

## Paul Went Into Europe Acts 16:6-15

Read Acts 16:6-12 that presents the second phase of Paul's second missionary journey. Three significant events occurred on the next phase. **First of all**, they were joined by Luke who later would write both the Gospel that bears his name and the book of Acts. **Second**, Paul associates felt God's call to move into modern day Europe. **Finally**, a woman named Lydia became the first convert in Europe.

Acts 16:6-10 details the next part of Paul's journey after ministering in Lystra. Paul and company first tried to go west but were **"kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia."** The Bible does not tell us how the Holy Spirit kept them from going there so we probably should not speculate. The Holy Spirit directs in a wide variety of ways including inner feeling, circumstances, friends, and on rare occasions a vision. Being prohibited from going in a particular direction is often called a "closed door. Paul, unable to go that way, undertook to go north. Once again, according to verse 7, the **"Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to."** No hint is given this time either as to how the Spirit stopped them but this was another closed door. The phrase **"Spirit of Jesus"** is unusual and is probably just a literary variation of the Holy Spirit. We should remember that God sometimes closes a door permanently and sometimes closes it because in God's plan the timing is not right. In this case, while the Spirit said "no, not now" about 2 years later Paul would minister in Ephesus, which is where he was headed at that time.

There is probably nothing harder to deal with as a Christian than a closed door. Closed doors are not planned, in fact they are just the opposite of what we planned. When we are so certain a plan is right for us it can be very upsetting when God says "no" in one way or another. Obviously a closed door can refer to life impacting decisions such as a job we thought for sure was meant for us only to discover someone else got the position.

Closed doors are not just for life impacting decisions. Have you ever suddenly found yourself in a traffic tie-up that really upset you because you were in a hurry so you asked God why He allowed that to happen? We all have, but I wonder sometimes if God is not closing a door by slowing us down because He knows what is ahead and wants us safe. Closed doors are not generally fun when we run into them but when they come from God they are blessings in disguise.

Acts 16:8-9 presents what may be one of the most important events in the history of the church. Verse 8 tells us that with doors closing, Paul proceeded to the city of Troas. Read Acts 16:9. Historically this has been known as the **"Macedonian Call"** and led Paul to proclaim the gospel for the very first time in what we today call Europe.

We are not given all of the details here either. Luke only tells us that Paul saw a vision in the night. It is important to see that Paul shared his vision with the others on his team. Read Acts 16:10. In finding God's will for them they put together the two negative experiences of being

blocked and the positive one of seeing a vision. God guides via both closed and open doors. The phrase “**we got ready**” was added to the account of their decision. It’s a phrase that means that they discussed these events together and collectively came to the conclusion that God wanted them to cross over into Macedonia. We need to learn to value the input of others, especially fellow Christians.

Notice that that verses says “**WE got ready.**” Suddenly the terminology shifts from 3<sup>rd</sup> person to 1<sup>st</sup> person. “**They**” becomes “**we**” because Luke is no longer reporting material he learned from others but is recording experiences he personally had with Paul. Luke will continue to use “**we**” until 16:40 where “**they**” is again used. “**We**” reappears in Acts 20:6 when Paul is once again in Philippi. The “**we**” verses stop in chapter 21 and are picked up again in chapter 27.

Acts 16:11 describes their trip by sea and then by land to Philippi. The trip by sea was approximately 150 miles and took just two days. To cover that distance in that time all of the winds had to have been blowing in the right direction and at a reasonable speed. Acts 20:6 tells us that it took 5 days on their return trip. The boat trip ended in port of Neapolis. From there they walked the 10-12 miles to Philippi.

Philippi was a Roman colony given its name originally by Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. Philippi was the location of one of the most strategic battles in the conquest of the Roman Empire and had become a Roman colony to which retired Roman soldiers were sent to live out their lives. The importance of being a Roman colony should not be missed because it colored the culture and economics of the city and certainly influenced the attitude of the people and government toward both Jews and Christians.

Read Acts 16:13. In any city where there were at least 10 male Jews it was expected that they would establish a synagogue. Where there were fewer than 10 they found a place to worship, usually near a river. As was Paul’s practice on the Sabbath he sought out a synagogue and finding none he went looking for any Jews who might be worshiping near a river. He found a group of women. As a visiting rabbi or Pharisee Paul was invited to speak and, of course, he presented the gospel of salvation in Jesus.

Read verse 14. Lydia was from Thyatira, which was located in Asia Minor. She sold purple dyed cloth. Dying cloth had become a lucrative business. The dye was, for years, extracted from a shellfish, making fabric dyed with it extremely expensive. It was the material of kings and the wealthiest.

Lydia believed in the God of Israel, in Jehovah. There was a small Jewish community in Thyatira and she may have first heard the message of the true and living God there. She was committed sufficiently to Jehovah that on the Sabbath she took time out to worship with the Jews of Philippi. That tells us she took her faith very seriously. The Sabbath was a religious day in Jerusalem but in Philippi it was a major selling day. To take that day off undoubtedly meant a

significant loss of income but she took her faith seriously and allowed her commitments, not the culture of the day, to dictate her actions.

In verse 14 we read, “**the Lord opened her eyes.**” Paul was the instrument but as always it is the Spirit of God who convicts and brings one to conversion. We dare not take credit for either our own conversion or the commitment of others with whom we share the gospel. When we witness we may plant or water but it is always God who gives the increase. We need to keep this in mind as we share our faith and therefore bathe our ministry and witness in prayer.

Lydia became the first person to accept Jesus in Europe, although technically she was not European but Asian. One can only marvel at the sovereignty of God who takes a lady from Asia and brings her to Europe to reach her with the gospel. It is especially fascinating to think about how God worked that out. God forbade Paul from going further into Asia Minor, according to Acts 16:6, but the very first one he reached in Europe was a lady from there. God always works to reach the lost because He loves them.

Then according to Acts 16:15, after receiving Jesus as Savior, she was baptized along with “**members of her household.**” Then Luke wrote that she insisted that Paul and company stay with her while they ministered in the city. Her home was a place of hospitality and fairly spacious since at that point Paul's group, included Silas, Timothy and Luke for sure, and probably others.

Read verse 15. The implication is that if she were not a believer it would have been inappropriate for Paul and the others to stay there but since she was a believer there would be no question about her moral standards and commitments so nothing would be brought into question. One could only wish that today the same were true. When one learns that another is a believer there should be no reason to question his or her moral character or behavioral standards. Unfortunately, today too many “Christians” and too many “Christian homes” are no different from those of the world.

These verses are a powerful lesson on allowing God to lead us to the places and people He would have us minister in and witness to. If we allow Him to do so, God will always lead us into His perfect plan for our lives and only there can we truly glorify Him and find joy.