

## Lydia, The Seller of Purple

*14 Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. ~ Acts 16:14*

Sometimes the Lord calls us to move and sometimes He moves. We don't always understand the purpose God has for each and every one of us. Sometimes we think that He is leading us in a specific direction, but then He steers us in a different direction, and we must obediently follow. Things don't usually turn out exactly the way that we want them, but they definitely turn out the way that God wants them. In today's study, we will be meeting Lydia, a seller of purple from Thyatira, whom Paul converts during his second missionary journey.

### Paul travels to Derbe and Lystra



## **Read Acts 16:1-5**

1 Then he [Paul] came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. 2 He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. 3 Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. 4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.

In these verses we see Paul on his second missionary journey traveling to visit the churches that were established in his first missionary journey in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. He meets Timothy who had a good reputation with the brethren at Lystra and Iconium even though his father was not a Jew. However, to remedy any potential issues this may have caused with the Jewish brethren, he takes him to be circumcised. In verses 4 and 5, we see that Paul is taking decrees (rules) that were determined by the apostles and the elders at Jerusalem to the churches, and they were strengthened and grew daily.

## **Holy Spirit Intervenes**

### **Read Acts 16:6-10**

<sup>6</sup>Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. <sup>7</sup>After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. <sup>8</sup>So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. <sup>9</sup>And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup>Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

In verses 6-10, we see the Holy Spirit directly intervenes in the journey to direct Paul's steps. As Paul, Silas, and Timothy were traveling through the area of Galatia they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word. They were allowed to travel through the area as you can see on the map, but the Holy Spirit did not allow them to preach the word. The Bible doesn't say how the Holy Spirit intervened, but it was clear to Paul that they should not stay and preach the word in these areas. The Holy Spirit then directs Paul away from Bithynia and directs him to Macedonia through a vision that Paul had in the night. Here the word for vision is *órama* in the Greek as opposed to *óneiro* which is a dream. So, Paul quickly seeks to obey the Holy Spirit and go to Macedonia to preach the Gospel.

### **Lydia Baptized at Philippi**

#### **Read Acts 16:11-15**

<sup>11</sup> Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next *day* came to Neapolis, <sup>12</sup> and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. <sup>13</sup> And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met *there*. <sup>14</sup> Now a certain woman named Lydia heard *us*. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. <sup>15</sup> And when she and her household were baptized, she begged *us*, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

Paul travels to Macedonia, and the first city of that part of Macedonia was Philippi a Roman colony, so they made plans to stay there for some days. So, on the Sabbath day, they went to the riverside "where prayer is customarily made." When there weren't enough Jewish men in the city to form a synagogue, which was usually 10 men, they usually met to pray by a body of water. They sat down and spoke to the women who met by the riverside to pray since there wasn't a synagogue available for Jewish women to pray. Lydia, who worshipped God, was there amongst the women.

It is noted that Lydia was a seller of purple from the city Thyatira because a seller of purple had to be a part of a recognized dyers guild in order to sell purple since it was expensive due to the laborious nature of harvesting and processing a specific type of sea snail. The city of Thyatira was a trade center for dyes, especially purple. Only members of the dyers guild were allowed to sell to the aristocrats and the Jews. Lydia's interactions with the Jews during trade may have been how she originally came to know and worship God. When she meets Paul, the Lord opens her heart to listen to the things that Paul was teaching. It is clear that she not only heard, but believed because she and her household were baptized. She not only believed but invited Paul and his companions to stay with her. So they agree to stay with her, establish the first converts in Europe, and also the church in Philippi.

In verses 11-15 we see one of the reasons that the Holy Spirit redirected Paul's travels to Macedonia. In a commentary by Matthew Henry, he states:

“Among the hearers of Paul was a woman, named Lydia. She had an honest calling, which the historian notices to her praise. Yet though she had a calling to mind, she found time to improve advantages for her soul. It will not excuse us from religious duties, to say, We have a trade to mind; for have not we also a God to serve, and souls to look after? Religion does not call us from our business in the world, but directs us in it. Pride, prejudice, and sin shut out the truths of God, till his grace makes way for them into the understanding and affections; and the Lord alone can open the heart to receive and believe his word. We must believe in Jesus Christ; there is no coming to God as a Father, but by the Son as Mediator.”

Lydia was committed to the Lord's work although she had a great responsibility as seller of purple and the possible head of the household. She was able to balance the time she spent working at her trade and the time for prayer at the riverside. But Lydia was not the only woman that Paul encountered in this journey.

### **Paul and Silas Imprisoned**

**Read 16:16-24**

<sup>16</sup> Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” <sup>18</sup> And this she did for **many** days.

But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And he came out that very hour. <sup>19</sup> But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged *them* into the marketplace to the authorities.

<sup>20</sup> And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, “These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; <sup>21</sup> and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.” <sup>22</sup> Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup> And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. <sup>24</sup> Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Here we see an example of Satan’s counterfeit. Lydia was a true believer and was proclaiming the word through prayer. This slave girl who was possessed with a spirit of divination followed Paul and his companions and loudly proclaimed the truth, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation,” but not because she was believer. Perhaps she wanted to be freed of the evil spirit and slavery and didn’t know how to ask, but it is certain that her proclamations were bringing negative attention to the missionaries. Paul finally commands the spirit in the name of Jesus Christ to leave the girl. The girl was finally free, but then Paul and Silas were imprisoned.

Despite their imprisonment, the Holy Spirit was able to work another miracle and the jailer and his household were saved before returning to Lydia’s house in verse 40. “<sup>40</sup> So they went out of the prison and entered *the house of* Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.” Lydia and the church at Philippi became great supporters of

Paul's ministry. Another reason the Holy Spirit brought Paul to Philippi was to make provision for the rest of the work that the Lord had prepared for him. Philippians 4:15-18:

15 Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. 18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

We don't know and we don't see what the Lord's purpose is in bringing people in and out of our lives. We must trust that His ways are greater than our ways and remain faithful to His calling on our lives wherever it may take us.

*Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.*

*--Psalm 37:5*

Resources:

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/discover/colour-purple-dyeing-techniques-phoenician-sea-snails>

<https://www.biblestudy.org/biblepic/churches-of-revelation-thyatira.html>

<https://www.biblestudy.org/maps/new-testament-churches/philippi.html>

<https://www.biblestudy.org/maps/apostle-paul-second-missionary-journey-large-map.html>

Has the Holy Spirit ever redirected you and changed your plans?