

Paul Begins His Second Journey: Acts 15:36-41

Paul's first missionary journey is recorded in Acts 13 and 14. Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch in Syria where they reported to the church on their ministry and once again became involved in the work of that church. We can't be sure what time elapsed. Read Acts 14:28.

Acts 15 is a break in the account of Paul's ministry and details a tremendously important church council that met in Jerusalem. They came together to discuss the issue of what, if anything, a Gentile had to do, in addition to having faith in Jesus, to become a part of the church. The issue was what, if any, aspects of Jewish rites, dietary codes, festivals, and in particular circumcision, were necessary to participate in to be identified as a Christian, or a follower of the Jewish Messiah. The council agreed that Jewish rites and practices were not a necessary part of being a Christian. They sent a letter to that effect to the churches. One of those who took the letter was a man named Silas. Read Acts 15:22 and Acts 15:35-36.

Paul and Barnabas had a strong disagreement over who should go with them. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark. Paul remembered how he had left them on their first journey and did not feel comfortable taking him again. Barnabas insisted he should go. They agreed to go separate ways. Barnabas returned to his homeland of Cyprus with Mark. Read Acts 15:40.

Who was Silas? Acts 15:22 is the first mention of him in Scripture. He was already a respected leader of the church. Where he came from, what his background was, and when he was converted is not known. Paul indicated, according to Acts 16:37, 38, that he was a Roman citizen. There was a strong tradition in the early church that Silas was one of the 72 sent out, as recorded in Luke 10, two by two by Jesus to bear witness in His Name. He must have been an early convert since he was in a position of responsibility and respect.

In Acts 15:32 we read that Silas was a prophet or preacher who said much to encourage the people before returning to Jerusalem. Read through Acts and you get the impression that Silas was both a scholar and a gifted preacher, yet nowhere do we have recorded even a single word that he spoke.

As noted in Acts 15:40, Paul chose Silas to accompany him on his second missionary journey. That request certainly must have been received with a lot of mixed emotions. Silas was one of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem and was being asked to replace Barnabas as an associate of Paul. Would such a position allow him to do more for the church? Could he contribute there in ways that would be more significant than that which he was doing in Jerusalem? Most certainly he could if that was the way God was leading and what God wanted.

Another issue was whether or not he could survive serving with Paul. If a man with the peaceful personality of Barnabas was unable to continue with Paul because they disagreed over John Mark, could Silas survive as Paul's associate? By God's grace they could work together. Silas agreed and became a faithful co-worker with Paul.

So they headed out on Paul's second missionary journey, his first. As we follow these two through chapters 16-18 of Acts we discover how much they shared during that journey. Both shared in the trials, tribulations, beatings, preaching, witnessing, and victories for Jesus. Silas was not a passive traveling companion who was there just to be good company and prepare breakfast for Paul. He was a hard-working, dedicated, faithful co-laborer with Paul.

Read Acts 16:22-37. Most Christians are familiar with how much Paul suffered, how often he was beaten and cast into prison or driven out of cities but we sometimes forget that Paul was not alone in any of this. It was costly for all who proclaimed Jesus in the early church. One who faithfully took a stand, counted the cost and continued to bear witness even in the face of suffering was Silas.

Acts 15 concludes with the statement, **"He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches."** In all, this journey would take 3 years to complete and covered almost 3000 miles by land and sea. The first stage involved walking close to 300 miles. Keep in mind that Paul was probably close to, if not already, 50 years old at that time.

Paul and Silas moved by foot up along the coast. Syria is the location of Antioch where Paul and Barnabas had been ministering for several years. Cilicia was the province that included Tarsus where Paul grew up. While Luke does not mention it, we can assume they stopped long enough at various churches to read the letter to them and undoubtedly to encourage them. They moved inland to the province of Galatia. That trip would have been east to west, just the opposite from Paul's first journey so, according to Acts 16:1, they arrived at Derbe first. From Derbe they then went to Lystra.

The last time Paul was there he suffered a painful stoning and that time he was with Barnabas, with whom he had split.

Lystra was where Timothy lived. We are told that Timothy was the son a Greek man and a Jewish woman. We are not told when or how he became a Christian. II Timothy 1:5 talks of the faith of his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. One might wonder if he or his mother were significantly influenced by Paul's stoning and attitude at that time. Paul had earlier been tremendously influenced by the stoning of Stephen but we are not give any specific information on that. In I Corinthians 4:17 and I Timothy 1:2 Paul refers to Timothy as his son. Paul used that designation only for those he had personally led to the Lord so Timothy probably made a decision to follow Jesus under Paul's ministry on his first missionary journey.

Read Acts 16:2. That testimony certainly had to have been an encouragement from God to Paul. It is amazing how often in ministry and life we get discouraged or are hurting in some way and God sends us a message to remind us of what He has done for us or through us that encourages us. God knows how we feel and what we need to carry on. We need to learn to listen to His voice.

As we learn from the rest of the New Testament, Timothy became a key servant with Paul in the years that followed. Two of Paul's letters were sent to him to encourage him and guide him in his ministry. In Romans 16:21, I Corinthians 16:10 and Philippians 2:22 Paul called him a "**fellow servant.**" In 6 of Paul's letters to others he tells the recipient that Timothy was a co-sender.

Read Acts 16:3. Some have questioned that decision because of Paul's strong stand on the issue of someone needing to be circumcised. His actions seem inconsistent to some. That, however, was not the case because of the uniqueness of Timothy's heritage. His father was Greek so he would not have been circumcised at birth but all of the Jews of the region knew his mother was Jewish. Under rabbinical law, Timothy was considered Jewish because his mother was, even though his father was not. Paul understood that all of the Jews in that region knew he was an uncircumcised Jew so they would not have listened to anything he had to say.

There is a principle we need to keep in mind. Our lives are directed by the Bible and we do not have to conform to the expectations of others. Sometimes there are activities in our life that cause the non-Christians around us to feel inclined to ignore our testimony. Then we need to evaluate it. We must ask ourselves if we should change in some way for the sake of our testimony. Read I Corinthians 9:20 and I Corinthians 10:23-24. Our witness should override our personal freedom. The question is "What personal sacrifice are you willing to make for the sake of the gospel?" Of course our efforts to witness should never override biblical commands or prohibitions. We cannot sin just to be friends with someone in the name of hoping to witness to them. Our witness is never an excuse to sin. Read I Corinthians 10:31-32. The secret is to be a true friend who does not sin.

Read Acts 16:5-6.

The duo was then a trio and God was using them. From that point on Timothy had a major ministry in the church. Their example is a challenge for us to work together to reach our community, sharing our testimony in a meaningful way to the many who do not know Jesus.