

Acts 16

Vs. 1-5 Paul and Barnabas have split over including John Mark in the next journey. Barnabas and John Mark sail to Cyprus.

Paul and Silas head to Derbe and Lystra, where Paul adds Timothy to his team. Timothy becomes one of the important leaders of the church.

Timothy is the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father, an example of the diversity that is coming to exist in the Christian synagogues of the diaspora. Though he is legally a Jew through his mother's lineage, he has not been circumcised. Paul has him circumcised – not to assure his membership in the covenant people but to encourage good working relationships with both Jew and gentile in the church.

Vs. 6-10 The Holy Spirit is responsible for the plan of the church's mission, leading by divine speech or heavenly vision. The repetition of "Spirit" confirms a theological conviction central to Acts. That is – the Spirit guides and empowers the church's witness. The Spirit blocks Paul from his plans for Asia and turns him toward Europe

And with a vision turns Paul's journey to Macedonia – the vision is not of a heavenly being but a Macedonian man.

Paul immediately responds to his call.

Macedonia has a much smaller Jewish population and therefore a more pagan culture.

The clairvoyant slave girl is a good representation of the spiritual state of the region.

Paul actually had to leave the confines of the city in order to find a place to worship.

Vs. 11-15 It is the Sabbath in a place of prayer with Christian gentiles at worship. But it is not a formal setting. Rather it is beside the river and most importantly outside the city limits – a place where a group of women had gathered to pray. Paul sits down among them and begins to speak with them. Lydia was there and listening intently to Paul.

About Lydia – Paul's first convert in Europe; from Thyatira; a business woman with her own household; a dealer in purple cloth, cloth destined for the rich and powerful. Therefore it is likely she rubbed shoulders with society's rich and famous. The information given about her suggests she enjoyed high status among free persons and merchants. She and her household were baptized and she provided housing to Paul and his fellow travelers. Lydia probably provided her home for the meeting place of the first

church in Philippi. Her name is Greek and she is likely a gentile rather than a Jew.

Lydia is an exemplar of one of Luke's recurring themes - response to the word of the Lord and hospitality.

Vs. 16-18 Paul's exorcism of the slave girl is similar to the exorcism found in Mark 1:21-26. In Mark it is Jesus's authority that is confirmed. Here it is Paul's. The Holy Spirit in Paul is greater than the spirit that speaks through the girl.

The girl continues to proclaim that Paul and his followers were slaves of the Most High God. Zeus was also known as the Most High God. Paul's exorcism is a demonstration of God's authority over all pagan gods.

The spirit in the girl is a "pythian spirit" – referencing the Greek myth of the dragon that guarded the Delphi oracle and was slain by Apollo. The name and the legend were

attached to one who had clairvoyant powers or the trickery of ventriloquism. However she did it the girl brought a lot of money to her owners.

When Paul cast out her spirit, he stopped the flow of money into the pockets of her owners.

Vs. 19-21 The disposition of property is an important theme in Acts, typically a measure for relationship with God.

The owners seize Paul and Silas and drag them to the market place – agora in Greek – the city's place where people come to conduct various transactions, including legal ones. There is a precise protocol for bringing claims to the court and the owners follow it carefully – first, they go to the authorities who are responsible for public order, and turn Paul and Silas over to the magistrates, who are responsible

for settling civil claims. The owners cleverly choose charges designed to incite prejudice against Jews – it works.

Paul and Silas are stripped, beaten and thrown in jail.

Vs. 24 -34 To insure no escape, the jailer is told to put them in the innermost cell with their feet in stocks. Paul and Silas, rather than fighting to get out spend the night praying and singing hymns while the other prisoners listened. It appears they were waiting for God to act. And God did act – earthquake high on the Richter scale. The very foundations shake. Cell doors opened and chains fell off – apparently stocks also opened for all the prisoners were free and could have left.

The poor jailer is so certain all the prisoners are gone he decides the best thing for him is to take his own life rather than wait for the authorities to do so.

The jailer – perhaps recognizing the power of Paul asks his most important question – what must I do to be saved – believe in Christ. The central message of Paul’s ministry.

Again we see the acting out of belief – the jailer takes care of them.

Vs. 35-40 Paul zaps the authorities!

After listing the grievances that resulted in his humiliation, public flogging, condemnation and incarceration – of a Roman citizen. Oops. Imprisoning a Roman citizen without a trial is illegal. Doing so publicly could get one executed.

Freed Paul and Silas go to Lydia’s home where Christians within the city could now worship.