

## Missions in Acts: God is in Control

### Acts 15:36–16:40

#### 1A Introduction: After the Jerusalem Conference, What?

**1B** The Jerusalem conference of Acts 15 was a key moment in the life of the early church. Poised on the brink of destruction due to religious legalism, the grace Gospel prevailed, and the ministry of the church was divided into two teams.

**2B** Paul and Barnabas, along with Judas and Silvanus, returned to Antioch, where they would plan their next moves.

#### 2A The decision to return to the cities of the first missionary journey, 36 Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.”

#### 3A The divisive dispute over John Mark, vv.37-41:

**1B** Barnabas’ determination, 37 Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark.

**2B** Paul’s disagreement due to John Mark’s former desertion, 38 But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.

**3B** The deepness of the divide, 39a Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another.

**4B** The divide leads to more discipleship, vv.39b-41, And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Παῦλος δὲ ἐπιλεξάμενος Σίλαν ἐξῆλθεν, παραδοθεὶς τῇ χάριτι τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀδελφῶν.

#### 4A The great discovery, vv.1-3:

**1B** The discovery of Timothy, 1 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.

**2B** His reputation, 2 He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium.

**3B** The confirmation of Timothy’s faith, 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.

#### 5A The distribution of the Jerusalem letter to the churches embroiled in judaizer legalism (“For it seemed best to the Holy Spirit and to us to place on you no greater burden except these necessary things: <sup>29</sup> *that you* abstain from food sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. *If you\** keep yourselves from [these things] you will do well.”

**1B** The distribution of the decrees according to plan, 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.

- 2B** Because of the release from legalism, the freedom of the churches to grow, 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.
- 6A** The GPS (Guidance Propelled by the Spirit) guidance of the Holy Spirit, vv.6-12:
- 1B** Forbidden, 6 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.
- 2B** The second prevention, 7 After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them.
- 3B** Arrival at Troas and the vision, 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."
- 4B** Their proper conclusion and intention, 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.
- 5B** Their arrival and sojourn in Philippi 11 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.
- 7A** Conversational beginnings, 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.
- 8A** The overhearer, 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.
- 9A** The invitation, 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.
- 10A** How to have a ministry, vv.16-24:
- 1B** The arrival of the valuable slave girl, 16 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.
- 2B** Her tagalong and proclamation, 17 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."
- 3B** Her annoying repetition, and Paul's response, 18 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.
- 4B** Profit loss statement and arrest, 19 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.
- 5B** Antisemitic false claims, vv.20-21:
- 1C** Their race and general accusation, 20 And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city;

- 2C** Their teaching of unlawful customs, 21 and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.”
- 6B** The command to punish, 22 Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods.
- 7B** Their imprisonment, 23 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.
- 8B** The inescapability of their situation, 24 Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.
- 11A** The concert and the jailbreak, vv.25-34:
- 1B** The midnight concert and prayer meeting, 25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.
- 2B** The earthquake and chainbreaking, 26 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.
- 3B** The response of the jailkeeper, 27 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.
- 4B** Better call Paul, 28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.”
- 5B** The humbling of the jailer, 29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.
- 6B** His one question, 30 And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”
- 7B** The Gospel, 31 So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”
- 8B** The first Bible lesson, 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.
- 9B** His care for them, and their baptism, 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.
- 10B** He feeds them physical food, 34 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.
- 12A** Final resolution of the incident, vv.35-40:
- 1B** The command of the magistrates to the prison keeper, 35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, “Let those men go.”
- 2B** The report of the prison keeper to Paul, and his suggestion, 36 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.”
- 3B** Paul’s refusal and desire for confrontation, 37 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.”
- 4B** The fear of the magistrates, 38 And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.
- 5B** Their apologetic nature and request, 39 Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city.

**6B** Final encouragement to the Philippian church, 40 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."

**13A** Observations:

**1B** It's a great idea that if you encounter positive response to follow up with it.

**2B** Even in bitter division God is in control.

**1C** Paul and Barnabas had to go their separate ways, and the whole church seemed against Paul.

**2C** Paul not only found Timothy, but he was eventually reconciled and reunited with John Mark. He was likely with Paul at the end of his life, 2 Timothy 4:11, "11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry."

**3B** Timothy was a *mensch*. Do what you have to do for the sake of the Gospel. And don't be afraid to ask hard things of your young men in ministry.

**4B** Less legalism will men more freedom to grow. And churches will certainly grow.

**5B** We don't always know where we are going but the Holy Spirit does. He can lead by a variety of means.

**6B** Talk to people and realize you are also talking to people within hearing range.

**7B** When people in a locality respond to the Gospel it may have economic and personal consequences.

**8B** When you are falsely accused and persecuted, God has a plan and He is in control. Faith rest. Wait on Him to act.

**9B** The Gospel is simple and one salvation can often lead to another.

**10B** Citizenship is a great thing.

**14A** Applications:

**1B** God is in control.

**2B** Stick to the Gospel.

**3B** Be a good citizen.