

BIBLE SERIES: "EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"

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ACTS 16-17 PAUL'S TRAVELS TO GREECE – PHILIPPI; THES.; BEREIA; ATHENS



Once Paul and Silas pick up Timothy in Lystra as a traveling companion, they head west in Asia Minor (now modern Turkey). But God had a specific place for him to go – Greece, which is part of Europe, and so He twice thwarts Paul's travels to western or northern Turkey. Luke records, "Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas" (Acts 16:6-8).

Recent archaeological explorations have shown how accurate Luke's account is, since Roman roads now discovered trace the normal route to Troas. Archaeologist Mark Wilson, who lives in Turkey, stated to me at a recent archaeological conference, "Luke is very careful in his account, for when he has personal knowledge of the region, he gives accurate details, but when he is not familiar with Paul's route, he doesn't embellish the narrative."

Once arriving at Troas, in the western coast of Turkey, close to Troy, Paul receives a message from God, "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' Now after he had seen the vision, immediately *we* sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them. Therefore, sailing from Troas, *we* ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia (in greater Greece), a [Roman] colony. And *we* were staying in that city for some days" (Acts 16:9-12).

Here begin the famous "we" texts of Luke, showing he had now joined Paul in his travels at Troas and they then headed to Greece. Reaching Philippi, a major city named after Alexander the Great's father, the group went on the Sabbath to a nearby river, probably the Gangites River, where Jews met to pray. It seems they didn't have enough Jewish men to establish a synagogue, which required having at least ten Jewish men present.

Luke says, "And on the Sabbath day *we* went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to

the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.' So she persuaded us" (Acts 16:13-15). We thus see how Paul first goes to the Jews on the Sabbath wherever he travels. Here it is a Jewish woman, Lydia, whom God calls and was converted. Her faith was so strong and resolute that Paul baptized her, along with her companions.

Note, though, as the *People's Bible Commentary* stresses, "Some have held that this implies the baptism of infants. It rather implies that her servants and friends also accepted the gospel. There is no ground for the inference that she was even married, or had children. (Meyer, a Lutheran scholar) states, 'the baptism of the children of Christians, of which no trace is found in the New Testament is not to be held as an apostolic ordinance.' Besides, it would have been scandalous at that time to baptize children, since Jesus never did and you first had to *count the cost*."

Next, Luke records how Paul got into trouble by expelling a demon from a young fortune teller, "Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. 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.' And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, 'These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.' Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten

with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks" (Luke 16:16-23).

On this young fortune teller, *The IVP Background Commentary* notes, "This slave girl (as in Acts 12:13, the Greek implies she is very young) has literally a 'spirit of a pythoness'—the same sort of spirit that stood behind the most famous of all Greek oracles, the Delphic oracle of Apollo whose priestess was called a pythoness...Thus Paul and his companions confront a powerful demon here."

This girl followed Paul and the others around and was proclaiming through a demon, probably in a sarcastic way, that they were servants of the Most High God preaching salvation. So Paul, after days of patiently putting up with it, finally cast out the demon. Notice he used the name and authority of Jesus Christ, not his own. Naturally, those who ran the now ruined fortune-telling business were furious and accused him to the authorities.

Since Philippi was a Roman colony, its citizens (but not foreigners) enjoyed all the rights of Roman citizenship. So non-Roman citizens arrested were normally beaten before the trial to secure evidence (called *coercitio*). Roman officials, called lictors, carried rods in bundles (fasces, where the term "fascist" comes from), and with these rods they punished them.

Yet, something wonderful happened. Luke writes, "But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, 'Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.' Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' So they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your

household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household. And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, 'Let those men go.' So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, 'The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace.' But Paul said to them, 'They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.' And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city. So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed" (Acts 16:25-40).

It definitely was rough going for Paul and his companions, but God worked miracles along the way, such as the baptism of the jail keeper and his household. Apparently, those converts would now meet in Lydia's place on the Sabbath.

Luke continues, "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ. And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas. But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, 'These who have turned the world upside down

have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.’ And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go” (Acts 17:1-9).

Here in Thessalonica, there was a larger Jewish presence since they had their own synagogue. Notice also Paul kept the Sabbath, not Sunday, and never brings up meeting on another day. When a small church is begun here, the Jews become jealous and accused them, causing Jason, a believer, to be jailed, but he is released under bond. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* explains, “Probably the bond-posting was to guarantee that Paul and Silas would leave town and not return. If more trouble arose, Jason and the others would lose their money. This may explain why Paul was prohibited from returning (1Thes. 2:18).”

Paul and his party now go to Berea, “Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there” (Acts 17:10-14). Another church was begun here, and Silas and Timothy are left in charge while Paul continues on.

Next is Athens—which had some 30,000 statues to the gods! “So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed. Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. Then certain Epicurean and Stoic

philosophers encountered him. And some said, ‘What does this babblers want to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,’ because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.’ For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: To the unknown God. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter.’ So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (17:15-34). So he adapts the message to the each place.