

\*This character study / commentary into Apostle Paul is based mostly on Charles Swindoll's "Great Lives in God's Word" series on Paul and FF Bruce's "Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free." Main source materials are based on contents in these books unless otherwise noted.

**Sunday May 14, 2023**

**Lesson 8: The New Mission and the New Team**

**Reference: Acts 16:1-10**

**Supplemental: Spiritual Journey of Timothy, First Missionary Journey (From Lesson 5)**

When we last saw Paul, he and Barnabas had engaged in an intense dispute that effectively ended both of their teaching and preaching ministries at the church in Syrian Antioch. Barnabas took John Mark and left towards Cyprus, where church tradition indicated that he started another healthy gospel ministry on Cyprus and in North Africa. Paul took Silas as they went north towards Cilicia, with the intention of continuing towards the cities where he and Barnabas had planted churches in their first missionary journey. This journey would begin sometime in the Spring of AD 51.

The goal of the second missionary journey was *initially* to deliver the verdict from the Jerusalem Council of AD50 about the doctrine of Grace on salvation (Acts 16:4). This would explain the strategic choice of having Silas accompany him on this journey, as Silas – being a leader of the Jerusalem church who had commanded a great deal of respect among the Jews – would fill a vital role to confirm and explain the Jerusalem church's decision to Jewish Christians. Note also that Silas was specifically named in that Jerusalem letter (Acts 15:27). As this journey progresses, their mission objectives would be changed by a vision of a man in Macedonia that Paul received in Troas.

### **Chronology of Events – Acts 16:1-10**

Paul's second missionary journey began somewhat somberly, preceded by an intense disagreement with Barnabas, his longtime ministry partner and friend (Acts 15:35-41). It is possible that the journey path towards Tarsus (Cilicia province) was also intentional, giving Paul some time to reflect and recalibrate his attitude towards others in ministry (Recall that Tarsus was Paul's hometown, and his retreat from the world before Barnabas recruited him into ministry in Antioch).

From Tarsus, Paul and Silas would likely cross the Tarsus mountain range through the Cilician Gates, leading them out of Cilicia and into Cappadocia. Turning west from there, they would follow the Roman road that would lead them to Derbe – the most eastern city visited by Paul and Barnabas in their first mission trip (Acts 14:20). Recall also that Derbe and Lystra, by this time, was also commonly referred to as the Lycaonian Cities. A visit to Derbe would effectively also include Lystra.

### **Timothy Joins the Mission Team**

During Paul's previous trip to Lystra (Acts 14:8-20), members of three generations of one family evidently came to faith in Christ – a grandmother named Lois, a mother named Eunice, and her son named Timothy (2 Tim 1:5 – See Supplemental: The Spiritual Journey of Timothy). While in Lystra, Paul would meet a young man named Timothy, who was primed to be mentored into a future minister of Christ. Paul would proceed to take Timothy as his understudy and invite Timothy to join his mission team, with the blessing of the elders in Timothy's community (1 Tim 4:14).

The timing of Timothy coming into Paul's life may not be incidental, given that Paul just had a fallout with Barnabas over the mentorship of another young man named John Mark (Acts 15:37-39). The inference can be made that Barnabas' message about the importance of mentorship ultimately sunk in with Paul after further personal reflection. Un-ironically, both John Mark and Timothy became prominent heroes of Scripture.

The need to circumcise Timothy (Acts 16:3) was for the purpose of the mission objective Paul and Silas set out to accomplish, not for spiritual reasons. Paul and Silas intends to visit many cities in the greater Galatia region, and will meet with many Jewish Christians. Having an uncircumcised team member on their mission team might present itself to be an obstacle to their mission objective.

Path towards Gentile Territory – Original Mission Objective

From Lystra, Luke tells us that Paul, Silas, and Timothy traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia (16:6), which meant that they likely would have followed an established Roman road named *Via Sebaste* that would take them back up to Iconium and Antioch Pisidia.

Dr. Luke then cites that they arrive at the border of Mysia, tried to enter Bithynia, but was prevented by the Holy Spirit (16:8). This meant that Paul and his team took the northern route from Pisidia Antioch, and since they were not able to go further north to north-east, they hugged the borders towards Troas (see map):



\*Map used by Permission – Standard Bible Atlas

### Paul's Vision of a man from Macedonia – New Mission Objective

While in Troas, Paul received a vision of a man of Macedonia begging Paul to go over to Macedonia and help them (16:9). This vision prompted Paul to change his mission objective.

The original intention of this mission trip was to clarify any confusion created by Pharisaic Jewish Christians with the established churches (16:4), taking this message throughout Galatia and Asia Minor. The path taken by Paul and his team validates this objective, where had they force themselves into Bithynia, that would naturally take them on a path back towards Galatia, Cappadocia, Cilicia, then towards Syrian Antioch.

As the team made its way into the province of Asia, Dr. Luke noted that the Holy Spirit frustrated their ministry efforts. Paul likely had used his previous ministry strategy of starting in the synagogues and talking to Gentiles thereafter (See Supplemental: First Mission Journey). This strategy evidently did not work as well as it did in their first missionary journey. The team of Paul, Silas, and Timothy went from city to city to try to share the gospel message and affirming the doctrine of Grace, but the Holy Spirit kept them from doing so (not providing the opportunity). And as the team tried to take this strategy back towards Galatia, they were stopped in their tracks and were told to go in a new (different) direction; in this case, westward towards Troas (16:8).

After receiving this vision, Paul knew that his mission objective now needs to change from clarifying the message of salvation, to bringing the gospel into a whole new Gentile world. Unlike the cities that they have visited thus far, cities and towns in Macedonia would not have the Jewish synagogues (or as many synagogues) that is more commonly found in Galatia and Asia. Paul's mission objectives would need to change, as does his strategy for outreach and evangelism.

It is worth noting also that beginning at this point, Dr. Luke began to use first person pronouns of 'we' (16:10) in the book of Acts, signifying that beginning at this point, Luke formally joined the mission team of Paul, Silas, and Timothy, leaving behind his secular profession as a physician (Col 4:14). Luke himself is a Gentile with no Jewish traits. Joining this team, he would become the first Gentile on a mission team. Luke is also the only Gentile to write any part of the New Testament (Col 4:11).

### **Analysis – Acts 16:1-10**

Often times, we would set out on a Godly mission with all of our great God-honoring intentions, where our mission statement and our vision goals all meet the critical and biblical validations for a God-honoring ministry. But then, as we begin to put our intentions and goals into practice, we may be confronted with a different reality where, ministry just isn't working. What should we do?

Such is the scenario that confronts Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Their mission objective was clear, and they were employing a strategy that had proven itself to be effective in the past. Yet, as they journey through Asia minor, nothing is working. What went "wrong?"

- Was this a motive issue, where this mission began with the wrong motive – coming off of a God-dishonoring disagreement that ended the teaching and preaching ministries of two super pastors?
- Was this a calling issue, that this mission wasn't called by, or ordained by the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 13:2)? That this was really something that Paul wanted to do, not something God wanted him to do?
- Was this a discipline issue, that the mission and strategy wasn't scrutinized enough by the church leaders before the team set out on this journey (cf Acts 13:2-3)? That the church should have spent more time debating, discussing, fasting, and praying before sending out the team?
- Was this a strategy issue, that Paul was too stubborn and too inflexible to change his strategies to adapt to new realities from city to city?

- Was this a sin issue, where God is punishing Paul for stubbornly refusing to mentor John Mark?

All of the above – and possibly others – would be human rationales for why ministry isn't working, and they would all be the wrong reasons. We were told it was the Holy Spirit that kept the ministry from "working." The reasoning can be inferred that the Holy Spirit wanted Paul to spend his energy and effort sharing the gospel in the true Gentile nations, rather than to waste time and energy clarifying doctrines to Jewish Christians and the Gentiles among them. God's plan for Paul is to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15).

The key lesson to be learned from this portion of Paul's life is that, when ministry isn't "working," avoid rationalizing based on human objectives. Take a moment to reflect and refocus on the mission goals that God had planned and called for our lives. Paul was spending too much time and energy on something that was not his calling. Equally so, we should always be sensitive to the movement and work of the Holy Spirit in our ministry responsibilities. Moreover, as ministry leaders, we can often be guilty of putting too much emphasis in our wisdom on worldly organizational practices, blinding us from the mission and goals advanced by the Holy Spirit. With this potential as the backdrop, the following principles applies, especially for church and mission leaders:

- **Ministry is about God's Mission, not about Our Mission** – Paul set out on this mission trip with *his own mission objective*, and his hand-picked mission partner in Silas validates this objective. He evidently was looking to replicate the results he had with Barnabas during this trip, but was not seeing the same results as before. When shown the vision towards Macedonia, he recognizes that his mission objective needs to change, and he adjusted accordingly. We should always be sensitive to make sure our initial mission objective is aligned (or continues to be aligned) with God's mission objectives; and adjust accordingly.
- **Ministry must be flexible especially when the Objective changes** – Paul could have maintained his stubbornness to keep his mission parameters in place, and force his way into Bithynia, circling back towards Galatia end his trip, but he didn't. He was sensitive to what the Holy Spirit wanted him to do, which in this case, means to scrap his mission statement, objectives, and strategies and simply do ministry as the Spirit leads. Mission statements, strategies, and objectives are good organizational practices, but sometimes, we need to put them aside and simply do ministry as the Spirit leads, especially when our man-defined objectives come into conflict with people ministries.
- **Ministry leaders must be sensitive to the members God brings on board** – Paul may have hand-picked Silas for his ministry team based on his mission objectives, but he didn't expect to meet Timothy or to have Dr. Luke join his ministry team. While Dr. Luke's participation was made clearer after the new mission objectives was revealed, Timothy's participation could not have been anticipated. Neither would have met the minimum qualifications to lead God's ministry at the time, but un-ironically, both ended up playing a major role in God's Kingdom. As ministry leaders, we must always be sensitive and receptive to who God brings into our ministry at any point.
- **Ministry leaders must avoid the "human" perspective** – All of the failed efforts through Asia Minor could have led Paul to over rationalize the meaning, to include the possibility that the ministry to the Gentiles have closed; or worse, that he is no longer useful in God's ministry plan. These are all human perspectives that are dangerous for ministry leaders to entertain. The proper approach would be to take our life and our ministry to prayers and seek God's guidance for a path forward. This was likely what Paul did that led to the vision he had received.

Re-read Acts 15:35-16:10. Perform some additional hermeneutical observations on Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke.

1. What can we observe about Paul's attitude towards John Mark vs that of Timothy? Compare and Contrast Timothy vs John Mark
2. What can we observe about Paul's attitude towards ministry evaluation? How does Paul qualify a successful mission?
3. What can we infer about Paul's reaction to ministry failure?
4. How can we correlate these observations into applications for our own ministry practices?

#### Reflecting Upon our World

Reflect on the way your church plan, coordinate, evaluate, and recruit for ministries

1. How does your church identify and invest in the "Timothy's" or "John Mark's" in your church? How does your church incorporate them in your current active or future ministries?
2. As your church plans for a ministry event, how does your church align and assign volunteers for various ministry responsibilities? How would the "Timothy's" (those who lacked practical ministry skills) or the "Luke's" (walk-ins, strength in worldly experience) participate in the program?
3. As your church performs evaluations on ministry effectiveness, how does your church determine the matrices for evaluation? How do these matrices incorporate sensitivity to the moving of the Holy Spirit?

#### Reflecting Upon Your Spiritual Journey

Reflect on your personal journey, focusing on how God put the people around you your ministry setting.

1. Have you ever been recruited by someone with a ministry need to help with the ministry mission? Were you recruited to be mentored? Or to lead? Try to correlate your personal life experience with that of Timothy (being recruited for mentoring) or of Silas (recruited to lead), or of Luke (recruited as a helper). Journal your experience into testimonial form to be shared in future Bible studies on these passages.
2. Has God ever put someone in your life unexpectedly that inspired you to want to invest in that individual, helping or mentoring that individual to his or her potential (i.e. Timothy to Paul)? What was your initial reaction to that individual? How did you interact with that individual? Were you able to be that individual's mentor? Journal your experience into a testimonial form and be prepared to share the joy and difficulties of being a mentor like Paul.
3. Have you ever been part of a mission trip or ministry program where the experience and results fall short of the ministry objectives and expectations? How did the team leaders react? Correlate that experience with this lesson plan, what would be the lessons learned? Journal your experience to be shared for future studies on these passages.