

Acts Chapter 16

Acts 16:1 "Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father [was] a Greek:"

“To Derbe and Lystra”:

See note on 14:6.

“Timothy”:

Often spelled Timotheus, was Paul’s spiritual son in the faith and loyal co-worker.

In the New Testament, Timothy appears with Paul more than any other man.

Though Timothy’s mother was Jewish and taught him the Scriptures (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15), his father was Greek.

The grammar likely suggests his father was dead.

By being both Jew and Gentile, Timothy had access to both cultures, an indispensable asset for missionary service.

A young man (later teens or early 20’s), of high regard, a “true child in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2), who eventually became Paul’s right-hand man (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Thess. 3:2; Phil. 2:19).

In essence, he became John Mark’s replacement.

After being commissioned by the elders of the local church (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6), he joined Paul and Silas.

Timothy grew up in Lystra (or possibly Derbe), in southern Galatia, and when Paul passed through on his second missionary journey he chose Timothy to join him.

Timothy not only served with Paul on the second and third journeys but also traveled with him to Jerusalem (20:4), was with him during the Roman imprisonment (Col. 1:1), and traveled with him on a fourth journey, staying on at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3).

During Paul’s second Roman imprisonment (not recorded in Acts), Timothy was a reserved young man who Paul repeatedly encourage to overcome his timidity and fear (1 Cor. 16:10-11; 2 Timothy 1:7).

His strengths include his great compassion and absolute loyalty (Phil. 2:19-22; see Acts 16:1; Acts 16 – 20; and 2 Timothy).

It appears that Timothy and his mother, Eunice, had been early converts of Paul.

Eunice was a Jewess, but she had received Christ.

(2 Timothy 1:5), tells us that Timothy's mother and grandmother were believers in Christ, even before Timothy was.

2 Timothy 1:5 "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also."

You see, Paul was acquainted with all three, Lois, Eunice, and Timothy.

He even calls Timothy his son.

Timothy is not his physical son, but his son in that Paul led Timothy to Christ.

2 Timothy 1:2 "To Timothy, [my] dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, [and] peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord."

We also see an inner faith marriage between Timothy's mother and father.

She was a Jew and he was a Greek.

Acts 16:2 "Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium."

It seems that since Paul's last visit, Timothy has been ministering.

It, also appears, that Timothy had been visiting other churches than his home churches, because he was highly spoken of by the brethren at Lystra and Iconium.

Timothy had been taught the Jewish law by his mother and had been told of the Messiah, as well.

As we said above, he had received Paul's message that Jesus Christ was the Messiah on Paul's earlier visit.

Timothy means "venerating God".

Verses 3-4

At first the circumcision of Timothy seems strange in light of the recent decrees of the Jerusalem council (15:1-5, 24).

The "decrees" Paul is now proclaiming.

But the context makes it clear that Paul's purpose in the circumcision was not for salvation, but for service, in that he wanted Timothy "to go forth with him."

Paul knew that Timothy's ministry to the Jews would be hampered as long as he continued to remain uncircumcised.

Paul's practice was to do all things that would help to win men to Christ.

He was willing to give up all of his personal rights (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Acts 16:3 "Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek."

"Circumcised him":

This was done to aid his acceptance by the Jews and provide full access to the synagogues (see note on 6:9), he would be visiting with Paul and Silas.

If Timothy had not been circumcised, the Jews could have assumed he had renounced his Jewish heritage and had chosen to live as a Gentile.

We see here in this circumcision of Timothy, that Paul does this because Timothy's father was a Greek, and the Jews will not accept him unless he has been circumcised.

This seems to be a terrible contradiction to Paul's fight against the Gentiles being circumcised.

Paul had even gone to Jerusalem and gotten Peter's support on non-circumcision.

The only way that I can explain this is that, Paul himself said he must be all things to all people that by all means he might save some.

You can find this (in 1 Corinthians 9:11).

He did this to appease the Jews they would minister to.

These Jews would not have accepted Timothy had this not been done.

Acts 16:4 "And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem."

The decrees":

The determinations of the Jerusalem Council (see notes on 15:23-29).

Here, Paul and Timothy are teaching the doctrine set down in Jerusalem that circumcising the men and keeping the Mosaic Law was not the doctrine of Christians.

The doctrine of Christians was to abstain from meats offered to idols and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication.

The doctrine of Christians, in a nut shell, is Love God and worship Him alone and love your neighbor as yourself.

Acts 16:5 "And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily."

The faith they were established in was faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and faith that Jesus Christ rose from the grave.

Romans 10:9-10, explains perfectly about this faith that we must have.

Notice how the churches were established (on faith).

They were undoubtedly having daily preaching, because they were saved every day.

The Bible says by the foolishness of preaching men believe and are saved.

1 Corinthians 1:21 "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

Verses 6-9

Paul's call to "Macedonia" (Europe), was preceded by other directives from the "Spirit."

After passing through the central part of Asia Minor, "Paul" attempted to swing down through the southerly province of Asia."

The Spirit forbade him.

He then attempted to turn back through the northern province of "Bithynia."

Again, the Spirit stopped him.

After guiding Paul to the west coast of Asia Minor at "Troas," the Holy Spirit finally gave him the positive direction for which he had been preparing him.

Acts 16:6 "Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,"

“Holy Ghost ... Asia”:

Paul was not allowed to fulfill his intention to minister in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), and to such cities as Ephesus, Smyrna, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Colossae, Sardis, Pergamos, and Thyatira.

“Galatia”:

In New Testament times referred to two entities: one ethnic, the other political.

More than two hundred years before Christ, the Gauls moved onto north central Asia Minor and established an independent kingdom known as Galatia.

In 25 B.C. Caesar Augustus made it a Roman province.

The province of Galatia during the New Testament era was comprised of much that was neither ethnically nor linguistically Galatian, including the cities of Lycaonia (Lustra, Derbe), and the cities of Phrygia (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium).

The boundaries of this province changed many times.

Thus, the meaning of the term “Galatia” in the New Testament is much debated.

Does it refer to the ethnic, northern part of Galatia, or to the political, southern part?

To whom did Paul write the Book of Galatians?

The evidence seems to favor the southern view.

First, Paul did have an extensive ministry during the first journey in southern Galatia (chapters 13 and 14).

Second, Paul’s alleged ministry in northern Galatia was brief, even if he did pass through there at (Acts 16:6 and 18:23).

This is unlikely since the grammar describes the area as one Phrygian-Galatian region.

Third, the location of the Roman roads favors the south, not the north.

Further, since the churches of Galatia were included among those who sent an offering for the poor of Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1), it is significant that the only Galatian city cited among the list of messengers (20:4), is the southern city of Derbe.

The Galatians were possibly newly converted churches that Paul started on this trip, rather than the first trip, but that is not explained.

The Holy Ghost was leading Paul and telling him where to go and where not to go.

Acts 16:7 "After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not."

“Bithynia”:

A separate Roman province northeast of Mysia.

“The Spirit suffered them not”:

Once the holy Spirit had providentially stopped their travel north, they had nowhere else to go but Troas, a seaport on the Aegean Sea.

We see, here, the Holy Spirit of God checking them from going into Bithynia.

So many times, ministers run ahead of God and go places God would not have them go.

We should be like Paul and let the Holy Spirit lead us to a fertile place to minister.

Acts 16:8 "And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas."

“Mysia ... Troas”:

The northwest part of the province of Asia Minor.

Verses 9-10

This was the second of 6 visions received by the apostle (see the following: 9:3-6; 18:9-10; 22:17-18; 23:11; 27:23-24).

Acts 16:9 "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us."

“Macedonia”:

The region located across the Aegean Sea on the mainland of Greece.

The cities of Philippi and Thessalonica were located there.

Most significantly, going there was to take the gospel from Asia into Europe.

Troas is in Asia, and Paul had his vision here.

Macedonia is a country lying north of Greece.

It seems that Paul heeds this vision and goes to Macedonia.

Acts 16:10 "And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them."

“We”:

A change from the third person pronoun to the first person indicates that Luke joined up with Paul, Silas and Timothy.

For the first time, the author of Acts places himself in the narrative by means of the first person plural personal pronouns, “we” and “us.”

Luke seems to join the missionary team at Troas, then at the end of chapter 16 remains at Philippi when the others leave.

Interestingly, the “we” passages resume about six years later, at the end of Paul’s third journey as he passes through Philippi (20:5-6).

The third “we” passage of Acts involves Paul’s transport as a prisoner to Rome (in chapter 27).

One really admirable trait that Paul had, was when God called him to do something, he did not hesitate, but immediately answered the call.

Paul immediately goes to Macedonia and begins to preach the good news of the gospel to them.

Acts 16:11 "Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next [day] to Neapolis;"

“Samothracia”:

An island in the Aegean Sea about halfway between Asia Minor and the Greek mainland.

They stayed there overnight to avoid the hazards associated with sailing in the dark.

“Neapolis”:

The port city for Philippi.

Acts 16:12 "And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, [and] a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days."

“Philippi”:

This was a prominent city in the eastern part of Macedonia, which Philip, the father of Alexander the Great, enlarged and fortified in the fourth century B.C.

It was located on the eastern end of the Via Egnatia, the military road that connected Rome with the east, and eight miles north of the seaport of Neapolis.

“A colony”:

Philippi became a Roman colony in 31 B.C., so it carried the right of freedom (it was self-governing and independent of the provincial government), the right of exemption from tax, and the right of holding land in full ownership.

Luke describes Philippi as:

“the chief city of that part of Macedonia”:

See verse 12.

Several readings and translations have been proposed regarding this difficult statement in that Thessalonica, not Philippi, was the capital of the province of Macedonia.

Luke may be saying that Philippi was the chief city of this part of Macedonia, since at one time Macedonia had been divided into four districts.

Or he may be saying that this was the first great city as one enters Macedonia from the east (as Paul and Luke did).

Luke also describes it as a colony, having the same rights and privileges as a city within the country of Italy itself.

Philippi was not ruled by the proconsul first at Philippi.

He evidently left Luke there, and when he returned five years later at the end of this third journey, Luke rejoined Paul.

After his first Roman imprisonment Paul probably returned to Philippi at least one more time (see 1 Tim. 1:3).

We see that Paul went to the main city of Macedonia.

We did not get any of the details of the vision he had in Troas, but we can assume the Holy Spirit told him to come to Philippi.

He passed other cities and made it to Philippi, so this appears that it was this specific city he was told to come to.

Acts 16:13 "And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted [thither]."

“By a river side”:

Evidently, the Jewish community did not have the minimum of 10 Jewish men who were heads of households required to form a synagogue.

In such cases, a place of prayer under the open sky and near a river or sea was adopted as a meeting place.

Most likely this spot was located where the road leading out of the city was crossing over the Gangites River.

“Women which resorted thither”:

In further evidence of the small number of Jewish men, it was women who met to pray, read from the Old Testament law, and discuss what they read.

Jews often gathered by a riverside on the Sabbath when their community lacked enough Jewish males to establish a synagogue.

Since the institution of the synagogue is usually dated with the Exile (as in Ezek. 11:16), this practice may also have arisen from Ezekiel (1:1; 3:15).

There are several things we must notice here.

These people were Jewish, because they observed Sabbath.

We know that Luke was with Paul here, because he says "we", and Luke is the penman.

It is rather interesting that Paul is not speaking in the synagogue, but on a river bank.

It is also interesting, that his first ministry here in Philippi is to the women.

This has to be the working of the Holy Spirit.

We will find later (in Philippians 4:3), that the church in Philippi has two women ministering in the church and Paul tells the church to be supportive of them.

Philippians 4:3 "And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and [with] other my fellow laborers, whose names [are] in the book of life."

Acts 16:14 "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard [us]: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."

“Lydia ... the city of Thyatira”:

Her home city was located in the Roman province of Lydia, thus the name “Lydia” was probably associated with her place of origin.

“Seller of purple”:

Because purple dye was extremely expensive, purple garments were usually worn by royalty and the wealthy.

As a result, Lydia’s business turned a nice profit, which enabled her to have a house large enough to accommodate the missionary team (verse 15), and the new church at Philippi (see verse 40).

“Which worshipped God”:

Like Cornelius, she believed in the God of Israel but had not become a full proselyte (10:2).

“Whose heart the Lord opened”:

This is another proof of the sovereignty of God in salvation (see note on 13:48).

Paul’s first European convert was from the very province (Asia), where Paul had recently been forbidden to go (16:6).

“Thyatira” was one of the seven cities of the Roman province of Asia addressed (in Revelation chapters 2 and 3).

It was situated over 50 miles northeast of Smyrna and about 30 miles southeast of Pergamum on the road from Pergamum to Laodicea.

Thyatira was a busy commercial center famous for its purple cloth and “fine brass”: (bronze), works, especially armor.

Lydia was apparently a salesperson traveling hundreds of miles from her hometown.

Archaeologists have uncovered many inscriptions at Thyatira revealing a more diversified manufacturing center here than among the more renowned cities like Ephesus or Smyrna.

These crafts included wool, linen, leather, bronze, dyeing, tanning and pottery.

Thyatira today is called Akhisar (population 47,000).

It appears that the Holy Spirit sent Paul and the others to minister to Lydia and to start a church here in her home.

It appears that Lydia worshipped God before Paul came, but after hearing the gospel message, received it with gladness in her heart.

Acts 16:15 "And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought [us], saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide [there]. And she constrained us."

“Household” (see note on 11:14; verse 31).

We are not told who Lydia's household was.

She may have been a widow.

At any rate, she was a seller of purple for a living.

She did as Paul had preached, and was baptized and her household was baptized also.

She insisted on Paul and his helpers coming and staying in her house, if they deemed her worthy.

Acts Chapter 16 Questions

1. When Paul came to Lystra, what disciple did he find there that would go with him?
2. Who was his mother?
3. What were his mother and father?
4. In 2 Timothy 1:5, who had faith first and passed it on to Timothy?
5. Was Timothy related to Paul?
6. Why did Paul call him his son in 2 Timothy 1:2?
7. Who spoke highly of Timothy recommending him to Paul?
8. What does Timothy mean?
9. Why did Paul circumcise Timothy?
10. How is the only way the author can put this together with Paul's fight against circumcision?

11. In verse 4, what doctrine did Paul teach?
12. How were the churches established?
13. How often did they have new members?
14. In 1 Corinthians 1:21, we learn that by what some are saved?
15. Where did the Holy Ghost tell Paul not to go?
16. Where was Paul when he had the vision?
17. Where did the vision tell him to go?
18. Why did Paul believe the Holy Spirit had sent him here?
19. What were some of the towns Paul came through getting to Philippi?
20. On what day did he begin to minister?
21. Where did Paul go to minister?
22. Who was he ministering to?
23. What message does Paul give the church in Philippi on another visit that can be found in Philippians 4:3?
24. What woman is specifically mentioned as receiving Paul's message?
25. What did she do for a living?
26. Who was baptized with her?
27. What did she insist Paul and his party do?
28. What can we probably safely assume about her husband?