

## **The Acts of the Apostles**

“A study of the application of theology to the work of the church as a group”

### **The Second Missionary Trip of Paul**

#### **Chapter Sixteen**

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**Acts 16:1 “And he came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek,**

**Acts 16:2 and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium.**

**Acts 16:3 Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.”**

Now we see the name of a new missionary, Timothy, being chosen by Paul to go with him on this trip. This is the first time we hear of this young man and we know from Paul's letters to him that he was young and apparently unsure of his abilities for the task given to him by Paul (really by God). Perhaps he also was a bit awed by being mentored by someone of the intellectual stature of Paul.

A red light tends to go off in my mind in verse three because in spite of the Jerusalem Council that we just studied we see that Paul circumcised Timothy! But, let's delve into the situation a bit. Timothy's mother was a Jew and so, by law, Timothy was a Jew even though his father was a Gentile. Since he was an uncircumcised Jew, Timothy would have been seen as an apostate Jew by the Jews to whom Paul was traveling. Paul was willing to make compromises only if such did not violate any Biblical message. If Paul were seen traveling with an apostate Jew he would have no credibility with the Jews. Paul was willing to circumcise Timothy so that he would be more accepted by the Jewish audience and thus make their missionary journey more acceptable. It is very important to be careful of our reputation as far as we have any control.

When I spent a year in Sweden as a visiting professor I also went as, of course, a Christian. I immediately put a plaque on my desk there that said “Expect a Miracle” for we should never be surprised when God works a miracle through our Christian witness. At first nobody commented on the plaque. But one day one of the scientists with whom I had become friends told me that people had to respect me as a scientist and then they would listen to what I had to say about spiritual things. I will never forget that statement by an agnostic who also told me on another occasion that I was a missionary. At first I even said that I was not a missionary but he insisted and, of course, this agnostic friend of mine was correct. Wherever we Christians go we are missionaries and we need to remember that. But applying my experience with the action of Paul in circumcising

Timothy I can easily know that what Paul did was correct. It was also a great act of submission by Timothy to allow Paul to circumcise him.

I can also correlate with this aspect of Timothy's submission in that when we joined a Baptist church after being in a Methodist church since a child, Carol and I allowed ourselves to be immersed in a baptism ritual even though it was not essential to our salvation. The Baptist church insisted on baptism by immersion and so did not recognize our sprinkling. Carol had even been immersed as a teenager in a Baptist church but then joined the Methodist church. Our immersion was very similar to the submission of Timothy but much less painful!

So even though Paul's action seems strange at first glance after studying chapter 15, a little study tells us that indeed what he and Timothy did was very important for the furtherance of the Gospel. Similarly we should all make sure that our Christian witness is based upon a firm foundation in whatever career God has placed us and we should be very willing to put aside any pride we might have in our past Christian walk so as to be acceptable to a new audience. These examples are indeed what Paul meant when he said

*1Cor 9:22 "To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some."*

He would never compromise the message of Jesus Christ so he certainly would not have circumcised Timothy as a condition for salvation. But he did circumcise Timothy so that the message of Jesus could be preached to the Jews.

**Acts 16:4 "Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees, which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.**

**Acts 16:5 So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily."**

The verdict of the Council of Jerusalem was delivered to the churches with the result that the churches were strengthened in their faith as both the inclusiveness and the exclusiveness of the Gospel were emphasized. The exclusiveness is that the Gospel message is only for the chosen people of God. The inclusiveness is that God is not a respecter of persons so that He chooses people from among all the people of the world. As the children of God understood that they could preach to all people and that they could expect God to impart faith to people of all races and genders then the number of people being added to the growing church increased daily.

**Acts 16:6 "And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia;**

**Acts 16:7 and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them;**

**Acts 16:8 and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.**



These three verses are indeed very interesting to us today. We see that the missionary team was first restricted from going west and south and then from going north and east! The only choice left to the team was to go into a region between the two forbidden territories. Such a choice led them eventually to Troas on the Aegean Sea. These three verses give us an example of negative guidance by God. Negative guidance is of equal importance to positive guidance in the same way that negative results of a research project are often even more important than positive results. Unfortunately we often get depressed by receiving negative research results or negative guidance rather than being thankful that we are now being driven in the correct direction.

We are not told how Paul and the team received this negative guidance and we need to be careful in using this “closed door” nomenclature in our actions today. In the paper today (July 8, 2006) there was an article about people claiming to hear the word of God in their ministerial work. I have been in a church where the committee report to the congregation about some study was that “God revealed to us that this plan is the one we are to follow”. And what are we to do when someone plays the “God trump card”? In my opinion we are to press the committee to reveal the manner in which God revealed this plan to them. Luke leaves out any details surrounding how the team was directed by God but I am assured that they did know the details and that they all accepted the negative direction. In our work today we need to not just accept one person’s word that God spoke to him/her about some plan. We have the entire Bible to use as a “yardstick” by which to judge any such closed/open door directive. Everyone involved in the decision needs to openly discuss the issue in the light of the Scripture and all circumstances including all consequences involved. Everyone involved in the decision needs to openly discuss the issue in the light of the Scripture and all circumstances including all consequences involved. There are no new revelations since the closing of the canon and certainly there are no directives of God that invalidate any aspect of the revealed Word of God.

Does God still “close” and “open” doors for His children who are sincerely seeking to follow His lead? I would say “of course”, but we need to be very careful in our interpretation of such directives. We should never move on our own regarding such an

inferred directive but we should discuss the issue with Godly people, study the implications in the light of Scripture, and pray with an open mind.

**Acts 16:9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."**

**Acts 16:10 And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."**

Now Luke explicitly tells us the means of a direction from God. Paul had a vision. I assume it occurred during his sleep. But notice carefully all of the words of Luke. Luke tells us that "we immediately sought to go" meaning that not just Paul was involved in the interpretation of his vision. He discussed the vision and what it implied with his fellow travelers and they all concluded that God had called them to go to Macedonia to preach the Gospel to those people. Macedonia became a power during the time of Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C. and had been a Roman province since 146 B.C. It was then a well-established city during the time of the team's visit.

We also see here the first use of the word "we" in the writing by Luke, which tells us that Luke joined the missionary team at this point. However we will see that in verse 16 Luke changes the word to "they" indicating that he stayed behind at Philippi and the "we" does not return until chapter 20 when Paul returns to Philippi. The word "we" then is dropped in chapter 21 and does not return until chapter 27 so we are told the times that Luke was part of the missionary team with Paul.

**Acts 16:11 "Therefore putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis;**

**Acts 16:12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.**

**Acts 16:13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.**

**Acts 16:14 And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.**

**Acts 16:15 And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us."**

Samothrace is a mountainous island rising to about 5000 feet and so is a formidable looking place. It was also the seat of a cult called the worship of the Cabiri about which not much is known although the cult has been known as long as time was being kept in this region. The missionary team did not linger there but at daylight they went on to Neapolis on the mainland. It was at this city that the great Roman road called the Egnatian Way began and linked the Adriatic with the Aegean. The team then went on to

Philippi. The city received its name from Philip II who was the father of Alexander the Great. The history of this region was now about to take a radical change of direction!

There was no synagogue in Philippi so Paul had to modify his usual method of first preaching in a synagogue. It only required ten Jewish men to allow the construction of a synagogue so there were evidently few Jewish people in this area. However they did find a few faithful Jewish women. One of these women was a God-fearing Gentile named Lydia who was a leader of the group and a wealthy woman. Women in Macedonia were noted for their independence and under Roman law the freeborn women with three or four children were allowed to make legal transactions on their own. Thus when she became a God-fearer she was really putting down her natural and state-given independence to become a servant to God. Her actions to this point thus showed that God was working in her heart to bring her to Him and then God opened her heart so that she could believe in Jesus and she became Paul's first Christian convert in Europe. She and her family then became God's children as the baptism showed what had already happened in their hearts. She still showed a servant's heart as she allowed Paul and the missionaries to be the judge of what had happened to her. Thus God worked through a vision to bring this woman and her household into the Kingdom and the first church in Europe was established in this woman's house. Now what about the vision that involved a **man** from Macedonia? Well, the story in this region is not over yet!

**Acts 16:16 “And it happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a certain slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling.**

**Acts 16:17 Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation."**

**Acts 16:18 And she continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment."**

Satan immediately sent an attack that was easily taken care of by the power of God working through Paul. This girl was possessed by a demon who was telling the future of some business dealings to help some people make considerable money. In the Greek language the text actually says that “she had a spirit of Pythona”. “Pythona” was a python snake associated with the god Apollo. Not far from this very site was a shrine to the Pythian Apollo so she was possessed by a demon associated with this particular cult and many people would have been aware of such details.

She was announcing the coming of the missionary team as men of the Most-High God who were telling the people the way of salvation. Saying the “Most-High God” meant that she or the demon recognized that these men worshiped the “real” God and the One that the demons and Satan wanted to be. This name for God is used in two Old Testament texts:

*Gen 14:18 “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High.”*

*Isaiah 14:14 “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”*

This name for God means the One who is the Owner of all the heavens and the earth and Satan and his demons want to have such ownership. But God tells us in this story and others how even when the demons have control over a small bit of creation it is easy for God to take it away from them.

She also was telling the truth in that they were proclaiming the only way of salvation. Certainly what she was saying was the truth but she must have been doing it day after day in a rather annoying way for Paul. I wonder why Paul just did not allow her to continue announcing their true presence but he did not. Perhaps the reason I cannot quickly understand Paul’s reaction is because of the language differences. Our text says that she practiced “fortune telling” but the Greek word is based on the word “manic” and that indicates a frantic, wild behavior during which time she apparently went into a spell and the demons would speak through her. Now if we imagine the girl in such a state as the demons announce the presence of the missionaries we can begin to understand why Paul would be greatly annoyed! This event is a recurrence of what happened often in the ministry of Jesus Christ as the demons would announce that He was the Holy One of God:

*Mark 1:23 “And just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out,*

*Mark 1:24 saying, “What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are-- the Holy One of God!””*

*Matt 8:28 “And when He had come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs; they were so exceedingly violent that no one could pass by that road.*

*Matt 8:29 And behold, they cried out, saying, “What do we have to do with You, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?””*

In both of these cases Jesus also rebuked the demons and drove them out of the men so Paul was following the example of his Master. In this particular case, Paul cast out the demon and the girl became the second member of the church in Europe. There is a bit of an assumption involved in saying that the girl was saved, but most scholars think such a conclusion is not much of a step from what we are explicitly told.

**Acts 16:19 “But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, Acts 16:20 and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, “These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews,**

**Acts 16:21 and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans. "**

**Acts 16:22 And the crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them, and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods.**

**Acts 16:23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely;**

**Acts 16:24 and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks."**

Now Paul and the missionaries found themselves in a bit of trouble from an earthly perspective. But we must always remember Rom 8:28 for God is going to use this situation for His glory and for the salvation of the **man** in Paul's vision. Luke and Timothy were not seized by the authorities probably because they were looking for Jews and Luke was a Gentile. It occurred to me that Timothy might have gotten in trouble because Paul circumcised him but God protected Timothy for his submission. Obviously the real reason the people wanted to punish Paul and Silas was because of their potential loss of income since the demon was gone from the girl. But they knew that such an argument would not serve them well with the authorities so they played the "Jew card". Philippi was founded by retired Roman soldiers and the Roman law was very proudly upheld in the city. So the merchants accused Paul and Silas of trying to make the Romans act like Jews in matters that were forbidden of them according to Roman laws. We are not told what specifics were involved in the accusations and when mob rule is invoked the details are not important. As we will see later, the accusers did not even check to see if Paul or Silas were Roman citizens and of course Paul was a Roman citizen. The crowd became unruly much like at the accusations of Jesus so the magistrates seemed to have bypassed any real trial and went straight to the punishment phase. They stripped Paul and Silas of their clothes and had then beaten with rods. The lictors were men who accompanied the magistrates as symbols of the power of their office. They carried rods and an axe, which were used to excise the authority of the magistrates to punish and even kill people for their illegal acts. It was these rods that were used to beat the missionaries. We know that Paul was beaten two more times during his service to the Lord:

*2Cor 11:25 "Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep."*

After the beating they were given to the jailor to put them into a secure location. He then put them into a deep part of the prison and put their legs into stocks, which had several different places for the legs to be placed to maximize the pain and cramping. From an earthly perspective the situation looked rather bleak!

**Acts 16:25 "But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;**

**Acts 16:26 and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were unfastened.**

**Acts 16:27 And when the jailer had been roused out of sleep and had seen the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.”**

They had followed the direction of the Holy Spirit in the direction in which they went to spread the Gospel and they had been involved in the salvation of a woman and a girl and the starting of the first church in Europe. They could have had a “pity party”, but instead they were praying and praising the Lord and doing so loudly. But let’s think about this situation a bit more deeply. Paul had a vision about a **certain** man in Macedonia, not some man but a **certain** man. I believe that Paul recognized the jailor as that man in the vision and when he did he knew that the Lord was working out this situation for the salvation of that man. So Paul and Silas were praising the Lord for His plan A! The Lord’s reaction to this situation was to shake the earth, open all the doors of the prison, and loosen the chains of all of the prisoners! He was also about to release the jailor from his chains! But when the jailor saw what had happened he drew his sword to kill himself. He was probably a retired Roman soldier and he knew the punishment for failing to do his duty, which in this case was to keep the prisoners locked away in the prison. He knew that if the prisoners then escaped and the magistrates found out about it he would then be treated with the axe of the lectors. To avoid a public execution by committing suicide was a better fate in his world view.

**Acts 16:28 “But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here!"**

**Acts 16:29 And he called for lights and rushed in and, trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas,**

**Acts 16:30 and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"**

**Acts 16:31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household."**

**Acts 16:32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house.**

**Acts 16:33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.**

**Acts 16:34 And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.”**

Paul knew the consequences of the jailor’s perceived failure, he knew also that they were in prison to help the jailor. So Paul yelled out to stop him from carrying out his self judgment. The jailor immediately did stop the thrust of his sword and asked for lights to be lit so that he could see what in the world had happened and so that he could see that these two prisoners were in fact still in the prison. The jailor immediately understood that a miracle had happened and that the God these people worshiped had saved His servants from prison. He knew the accusations against Paul and Silas and he knew what the slave-girl had been saying about them, as did everyone else in the area, so he came to the obvious conclusion that they indeed did know the way to salvation as the demon had been screaming. He then asked them the pressing question of all people who earnestly

seek life and peace with God. After having told my mom about the Roman road to salvation, she asked me the same question. She asked me “What can we do to have salvation if it is not works?” I was then able to give her the simple yet profound answer which is the same as Paul told the jailor. Was the end of the sentence (“you and your family”) a promise for all people or a prophecy for this particular situation? Lydia and her family were saved so the same question could be asked in her situation also. Certainly not even all the family of Jesus were saved and we can look to many other examples where salvation for a particular person does not necessarily also apply to the rest of the family so I would have to say that I think the statement by Paul was prophesy of what was going to happen. The jailor and his family were going to receive salvation. People are certainly free to disagree with my conclusion for such a position is a “pernt” and not a point.

**Acts 16:35 “Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, "Release those men."**

**Acts 16:36 And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Now therefore, come out and go in peace."**

**Acts 16:37 But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out."**

**Acts 16:38 And the policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. And they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans,**

**Acts 16:39 and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city.**

**Acts 16:40 And they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.”**

Paul knew how to turn a situation! The magistrates were satisfied with the beating and one night’s stay in the prison situation (naked, hurting with no treatment, and staked in a very painful manner) so they were generously letting them go free now. They did not know that they were already free from their bonds and that the doors of the prison had been opened and Paul did not tell them as he protected the jailor. Paul’s statement about him being a Roman citizen was terrible news to the magistrates for Roman citizens had special rights especially in this city that were not to be violated. The magistrates could lose their positions and be thrown in prison themselves so they were in a bit of a panic. They brought them out and begged them to leave the city and not report what had happened to them. Paul was not a vengeful person, but I think that he did enjoy this situation as these self-righteous men were begging him for their lives! Paul did know how to forgive as Jesus taught us all to forgive. It is not our place to enforce restitution but God will have the ultimate justice. I do wonder what happened to these men as they contemplated the entire situation. Paul and Silas went back to the first church in Europe and I am sure that they rejoiced in the Lord as now the **man** of Paul’s vision had been saved!

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