

LYDIA WHO ATTENDED MEETINGS FOR WOMEN
LYDIA WHO ATTENDED MEETINGS FOR WOMEN

Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. 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. 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 by Paul (Acts 16: 12-15).

Among modern churches meetings specially convened for ladies are commonplace. Yet it is surprising to learn that throughout the Bible only one gathering of this type is mentioned. It was a service probably held every sabbath on the banks of the river at Philippi. It was one of the most important meetings connected with the early church. Its influence reached the entire world.

When Paul and Silas reached Philippi, they sought a place to stay and then began to make inquiries about the city. It was their first visit. Paul usually began his ministry in the local synagogue, but there was no such place in Philippi. If ten Jews lived in a community, they could legally establish a place of worship. The fact that there were fewer than the required number suggests Philippi was a Gentile city. Perhaps that explains why Caesar had built a garrison in the vicinity. The soldiers were there to protect Roman inhabitants. Paul must have been disappointed to learn of the scarcity of Jews, but someone informed him that every sabbath women held a prayer meeting on the banks of the river. Paul and his companions decided to attend to find out what was happening. The ladies who were present that day were astonished to see men approaching along the river bank and sitting down in their midst. Evidently the newcomers intended to stay for the whole meeting. Strangers in such a situation were always invited to participate, and when asked, Paul began to address the audience. Soon the face of a woman named Lydia began to glow, and later she requested to be baptized. Perhaps God smiled, for this was the climax of a very long process arranged in heaven. It might be easier to understand and appreciate this lady if we seek answers to certain questions.

186

Who Was Lydia, and What Had Happened to Her?

Luke says she was a native of Thyatira, an important center for the dyeing of cloth and the manufacture of fine garments. Within the city were the headquarters of a very famous Guild of Dyers, and Lydia might have had connections with that organization. Apparently her husband had died. She was a widow, a Gentile by birth. Although she may have formally worshiped idols, she had become a convert to the Jewish faith. She was a proselyte. Evidently she had passed through a great crisis that left her devastated. If that time of testing were associated with the death of her husband, it would be easy to understand her predicament. She became a worried soul in search of peace.

Why Did She Leave Her Home in Thyatira?

Certain reasons might have accounted for her decision. (1) If she had renounced her idolatry to be identified with Jehovah, many of her former associates might accuse her of being a religious traitor. (2) The members of the Guild of Dyers might use their influence to persuade customers to purchase goods from others who were faithful to the gods. That could lead to bank-

LYDIA WHO ATTENDED MEETINGS FOR WOMEN

ruptcy. On the other hand, that same organization might have appointed this gifted woman to be their representative in an effort to extend trade relations. Perhaps the most convincing reason for her departure was the overruling grace of God. Lydia was destined to have a far-reaching ministry which would have been impossible had she remained in her native city.

Why Did She Decide to Go to Philippi—600 Miles Away?

Philippi was the chief city in Macedonia. It was inhabited mostly by Gentiles, and many soldiers were stationed in the local Roman garrison. Military men were always looking for unusual gifts to take to their families and friends. The prospects for increasing business were excellent, and through the coming and going of military men there existed the chance of reaching the entire Roman Empire. Furthermore, since Philippi was far removed from Thyatira, Lydia would be a stranger. and repercussions from enemies were unlikely to occur. She could live without fear of recrimination. There is reason to believe that, above all else, God was fulfilling His own purpose.

187

Why Did Lydia Begin Attending a Ladies' Prayer Meeting?

This woman was not only a convert to Judaism. she was also a very sincere soul searching for peace. When she arrived in the city. she purchased a large house, and this suggests she was either a wealthy woman or was sponsored by the Guild which had sent her to increase their business. When the lady discovered there was no synagogue. she wondered how she could possibly exist without a sanctuary. It is not known whether or not she commenced the sabbath service, but in any case. Lydia became one of the women who regularly attended. At the weekly meeting the women sang some of the songs of Israel and then discussed important parts of the sacred writings. Lydia still hungered for something of which she had no knowledge. Only people who have known that yearning can appreciate the struggle within her soul.

Why Did She Ask to Be Baptized?

When she watched with speculative eyes the visiting men sitting among the congregation. she wondered what they desired and what they would say. It is not difficult to understand what was said by Paul, for whenever he preached to people for the first time, he followed the same pattern. It is safe to assume all the women were Jewish. and, recognizing that fact. Paul would describe his own experiences. His testimony of being employed by the high priest in Jerusalem would at least be interesting. The story of his encounter with the risen Christ would introduce his new faith that Jesus was the Messiah. When he explained how the deepest yearning of his hungry soul had been satisfied in Christ, Lydia suddenly realized he was speaking to her. When her soul responded, it became evident the Spirit of God was leading her to the kingdom of God. Salvation is not the exercise of a religious ordinance, but an encounter with the risen Lord. She already knew the significance of baptism for she had become a proselyte, and no Gentile was ever accepted into Judaism until they had been immersed as a confession that he or she was abandoning idols to worship Jehovah. Lydia announced to everyone that she was forsaking everything to become a Christian.

What Happened in Her Home?

Probably she was immersed immediately in the nearby river.

LYDIA WHO ATTENDED MEETINGS FOR WOMEN

188

and afterward she said to Paul. If ye have judged me faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there." "She earnestly entreated us." Luke said. "The Lord opened her heart." but she opened her home. Gratitude always gives! After Paul and Silas were released from prison, they were instructed by the magistrates to leave the city immediately. but Paul refused to do this. It was significant that he went first to the home of Lydia to comfort and strengthen the brethren. Men were already associating with the new movement. Possibly. the jailer and his family were among the first to do this.

It is thought-provoking that Luke came to Philippi with Paul and Silas. but he did not leave with them. Later when he wrote the Acts of the Apostles. he said: "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" (Acts 16:40). Paul recognized the need of someone to help the young converts, and it seems Luke stayed behind to become the pastor of the first church in Philippi. There was no other suitable place where those early Christians could assemble. It was providential that Lydia had bought a large house.

Why Did Lydia Continue to Give So Much?

When Paul left Philippi, he ultimately arrived in Thessalonica. The journey could not have taken longer than a few days. Yet even in that short space of time the apostle received two love-gifts from the church in Philippi. Long afterward he remembered the assistance received from those people and wrote, "Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel . . . no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving. but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity" (Phil. 4:15-16). This generosity continued throughout the life and ministry of the apostle. Probably Lydia spoke to her brothers and sisters in Christ and suggested it would be nice to send help to their beloved Paul. This was a great way to express their appreciation. Consecrated souls are never stingy! Longfellow was one of Britain's greatest poets. His work never deteriorated. Toward the end of his life he was asked what was the secret of his continuing success. Pointing to an apple tree, he replied. "That apple tree is very old, but I never saw greater blossoms than those it carried

189

this year. That tree grows a little new wood each year, and the wood produces the flowers. I try to grow some new wood each year, and this explains my success." Probably Lydia did the same kind of thing. Her love gifts to Paul expressed the gratitude in her soul. She influenced the entire world with her dedicated service.

What Kind of Welcome Did She Receive in Heaven?

If Paul's homegoing to heaven preceded Lydia's it would be easy to imagine his taking her by the hand to say. "Master, she is home at last. I could not have accomplished my mission without her help." And the Lord would respond, saying, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." It would be nice to know what kind of reception we shall have when we stand before God's throne.

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.daneprairie.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.