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The Greco-Roman Diasporic Women in Acts 16

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Acts 16 presents the stories of two selected diasporic women whose lives were shaped by the experiences of displacement in the Greco-Roman period. These women's stories appear within the narrative of Paul's second missionary journey. Their lives and experiences emerge from Paul's response to God's calling and are deeply embedded in settings of voluntary and forced diaspora, respectively. Although the two women's stories differ greatly in social status, freedom, and social power, their encounters with Paul reveal important theological and ethical insights into their key roles in the expansion of the gospel into Jewish-Gentile worlds. Their stories offer insight into how God works through displacement to transform individuals and build new faith communities.

Each of the two women experienced diaspora differently, yet God used their lives in meaningful ways. Just as in today's global migrations, these stories show that God uses the lives of the displaced to bridge divides and sow hope in those in a waiting season. The study of these women highlights the meaningful roles diasporic women played in strengthening the early church, suggesting that God has divine purposes in the border-crossing journeys of diasporic people who follow him.

The Historical Context of Acts

According to tradition, the book of Acts was written by Luke, a Gentile Christian physician and close friend of the apostle Paul. The internal evidence supports common authorship with the Gospel of Luke, as both volumes are addressed to Theophilus (Luke 1:1–4, Acts 1:1) and together form a two-part narrative of God's saving work, first through Jesus and then through the early church. Acts continues the story by tracing the growth of

the gospel from Jerusalem to the wider Greco-Roman world. Acts was written to address a Gentile audience and seeks to provide an accurate historical record, proclaim the core message of the gospel, defend Christianity within the Roman world, and promote unity between Jewish and Gentile believers. This book focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit, church growth, witness, opposition, and persecution. Acts presents a dynamic narrative filled with divine intervention, miraculous events, bold preaching, suffering, and movement across regions. Beyond the dramatic stories, Acts shows how God transforms the lives of individuals and communities. It indicates that faith grows through the challenges of moving to new lands, facing hard times, encountering persecution, and undergoing cultural transition. The disciples, once fearful and scattered, are transformed into courageous witnesses, and Paul himself becomes a central figure, serving among diverse peoples and traversing cultural boundaries.[1]

The narrative of Acts 16 follows Paul's second missionary journey, spreading the gospel far into the Gentile world. During his second journey, Paul revisited several earlier sites, namely, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Galatia, and Phrygia. Following God's lead from Troas, he then traveled into Macedonia, visiting the key cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea before going on to Athens and Corinth and finally returning to Antioch. This movement across borders shows the mission spreading through the diaspora's diverse networks. It highlights the specific cities of Philippi (where Lydia and the slave woman lived). The narrative arc sets the stage for the stories of Lydia and the slave woman by showing the path Paul took to reach them.[2]

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[1] Grant R. Osborne and Philip W. Comfort, *Acts: Life Application Bible Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2021), xi–xx; Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 8–28.

[2] Bock, *Acts*, 16–17; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 3:2337.

At the time narrated in Acts 16, Lydia and the slave woman lived in Philippi. Philippi was a Roman colony, a status that granted its citizens specific legal privileges like those in Rome itself.[3] It was characterized by social inequality and a pluralistic environment shaped by Roman political power, economic networks, cultural diversity, and various religious traditions.[4]

According to Kwŏn, many people in Philippi were migrants, traders, slaves, or religious seekers who lived far from their original homelands yet maintained their identities, religions, cultures, and traditions. At the same time, they navigated the unfamiliar cultures of their host lands. Women, in particular, experienced diaspora in unique ways due to their social vulnerability, household roles, economic networks, legal positions, and religious communities. Some people enjoyed privilege, while others lived in deep vulnerability, especially women, migrants, and enslaved persons.[5]

Encounter 1: Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:11–15, 40)

Lydia is described as a seller of purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, living in Philippi. The meaning of the Greek name Lydia is "travail."[6] Lydia's place of origin, Thyatira, was a city in Asia Minor known for its trade guilds, especially in textile production. Lydia is the first woman in the narrative of Acts that Paul encounters after entering Macedonia, and the first recorded convert to Christianity in Europe (Acts 16:11–15). Lydia was a God-fearer, that is, probably a Gentile, not a Jew.[7] According to Darrell L. Bock, "Lydia

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[3] James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 257.

[4] Osborne and Comfort, *Acts: Life Application Bible Commentary*, 280,311.

[5] Yŏn-gyŏng Kwŏn, *A Commentary on Acts* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015), 1.

[6] "G3070 - Lydia - Strong's Greek Lexicon (KJV)," Blue Letter Bible, accessed April 24, 2024, https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/gen/1/1/s_1001.

[7] Dunn, *Acts*, 254; Francis Martin, ed., *Acts*, V, with Evan Smith and Thomas C.

[was] a pious woman.... This phrase often describes former polytheists who become worshipers of the God of Israel, adopt monotheism, and attend the synagogue but do not keep the entire Jewish law (Acts 13:43)."[8] This suggests Lydia was likely of Greek background and held a respected position in society.

Her Encounter with Paul in Philippi

Lydia met Paul on a Sabbath outside the city gates of Philippi by a river, a place where women gathered for prayer (Acts 16:13). Sabbath was a special day for Jews and God-fearers. Some rabbis believed that "God spoke in the Diaspora only in pure places near water."[9] Water was vital for rituals. The setting by the river is significant because it shows that, as a worshiper of God, Lydia was also practicing her faith. The synagogues were also known as places of prayer. In cities where there were not enough Jewish men to form a synagogue, prayer gatherings often took place in informal spaces. Luke records that "the Lord opened her heart" (Acts 16:14 ESV), leading to Lydia's baptism and that of her entire household. The narrative immediately shifts from the riverbank to Lydia's home, which becomes the primary base for the early Christian mission in Philippi.[10]

Lydia as a Diasporic Woman

Lydia's occupation as a seller of purple cloth suggests that she was connected to long-distance trade routes and elite markets. Purple dye was expensive and often associated with royalty and wealth. Having a home and business in Philippi, Lydia lived and worked outside her homeland, likely

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Oden, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 200–203.

[8] Bock, *Acts*, 534.

[9] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2385.

[10] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2380–88.

navigating foreign customs and social expectations. It is reasonable to consider Lydia as a diasporic woman because her identity is defined by voluntary economic migration. She lived between cultures, maintaining her business connections to her homeland while navigating the social structures of a Roman military city. Furthermore, she existed in a spiritual diaspora; as a God-fearer, she belonged neither fully to the pagan world of Philippi nor fully to the Jewish community, placing her in a liminal, or in-between social situation.[11]

Luke does not explicitly identify Lydia's marital status, but the narrative and historical context invite careful consideration of her circumstances. The absence of any mention of a husband is striking, especially given Luke's tendency to name husbands when they are present and relevant. Many scholars therefore suggest that Lydia was likely a widow, a divorced woman, or possibly a freedwoman acting independently.[12] If she were married, cultural expectations would suggest that her husband, rather than Lydia alone, would have invited Paul and his companions to stay in their home. The repeated narrative focus on Lydia herself (Acts 16:14–15, 40) further strengthens the likelihood that she functioned as the head of her household. Widowhood in the Roman world often granted women greater legal and economic independence, but also carried social vulnerability and shame. Divorced women, particularly those without moral accusation, could retain property and eventually engage in business activities.

Lydia owned a home large enough to host Paul and his companions, suggesting she was a woman of wealth and independent means.[13] Possibly,

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[11] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2389.

[12] See, for example, Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 493; Keener, *Acts*, 3:2404–8.

[13] David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 254; Willie James Jennings, *Acts* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 158.

she was an elite freedwoman—someone who had gained her independence and built a successful business.[14] While her exact status cannot be determined with certainty, Luke's portrayal presents her as an economically independent woman exercising authority over her household.[15]

Experience of a Merchant and Life in Diaspora

Lydia's occupation as a seller of purple cloth reveals much about her economic and social status. Although other places also produced the purple dye, the best and most famous purple dye came from Tyre. The purple dyes were made from Mediterranean murex shellfish, which were crushed to release the dye fluid for the vat. Some murex shellfish were four inches wide and up to a foot long. The shellfish were caught and crushed while alive because they produced purple only when alive. After that, the workers would break the murex shellfish with an iron tool, which would extract a purple liquid. The workers would have to mix honey with the liquid quickly to prevent it from drying out. It took many shellfish to produce even a gram of dye. Thus, the purple dye produced by this method was one of the most expensive and prestigious products in the ancient world. The production method, however, was regarded as a smelly, dirty process involving animal urine, sea snail secretions, and complex, intense labor. For this reason, dye houses were usually in isolated places.[16]

During the Greco-Roman time, purple dyes were rare, expensive, and highly valued because they symbolized great wealth. Sometimes, entertainers would steal purple-dye napkins and sell them at a higher price. People wore dyed clothes together with gold. The rulers and emperors wore

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[14] Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 321.

[15] Witherington, *Acts*, 493–95.

[16] See the section entitled, "Inferring Non-Jewish Women from the Jewish Diasporic Women," in Chapter 3, above. Cf. Keener, *Acts*, 3:2398.

purple. Laws in some regions even restricted who could wear certain shades of purple. However, despite the high status associated with having purple products, the purple trade itself carried risks. It required access to trade networks, capital, and trust. Lydia's success depended on her reputation and relationships. Her economic independence did not remove vulnerability; instead, it placed her in a position where failure or scandal could have serious consequences. Lydia's economic status, therefore, reflects a complex combination of privilege and exposure, common among diasporic women who rely on mobility and networks for survival.[17]

As a woman engaged in long-distance trade, Lydia occupied a vulnerable position in a male-dominated economic world, despite her financial resources. But her vulnerability as a diasporic woman does not signify weakness. Rather, it highlights the tension she lived with daily. She was both empowered and exposed. Her experience shows that diaspora can be a space of opportunity mixed with vulnerability, where economic success provides the resources to support a new community. Her social standing depended largely on her economic role and her household rather than on her legal status. Although diasporic women often found opportunities through work and networks, they remained socially and politically vulnerable.[18]

Rereading Lydia's Story through a Diaspora Lens

Lydia's story is a significant element in the larger narrative of the early church's expansion. As noted above, she was not in her original land. Her displacement shows that she was in a voluntary diaspora. Her settling as a trader in Philippi was probably due to the city's status as a commercial

[17] Keener, *Acts*, 3:2401–3.

[18] I discuss this phenomenon in chapters two and three of my master's thesis. See, Thang Hli Pai, "Diasporic Women in the New Testament: An Exploration of Encounters in the Book of Acts During Paul's Second Missionary Journey," Master's Thesis, Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, 2026.

center. Though the passage does not provide details about Lydia's migration or her length of residence in Philippi, her presence there as a merchant from Thyatira (Acts 16:14) suggests mobility characteristic of diaspora life.

Lydia's wealth might have given her easier access in the business world, but as a woman, life might have been challenging. As noted above, she is also described as a worshipper of God (Acts 16:14), an example of a Gentile woman who had a devout relationship with the true God but was not actually an observer of the Jewish law. Being a Gentile worshipper of God indicates that she had turned from her pagan gods and followed the Jewish way of worshipping the one God. She was among the Gentile women who gathered at Philippi each Sabbath to pray to the God of the Jews. This shows that Lydia's worship of God was not just private. Being a worshipper of God as a Gentile would have been challenging; she would have needed to adjust and adapt. These are the things we can know about who Lydia was. She lived between cultures, maintaining her business while navigating the social structure of the Roman city. We can say that she was also between spiritual worlds, existing as a God-fearing woman who followed neither pagan gods nor Jewish customs fully.[19] Furthermore, being a businesswoman and a devoted worshiper of God might have challenged her time management and balance.[20]

Still, she proved herself a spiritual seeker; she used her status as a wealthy woman to help other believers come to know God. When God opened her heart, she did not stay silent; she responded to God's call. She did not refuse it but responded with action by inviting and welcoming Paul

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[19] Although we cannot know exactly which Jewish laws and customs she might not have observed, based on her description as a God-fearer, it is reasonable to assume that she did not observe all.

[20] Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 95–189.

and his companions. She used her hospitality to make a way for the gospel to reach her whole family. When she heard the gospel, she listened, believed, and applied it in her life, including her household. She did not stop even there but invited the apostles to her house. She brought the rest of her household to Paul, and, apparently, they believed and were baptized.

The passage mentions that the members of her household were baptized with her, showing the contours of dependent people around her. She seems to have been the head of her household. She was not just a victim; she was a leader, a thriver. One thing we can also investigate is her inviting Paul and others to her house. Opening her household to Paul and his companions (Acts 16:15, 40) reflects more than personal generosity; it aligns with broader biblical patterns in which hospitality participates in God's mission (Romans 12:13, Hebrews 13:2). Lydia's response was both inward and outward. She immediately understood that her new faith offered many opportunities for practical application. As is well known, the gospel had life-changing effects. Lydia's life is a lesson for believers, an example of a response to the gospel.

Lydia's house was now a Christian home of worship. Lydia practically begged for the opportunity to host Paul and Silas in her home, rather than seeing the men as a burden and their presence as a disruption to her family and business routine. The fact that Paul and his companions revisited Lydia's house after their imprisonment shows that her house became a place for the believers in the early church to build a close relationship with one another and grow together in Christ (Acts 16:40). Consequently, Lydia's house became a place for other believers to find God. It became much like house churches, a space for others to be saved and feel safe (Acts 2:46–47).

Lydia's life also represents the women whose lives do not fit neatly into the patriarchal paradigm, yet who are clearly called, healed, transformed, and used. Her story offers powerful encouragement to diaspora women today, many of whom live in an uncomfortable, complex society. Lydia's ability to decide on baptism for her household and to invite Paul and his companions to her house indicates uncommon social authority for a

woman, but this is sometimes more possible in diaspora settings, where social structures are looser.

Lydia's household leadership reflects and represents both the independence and vulnerability of a diasporic woman in a male-dominated world. Her life experiences show that diaspora can be a space of opportunity mixed with vulnerability. While culture restricted women's participation in religion and society, Lydia's life shows that the diaspora also created a space for women to participate more freely and actively.

Lydia's story also shows how diasporic women maintained their identity and faith by following cultural traditions and religious rituals, and by building relationships in the community. The text describes Lydia as an active woman—a woman who listened, believed, and responded. Her story implies that those in diaspora who achieve success should use their mobility and resources to create a space for belonging for those still searching for a home where they can find physical, spiritual, and emotional support.

The story of Lydia reflects many themes. As a diasporic woman, she experiences both opportunities and challenges. Her economic independence provides stability, yet her social identity remains fragile. Her faith journey unfolds outside her original homeland, reflecting the faith of diaspora people in diaspora settings. Her life and experiences show that diasporic women are not merely the recipients of mission but active partners in God's kingdom mission. Lydia's life transformation begins not when her life is stable but rather while she was living between places, cultures, and religions. Her story also invites the reader to recognize and value the leadership of a woman not only in diaspora space but also in every ministry. Her becoming the first European believer is also a powerful example to learn and practice in our lives.

Encounter 2: Demonized Slave Woman (Acts 16:16–38)

The second female figure Paul encounters in Philippi is an unnamed slave woman who is described as having "a spirit of divination" (Acts 16:16, ESV).

Although her story is short, it is one of the most complex and troubling narratives in Acts. In the Greek text, she is called a *paidiskē,* the most common term for "a maidservant, a young female slave."[21] In the Roman Empire, slaves had few rights. They were categorized as merchandise and were often referred to simply as *sōmata* (bodies), indicating that they were viewed only for their physical labor or value.[22] The slave woman of Acts 16 was possessed by a *pneuma pythōna* (spirit of Python), a direct reference to the Pythian god (a dragon or snake-like spirit) at Delphi, the most famous place in the world for oracles. The Pythian spirit at Delphi was believed to overpower the priestesses, allowing them to foretell the future, a practice called soothsaying. When Acts describes the slave woman as having a Python spirit, it means she had the same kind of power as the famous priestesses at Delphi.[23] In the ancient world, magic and oracles were used to protect people from misfortune, to issue curses, and to secure divine messages. Magic sought to coerce the gods, whereas prayer petitioned them. Because she was associated with this dark side of magic, Paul was initially troubled by her presence.[24]

The Slave Woman as a Diasporic Woman

It is reasonable to consider this slave woman as a representative of the forced diaspora. Acts 16:16–18 describes her as a female slave with a spirit

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[21] "G3814 - Paidiskē - Strong's Greek Lexicon (KJV)," Blue Letter Bible, accessed March 9, 2026, https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/gen/1/1/s_1001.

[22] Anna Rebecca Solevåg, "Women on the Move in the New Testament," *Religion and Theology* 29, nos. 3–4 (2022): 15–17; Bock, *Acts*, 535.

[23] Richard P. Thompson, *Acts: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 2015), 280; W. Robert III Shade, *Acts*, ed. Bruce J. Nicholls and Brian Wintle, Asia Bible Commentary (Singapore: Asia Theological Association, 2007), 241.

[24] Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, Accordance electronic (Altamonte Springs, FL: OakTree Software, 2006), para. 11814; Bock, *Acts*, 535–36.

that enabled her to predict the future and adds that she earned money for her owners through fortune-telling. While Acts does not explicitly state where the slave woman was born, Solevåg argues that if she was originally from the area around Delphi, her presence as a slave in Philippi is a clear sign of forced migration. She could have been trafficked from her home region in Greece to the Roman colony of Philippi to be exploited for her gift of fortune-telling.[25] It shows that even her spiritual identity was tied to a specific place (Delphi) that she was forcibly removed from. The likelihood of her forced migration adds a layer of cultural displacement to her story. She could also be an internal diasporic woman. She was not just a slave; she was a woman whose religious background was also being monetized by her owners in a foreign city. Her ability to predict was not a matter of her own will. She was a victim of both a woman under exploitative enslavement and spiritual bondage.

Solevåg also points out that the slave woman is given no name in the text. When read through the lens of diaspora, her experience reveals the harshest form of displacement and vulnerability of trafficked slaves. Her identity sits at the intersection of being a woman, a slave, a pagan, and a demonized person. Her owners entirely controlled her mobility. Even after Paul performed an exorcism, she likely remained in a state of vulnerability, potentially being forced into other forms of labor like prostitution once her fortune-telling income was gone. Her fragile status could be the reason the slave woman in Acts 16:16 is never given a name. Her identity was completely erased by her status as property.[26]

The Encounter with Paul in Philippi

The encounter with the slave woman in Philippi (Acts 16:16–18) happens

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[25] Solevåg, "Women on the Move," 15–17.

[26] Solevåg, "Women on the Move."

in a public space as Paul and his companions were going to the place of prayer. As Paul and his companions moved through the city for many days, she followed them, shouting that they were "servants of the Most High God" (Acts 16:17, ESV). The text says that Paul was "grieved" (Acts 16:18, KJV). The Greek word translated "grieved" (*diaponeō*) means troubled, displeased, offended, pained, or annoyed.[27] He was grieved because her presence was a constant hindrance to his work. Paul spoke directly to the spirit and commanded the spirit to come out of her in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 16:18). The point was not to silence her voice, but to release her from the network of captivity. This shows that Jesus' ministry broke the power that held the slave woman captive. Paul spoke not only to the spirit but also against the system that controlled her life. The text reminds us that true ministry should help oppressed people become free, especially poor women whose voices are often hidden. It also shows that freedom comes at a cost.[28] By casting out the spirit, Paul was showing that the power of Jesus Christ was superior to the arts and powers of evil.[29]

Once their income was gone, the owners did not tell the judges they were mad about losing money. Instead, they acted like hypocritical citizens. They claimed Paul and Silas were troubling the city and teaching illegal customs (Acts 16:20–21). They used the law and religion as an excuse to attack the apostles because their dishonorable employment had been stopped. While the woman was in a state of bondage—both physically as a slave and spiritually by the demon—her owners only cared about their profits.[30]

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[27] "G1278 - Diaponeomai - Strong's Greek Lexicon (KJV)," Blue Letter Bible, accessed March 21, 2026, https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/gen/1/1/s_1001.

[28] Jennings, *Acts*, 160–61.

[29] Barnes, *Notes*, paragraph 11823.

[30] Barnes, *Notes*, paragraph 11822.

Rereading the Slave Woman's Story through a Diaspora Lens

When exploring the story of a slave woman through a diasporic lens, we can draw several key insights and a new perspective about her story and the text, especially in Acts 16:16–18. Among the three selected diasporic women, the slave woman is the only one who is not mentioned by her own name. She is simply called a slave woman and remains nameless in the text.[31] She was cut off from family, culture, and identity. She was a victim of human trafficking and economic exploitation. Her identity was defined by who she became; her life was not in her own hands but controlled by others, both physically and spiritually. She is representative of forced diasporic women who have no control over their own lives and no voice. While the other two selected diasporic women received benefits from their work, the slave woman lost the benefits of all her efforts. She was valuable not as a human being, but as a source of income.

The slave woman's story also shows us the dark side of society in the Greco-Roman world. Her condition was both social and spiritual bondage (Acts 16:16–18). Her identity as a slave woman reflects the circumstances of many diasporic women who are struggling with systematic injustice and a sense of dislocation. The fact that Luke does not give her a name highlights the historical reality that the lives of enslaved and displaced women were often undocumented, forgotten, and invisible in society. The owner of the slave woman also showed greed and exploitation. He only cared about income from the slave woman's spiritual power, not her freedom or well-being. This narrative also shows that society and community offered no response to her issue until Paul arrived in Philippi. Maybe because of the harsh reality of Roman culture and society, they accepted slavery as normal. There were no proper laws and few opportunities for enslaved people. This slave woman's story encourages readers to confront injustice not only in ancient society and the early Christian community but also today. It reflects how vulnerable diasporic

[31] Jennings, *Acts*, 159.

women are often trapped in systems where their bodies, labor, or abilities are commodified. The story exposes the injustice of the social system that treats human life as a tool for profit.

She followed Paul and his companions for many days yet was still neglected. There was no direct conversation, no relationship, and no community or safe place where she felt safe. This showed that sometimes the most vulnerable people are seen but not fully engaged. This is not just about Paul; it also reflects a wider reality that society often fails to acknowledge the oppressed, even in the mission field. Some life stories remain unaddressed and unheard.

The story continues as she was freed from demonic possession. What the slave woman said was true, even though the source of her knowledge came from a demon. Although she recognized God's work, her voice carried no authority within society. In fact, oppressed people are often excluded from power structures in society because of who they are. After she was freed from the demonic oppression, nothing more is said about her. Instead, the narrative shifts to the reaction of her masters and the arrest of Paul and Silas for casting out the demon spirit from her. This act was more than a personal healing; it was a public challenge to an exploitative system. The spirit left her immediately, but her liberation threatened the economic interests of her owners. Liberation does not automatically lead to safety or social change. The liberation did not automatically lead her to a safe space. As soon as profit was lost, violence followed. This response reveals how deeply injustice permeated the social system. Her liberation story awakened the world's systems and reshaped the meaning of mission in Acts. Reading the story through a diaspora lens helps us to see God's love upon the lives of displaced women, even when their stories remain unfinished. And this also shows that God's redemptive work is for everyone and that liberation may bring resistance before it brings safety (Acts 16:22–24).

Again, the text does not tell us what happened to her after her deliverance from the demon, about her future, her freedom story, or her faith as a freed woman. This silence is important; it reflects the historical

reality that the lives of enslaved and involuntarily displaced women were often ignored and forgotten. The text's own limits regarding the slave woman are one of the tensions in the text. The silence surrounding the slave woman's future is especially important. It reflects the historical reality of diasporic slave women's lives and experiences, whose stories are often left untold. Her story also shows us that the devil is at work and that spiritual warfare is real. A stronger faith is required to face the devil's work. Most of the time, we believers tend to forget that we are fighting evil spirits. This story is a reminder of the fight we have in this world. It shows us that God's salvation includes both physical and spiritual deliverance. God did not wait for the slave woman to become a freed woman to become perfect; healing and deliverance came while she was still in oppression.

The fact that she was free from demon possession shows that God cared about her suffering, and her oppression was not ignored. But freeing her did not solve everything. Instead, she suffered even worse than before. She lost her value, her master became angry, and her future was unknown. It only brought new risks for her and also for Paul and Silas. This kind of chaos still happens today. Many people may be free but still lack safety, support, and community. God's action is real, but it does not erase all suffering at once. This honest tension deepens the narrative's theological depth. What the text really shows is that, instead of claiming Paul did everything perfectly, his response as a human being was limited. The story not only shows what Paul did; it reveals what remains missing. Namely, the narrative reveals how the most vulnerable woman received the least visible care among the three selected diasporic women. She did not matter less than the other two; rather, she lived in a system that limited her life. The story highlights both power and the limits of missionary action. Liberation occurs, yet it remains incomplete without ongoing care and community integration. Mission, therefore, must also include confrontation with systems that benefit from displacement and exploitation. God did not wait for the girl to be free to heal her; healing came while she was still trapped. This affirms that God is present—even in the most painful forms of diaspora. At the same time, the story acknowledges that liberation is costly

and incomplete within unjust societies. Ethically, this story encourages the church to look beyond and confront the unjust systems that continue to exploit displaced women and children today. It calls for a mission that is willing to face prison and persecution to protect the dignity of the voiceless in the diaspora. It affirms that God is near to the oppressed, yet it does not deny the ongoing struggle for justice. Faith does not remove hardship, but it gives meaning and hope within it, and God acts in spaces of pain, conflict, and injustice.

Rereading the Text Through a Diaspora Lens

Reading Acts 16 through the lens of diasporic women sharpens the narrative and reveals layers of meaning often overlooked. Lydia and the slave woman reflect the different diasporic realities shaped by power, movement, gender, and social systems. Their stories reveal the complex picture of diasporic lives, including unequal power, unbreakable social systems, survival, faith, hope, and God's work.

Although these two diasporic women came from different places and backgrounds, their stories are connected by movement, having similar experiences of displacement and their encounters with the gospel in different life situations. Their stories showed both shared experiences of displacement and big differences in identity, belonging, and outcome. Through their stories, Acts 16 reveals that God is at work among diasporic people as they travel, relocate, and rebuild. This reminds us that God is present in every movement and transition and shows us that displacement is not an accident but a purposeful space for divine action.

The fact that the Bible mentions their stories, including their places of origin and their own names and identities, is significant. They are introduced with very different identities, which already shows their unequal positions in the diaspora life. Lydia's displacement was more likely voluntary, while the slave woman was in the category of involuntary diaspora. Lydia is mentioned by name (identity) and linked to her diasporic origins. She is described as a seller of purple cloth, indicating that she had

both identity and economic stability. Even though she was displaced, she still had family that stayed with her; she was not alone. She had a safe place to stay and a community where she could participate and connect with people as a worshipper of God. She had a home that was hers.

In contrast, the slave woman remains unnamed. She is only described by her condition as a slave and as someone who is possessed by a demonic spirit, showing a complete loss of her identity and belonging. She lost her name (identity). Lydia still had freedom, power, and access in society, but the slave woman had lost her freedom and power. No family member or community was found for the slave woman.

Their encounters with Paul also occurred in different spaces. Lydia was found in a place of prayer by the river, which shows openness, seeking, and freedom to gather and worship God. The slave woman was found in the public street, revealing exposure, exploitation, and a lack of safety, where her movement was not by choice. She shouted for many days, yet her voice was ignored. These contrasting settings reveal that not all movement is the same. Some movements are voluntary, while others are forced. Yet, the gospel meets each woman exactly where they were. God met them in their most vulnerable moments. The place where they were found also shows that God's mission is not limited.

Their lives were changed by their encounters with the gospel. But the change happened in very different ways and led to different outcomes. Lydia's life changed through understanding and faith; her heart was opened, and she responded by being baptized, welcoming the apostles, and opening her home as a safe place and a center for the new Christian community in the early church. Her change brought stability, hospitality, and the growth of the church. However, the slave woman's life changed through sudden spiritual liberation. She was freed from spiritual oppression, but the text does not show any further care, a community where she can find support, or a future for her. Instead, her experience of deliverance led to worse situations, caused conflicts and imprisonment, but resulted in silence about her life. She was freed from the spiritual bondage,

but her story stopped there, with no further narration about her freedom from physical bondage. She had no community, no family members, and no clear future. The slave woman remained alone in the narrative both before and after her liberation.

These similarities and differences reveal that while these two diasporic women were part of God's redemptive work, their lives and experiences remain shaped by an unequal social reality, including differences in power, voice, gender, and status. Some are named, supported, and remembered, while others remain unnamed and vulnerable. Their stories also show that the gospel crosses cultures and social boundaries, bringing people together, yet it does not immediately remove inequality and challenges. Instead, it exposes both the reach of God's love to people and the limitations of human beings and social systems.

Reading Acts 16 through a diaspora lens helps the reader to see that the gospel does not come into a perfect or equal world, but into the broken world where people live very different and unequal lives: those who are stable, those who are displaced, those who are deeply oppressed, and those who are vulnerable. Even though they live in different and unequal circumstances, their stories carry the same gospel. This fact teaches us that people of all kinds can be bearers of the gospel.

Their stories also invite the reader to read Acts not only as the story of church growth but also as a book that reveals gaps, silence, unremembering, and an unfinished life story. Lydia and the slave women's stories invite today's readers not just to celebrate the spread of the gospel across cultures and to bridge people together, but also to recognize our responsibility to continue caring for those who are still unheard and vulnerable. Reading Acts 16 in this way presents displacement as part of God's mission, where the gospel bridges divided worlds and brings people together.

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