

# More Than Me

## Acts 16:14-15,40

### Pierre Cannings

#### I. Just Me v. 14

##### a. Lydia

- i. Because Acts identifies Lydia as the head of a household (Acts 16:15), she might have been single, widowed, or divorced person of some means
- ii. The author of Acts might identify Lydia not because of her wealth or social position (Peterson, *Acts*, 461) but rather because she was well known and respected within the church (compare Chloe in 1 Cor 1:11).
- iii. A woman of Thyatira in Lydia, who at Philippi became Paul's first European convert and gave him hospitality, with Silas and Luke (Acts 16:14–15, 40). Lydia may be an adjectival form, 'the Lydian woman' (such ethnic names were common), but it was also a personal name (Evidently a woman of rank (*cf.* Acts 17:4, 12),
- iv. The apparent absence of a synagogue in Philippi (see below) suggests that Lydia's exposure to Judaism came when she lived in Thyatira (Polhill, *Acts*, 350). Josephus confirms the presence of an established Jewish community in that region beginning in the time of Antiochus II
- v. Women in Macedonia were noted for their independence; moreover, under Roman law (which governed life in the colony) freeborn women with three children and freedwomen with four children were at this time granted a number of privileges, including the right to undertake legal transactions on their own initiative

##### b. Seller

##### i. Purple Fabric

1. The noun *porphyra*, "purple," denoted actually the shellfish (*Murex trunculus*), from which one form of the ancient precious purple dye was obtained. The mollusks were harvested from the Mediterranean, and Tyre in Phoenicia was a very important place for the production of purple goods; it's twice-dyed).
2. It marks her as a person of means. Purple goods were expensive and often associated with royalty; thus the business was a lucrative one
3. Lydia's association with the purple trade is plausible. Thyatira was known for its trade guilds, including those devoted to clothiers and particularly to dyers, and Lydian women had long been associated with purple dyeing
4. made purple goods a coveted luxury associated with royalty, wealth, and high position

##### c. Worshiper of God

- i. Worshipper - **to express in gestures, rites, or ceremonies one's allegiance or devotion to deity, worship**
- ii. Lydia was a "worshiper of God" (16:14), one of those devout Gentiles like Cornelius who believed in God but had not become a full convert to Judaism. There was an extensive Jewish community at Thyatira, and she had perhaps first come to her faith in God there.
- iii. It may be that she was neither a born Jew (her name is not Jewish) nor a proselyte but an adherent of the synagogue, a Jewish sympathizer. On the other hand, the words do not necessarily mean more than that she feared God; she was a devout woman
- iv. A wealthy, God-fearing Gentile who is reported as the first Christian in Europe (Acts 16:14–15). Her house appears to have been a meeting place for the Philippian church (Acts 16:40).
- v. Acts 16:13–14 describes Lydia participating in prayer on the Sabbath as "a worshiper of God" (Acts 16:13–14 NRSV; σεβομένη τὸν θεόν, *sebomenē ton theon*), a phrase used frequently to indicate a Gentile who had adopted elements of Jewish belief and practice but had not become a full proselyte
- vi. She was a Jewish proselyte, engaging in prayers and ablutions at the riverside on the sabbath; her connection with the Jewish faith probably went back to the colony in Thyatira

## II. For Mine v. 15

- a. Listened
  - i. As Paul and his friends spoke, Lydia believed what they said and acknowledged Jesus as Lord. She thus became Paul's first convert in Europe.
- b. Lord Opened the Heart
  - i. **Opened** - enable someone to perceive
  - ii. Respond - Heed words or instruction
    1. To respond - God responded to her faith and "opened her heart" to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ which Paul proclaimed. As always with divine grace, it was God's Spirit moving in her heart that led to faith.
  - iii. Lydia hears, but it is the Lord who opens her heart
- c. She and Her Household
  - i. Household
    1. Not only did Lydia share her goods, but she shared her faith as well. As the leader of her household, she led them to join her in commitment and baptism (16:15). This is the first time the baptism of a "household" is *narrated* in Acts. Another will follow shortly (v. 33).

- ii. Baptized
  1. Lydia, upon hearing the word of the Lord from Paul, was baptized, receiving the covenant sign of the new religion, something she could not do in Judaism. Thus Luke presents a story illustrating how the Gospel is for all sorts of people regardless of their gender, previous religious background, or economic status.
  2. Lydia is baptized along with her household (a group that could have included children, extended family, slaves, and business associates), and she insists that Paul and his fellow missionaries stay at her home (Acts 16:15)

### III. For Everyone vs.15, 40

- a. She Urged
- b. Judged to be Faithful
  - i. For missionaries to stay at the home of converts demonstrates that the new believers are fully acceptable. God-Fearers are not second-class citizens in the Christian community. In v. 15, that purpose is explicit. Lydia's "compelling" argument is the second possible allusion to Luke 24 in two verses
- c. Come to my house and Stay
  - i. Prevailed Upon Us
    1. Lydia's invitation to the four missionaries to stay in her home in itself indicates that she had considerable substance, such as guest rooms and servants to accommodate them adequately. Of all Paul's churches, the Philippians' generosity stood out.
    2. Lydia's ability to offer lodging in her home to numerous guests and the subsequent use of her home as a house church indicate that her wealth exceeded that of the average Macedonian of the time. Lydia could have gained her wealth through her purple business, an inheritance, or release from slavery. It is not clear that Lydia's home in Philippi was her primary residence. As a wealthy merchant, she could have maintained a secondary residence there for business purposes.
- d. After Prison 16:40
  - i. Went to her house again
- e. Active in ministry
  - i. Women like Lydia were particularly prominent in Paul's missionary efforts in this portion of Acts—the women of Thessalonica (17:4) and of Berea (17:12), Damaris in Athens (17:34), and Priscilla in Corinth (18:2). Priscilla and Lydia took an active role in the ministry of their churches. This was in part due to the more elevated status of women in the contemporary Greek and Roman society. This was particularly true in the first century

when women were given a number of legal privileges such as initiating divorce, signing legal documents, even holding honorary public titles. The prominent role of the women in Acts is perhaps due even more to the message Paul brought them: "In Christ Jesus, there is neither male nor female" (Gal 3:28).

- ii. It was an offer they could not refuse. But she did not merely open her home to the missionaries; she allowed it to become the gathering place for the entire Christian community (v. 40). Perhaps the wealthiest member of the Philippian church, Lydia embraced the ideal of the early church, not laying claim to what was hers but freely sharing it with her sisters and brothers in Christ (4:32).
- iii. Acts 16:40 appears to present Lydia's house as a gathering place for the Philippian church. After Paul and Silas are released from jail, they apparently meet with the believers at Lydia's house before they leave Philippi.