

New Testament Conversions – No. 7

The Conversion of Lydia

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As far as we know, the first attempt to preach the Gospel on European soil was made by Paul and his companions in the city of Philippi. The record of their arrival in the city and of their first converts is found in Acts 16:11–15. Apparently not enough Jews lived in this Roman colony to support a synagogue, but the group learned of a place by the river where people met to pray on the sabbath. Finding some women there, they preached to them (v. 13). One of the women who had gathered to worship was named Lydia, “whose heart the Lord opened to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul,” according to Luke (v. 14). This resulted in the baptism of Lydia and her whole household (v. 15). She then constrained the evangelists to stay in her house (v. 15). In this brief record, we are told how the church began in Europe.

What can we learn from this account of conversion?

1. Just as we learned in the case of Cornelius (Acts 10:1–2), despite the emphatic statement that she was a worshipper of God, it is necessarily implied that she was lost (v. 14). It is good to worship God as He directs, but if one has not done what God teaches man to do to be saved, he may worship God all his life and still be lost.
2. Lydia’s heart was opened by the Lord to the Gospel, but we are not told how (v. 14). It is implied that earlier it had been closed, likely for the same reason that most of the Jews had rejected Christ—they were looking for a political ruler who would conquer their foes, not a spiritual King who would be crucified. There is no implication here of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on Lydia. Indeed, had He done this for Lydia (and it is nowhere else mentioned) and not for all the hard-hearted Jews, God would have been a most flagrant respecter of persons, which He is not (Acts 10:34). Likely, the means by which the Lord opened her heart was by sending these preachers from such a great distance to seek her out and by their persuasive proclamation of Gospel Truth to her and her household.
3. When Lydia’s heart was opened, she gave heed to the things Paul spoke, meaning that she not only heard them, but was quick to obey them. This is the “acid test” of an open heart to the Word of God: Is there a willingness and a desire to do what God’s Word commands?
4. Luke has described what men were told to do to be saved several times by the time he tells of Lydia’s conversion, so he does not take time to repeat it all again. Although it is not mentioned, we can be sure that she and the others converted were brought to a faith in Christ through the preaching they heard and that they were commanded to turn from their former unbelief and other sins in repentance. These actions have been required in previous cases, and the same requirements are made of all. The only act specifically mentioned and to which they submitted, was baptism (v. 15). It is surely not too much to say that when a person’s heart is open to hear and heed the Gospel, the necessity of baptism will not be

rejected — any more so than faith or repentance — unto remission of sins. May we all be as wise as Lydia “to give heed to the things which were spoken” (v. 15).

[**Note:** I wrote this article for, and it was published in the “Bible Thoughts” Column for the *Hood County News*, Granbury, Texas, October 1, 1978.]

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