

## A SELF-MADE WOMAN

Lydia is a self-made woman and a very successful businesswoman who is referred to in the Bible as a “dealer in purple”. This term means that she sold and traded purple linen and was involved in the dyeing process, which would have been a very profitable business. Purple at that time signified status and wealth. The Romans used purple and the various shades of it to designate the aristocracy (usually senators) and royalty (the emperor) in their empire.

Lydia comes from Thyatira in Asia Minor, and later she moves and works in the city of Philippi in Macedonia. As a Gentile who was attracted to Judaism and attended the synagogue, but never formally converted to Judaism, she sought to grow in her faith. Fortunately, she hears Paul and Silas preaching, which converts her and her entire household to Christianity, and she then uses her wealth and position to assist the infant church (you can read her story in Acts 16:14-15; 40).

## CHARITY

She offers housing for Christian missionaries on their many travels. Her kindness and thoughtfulness go beyond occasional charitable acts. Instead Lydia personifies that ideal the obligation and duty of society's wealthy and powerful to help the less fortunate. She sets a good example by using her home and her money for the sake of those in need and for the spread of the faith. Although some forsake their



earthly treasures for the sake of serving God, others use the blessings they have in the forms of wealth and possessions and power or influence to also serve God by helping those less fortunate.

The story of Lydia in the Bible is a great example of God's wisdom and his care for believers. Lydia was a worshipper of God but, like Cornelius in Acts 10, had not yet heard the gospel. God rerouted Paul and friends and also ensured that Lydia would be in the right place at the right time to encounter Paul and hear the good news of Jesus. And, as Lydia heard the gospel, God opened her heart so that she received the life-giving message.

## LUKE'S VIEW

Luke's placing of Lydia (an Eastern businesswoman turned Christian heroine) at Philippi (a city where many were converted by Paul, yet where polytheism and female participation in religion was thriving) had a theological message. For Luke, Lydia represents an example to the women of Philippi: even businesswomen who own homes and have servants should convert to Luke's understanding of Christianity, offer their wealth and resources to Christian missionaries (who were usually men) and allow men to keep or undertake leadership roles in the community. Luke's judgement does not have to be the final word however. Today, instead of viewing Lydia and other women like her as pawns in male leaders' games, women can recognise them as resilient, affluent, and independent people who, upon embracing the new Christian movement, became leaders in it. ■

Front cover: "Lydia"; Painted by Eispeth Young

# SoulSpace

SERIES: WOMEN FROM THE BIBLE

Season colour: **GREEN**

In this series, **Máire Byrne** examines key female figures from the Old and New Testaments.



## LYDIA – AN EXAMPLE OF GOD'S WISDOM & CARE

Lydia is referred to as the first Christian convert of Europe. Lydia and others like her demonstrate that you can have wealth, power, position and influence, and be a devout Christian, as long as you recognise the plight of the disenfranchised and powerless and do something to help them. She is able to be poor in spirit by not allowing her material possessions to possess her. She shares liberally and happily, and her kindness helps key figures like the apostle Paul and Silas (a Christian leader from Jerusalem) when they need a place to stay after being released from prison in Philippi.



## Today's readings

1 Kg 19:9.11-13

Rm 9:1-5

Mt 14:22-33

that is not the end for Peter. The Lord, who stretched out a hand to support him in the storm at sea and help him back into the boat, will meet him again after the resurrection as the forgiving Lord and restore him to his place as leader of the community.

## GOD'S WORD TODAY

In today's Gospel, the story about Peter shows two sides of the apostle. The first is his generous commitment to Jesus. He is prepared to come to him even if it means defying the wind and the waves. The second side is his impulsiveness; he is liable to collapse in time of crisis. The best illustration of those two sides will be his denial of Jesus. He followed him to the house of the high priest when the others abandoned him. While he is there, a storm will break, and Peter will deny that he knows Jesus. He will prove again that he is a man of weak faith. Yet

