

Bi134 Acts

Lesson Bi134-30 The Gospel Goes to Europe

I once served on a church planning committee. The members of the committee were full of ideas and often put together great plans. The problem was that no one ever got around to carrying out the plans. As a result, little was accomplished. In time, I became frustrated with the committee and moved on to other more productive pursuits. Paul and his missionary team were not like this committee. Once they had determined that Paul's vision of the man from Macedonia was from God, they immediately moved into action. They boarded a ship and sailed for Macedonia. Landing in Neopolis, they proceeded to the city of Philippi.

The next Sabbath the missionaries went to the nearby river in search of a good place to pray. Upon arriving, they encountered a group of Jewish women. After greeting them, they sat down and began to talk. One of the women by the name of Lydia was a businesswoman from Thyatira. She was a seller of expensive purple cloth. She was also a worshipper of God. As Lydia listened to Paul talk about Jesus, the Lord opened her heart and she believed the good news.

Soon she and other members of her household were baptized in water. That's when she approached the missionaries and said, "If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house." At first the apostles were reluctant to impose upon her, but because she persisted, they took her offer (Acts 15:11-15).

Philippi was a chief city of the Roman province of Macedonia, and it was the first place Paul preached in Europe. While there, Paul planted what was to become a thriving church. Paul would later write a letter to the Philippians to encourage the brothers and sisters there. This letter is found in the New Testament. In it, Paul called the Philippian believers his "dear friends." He referred to them as his brothers and sisters, whom he loved and longed for (Phil 4:1). Paul truly loved the people he ministered to. We should do the same; we should love those whom God has given into our care.

In the story of Lydia's conversion, we see the Spirit of God working in the heart of a Gentile nonbeliever. Luke tells us that, even before she was saved, "the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message." Earlier in Acts, the Spirit worked in the heart of Cornelius before he came to Christ. The Holy Spirit gave him a vision of the Lord telling him to send for Peter. When Peter arrived, he told Cornelius how to be saved.

In each of these stories, we observe how the Spirit of God works in the hearts of nonbelievers. The Spirit draws them to God and opens their hearts to receive the gospel. Further, when sinners repent of their sins and put their faith in Christ for salvation, the Holy Spirit regenerates them. He makes them new creations in Christ. This is what happened to Lydia and Cornelius.

From the story of Lydia's conversion, we learn another important ministry lesson. Here, as he often does in the Book of Acts, Luke emphasizes the role of committed women in advancing the kingdom of God.

For instance, he begins Acts by telling how women gathered with men to pray and wait for the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. Jesus gave them the same command he gave to the men. They were to "stay in the city until [they had] been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

Then, when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, the women were filled with the Spirit just as the men were. Luke says that "all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4). He thus empowered the women for the same reason he empowered the men, that they might "be [his] witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Then, when Peter stood to explain what had happened, he quoted from the prophecy of Joel where God promised, "In the last days ... I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons *and daughters* will prophesy" (Acts 2:17). Thus, women are qualified for ministry in the same way that men are qualified; the Lord empowers them by his Holy Spirit.

Now, in today's story, Luke emphasizes that Lydia was the first convert in Europe. A woman thus played a major role in the founding of the church in Philippi. Later in Acts, Luke will tell how a woman named Priscilla, along with her husband Aquila, served with Paul as "fellow workers in Christ Jesus" (Rom 16:3). She led the way in instructing the mighty preacher, Apollos, and helping him to understand the ways of God more clearly (Acts 18:26). Luke further writes of Philip's four unmarried daughters who served God as prophets.

More recently, Spirit-filled women have played a key role in the global advance of the modern Pentecostal movement. They have served the church as pastors, missionaries, writers, teachers, and in many other vital ways. We should thank God for the women who have committed themselves to the work of God. And we should support them and encourage them in their ministries.

This lesson is **important** because it teaches how the gospel first entered the European Continent. We have also learned how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of unbelievers opening their hearts to the message of the gospel.

The **main truth** we learn from this lesson is the value of women to the work of God. God calls them and empowers them to do the work of God just as he calls and empowers men.

Let's **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. Who was the first person in Europe to receive the gospel and be saved?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that the first person in Europe to receive the gospel was a woman named Lydia, you are correct.

2. Name one way, discussed in our lesson, that the Holy Spirit works in the lives of nonbelievers.
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, “The Holy Spirit works in the lives of nonbelievers opening their hearts to receive the gospel and be saved, you are right.

3. What qualifies both men and women for ministry?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, “Being filled with and empowered by the Spirit qualifies both men and women for ministry,” you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** is to listen to this lesson several more times until you can accurately tell others the story of Lydia’s conversion. You should also be able to explain how the Holy Spirit qualifies women for ministry. Finally, you should find time to speak with women and encourage them in their God-given ministries.