

Paul's Second Missionary Journey: Into Europe (Acts 15:36-16:40)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Acts

I. Background and Introduction

- a. In recent lessons, we discussed the start of the church in Antioch, in the northern part of ancient Syria. This became a launching point for great missionary work to spread the gospel to the east and west.
- b. Paul and Barnabas embarked from Antioch on Paul's first missionary trip, and they returned there at the end.
- c. In the beginning of Acts, the gospel is going to the Jews. However, now Peter (to the household of Cornelius, in **Acts 10-11**) and Paul (on his first missionary journey, in **Acts 13-14**) have started preaching to Gentiles and converting them.
- d. A great controversy arose regarding whether Gentile converts to the Christian faith had to be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses. This results in a council of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to resolve the issue, in **Acts 15**. The conclusion:
 - i. The Gentiles coming to the faith do NOT need to be circumcised and do not need to follow the Law of Moses.
 - ii. Of all the things in the writings of Moses, the Gentiles had to abstain from four things:
 1. Things offered to idols,
 2. Blood,
 3. Things strangled, and
 4. Sexual immorality.
 - iii. A letter to this effect was prepared to go to Antioch and elsewhere.
- e. Paul is now back in Antioch, and the stage is set for his second missionary journey to the west. Significant things that will happen on this journey include:
 - i. Paul first goes back to visit the churches in Asia Minor that were planted during his first missionary journey.

- ii. In Lystra, he meets Timothy, who will become an important companion on his journeys (and to whom we have two important letters from Paul).
- iii. Paul has a vision to take the gospel even further west, into Europe. He sails west to Macedonia and ultimately preaches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea (in Macedonia), then Athens and Corinth (in Achaia) before returning back to Antioch by way of Ephesus.
- iv. Notable adventures on this trip include:
 - 1. The conversion of Lydia and her household in Philippi.
 - 2. Being jailed in Philippi, followed by a miraculous release from prison and the conversion of the jailer's household.
 - 3. The account of the Berean response to the gospel, indicating their good hearts.
 - 4. Preaching in Athens to a pagan group highly influenced by Greek philosophy.
- f. Things we can gain from studying Paul's second missionary journey include:
 - i. An appreciation for the fact that conflict among spiritually-minded Christians is nothing new. We will see that this problem has existed from the beginning of the church.
 - ii. Valuable practical insights on evangelism (much of this we will discuss in the lesson that follows, which will cover the second half of Paul's second missionary journey).

II. Paul and Barnabas Go Separate Ways

- a. Read **Acts 15:36-15:41**.
- b. Storyline:
 - i. Paul and Barnabas are in Antioch again.
 - ii. They decide to visit the cities where they preached previously (on their prior missionary trip).
 - iii. However, a dispute breaks out between them regarding John Mark.
 - 1. Recall that on the prior trip, John Mark had accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Cyprus, and then to Pamphylia (on the southern coast of Turkey). However, John Mark departed and returned to Jerusalem. So, he did not continue with them to

Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, in the interior of Asia Minor.

- a. “Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and *John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.*” (**Acts 13:13**, NKJV)
- iv. Barnabas and Paul now part ways.
 1. Paul takes Silas and goes on a land route to the north, through Syria and Cilicia (where Paul is from), on their way to Derbe, Lystra and Iconium in the interior.
 2. Barnabas and John Mark (who are cousins, **Colossians 4:10**) sail west to Cyprus, where they had gone on the first leg of Paul’s first missionary journey. Recall that Barnabas was originally from Cyprus (**Acts 4:36**).
 - c. **Question:** Why such a strong disagreement? Why did Paul refuse to take John Mark with them?
 - i. **Possible Reasons/Answers:**
 1. Perhaps Paul may have felt he was unreliable or fearful, having abandoned them part way on their journey.
 2. Or perhaps Paul saw no benefit in bringing John Mark with them on their return trip to Derbe, Lystra and Iconium, since John Mark was not with them on the prior trip and therefore would know no one in those places.
 - d. Possible lessons for us to consider, related to this split-up:
 - i. While it might be easy to side with Paul and criticize Barnabas (since the story continues with coverage of Paul’s journey, which covers a much broader territory), a judgment of that kind is not made by Luke here.
 - ii. Sometimes Christians, even strong spiritual leaders, will disagree and go in different directions for a time. We don’t necessarily have to choose sides. However, we should always strive for unity and reconciliation.
 - iii. Reconciliation is possible. In this case, the rift was not permanent, as we see from Paul’s writings later:
 1. “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him),” (**Colossians 4:10**, NKJV)

2. “Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.” (**2 Timothy 4:11**, NKJV)
- iv. Luke certainly isn’t trying to provide a ‘whitewashed or ‘candy-coated’ account of events to make the apostles look good. As we see throughout the New Testament, the apostles and other writers strive to paint an accurate picture, ‘warts and all’.
 1. Other examples include the gospel writers documenting that Peter denied Jesus three times, and that Thomas and the other apostles doubted the resurrection of Jesus after the fact.

III. Timothy Joins Paul in Lystra

- a. Read **Acts 16:1-5**.
- b. What we learn about Timothy:
 - i. He was from Lystra and had a good reputation in the region.
 - ii. His mother was Jewish, but his father was a Gentile (Greek).
 - iii. Paul circumcises Timothy before taking him along with the group.
 - iv. Elsewhere in the Scriptures, we learn a few more things.
 1. Paul later writes to Timothy, addressing him as “my true son in the faith....” (**1 Timothy 1:2**)
 2. He must have been quite young when Paul met him and took him along. Even years later (likely about 15 years later), Paul would write:
 - a. “*Let no one despise your youth*, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” (**1 Timothy 4:12**, NKJV)
 - b. “...flee also youthful lusts.” (**2 Timothy 2:22**)
 3. His faith came through his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice.
 - a. Read **2 Timothy 1:3-5**.
 - b. “... the genuine faith that is in you, *which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice*, and I am persuaded is in you also.” (**2 Timothy 1:5**, NKJV)

4. Paul had laid hands on Timothy and imparted some spiritual gift(s) upon him, which would help him overcome fear and give him a spirit of “of power, of love and of a sound mind”.
 - a. “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but *of power and of love and of a sound mind.*” (**2 Timothy 1:6-7**, NKJV)
 - b. Perhaps Timothy had been naturally fearful or lacking courage earlier in life. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul encouraged Timothy to draw on the spiritual power that he had received.
5. Timothy had been raised with the Scriptures (the Old Testament) from childhood, which would equip him for the trials he would face.
 - a. Read **2 Timothy 3:10-17**.
 - i. Timothy also saw first-hand the sufferings that Paul went through (and which he should expect to see himself) and how God had delivered Paul from them all.
 - ii. Paul calls him to remember the things Paul personally taught him.
 - iii. He also points him to the Scriptures Timothy had been taught from childhood (ASV says “from a babe...”, the Old Testament Scriptures).
 1. They can make him “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”.
 2. They can make him complete, thoroughly equipped.
 - c. Lessons for us, from the life of Timothy, include:
 - i. Very young people, if they have faith and a strong foundation in the Word of God, can be used at an early age to do great things for God.
 - ii. Let us not underestimate the impact of this ‘1-2 combination’:
 1. The example of a mature Christian as they go through trials. Your example as an older Christian can have significant impact on others!

2. A solid understanding of the Scriptures.
- iii. Consider the spiritual impact that a grandmother and mother can have.
 1. The seeds of faith of Timothy trace back to his *grandmother!*
 2. The greatest spiritual impact you have in eternity, in some cases, will be seen in the lives of your children and grandchildren.

a. This reminds me of the words of a famous poem by William Ross Wallace (1865), "The Hand that Rocks the Cradle":

i. "Blessings on the hand of women!
 Angels guard its strength and grace,
 In the palace, cottage, hovel,
 Oh, no matter where the place;
 Would that never storms assailed it,
 Rainbows ever gently curled;
 For the hand that rocks the cradle
 Is the hand that rules the world.

"Infancy's the tender fountain,
 Power may with beauty flow,
 Mother's first to guide the streamlets,
 From them souls unresting grow—
 Grow on for the good or evil,
 Sunshine streamed or evil hurled;
 For the hand that rocks the cradle
 Is the hand that rules the world.

"Woman, how divine your mission
 Here upon our natal* sod!
 Keep, oh, keep the young heart open
 Always to the breath of God!
 All true trophies of the ages
 Are from mother-love impearled;
 For the hand that rocks the cradle
 Is the hand that rules the world.

"Blessings on the hand of women!
 Fathers, sons, and daughters cry,
 And the sacred song is mingled
 With the worship in the sky—

Mingles where no tempest darkens,
 Rainbows evermore are hurled;
 For the hand that rocks the cradle
 Is the hand that rules the world."

ii. (*Natal = *of birth, native*)

3. Raise our children with the Scriptures from childhood.

a. Mothers and grandmothers: take note!

b. Also, a challenge to those of us who did not have the benefit of a Lois and Eunice to teach us the Scriptures in our early years:

i. *Let us work hard in studying the Scriptures, doing whatever it takes to catch up!*

d. **Question:** Why did Paul have Timothy circumcised?

i. Paul had attended the council in Jerusalem, where *everyone agreed* that the Gentiles do not have to be circumcised.

1. As he traveled, Paul was distributing the letter that came out of that council, explaining to all that the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised and did not have to follow the Law of Moses.

ii. Paul also says elsewhere, repeatedly, that circumcision was done away with.

1. Read **Galatians 3:19-25**.

a. We were under a tutor designed to lead us to Christ. Now that Christ has come, we are no longer under the tutor.

2. Read **Galatians 5:1-6**.

a. "Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing." (**Galatians 5:2**, NKJV)

b. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything..." (**Galatians 5:6**, NKJV)

3. Read **Colossians 2:8-15**.

a. The Law of Moses had been nailed to the cross and crucified with Christ.

- c. Paul "became all things to all men", that he might "by all means save some".
3. I came from a church that (I believe) used this passage in inappropriate ways. In many cases, it was used to justify loving the world and watering down the gospel for the sake of bringing more people to believe in Jesus.
 - a. They looked at many things from the point of view of: 'Would this make the gospel *more or less attractive* to worldly people'? The unfortunate outcome of that mindset included:
 - i. Rejecting unpopular New Testament teachings on the roles of men and women
 - ii. Rejecting what Paul taught regarding women covering their heads, in **1 Corinthians 11**.
 - iii. Rejecting New Testament teachings that pertain to modest dress and worldly entertainment.
 - iv. Rejecting Biblical teaching on nonresistance and war.
 1. Many of the teachers in the church had come to nonresistant convictions based on the Scriptures. However, some of the churches were in communities with large military bases, and the leaders did not want to risk alienating members or potential members of their congregations.
 - v. Rejecting Jesus' teachings on the permanence of marriage and on remarriage after divorce.
 - vi. In general, this approach resulted in a lack of teaching on unpopular, counter-cultural subjects addressed in the Scriptures. There was a lack of emphasis on living holy lives and being separate from the world.
 - b. On the other hand, we don't need to swing to the opposite extreme and make little or no effort to reach out to a confused and lost world, including give up rights we have in Christ.

- i. A good example to follow: Paul in circumcising Timothy (and Timothy for going along with it!)
 1. Keep in mind the level of pain and discomfort Timothy was willing to undergo for the sake of eliminating a barrier with his fellow Jews.
 2. As we learned from the story of the circumcision of the Shechemites in **Genesis 34**, the pain of adult circumcision can be incapacitating for several days!
 - ii. There was nothing sinful about Timothy, half-Jewish, getting circumcised to remove a potential obstacle in reaching out to fellow Jews.
 - iii. We should be willing to bend and even do uncomfortable things (which are not sinful) to remove barriers between ourselves and those we want to impact for the gospel (including those who are already Christians).
- c. **Very Small Personal Example (at least for me):** My wedding band.
- i. Alison gave me a simple wedding band (a simple ring) at our wedding ceremony. I never considered it an “adornment”, or something to make me appear more attractive. It was just signaling to the world that I am a married man.
 - ii. Decades later, we encountered Christians who were very serious about separation from the world and rejecting worldly adornments. They considered a wedding band to be an adornment, therefore something that was sinful. While I did not see it as a sin, I put off the band to eliminate a potential spiritual barrier between them and me. I have not worn it since then (for the past ten years).

IV. Paul to Europe (Starting in Philippi, in Macedonia)

- a. Read **Acts 16:6-10**.
 - i. Two closed doors.

1. The Spirit “prohibits” them from preaching in Asia (Asia Minor).
 2. They try to head north to Bithynia, but “the Spirit did not permit them”.
 3. Somehow, the Spirit was closing (slamming?) doors that they wanted for good reason to enter – in order to preach the gospel.
 - a. Sometimes we can make plans with good intentions, however, God slams the door and prevents those plans from being accomplished.
 - b. **Question:** Is God not listening to us, or does He have something better or more important in mind (for us, or for His overall plan, for His kingdom)?
 - c. The Holy Spirit shut two doors, but *opened up a third door* (to Macedonia and Europe) after that.
 4. The vision of the “man of Macedonia” pleading for them to come there (across the water, to Europe from Troas).
- b. Read **Acts 16:11-15**.
- i. They land in Macedonia and proceed to Philippi (named after Philip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great).
 1. Ancient Macedonia corresponds roughly to the northern part of modern Greece, while Achaia (where Athens and Corinth are) corresponds to the southern part of modern Greece.
 - ii. Instead of going to the local synagogue (as general custom), they go to a customary place of prayer by the riverside.
 1. They preach to the women gathered there.
 2. Lydia, a businesswoman in the purple cloth trade from Thyatira, hears what Paul is preaching. She and her household are baptized.
 3. She persuades Paul and his companions to stay at her house.
- c. Read **Acts 16:16-24**.
- i. As Paul goes to pray, he encounters (and afterward is followed by) a demon-possessed slave girl who cries out constantly for days, “These

men are servants of the Most High God, *who proclaim to us the way of salvation.*”

- ii. Finally, after days of this behavior, Paul is annoyed and casts the demon out of the girl, in the name of Jesus.
 1. “And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons....” (**Mark 16:17**, NKJV)
- iii. This infuriates the men who owned the slave girl, who had just lost their fortune-telling concession. (They pretend their real concern is that Paul and Silas are stirring up trouble.) They have Paul and Silas brought before the local authorities, beaten, cast into prison and placed in leg irons.
- iv. The gospel message will result in powerful people losing some or all of their wicked means of income. That has always been the case. We will see it again in Ephesus, in **Acts 19**, when the idol-making business is impacted.
 1. How many businesses today exist and are extremely profitable because of something ungodly they are doing?
 - a. Fortune-telling here
 - b. Astrology
 - c. Abortion
 - i. In what may be surprising to many modern disciples, one of the earliest Christian writings addressed the issue of abortion directly. *The Didache*, which gives practical instruction regarding how to live the Christian life, may have been written as early as 80 or as late as 140 AD. From chapter 2 of *The Didache* describing practically what it means to love your neighbor as yourself:
 1. “This is the second commandment of the teaching:
 - a. “Do not murder.
 - b. “Do not commit adultery.
 - c. “Do not have sex with children.
 - d. “Do not be sexually promiscuous.

- e. "Do not steal.
 - f. "Do not practice magic.
 - g. "Do not use drugs (or commit sorcery/mix potions).
 - h. "Do not abort a child or kill babies."
- ii. Keep in mind that the above instructions to Christians from *The Didache* were written in the late first or early second century. The last point reminds me of a very recent event: the US Supreme Court overturning the *Roe vs. Wade* case regarding abortion, which had been a legal precedent since the early 1970s.
1. Many pro-life Christians were very happy about this court decision. On the other hand, some other Christians were ambivalent, since they considered this court ruling to be among the affairs of "another kingdom".
 2. Some of us who were around in the early 1970s (when *Roe v. Wade* was decided) have noticed *a major shift in American culture* since that time. Today, unlike 50 years prior, major American corporations (including Disney, Amazon, Google, Starbucks, Tesla, etc.) subsidize abortions for their employees, even paying for out-of-state travel for those in states where abortions are illegal!
 3. These soul-less corporations are more interested in making a profit than in supporting the life of an innocent child.
 - a. They have noticed that childless employees help their 'bottom line' achieve maximum profit.
 - b. If their employees abort their unborn children rather than carrying them to term and raising them, the corporations will benefit

through no paid maternity leave, lower health insurance costs, and fewer distractions from their employees giving undivided attention to work.

- iii. War machine – military/industrial complex, war profiteers. The U.S. spends more on its military, by far, than any other nation.
- iv. Gambling, pornography, prostitution, illicit drugs, tobacco, alcohol abuse.
- v. Gender reassignment surgery, and the new industries that have arisen based on exploiting gender confusion.

2. The gospel will have economic impacts that will ultimately threaten the powerful.

- a. “For the love of money is a root of *all kinds of evil...*”
(**1 Timothy 6:10**, NKJV)

d. Read **Acts 16:25-34**.

- i. In prison, yet Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God!
 - 1. What a wonderful example of what to do when things appear to be bleak!
 - 2. The other prisoners are listening.
- ii. An earthquake and another miraculous prison break.
- iii. The prison keeper awakes, assumes prisoners have escaped, and plans to kill himself (presumably to avoid a more brutal torture and death at the hands of government officials). Paul reassures him that they are all still there. The prison keeper rushes in and asks the 'million-dollar question': “What must I do to be saved?” (**Acts 16:30**)
 - 1. **Question:** Why did he ask such an odd question at a time like that? He had not yet even heard the gospel!
 - a. Recall what the demon-possessed servant girl who followed Paul had been saying, publicly and repeatedly, prior to Paul’s imprisonment.
 - b. “This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, ‘*These men* are the servants of the Most High God, who

proclaim to us the way of salvation.” (**Acts 16:17**, NKJV)

- c. It makes sense to me that the Philippian jailer, seeing the miracle, assumed that what that annoying servant girl had been saying, over and over again, was right! Paul and Silas did indeed know the way of salvation.
 - i. Therefore, the jailer’s response seems both reasonable and logical. After seeing the miraculous events in his prison (and Paul and Silas signing and praying while in chains), he naturally asked them, “What must I do *to be saved?*”.
2. **Question:** Did Paul’s immediate answer here tell him (and us) *everything* one needs to know to be saved?
- a. Paul’s answer: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”
 - b. **Question:** Is *repenting from sin* (which is not mentioned here by Paul) also necessary for salvation?
 - c. It says that his immediate answer, Paul and Silas “spoke the word of the Lord” to the jailer, and then he is baptized, along with his household.
 - d. Obviously, there is more to being saved than just believing in Jesus. One also needs to hear the word of the Lord, the gospel (**Romans 10:14-17**), and repent if they desire to be saved. (**Luke 13:1-5**, **Acts 2:38**, **Acts 3:19**)
 - e. Note that baptism was seen as a matter of urgency. It was done that night, not even waiting for the next day!
 - i. **Question:** Why not wait for a more convenient time?
 - ii. Re-read **Acts 2:38-39**.
 - 1. Baptism is for the remission of sins (among other things).
 - iii. Also, consider what Ananias told Paul in **Acts 22:16**:

1. “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

e. Read **Acts 16:35-40**.

- i. Paul demands that the magistrates personally escort them out.
- ii. He is a Roman citizen with rights that were protected.
 1. Having a Roman citizen like Paul beaten without a proper trial and sentencing could have gotten the magistrates in big trouble.

V. Summary and Conclusions

- a. Strong spiritual leaders (Paul and Barnabus) may disagree and go in different direction for a period of time. We should always strive for unity and reconciliation.
- b. There is much to learn from the life and upbringing of Timothy, who is introduced to us here.
 - i. His grandmother and mother had a great spiritual impact on him; and thereby blessed many Christians then and continuing into future generations.
 - ii. Timothy had been taught the Old Testament Scriptures from childhood, which gave him a tremendous spiritual foundation for a godly life and to effectively proclaim the gospel.
 - iii. Timothy was willing to “become all things to all men” at the cost of great personal pain, in consenting to be circumcised by Paul to remove a barrier to reaching out to his fellow Jews.
- c. God closes doors, but sometimes that can lead us to better ones to accomplish His purposes!
- d. The gospel will cause a financial loss to many wicked and powerful businesses. These businesses (and their owners) will therefore tend to see the Christian faith as a threat.
- e. Sing and pray when you find yourself in tough situations. God may be using it all to accomplish something wonderful that we do not yet see!