

10. Conversions of Lydia and the Philippian Jailor—Acts 16

Acts 16 accounts the events preceding and including the conversion of the house of Lydia and the Philippian jailor: The first five verses of the chapter cover the selecting of Timothy as a traveling companion and describes their travels from town to town. From this effort, “the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.” Acts 16:5. In verses 6-10, Luke records what some call the Macedonian Call:

7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

From Troas they sailed for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. From there they traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia.



The Conversion of Lydia Takes the Gospel to a Business Woman

Acts 16:13-15: 13 *On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.* 14 *One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.* 15 *When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.*

Upon arriving in the city of Philippi, Paul and his companions went to where they expected to find a place of prayer, and therefore, religious people. One of the women was Lydia, a business woman who dealt in purple cloth. The *all nations* element of the Great Commission extends by example to include business people and women. Verse 14 describes Lydia as a “worshiper of God.” In this regard, she is not unlike Cornelius, of whom Acts 10:2 says, “He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.” Verse 14 further describes Lydia, saying, “The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.” Even though the Lord opened her heart, she still had to respond to the message (the gospel). While it is clear from all the examples of conversion that salvation requires the gospel and one’s obedience, the Lord often has a role in opening the heart of an individual. Jesus taught that God is available to help those of a true spirit and mind in Matt 7:7-8: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Lydia and members of her household responded to the gospel message by being baptized. It was after obeying the message that she phrased the statement, “If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house. This passage teaches with certainty that true believers are those who obey the gospel by being baptized. This is how the Great Commission stated it in Matt 28:19, “Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” When modern teachers teach that people are saved by faith only and without baptism, they fail to understand that the belief that Jesus and the apostles taught is all inclusive of all the commands of the Lord in the Great Commission. In

this way they misled their followers. James confirmed this teaching of Acts in James 2:20-24:

20 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. 24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

Paul and Silas Are Severely Flogged and Thrown in Jail

Acts 16:16-23: Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." 18 She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

19 When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20 They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21 by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

The events of these paragraphs describe how Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown in jail because of the miracle that Paul did—casting out the demon that allowed the girl to foretell the future. The owners of this slave girl caused the crowd, who were Romans, to attack Paul and Silas, and caused the magistrates to order them beaten and imprisoned. The jailer put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet with stocks. The importance of these events is to lead to the miracle of their escape and the conversion of the jailer in the next few verses. However, one must note that what the slave girl shouted is an exact truth of gospel conversion. She said, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” Acts 16:17. Emphatically, there is **a way** to be saved, and not just any way to be saved, as taught by many teachers today. The jailer learns this exact **way** to be saved from Paul and Silas

The Jailer Asked, “What Must I Do to Be Saved?”

Acts 16:25-29: About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Upon the earthquake and the freeing of the prisoners, the jailer was provoked even to the taking of his own life, since Roman law would have required the death sentence for allowing prisoners to escape. Paul stopped him by presenting himself and Silas. The jailer’s first and immediate response was, “What must I do to be saved?” He undoubtedly knew that the jailing of Paul and Silas was the result of the slave crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” The apostles, with Peter leading, faced this question in Acts 2:37-39, when after the sermon, the listeners were cut to the heart and said, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter told them: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Paul himself had asked a similar question in Acts 22:10. “What shall I do, Lord?” he asked. He was told, in Acts 22:16, to do just what those on the day of Pentecost had done, “And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.” The rest of the jailer’s conversion story tells exactly what one must do to be saved, confirming the absolute necessity of faith and baptism in conversion. Men can only fulfill the Great Commission in this way.

Paul and Silas Teach the Jailer the Way to Be Saved

Acts 16:31-34: *They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole family.*

In answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas issued an all-inclusive statement in reply, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." The Lord himself had said in the Great Commission in Mark 16:16, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." In keeping with the Great Commission, they spoke the word of the Lord to him and his entire house. Paul and Silas preached the gospel. In that very hour of the night, they dressed the wounds of Paul and Silas (a penitent act), and the jailer and all his family were immediately baptized. Joy filled the jailer because he had come to believe in God. This example defines the all-encompassing nature of true faith. As with Lydia, so with the jailer, belief was complete after obedience. The past perfect verb, *had come*, expresses a state of being begun in the past with instruction and obedience. The present infinitive, *to believe*, extends the state of being into the indefinite future. A believing person will always be a taught, obedient person, and never one like the devils who believe and tremble, but never obey and follow.

The all-encompassing faith is evident in all the translations. Acts 16:34 in the New King James and the New American Standard versions read, "Having believed in God." The use here of the present perfect tense verb, *having believed*, indicates an action begun in the past and extended to the present, and beyond to an indefinite time in the future. Therefore, true faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God as Paul taught in Rom 10:8-10. However, one who believes obeys:

"The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Conclusion

Lydia and her household and the jailer and all his family fulfilled their faith by their obedient acts of belief in God and His word. The rest of the story follows:

Acts 16:35-40: *35 When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." 36 The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."*

37 But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

38 The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. 39 They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. 40 After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.

Study Questions

1. Why did Paul and his companions go to Macedonia? _____
 2. What were Lydia and the women doing at the river side? _____
 3. What was necessary for Lydia to do to be considered a believer in the Lord? _____
 4. What kind of faith is dead faith? _____
 5. What were Paul and Silas doing while they were waiting in prison? _____
 6. What question did the jailer ask? _____
 7. In what way is faith all-encompassing? _____
 8. Why were Lydia and her household and the jailer and all his family baptized? _____
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