

SCRIPTURE STUDIES

SERIES: A SURVEY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS**ACTS CHAPTER 16 Part 2****“HELP!”****Acts 16:4-15**

Help was on the way! Acts chapter 16 is a page from the experiences of Paul as he begins his second missionary journey. His experiences are many, varied and instructive. After the old team of Paul and Barnabas, who made the first missionary journey, broke up, (Acts 15:36-39a) a new team makes up – Paul and Silas. (Acts 15:39b-40) Chapter 15 ends with them going *“through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”* (15:41)

When they arrived in Lystra, Paul enlisted the teenager Timothy to assist them. (16:1-3) They then journeyed onward 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. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.”* (16:4-5)

But then there was a very interesting delay in their plans, you might say a divine detour, a rerouting was experienced. We have heard Robert Burn’s phrase often quoted: “The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry.” Well, that is what happened to Paul and company.

I. THE PAUSE AT TROAS. (16:6-8)

“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. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.”

The Holy Spirit doesn't permit them go into certain places to preach the Gospel. In verse 6, they can't go into Asia. In verse 7, they can't go into Bythinia. This must have been a real puzzle to Paul and his friends. Why would God not want the Asians and the Bythinians to hear about Jesus? The Holy Spirit probably wasn't letting Paul go into those areas because somebody else was already ministering there or He had planned to have some others to go to those areas.

They were having a very fruitful ministry. But suddenly a very strange development perplexed them – they were blocked, stopped, halted by God. “Man proposes but God disposes.” That is what Paul and company experienced. There are lessons for us to learn from this pause by the Aegean Sea. We can learn from these verses that not only are “the *steps* of a good man are ordered of the Lord” (Psalm 37:23) but the *stops* of a righteous person can also be ordered by the Lord as well. Sometimes our disappointments are God’s appointments!

I suggest two lessons we can learn from these verses:

A. Before The Lord Turns Us He Often Stops Us.

It is possible to get so caught up in doing good things that in order to redirect us to better things the Lord has to stop us. We can see this throughout scripture. For example, Philip was leading a great revival movement in the city of Samaria (Acts 8:5-8). The Lord stepped in, stopped him and redirected him. Where did the Lord send him? To the desert! He said, *“Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is desert.”* (Acts 8:26)

From the city to the country; from crowds to one individual. This individual was the Treasurer of Ethiopia riding along in a chariot reading from the book of Isaiah. Philip hitch-hiked a ride with him and introduced him the Lord Jesus, baptized him and sent him on his way rejoicing! Truly God “moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform.”

B. Before The Lord Opens A New Door He Often Closes An Old Door.

God knows best how to accomplish His work in this world. To the church in the city of Philadelphia Jesus sent a message reminding them that He was the One Who *“opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens.”* (Rev.3:7)

He is the Divine Doorkeeper. The Lord channeled Paul and company to Troas where they were shut down awaiting further orders. Remember, “God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him.” It is better to be in Troas where the Lord had planned for Paul to be than in Asia or Bithynia where Paul had planned to be. We need to remember that God leads the orchestra and we are only one instrument in it. Let us keep our eyes upon The Conductor. Sometimes there are pauses in the music. In Troas, Paul and companions were commanded to pause.

II. THE PLEA FROM MACEDONIA. (16:8-10)

“So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. 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.” 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.”

Troas was situated on the Aegean Sea near the northern tip of what is now known as Turkey’s western coast. In Roman times, it was a significant port for travelling between the the westernmost protrusion of Asia to Europe. The pause in Troas was not only a pause that refreshed but a pause that re-routed the missionary team. God not only routes us, but He also re-routes us if He desires.

A. The Vision That Paul Saw.

How long they were in Troas we do not know, however, while there Paul had a vision that that resulted in a historic venture. In his vision he saw a man across the Aegean Sea in Macedonia, about 200 miles away. Macedonia was in Greece and Greece was in Europe. Greece had art, beauty, culture and philosophy. They had seen the likes of Aristotle, Plato and Socrates. Here was a most advanced civilization and yet, in Paul’s vision he saw a man who had a need.

B. The Voice That Paul Heard.

In his vision, which the Lord undoubtedly gave Paul, he not only saw a man across the Aegean Sea in distress but in the vision, *“A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”*

What could Paul and team contribute to the Macedonian society that they did not already have? One thing: The Gospel of Jesus Christ! Up until this time the Gospel had not reached Europe. Jesus had said to His disciples years before, *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel.”* (Mark 16:15) It had not reached Greece at this time.

We are beginning to see why the Lord in His infinite wisdom, closed and opened doors in order to direct Paul and his companions to the sea coast city of Troas, the port from which they could sail to Europe. Paul was about to make the most historic journey of his life!

There are people around the world who know that there is something more to life than just eating, drinking, working, enjoying pleasures and then dying. They are calling out in various ways for help. I wonder if introverted American churches and Christians are willing for God to interrupt their plans and redirect their focus to the regions beyond? Are their ears open to hear the Christless cries for “Help”? Jesus said, “He that has ears to hear let him hear.” Do we hear? Do we care?

III. THE PASSAGE TO EUROPE. (16:10-12)

“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. Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, 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.”

Notice the words, *“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.”* Paul and his team of Good News spreaders had a burden to preach the gospel where Christ was not known. Paul had said, *“I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named.”* (Rom. 15:20) Now they had an opportunity to be pioneers on a new continent – Europe.

Dr. Patrick Fairbairn, a Bible scholar of by-gone years, wrote in his commentary on this passage, that “the greatest single human achievement was the apostle Paul taking the gospel for the first time to Europe.” Little did Paul know that when he went to Macedonia he was going to Europe. Beyond Macedonia was Italy, Spain and eventually the message would spread to Britain and hundreds of years later to a new country called America!

Paul’s burden could have been echoed in the missionary song, “To The Regions Beyond.”

*“To the regions beyond I must go, I must go;
‘Til the world, all the world, His salvation shall know.”*

Notice 5 “open” things in this portion of scripture:

A. There Was An Open Door.

The Holy Spirit had closed several doors prior to Paul's vision: *"They were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them."* (16:6,7) Now, here in Troas a new door is opened. Open doors are golden opportunities to advance the cause of Christ. Are we sensitive to "open doors"?

B. There Was An Open Mind.

"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." (v.10) Paul's mind was open to the new challenge that the Lord set before him. Sometimes I have been so focused upon what I thought the Lord wanted me to do that I initially missed the new signal that He gave me and He had to stop me and confront me again with the change of direction that He wanted me to take.

In football, after each play the team huddles for a new signal. We need to "huddle" with the Lord repeatedly and make sure we have His signal for every move we make in our individual lives and church life as well. Just because "we have always done it this way" does not mean that we should keep in the same old rut. The Lord may want to give us a fresh vision, send us on a new voyage and give us greater victories, so keep an open mind!

C. There Was An Open Mouth.

"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." (v.13)

When they arrived in the city of Philippi, Paul looked for opportunities to share the Good News. One of the venues he used was down by the riverside where a group of women were meeting. To them he communicated the message that he had come to deliver.

Can you imagine Paul and company visiting any place solely for the purpose of sight seeing? They were on a mission and they did not fail to capitalize upon every opportunity to speak the gospel message. They were obeying the Great Commission to *"Go into all the world, and preach the gospel."* Not to do so was to be committing the Great Omission! Closed-mouthed Christians are the curse of the church today. They need to do as the four leprous men did as recorded in II Kings 7 - *"Then they said to one another, 'We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent come, let us go and tell"* (v.9)

D. There Was An Open Heart.

"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." (v.14)

There are two different types of open-heart surgeries: physical heart surgery operated upon by a human physician and spiritual heart surgery operated upon by the Great Physician. The former may extend life upon earth, the latter is essential for life eternal. Lydia received new life in Christ because she received a new heart from the Lord. Have you?

E. There was An Open Home.

“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.” (v.15)

The Bible says she was a seller of purple. She bought and sold purple dye and cloth that had been dyed purple. As you may know, purple was a very rare and expensive color in that day and age. It came from a kind of seashell that lived on the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea, and it was so rare that it used to be reserved for kings and royalty. So, to buy and sell the dye and that kind of cloth takes money. Lydia was not a poor woman. She probably had a good business going, she was probably well-regarded in her community.

The first Christian church was probably started and met in Lydia’s home in Philippi. Later Paul wrote a letter to the church in Philippi which we call the book of Philippians. In the introduction he said, *“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.”* (Phil. 1:3-5) Good old positive Paul! Even though he was beaten and thrown in prison in Philippi, as we shall see in our next study, the good memories of his ministry there came to the forefront of his mind.

SUMMATION:

In review: Paul’s plans were interrupted, he heard a man calling for help, he responded and went to Europe, a lady named Lydia was saved, her house became a church building. Paul and his team-mates were the bridge that spanned the Aegean Sea and took the gospel from Asia Minor to Europe. Perhaps that was the greatest contribution to world-wide evangelization that has ever been made.

Their mission was to reach the un-reached. Their theme song could have been:

“To the regions beyond I must go, I must go;
‘Till the world, all the world His salvation shall know.”

Illust. In his book, “The Great Omission”, Robert McQuilken wrote, “In a world in which nine out of every ten people are lost, three out of four have never heard the way out, and one of every two cannot hear, the church sleeps on. Could it be we think there must be some other way? Or perhaps we don’t really care that much.”

Are we willing for the Lord to use us to spread the Good News? Do we hear the cries of the Christless crowd all around us? Are we answering and advancing the Lord’s agenda for His church to go into all the world with the gospel message? How do we begin to implement Christ’s Commission? By visible and vocal Christianity right where we live! There are people all around us who are calling out, “Come over and help us!”

JdonJ