

Acts 16 – Paul first European Convert

Timothy Joins Paul and Silas

THEME: The second missionary journey of Paul.

The final verse of chapter 15 actually told of the beginning of the journey. Paul and Silas “went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.” From there they will go up into the Galatian country. Paul will visit the Galatian churches because that is where the problem had arisen with the Judaizers. The Epistle to the Galatians is Paul's letter to them, sternly warning them about being led astray by those who are trying to put them under the Mosaic system. It is his strongest declaration and defense of the doctrine of justification by faith. Not only is a sinner saved by grace through faith, but the saved sinner lives by grace. Grace is a way to life and a way of life.

Again let me suggest that you follow Paul's journey on the map. You will find that traveling with Paul is a very thrilling experience. On this second missionary journey we will go with him to Europe (after he has received the vision of the man in Macedonia). We will see that he arrives in Philippi where he ends up in the local jail. At midnight Paul and Silas pray and sing praises! An earthquake shakes the jail, the doors are opened, and the jailer opens his heart to receive Christ as Savior. - McGee

Act 16:1-2 Paul went first to Derbe and then to Lystra, where there was a young disciple named Timothy. His mother was a Jewish believer, but his father was a Greek. Timothy was well thought of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium,

Memories must have come back to Paul like swallows to a barn when he returned to DERBE and LYSTRA. The memory of his stoning at Lystra might conceivably have raised misgivings about ever returning. But the apostle knew that God had people in this area, and no consideration of personal safety could deter him.

As suggested previously, Timothy may have been converted through Paul's ministry during the apostle's first visit to Lystra (apparently Timothy's home town. Timothy's mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, were both Jewish believers (2Ti_1:5). His father was Greek and may have died by this time.

It rejoiced Paul's heart to learn from the brethren ... at Lystra and Iconium that Timothy was progressing well in the Christian faith. Paul invited him to go along on this missionary trip. We do well to notice that the early apostles not only worked in pairs, but also took along younger brethren (Mark and Timothy) for training in practical aspects of the Christian ministry. What a privilege it was for these young men to be yoked together with seasoned veterans in Christian missionary enterprise. – Believers Bible Commentary

Act 16:3 so Paul wanted him to join them on their journey. In deference to the Jews of the area, he arranged for Timothy to be circumcised before they left, for everyone knew that his father was a Greek.

Before Paul departed, he circumcised Timothy. Why did he do this, when he had steadfastly refused to have Titus circumcised some time previously (Gal_2:1-5)? The answer is simply this: in the case of Titus it was a question of fundamental Christian doctrine, where as here it was not. The false teachers were insisting that a full-blooded Gentile, like Titus, had to be circumcised in order to be saved. Paul recognized this as a denial of the sufficiency of Christ's atoning work, and would not allow it. Here the case was entirely different. The people of the area knew that Timothy was Jewish from his mother. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were going forth on evangelistic work. Their first contacts would frequently be with the Jews. If these Jews knew that Timothy was not circumcised, they might refuse to listen; whereas if he were, there would be no possibility of offense on this score. Since it was entirely a matter of moral indifference and not of doctrinal importance, Paul submitted Timothy to this Jewish ordinance. He was made all things to all men that he might by all means save some (1Co_9:19-23).

Acts 16 – Paul first European Convert

The interpretation that Paul's circumcising of Timothy was in order to gain an audience for the gospel with the Jews seems to be strongly implied by the words, and circumcised him because of the Jews ... for they all knew that his father was Greek. – Believers Bible Commentary

Act 16:4-5 Then they went from town to town, instructing the believers to follow the decisions made by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. So, the churches were strengthened in their faith and grew larger every day.

As the three missionaries traveled through the cities of Lycaonia, they delivered to the churches the decrees which had been drawn up by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. These decrees were, in brief, as follows:

1. As far as salvation is concerned, faith alone is necessary. Circumcision or law-keeping should not be added to faith as a condition for being saved.
2. Sexual immorality was forbidden for all believers and for all time, but this reminder was probably addressed primarily to converted Gentiles, since this was (and is) their besetting sin.
3. Meats offered to idols, meat from animals that had been strangled, and blood were forbidden as food, not as matters essential to salvation, but to facilitate fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers. Some of these instructions were subsequently revised (see 1 Cor. 8-10; 1Ti_4:4-5).

As a result of the ministry of these men, the churches were strengthened in the Christian faith, and increased in number daily. – Believers Bible Commentary

The Macedonian Call

Act 16:6-8 Next Paul and Silas traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia, because the Holy Spirit had prevented them from preaching the word in the province of Asia at that time. Then coming to the borders of Mysia, they headed north for the province of Bithynia, but again the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go there. So instead, they went on through Mysia to the seaport of Troas.

Galatia includes all this area. I am of the opinion that Paul moved into the northern part of the country at this particular point. The province of Asia is down south where Ephesus is. In fact, Ephesus was the chief city of the province of Asia. Paul may have been planning to make a circuit through Asia Minor. This was a heavily populated area in that day, and it was really the center of Greek culture. This was a great commercial area, a great political area, a great educational area. Paul would make a great circle by going through the Galatian country, then Phrygia, then south into the province of Asia, and then back again to Antioch to report to the home church.

The Spirit of God had something else in mind. We are told that the Holy Spirit forbade him to preach the Word down in Asia. That is really amazing, isn't it? Paul wanted to go there, and the Spirit of God wanted the Word of God given out, but the Spirit of God wanted Paul in a different place at this time. So Paul naturally thought that if he could not go south, he would go north. Bithynia was in the north, along the Black Sea. That also was a large population center, and there was a very heavy concentration of Hebrews in that area. This section is in Turkey today.

The Spirit forbade them to go south into the province of Asia. Then the Spirit of God forbade them to go north into Bithynia. He has come from the east. Where will he go? Well, there is only one direction left and that is west. You see, it was not Horace Greeley of The New York Sun who first said, "Go west, young man, go west." Instead it was the Spirit of God speaking to the apostle Paul!

So, Paul kept going west until he came to Troas. He had to stop there because from that point he would need a ship to continue. Paul couldn't imagine what he was to do or where he was to go from that point.

Acts 16 – Paul first European Convert

I think that if we had met Paul during the time of his delay in Troas, we could have asked him, “Paul, where are you going?” I’m sure his reply would have been, “I don’t know.” I’m afraid our next statement would have been something like this: “Now brother Paul, do you mean that the great Apostle of the Gentiles doesn’t know where he is going next? Surely you must know the will of God for your life.” Then we would have sat down for a nice long lecture on how to determine the will of God in his life. My, I’ve read so many books on that subject—it’s too bad Paul didn’t have one of those books with him at that time! Paul does not know the will of God. Why? Because the Spirit of God is leading him. Paul is simply waiting. It is going to take a mighty movement to get Paul out of Asia and move him over into Europe.-McGee

Act 16:9-10 That night Paul had a vision: A man from Macedonia in northern Greece was standing there, pleading with him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” So, we decided to leave for Macedonia at once, having concluded that God was calling us to preach the Good News there.

This is Paul’s call into Macedonia. Now Macedonia is across the Aegean Sea, over in Europe. Paul is in Asia. The gospel is going to cross from Asia into Europe. The Spirit of God is moving him in that direction.

I do not know why Paul was not moved east to China. All I know is that the Spirit of God moved him west to Europe. I thank God that this is the direction he went. At that particular time my ancestors, from one side of the family, were roaming in the forests of Germany. They were pagan and they were evil, worshiping all kinds of idols. They were a low, heathen people. The other side of my family came from Scotland, and perhaps my ancestors were already in Scotland at that time or came there a little later. At any rate, I am told they were the dirtiest, filthiest savages that have ever been on the topside of this earth. I thank God the gospel went to Europe to reach my people over there.

Now maybe you are smiling, thinking that your ancestors were very superior to mine. Well, you can wipe that smile off your face because your ancestors probably were living in the cave right next door to mine! They were just as dirty and just as filthy as mine were. Thank God the gospel crossed over into Europe. This was a great and significant crossing.

Note it says “we endeavoured to go.” We have never had “we” before. It has always been “they” or “them” or “he” or “him.” What about “we”? Well, Dr. Luke has now joined the party. It is really quite a party now—in fact, it is a quartet. There may have been others along also, but we have four who are named: Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Dr. Luke. This is quite a delegation that crossed over into Europe. -McGee

The Conversion of Lydia

Act 16:11-12 We boarded a boat at Troas and sailed straight across to the island of Samothrace, and the next day we landed at Neapolis. From there we reached Philippi, a major city of that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And we stayed there several days.

Neapolis is just a little inland from the coast. Philippi was a colony in Macedonia, which means it was a Roman colony. This would be where the Roman governor resided. These people had Roman customs and they spoke Latin. It would be a city where they would “do as the Romans do.”

This is their first destination in Europe. Paul went to a strategic center to begin his ministry in Europe. That alone makes the church in Philippi a remarkable church. For other reasons, which we will learn when we get to the Epistle to the Philippians, we will see that this church was close to the heart of Paul. This was the church which loved him; and Paul loved this church. There were wonderful saints in this church, as we shall see. -McGee

Act 16:13 On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there.

Acts 16 – Paul first European Convert

Just outside the city, down by the river, there was a prayer meeting. I wonder whether that prayer meeting had anything to do with Paul coming over to Europe and the vision of the man of Macedonia! We will find that the “man of Macedonia” is a woman by the name of Lydia who was holding this prayer meeting.-McGee

Act 16:14 One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying.

Thyatira is over in Asia Minor. It is the place where one of the seven churches was located which received admonition from our Lord in the second chapter of the Book of Revelation. This woman had come from over there. She worshiped the living and true God, but she had very little knowledge.

Lydia was a remarkable person. She was a dominant person and a leader. Apparently she was the leader of the prayer meeting. She will be the first convert to Christ in Europe. - McGee

Act 16:15 She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests. “If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my home.” And she urged us until we agreed.

We do not know anything about Mr. Lydia, but he must have been around there somewhere. There are families like that, you know, where the woman is the dominant one in the family. Apparently that was the way it was in the family of Lydia. Thank God she was that kind of woman because her entire household turned to God through her witness. And now we find Paul and his group staying at her home and boarding there. I would assume she was a person of means and was able to take care of them. - McGee

Paul and Silas in Prison

Act 16:16 One day as we were going down to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit that enabled her to tell the future. She earned a lot of money for her masters by telling fortunes.

Don't think this was just foolish superstition. This girl was possessed by a demon. We are seeing a resurgence of demonism in our own day. I have before me now a letter from a Christian woman in El Paso, Texas. She got tied up in spiritism by just fooling around with it, not thinking that it was dangerous. She has quite a story. It was hearing the Word of God through our radio program that delivered her from it. She cried out to God, and He delivered her. Demonism is a reality. This girl in Paul's day was demon possessed. She was a slave girl and her masters were using her to make a big profit. The Mafia had already begun in those days.- McGee

Act 16:17-19 She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved.” This went on day after day until Paul got so exasperated that he turned and said to the demon within her, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And instantly it left her. Her masters’ hopes of wealth were now shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace.

Paul was able to cast out the demon in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This dried up the profit her masters were making, and you know that if you touch a man's pocketbook, he will begin to move. So now these men really turn against Paul and his group.-McGee

Act 16:20-21 “The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!” they shouted to the city officials. “They are teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice.”

Remember that Philippi was a Roman colony and practiced Roman idolatry. Paul and his men were charged with trying to change things. Of course, the real issue was that the girl's masters had lost their source of income. - McGee

Acts 16 – Paul first European Convert

Act 16:22-24 A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape. So, the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.

The Philippian Jailer Converted

Act 16:25 Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening.

These men are beaten, their backs are lacerated, and they are locked into the stocks. What a wonderful thing it is that these men were singing praises unto God while they were in such a miserable situation. No wonder the doors were shaken loose!

Act 16:26-27 Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself.

Let's look at this Philippian jailer for a moment. He was responsible for those prisoners. He naturally assumed that if the doors were open and the chains lying loose, the prisoners would be gone. He would be responsible for their escape and would have to forfeit his own life. So he stands there, poised, ready to fall on his own sword. When a man is in a position like that, he thinks about eternity. This man did just that, as his question to Paul indicates. - McGee

Act 16:28-30 But Paul shouted to him, "Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

He had looked into eternity. He knew that he was a lost man.

Act 16:31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household."

How can a man be saved? By believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. Could he believe for someone else? No. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and if thy household believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, they shall be saved also. That is the meaning here. - McGee

Act 16:32-33 And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized.

What a difference! He had put the stripes on these men. Now he washes their stripes. He is a changed man. - McGee

Act 16:34 He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.

All in one night they were flogged, thrown into jail, freed by the direct intervention of God, and now they are being royally entertained in the home of these rejoicing young converts! - McGee

Act 16:35-36 The next morning the city officials sent the police to tell the jailer, "Let those men go!" So the jailer told Paul, "The city officials have said you and Silas are free to leave. Go in peace."

Acts 16 – Paul first European Convert

You see, they realize that what they had done was illegal. Now they are issuing orders to free the prisoners and get them out of town. However, Paul objects. He says that he will not leave under such circumstances. - McGee

Act 16:37 But Paul replied, “They have publicly beaten us without a trial and put us in prison—and we are Roman citizens. So now they want us to leave secretly? Certainly not! Let them come themselves to release us!”

Of course Paul's reason for insisting upon a public recognition of their innocence was to protect the new believers whom he would soon be leaving there in Philippi. - McGee

Act 16:38-40 When the police reported this, the city officials were alarmed to learn that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. So, they came to the jail and apologized to them. Then they brought them out and begged them to leave the city. When Paul and Silas left the prison, they returned to the home of Lydia. There they met with the believers and encouraged them once more. Then they left town.

The magistrates did come, and rather apologetically at that! They urged Paul and Silas to depart from the city without further disturbance. With the dignity of sons of the King, the Lord's servants went out of the prison, but they did not leave the city immediately. First, they went to Lydia's house, conferred with the brethren, and encouraged them. How wonderful! The ones who should have been comforted were encouraging others.

When their mission in Philippi was accomplished, they departed with full colors flying. – Believers Bible Commentary