

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts

(SB_Acts 16_Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey)

Introduction

In chapter 15, we observed the dichotomy that was beginning to emerge and crystallize in embryonic form. In its request of Gentile believers, the Jerusalem church leaders wanted the Gentile believers to be sensitive to the long-held traditions and practices surrounding the Mosaic Law and the covenant with Abraham that had set them apart as a people (see Acts 15:22-29). They recognized the following facts:

- They recognized the fact that Gentiles were becoming believers apart from any association with Judaism (e.g. circumcision).
- They acknowledged that God had sanctioned the salvation of the Gentiles via the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the same manner as on the day of Pentecost.
- They also recognized the Scriptural precedent for this phenomenon and knew on the basis of Scripture that Gentiles would be saved in association with the latter days of the Age of Israel leading up to the establishment of the Kingdom.
- They recognized the parallels between Scripture teaching on the subject and what was happening in their own day.

In their interpretive grid, the Jewish leaders who were believers would have associated the salvation of the Gentiles apart from Judaism as possible indications that the Messiah, Jesus, in whom they believed, was to soon return and establish His kingdom. They would have also been encouraged by Scriptural teaching on the subject to know that in the Kingdom, Israel would be exalted to a place of prominence.

The dichotomy between two interpretive grids was beginning to emerge. In contrast to James and the Jerusalem church leadership at the time of the Jerusalem Council in A.D. 46, Paul was already recognizing (or was shortly to recognize) that the body of believers now being formed was a unique body of faith. This body did not consist only of Gentiles who were saved apart from Judaism, but it consisted of Jew and Gentile alike – no distinction (Gal 3:28 cf. 2:16).

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28)

Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. (Gal 2:16)

Paul wrote Galatians in approximately A.D. 48 and it is possible he recognized the truth of this principle in practice (i.e. at the time of the Jerusalem Council in A.D. 46) prior to putting it to the pen.

In spite of this apparent dichotomy of interpretive grids, the Jerusalem leadership held in common with Paul and Barnabas a desire to see Gentiles saved and coming to faith. In their letter that they prepared to the Gentile believers, the Jerusalem leadership expressed great appreciation and respect for Paul and Barnabas referring to them as “our beloved Paul and Barnabas, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:25b-26).

Observation: There was apparently a difference in interpretive grids between Paul and the Jerusalem leadership.

Observation: Both groups of leaders (i.e. the Jerusalem church leadership and Paul & Barnabas) were in agreement on an essential to salvation, i.e. believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah/Son of God and Redeemer.

Observation: These two groups did not break fellowship.

Interpretation: It is important to distinguish between an essential to the faith and a non-essential to the faith.

Application: We should not break fellowship with other believers if an essential to the faith is held in common.

Application: We should be supportive of the efforts of other believers in regard to the essentials to the faith.

Application: There are interpretive grids or positions that you or I may hold that should be considered a “non-essential” to the faith (e.g. predestination & election, observance of the ritual of baptism, dispensations, positions on the subject of abortion, etc.); however, we should leave it up to other believers to separate from us over such positions if they choose to do so, thus allowing them to treat a non-essential as an essential.

The Second Missionary Journey Begins Paul Separates from Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41)

Barnabas was agreeable to Paul's request to go back and visit the churches they had founded together; however Barnabas wanted to take John Mark who had departed from them on the first journey. The contention between Paul and Barnabas was so great that they parted ways – Barnabas and Mark to Cyprus and Paul choosing another partner, Silas.

Why was the contention so sharp? Was Paul not as gracious of a man as was Barnabas? The answer probably depends upon the reason Mark left them in the first place – which we do not know. Some have speculated that Mark may not have been in favor of granting the Gentiles full freedom in the Gospel. Barnabas had even exhibited a tendency in this regard based upon Paul's statements in Galatians 2:13. If this was true, then it is understandable that Paul would have taken such a strong position on the matter. The church at Antioch apparently sided with Paul for they recommended Paul and Silas, but nothing similar is stated in regard to Barnabas and Mark. Nevertheless, Paul eventually reconciled with Mark for in 2 Timothy 4:11, Paul states that he found Mark to be profitable for the ministry.

In his narrative, Luke does not assign blame for the split. When there are such disagreements (sometimes they might be over non-essentials) between believers, a split might be necessary to preserve the integrity of the essentials at stake. In this example, Barnabas shows his character for he never makes an issue out of the disagreement with the church at Antioch. Barnabas had led the church in its early days (Acts 11:22-25). He was the church's main representative at the Jerusalem council, but did not use his position of prominence to seek a reprimand of Paul. He just kept serving the Lord.

Observation: Barnabas kept on serving the Lord in spite of differences of opinion and even disputes with fellow servants of the Lord.

Observation: There is no record that Barnabas ever bad-mouthed Paul or vice versa.

Interpretation: Barnabas loved the Lord in spite of differences with a man whom God had obviously selected for a special ministry and purpose.

Application: In the spiritual realm, God will sometimes place certain believers in more prominent roles. Our position when this happens should be like Barnabas – continue to serve as we are motivated by love and trust of our Lord.

Principle: The degree to which we love the Lord reflects the degree to which we trust the Lord and the degree to which we trust the Lord is reflected in our service of Him.

Principle: Selfishness, the desire for personal gratification, and the desire for approbation are the greatest hindrances to the believer's effective service. (Barnabas was a man who was not selfish and who was not motivated by a desire for his own approbation).

Principle: We accomplish the most as a body of faith when we don't care who gets the credit.

Timothy Joins Paul and Silas (16:1-5)

Paul and Silas travel north and then west from Antioch to Syria and Cilicia visiting the churches (15:34-35, 41). We don't have a record of the establishment of any churches in Cilicia by Paul, but it is possible that Paul went there sometime between his conversion and his move to Antioch.

In Derbe, Paul discovered a young man who was a disciple named Timothy. Timothy was the son of a Jewish woman of great faith (2 Tim 1:5) who had taught the Scriptures to Timothy from infancy (2 Tim 3:15). Nothing is stated about Timothy's father, a Gentile, and since Timothy was uncircumcised, it would be reasonable to assume that Timothy's father was not a believer. In Jewish custom, the son of a mixed marriage took the religion of the mother even though in Greek law, the father dominated the home. So, Timothy had two strikes against him if he was to be effective with evangelizing Jews – he was half-Jew, half-Gentile (like a Samaritan) and he was not circumcised. Paul decided to circumcise him in order to eliminate any barriers to the evangelization of Jews. Timothy was to become in time one of Paul's most faithful fellow workers and a dear friend (Phil 2:20). Paul knew that he needed to train younger men to carry on the work and even directed two of his epistles to Timothy.

It is very clear that Paul was motivated in this action only by a desire to be more effective in evangelism among the Jews (1 Cor 9:20-22; Rom 14:13-15).

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak, I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. (1 Cor 9:19-22)

But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Yet if your brother is

grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. (Rom 14:10-15)

Unbelieving Jews would not have given Paul a hearing if he had traveled with an uncircumcised Gentile even though Timothy was half Jewish (cf. 1 Cor. 9:20). Timothy would not have been allowed in Jewish synagogues had he remained uncircumcised. Furthermore, the action was totally voluntary and no one was forcing Timothy or Paul to practice circumcision or making an issue of circumcision.

Earlier, Paul did not heed the demands to have Titus, a full Gentile, circumcised when he attended the Jerusalem Council (Gal 2:3). Even though Paul would later circumcise Timothy in the interest of removing a potential stumbling block for Jews, on that occasion, there was no “essential” to the faith that was compromised by doing so. However, in the case of Titus, Paul would have compromised on an “essential” to the faith had he circumcised Titus.

Observation: On one occasion, Paul would have been wrong to circumcise and on the other occasion, Paul would have been wrong to not circumcise.

Interpretation: The same action can be wrong or right depending upon the circumstances.

Application: Sometimes, we need to ask for wisdom to know when to do the right thing when a doctrinal issue is at stake.

The Macedonian Call (16:6-10)

After visiting the churches he had established on his first journey, Paul tried to enter a new territory – the province of Asia located to the West and Southwest of the regions Paul had visited earlier (i.e. Pisidia, Pamphylia, Galatia and Phrygia). This is not the area of Asia that we associate with China or Russia. The province of Asia was one of several Roman provinces that occupied the larger district of Asia Minor. Asia Minor was ancient Anatolia and modern western Turkey. Asia Minor is the southwest portion of the Asian land mass that is occupied by Turkey today. The province of Asia that is referenced by Luke such cities as Ephesus, Colosse, and Smyrna and the seven churches of Revelation 2 & 3.

Paul wanted to travel in a southwesterly direction from Galatia into Asia; however, he was forbidden to do so by the Holy Spirit for some undisclosed reason. After traveling to Mysia, Paul wanted to go north into Bithynia. The Holy Spirit prevented him from going that direction also. Actually, in some Greek manuscripts, the phrase Luke uses in verse 7 is the “Spirit of Jesus.” This phrase indicates the fact that Jesus had a direct role in leading Paul and the team on their journeys.

Note that Luke used three terms to stress the fact that the triune God was leading these apostles by His Spirit. He first referred to the Holy Spirit (v. 6), then the Spirit of Jesus (v. 7), and then God (v. 10) as leading them.¹

Why would the Holy Spirit prevent Paul from going to an area to evangelize? Wouldn't God want people to be evangelized in all areas of the world? We do not know exactly why God would not have allowed Paul to travel into Bithynia at this time and we do not know exactly how the Holy Spirit communicated the message to Paul and his party. As far as we know, Paul never had a ministry in Bithynia, but he would later have a very effective ministry in Asia (Acts 18:19 – 19:20). However, we do know that Peter addresses his first epistle to the “pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (1 Pet 1:1). These scattered

¹ Thomas Constable, “Notes on the Book of Acts,” www.soniclight.com

“strangers” were Jews of the dispersion. We don’t know whether Peter ever visited Bithynia, but we do know that the gospel did reach this area based upon Peter’s salutation in his first epistle.

This vision of the man in Macedonia is one of the major turning points in human history. If God would have led Paul eastward instead of westward towards Europe, the area occupied by modern day Russia, China, India and the other Asian nations may have been the direction of this initial evangelistic activity and the geo-political base upon which the western world would eventually be patterned.

Paul continued to journey westward for some three hundred miles from Iconium until he came to Troas, the westernmost point of the continent of Asia. Troas was near the site of ancient Troy, the scene of Homer’s Iliad, and the Trojan horse. Paul must have established a church at Troas since he mentions a church service there with the disciples upon his return in Acts 20:5-11. This was where Paul preached late into the night and Eutychus, who was sitting on the 3rd story window went to sleep and fell to his death only to be restored by Paul (Acts 20:7-12). One night at Troas, Paul had a vision.² He saw a Macedonian man requesting that he come to Macedonia to help them.

Consequently Paul turned west from where he was and proceeded to Troas. This city was a Roman colony, like Antioch of Pisidia and Lystra, located at a very strategic site. It was one of the main seaports from which travelers entered Asia Minor from the West and departed from Asia Minor for the Roman provinces farther west.³

In the present passage, we once again see a principle of divine guidance that is still true today in spite of the fact that God no longer leads through visions and dreams. It is when we involve ourselves in Christian ministry of some type to others that God has the circumstances with which to work to provide guidance into greater ministry.

This passage has become popular because in it God gave Paul definite guidance concerning where He wanted him to minister. Anyone who wants to propagate the gospel has questions about this kind of guidance. Notice that Paul was actively ministering and was seeking to do what appeared to him to be the wise thing when God said no and yes to his efforts. In providing positive direction God brought new information to Paul that impressed the apostle with a particular need God wanted him to meet. It seems to me that we should not concern ourselves mainly with the methods God uses to guide people. These varied in Acts and were not Luke’s primary concern. We should, however, concentrate on where we can be of most use as the Lord’s instruments. This was Paul’s dominant concern. If our choices for places of ministry are equally acceptable to God, He probably will not steer us away from any of them as was true in Paul’s first missionary journey. We can go wherever we please. However if He does not want us in one or more of these places, I believe He will shut one or more doors for us as He did for Paul. Lewis S. Chafer used to say that God often guides us by bringing

² Visions were a phenomena used by God to communicate his sovereign purpose and provide guidance on occasion. (Of course, where God employs a technique or tactic, Satan has a counterfeit). There are about 11 occasions in the book of Acts where a vision occurred (i.e. 9:10, 12; 10:3, 17, 19; 11:5; 12:9, 10; 18:8; 26:19). While God is certainly able to employ such techniques today, it is the position of The Church of the Servant King that this technique has no longer been employed by God since last used in giving the Apokalupsis to John on the Isle of Patmos in approximately A.D. 95-96.

³ Thomas Constable, “Notes on the Book of Acts,” www.soniclight.com

information to our attention that enlightens our judgment when we need to make decisions.⁴

Luke uses the pronoun “we” in Acts 16:10. Up to this point, Luke used the pronoun “they” in reference to Paul and his party. This indicates that Luke probably joined Paul’s party at this point in the journey at Troas. This is the first of several uses of the plural pronoun by Luke and indicates that Luke accompanied Paul on at least those occasions where we find the pronoun. The plural pronoun “we” is used here in the narrative of Paul’s 2nd missionary journey and it is used on three other occasions in Acts.

- Acts 20:5-15 – Paul’s 3rd missionary journey where he revisited the regions of Asia and Greece
- Acts 21:1-18 – pleading with Paul not to return to Jerusalem
- Acts 27:1-28:16 – the voyage to Rome

This fact increases the historical value of the book of Acts since Luke was a first-hand witness of that which he writes. In addition, it may indicate something even more significant. The sign gifts including miraculous healings may have already started passing away at this point and not be such a prominent tool. If so, it would have been wise for Paul and his team to have “the beloved physician” join them (Col 4:14). As evidenced by the numerous occasions where we see the pronoun “we” employed by Luke, Luke would become one of Paul’s most faithful companions. At the very last, when Paul was imprisoned in Rome and shortly prior to his death, Paul wrote to Timothy – “Only Luke is with me” (2 Tim 4:11).

Lydia is Baptized at Philippi (16:11-15)

Philippi was a chief city in that part of Macedonia and it was a colony of Rome that functioned as a military outpost. It was named after the father of Alexander the Great – Philip. The people who settled the city most likely included a large group of veterans who had been granted the status of Roman citizens as a result of their faithful military service to the Empire. A Roman colony possessed an autonomous government and was immune from taxation or other forms of mandatory tribute. Because of its proximity to the sea and location along trade routes to Europe, it was a commercial center. It also was home to a famous school of medicine with graduates throughout the world at that time. Finally, it was located along the Via Egnatia (Egnatian Road) that connected the Adriatic and Aegean Sea. As a city of great influence in the region, it was just the right place to serve as a launch pad for evangelistic activities in the region.

After Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar, near Philippi in 42 A.D., the city was made into a Roman colony. This gave it special privileges (e.g, [*sic*] fewer taxes) but more importantly it became like a 'transplanted' Rome . . . The primary purpose of colonies was military, for the Roman leaders felt it wise to have Roman citizens and sympathizers settled in strategic locations. So Octavian (who became Caesar Augustus, the first Roman emperor, in 27 B.C.) settled more colonists (primarily former soldiers) at Philippi after his defeat of Antony at Actium, on Greece's west coast, in 31 B.C.⁵

Normally, Paul would go to a synagogue, but there was evidently no synagogue in Philippi which also indicates that there were very few Jews living there. It only took 10 Jewish men to form a synagogue. According to Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian, it was common for worshippers of Yahweh to gather at a river or by the sea on the Sabbath day to pray and

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 399.

worship together if there was no synagogue. Evidently, there were no men on the day Paul met with this group, so Paul met with the women.

One of the women who was in Philippi conducting business listened to Paul's message and trusted in Christ based upon the gospel Paul spoke. In addition, all of her household that was with her believed. Thyatira, her home town, was a city that was famous for its dyes and fabrics. It is interesting that Thyatira is located in Asia – the region to which Paul was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to travel. She just happened to be in Philippi and evidently, she traveled there frequently since she had a house in Philippi at which she lodged. She probably had guest quarters of some type since she had a "household" and she was evidently fairly wealthy since she was involved in a trade that would have most likely been lucrative. Purple dye had to be gathered drop-by-drop from a certain type of shellfish (the murex) or from the root of a certain type of plant (the Madder Plant – *Rubia tinctorum*). Purple was the color of royalty, thus indicating that her clientele could afford the more expensive linens and cloths that resulted from such a labor intensive process.⁶

Observation: It is interesting that Luke only notes that one woman became a believer on this first evangelistic effort when Paul and the team arrived at Philippi. (We don't know where they stayed for some days prior to the Sabbath).

Interpretation: God had led Paul and the team to this city and timing was critical.

Application: Timing is key to the effectiveness of believers who have yielded their lives to serve the Lord in any type of ministry to others.

Application: God leads those involved in missionary activities and evangelistic activities in ways the world does not comprehend in order to accomplish results that seem insignificant. (Only one woman was saved).

This is the first mention of water baptism under Paul's ministry. (We've seen Peter and others practice water baptism previously in the Acts narrative). Like the rite of circumcision, water baptism was a ritual that was practiced and had been practiced during the Age of Israel. It was an outward manifestation of identification with a belief system and it signified cleansing. Like the rite of circumcision, water baptism was not a requirement for salvation. Hebrews 10:4 and 9:8-14 are very clear on this subject not to mention the very dramatic example of the thief that was crucified with Jesus, who believed and could not possibly have been water baptized. Evidently, during this transition period, the rite or ritual of baptism was not optional, but seems to have been commanded to serve as a testimony to others of one's acceptance of the gospel message. Later, Paul would make it clear that water baptism was not a part of his commission for the present age (1 Cor 1:17) and Paul would eventually declare that there was only one baptism, a spiritual baptism involving the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:5) whereby the Holy Spirit places believers in union with Christ.⁷

⁶ Ibid. See also Earle D. Radmacher, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1850 and Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Bible College Publications, 1981), 102.

⁷ For a very good discussion on the subject of water baptism during this transition age, see Charles F. Baker, *A Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Publications, 1994), 563-566.