

Little Known Great Women of the Bible: Lydia of Thyatira — A Woman of Faith and Action

By Mary J. Ferrill Brown



I enjoy delving deep into Bible characters who are only mentioned briefly in passing. My initial interest in these rare people originated many years ago after reading the book: *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life*. Jabez was only mentioned in two short verses in the middle of the long lists of biblical “begats” (1 Chronicles 4:9-10). The book was life changing for me. It opened my eyes to the major influence that minor characters can exert on the lives of everyday people. Since then, I have sought other characters to learn more about their unique stories. One such person is Lydia. I immediately felt a connection to her because she sold purple fabric (my favorite color!) and so few women in the Bible appear to have been in leadership roles. Indeed, there is much we can learn from Lydia.

Lydia is referred to by name only in the book of Acts, when Paul and his companions preached in Philippi. She is only mentioned in three verses: *“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. One of those listening was a*

woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. 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.” (Acts 16:13-15, NIV). She is also mentioned at the end of the chapter: *“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.”* Acts 16:40 (NIV)

Lydia was probably not her actual name but refers to the region where she was from (Thyatira in the province of Lydia, now modern-day Turkey). Her name is not of significance, but her actions were profound. Lydia was referred to as “a dealer in purple cloth.” This provides two important pieces of information: since she sold purple cloth, she must have been wealthy and had connections with powerful people. Only royalty and the wealthy could afford purple fabric. Tyrian purple was a dye made from marine mollusks, which was much more expensive to make compared to a lesser vibrant reddish local dye, known today as Turkish Red. Also, the fact that she was “a dealer in purple cloth” tells us that she engaged in a vocation typically restricted to men; so she was a bold woman, willing to push the boundaries of that culture. More importantly, the text states: *“She was a worshiper of God.”* This is very unusual since she was not a Jew, but she still chose to follow the one true God. In Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV) it states: *“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”* Hebrews 11:6 (NIV) further explains: *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”* Lydia helps us to understand that your heritage or your social status does not matter to God. He stands at everyone’s door and knocks, desiring for us to fellowship with Him (see Revelation 3:20).

Because Lydia was a woman of action even before meeting Paul and Silas, she was part of a group of women who prayed regularly outside the city to the God of the Jews. That is where she met Paul and Silas. Lydia became Paul’s first recorded Gentile European convert. She was chosen by God. Acts 16:14 (NIV) states that *“The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.”* Lydia sprang into action and was baptized, along with her entire household. No doubt it was her personal influence that led her family to be baptized. It is reasonable to assume that she was not married, because she appears to have been the head of her household. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that although Luke frequently mentioned women in his writings, he rarely quoted a woman directly, as in the case of Lydia: *“If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.”* Acts 16:15 (NIV). She must have been an assertive, outspoken, and determined woman. Hosting Paul and his companions (who were foreigners and known to be disrupters and were imprisoned) in her home for several weeks could have ruined her reputation and business, but she was faithful and trusted in the Lord.

Although Acts is the only book of the Bible to mention Lydia by name, her home was used by the church at Philippi. Jesus commended the believers in Thyatira, saying, *“I know your deeds, your love, and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.”* (Revelation 2:19, NIV). Lydia’s house was the location of church meetings, so she probably played an influential role in the good deeds, love, faith, service, and perseverance of her church.

Lydia's response to the Good News was a complete transformation both inside and out. Her example of faithfulness inspires me to recall the words of my life verse, Jeremiah 20:9 (NIV): "But if I say, 'I will not mention Him or speak anymore in His name,' His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot." Lydia understood that the hallmark of abiding faith is to trust in Christ and obey Him by caring for others, both spiritually and physically. She saw the value of mentoring others and taking a leadership role in bringing the Good News to her world. May there be a little Lydia in all of us!



St Paul Meeting Lydia of Thyatira by Edward Irvine Halliday. (1902-84) oil on canvas. Victoria Gallery & Museum, Liverpool, England.
artuk.org/discover/artworks/st-paul-meeting-lydia-of-thyatira-66511

What Role Could Artificial Intelligence Play in Fulfilling Bible Prophecy?

By Daniel Spadaro and Nena Lindrose

Prelude

I, Nena, became interested in artificial intelligence (AI) when I began to learn how extensively it is being used by Christian leaders and pastors to direct their organizations and churches. This seemed to contradict how I believed a Christian leader should manage the church and serve the Lord. Most people would agree that consulting AI for basic information (rather than spending valuable time and effort to research it) is acceptable and nearly impossible to avoid in our culture; but using AI to prepare a sermon, a prayer, a message, or a paper seemed wrong to me. More importantly, it can easily leave out the necessary connection between the Christian leader/writer and the Holy Spirit. By praying, reading the inspired Word of God, and seeking the Holy Spirit for our words, messages, prayers, and sermons, we invite the Lord to lead the Church, as He should. If we do not give Him the opportunity to have His rightful place in our churches and organizations, then who holds this place? I was curious as to how pervasive and extensive the use of AI is becoming with other Christian leaders, so I interviewed a Chief Operating Officer at a

very large and well-known Christian organization. I also sent similar questions to another (even larger) Christian organization. Both leaders felt strongly that sermons, prayers, and messages should not be written by AI, or even predominantly written or developed using an AI tool. However, my questions seemed to cause them to think more about where Christian leaders are headed and where they are taking our churches and organizations. We all recognized that we do not have any guidelines in place for using AI in our Christian organizations, and not one of us has an official position statement on the use of AI. These thoughts and concerns caused me to reach out to my friend and fellow CPFI member, Dr. Daniel Spadaro, and ask him if he would consider exploring this topic with me for an article to be published in *Christianity & Pharmacy*. What you will read in this article is the result of many hours of research by Dr. Spadaro. The use of AI is an enormous topic which covers many different areas that should be of interest to Christian healthcare providers. Through our discussions, we have tried to condense the research and information we gathered into this article. We hope that, at a minimum, what