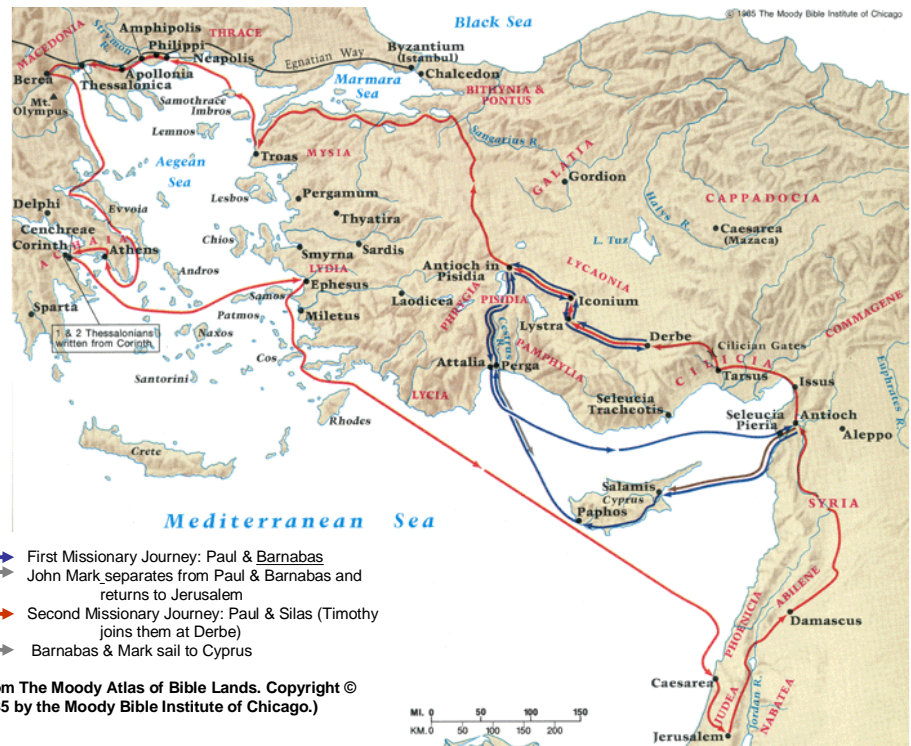


23. The Macedonian Call and Conversions at Philippi: Acts 16

Acts 15 closed with Paul and Barnabas leaving on their second missionary journey, with the intent to revisit the brothers in all the towns where they preached on the first journey. A separation occurred between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark who had turned back on the first journey [See the detailed notes on this dispute in Acts 13:13-14.]. Barnabas and John Mark sailed for Cyprus; and Paul and Silas struck out through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Luke described their contention as a “sharp disagreement”. However, by Corinth, Paul was endorsing Barnabas, expressing knowledge of his work in 1 Cor 9:6: “6 Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?” Later, in Rome, Paul fully supported John Mark, who was with him there, according to Col 4:10: “10 My fellow prisoner

Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)”



Timothy Joins Paul

Acts 16:1-2

16 He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. 2 The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.

Derbe and Lystra were the last two churches Paul and Barnabas visited on the first journey. It was from Derbe that they turned around, revisiting the churches that they had established and organizing them with elders in each one. Acts 14:21-24 tells how they had strengthened the churches and appointed elders (plural) in each church:

Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. 23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

A huge event, because of its future benefits to the work of the Lord, was when Paul selected Timothy to accompany him. 1 Cor 4:17 expresses Paul's love and reliance on Timothy: "17 For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church." So close were Paul and Timothy, that Paul called him his *true son* in 1 Tim 1:2: "2 To Timothy my true son in the faith;" and *dear son* in 2 Tim 1:2. All Paul's letters beginning in Colossians recognize Timothy as co-author or at least co-correspondent. These letters were in all probability written from prison in Rome, and the Hebrew letter indicates that Timothy was also a prisoner in Heb 13:23: "23 I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you."

Acts 16:3-5

3 Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4 As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

As a free will matter and not as an obligation of faith, Paul circumcised Timothy, making him more effective in working with Jews. There are times when Paul, by act or teaching, accommodated Jews and Gentiles when no principles of the law of Christ were at risk. Acts 18:18 records that Paul took what may have been a Jewish vow: "Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken." This vow, with its cutting of hair, is most likely the Nazirite vow of Numbers 6:3ff. Paul knew that in Jerusalem his credentials as a practicing Jew would come into question. The end of the vow would be the rite of purification spoken of in Acts 21:20-24

20 When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. 21 They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. 22 What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, 23 so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. 24 Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.

There are also examples of Paul teaching an accommodation with the Gentiles. Paul stated his position in 1 Cor 9:19-22:

19 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.

Eating meat sacrificed to Greek idols and sold in the marketplace is an application of this principle of accommodation, when it does not violate Christ's law. Paul wrote in 1 Cor 10:25-26a, 27:

25 Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, 26 for, 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. . . .' 27 If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.

They traveled from town to town reading the letter from the elders of the church in Jerusalem strengthening the churches.

The Macedonian Call

Acts 16:6-10

6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

The second journey turned north allowing them to preach in regions of Phrygia and Galatia. The Holy Spirit kept them out of Asia and out of Mysia and Bithynia. This took them on a straight course to Troas on the Aegean Sea. Here, Paul had what commonly is called the Macedonian Call. Paul and his companions responded immediately and left to preach the gospel to those in Macedonia, which was the Roman province north of Greece and Achaia.

Acts 16:11-12

11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. 12 From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

Photographs by Lee and David Todd Clockwise: Neapolis and Egnation Way, Philippi, Roman Amphitheater, Philippian Jail

Samothrace was an island in the Aegean Sea on the way to Neapolis. Although Philippi was land locked, it was on the main Roman highway, the Egnation Way, and close to the seaport of Neapolis.

The Conversion of Lydia

Acts 16:13-14

13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14 One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

As Paul's custom was, he and his companions sought out worshippers on the Sabbath. As he spoke to the women, Lydia responded to the gospel preached by Paul: "The Lord opened her



heart to respond." Her response raises the question: how does God act on the heart of people. This statement clearly places Lydia in a group that includes Cornelius (See notes on Acts 10). Cornelius was a good man who prayed to God and gave gifts to the poor. Evidently, God took notice as Acts 10:4 states:

4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.

In all such recorded cases, God provides a way, but the person has to supply faith and obedience to the gospel. There are no cases of divine intervention providing salvation. The Lord taught in the parable of the sower in Luke 8:15: "15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop." Paul speaks of how God may have put concern in the heart of Titus in 2 Cor 8:16: "16 I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you." Paul also prayed for the Ephesians that God would affect their hearts in Eph 1:18: "18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. "

Acts 16:15

15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Therefore, Lydia's response to Paul's teaching, defined her belief. That response was to obey the message by baptism. Only after her response to the message with baptism, did she say; "If you consider me a believer in the Lord . . ." Those who deny baptism unto the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) must answer the question: If Lydia had not responded to the message with baptism, would Paul have considered her a believer? Or how can one be a believer and not obey the message?

Paul and Silas Severely Flogged and Thrown in Jail

Acts 16:16-18

16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." 18 She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

The older translation read "spirit of divination" in describing this girl. According to Vine, this description more aptly connects the girl and her masters to the idolatry of Philippi:

DIVINATION: puthon; pu/qwn,

(Eng., "python"), in Greek mythology was the name of the Pythian serpent or dragon, dwelling in Pytho, at the foot of mount Parnassus, guarding the oracle of Delphi, and slain by Apollo. Thence the name was transferred to Apollo himself. Later the word was applied to diviners or soothsayers, regarded as inspired by Apollo. Since demons are the agents inspiring idolatry, 1 Cor 10:20, the young woman in Acts 16:16 was possessed by a demon instigating the cult of Apollo, and thus had "a spirit of divination."

(from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

As a fortuneteller, the girl was a principal source of money for her owners; but when she kept saying that Paul and his companions were servants of the Most High God who are telling the way of salvation, Paul, being troubled, cast out the spirit from her.

Acts 16:19-20

19 When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20 They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21 by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

Philippi was a Roman city with few Jews or Greeks living there. In such a city, it was easy to make the charge stick that Paul and companions were Jews advocating customs unlawful for Romans.

Acts 16:22-24

22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

With the crowd behind them, the magistrates had them severely flogged and thrown into prison. The jailer, who was commanded to guard them carefully, doubly secured them in the inner cell with their feet in stocks. Escape under such circumstance would seem impossible.

Conversion of the Philippian Jailer

Acts 16:25-26

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.

Beaten and jailed, Paul and Silas responded with the bravery of men dedicated to the Lord, whatever may come. Luke had recorded in his gospel the encouraging words of Christ in Luke 21:36: "36 Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man." Their singing fit the New Testament requirement of speaking not only to one another but to the prisoners who were listening. Paul would command all Christians to sing, establishing vocal music as the authorized music of the church. In Eph 5:19-20, he taught:

19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Also in Col 3:16-17, he wrote:

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

The earthquake, so violent that it shook the foundations of the prison reflects, God's power in response to the prayers of the saints. John spoke of that power in symbolic language in Rev 8:4-5:

4 The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of **thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.** [Emphasis added.]

By God's power, the doors flew open and the chains released.

Acts 8:27-28

27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

Immediately upon waking and seeing the doors open, the jailor sought to kill himself. The penalty in that day for letting one's prisoners escape was the giving of one's own life. Paul stopped him.

Acts 16:29-30

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Perhaps, the jailer knew from the circumstances surrounding their imprisonment that Paul and Silas were teaching the way of salvation, or perhaps, the miracles of their release confirmed the word they had taught. Whatever his motivation, the jailor asked the most important question of all for an alien sinner: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The people on the day of Pentecost asked the same question in Acts 2:37: "37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Paul himself had asked this same question prior to his conversion, recorded in Acts 22:8-10:

8 "Who are you, Lord?" I asked.

"I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 9 My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

10 "What shall I do, Lord?" I asked.

Acts 16:31-34

31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole family.

Paul now tells the jailer the way of salvation, step by step. As with Lydia, the way of salvation starts with "believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." The answer to the question of what must we do in Acts 2:37 is in Acts 2:38: "38 Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.'" The jailer took them, washed their wounds, and was baptized. The urgency of acting on his belief is expressed in the terms—*at that hour of the night* and *immediately*. When Paul asked the question of what to do, Ananius expressed the same overwhelming sense of urgency in Acts 22:16; "16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."

The joy expressed by the jailer was only evident after he had obeyed all of the commands included in the way of salvation.

Paul and Silas Freed from Prison

Acts 16:35-37

35 When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." 36 The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

37 But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

It is only at the end of the ordeal that Paul tells of their Roman citizenship, insisting that those who beat and jailed them without a trial, come and escort them out personally.

Acts 16:38-40

38 The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. 39 They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. 40 After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.

This is not the end of Paul's relationship with the church at Philippi. Later when he wrote his letter to them, he thanked them for sending support to him as he left the city. Phil 4:15-19 records:

15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. 17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.