

# Session #15: Acts, Chapter 16

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## Paul's second missionary journey Acts 15:36-18:23

Paul's journey began about 49 AD, and like the first journey, it was no "10-day excursion." He would not return to Antioch for about 3 years. The previous experience began with Paul and Barnabas sailing to Cyprus. This trip begins with an argument over the inclusion of John Mark with brings about the separation of Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas takes John Mark and head to Cyprus. Paul invites Silas and they set out over land through Syria and Cilicia, to revisit the churches that had earlier been established in Asia Minor. Their purpose was first to offer each community the decision from Jerusalem as well as to see to the health and well being of the believers. Paul and Silas' first stops are at Derbe, and Lystra. It is at Lystra that Timothy will join him (Acts 16:1-5) but only after being circumcised. From there the group will continue northward through Phrygia and Galatia (Acts 16:6).

Paul remained in Galatia for some time due to an unspecified illness (Galatians 4:13-14). From Galatia, Paul then intended to travel northeastward into Asia through Bithynia, a region on the shore of the Black Sea, however "...they tried to enter Bithynia, but *The Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they went down to Troas.*" (Acts 16:7-8). Troas is on the shore of the Aegean Sea and it is here Paul has a vision of Jesus which stops Paul from going into Asia. It is also here at Troas that Paul has a vision: *of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."* (Acts 16:9). Paul realized that the vision was a message from the Lord, so the very next day he booked passage and crosses the Dardanelles and come to Berea. This was a major step because now the gospel has moved into Europe.

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Paul's first major stop in Macedonia is Philippi where quite a bit happens. First he meets Lydia (16:14-15), baptizes her and her household and uses her home as his "headquarters". While in Philippi Paul and Silas go to the synagogue every day to teach and preach but are followed by a slave girl. This slave girl is well liked by her owners because of her prophecies and predictions. But the demon who provided this information recognizes Paul as a believer in the one true God, so he causes the slave girl to follow him each day yelling at him. When St. Paul could take it no longer he heals the girl of the demon. Her owners realizing St. Paul has now denied them of future wealth dragged him and Silas into the city square and after agitating the crowd, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into the jail. (Acts 16:25-39) This is a wonderful story showing Sts Paul and Silas' compassion and the hand of God.

Sts Paul and Silas are freed from their imprisonment and make their way to Thessalonica (17:1), but after three weeks trouble starts again and Paul and Silas leave for Berea in the middle of the night (17:10). Here they find much success preaching the gospel but those in Thessalonica hear of what is going on in Berea, go there and St. Paul is escorted out of the city and to Athens. He lets Silas and Timothy know to join him when they can (17:14-15)

St. Paul is now in Athens with Silas and Timothy in Berea. While St. Paul waits for his brethren, overwhelmed by the idolatry of the Greek gods he begins to enter into discussions with the Athenians to some success. They invite him to the Areopagus, a place famous for the exchange of ideas and we hear the speech St. Paul gives (17:22-31). Tired of waiting St. Paul travels on to Corinth, which was at the time a seat of the Roman government for the area. It is here in Corinth that he remains after having a vision for approximately a year and a half working as a tent maker and preaching the gospel. It is here that Silas and Timothy rejoin him and St. Paul hearing of the happening in Thessalonica writes his two letters (epistles) to that community. From Corinth, after Paul has another vision the little troupe heads home through Ephesus eventually making it back home to Antioch. My hope is to cover this trip over the course of this study and next.

### **Paul and Barnabas Separate 15:36-41**

We can see by passages such as this that St. Luke was not afraid to report the whole truth – the good and the ugly such as with this tale of disagreement. What we read here is the dispute over who should accompany them. Paul does not want to take John Mark and cites the history of Mark's leaving them on their first Missionary trip. The argument became so bad that they decided to part ways. Barnabas takes Mark and goes to his native Cyprus. Paul selects Silas and together they go to his home province of Syria

### ***15:36 Come, let us return***

St. Paul is speaking here. What we can see is that this decision to continue to travel, preach and teach is Paul's decision. He was not commissioned nor asked by the

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leadership in Jerusalem to take on this mission. And what is the mission to go back and check on those communities he and Barnabas began. They also have the responsibility of informing everyone of the decision made in Jerusalem regarding Gentile converts.

**15:39 so sharp was their disagreement**

This would be Luke's polite way of saying they argued and could not come to a compromise. We should not read into this more than is there. Just because they parted ways does not mean that they parted enemies. We must remember that faith does not mean there won't be disagreements.

**15:40 but Paul chose Silas**

Silas first appears in Acts (15:22-29) with Barnabas, after the Council of Jerusalem, as carrying a letter with the council's decision, to Antioch. It seems that Paul got to know Silas in those weeks traveling to Antioch and must have been impressed with what he saw because he now invites him to continue to travel together.

### **Timothy Joins Paul 16:1-5**

So Paul and Silas head off on their journey. This time instead of by boat they travel by land. Their primary intention is to deliver the decision of the leaders in Jerusalem regarding circumcision and the Gentiles. But stay tuned. God has other plans for them and one if for a third, even a fourth to join them.

**16:1 Timothy**

The son of a Jewish mother (we learn in 2 Timothy 1:5 that her name



is Eunice who had raised him Jewish but just had never had him circumcised which was very possibly prevented by his father) and a Greek father, Timothy would become a longtime friend and companion of St. Paul's. According to tradition Paul would ordain him bishop of Ephesus around the year 65 and he would remain as leader of the church there for 15 years. It is believed that Timothy died by stoning as he tried to stop a procession of pagan worship. He interrupted their movement by preaching and teaching the faith and they reacted by stoning him to death.

**16:3 had him circumcised**

After all this discussion and Paul standing strong against the need for circumcision why is it the first thing we come across is Paul circumcising Timothy. Scholars believe that Paul made this decision so that Timothy would be free to preach and teach Jews not only

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in the public squares but in the synagogues and the homes of Jewish brethren. Because Timothy's mother was Jewish, the rabbinic laws state that religious affiliation follows the mother's line, so that children born of a Jewish mother were automatically Jewish, regardless of the faith of the father. So, the only thing that kept Timothy from possible scandal in synagogues was the lack of circumcision. This decision to have Timothy circumcised gives testimony that the early Church, with the decision at the Council of Jerusalem, is not giving up on making Jewish converts.

**16:4 the decision** They were bringing to the Christians the Apostolic decision from the Council of Jerusalem about circumcision and those three guidelines for Gentile converts. (Eating Kosher, no fornication and no eating of meat offer to idols.) We can understand that since there is very little else said the Churches accepted the decision with obedience and joy.

**By the apostles** From this point on in Acts focus of the story will be exclusively on St. Paul. St. Luke may mention James in chapter 21 but no longer will St. Luke direct our attention to the original 12. This is not to say that the Apostles are no longer important, but if we stay with our original understanding of this document – the growth of the Church, with them remaining in Jerusalem the longer are pertinent to the tale of the expansion of the Gospel.

**16:5 they increased in numbers daily** This is a phrase we have not heard in a while. Remember back in the early chapters of Acts? Whenever St. Luke closed out a section he would end sharing that the early Church was expanding and growing. Well, here we have another of those moments.

### Traveling through Asia Minor into Europe 16:6-10

We will see that God's presence is with Paul on this trip directing his steps. Just like you and I have plans to go here and do that if we open ourselves to God's voice we will often find that our lives go in very different directions.

**16:7 the spirit of Jesus** Simply put we are talking of the Holy Spirit because the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus are the same... the Holy Spirit. This is the only place in scripture that you will find the phrase *spirit of Jesus*. Scholars are a bit perplexed as to why St. Luke would use such a phrase.

**16:10 immediately we** There is a very abrupt shift in the narrative tone. St. Luke's writings go from third person to first person. St. Luke who has been content to share the story of the early church as an observer now inserts himself into the story. (Example is he writes: we not they). There are several "we" passages throughout Acts (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28). Scholars believe these are Luke's memories of being a part of the missionary team.

As a thought: *Why would he (St. Luke) so suddenly emerge on the scene? Luke was a doctor. What is more likely than that he met Paul then because Pau, who had fallen ill and so was barred from making the journeys he would like to make, needed his professional services? If this is so, it is instructive to reflect that Paul took even his weakness and his pain as a messenger from God.*

The New Daily Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles by William Barclay

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### **The Conversion of Lydia 16:11-15**

As the boat crosses over into Europe (what is present day Greece) the gospel message has expanded into a whole new world. As we have talked about before one of the major themes of St. Luke is for his readers to understand that the gospel message expanded further and further into the then known world.

#### **16:12 Philippi**

The community at Philippi, about eight miles inland, was a large city that held a colony of retired Roman army veterans. Alexander the Great's father was Philip II which is where this city gets its name. Philippi will become the center of a large Christian community that St. Paul will continue to have ties to choosing to write to (Letter to the Philippians) rather than visit again.

#### **16:13 riverside**

In communities where there were not enough Jewish males to warrant a synagogue, the community would choose a common place to gather and worship. It was often by a body of water or river so visitor such as Paul and Silas would know where to look and would allow for ritual cleansing. According to Jewish tradition, a synagogue could not be built until ten or more household heads (males) lived in the area.

#### **16:14 Lydia**

What we know of this woman we must deduce in this verse and verse 16:40. It is most probable that Lydia is a widow because later when Sts Paul and Silas are released from prison they return to HER home and not the home of her husband. She is a business woman because she was **a seller of purple goods**. In understanding that only the wealthy could afford cloth/clothing that was dyed to know that Lydia sells "Purple good" announces that she was very wealthy. At that time purple dye had to be collected drop by drop from certain shellfish. Since Lydia sells her cloth in Thyatira, a place on the coast in present day Turkey this is certainly where she learned her trade. This prohibited anybody but the extremely wealthy to go into such a trade as this. She is identified as a **worshipper of God**. This means that she was a Gentile who believed and practiced the Jewish faith but as an outsider just as we saw in Cornelius (Acts 10). Scholars suggest that St. Luke offers this meeting between Lydia and Paul to show that faith comes from God and God

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alone.

### **16:15 her household**

Much in the same way we today baptize the entire family (Mom, Dad and all younger children) when Mom and Dad decide to become Catholic. The Catholic Church understands that the first faith givers of children are their parents. In the time of Christ, while slaves were not children they were treated as such and much worse as possessions. All slaves understood that the fate of their owners would become their fate as well. So, it was routine to baptize not only the individual but, such as with the case Cornelius and now here Lydia, all those who “belonged” to them.

### **Imprisonment at Philippi 16:16-24**

God is the creator of all life, even the life that chooses to disobey living in the dark such as demons. In this section we will see St. Luke making a parallel between the ministry of St. Paul and that of Jesus. Just as in the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus we find demons identifying Him as the one true God and calling out the name of the Lord, we will see the demon possessing the young lady identifies Paul and Silas as “servants of the Most High” and calling out to them.

### **16:16 spirit of divination**

Another word used is oracular spirit which is understood as, “ a python spirit”. To have an oracular spirit refers to a mythical serpent/dragon said to guard the Greek temple of Apollo at Delphi. One controlled by this spirit was given the gift of foretelling the future not by means of their own but by the spirit within much like a ventriloquist using their “dummy”. In that time period it was said that the gods took away her own mind (sanity) so as to place their mind within her. So, you can imagine how upset the girl’s owner became when St. Paul healed her of the evil spirit. They could no longer exploit her misfortune for their money-making potential.

### **16:17 servants of the Most High**

The one thing that all of creation cannot do in the face of the Holy is lie. Here the evil spirit within the girl recognized the truth before them – Paul, Silas and Timothy were servants of God. So, if the evil within the girl is testifying to the truth why heal her of the spirit? For the same reason Jesus did. Out of compassion for the one possessed and to stop the testimony of unclean spirits. Their proclamation was not one of worship and honor but meant to humiliate and taunt.

### **16:20 magistrates**

The title used for those in charge of civil order. They authorized a beating (16:22) on charges that Paul and Silas were causing a citywide disturbance with questionable religious teachings.

### **16:22 beat them with rods**

Just as the Romans used crucifixion to strike terror in the hearts of all who looked on, it would appear that to be beaten by rods was probably the most humiliating and painful treatment at Philippi. If we turn our attention to St. Paul’s 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to the Thessalonians (2:2) we read: *though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the face of great opposition.* St. Paul suffered much in his willingness to proclaim the Gospel we read in 2 Corinthians 11:25: *Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have*

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*been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea* Paul and Silas were beaten and jailed for doing the right thing and yet most of us are unwilling to suffer even the smallest of possible embarrassment.

**16:24 put them in prison:**

*“St. John Chrysostom, reflecting on the punishment Paul and Silas underwent, sees them as sitting or lying on the ground, covered with wounds caused by the beating. He contrasts this suffering with the way many people avoid anything which involves effort, discomfort of suffering – ‘How we should weep over the disorders of our time! The apostles were subjected to the worst kinds of tribulations, and here we are, spending our time in search of pleasure and diversion. This pursuit of leisure and pleasure is the cause of our ruin. We do not see the value of suffering even the least injury or insult for the love of Jesus Christ. Let us remember the tribulations the saints experienced; nothing alarmed them or scared them. Severe humiliation made them tough, enabled them to do God’s work. They did not say, if we are preaching Jesus Christ, why does he not come to our rescue?’”*

*(Homily on Acts, 35) Taken from the Navarre Bible.*

Bible.

### **Deliverance from Prison 16:25-40**

This passage is one of the better-known stories of St. Paul. It is a good passage to reflect on and pray with as we think about how we handle adversity. Do we sing praises to God as Paul and Silas did or do we whine and complain wondering why God is so slow to deliver us?

**16:26 great earthquake**

This is the second time God has intervened on behalf of an imprisoned Apostle. Remember Peter’s two experiences in Jail? Each time an angel came to release him (5:19; 12:6-11). It should be said here that although earthquakes were not that common they did occur and first century jails, poorly built were apt to give freedom to all within its walls when one occurred.

**16:27 to kill himself**

Punishments were harsh when soldiers failed in their job. It was the common practice of that period that if a prisoner escaped during their watch they were likely tortured and killed. This prison guard believing that Paul and Silas had taken advantage of the moment and fled decided to end his life rather than wait for the sentence he was certain to receive.

**16:31 Believe in the Lord Jesus**

The challenge is presented to the jailer – Believe in Jesus Christ. Let’s take a moment and ask ourselves just what is going to lead the jailer to believe? It is the compassion of Paul and Silas who remained in the prison for the sake of his life. The Jailer comes to faith through the actions, choices of those that do believe.

**16:33 washed their wounds**

The jailer’s response? To believe and in that he now sees Paul and Silas as his brothers and immediately offers hospitality to them by taking them into his home. Keep in mind that the jailer is putting his life in jeopardy for leaving his post.

**16:35 the lictors**

We could identify “lictors” as police officers and while both are civil servants, in the first century these lictors were more free agent Roman bodyguard for the magistrates than they were autonomous forces that upheld the law.

**16:37 Roman citizens**

To be a Roman citizen when Rome ruled the known world

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meant one enjoyed certain privileges not shared by all inhabitants of the empire. Citizens, for example, were exempt from degrading forms of punishment (such as being beaten in the public square). Also, as a Roman citizen you were not to endure any form of punishment without a thorough investigation of the charges brought against them.

**16:40 the brethren** The Church in Philippi! This Church of believers includes Lydia and her household, the jailer and his household and all those lives that had been touched in Sts. Paul and Silas' brief stay. Over the coming years, while Paul will never return to this community, he will hold a special attachment to this Church in Philippi calling them his "joy and crown". (Philippians 4:1)

**They departed** Notice the pronoun. St. Luke is once again writing in the third person. It is not "We departed." Scholars understand this small change as a statement that while Paul, Silas and Timothy move on to Thessalonica, St. Luke remains behind in Philippi. It could be he returned to his home back across the strait. Note to worry St. Luke will rejoin the group in chapter 20.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. St. Paul understood, in part, that he was not to go into Asia because of his illness. Have you ever used circumstances to help you decide what God wanted of you? What happened?
2. In studying the Catechism of the Catholic Church (2110-2126) we can see that the Church opposes even dabbling in the occult. Why do you think that is so?
3. We studied two conversion experiences: Lydia, the dealing in purple goods, and the jailer. Which story do you relate to more? Why?

### **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

**Superstition, Idolatry and Divination: 2110-2126**

**Apostles and Their Power to Cast out Demons: 1506**

**Deliverance from the Devil: 2850, 2853-54**

**Exorcisms for Casting Out: 517, 550, 1237, 1673**

### **Bibliography:**

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- Agape Bible Study: Gospel of Luke by Michal Hunt. [AgapeBibleStudy.com](http://AgapeBibleStudy.com)
- [Acts: The Spread of the Kingdom](#) by Jeff Cavins and Sarah Christmyer