

Study 25: Acts chapter 16

Introduction

The second missionary Journey continues. Timothy goes with Paul and Silas, and Luke joins the party at Troas. This marks the beginning of the record of the gospel in the area that we know today as Europe, although there is evidence that the gospel had already gone into some areas.

Whilst we may regard the area as “Europe”, to Paul and Silas, it was just another part of the Roman Empire.

Timing: *When did these events occur?*

Content: *What are the major events?*

Cast: *Who are the major players?*

Body of the Study

What did Paul do with the letter from the apostles in Jerusalem?

Where did they go to next?

How did the Spirit communicate with them?

Luke joins the party

Philippi in Paul’s time

What was Paul’s method of evangelism here?

How did Lydia react to the preaching of the word?

What happens to the demonic girl?

What charge is brought before Paul and Silas?

How do Paul and Silas react?

What must I do to be saved?

The release from custody

Homework:

Read the notes as a review of the study.

- *How would you describe the characteristics of Lydia?*
- *Read the letter that Paul wrote some years later to the church at Philippi, and reflect on the beginnings of the church there.*

Read chapter 17 in preparation for next week

Notes for study 25: Acts chapter 16

Introduction

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Whilst we may regard the area as “Europe”, to Paul and Silas, it was just another part of the Roman Empire.

Timing: *When did these events occur?*

The second missionary journey is placed around AD 51 or 52. There was not a great deal of time spent in any of the locations described in this chapter – perhaps a few weeks or a month in some places. This places the time of the chapter at around AD 52.

Content: *What are the major events?*

Early part of the Second Journey continues, Derbe & Lystra, Phrygia, Galatia, Mysia, Troas. Macedonian call – Philippi, Lydia converted, demonic girl. Paul & Silas in prison – jailer converted.

Cast: *Who are the major players?*

Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke, Lydia, Demonic girl, Jailer.

Body of the Study

What did Paul do with the letter from the apostles in Jerusalem?

As they went throughout the regions visiting the churches, they ensured that the letter from the apostles in Jerusalem was read and understood (and most likely copied). As we specifically noted in the last study, circumcision was for the Jews, not for the Gentiles. But it was important for the Jews NOT to bind circumcision upon the Gentiles, even although the Jews were required to keep it.

The letter written by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem was written particularly for the brethren in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. However, that Paul delivered it to the churches wherever he went, and that they were “decrees” (Gk *dogma*) for them to keep shows that these were generic instructions for all Christians, and not just for those to whom it was specifically addressed. In exactly the same way, many of the things that we find written in the New Testament are written specifically for others (Paul’s letters to specific churches for instance), but they are also to be obeyed by us, because they are a part of the commands spoken by God through the apostles.

As Paul and Silas passed through the Galatian region, they “...strengthened the churches...” (16:5). We are not told what they were doing, or how they were strengthening them, but even just having a return visit from Paul would have been a significant event. This was Paul’s third visit to them (twice on the first journey, and then this time on the second journey). It will be followed by another visit on the third journey, and perhaps a final visit on Paul’s fourth missionary journey (which is not recorded in Acts).

Where did they go to next?

Luke is scant about where they went, except to say that it was through the region of Galatia, and then through Phrygia. It is likely to be the area of Southern Galatia, since they were revisiting the areas that they had previously laboured in. The Galatian letter was addressed to the brethren in Southern Galatia, rather than those of the Northern areas. When Paul wrote the

letter, he addressed those who had been in Christ *before* the Jerusalem conference (Gal 2:5). The only time for Paul's visit to them was during the first journey – since he went to Jerusalem for the conference not long afterwards – and during that journey he only visited the Southern regions.

They next passed through Mysia, which is at the western end of the Galatian region. At this time, Paul would have been heading to Ephesus, which was the fourth largest city in the world at that time and in the region known as “Asia Minor” or just “Asia”. However, they were explicitly “...*forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia...*” (16:6 NKJV).

How did the Spirit communicate with them?

We are not told exactly how these communications occurred, and it is possible that natural actions may have prevented them from going where they had intended (such as swollen rivers, blocked passes etc). However we need to remember that Paul was a prophet, and an apostle, and that God had on several other occasions communicated directly with him. He may have received the information from God in a vision. The description is strong: “...*they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia...*” (16:6 NKJV)

Since going to Asia (presumably Ephesus) was not possible, “...*they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them...*” (16:7 NKJV). Bithynia was to the north. The language is not as strong as the *forbidden* above, and suggests that they were *trying to work out* where to go next, and God was limiting their actions. Eventually they came down to Troas.

During the night, a vision appeared to Paul. That Luke recorded the event on this occasion, but omitted it to mention it on the previous occasion (forbidding them to go into Asia) suggests that such a vision might not have occurred.

The vision is of a man in Macedonia pleading with them to come over and help. But notice Luke's description of this event.

“... *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...*” (16:10 NIV)

Paul and Silas *had to work out for themselves* what the vision meant. They had to *consider the evidence* and draw a conclusion. Based on the evidence that they had before them, the conclusion that they had drawn was that the Holy Spirit wanted them to go to Macedonia, and not into Asia (Paul would have most likely headed for Ephesus had he had his own way).

So, here we have an important example of the Holy Spirit communicating with the apostles during their work. The communications were not explicit, but provided sufficient information for them to consider the facts and draw a conclusion. They were then able to act on that conclusion with confidence, knowing that they were following the divinely given direction. This is exactly the same situation in which Peter found himself, after being freed from prison in Jerusalem (12:11-12).

In exactly the same way, we have in the writings of the apostles, not (usually) explicit commands, but those that provide us with *sufficient information* on which to *consider the facts* and draw a conclusion. We are able to act on that conclusion with confidence, knowing that we are following the divinely given direction that we have received from God through the Holy Spirit and the apostles and prophets.

In precisely the same way then, we are guided by the Holy Spirit just as the apostles and prophets were in the first century!

Luke joins the party

Here (16:10) for the first consistent time in the narrative, Luke uses the pronoun “we”, which shows that he was now travelling with Paul, Silas, and Timothy. It may be that this was where Luke was living at that time – although some other passages suggest that he might have come from Syrian Antioch. (This is confirmed by some of the early christian writers – Eusebius and Jerome).

Some of the early manuscripts also have “we” at 11:27 and 14:22 – adding weight to Luke having been in Antioch at that time. Other evidence (as previously noted) is that Antioch is the only home city mentioned in the case of the election of the seven deacons in chapter 6, again suggesting that Antioch was of special significance to the writer of the book of Acts.

The trip to Macedonia took two days, with an overnight stop in Samothrace. The winds must have been prevailing and strong, because “...we ran a straight course...” (16:11), and the same journey on a later occasion took 5 days (20:6), although in the opposite direction. This would suggest that God was working with them and assisting them on their journey.

Neapolis was the seaport for the city of Philippi, and it is here that “Paul’s party” made their entrance into Europe, with the first record of the gospel being preached on that continent. Although, it may be implied that some from the dispersion in chapter 8, went back to Rome (2:10) and established the church there. However from the travellers perspective, they were really travelling from one part of the Roman Empire to another.

Philippi in Paul’s time

Philippi is described as “...the chief city of that part of Macedonia...” (16:12 KJV) however Amphipolis was the chief city, not Philippi. Philippi was a leading city of the district, which is a better translation (since the Greek text has the lack of the definite article). The city was also a Roman colony. The NASB correctly adds the word Roman to that description (*Roman colony*) that is omitted by the KJV & NKJV. Roman colonies enjoyed self-government, freedom of paying taxes to the Emperor, and the same rights as those who lived in Italy – Roman dress, language, coinage, and holidays. Roman citizenship was of great benefit to the Philippians and provided a sense of great pride (Phil 1:27; 3:20). Those in Philippi would have been justly proud of their city and its status as a colony, and would no doubt have thought of it as the leading city rather than Samothrace. The description shows the accurate presentation of the detail and the facts by Luke the historian.

Philippi is worthy of some “extra consideration” here because of its prominence in the New Testament. Philippi is located on the major Roman road – the Egnation Way – which connected Rome with Byzantium (now Istanbul).

Philippi was located in Macedonia about ten miles inland from the Aegean Sea. The original settlement was called Krenides, but in 356 B.C. the name was changed by Philip II, king of Macedonia, when he enlarged the city with many new inhabitants and considerable construction.

During the era of Roman rule, Philippi became a military colony in 42 B.C.; in 27 B.C., its status was again changed so that it received autonomous government, immunity from tribute, and treatment of its residents as if they actually lived in Italy. It was therefore one of the leading cities in the district of Macedonia (cf. Ac 16:12). The Via Egnatia, the main highway from Asia to the west, passed through Philippi and ran alongside the forum of the city. Near the city was the river Gangites.

Paul made a second visit to Philippi in A.D. 55-56 on his third missionary journey (Ac 20:1-6). He must have passed through the city twice: on his outward trip toward Corinth and again on his return when he was on the way to Jerusalem. Luke apparently rejoined the party at that time (NIVBC).

Philip II of Macedonia was the father of Alexander the Great. (At time of writing, I have been unable to source information regarding the population of Philippi, or the major industries / activities, however it must have been a significant city). Previous to this time, the area had been the location for Gold and Silver mines that were nearby.

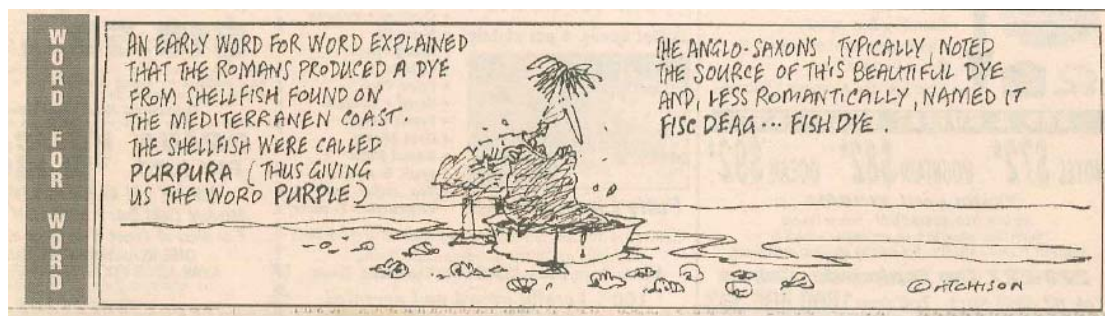
What was Paul’s method of evangelism here?

There must not have been a synagogue in Philippi, since Paul’s usual method of evangelism was to go there first (“for three sabbath days”). From our study of the synagogue, this gives us some information that there must have been less than 10 Jewish families in the city.

The party had been in the city for some time (“some days”) before the sabbath day arrived, and when it did arrive they had already sniffed out where they Jews would be gathered

together – in this case outside of the city down by the river side. This was “...where prayer was customarily made...” (16:13 NKJV), and so it must have been the usual place of assembly for the God-fearing Jews in the absence of the synagogue. The river was one mile outside of the city, and the body of water would have been necessary for the many ceremonial washings.

At this meeting there were many women, but we are not told about any men. One of those was Lydia. She was a seller of purple dye, and came from the city of Thyatira (one of the seven churches of Asia that John addressed in the Revelation letter Rev 2:18-29). It is not clear whether Lydia sold the dye, or the fabrics that had been dyed. The colour was obtained from shellfish, and the colour had great demand amongst the rich – it was used for the official toga in Rome and the colonies. The ancient writer Homer informs us that Thyatira was noted for the art of dyeing, and inscriptions found there bear witness to a guild (trade union) of purple sellers.



Lydia must have been a woman of considerable means, since she was able to travel quite considerable distances to trade her dye or cloth. She is described as a “*God fearer*” (*Gk sebomene*) which is the same word used to describe a Proselyte of the Gate – ie a Proselyte who had not yet converted to Judaism. It is possible that she gained her interest in the Jewish religion in Thyatira where there was a considerable Jewish population. She either owned or rented a house in Philippi (16:15), and nothing is said about her husband, so as a woman home-owner of considerable means, it is likely that she was a widow.

How did Lydia react to the preaching of the word?

Paul (and the others also – since Luke uses the term “...*we sat down and spoke...*” 16:13 NKJV) was *preaching*. Lydia was *listening* to the things that were spoken. If Lydia was not interested in the things that Paul was saying, then we could say that her heart was *closed* to the gospel. However in this case, we find that her heart was receptive – *open* – to the gospel.

Many have taught that the events described here are a direct action of the Spirit onto Lydia’s heart “...*God opened her heart...*”, however nothing is said that requires such a conclusion. It is true that her heart was opened, and it is true that God had placed Paul and Lydia together by bringing together special events – possibly even the timing of the missionary’s journey to coincide with the visit of Lydia to Philippi. But note that her heart was opened after she *heard the word that was preached* by Paul. This is exactly consistent with every other case of conversion in the New Testament – “...*for faith comes by hearing...the word of God...*” (Rom 10:17).

Lydia’s heart was receptive to the word, and she was obedient to the things that were taught. She was baptised right away (possibly even in the river right beside where they had been meeting) – it does not appear that she put it off for several days or weeks. She was baptised, along with *her household*. There is nothing here that implies that anyone was baptised who did not *believe* the things that were spoken by Paul.

Lydia appealed to the missionaries “...*she constrained us...*” (16:15) to come and stay in her house. The idea is that it was not just a token offer by Lydia and rapid acceptance by Paul, but rather one of genuine persistence by Lydia, and reluctant acceptance by Paul and the party. There was really no reason to reject the offer unless they judged her not to be faithful and genuine in her conversion.

What happens to the demonic girl?

Paul, and his friends were going to the place of prayer. It seems that this was some days after the conversion of Lydia, and they were still meeting outside of the city. As they were making their way (probably through the city), the demonic girl followed them. Literally, this was a “*python spirit*” – a monstrous mythological dragon who lived in a cave near Delphi. It seems that the demon had literally taken over and controlled the girl.

Up until this time, it appears that the Jews were making no attempt to persecute the Christians, and it is possible that Satan was using this girl “*to get at*” the missionaries.

She was crying out that “...*these men are proclaiming to us a way of salvation...*” (which could be just as good as any other way of salvation – through Mohammad, or Buddha, or Confucius). There is no definite article in the Greek, and so “*a way*” is more correct than “*the way of salvation*”. This explains why Paul was upset! There is not a way to God, but only the way to God! Paul became annoyed by the girl as she continued for several days disrupting him as he taught by the river at the place of prayer. He then turned to the girl, and commanded the spirit to come out of her. The response was immediate. There was no doubt about what was done, and the apostles proved that they were from God by the miracles that they did.

Her masters were troubled by the loss of their income, rather than being happy for the relief to the girl – she had probably been bought at a market because of her “abilities”, and they had no real concern for her, but only what she could provide for them. Their response was to arrest Paul and Silas, and bring them before the magistrates.

What charge is brought before Paul and Silas?

“...*They are Jews (correct)...who are teaching customs (sort of correct) ...which are not lawful (not correct) ...for us who are Romans, to receive or observe... (not correct)*”. (16:20-21). It is likely that the accusers had in mind the decree from Claudius Caesar to expel all of the Jews from Rome, with the implication that these Jews should also be expelled from the Roman Colony.

Paul and Silas were of course, teaching that the gospel was for Gentiles as well as the Jews. It is quite contrary to proclaiming that the Jewish customs should be bound upon the Gentiles – for that was the very issue that was dealt with in the Jerusalem conference, and Paul had made sure that the Gentile churches understood it (16:4).

The false accusations raised the anger of the citizens and the magistrates of the city against Paul and Silas. They were taken and beaten and then cast into prison. Paul discusses this “*shameful treatment at Philippi*” in 1 Thess 2:2, and Luke concurs by telling us that they had “...*many blows inflicted upon them...*” (16:23). The Jailer was commanded to keep the prisoners securely, and consequently they had their feet securely fastened in the stocks. If that was not punishment enough, we need to remember that they had just undertaken a severe beating for something that they had not done!

How do Paul and Silas react?

They were singing hymns of praise to God, and praying! The other prisoners heard them – and must have wondered how it was that these men could rejoice in such a time of tribulation.

At midnight, there was a great earthquake. The whole prison was shaken – and the noise and rumble awakened the prison keeper. The prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains fall off and they became free from the restraint. Theoretically, the prisoners could have just walked out. The reaction from the jailer was to kill himself, because the punishment for losing a prisoner was to himself bear the punishment that was to be meted out to the prisoners.

Paul cried out with a loud voice not to do that – for all of the prisoners were still there! This must have come as great source of astonishment to the jailer. Here were men who had obviously been mistreated, but in their punishment were singing songs of praise to God! And when given the opportunity to escape, did not! And further, when the Jailer was about to kill

himself which would have absolutely given them the opportunity to escape, they prevented the action!

The Jailer got a light and came to see for himself – hardly believing that this could be possible. He was faced with the reality that these were no ordinary men, and they must be who they claimed to be – as the servant girl had said – servants of the Most High God.

The Jailer brought them out of the prison, and asked:

What must I do to be saved?

The Jailer addressed Paul and Silas as *lords* (*kurioi*) “sirs”; but Paul’s answer was there is only one *Lord* (*kurios*) believe in Him. This does **not** mean that ***all he had to do*** was believe. We note that Paul taught him to repent and to be baptised. Whilst repentance is not mentioned, it cannot be argued that anyone can come to God without repenting of his sins. That he was told to be baptised is evident from the action that followed. In the next verse, we note, that Paul and Silas “...spoke the word of the Lord to them...” (16:32). This should not surprise us, since (as we have already noted in this study) “*faith comes by hearing the word of God*”. The word was spoken not only to the Jailer, but also to all of his household.

Some have concluded that this included children (babies), and that therefore babies should be baptised. However, we need to notice that all of those to whom Paul and Silas spoke “...believed in God...” (16:34), and further after they were baptised, “...they rejoiced...” (16:34)

It is also of note that his baptism occurred after midnight, which shows the importance and necessity of baptism in the plan of salvation. Here was a family who *knew* their state with God – *they knew they were lost*. They had just been told *how* to get back into a right relationship with God, and they wanted it ***RIGHT NOW!***

The release from custody

Paul and Silas went back to jail after having baptised the Jailer, and taken some food. The Magistrates must have had a reflection on the circumstances, and may have been influenced by the earthquake, and most likely by the Jailer. Paul’s response to them was that as Roman citizens, they were entitled to a trial, and that Roman justice had been subverted by the Magistrates by the punishment that they received. Paul called for the Magistrates themselves to come and release them, rather than have their messengers do it!

The Magistrates had broken the Roman law, and could have been severely punished had Paul and Silas pressed charges. They did come and release them, and some of the early texts add that they brought many people with them to witness the release. The Magistrates could not demand that Roman citizens leave the city, but they *asked* them to leave – probably to ensure that peace was maintained.

Before they left however, they went and visited Lydia. They then had several brethren to visit – not only the house of Lydia, but also the household of the Jailer, and perhaps others that we are not told of.

From here, Luke changes the pronoun that is used from “we” to “they”, and it appears that Luke stayed in Philippi whilst Paul, Silas and Timothy continued their journey to Thessalonica (17:1). It appears that Luke remained in Philippi for about 5 years, as he does not appear again in the narrative until chapter 20:5-6, where he is either still (or again) found in Philippi.

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