



## Session Twenty-Three

### The Book of Acts, Pt.7

#### Acts 15:36-18:22

1) This week's reading begins with conflict (15:36-41). Luke is not extravagant with details; all we can know with certainty is that Paul and Barnabas had a falling out over Baranabas' desire that John Mark accompany them on a journey revisiting some congregations Paul had established on his first missionary journey. This results in Paul asking Silas and, once they reach Lystra, Timothy, to accompany him instead. This is really the key development: the emergence of Timothy (the same Timothy to whom Paul writes what we know as 1 and 2 Timothy).

- a. In light of what we know of Paul's insistence that circumcision was an unnecessary requirement to make of new followers of Jesus (see, for example, Galatians), why would Paul have Timothy circumcised before taking him on this journey?
- b. We learn that Timothy was the son of a Jewish woman and a Gentile (Greek) father (16:1). Why is this significant vis-à-vis Paul's decision to ask him to accompany him?

2) Re: "the Spirit of Jesus" (16:7), this is the only place in Acts this title is used. More importantly, these verses demonstrate the role of the Holy Spirit in directing the growth of the early church.

3) At 16:11, Luke shifts to the pronoun "we" which scholars have concluded is an indication that Luke somehow must have accompanied Paul, Silas, and Timothy on this portion of their journey. In any case, 16:11-40 narrates Paul's mission to the Philippians. It begins with the story of Lydia who, from all indications, was a Gentile and a successful business woman (the fact she dealt exclusively in purple cloth suggests her clientele was decidedly upper-class because, in Roman society, purple symbolized power and influence). What is significant about Lydia's possible social standing?

4) Paul's interaction with the slave-girl ends him in jail where, eventually, the jailer undergoes a conversion experience (16:24-34). Notice how this story, whatever else it has to teach us, ultimately becomes about grace. How is this evident?

5) Look at Paul's time in Thessalonica (17:1-9) and Borea (17:10-15). What do you notice about his experiences there that you've encountered in your reading before and what might that suggest concerning your own discipleship?

6) Paul's time in Athens (17:16-34) is important for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the extent to which western society and culture of Paul's day was so much like western society and culture today. Read these verses carefully. What evidence do you see of these similarities?

7) The claims of Christianity have always put it at odds with the claims of secular society and reasoning. As time has gone on and human understanding of life and the cosmos has expanded exponentially, there has been an ever-greater turn away from Christian claims of Truth. In short, people expect faith statements to square with science and reason and when they don't, they reject them. Or they claim that the Truth of one religion is no more truthful than the Truth of another. Paul seems to say, though, that all ways of making sense of the world are ultimately statements of faith—the only question is whether the measure of that faith is God or humanity. What do you think?

8) Paul leaves Athens for Corinth. In 18:3 we discover Paul is a tentmaker, a reminder that Paul was not always able to devote himself to fulltime ministry. But this also underscores a bigger issue, namely the Jewish ethic of an individual fully integrating his/her vocation with his/her life and service before God and neighbor. In other words, life was not compartmentalized into "work," "family life," and "faith." This tends to be much less the case today, even among Jesus followers. How integrated is your faith with other areas of your life? If you keep them separate, why?

9) Paul's experience in Corinth (where he spent 18 months) once again involved conflict. But two other issues are noteworthy: Paul's commitment to sharing the Gospel and his decision to leave the synagogue to start a house church in the home of Titius Justus. Relative to the latter, we might wish to consider that part of the message of house churches is *who* you worship is what matters, not *where* you worship. Consider your own experience of worship. To what extent is it dependent upon setting and liturgy? Are you open to worshiping God *anywhere*? If not, why not?