

BIBLE WOMEN – NEW TESTAMEN
Lesson 21 – Lydia – Priscilla
By Beverly McKey

I. LYDIA and the SLAVE GIRL – Acts 16:13-40

- A. In Acts 16, Paul and Silas came to Derbe and Lystra preaching the gospel.
1. They met a young man named Timothy, who would later become known as Paul's "son in the faith".
 2. Timothy's mother was a Jew but his father was a Greek (Gentile).
 3. Paul took Timothy with him and Silas and they travelled from city to city teaching the gospel that was first taught by the Apostles in Jerusalem. **Vs. 4-5**
 4. During that time Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia pleading with him to come to Macedonia to help them.
- B. So Paul, Silas and Timothy headed for Macedonia.
1. When they came to the city of Philippi (in Macedonia), they stayed a while.
 - a. On the Sabbath day they went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made (since there was no synagogue there).
 - b. There they met a woman named Lydia, who had heard of Paul.
 - c. Lydia was a woman who worshipped God. **Vs. 14**
 - d. She was also a businesswoman who was originally from the city of Thyatira, although she lived in Philippi at this time.
 - e. Apparently she was either widowed or never married, since no husband is ever mentioned.
 2. Her business was selling "purple". Some translations add "cloth", but the NKJV stays strictly with the original language that only indicates "purple", which was a very expensive type of dye reserved for the elite of society.
 - a. This dye was written about 1600 years before Jesus was born.
 - b. It was so expensive that only the emperor wore a toga made entirely of purple cloth.
 3. The dye was so expensive because it of the extreme difficulty in extracting it.
 - a. Thousands of mollusks (snails) were required to dye a single yard of fabric.
 - b. The specific mollusk needed was especially prominent in Thyatira, which was 250 miles southeast of Philippi in the Roman province of Asia. **See map at the end of this section.**
 - c. The purple colored dye was extracted from a gland in mollusks (snails).
 - d. It produced a deep blue violet dye that, unlike other dyes, is colorfast when washed.
 - e. The snails were gathered in autumn and winter and kept alive until a huge quantity had been collected, since each shell produced only a single drop of dye.

- f. The dye was extracted by crushing the smaller shells and piercing the larger ones which produced a milky fluid which was put into brine where vinegar was added.
 - g. It was left in the sun until the color gradually transformed from a yellowish hue to a deep purplish red.
 - h. It was then boiled down to further concentrate it.
 - i. It took approximately 12,000 shells to extract one half of an ounce of dye.
 - j. A whole cloak of purple fabric would cost approximately 10,000 denarii (equal to thirty years of wages for an average person).
 - k. Lydia's involvement in this business explains how she had the resources to host Paul and his companions during their lengthy stay in Philippi.
4. Paul, Silas and Timothy saw a group of women by the riverside and they sat down and spoke to them.
- a. Lydia was one of those women and she believed the gospel message Paul presented.
 - b. Lydia and all of her household were baptized and she begged Paul and Timothy to come to her house saying: **Acts 16:15** – *"If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay."*
 - c. So they stayed in her home while they taught the gospel in Philippi.
5. One day as they went to prayer, a slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination (fortune telling) met them. **Vs. 16**
- a. Her master made a great profit by charging people to have their fortune told.
 - b. The girl followed Paul for several days saying: *"These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaimed to us the way of salvation."* **Vs. 17**
 - c. Paul became very annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, *"I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her."*
 - d. The spirit left her immediately, but her masters were furious when they learned that their hopes for making a fortune with this girl was gone.
 - e. They dragged Paul and Silas into the marketplace and brought them before the magistrates. **Vs. 22** (apparently Timothy was not with them.)
 - f. They accused Paul and Silas of teaching customs which were not lawful for Romans to observe.
 - g. When the multitude became angry, the magistrates commanded that Paul and Silas be beaten with rods.
 - h. They removed their clothes and beat them until their bodies were cut with many stripes and then put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in stocks. (They wanted to be very sure they could not escape.) **Vs. 24**
6. At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

- a. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, and the foundations of the prison were shaken so that the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosened.
- b. The jailer awoke and saw that the prison doors were open, and supposing the prisoners were gone, he drew his sword and prepared to kill himself. After all, his superiors would kill him anyway. **Vs. 27**
- c. Paul called out loudly saying, *"Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."* **Vs. 28**
- d. The jailer called for a light and he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas, saying *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* **Vs. 30**
- e. Paul said, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."* **Vs. 31**
- f. **Then** Paul "spoke the word of the Lord" to him and to all who were in his house.
 - 1) Many denominations have taken verse 31, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved..."*, and have created a false doctrine that teaches that belief in Jesus Christ is ALL one has to do to be saved.
 - 2) They have totally ignored the following verse that verifies that Paul "spoke the word of the Lord to him and all who were in his house."
 - a) When Paul himself was saved, it was not while he was still on the road to Damascus, but later when Ananias came to him instructing him to be baptized and "wash away his sins".
 - b) If Paul's sins were not "washed away" until baptism, why would he ever teach anyone else that belief was all that was necessary? After all, Paul believed that Jesus was the Christ when Jesus spoke to him on the road to Damascus.
 - c) This is simply one more example of how easily careless readers of the Bible can overlook important information – without which they twist the gospel into a false teaching.
 - 3) The result of Paul's "speaking the word of the Lord" to the jailer was that the jailer and his entire household were baptized. Why would they do that unless part of the "word of the Lord" included the doctrine of baptism for the forgiveness of sin?
 - 4) The jailer then washed the wounds on their backs and gave them food to eat and he rejoiced in his new faith along with his household.
- g. The next morning the magistrates told the officers of the prison to let Paul and Silas go.
 - 1) Paul would not be dismissed so quickly. He said that they had beaten Roman citizens publicly without a trial and now they would not be put out secretly.
 - 2) Paul insisted that the magistrates come to let them out personally.
 - 3) When the officers gave this message to the magistrates, they were afraid when they learned that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens who were protected from such treatment before a formal trial.

- 4) The magistrates went to the prison and begged them to leave the city.
- 5) When Paul and Silas left, they went back to Lydia's house to encourage the Christians there.
- 6) The group of brethren encouraged Paul and Silas to leave town before more harm came to them.
7. Lydia was a faithful servant of God who used her wealth to support the newly established church in Philippi, which was a successful church for many, many more years.
8. Even as a "babe in Christ" Lydia didn't have to be begged or "talked into" getting deeply involved in the work of the church.
 - a. She felt compelled to assist Paul and Silas and Timothy from the moment she was baptized.
 - b. She was a great example for all of her household, which may have included her parents or perhaps just servants and employees.
 - c. As we discussed a couple of weeks ago, good works will not earn our home in heaven, but our good works are the evidence of our faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, who has redeemed us from sin through the sacrifice He made on the cross.
 - d. Lydia was quick to learn that lesson.

Lydia was from the city of Thyatira, where very expensive purple dye was produced. Paul met Lydia in Philippi by the river where she came to pray on the Sabbath. She was considered the first convert in Asia.



II. PRISCILLA (PRISCA is a nickname)

A. Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, are introduced to us in **Acts 18:1-3**

"² And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them."

1. It was the providence of God that brought Priscilla and Aquila to Corinth which resulted in their meeting with Paul.
 - a. In 49 AD, Emperor Tiberius Claudius issued an edict expelling all the Jews from Rome, so Priscilla and Aquila had to leave their home.
 - b. Verse two verifies that Aquila was a Jew, but no mention is made of Priscilla's background. It is likely that she was also a Jew, since faithful Jews knew that God forbid marriage outside of their faith, but there is no evidence to confirm that.

B. Approximately 52-53 AD, Priscilla and Aquila moved to the port city of Corinth, where they re-established their tent making business. **See map on the last page.**

1. The portability of their trade made it easier for them to survive after being expelled from Rome.
2. They were already Christians when they moved to Corinth, so they were either converted in Jerusalem where the church was established on the Day of Pentecost, OR they were converted by some of the new Christians who came back from Jerusalem after celebrating the Feast of Weeks.
3. The fact that they were tentmakers and Christians made it logical that they would eventually meet Paul, since he was a tentmaker also.
 - a. Paul became friends with the couple almost immediately.
 - b. He stayed in their home and worked with them in their business.

Acts 18:3

- c. When he was not making tents, Paul "reasoned" with the Jews in the synagogue every Sabbath. **Acts 18:4**
- d. Many of the Jews and Greeks were persuaded by Paul's message.
- e. However when Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul preached to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ, but many of them opposed Paul.
- f. Paul shook out his garments and said, "*Your blood be upon your own heads, I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.*" **Acts 18:6**
- g. Paul then stopped teaching in the synagogue and taught from the home of a man named Justus.
- h. During this time Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all of his household and many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized.
- i. Paul remained in Corinth one and one-half years, but over the years he returned to Corinth two more times. **Acts 18:11**

C. Approximately 53-54 AD, when Paul left Corinth, Priscilla and Aquila went with him to Ephesus. **Acts 18:18**

1. There Paul taught in the synagogue and the people asked him to stay; however, Paul said he had to go to Jerusalem for the upcoming feast, but he promised to return to Ephesus. **Acts 18:20-21**
2. Priscilla and Aquila stayed on in Ephesus. Paul trusted them to be more than qualified to spread the gospel there.
3. After Paul left, a new evangelist arrived in Ephesus named Apollos.
4. He was a Jew born in Alexandria (Egypt) and he was an eloquent speaker who was very knowledgeable about the Scriptures (Old Testament).
 - a. He was converted to Christianity at some point, and being “instructed in the way of the Lord”, he was eager to share the message of Jesus Christ.
 - b. There was only one problem: he knew about the baptism of John but he had not been taught that baptism was for the forgiveness of sins and in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
 - c. He was simply preaching the truth as he knew it but he was not fully informed. Many are guilty of that still today.
 - d. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him speaking boldly in the synagogue in Corinth, they saw that he lacked some very important knowledge.
 - e. Not wanting to embarrass him in the presence of the members meeting in the synagogue, they waited until after his sermon and took him aside privately.
 - f. There they explained to him “the way of God more accurately.”
Acts 18:26
 - g. Apollos was not offended, nor defensive nor argumentative. His feelings were not hurt because his ignorance on this issue was pointed out. He was grateful that Priscilla and Aquila took time to correct his error.
 - h. He was eager to accept the entire truth and when he wanted to move on to Achaia, the brethren in Ephesus write a letter exhorting the disciples there to receive him since he had been taught the complete truth.
 - i. Think how quickly the gospel would spread today if:
 - 1) everyone was so eager to know the truth
 - 2) everyone would accept it when they heard it
 - 3) everyone would teach that message to everyone they possibly could
 - 4) everyone would correct scriptural error when they hear it.
5. When Paul returned from Jerusalem, the work that Paul, Priscilla and Aquila did in Ephesus was very successful and many turned away from the false idols to believe in Jesus Christ.
 - a. Paul stayed there two and one-half years.
 - b. Because of their great success a “great commotion” was stirred up about the Paul and his teaching. **Acts 19:23**
 - 1) There was a silversmith named Demetrius made silver shrines and statues of Diana for the idolaters living in Ephesus – and business was good.

- 2) However, when Paul began teaching the gospel of Christ, his business began to decrease because the people who were converted to Christ realized that the idols were worthless and stopped buying D
 - 3) Demetrius stirred up the other craftsmen saying that it was Paul's fault that their prosperity was diminishing and that their famous temple of the goddess Diana would be destroyed if he continued with this teaching. **Acts 19:23-28**
 - 4) The crowd grew into a riot and Paul's life was in danger, so after the riot was calmed down, Paul decided to move on to Greece where he stayed three months. **Acts 20:1-3**
- c. Approximately 53-55 AD, while Paul was in Ephesus, he wrote his first letter to the **Corinthians**.
- 1) In **I Corinthians 16:19** Paul sent greetings to the church in Corinth from the "churches of Asia and from Priscilla and Aquila and the church that is in their house."
 - 2) It is not surprising to find that Priscilla and Aquila opened their home in Ephesus as a place for the brethren to meet for worship.
- D. Approximately 56-57 AD, Paul wrote the book of Romans while on his third and last visit to Corinth.
1. Remember that Emperor Tiberius Claudius had expelled all of the Jews in 49AD.
 2. There was a significant population of Jews in Rome at that time.
 3. Some of the Jews there were converted to Christianity, but those who held firmly to the Law of Moses and rejected Jesus as the Christ opposed the Christian Jews.
 4. The division between the two groups was so passionate that it often resulted in violent conflicts or riots.
 - a. Just as Paul had been a persecutor of Christians in his fervor to prevent what he thought was "blasphemous teaching" by the first Christians, other cities also had devout Jews who tried to stamp out this "new sect" of Christian Jews. **Acts 9:1-2, Acts 13:44,45,50; 14:1-6**
 - b. Just as Paul was zealously dragging the new Christians out of their houses in order to put them in prison for their belief, so this was also occurring in other cities.
 - c. Persecution initiated by the Jews was common during the first century of the church.
 - d. Some of the new Christians were killed for their public declaration of their belief in Jesus as the Christ.
 - e. Claudius made no distinction between Jews who did not believe in Christ and Jews who did believe in Christ. He just ordered all Jews out of Rome in order to achieve peace in Rome.
 - f. This had a profound impact on the Christian community in Rome.

- g. For many reasons, including their knowledge of the scriptures regarding the prophecies of Jesus as the Christ, Jewish Christians provided the bulk of leadership and teaching in many of the early congregations.
- h. Those congregations had a distinctly Jewish character, and many things were done in distinctively Jewish ways.
- i. When the Jews were expelled, the church in Rome lost most of its leadership and many of its teachers.
- j. Converted Gentiles took over the vacated roles, and the basic character of the church in Rome changed from the way Jewish Christians did things to the way Gentile Christians did things.
- k. Claudius died in 54 AD and consequently his order to expel the Jews was automatically ended at his death. This prompted many Jews returned to Rome, including many Jewish Christians. They returned with two basic expectations.
 - 1) First, they expected to assume the leadership roles in the church they had filled before leaving Rome.
 - 2) Second, they expected the church to do things the way they were done before they left.
- l. As a result, a major conflict developed between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians in Rome.
 - 1) This conflict was the basic reason for Paul's letter to the Romans, although he had not established this congregation.
 - a) He had to halt the errors of the "Judaizing teachers" who insisted that certain parts of the Law of Moses were requirements for Christianity.
 - b) Some of the issues they faced were:
 - (i) Jews insisted that Gentiles be circumcised.
 - (ii) Jew taught Gentiles to avoid certain "unclean foods"
 - (iii) Jewish Christians demanding more authority because they were "offspring of Abraham"
 - c) This was the purpose of Paul's letter to the Romans. He had to settle the dispute caused by the Judaizing teachers.
 - d) Paul clearly and repetitively taught in his letter to the Roman Christians that nothing in the Law of Moses was of any value in securing salvation either for the Jews or the Gentiles – the Law of Moses was obsolete. **Romans 7:4-6**
 - m. In **Romans 16**, Paul sent greetings to many Christians in Rome who had been very helpful to him in his work of spreading the Gospel and Priscilla and Aquila were chief among those listed.
- 5. How did they come to be in Rome again?
 - a. Priscilla and Aquila were some of multitude of Jews who returned to Rome some time after 54AD when Emperor Claudius died.
 - b. Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned with great appreciation. Paul commended them for:
 - 1) Risking their own lives on Paul's behalf

- 2) Paul indicated that all of the Gentile churches were grateful to Priscilla and Aquila for defending Paul which enabled Paul to establish many churches among the Gentiles.
 - 3) Paul also sent greetings to the "church that is in their house".
 - a) This is the second church we have verified that met in their house.
 - b) Wherever they went, the church seemed to thrive.
- E. Approximately 67AD (eleven years after writing Romans), Paul wrote the second letter to Timothy, which was probably his last letter before his death.
1. In this letter to Timothy, Paul knows that his life is very near its end.

2 Timothy 4:6
 2. This letter gives Timothy, his son in the faith, a final message encouraging him to continue the work he has so faithfully done with Paul as well as on his own.
 3. At this time Timothy was working fulltime with the church in Ephesus, where Paul left him to ensure that they remained strong and faithful. **I Timothy 1:4**
 4. Timothy had been there approximately four years and at this time Priscilla and Aquila were there as well.

2 Timothy 4:19 – Paul writes: "*Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.*" Prisca is a nickname for Priscilla.

 - a. It is endearing to see that Priscilla's name is never mentioned without her faithful husband Aquila.
 - b. They were united as one in marriage and they worked together as one in the work of spreading the gospel and faithfully supporting the church in wherever they went.
 5. What brought Priscilla and Aquila back from Rome to Ephesus?
 - a. When Claudius died, Nero became emperor in his place.
 - b. Nero was a self-absorbed, morally bankrupt tyrant who murdered his own mother, his first wife and many others.
 - c. In 64AD, the city of Rome suffered a catastrophic fire that was rumored to be started by Nero so he could rebuild the city in his own honor.
 - d. In order to deflect the blame for the fire from himself, Nero accused the Christians of starting the fire.
 - e. He used this excuse to initiate the most heinously outrageous persecution of Christian in history.
 - f. He took pleasure in torturing Christians to death and even introduced it as entertainment for the citizens of Rome.
 - g. This forced the Christians to leave Rome in order to escape Nero's unimaginable cruelty.
 - h. It was most likely at this time that Priscilla and Aquila returned to Ephesus, where they had spend time with Paul in establishing the church there.

- i. Timothy was working there at the time and they assisted him in the work.
- F. When I see the important part that Priscilla and Aquila played in the growth of the church in the first century, I wonder if I would have the strength of faith to accept the challenges they did.
1. When_ they were expelled from Rome, they just moved their business to another city where their business could be rebuilt.
 2. As Christians, apparently they sought out other Christians in their new location which resulted in a lifelong friendship with the Apostle Paul.
 3. They didn't just complain because there was no church in Corinth in which to meet, they joined Paul in establishing a church by teaching the gospel themselves, alongside Paul.
 4. They not only taught the gospel themselves, but they corrected the errors of others who were teaching error.
 5. When they moved again to Ephesus, they didn't complain that they only found twelve believers in the whole city, they stayed and successfully taught the gospel in a city where idolatry was deeply ingrained in their society.
 6. Wherever they went, they opened their home as a meeting place for the church to gather.
 7. They witnessed the horrific persecution initiated by Nero upon the Christians of Rome and were forced to leave their home again.
 8. I wonder if I moved to a place where there was no scripturally sound congregation of the church, would I:
 - a. Be willing to commit to helping establish a congregation?
 - b. Know the Bible well enough to teach it truthfully to others?
 - c. Willing to open my home as a meeting place two or three times a week?
 - d. Be grateful to God for such an opportunity OR use it as an excuse for doing nothing?
 9. Today there are more and more communities that have no "scripturally sound" congregation.
 - a. We had better prepare ourselves and our children to accept that challenge if the church is to survive in the future.
 - b. We are in an age now where we need another "Restoration Movement", since so many churches are moving away from the basic doctrines established in the first century church.

Priscilla and Aquila assisted in the establishment of churches in Corinth and Ephesus (and possibly others) along with the Apostle Paul. They also worked in the church in Rome before they were forced to leave to escape the persecution of Emperor Nero in 64BC.

