

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 19)

Acts 15:36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.

Not long after the “church council” in Jerusalem, Paul sets out on his second missionary journey, to revisit and strengthen the churches. He ends up traveling with Silas, not Barnabas, due to a disagreement.

Acts 16:1-5 Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

Paul will later write that Timothy is a third-generation Apostolic. Here he says that he is “well reported of” among the local believers. Timothy has proved his ministry locally before he begins to travel with Paul, and he is sent out by his local church. That is the Apostolic model!

2 Timothy 1:5 When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.

1 Timothy 4:14 Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

Part of their assignment on this journey is to deliver the “decrees” from the elders in Jerusalem to all the churches. Remember that those decrees state that the Gentiles should not have to become Jews (and be circumcised!) before they can become Christians! Remember that Paul had steadfastly refused to have Titus circumcised. And remember that Paul said that circumcision was not of any spiritual benefit! So why now does he have Timothy circumcised? Isn't that inconsistent?

Galatians 2:3 But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:

Galatians 6:15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

Not at all! Titus was a pure Greek, but Timothy was half-Jewish already (“his father was a Greek”). The Judaizers were trying to pressure Titus to become Jewish, but Timothy was already a practicing Jew. So Timothy's circumcision was not motivated by pressure from inside the church, but by a missionary strategy outside the church! Timothy was circumcised only so he would not offend the Jews they were trying to reach!

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

In the twenty-first century, many people are offended by any little thing that is asked of them, that would please the Lord or remove a stumbling block for someone else. Not so in the first century! They willingly did anything and everything to please God and win others for the gospel!

Acts 16:6-10 Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

Notice the language here ... “forbidden of the Holy Ghost” ... “the Spirit suffered them not” ... they are waiting on God for direction, really just feeling their way along until they get a “green light” from the Lord ... just like US, because they were just normal people sold out to God! But can you imagine how history might have been changed if Paul had continued ministering in Asia only, and followed this vision into Europe?

Two technical notes at this point that will help you as you read ACTS:

- (1) Verse 10 says “after HE ... immediately WE” – when Luke says “we” it tells us that he has joined the missionary party at that point.
- (2) Several of the cities referred to in Acts contain churches that later have epistles written to them by Paul ... it is very informative to read those epistles simultaneously with Acts (i.e. Philippi / Philippians)

Acts 16:11-15 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

Notice that “BELIEVERS” in the book of Acts are always BAPTIZED! There are two households like that in this chapter – it is the Apostolic pattern! If you haven’t been baptized in Jesus’ name, you are not a Christian in the Biblical sense of the word!

Acts 16:16-24 And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

No does God begin to move than Satan begins to try to hinder the work. Here he uses a demonized girl who had made her masters wealthy by telling fortunes. She repeatedly shouted after them, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who show us the way of salvation!" Paul did not want his message "promoted" by one of Satan's slaves, so he cast out the demon – because Satan may speak the truth one minute and a lie the next, and the unsaved wouldn't know the difference. Her masters didn't care about her, only the money they would lose. They accosted Paul and Silas, had them whipped and cast them into prison – simply for preaching the gospel! But it didn't even slow them down!

Acts 16:25-34 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

- “at midnight” – the midnight hour, the blackest hour of the night, is very significant in Scripture!

Exodus 11:4 And Moses said, Thus saith the LORD, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt:

Matthew 25:6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

- “they sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them” – God can give songs in the night if we will pray!

Job 35:10 But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night;

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

- “there was a great earthquake ... the foundations of the prison were shaken ... all the doors were opened ... every one's bands were loosed” – GOD CAN WORK A MIRACLE AT MIDNIGHT!

When the jailer asks, “What must I do to be saved?” you can be sure that he receives the same instruction from Paul as every other believer receives in the book of Acts. That's why there is a BAPTISM after midnight (“the same hour”)! The word “believe” in the New Testament is a synonym for the word “commit” – when you believe, you will obey!

THOU SHALT BE SAVED, AND THY HOUSE! CLAIM THAT PROMISE!

Acts 16:35-40 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

Notice that Paul refuses to sneak out of town, because that would have placed a cloud of suspicion over his ministry. And notice how he uses his Roman citizenship, not to avoid persecution for himself (he could have!), but to bring protection to the church. It's all about the MESSAGE!

Acts 17:1-9 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.

Once again, Paul takes the gospel "to the Jew first," going to the synagogue. Over the course of three weeks he "reasoned with them out of the scriptures" – "this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ!" Once again, there is great revival – and once again, there is great persecution.

"These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also!" Jason's experience here tells us that you may see spiritual opposition if you associate with an Apostolic ministry – but it is worth it! Everywhere the missionary team went there was either RIOT or REVIVAL, or BOTH!

Acts 17:10-15 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

The Bereans were MORE NOBLE because they received the Word with a ready mind, and searched the Scriptures daily. They didn't just take the preacher's word for it – they wanted to know it for themselves!

Paul is sent ahead to Athens, and waits there for Silas and Timothy ...

Acts 17:16-21 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

Paul's spirit is stirred because of what he sees in the city – what about you? He again takes the gospel "to the Jew first," and to those who are "devout persons," then finally he meets with the intellectuals of Athens.

The Greek religion was a mere deification of human attributes and the powers of nature. It was a religion entirely destitute of moral power. The Greek myths spoke of gods and goddesses that, in their own rivalries acted more like humans than gods; and there were plenty of deities to choose from! One common saying from ancient times was, "In Athens it is easier to find a god than a man." The Greek gods were merely fictional characters that were unable to change men's lives. With all of their culture and wisdom, the people of Athens did not know the true God!

EPICURIANS: A sect of philosophers that sought truth through experience rather than reasoning. They were materialists and atheists, and their goal in life was to embrace PLEASURE.

STOICS: A sect of philosophers that rejected the idolatry of pagan worship and taught that there was one "World God." They were pantheists, and they emphasized personal discipline and self-control. They sought truth through reasoning and tried to be unmoved by inner feelings or outward circumstances. They believed that pleasure was evil, and their goal in life was to embrace PAIN.

The Epicureans said "Enjoy life!" and the Stoics said "Endure life!" but Paul was able to tell them how to find "Abundant life!"

Acts 17:22-31 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

The Areopagus on Mars' Hill was the highest court in Athens, and its council was responsible to watch over religion and education in the city. Notice that Paul's approach is different with these Gentiles than it is with the Jews. With the Jews, he always reasons out of Scripture, but with the Gentiles, he always reasons from Creation – because Creation also reveals God! He opens his mouth, STARTS WHERE THEY ARE, and preaches Jesus! They have an altar TO THE UNKNOWN GOD, which indicates spiritual hunger – so Paul tells them about the God he knows! **"You're looking for something, and I've already found it!"**

GOD IS NOT A DISTANT DEITY! "He be not far from every one of us" (verse 17). Here Paul quotes from the poet Epimenides: "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being." Then he adds a quote from two poets, Aratus and Cleanthes, "For we are also His offspring." He is using his knowledge of their culture to preach Christ. His point is that God made us in His image, so we are foolish to make gods in our own image!

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at" ... For centuries, God was patient with man's sin and ignorance, holding back His divine wrath. But then, in due time, God sent a Saviour, and now He commands all men to repent of their foolish ways.

Galatians 4:3-5 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Romans 5:6-8 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

The intellectual Athenians stumble over the resurrection of Jesus – some mock, some procrastinate any decision, some believe – just like today!

Acts 17:32-34 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

1 Corinthians 1:22-29 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.