

Ministry of Grace Church

The Acts of The Apostles Chapter 16

Preface:

The last time we were in the book of Acts, we were in chapter 15. There we learned about the first Jerusalem Council, where the question of whether or not a Christian was required to be circumcised and keep all the Law of Moses. The final statement was made by James, the Lord's brother, who said that Gentiles need not be circumcised or submit to the Law of Moses, but that they should abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from eating animals that had been strangled, and from blood.

Paul and Barnabas took the message back to Antioch, accompanied by Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, who were both prophets. After delivering the message, they stayed in Antioch for some time teaching and preaching. Paul and Barnabas then decided to revisit the churches they had started, to see how they were doing. However, Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them but Paul refused to let John Mark come because he had deserted them on the 1st missionary journey. The contention became so strong between them that they decided to split up. Barnabas took John Mark and went back to Cyprus to check up on the churches there, while Paul took Silas and headed north to Syria, Cilicia, and Galatia.

Timothy Joins Paul and Silas

Acts 16:1-5

¹Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. ²He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. ³Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

Notes:

Paul and Silas went first to Derbe and Lystra. Derbe was one of the cities that Paul and Barnabas had fled to after the Jews in Iconium had tried to stone them. Lystra was where Paul had healed a man crippled from birth and the people, believing Paul and Barnabas to be gods, wanted to offer a sacrifice to them. Later, Jews from Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia came and stirred up the people against Paul and Barnabas until they caught Paul and stoned him.

It was here in Lystra that they met Timothy, a Greek man. Paul was so impressed with him that he insisted on taking Timothy with them on this mission trip. Timothy's mother was a Jewish woman who had become a Christian, but his father was a Greek. Because of this, Paul circumcised Timothy. Say what?! I thought that Paul taught that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision meant anything? That is, in fact, what Paul taught:

For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. (1 Corinthians 7:19)

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. (Galatians 5:6)

For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. (Galatians 6:15)

If you look at the context of these three passages, however, you will discover that Paul's point is that circumcision means nothing with regard to our salvation and it also means nothing with regard to our ongoing relationship with God. So, why did he circumcise Timothy?

The Jews in that area knew that Timothy's father was a Gentile. And - any Jew of that time knew that the Jews had been entrusted with the oracles of God (see Romans 3:2). They were not inclined to listen to any Gentile proclaiming God's word, no matter what his pedigree, unless he could identify as a Jew. So, Paul's decision to circumcise Timothy was not a spiritual decision, but a political and practical one. He did it so as to not offend those who might be potential Christians.

The Macedonian Call

Acts 16:6-10

⁶And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Notes:

Having already gone through part of the area that Paul and Barnabas covered in the first missionary journey, Paul and Silas intended to head west into Asia. But that was not where the Holy Spirit wanted them to go. So, when they had gone through the northern part of Asia, they wanted to go farther north, into Bithynia. But, once again, the Holy Spirit did not allow them to go that way. So, instead, they headed farther west to the coastal town of Troas, on the Aegean Sea.

It was here, in Troas, that Paul received what is referred to as "the Macedonian Call." At night, Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia who was urging him to come over there. The word translated "urging" is *parakaleō*, which literally means "to call alongside." It is the word used of the Holy Spirit when he is referred to as a "comforter." The man in Paul's vision was calling for Paul and Silas to come over to where he was for the purpose of helping the Macedonians.

Paul's response was to immediately go over to Macedonia because he recognized that "God had called us to preach the gospel to them."

The Conversion of Lydia

Acts 16:11-15

¹¹So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹²and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. ¹³And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

Notes:

Notice the subtle change of pronouns between verses 6-8 (*they* went through the region, when *they* had come up, *they* went down) and verse 11 (*we* made a direct voyage). It appears that Luke joined the missionary team in Troas. Consider this: If Paul and Silas had not listened to the Holy Spirit’s guidance which eventually led them to Troas, Luke might not have been part of the missionary team.

As we have learned previously, it was Paul’s custom when he arrived in a new town or city to visit the Synagogue on his first Sabbath there. Apparently, there was no Synagogue in Philippi. By Jewish tradition, if a town or city has at least 10 Jewish men in it, it is required to have a synagogue. So, since there was no synagogue, after some investigation, Paul learned that there was a group of Jews who met down by the river on the Sabbath to pray. This is an indication that there were less than 10 Jewish men in all of Philippi.

Since there were so few Jewish men, the Jewish women took it upon themselves to form this prayer meeting each Sabbath. One of the leaders was a woman named Lydia. Our text tells us that she was a seller of purple. Purple cloth was highly sought after by the aristocracy and the ruling class. Since no mention is ever made of her husband, we must assume that he had passed away and she had taken over his business. She was obviously a talented leader and a landowner. She was the first convert in Europe, so the man in Paul’s vision calling him over to Macedonia, was, in a way, actually a woman.

Paul and Silas in Prison

Acts 16:16-24

¹⁶As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. ¹⁷She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” ¹⁸And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour. ¹⁹But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. ²⁰And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, “These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. ²¹They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.” ²²The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to

keep them safely. ²⁴Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Notes:

On their way to the prayer meeting, they encountered a girl who had a spirit of divination. The Greek text reads, “a spirit of python,” which is also referred to as a “pythonic spirit.” In Greek mythology, the python was associated with the god Apollo. And - not far from Philippi, there was a shrine to the Pythian Apollo, who was the national deity of the Greeks. Apparently, this girl was possessed by a demon who provided the information for fortune-telling. However, once Paul had cast out the demon from the slave girl, she was no longer able to tell fortunes and her owners saw that their money-making scheme was foiled. Therefore, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace in front of the rulers.

Notice how the accusers began their presentation: “These men are Jews.” Antisemitism is not something new. It has been going on since God first chose Abraham. And, since Jews only worship Yahweh, they were seen as religious bigots who refused to worship the Gods of Rome.

Paul and Silas were accused of “troubling the city and teaching customs which are not lawful for Romans.” These are rather vague accusations, but since Paul and Silas were Jewish, it was all that it took to stir-up the people (and the magistrates) against them. Also, keep in mind that Paul and Silas were teaching about a savior who was, as the polite Romans say, “hanged on the unlucky tree.” (See last week’s message on Galatians chapter 6). Since crucifixion was such a shameful execution, worshipping someone who had been crucified would have seemed ludicrous to any normal Roman citizen.

Since the magistrates assumed that Paul and Silas were not Roman citizens, they were offended that these obviously Jewish men harassed Roman citizens with their strange religion of a crucified Savior. Understand this, Roman citizens had well-guarded civil rights that non-citizens didn’t have. Non-citizens were basically at the mercy of the magistrates and these magistrates were determined to put these upstart, non-citizen Jews in their proper place. Therefore, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison even though they were, in fact, Roman citizens.

The Philippian Jailer Converted

Acts 16:25-34

²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. ²⁷When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” ²⁹And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” ³²And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

Notes:

Roman stocks were designed to give the maximum amount of pain to the feet, legs, hips, and back. So, it would be surprising to hear Paul and Silas singing hymns. Apparently, they were making beautiful music together because the text tells us that the other prisoners were listening. But - they were not just singing they were praying as well. And – God was listening.

God's response to the heavenly music was an earthquake. This was no ordinary earthquake, however, because not only were all the prison doors opened, but all the prisoners' bonds came undone. That's a heavenly earthquake. Keep in mind that one of the things about being a Roman Jailer is, if a single prisoner escapes, the jailer is to be executed. So, after the earthquake, the jailer saw that the doors were all open and he assumed that the prisoners had all escaped, so he was about to kill himself. However, Paul called out to him and informed him that no one had escaped.

The jailer, no doubt, had also heard the singing and probably assumed that these two were "religious" men. So, he came in and fell down at their feet. Then, after taking Paul and Silas out of the prison, he asked them how to be saved. But, how would the jailer know about salvation unless Paul and Silas had already been witnessing to him, even before the singing and the earthquake.

The jailer and his whole family then got saved. How do we know they got saved? Because we are told that as soon as Paul's and Silas' wounds were treated, the jailer and all his household were baptized. Then the jailer took them into his house and fed them (kinda like a thanksgiving dinner, huh?)

The Magistrates Eat Crow

Acts 16:35-40

³⁵But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." ³⁶And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." ³⁷But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." ³⁸The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. ³⁹So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. ⁴⁰So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

Notes:

As we said before, magistrates had a lot of leeway when it came to sentencing non-citizens of Rome. They could inflict pain, they could confine them to prison for an undisclosed amount of time, and they could also set them free on a moment's notice. So, when the jailer was told to let Paul and Silas go, Paul revealed to him that they were, in fact, Roman citizens and what the magistrates had done to them was highly illegal. The magistrates could lose their commission for having beaten and imprisoned these two Roman citizens; they could even have been thrown in prison themselves.

Paul and Silas could have caused a lot of trouble for the magistrates and the jailer, but they were God's representatives and chose to be forgiving. (Let every Christian take note of this). Paul and Silas were found guilty without a proper trial, they were illegally beaten with rods and they were thrown into the inner prison, the darkest, most uncomfortable place there was. But, instead of causing a big fuss, they

insisted that the magistrates come and personally release them. I suspect that this was not just to be belligerent, but it gave Paul and Silas an opportunity to witness to the magistrates as well.

So What?

Once Paul and his companions had gone through Galatia and had delivered the ruling of the Jerusalem Council to all the churches there, we are told that the churches were strengthened in the faith and that they were growing in numbers. How pleased Paul must have felt that God was using him to spread the Gospel message. On the heels of their great success, I'm sure that Paul and his companions discussed where they should go next.

When the Romans conquered Asia Minor and the Middle East, one of the first things they did was to construct well-engineered roads that would facilitate the movement of army troops throughout the area. This was crucial in maintaining their control of these areas. One of these, the main east-west road out of Pisidian Antioch, was one of the most well-travelled in the area. This road led to Ephesus, the most important city in the province of Asia. This would certainly be the direction that they should go next. However, the Holy Spirit would not allow them to go that way.

The only other main road heading west took them along the northern edge of the province into the area of Misis. From there, it would be easy to head northeast to the area of Bithynia and Pontus. This area had a number of seaport towns on the southern edge of the Black Sea. It appears that Paul and his companions attempted to go into Bithynia, but once again the Holy Spirit prevented them from going that direction. Instead, they headed to the city of Troas.

Two important things happened while the missionary team was in Troas. The first is that Paul had the vision calling him to preach in Macedonia. This is what ultimately led them to some of the most important cities for the new Christian faith. The second thing that occurred in Troas is that Dr. Luke joined-up with Paul and the others. According to [Colossians 4:14](#), Luke was a physician:

Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. ([Colossians 4:14](#))

Having a doctor on the team would have been very beneficial to Paul, especially given the fact that Paul had been sick on the first missionary trip and he had some kind of "thorn in the flesh" that caused him some physical distress:

You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, ([Galatians 4:13](#))

... a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ([2 Corinthians 12:7](#))

So, when Paul and his companions were in Pisidian Antioch, they most likely didn't understand why God would not allow them to travel over to Ephesus, the most important city in the entire area and the center for the cult of the goddess Diana (also known as Artemis). It seemed to have been an obvious choice for their next evangelistic meeting. But – the Holy Spirit had other ideas.

I wonder how the Spirit let Paul and the others know not to go to Ephesus? Was it a traveler coming from Ephesus telling them that the road had sustained major damage from the previous winter? Or, perhaps it was reports of highway robbers who were working in that vicinity. Perhaps it was the fact that every time they enquired of God regarding heading to Ephesus, all they heard were crickets. Maybe it

was just a general sense of uneasiness that they all felt when they talked about going that direction. Most likely, God spoke to the entire group through Silas, who was a prophet, telling them not to go that way.

The next place they wanted to go was Bithynia and Pontus, but again, the Holy Spirit would not let them go that direction. Even though the missionary team might not have understood God's reasoning at the time, there is no evidence that any of them complained. There is an old saying, "Hindsight is 20/20." We can see (remember) things that have occurred in the past, but God has not gifted us with the ability to see into the future.

In both these cases, God did not tell Paul and his companions where to go, but He did tell them where NOT to go. The Holy Spirit often guides as much by the *closing* of doors as He does by the *opening* of doors.

God stopped Paul and Silas from going where they wanted to go. Was He being mean? Look, their desire was to preach the Word of God! Was God trying to hinder their work? Of course not! That's not who our God is. But - keep in mind that just because something is a "good" thing, doesn't mean that it is the "right" thing from God's perspective.

Think about this. If Paul and Silas had gone the direction they wanted to go, they may never have met up with Dr. Luke and he may never have written the Gospel according to Luke or the Book of Acts. Did you know that Luke was responsible for writing about one quarter of the New Testament?

Now What?

Have you been praying for God's direction? Are you frustrated because He hasn't answered your prayers the way you wanted Him to? Perhaps He wants you to be going in another direction. Are you willing to go the long way around? And, are you willing to step out on faith?

Let's open up our hearts to God and commit to letting Him direct our paths. We never know what our stubbornness might be causing us to miss out on. And we never know what hidden blessings our willing obedience might bring into our path. Let's focus on doing the "right" thing from God's perspective instead of just settling for a "good" thing.

Let's pray.

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