

Lydia



Paul meets Lydia after travelling to Macedonia and evangelising in Philippi. His first encounter there is with a group of women, rather than men. One of these women is Lydia. Lydia's name may imply that she used to be a slave and has then become a successful freedwoman. Slaves were often named after their place of origin – Luke indicates that she was from Thyatira (a city in a place called Lydia). However, other sources suggest there was a woman of high social status named Lydia, which may cast doubt on the idea she was originally a slave.

The fact her name is mentioned at all is significant and implies that she was important to Paul and the wider early church, and became prominent in the church of Philippi. Highly likely she led it.

Lydia is a successful businesswoman, wealthy, a dealer of purple cloth (which was the most expensive colour of fabric at that time). Her house must have been exceptionally large to accommodate church meetings, once again indicating Lydia's significant wealth.

Hospitable and kind, Lydia opens her house to Paul and his companions. She is head of her household and makes her own decisions - at no point does it reference her asking a man for permission to provide hospitality to Paul and his fellow missionaries. This is very unusual for the time and implies independence.

Lydia seems very courageous to invite strangers into her home, particularly as they were men, and this could have attracted a scandal/public humiliation. Furthermore, these men were following a different religion to the majority in Macedonia.

Read Acts 16:11-15

What strikes you most about Lydia? What impression does she give you about her character and circumstances?

What do you think about the fact that Lydia is mentioned at all?

Why would Lydia open her home to complete strangers and risk her reputation?

Do you think she was influenced by the holy spirit into trusting Paul?

How integral do you think Lydia was for enabling the Philippi church to form and succeed?

Do you think we should follow by Lydia's example in the way we live our lives and support our local church? Is there anything you think we should change or do differently?

Do you think it is significant that the first people Paul evangelised in Philippi were women? Why? Where do you think the men were?

Can you think of any other women that are positively singled out in the New Testament during Paul's travels?

Could this story be an early example of women practicing theology together?

Despite the obvious importance and presence of women in this story, why do you think it has taken so long for women to legitimately be ordained as leaders in the church?

How do you feel this story interacts with other parts of the bible that give opinions on women in church leadership? Does it support them or differ from them?