

ST MARKS PRESENTS:

THE BOOK of Acts

Part 26

INTRODUCTION

ANCIENT CITIES

ICONIUM: the capital of ancient Lycaonia. It was first visited by Paul and Barnabas from Antioch-in-Pisidia during the apostle's first missionary journey.

LYSTRA: a town of Lycaonia, in Asia Minor, in a wild district and among a rude population.

PHILIPPI: Formerly Crenides, "the fountain," the capital of the province of Macedonia

GALATIA: Roman writers called its inhabitants Galli. They were an intermixture of Gauls and Greeks, and hence the place was referred to as Gallo-Graecia.

THYATIRA: a city of Asia Minor, on the borders of Lydia and Mysia. Its modern name is Ak-hissar, i.e., "white castle."

Acts 16: 1-5 Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. (2) He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. (3) Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. (4) And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. (5) So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.

We should learn from Paul's perseverance and courage. The above passage records his third visit to Derbe and Lystra, where he had been stoned and left for dead. It was in this vicinity that the apostle found a young man, remarkably provided by God as another helper and fellow-traveller, and destined to become one of Paul's most faithful and effective co-workers. Timothy was the offspring of an unscriptural marriage. His mother was a Jewess, named Eunice, and his father was a Greek. In Judaea such marriages seldom occurred, but here among the Jews of the dispersion they were naturally more prevalent. However, "from a child" Timothy had "known the holy Scriptures" (II Tim. 3:15) being taught by his mother, and grandmother, Lois.

The previous chapter dealt with the contentious issue of circumcision and here we are confronted with Paul circumcising Timothy. Was Paul compromising the faith? We do not believe so. Why is it that he chose to circumcise Timothy but not Titus on another occasion? Consider the following thoughts:

1. Paul still continued with his custom of going to the **Synagogues first** and Timothy being of Jewish stock was the perfect candidate to assist Paul in the ministry to the Jewish Nation. Timothy needed to be able to enter Synagogues.
2. Paul wanted to have the least amount of obstacles for the Gospel's sake.
3. There was no spiritual element connected to Timothy's circumcision, it was purely practical.

"For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. "And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law" (1 Cor. 9.19,20).

Acts 16:6-10 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. (7) After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. (8) So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. (9) 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." (10) 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.

As Paul and Silas travelled through the cities they shared the Gospel and the good news that Gentiles were part of God's new programme. Paul also confirmed the decree from Jerusalem, freeing Gentiles from the legal practices that were part of Israel's heritage i.e. circumcision and the Law of Moses. More churches were established and they grew in number. During this time the Holy Spirit spoke to Paul and gave him a vision to go to Macedonia. Given that Paul was a called Apostle and with the New Testament not yet complete; visions and direct, divine communication was how God spoke and revealed His Word to Paul. We now have the completed version of the Scriptures and so this form of communication is no longer normative. God now speaks through His established Word, the Bible. The message spread from Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor (Turkey) and into Europe. This was a natural and inspired progression of God's plan to establish the Christian Church. Verse 10 is interesting in that Luke, the writer of Acts, uses the wording "we". This indicates that he was with Paul on his journey and writes a first hand account.

Acts 16:11-15 Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, (12) and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. (13) 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. (14) 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. (15) 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.

It must have proved encouraging to the apostle to have things go more smoothly for a time. In Galatia he had suffered illness, then twice the Spirit had hindered him from ministering in certain areas. But upon arriving at Troas all was different. The beloved physician Luke was with them, a special vision had called him to new opportunities, a ship was ready to offer transportation and even the wind was favorable.

It would appear that there was no synagogue in Philippi. In any city like Philippi, where there were not enough Jews to maintain a synagogue, the few who did reside there would choose (be granted) a place outside the city near a river or stream, to carry on their devotions. This would be by flowing water so that they could attend to the baptisms, or washings, which played so prominent a part in their worship. Surely Israel was not being left without abundant testimony to the person and claims of Christ, for here, where there was not even a synagogue, the apostle and his helpers still made it a point to deal with "the Jew first," seeking out those who might resort to the riverside on the Sabbath day to pray. In this case the company was made up mostly, if not entirely, of women—always apt to be more devoted and faithful than men. And among these women was one named Lydia, a merchant from Thyatira, who dealt in purple goods, the clothing of the rich and of the socially or politically prominent (See Luke 16:19). From her name it would appear that she was not a Jewess, but she had evidently come to fear the God of Israel and may have been a proselyte to Judaism. Yet it was not surprising that God, in His foreknowledge of all things, should choose to open this woman's heart for, though far from home and engaged in business, she was found here seeking the fellowship of those whose God had said: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," and was seeking God in prayer. And now, through Paul's preaching, Lydia found God and true Sabbath rest in Christ (See Heb. 1:3; 4:9,10). Baptism was still carried out because Israel was still in the picture. As with Cornelius' baptism, nothing had changed yet considering baptism as 1 Corinthians 1:17 and Ephesians 4:5 was not yet written. It would also seem that it was always with those who were known by Jews as in the case of Cornelius and Lydia. It was also a declaration within families who had come from paganism to turn toward the one true God as in the case of the Philippian jailor.



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