

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles
Week Twenty
Acts 16:1-28

Day One

16:1 He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. 2 The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. 3 Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4 As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey.

v. 1 – Paul now returned to the area that had stoned him and left him for dead in Acts 14. This visit provided, however, a replacement that was more in line with Paul being the leader of the group. It's interesting that Paul didn't find Timothy until he lost Barnabas. It is also interesting that we hear nothing of Silas, Barnabas' replacement. Some would conjecture that Paul didn't want or flow well with Silas, but he certainly did with Timothy. Team-building is an exacting work. Not all people can get along or work together. **Is it time to admit that someone you are working with has become a problem? Is there tension or production from your relationship? Don't wait for things to get worse or "blow up." Face reality and see if there needs to be a change of some kind.**

v. 2 – Timothy was of mixed parentage, his mother being a Jew but his father a Gentile. These marriages were rare in Jerusalem, but must have been a bit more commonplace in the Gentile regions. His mother, named Eunice (see 2 Timothy 1:5), was a believer and Timothy was, too. Timothy must have been doing something to distinguish himself, for the brothers all spoke well of him and that caught Paul's attention. My thinking is that Paul wanted someone more in touch with the Gentile world, something that Silas from Jerusalem could not have.

v. 3 – I must always smile when I read this verse. What was Timothy's preparation for ministry? Was it Bible school? A crash-course in church history? A trial ministry trip to see what his spiritual gifts were? No, none of these. His preparation for ministry was that Paul circumcised him! This same Paul, who had just traveled to Jerusalem to fight the teaching that believing Gentiles had to be circumcised, then circumcised Timothy! Was this hypocrisy? Did Paul have a weak moment? I doubt both. Instead, I think Paul did this for the sake of his ministry. He knew that he would still encounter more Jews and Christian Jews, so he decided not to have to fight that battle, but go ahead and circumcise Timothy. Notice also that Paul chose to circumcise Timothy, not for Timothy to be saved, but for Timothy to have an effective ministry. There was a big difference between that reason and the motivation for the Jewish believers who saw the Law as a means of holiness and salvation.

I'm glad that this isn't a ministry requirement for modern ministers!

v. 4 – Paul faithfully delivered the Jerusalem to the believers in the region where he and Barnabas had first come. But now Paul entered a new phase of his ministry, which would take him and Timothy to outermost parts of the Roman Empire. **What if God wanted to expand your work or ministry? Would you be open to this? Would you be ready? Would can you do to get ready? As I write this, I sense this may be something that God is speaking to me. Speak, Lord for Your servant listens. Help me, Lord, for I want to do whatever you want me to do wherever you want me to do it! Amen.**

Day Two

5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. 6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.

v. 5 – Paul accomplished the purpose for which he had set out, the purpose which cost him his relationship for the time being with Barnabas. He had checked on and strengthened the churches. The churches grew, but Paul grew restless. Paul wasn't the kind of man to stay around long and get involved in the day-to-day work of the ministry. Paul had a mandate from God to reach the Gentile world and that was what he was determined to do. **What is your mandate, do you know? Are you determined to do it? Have you gotten sidetracked in any way? What can you do to get back on track?**

v. 6 – It seems that Paul's idea was to go east to the province of Asia (not the Asia we know today), but the Spirit kept him from going east. Instead the Spirit kept nudging him west, which was more toward modern Europe. This was a major development, for the church would have taken on a whole new flavor had Paul been able to move east as he had intended. Often God uses opposition to direct us, as he did here with Paul. **Are you sensing some resistance in a path you are taking? Then you need the Spirit's help to determine whether this is something you must overcome or something you must acknowledge as from the Lord and then move around. There is no easy answer to this, nor is there any way to determine which is which except through asking and seeking the Lord.**

vs. 7&8 – It may be helpful here to consult a good Bible map of the region during Paul's ministry to visualize where Paul was, where he wanted to go and where he ended up going. There are so many good Bible study tools available today. Do you have any? I urge you to invest in some as you can. They will greatly help your study of God's word.

The Spirit again blocked their path. Notice that Paul didn't stop moving when he was first resisted, but kept in motion. Someone has said a moving car is easier to steer and Paul was too aggressive to sit back and wait. He waited on the Lord, but he waited while he worked. Does this make sense, that you can wait and be aggressive at the same time?

Faith without action is useless, and there is always something you can do as you have faith. I hear too many people justify their inactivity by saying, "I'm waiting on the Lord." Paul waited on the Lord, but he kept moving, kept probing to see what door God would open.

Day Three

9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. 11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. 12 From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

v. 9 – There are six instances in Acts where Paul had a vision or where the Lord appeared to him and this is one of them. In each instance, the Lord appeared to give Paul assistance so that he could fulfill his purpose. I have often said that God wants us to do His will more than we do, and will give us all the help we need to do so. But our heart has to be to do His will and not just consider His will. Paul had been prevented on two earlier occasions of going in another direction. Now the orders came of where he was to go.

What is your purpose? How aggressively are you seeking to know it? How aggressively are you seeking to fulfill it? Do you expect supernatural help to be a person of purpose?

v. 10 – Notice the first person plural in this verse: Luke was with Paul at this point. And notice the urgency: They immediately got ready to go. And notice that the Lord left some room for Paul and his team to decide what to do, for they "concluded" that they were supposed to go over to Macedonia. I know many people who are waiting for specific instructions and are afraid to think. I have said that some people check their brains in the lobby of the church on their way in, and forget to pick them up on the way out. While I know that our minds must be renewed, I think the work of the Spirit can produce this renewal more quickly than we think. So younger believers can have the mind of Christ. Yet the renewal of the mind is an ongoing process, so to wait for us to have the perfect mind of Christ is to wait for that which won't happen this side of our resurrection or the Lord's return.

So, do you have any good ideas? If so, why aren't you acting on them? What are you waiting for?

v. 11 – Luke was ever the one for details, and he gave us the travel itinerary for Paul and the team. This gives us an indication of the relative ease of travel within the Roman Empire. The team could decide to go somewhere and get there in a reasonably quick fashion. They must have had money to travel, too, or else they could not have booked passage so quickly.

v. 12 – The team didn't have specific instructions as to what city to go to. They just concluded they were to be in Macedonia and set off accordingly. Paul's strategy was to stick to the major cities so that the gospel could have maximum effect to the most people possible. So the team came to Philippi and waited for several days. I like Paul's attitude and style—aggressive and decisive. **Are you waiting to make a decision that could be made today? Then I suggest you make it!**

Day Four

13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14 One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. 15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

v. 13 – Again we see Paul's restless style, for he was not content for God to bring the ministry to him; he wanted to go find the ministry himself. Since there was no synagogue, the team decided to discover a place of prayer, which was probably commonplace in most cities without a synagogue. Perhaps the Gentiles or even the Jews in the area told the team about the existence of this riverside prayer refuge.

The team began to share with the women there. Paul was sent to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and that is what he intended to do, wherever and whenever possible. Notice how the ministry unfolded here, without a lot of preparation by the team. A few years ago, I had a trip planned to a city but I wasn't sure what I would do when I got there. I was a bit unnerved by this, for I was used to planning and organizing speaking slots and counseling sessions. One day in the shower I said to the Lord, "God, I'm going to Dallas and I don't even know what I'm doing there or how I will pay for the trip!" It was then that the Lord reminded me that Paul went to areas and he didn't know what he was going to do either. Yet Paul never had any lack of activity on his trips, and neither did I on that trip to Dallas. God opened many doors once I got there, but not before.

Are you waiting for doors to open before you go or do? What if God wants you to go and do first, and then He opens the doors? Can you trust Him for that, whether in business or ministry?

v. 14 – Lydia was a woman of means who was probably a Gentile who was a convert or at least an adherent to Judaism. She dealt in purple fabric, which was unique to this area. The purple dye came from a shellfish, whose glands produced the dye when exposed to the light and air. It is said that only one drop of dye came from each shellfish, which would explain why the fabric was so costly and why Lydia was probably wealthy.

God opened her heart to hear the message and believe. Notice the partnership here: God opened her heart and Lydia responded. God can open an opportunity for you, but you must cooperate and do your part. Don't put off on God what only you can do, but don't try to do what only God can do. Learn the difference between the two and then be faithful to act when God opens the door.

v. 15 – The team made their first disciples in Macedonia, baptizing Lydia and her household. This could mean children, but could also include her household help and some employees. Then Lydia prevailed upon the team to stay in her house, which let's us know that she had a large house that could handle more than a few guests. Lydia was obviously a strong woman who ran a business, made quick decisions (which we can see from her baptism), and then persuaded the whole team to stay at her house.

Decisions are easier for some than for others. If you have difficulty making a decision, then you need some mentors and counselors who can help you process the options and decide. If you are decisive, you need counselors who can help you assess some of the options that you may not see. In either case, the proverb is true:

Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed (Proverbs 15:22).

Who are you counselors? Are they people like you, or do they complement your style? Who are your mentors? Have you asked anyone to be one? Do you even need mentors, or is your life such that you don't need to make decisions or lead?

Day Five

16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." 18 She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

vs. 16&17 – The team was heading back to the place of prayer, when they encountered a different sort of opposition. This time they were met by a girl with a spirit of fortune-telling. Even though this girl proclaimed the truth, her source of truth was a demon. She was saying all the right things but had the wrong source. This behavior and condition is totally unacceptable to the Lord:

When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable

practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the LORD your God (Deuteronomy 18:9-13).

While the spirit in this girl predicted the future and said some true things, it wasn't what the spirit said, but where the spirit got the information. There is only one safeguard that will help you know whether a spirit is unclean and it is found in 1 John:

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world (1 John 4:1-3).

Jesus is always the boundary between truth and deception. This girl wasn't a follower of Jesus, therefore Jesus couldn't have been her source of truth. **Are you testing the spirits? Do you follow something because it sounds good, or because you have checked its source?**

v. 18 – Paul didn't respond right away, but eventually he got tired of her harangue. So he cast the spirit out of the girl. This is an indication of Paul's authority, for the girl wasn't asking to be delivered as far as we know. Yet the spirit world had to respond to the name of Jesus, regardless of the girl's will. There are some things that we cannot counsel, rebuke or instruct. We simply must cast them out. **Does this surprise you? Do you believe that evil spirits still function and reside in people? If not, you should, because they do. And a demonic source may be the problem in your life or that of your family, business or ministry.**

How did Paul know it was an evil spirit? Obviously, he had discernment, which is a gift of the Spirit. I have seen a lot of folks get weird with this stuff and begin to see a demon everywhere. But that wasn't Paul's style. Please don't get strange with what is called deliverance ministry, but don't shy away from it either. If you encounter a spirit, use the name of Jesus to remove it and move on. Casting out of spirits is only one weapon in our arsenal; it's not the only weapon as is explained below:

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well" (Mark 16:15-18).

Day Six

19 When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20 They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21 by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice." 22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

v. 19 – This slave girl was a slave not only to the devil, but also to her owners. But now that the owners had lost their source of income, they retaliated. From this point forward, the gospel began to confront not only the religious establishment of Israel, but the economic powers of Rome. For some, the gospel was bad for business and on that basis had to be opposed. Jesus was also bad for the Temple business and that was, in part, why the leaders tried to do away with Him, too. I guess some serve religious traditions and some serve money, and both are idols that take God’s place in some hearts. Make sure neither take root in your heart.

vs. 20&21 – The owners charge that these “Jews” were advocating things that were unlawful for Roman citizens. They acknowledged that Paul and Silas had thrown the city into an uproar, which may or may not have been an exaggeration. But the facts didn’t really matter because they had lost a revenue stream.

v. 22 – The magistrates assumed that these men weren’t citizens, so they did not proceed with any formalities such as charges being filed and a hearing. They simply ordered them to be stripped and beaten. This is just what Rome did to Jesus, which is an indication of how Rome treated their “non-citizens.” Of course, Jesus had warned His disciples that this would happen:

"You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:9-11).

And of course it happened to Paul on more than one occasion:

Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again (2 Corinthians 11:23).

When I read about Paul and his sufferings, I realize that I have been inconvenienced for the gospel but not really suffered by comparison. What price are you willing to pay to see the gospel preached and people saved? The same price that Paul paid? I ask myself the same questions, but I'm not sure of the answers.

vs. 23&24 – Once they were beaten, Paul and Silas were chained in a prison with a guard who was to forfeit his life if they escaped. Does this sound familiar? Didn't they do this to Jesus when they laid Him in the tomb? Didn't they do this to Peter and the apostles after they healed the man in the Temple? There is no prison that can hold God's people when they are on a mission from God. God promises to be with all His servants who go forth to preach the good news. But that doesn't mean these servants won't encounter hardships along the way.

But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry (2 Timothy 4:5).

Day Seven

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

v. 25 – Wow! These men had just been severely flogged hours earlier, and now they are awake at midnight singing hymns! And they were keeping everyone else awake! What great men these were! How committed to their cause they were! And how powerfully the grace of God was with them! I am overwhelmed by my own lack of commitment and selfishness as I behold two models of supreme faith and love for God. Just this morning, I was “complaining” to God about a situation; I wasn't singing praise—I was moaning. Forgive me, Lord.

v. 26 – Double wow! God was so impressed with their singing, or perhaps the conditions surrounding their singing, that he began to tap his foot to the music and started an earthquake! ☺ This was no ordinary earthquake, however, for it was one that released everyone from their chains! **Did you ever think that your praise in the midst of difficult times would release other people from their bondage? It can happen!**

This isn't the first time that God released his people from prison. He did it for Joseph, Daniel, Peter and now Paul and Silas. God didn't prevent these men from going to jail, but He did release them once they got in. And some of them were in longer than just one night! God doesn't promise to keep you from trials, but He does promise to deliver you from them.

v. 27 – The jailer had been charged to keep the prisoners, so when he awoke and saw the doors opened, he assumed they had all escaped. Since he protected them with his life, he was ready to forfeit his life. God wanted him to forfeit his life, but not in the way he thought. Paul’s jail time had served to release the other prisoners from their chains and was about to free the jailer from his chains of sin. When you surrender your life to God, it’s no longer yours. He can do with it what He chooses. Here God chose to send the team to Macedonia, to encounter a slave-girl with a demon, to send them to jail and then to release them by a dramatic and miraculous earthquake. **What is God doing in your life? Have you surrendered your life, future, reputation and self-determination? Can you trust Him even in the darkness of your financial, relational, vocational or ministry “prison?”**

v. 28 – Paul must have seen what the jailer was about to do and he cried out to stop the man from killing himself. This is some commitment in and of itself. The jailer was a man of integrity. Instead of running away, he was ready to face the consequences for what he considered a failure to fulfill his duties. You can see why God wanted to reach this man. God cared enough about this jailer to send his very best Gentile apostle to reach him. And God cared enough that he put Paul and Silas through a bit of hell so that this man could reach heaven. **This tells you a lot about God, doesn’t it? Are you ready for God to use you? If so, be prepared for the adventure of a lifetime!**