.

15b. Lydia is no longer merely a "worshiper of God." She experiences a shift in identity that leads her to be a *believer in 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. Such an occurrence is not new by this point in the first-century church. Even so, 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 After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

40a. 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, proclaim-

ing their movements and intentions (Acts 16:16–17). Annoyed by her presence and actions, Paul eventually cast out the spirit from her. 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. 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. Rather than retaliate against the jailer, they convert him and his household to faith in Christ. The following morning, after Paul proclaims his Roman citizenship, the authorities escort him and his companions from the prison and request that they leave Philippi.

40b. The shift in narrative from first-person “us” to the third-person *they* indicates that Luke is likely no longer with Paul at this point in the journey.

Before departing from Philippi, Paul and Silas feel compelled to stop again at *Lydia's house* 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.

This stop also gives Paul and Silas a chance to see and comfort *the brothers and sisters* 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. Later, perhaps Paul's letter to the Philippians would be read aloud in her house. 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*.

Write a definition of *evangelism*.

How are Christian hospitality and evangelism related?

What is the role of the believer in each?

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?

What city was Lydia from?

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

Where did people assemble for prayer in Philippi?

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

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

After Neapolis, where did Paul travel?

Key Text

When [Lydia] and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house."

And she persuaded 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.

Thought to Remember

God grows the church through our hospitality.