

## **ACTS 15:36 to 16:24 THE GOSPEL MAKES IT TO EUROPE**

We have been going through the entire book of Acts. We will eventually finish, but we are right in the middle of it now. Last time we looked at the Jerusalem Council in Acts Chapter 15. After returning to Antioch from the Jerusalem Council, Paul and Barnabas spend a while – about three years – ministering in their home church there in Antioch. They teach and disciple the believers in Antioch and continue to evangelize that area. During this period, the church at Antioch grows both in both numbers and spiritually. Many of the new converts are on fire for the Lord. From this group new teachers and leaders begin to emerge. It is a very healthy church. Everything is going well. But at some point, Paul feels compelled by the Holy Spirit to return to the mission field. A second missionary journey is proposed. As you will see, a lot happens on this second trip, which will be discussed from Acts Chapters 16 through 18.

This second missionary journey will take him from Antioch in Syria; to his hometown of Tarsus which is in Cilicia; then into the southern region of Galatia to the same towns he visited on his first journey. From there he will head north and west into Asia, cross over the Aegean Sea to Macedonia (which is on the continent of Europe in modern day Greece). His travels will take him to such cities as Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth and Ephesus before returning home. That is a broad overview of his second missionary journey. As you can see, this is a much longer trip than the first one. Let's get into the scriptures...

READ Acts 15:36

So, Paul approaches Barnabas, his missionary partner on the first mission trip, about going back to the region of Southern Galatia. He wants to visit those previously established churches and see how the new believers are doing. It has been several years since he last saw them. Paul recently wrote a doctrinal letter to these churches – what we know as the book of Galatians. He is quite concerned about their spiritual development

and their susceptibility to false teachings. In the book of Galatians Paul addressed a lot of those.

READ Acts 15:37

So, Barnabas's response to Paul is, "Hey, that is a great idea, Paul! Let's take John Mark with us." But Paul, well let's just say, he is less than enthusiastic about that idea.

READ Acts 15:38

You all remember what happened. It was the young and inexperienced John Mark who had started out with them on their first missionary journey and then left them at Perga in Pamphylia and returned home. After several years Mark apparently regrets that decision. He has matured a bit. His uncle, Barnabas, is aware of this and he wants to give Mark another chance. There is a reason why Barnabas is called the "son of encouragement." It is what he does. He wants to encourage John Mark.

READ Acts 15:39-40

We could argue all day long about who was right here – Paul or Barnabas? It doesn't matter because... "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28), right? We've read our Bibles! Paul and Barnabas both love God and so, things work out for good. The result of this rift between these two men is that two different missionary teams are formed. Barnabas and John Mark team up and they set sail for Cyprus. Barnabas is originally from Cyprus. He and Paul went there on the first mission trip. After this nothing more about Barnabas is mentioned in the book of Acts. But we do know that Barnabas's mentoring of John Mark has a positive effect on young Mark. He eventually grows up and become a close ministry associate of the Apostle Peter. Later Mark will write the Gospel of Mark, which presents the life of Jesus from Peter's perspective. If you will recall, Peter and John Mark's family were close friends. So then, Barnabas mentors John Mark and that is a good thing.

Meanwhile Paul chooses Silas, forming a second mission team. Luke, who is the writer of the book of Acts (a close friend of Paul's) is going to follow and record Paul's journeys and his adventures from this point on in the book of Acts.

READ Acts 15:41-16:1a

These verses summarize the first phase of Paul's second missionary journey. This is all familiar territory for Paul. Paul and Silas walk from Antioch in Syria northward into Cilicia to Paul's hometown of Tarsus. From there they take the northern route through pine and cedar forests and climb 4,000 feet into the Taurus Mountains. They ascend up to a high tableland and make their way to the town of Derbe. This was one of Paul's stops on his first mission trip. From Derbe they head to Lystra.

Now remember, it was at Lystra in Acts Chapter 14 where Paul had been stoned by the crowd and left for dead. Acts 14 tells us "But when the disciples gathered about [Paul], he rose up and entered the city" (Acts 14:20). So, we know that there are several people in Lystra who had embraced the Gospel that Paul preached and got saved. They rallied around Paul at this time. As it turns out one these believers is a young man named Timothy. We are about to be introduced to him in Acts Chapter 16.

Before I go on any further, I want stop right here and address Paul's strained relationship with John Mark.

You know, some people will go through their entire lives clinging to their resentments. Do you know of anybody like that? They just can't seem to let go. Paul, however, does not do that. The relationship between Paul and John Mark, though it is strained to the point that it led to the split between Paul and Barnabas – it eventually gets mended. You need to know that. The Bible doesn't give us any of the details, but we know that their differences eventually become resolved.

In his last letter to Timothy (the man we are about to meet) just before his death, Paul writes these words to his protégé Timothy. He says, "Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you [speaking of John

Mark], for he is very useful to me for ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:11). Whatever differences Paul had with Mark earlier in the book of Acts get worked out. Here we see Paul at the end of his life requesting to see John Mark. So, as it turns out, even though we don’t know the details about how, we know that they ended up having a pretty good relationship after all. I just wanted to point that out because it is not in the book of Acts but this seemed like a good place to bring that up.

READ Acts 16:1b-3

Timothy is a new believer. He has a Jewish mother and a Gentile father. In Timothy, Paul sees great potential and wants him to join his missionary team. One thing that we see about Paul is that he is always eager to pour himself into the lives of new believers. He is not just out there for evangelism. He is big on discipleship.

The question comes up when people read this passage – “Why did Paul agree to have Timothy circumcised when he had refused to have Titus, a young Gentile convert, circumcised in Jerusalem?” Well, the circumstances are completely different. In Titus’s case, Paul refused to have him circumcised in direct response to the Judaizers (believers who wanted to live according to Jewish customs). This group had insisted that Titus, a Gentile, be circumcised in order to be accepted into the Christian church. That wrong kind of thinking was refuted by the Jerusalem Council. In Timothy’s case, Paul insists that Timothy, a half-Jew and half-Gentile, be circumcised in order to overcome any barriers to his witness for Christ.

One commentary I read explains Paul’s rationale this way: Paul can see that Timothy, neither fully a Jew nor fully a Gentile, might lack credibility, especially with the Jews. Notice that V 3 says that he “circumcised him because of the Jews.” By having Timothy circumcised he will be viewed as Jewish. Paul knows that the Gentiles are more likely to accept a missionary who is fully Jewish more readily than the Jews would accept a missionary who is half-Gentile. So then, this is a practical thing based on what Paul knows about both groups. He is aware of the

prejudices that exist in these groups at this time. If Timothy had been a full-blooded Gentile like Titus, Paul more than likely would not have had him circumcised. But because he is a half-Jew, he does. Timothy agrees to be circumcised and then he joins Paul and Silas on their missionary trip.

READ Acts 16:4-5

The three men travel from town-to-town teaching and strengthening the new believers in their faith. Paul tells each group of believers in these various cities the decision that was reached by the Jerusalem Council. He has a letter that they wrote which he takes with him and reads to the various churches. This is important information because in the book of Galatians we were made aware of two false doctrines that had permeated churches in this region, Southern Galatia:

1. The teaching by the Judaizers that imposed on Christians the need for them to keep Jewish traditions and ceremonial laws.
2. The tendency by converted pagan Gentiles to turn their Christian freedom from the law into license to behave as they pleased, free from all moral restraints.

The Jerusalem Council specifically addressed both of these false doctrines. So that is why it is important for Paul to state what the Jerusalem Council's findings were. Paul spends quite a bit of time trying to straighten the saints in this region out doctrinally. Sound doctrine is very important to Paul. If you read Paul's letters you understand just how important doctrine is to him. He emphasizes that throughout his letters.

When I was going to DTS (Dallas Theological Seminary) a sign sitting out in front of the seminary reminded all of us who are in ministry of an important point – "Teach the truth in love." It is important to teach sound doctrine in love. That is what Paul does. He wants to make sure they know the truth.

READ Acts 16:6-8

The team is down in the region of Southern Galatia and they make their way to Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia; then they go into Asia. Their original plans are to travel across Asia and up into Bithynia (what is today northern Turkey). But something or should I say Someone changes their plans. The Holy Spirit prompts them to change course and head west to the coastal town of Troas. Troas is a major port city on the Aegean coast. It is very scenic and very old. But in Troas there is nothing in front of them except blue seas. So, where do they go from here? Why has God blocked all their plans to evangelize Asia and Bithynia? Paul and Silas and Timothy will soon find out the answer to these questions. When God closes one door, He opens up another.

So, I think about Asia and Bithynia – these regions that Paul did not preach. We know that Christianity WILL eventually spread to this part of Asia and Bithynia. We are not for certain who the missionaries were that brought the Gospel. But we do know that churches are started in this area by 64 A.D. Paul's second missionary journey here is taking place roughly 52-53 A.D. By 64 A.D. when First Peter is written there are churches here. So, over the next 10 years we know the Gospel makes it to this area. In his first letter, Peter opens with these words of greeting: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia..." (1 Peter 1:1). So then, God is preparing somebody else to carry the Gospel to this area. He has other plans though for Paul and Silas and Timothy.

So then, they are in Troas where we last left them...

READ Acts 16:9-10

Paul sees a vision of a man standing there calling out to him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" Paul interprets this to be clear direction from God to go to Macedonia. The work that Paul does from this point forward will prove to be the most important of his ministry. It is during this phase of his second missionary journey that Paul will start up many of the churches to whom he will later write his most important letters. These will

include his epistles to the Thessalonians, Philippians, Corinthians, Ephesians and the Colossians. He is about to go visit these places.

During this time that Paul surrounds himself with an increasing group of devoted workers and friends, what I affectionately call his "European Connection." These include people such as Lydia and Epaphroditus (Philippi); Aristarchus and Jason (Thessalonica); Dionysius and Damaris (Athens); Justus Titus, Crispus, Priscilla and Aquila (Corinth); Tychicus and Trophimus (Ephesus); and Sopater (Berea). These are some of his future co-workers in the ministry.

Just think what would have happened if Paul had ignored the Spirit's prompting and just proceeded on with his original plans to head north instead of west. What a blessing he would have missed out on had he insisted on doing things his own way. Think about all the letters we would not have in our Bible because he never would have been in those places. God knows what He is doing! So, he redirects Paul.

Well, having made his way across Asia in present day Turkey, Paul will next take the Gospel across the Aegean Sea to the European continent. It takes a couple of days to sail 125 miles to the port city of Neapolis. This is near the modern city of Kavala, Greece. From there he and his team will walk the remaining 10 miles from that port city to Philippi which is inland.

READ Acts 16:11-12

When the missionary team sets sail from Troas to the Roman province of Macedonia, Luke apparently joins them. Beginning in these verses, Luke uses the word "we," which is a pretty good indication of his presence with them. Some people have surmised that Luke was practicing as a physician in Troas, but we do not know that for certain.

READ Acts 16:13-15

At Philippi they find responsive hearts and receive a warm welcome. There are no hostile Jews to disrupt their ministry because there is no synagogue here. This is a Gentile city. Philippi is a major city. In the First

Century it was known as "a small Rome." It is very much a Roman City. It is an old city, founded in 400 B.C. and named for Philip of Macedon who was Alexander the Great's father.

They come upon this group of women who are praying on a riverbank. It is with these women that our four missionaries gathered together on the Sabbath. The main person among the women (at least she is the only one named) is Lydia. She is a woman of considerable wealth who operates a purple dye industry. She listens to Paul and God opens her heart. She responds to Paul's message and received Christ as her Savior. She becomes Paul's first convert in Europe. Lydia is baptized, her and her entire household. She then invites the missionaries to stay at her home. At first Paul was hesitant, but Lydia insists. It is hard to argue with a woman who offers such great hospitality! It is Lydia's home that will become the first church at Philippi (see Acts 16:40). Remember that in the First Century churches met in people's homes.

There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit's presence was mightily evident in the work at Philippi. In no letter does Paul more freely pour out his deepest feelings nor is any letter more filled with joy, thanksgiving and deep affection than the letter he writes to the Philippians. Wherever God powerfully moves in a place, there is sure to be a counter-attack from the powers of evil. That happens in Philippi. Everything is off to a great start, a warm welcome, evangelism going well. At this point they can expect an attack by Satan and that happens next.

READ Acts 16:16-18

Paul and Silas cross paths with a demon-possessed slave girl who is being exploited by her masters. The girl, possessed by evil spirits, is foretelling futures and bringing great financial gain to her masters. She declares the truth about Paul and his missionary team in v 17: "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." She is absolutely right. How does she know this? She is not the one saying it. It is the demons inside of her. They know who Paul and Silas



are! This is similar to the situation that Jesus faced in Mark 1:24 when a demon-possessed man declared to Jesus, "I know who you are – the Holy One of God." Like Jesus, Paul recognizes that the words coming out of this girl are not her own but are from an evil influence. And like Jesus, Paul casts the evil spirit out. He has the authority to do that because of the Holy Spirit.

READ Acts 16:19-21

Well, with the demon gone, the girl is no longer able to tell fortunes or predict future events. With their primary source of revenue taken away, the slave girl's masters, as you might imagine, become very upset with Paul and Silas. They have the two missionaries dragged in front of the local ruling magistrates. For whatever reason Timothy is not mentioned (he is not with them) when all of this happens.

Notice the false accusation that they levy against Paul and Silas – "disturbing our city" and "advocate customs that are not lawful." They didn't do any of that stuff. They are just making stuff up, false accusations! In other words, these guys who have been hit in the pocket take what is a private matter and turn it into a political issue. That never happens in our day and time does it? This sounds a lot like what happened with Jesus when He was before the Sanhedrin. They took a private matter between them and Jesus and then lied about it before Pilate, made it a political issue so that Pilate would do something about it. The strategy worked then and it works now also.

READ Acts 16:22-24

Their accusations throw the crowd into an uproar against Paul and Silas. Being influenced by this loud public outrage, as politicians often are, the magistrates have Paul and Silas stripped of their clothes, beaten with rods and thrown bleeding and bruised into jail.

There, that takes care of that! That ought to shut those trouble-makers up! Or so they thought. We will pick it up here next time.

Here are some applications from today's lesson...

- God can take what appears to be a negative situation and turn it into something positive. A sharp disagreement between two men created two missionary teams instead of only one.
- When God closes one door, He opens another. Make plans but then hold on to them loosely. Be sensitive to the Spirit's leading and then go wherever He directs you to go.
- Before you share the Gospel, it is a good idea to pray and ask God to go before you and open people's hearts to receive His message. Then allow God to lead you to those whose hearts He has been preparing.
- Our own Christian pilgrimage, even if we are in God's will, will not always be smooth sailing. Things are likely going to get rough at some point. What will be your response when that happens?