

# THE ACTS

## OF THE APOSTLES

### *Chapter 15:36 – 16:40*

#### **“Let us return”: Paul’s second journey begins**

\*Why did Paul change traveling partners?

\*Why was Paul arrested, and how did God rescue him?

\*What does it mean to believe?

#### **Acts 15:36-41 Beginning of Paul’s second journey**

After spending a while with the brethren in Antioch, both Paul and Barnabas wanted to go visit and encourage the churches that they helped to begin on the first journey they took in chapters 13 and 14. However, they had a disagreement. Barnabas wanted to take along John Mark, a man who started out with them on the first trip. But Paul had decided that he didn’t want to bring Mark along; perhaps he was afraid Mark would leave the group like he did the first time (Acts 13:13). Paul and Barnabas couldn’t come to an agreement, so they each decided to take their own trip. The book of Acts will be following Paul’s trip. Silas, who had come to Antioch from Jerusalem, will accompany him.

#### **Note: John Mark**

*It might have been frustrating for Mark to not be able to go with Paul on the trip because of his past mistake. But later on in the New Testament we read that Paul thought Mark was a good worker (2 Timothy 4:11). Peter considered him as close as a son (1 Peter 5:13), and he even penned the gospel of Mark. Apparently, over time Mark had proven himself to be useful in the Lord’s service. We should not get depressed about our past mistakes; we should work hard to change. Our story can be like John Mark’s.*

#### **Acts 16:1-5 Back in Lystra and Derbe**

Paul and Silas traveled by land up to the cities of Derbe and Lystra, where Paul and Barnabas had started churches on the first trip. Do you remember how hostile the people there were towards Christianity? In Lystra Paul had even been stoned (Acts 14:19-20). Paul must have been very concerned about their welfare, yet all he could do was trust them to the Lord (14:23). What a joy it was for Paul to see they were doing well! The Lord truly had kept them. Paul even found a young man, Timothy, who was so dedicated to the Lord that Paul wanted to take him along.

#### **Note: Why circumcise Timothy?**

*Paul and Silas had been delivering the decree from Jerusalem that they had worked so hard to support: God no longer required people to keep the Law of Moses, including the commandment of circumcision. Why then did Paul want to circumcise Timothy?*

*What the Holy Spirit revealed in Acts 15 was that nobody had to keep the Law of Moses (15:28-29) — but they still had the option. Paul decided in this case that it was best. People who knew that Timothy’s father was a Greek would be prejudiced against him if they thought he was uncircumcised, and wouldn’t even listen to him. So Paul had him circumcised to further the gospel. However, when choosing to have someone circumcised would endanger the message, Paul did not want it. This was the case with another of Paul’s companions, Titus (Galatians 3:3-5).*

*Under Christ’s law, we as disciples have many liberties. We can all decide on our own what to wear, how big a house to buy, whether to keep the Law of Moses,*

*when to fast, where to live, and anything else that the New Testament doesn't specifically direct us in. The only rule that God has is that we put Him and His kingdom first in all the decisions we make as individuals.*

### **Acts 16:6-15**

#### **The "Macedonian call"**

The trip was originally a plan to check on the churches already planted, but now the companions wanted to press on to new frontiers. They tried to go up west, but the Holy Spirit did not want them to preach there. So they headed up north, but the Spirit wanted them to go elsewhere. Finally, Paul and the others ended up in the port city of Troas, where they found out from a vision where they were supposed to go: Macedonia.

So Paul and his companions crossed the sea and made their way to Philippi, a major city in Macedonia. Apparently there was no synagogue in the city, so on the Sabbath day they went to search for a place where they thought people would be praying. By the river they found a group of women, and they told them the good news about Jesus. One lady, Lydia, was especially open to the word and obeyed it readily. She was baptized, and then invited the preachers to stay in her house. Perhaps the ready hearts of Lydia, her household, and others was the reason the Spirit wanted the gospel preached there instead of in Asia or Bithynia.

### **Acts 16:16-24**

#### **Trouble with an evil spirit**

One day the disciples were heading to the place of prayer when a slave-girl with an evil spirit met them. Judging by the practices of that time and place, the girl's masters would have claimed that she was an oracle for the Greek god Apollo. Apparently the demon caused her to convulse and babble (see Mark 9:18-20) so that the masters could "interpret" her sayings as a message from the gods. Whatever the case, this girl was incessantly, day after day, shouting that Paul and Silas were God's true messengers. This proclamation got on Paul's nerves; even though the demon spoke the truth, the testimony from this Apollo oracle would have hurt the preaching of the men instead of helping it. So Paul eventually cast the demon from the girl.

But one of the dangers in preaching the gospel among the Gentiles was that Christianity's success often meant economic ruin for those who dealt in idolatry. That was the case here. The girl's masters, when they saw that Paul had made the girl useless as an oracle, dragged Paul and Silas to the police. They made three charges: 1) the evangelists created confusion and so ruined their business; 2) they were Jews, foreigners who were troublemakers; and 3) they were disobeying the law, since it was illegal to found new religions at this time. Their accusations were successful. Both the crowd and the authorities were upset and ordered that Paul and Silas be beaten and then put in the innermost prison.

### **Acts 16:19-34**

#### **The conversion of the jailer**

If you or I were unjustly tried, beaten, and imprisoned, we would probably cry and complain to God. But Paul and Silas were praying and singing to Him! What must the other prisoners listening to them have been thinking? Soon they found out why Paul and Silas had put their faith in God despite their circumstances. A great earthquake occurred, and the all the prisoners' chains and doors were loosed.

The jailer had been sleeping, but the earthquake woke him up. He looked around and saw all the open doors. The jailer drew his sword and was about to commit suicide. At that time, a jail keeper would be executed if he allowed prisoners to escape, so the jailer was about to kill himself before others could do it for him. But Paul stopped him.

At that moment, the jailer realized that the God of Paul and Silas had miraculously set them and the other prisoners free. He has badly mistreated the messengers of the true God! This thought frightened him so much that he fell before the two preachers, and asked them what he had to do to be saved. He did not have to

make some great sacrifice or perform some great feat; he needed to believe in Jesus, according to Paul and Silas. So the pair related the gospel to him and to his family, and then immediately they were baptized. The jailer washed the wounds of Paul and Silas, gave them food, and rejoiced greatly in his salvation.

**Note: Two stories of liberation**

*This text began as the story of Paul and Silas being set free from prison, but it ended as the story of the jailer being set free from prison — the prison of sin and death.*

*Notice the difference between the reactions of the evangelists and the jailer to difficult circumstances: Paul and Silas sang and prayed; the jailer was about to commit suicide. What was the real difference? Paul and Silas believed in the Lord; the jailer did not. God used this opportunity to give the jailer the message that would set him free from this prison.*

*The jailer's question, "What must I do to be saved?" showed that he had a good heart, ready to be freed. We have seen this question before. The Jews on the day of Pentecost had asked the same question: "Brethren, what shall we do?" On that occasion, Peter responded, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:37-38). Why did different people receive different answers to the same question? Simply because the jailer didn't yet know what exactly to believe; he had never heard the story of Jesus. How could he repent and be baptized before he knew why to do so? Once he heard the word of the Lord, then he took the same steps as the people on the day of Pentecost and was baptized. Notice how important that step was to him; though it was in the early hours of the morning, he was baptized immediately. The jailer was just like the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35-39), Saul (9:18-20), Cornelius (10:46-48), and Lydia (16:14-15) — they all insisted on being baptized immediately, and only afterwards rejoiced in their salvation and tended to other matters. The jailer could only say that he truly believed (verse 34) and could rejoice in salvation after he had taken that step of obedience.*

**Acts 16:35-40 A turn of events**

The next day, the same authorities, perhaps hearing of the events of the night, sent to have Paul and Silas released. The jailer relayed the message, but Paul demanded that they come themselves to bring them out openly. His rights as a Roman citizen (Paul, though he was a Jew, was born a Roman citizen — Acts 22:27-28) had been seriously violated. Why hadn't Paul mentioned his citizenship before being beaten? The text doesn't say, but perhaps Paul anticipated that suffering for Christ in this instance would lead to the furtherance of the kingdom. At this point, however, using his privileges as a citizen allowed him to stay a little longer to encourage the new Christians, and ensured that the authorities wouldn't bother the church. God's deliverance had worked an amazing turn of events!

**Choose the right answer:**

- \_\_\_ 1. Why did Paul and Barnabas want to take another trip? a) to visit the churches they had started, b) to take revenge on the people who had persecuted them, c) to collect money, or d) to get away from the church in Antioch.
- \_\_\_ 2. Who did Paul take with him? a) Barnabas, b) John Mark, c) Silas, or d) Sergius Paulus.
- \_\_\_ 3. Who was the woman in Philippi who heard Paul and Silas speak by the river and converted to Christ? a) Mary Magdalene, b) Lydia, c) Tabitha, or d) Sapphira.
- \_\_\_ 4. What were Paul and Silas doing in the jail cell at midnight? a) sleeping, b) weeping and complaining, c) praying and singing, or d) preaching to the prisoners.
- \_\_\_ 5. How did God rescue Paul and Silas? a) an angel, b) an earthquake, c) the brethren, or d) He let them suffer through it.

**True or False:**

- \_\_\_ 1. Paul hated Mark and never forgave him for deserting them in the first trip.

- \_\_\_ 2. The churches had fallen apart in Paul's absence.
- \_\_\_ 3. Paul wanted Timothy to be circumcised even though that act was not necessary for salvation.
- \_\_\_ 4. The Spirit didn't want Paul and Silas to preach in certain places on their trip.
- \_\_\_ 5. Paul liked the good publicity that the demon-possessed girl gave them.
- \_\_\_ 6. The masters of the slave girl got people so upset over Paul and Silas that the authorities beat them and threw them in jail.
- \_\_\_ 7. The jailer was about to kill himself when he thought the prisoners had escaped.
- \_\_\_ 8. Paul told the jailer he had to climb Mount Sinai and offer up a sacrifice in order to be saved.
- \_\_\_ 9. The jailer and his family were baptized that very hour of the night.
- \_\_\_ 10. The authorities ended up begging Paul to leave the city.

*After you've filled out the answers, send this lesson back to the person who sent it to you with your name and address. They will correct your answers and discuss any questions or comments you have on the text.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

*Or, send it to:*

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