

CONVERSION STUDIES

CONVERSION OF LYDIA

Example ten of thirteen

Much of the earliest history of the church is unknown to us save that recorded in Acts. It contains the fascinating history of the gospel being carried into all the world. Like a spreading flame, the gospel of Christ engulfed the Roman world and beyond in a few short years. The first record of any gospel preaching on what is today the continent of Europe was done by Paul in the Macedonian city of Philippi. Paul made the trip from Asia to Philippi after receiving the famous "Macedonian Call." The first known convert in Europe was Lydia, an Asian from Thyatira in Asia Minor. She became the first recorded convert of Europe.

She was an industrious woman. People who are busy in religion or anything else also make the best doers after conversion. This is demonstrated dramatically in Saul of Tarsus. Lydia was a religious woman. She may have been a Jew by birth, but it is possible she was a proselyte. She was faithful in her religious activities in spite of various handicaps. As the sabbath was not a regular holiday in Roman cities, others in her business would continue to operate, but she stopped. No business was more important to her than God's business. There was no synagogue and no male leadership, but she worshiped anyway. The place chosen was by the riverside. This seems to be traditional as Paul went there seeking worshipers.

In spite of her zeal and faithfulness in the religion of Israel, she needed to be converted. The process began when she heard the gospel. People are not converted by dreams, visions, or feelings. The truth must be heard. Those who close their ears to the truth will be lost (Acts 28:27).

All who listen earnestly and honestly soon turn to the Lord. Lydia was one "whose heart the Lord opened to give heed to the things which were spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14). Her heart must have been closed before Paul came; but how? I think it is safe to say it was not as some who have closed their hearts because of sin. Many hearts are closed because of an unwillingness to do right. Her fidelity in Judaism is evidence that such was not true

of her. Her heart must have been closed because of a lack of knowledge and the false conceptions of the Jews. "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block..." (I Cor. 1:23). But her heart was opened. How did this come about?

God worked the same way with her as He did in all other cases of conversion. Some have jumped to the conclusion that a direct operation of the Holy Spirit took place; that the Spirit came separate and apart from the Word to open her heart. There is no evidence of such, and this would contradict Romans 10:17. "For belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." God had something to do with her conversion as He does in all cases. Her heart was opened and she gave heed unto the things spoken by Paul. The word was preached which destroyed false ideas and revealed the truth. She understood, gave heed, and put into practice what she heard. Presenting the word was the work of God giving the revelation and His servants preaching it. Giving attention was her responsibility.

Although no mention is made of her believing, it is certain she did. Nor does it say she repented, but it is clear that she did. The record definitely says she was baptized which makes baptism a part of her attending to what she heard. She was baptized without delay. It was usual to be baptized immediately upon believing. Baptism must have been part of the preaching done by Paul. Compare this with most preaching today in which baptism is never mentioned. Baptism is the final step in conversion. There is no New Testament record of convert's "prayer experiences" or "testimonies", but of being baptized in water for the remission of sins.

An open heart attends to what is taught. A closed heart is unwilling to pay attention. If you do not obey, you are not attending to God's will. Some people read verses that mention faith and try to claim that baptism is not necessary because it was not mentioned. Many cases, like Lydia's, do not mention repentance, but they do not claim that repentance is not necessary. Lydia's

case doesn't mention faith, but no one claims faith is not necessary.

We get a glimpse of Lydia in Christ, and it is very enlightening. She was hospitable. She invited the preachers to stay in her home. Many preachers can testify to the comfort this is in a strange place. Hospitality is a mark of being a Christian (I Pet. 4: 9). This is not talking about taking your friends or having your family for supper. The word means "friend of strangers." Paul judged her faithful which is the greatest thing that can be said of a Christian.

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