

# Lydia, Seller of Purple



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Welcome to a study of Lydia, a seller of purple in Acts 16. Lydia is also known as the first European convert, saved during Paul's second missionary journey. Lydia's story is best understood when we read most of chapter 16 in Acts and view the events that occurred while Paul was in Philippi. So, get your Bible – the version you are most comfortable reading – and we will experience this first century woman together.



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**Read Acts 16:6-10** At this time, all paths to Asia were closed to Paul by God. But the Holy Spirit gave Paul a vision of the need in Macedonia. It is important to note that the narrator changes from they to we; meaning that Luke, the author of Acts, is now an eyewitness to Paul's journey. Events begin to unfold quickly now as Paul sets sail to the Roman colony of Philippi in Macedonia (modern Greece).

**Read Acts 16:11-15** Paul's usual pattern of spreading the Gospel was to go first to the Jews. He would visit the local synagogue and preach about Jesus from the scriptures. Evidently there were not enough Jewish men in Philippi to establish a synagogue (10 men were required), so Paul and his friends made their way to the riverside on the Sabbath and talked with the women who met in that place. Here we first encounter Lydia. Luke gives us several details: Lydia is a worshiper of God (God-fearer), a dealer in purple dyed cloth, she is from Thyatira (Asia), she owns a house and is responsible for the household, and (perhaps) meets regularly with the women at the river place of prayer (Greek *proseuche*).

Paul sits down in the place and speaks to the women there. Luke records that Lydia "heard us"; he used words in Greek that meant she was listening intently, and her heart was opened wide! God had truly opened both her ears and her heart to hear the gospel message.

Lydia's faith was immediately evident in her next actions. Lydia, like the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, needed no encouragement to take her first step of obedience to Christ. Lydia was baptized, along with her household, right there in the river!



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Lydia then offered her home to these missionaries in the name of the Lord. According to Luke, she “begged” them to be her guests. We know from Scripture that the group included Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke. There may have been more, but Lydia didn’t hesitate to offer what means she had to them. Her wonderful act of hospitality may have extended for several days, because events take place that are part of the Lydia story.

**Read Acts 16: 16-24** Luke continues Paul’s story with the incident of the slave girl that had a spirit of divination. Her masters profited from her abilities to speak fortunes. The girl had taken to following Paul and the missionaries for days, proclaiming that the men were servants of the Most High God. In the Gospels, the first ones to recognize the identity of Jesus in His earthly ministry were the demons! So, now we have another instance of Satan acknowledging the Lordship of Jesus! Paul commanded the spirit to come out of the girl in the name of Jesus Christ. This event probably occurred in the agora, or marketplace. Paul and the men were brought to the magistrates and falsely accused of teaching a foreign religion. Paul and Silas were stripped and beaten and thrown into prison.

**Read Acts 16: 25-34** What happens next is miraculous! Bruised and bloody, Paul and Silas were praying and singing praises to God when a violent earthquake released their bonds! Paul reassures the jailer that no one had escaped. The terrified jailer and all his household are baptized, and they minister to Paul’s and Silas’ wounds and feed them. We can’t miss the similarity of the jailer’s and Lydia’s households eager to be baptized and giving hospitality!

**Read Acts 16:35-39** Paul and Silas are released from prison, but they refused to leave until the magistrates apologized for beating Roman citizens without due process.

**Acts 16:40** Luke said, “They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.” Paul’s final act was to encourage the fledgling church in Philippi. Because of Lydia’s generosity to the missionaries, the gospel was able to gain a solid foothold in Philippi. A few years later, Paul would write to the Philippian church, thanking them for their continued generosity in sending gifts to him in prison. He reassures them to have courage during times of trouble, to stand firm against enemies, dangers and false teachers, to do everything without complaining so as to be as shining lights to the world.

## Tyrian purple dye was literally worth more than its weight in gold.

The first historical record of purple dye indicates that the manufacture of Tyrian purple began in the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC in the eastern Mediterranean. Cloth dyed with purple was a lucrative export in the ancient world. The dye was extracted from the fluid of Murex shellfish. The crushed shellfish were left to bake in the sun and the smell must have been overwhelming. For that reason, workshops were located outside the city boundaries. Tyrian purple was noted for its deep rich color and durability.



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**A pound of dyed wool  
would cost you a pound of gold!**

Father God,

I pray that this study speaks to each woman and to her needs at this stressful time of isolation and anxiety. Keep us all safe in the knowledge of your absolute sovereign power; give us grace to help others as they struggle through this time. In Jesus' holy name.

Amen.