

Acts 16:1-24

Paul began his second journey with a new companion. He suggested to Barnabas that they return and revisit the churches planted on their first journey and while Barnabas was agreeable, he wanted to carry Mark. Mark had begun that first journey with them but for reasons not stated, he returned home. A strong contention arose between Paul and Barnabas and they separated. Paul took Silas and traveled by an overland route; Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus (Acts 15:36-40).

One of the marks of the Scriptures' inspiration is that the sacred text never varnishes the truth nor hides its characters' weaknesses and sins. It revealed that both Abraham and Isaac lied, saying their wives were their sisters (Gen. 20:2; 26:7). It recorded the duplicity of Jacob (Gen. 27:5-25), Moses' presumptuous speaking (Ps. 106:32f), the adultery of David (2 Sam. 11:2-5) and the contention between Paul and Barnabas. Who was right; who was wrong? Apparently the church at Antioch felt Paul was for the church commended him to the grace of the Lord (Acts 15:40).

Was there more to the problem than that which meets the eye? The events of Galatians 2:11-14 had most likely occurred before Paul and Barnabas's separation. Barnabas followed Peter when he separated himself from the Gentiles, and Peter (and Barnabas) was rightly rebuked by Paul. Some view Barnabas as right arguing that Mark's faithfulness demonstrated Paul had "misjudged him." Others feel, just as certainly, that Paul was right and that it took his stand on Mark to wake that young man up to determine he would prove himself trustworthy. Both positions have merit, neither can be clearly established by the Scriptures. But, "all's well that ends well" and whoever was right or wrong, the parties ultimately were reconciled to each other. Paul instructed the Colossians to receive Mark (who was with Paul in Rome) and in Paul's second letter to Timothy, he asked him to bring Mark for he was useful to him (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11).

Paul and Silas came to Derbe and Lystra and found a certain disciple named Timothy (Acts 16:1). Presumably Timothy had been converted on Paul's first journey for Timothy seemed to have been aware of Paul's persecutions there (2 Tim. 3:10). Timothy's father was a Greek, but Eunice, his mother, was Jewish and she and her mother (Lois) instilled an unfeigned faith in Timothy. Paul wished to take Timothy with him and he had him circumcised. Many see inconsistency in Paul doing this because

he had refused to allow Titus to be circumcised in the conflict over circumcision (Gal. 2:3). But the two cases are not the same. Titus was a Greek. To yield to having him be circumcised would have been to have conceded the fight to the Judaizing teachers from Jerusalem who insisted that Gentiles should be circumcised and keep the law in order to be saved (Acts 15:1, 5). On the other hand, Timothy was Jewish and Paul had written "neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcised, but a new creature" (Gal. 6:16). Paul never opposed circumcision among the Jews; he recognized it as a national custom. And his having Timothy circumcised proved false the charge that he taught the Jews among the Gentiles "...not to circumcise their children" (Acts 21:21). Paul had enough prejudices to deal with among the Jews. To have carried a "Jewish" young man with him, flaunting his uncircumcised state would have shut many doors to him. He circumcised Timothy for expediency's sake and Timothy became Paul's companion, his "true child in the faith."

The company of evangelists went through Phrygia, Galatia and Bithynia but was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak in those parts (16:6). They came to Troas, no doubt perplexed. Where did the Lord wish them to go? Paul saw in the night visions a man standing, saying, "Come over into Macedonia and help us" (16:9). The company concluded that the Lord wished them to go to Macedonia and they prepared to go.

At this point the narrative makes a subtle change. No longer does it record the activities of its' principal characters in the third person; the history is written as the actions of the writer as well. "Straightway we sought to go forth into Macedonia" (Acts 16:10). This transition will be brief; the history will revert again to the third person at chapter's end, but it tells, to some degree at least, when the chronicler of the book is describing his personal experiences or simply the experiences of others.

So they came to Philippi. From Troas they made a straight course to Samothrace, then to Neopolis, then to Philippi (Acts 16:11). God and the winds favored this journey. In a later voyage (except in the reverse) the journey took much more time (Acts 20:6). Philippi was a Roman colony, first city in the district. To Christians, this incident takes on great importance. Like waves of a sea, the gospel rolls westward to reach European soil.

Lydia was a businesswoman in Philippi, a "seller of purple" (16:14). Purple dye was an expensive commodity and few beside royalty and the very rich, were able to buy it. Lydia and a few other women were worshippers of God and, lacking a synagogue in Philippi, worshipped by

the riverside on Sabbath days. On this special Sabbath they had visiting evangelists, and Paul spoke to the group of women. Lydia heard Paul and the Lord opened her heart to give heed to the things which he spoke. She, along with her whole house, was baptized (16:15). God opened her heart through the word which Paul spoke for it is through the word that faith comes (Rom. 10:17). Lydia put her faith into action. To this company of homeless preachers she insisted: "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there. And she constrained us" (Acts 16:15).

Paul continued his preaching in Philippi. There was a certain damsel who had a spirit of divination and she followed Paul's company from day to day saying, "These men are servants of the most high God who proclaim unto you the way of salvation" (16:17). Her "oracles" became troublesome to Paul. Her declarations were true, but from a dubious source. Paul did not wish men to connect the "occult" with the religion of Christ and so he cast the spirit out of the young woman. The young woman was a slave and her "oracles" brought much gain to her masters. When the spirit was cast out, so also was their hope of gain (16:19). They cared not that the young woman was freed from an evil spirit, but they were outraged with Paul from casting out their profit. And so, they made false charges against Paul and had him, and Silas, cast into prison.

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