

# Lydia

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I'd like us to begin this evening a short series on people that we might describe as key links in the development of the Gospel in the New Testament.

Obviously, links presupposes a chain, and whilst the focus of most chains tends to be the buckle or the clasp at either end, each link in the chain is nonetheless vital, since as we all know, any chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

Now, obviously, there are literally thousands of people who were converted under the various ministries of different apostles, of whose names or lives we know absolutely nothing at all.

We read in Acts chapter 2, verse 41, Then they that gladly received his, that is Peter's word, were baptised, and the same day there were added unto them about 3,000 souls.

And then turn a page and you find in chapter 4, verse 4, And we don't know whether that's a fresh 5,000, or now it's 5,000 in total, or 5,000 is just the men, and there was the women and young people as well on top of that.

[ 1 : 1 9 ] But clearly, within the first few weeks of the pouring out of God's Spirit at Pentecost, there were thousands of believers amongst the Jews there in Jerusalem and spreading outwards.

That is to say, nothing of the multitudes converted in Samaria or in Antioch and all the other places where the apostles went preaching the gospel. But there are various converts who are explicitly mentioned, sometimes only once or twice, but who, by their witness or ministry or help, provide what we could call key support at key times in the gospel progress.

And without whom, the story might have developed quite differently. Under God, we must, of course, acknowledge that the kingdom would still have spread and progressed, but it would have been different, had some of the key links in the chain been different people with different giftings or abilities.

So over the course of the next few weeks, look, Lord willing, at some of these different people mentioned only rarely in the New Testament narrative.

Perhaps only once or twice, but we all had a key part to play in the growth, and development of the early apostolic church, although they themselves were not apostles.

[ 2 : 5 3 ] They themselves were only the next link in the chain. They may have been converted, I was going to say by apostles, obviously, they're only converted by Christ, they're not only ghosts, but they are converted through the direct instrumentality of apostles, but they themselves are not apostles.

But no doubt, through their witness, others were brought. Again, the next generation down of Christians. The farther away link in the chain. But without these key links between the apostles on the one hand, and that generation of Christians, which was two stages removed, we have this kind of middle section.

Key links in the chain. Now, we'll look at, over the next few weeks, Lord willing, sometimes maybe doubling up with one or two names that are up and down, we'll look at Manasson, M-A-S-O-N, which mentioned briefly.

Epaphroditus, Tychicus, Susthenes, Epaphras, and this evening in the opening subject of these key links, we'll look at Lydia.

Lydia, of course, is mentioned in this chapter that we read from verse 14 and verse 15, then again at the end of the chapter. Most of us, when we think of the New Testament, probably feel we know Lydia pretty well, that she was a God-fearing seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who met Paul and Silas at the place of prayer by the riverside in Philippi, welcomed them into her home, where the first Philippian church, and thereby, as far as we know, the first European church began to meet.

[ 4 : 36 ] Remember that whilst Paul is throughout the areas of what is now Turkey, when he comes down to Troas on the coast, he then has this Macedonian vision, verse 9 onwards, where they say, come over to Macedonia and help us, and then they sail across that section of the sea between what is now western Turkey and eastern Greece.

They land at Neapolis, which was the port for Philippi, a port city, verse 11, and thence to Philippi, which is the chief city in that part of Macedonia, and a colony, originally called Crenivis, or Crenivis.

It was a city there, which was a very ancient foundation, gold mines and so on, very wealthy, and then Alexander the Great's father, Philip of Macedon, conquered it, or took it over, and made it a bulwark against the Thracians, his rivals in that other part of Greece, and called it after himself, hence Philip, after Philip of Macedon.

The Romans took it over, and drew course, as they conquered just about everything else, and as it says, they made it a colony, verse 12, and being a colony, that means that it was settled with a sort of core of military veterans, soldiers and centurions who had filled out their time, they'd finished their time in the military, they were given certain privileges, and they were settled there in the midst of the city to be sort of the ruling core of the city, to colonize it, it meant that all the language, the customs, the dress, and so on, was that of Rome.

It was a little piece of Rome transplanted to where whatever city was. The Romans planted these colonies all over their empire, so stabilize it and strengthen it with their own loyal people, in that sense.

[ 6 : 25 ] So, whilst we have the feeling that we know Lydia, this European church, which has established it, of course, there would have been perhaps some converts at Rome, but we don't know for sure exactly how organized that church was, but we know that because in Acts 2, at verse 10, when they're describing, when we hear every man in our own tongue, when we were born, Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, as well as in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, and Pontus, and Asia, Frigia, and Pamphylia, and Egypt, and the parts of Libya, about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes.

We must assume that some of these Jewish people and converts to Judaism, proselytes, went back to Rome and began to meet together as a Christian church there, as believers in Jesus of Nazareth, but none of the apostles had gone there to plant that church.

It had sort of arisen spontaneously from the word that they got at Pentecost, the message they got, they went back to Rome. This is the first planted European church that we know of.

And that's where they began to meet. And then, well then what? Well actually, that's all there is in terms of hard fact about Lydia. One's tendency is to think of her as a familiar New Testament character, one we can place and recognise that in reality, she is mentioned in only three verses.

Verse 14, verse 15, and in the last verse of this chapter, verse 14, when you go back to Lydia, she said, that's it. That's all we have. And yet the feeling is that she's part of the background music for so much more, which indeed I suppose you could say she is.

[ 8 : 14 ] She's there in the background. In fact, although mentioned so sparingly, we were actually told quite a lot about Lydia and those brief three verses. First of all, if we think about her name, her name is probably derived from the region of which she was a native.

Thyatira, that was part of the ancient province of Lydia in what is now Western Turkey. Sometimes perhaps, if you've got maps at the back of your Bible in the Old Testament times, it might be given there, the sort of southwestern part of what is now Turkey.

It's mentioned briefly in Ezekiel chapter 30 and verse 5 when it says, Ethiopia and Libya and Lydia and all the mingled people and Job and the men of the land that is in need shall fall with them by the sword.

That's all we've got in the Old Testament about Lydia as such. But that's the area that was meant, southwestern Turkey, of which Thyatira was a major city. So it is probable that her name comes from the region from which she originated.

And that's a not uncommon thing. I mean, when I grew up in Aberdeenshire, the Dukes of Gordon had been the main sort of titled family in ancient days.

[ 9 : 32 ] But the name Gordon is not from the northeast. Originally, those who became the Dukes of Gordon and so on came from southwest Scotland.

Dukes of Gordon is where Gordon originates as a name. Likewise, if you think of Ireland, you know, that orange man taken that name from William of Orange, the ruling house of the Netherlands, the Dutch ruling house.

But where do the Orange family get their title from? It's from that tiny little town in southern France that used to be a self-governing principality.

It used to be its own kind of self-ruled state, Orange, in southern France. And it was the princes of Orange from that tiny little town that then found a home in the Netherlands and so on from which you get the House of Orange in the Netherlands and then, you know, the William of Orange and then Orange Order now in Ireland and elsewhere.

And so all of this they rise to a particular place. It's not uncommon for people to take their names from the place in which their origin was.

[ 10 : 38 ] so it's probable that her name is to do with where she originally came from. Secondly, we know her occupation, a seller of purple.

Now this, of course, as many of you will know, we know to be a highly expensive commodity in New Testament times. Let's look at that just for a minute. Dictionary defines purple as any of a group of colours with a hue between that of violet and red and as a symbol of royalty or high office.

Historically, the colour of purple has been associated with royalty and power but the secret of associating with it lies the secret of the purple lies in the glands of tiny shellfish creatures.

The earliest archaeological evidence for the origins of purple dyes points to the Minoan civilisation in Crete about 1900 BC.

The ancient land of Canaan, its corresponding Greek name is Phoenicia which means land of the purple, was the centre of ancient purple dye industry.

[ 11 : 51 ] Tyrian purple and from the city of Tyre is another particular distinct element. The purple dye of the ancients mentioned in text dating back to about 1600 BC was produced from the mucus of the hyperbranchial gland of various species of marine molluscs.

The legend says that Hercules or Hercules as you sometimes know it or rather his dog found this great dye because he was crunching up snails, he was eating snails, they found him in the ground and his mouth came up dyed purple and that's how he supposedly in legend discovered it and after that when Hercules supposedly gave a gift of a garment dyed purple to the king he ruled that this should be the colour for royalty then after.

The point is it was so rare to extract, so difficult to get hold of, tiny little amounts, although you could only get a small amount, only the rich had access to it and although the trade originated in Tyre, the commercial practice spread throughout the world.

Persia, Egypt and Rome all came to use purple as the imperial standard. Purple dyes as you say were rare and expensive, only the very rich had access to them.

The purple colour that's used in different countries came from different sources, most of the dye extraction as we say from fish occasionally insects and the imperial purple of Rome was based on a mollusk from which purpura comes.

[ 13 : 31 ] So there's various details we can find about it but the main point is that it was so expensive and so exclusive that only the very rich could deal in it, only the very rich could buy it.

Now Lydia bought and sold purple. From this fact along with the fact that she had a household that is a substantial house with servants and almost certainly included slaves in that day and age one concludes her to have been wealthy and probably widowed because it's her house that's described rather than the name of her husband around probably widowed and carrying on the husband's business her deceased husband's business.

Such independent wealth for a woman on her own would have been very very rare in those days. Not impossible but very very rare particularly something that's such the upper end of the market.

So she is probably widowed she is certainly from originally south western Turkey she will certainly be very wealthy. She has a house of her own she's got servants she's got she's got this trade which only the super rich can't afford.

Now of Thyatira itself we don't know a great deal. We know that Lydia comes from there and we know that by the turn of the first century by the time you know the first century AD is turning into the 100s Thyatira has a church established there.

[ 15 : 08 ] We don't know of a church there at the time of the Acts of the Apostles but we know it's because it's one of the seven churches in Asia to which our Lord sends his letter in Revelation chapter 2.

Thyatira is described as being a faithful church I know thy works and charity and service and faith and thy patience and thy works and the last to be more than the first.

Now that's a contrast with for example Ephesus Ephesus the gateway to Asia is said I know thy works and thy labour and thy patience and how thy canst not bear them which are evil and has tried them which say the apostles are not as bound in lions as born as patients and for my name's sake as laboured and as not fated nevertheless I am somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love that's what he says about Ephesus but what he says about Thyatira is that he knows that works and charity and service and faith and patience and thy works and the last to be more than the first in other words their works their faithfulness is going on from strength to strength the problem in Thyatira is that they tolerate heresy and what they call the false prophetess Jezebel and so on within them but there are those who are faithful in Thyatira as many as have not this doctrine which have not known the depths of Satan I will put upon you none other burden but that which ye have already hold fast till I come and he that overcometh and keepeth my works to the end to him will I give power over the nations he shall rule them with a rod of iron as the vessels of a potter shall be broken to shivers even as I receive to my father and I will give him the morning star that fantastic verse that I will give him the morning star and I said to Thyatira this church which struggles with his false prophetess and with the lasciviousness and immorality that is overlooked perhaps and allowed within their church despite all their other virtues and faithfulness it's a mixture of good and ill just as everywhere else most other churches in Revelation are described this is

Thyatira which probably didn't have a church of its own when Lydia was converted but that is where she comes from fourthly we know that she had a devout interest in the Lord where it says a certain woman named Lydia a seller of purple city of Thyatira which worshipped God you think well of course she worshipped God otherwise she wouldn't be in a place of prayer why does it mean say she worshipped God that means to be a worshipper of God in that context means one who was a Gentile but who worshipped the God of Israel there was umpteen different gods you could worship as a Greek as a Roman or whatever a whole pantheon of false gods but one which worshipped God means they worshipped the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob they worshipped the God of Israel the one living and true God this is unusual in a Gentile but it wasn't unknown and these God feeders or worshippers of God if they were complete converts to Judaism then they were called proselytes but she clearly is a Gentile why do we say this why couldn't she be a Jewish lady who worshipped God well probably if she was Jewish she wouldn't be a seller of purple that was probably reserved to those who were maybe the upper echelons of Greco-Roman society but also you go back to verse 1 of chapter 16 when you look at Timothy's heritage

Timothy the son of a certain woman which was a Jewess and believed now that means she was Jewish but she believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah the fulfilment of the Jewish scriptures but his father was a Greek so Timothy is of mixed heritage his mother's Jewish his father's Greek Gentile but his mother believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of all the Jewish scriptures Lydia is not described as a Jewess unlike Timothy's mother she's certainly described as a worshipper of God that means she's a Gentile means she's a Greek or Roman background but she has a devout interest in the Lord if she is a worshipper of this one true God if she is gathering with the people who gather at the place of prayer she's doing this of her own free will she's doing this because that's where she wants to be nobody's making her do it it's not part of her cultural background it's not part of her sort of nationality and identity and so on this is something she is seeking for herself she wants to be where the people are praying to the one living true God there aren't enough Jewish men to set up a synagogue you needed ten

[ 20 : 06 ] Jewish men to make a synagogue you know there's many women as you like but if you didn't have ten Jewish men you couldn't set up a synagogue that means that the Jewish population of Philip and this Roman colony was tiny doesn't mean there were none but it means there weren't ten Jewish men there were two or three or whatever but here they gather with the women who gather to pray that's what it says verse 30 we sat down and spoke unto the women which resorted for her and a certain woman named Lydia so a little purple the city of Thyatira which worshipped God heard us and then we read whose heart the Lord opened that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul the Lord opened her heart conversion is not a work of man it's not oh she was converted by Paul sometimes we use that term but it's more wise if we're thinking of people you know converted during some revival or kind of blessedness converted under the ministry of so and so or under the preaching of she attended things which were spoken of Paul she wasn't converted by Paul the Lord opened her heart whose heart the Lord opened that she attended unto the things which were spoken of by Paul here Paul and Silas coming with the good news the good news the gospel that's what it means is that the time of fulfillment has come all that has been promised in the Hebrew scriptures all that has been prophesied all the fulfillment of the law the sacrifices the prophets is all personified and fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth who has died upon the cross and crucified but rose again the third day so death could not hold him and having appeared to his disciples over the course of 40 days he's now been received into heaven and his once and for all sacrifice has paid the price of sin for all who will trust and believe in his name it's the the crowding glory of the work of the true God the God of Israel the God of Abraham

Isaac and Jacob that she has been worshipping Lydia has been seeking and now this is if you like the icing on the cake of it all the fulfillment of what it was all leading up to it is perfected in Jesus of Nazareth it is completed and her heart the Lord opened that she attended unto her things which were spoken of by Paul the Lord opened her heart she listened to Paul and Silas and Luke who was with them obviously which is why of course in this chapter the description changes from them you know what Paul and Silas were doing to us you know if you go back to verse 8 in chapter 16 you know after they were come down to Mycenae they were safe going to Mysinia they passing by Mycenae came to Troas a vision appeared to Paul in the night and after he had seen the vision immediately we endeavour to go into Macedonia suddenly it's changed so Luke the writer of the Acts of the Apostles has joined them or has become part of the party from Troas and then entering on into Europe to Neapolis to Philippi and so on so Luke is there

Silas is there the Paul was there and the Lord has opened her heart and having had her heart opened she then this is the next thing she committed herself then and there she is baptized and all her household that she attended the things which were spoken of Paul and when she was baptized and her household she decided to say if you judge me faithful up to the Lord come now into my house so she commits herself to her and she doesn't need to be told to say well I don't know I'll have to go away and think about this we'll have to talk about this some more she is convinced it's not unlike when you think about in John chapter 1 where Nathaniel is told we've found the Messiah and who is it Jesus of Nazareth can any good thing come out of Nazareth and then Jesus says to him before Philip called you I saw you under the fig tree and Nathaniel says

Rabbi you are the son of God you are the king of Israel wow that's quite a change that's quite a transformation that's quite sudden but it's not a case of who this guy is well I think he's the son of God I think he's the king of Israel out of all the other possibilities no there's not all these other possibilities he has been told who they have found the question then comes down to not who might this man be but rather is he the fulfilment of the scriptures is he the messiah the king of Israel or is he not it's a yes or no it's not a range of possibilities this is one reason why Nathaniel's change of heart is so dramatic and sudden because it was only either an on off switch it was was he this or wasn't he and by Jesus speaking to Satan he could see right through before Philip called you I saw you under the big tree he knows exactly what he's talking about seems a bit cryptic to us but Nathaniel knows exactly that he has seen right into his heart and he says

Rabbi I want the son of God that art the king of Israel in other words it's the on switch not the off it's a definite yes not a no there was only the two possibilities and he's plumped for the right one now as the Lord opens Lydia's heart I would suggest to you that in the same way having been seeking the true God having been worshipping the true God and worshipped the one who called Abraham Isaac and Jacob and was the one who guided King David and Solomon and all the prophets down from all the centuries having laid hold on faith in this true God she sees or she hears at a glance yes all the pieces of the jigsaw fit together and just as you've got all your pieces lying in a pile you've got a jigsaw and then you fit them together you see the complete picture when they're all fitted in and even if you haven't got every last piece in which you could argue none of us will have ultimately in this life now we know in part eventually we know even as also we are known but even if all the pieces you can see the picture there and you can see all these pieces that are left they must go certain places just to finalise it just to complete it and you can see the picture and she can see the picture and she can see yes this Jesus is the fulfilment of it all she doesn't hang up at it she committed herself then and there and she was baptised and all her household there's no faffing about with oh maybe they don't want that maybe it's just me as far as she's concerned this is good news this is good news that she wants all her house to have it's not going to be a single private individualistic thing

[ 27 : 36 ] I'm not going to share it with anybody else this is something she's got she wants everyone to have she wants her home to be a Christian home and therefore all her household are going to follow this faith all her household are going to receive and accept what she has she wants them to have it she wants them to be shares in what she has so she is baptised and her household everyone in it we don't know whether that involves children quite possibly it does we don't know whether maybe grandchildren we don't know whether it's just servants or household slaves or whatever but they're all baptized and this becomes a Christian home she commits herself there and there the life saving good news she's not concerned oh so so might not agree with me so I'm not going to do it this is her home and everybody in it is going to have the benefit of this good news she can't afford them not to have it because she's got affection a concern for those under her care the other thing we're told is that later and then she welcomed them into her house if you have judged me to be faithful verse 15 to the lord come into my house and abide there and she can spread us now if she's a wealthy merchant woman it's going to be a big house it's going to be a comparatively luxurious house it's going to be probably some of the best accommodation the apostles have had in the course of their ministry other than when they perhaps were in Malta much later on and they're washed up and then the person who's in charge of the entire island then he treats them hospitably and looks after them and so on doesn't mean they live in his personal house

Lydia brings them into her home she shares her home with Paul with Silas and the implication is that all the believers then meet in her home to worship that's one reason why?

I would suggest to you that after they were released from prison they went out of the prison verse 40 entered into the house of Lydia when they had seen the brethren doesn't just mean Lydia's household servants or the rest of her family it means the other Christians those who were believers now in Philippi were gathering in Lydia's house they comforted them and then departed she puts what she has at their disposal and she's not being daft about it she's not saying oh well this is so big what can I get here each of you have a purple cloak because I've got them and I said I'm going to give you a gift each one a purple cloak and off you go bye bye off on the road no that's no earthly Easter but bringing them into her home being hospitable now the word hospitable it's from the same root as hospitable it's bringing people in the knights hospitaller in the middle ages were those who gave shelter and protection to pilgrims and to those who had nowhere else to go they gave hospitality it's the shortening of that word from which we get hospital and also hotel it's the same principle a place of being able to stay lodges shelter protection so she is hospitable to them it becomes their place of refuge of meeting of protection of being looked after what she has she puts at their disposal this is something which all Christians are called you know are called to be hospitable

Peter says we're to use hospitality one to another in other words our home should be open to the servants of the Lord our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ visiting missionaries or ordinary Christians we should always be welcoming to them ready to allow them the benefit of whatever we have food drink shelter roof over your head a warm bed for the night maybe they're travelling or whatever you know hospitality is part of our Christian calling and it's not a complicated thing to do all that's required is the things that we do every day we eat we drink we sleep we have a roof over our heads you have a warm bed at night and so on all these things that we have we enable other people to have in our home that's all it is it's not complicated it's not rocket science anyone can do it and yet it is a key thing that Lydia does which the Lord has enabled nobody else to do in Philippi he has given her the resources he has given her the means and the power to be able to be a welcoming hostess not only to

Paul and Silas but to the fledgling Christian church now as we say obviously the Lord could have used other people he could have taken it in another direction but she welcomed them into her house she was used as a key link in the establishment of the church in Philippi by extension in Europe now it is quite possible that Lydia was of some considerable age an elderly woman perhaps by the time Paul is writing to the Philippians when he's a prisoner in Rome you know quite often he'll put a long list of greetings at the end of his letters he doesn't do that really with Philippians and there is no mention in Philippians of Lydia or the church that meets in her house perhaps her contribution was brief perhaps all the contribution of any of us will be brief but it is all the more key then that at that critical time she was there to bring them in and establish a base as already mentioned

[ 33 : 46 ] Philippi is like the launch pad for the apostolic work in Europe although doubtless as we said there are already Christians at Rome but these would have been sort of almost a spontaneous growing up of the church there all the key links that we will look at in the next few weeks and mention them earlier all of them are short and very brief in their mention just like Lydia is here but they are key they each have a key role in that early fledgling state of the church as it is passed between the apostolic generation and those that come afterwards they have a key link in the chain they have each given something specific that the Lord enables them to do and as a result they are examples for us because we are we are briefly here for a little time the Lord puts resources in our hands he gives us certain abilities or gifts that we can use for his cause his kingdom but our time our mention if you like is very brief we are not apostles we are not super saints or spiritual giants we are just dead or young people who have got some gifts and some resources and some abilities to put at the

Lord's disposal for a little time whilst we are given this time on earth all the key links are short and brief and the mention Lydia is very very brief as we say only verses 14 and 15 and 40 that's it no other mentions of our in words but they are key and they are recorded as we say not only in scripture but we trust also in heaven all on earth and that we yeah so we are all we are