

WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY- Acts Chapter 16 (ESV 1024)

Verse 1-2- In these beginning verses, Luke points to three distinct types of worshippers. He points to a disciple, a believer, and a Greek. Are these three different? Let's look at the definitions.

Disciple – Greek word, mathetes (math-ay-tes')- a learner, pupil, a devoted student, one who assists in spreading the doctrine of Christ

Believer- Greek word, pistos (pis-tos')- one who is faithful, who trusts in God's word and is convinced that Jesus has been raised from the dead and is the author of salvation.

Greek- Greek word, Hellen (Hel'-lane)- one from the nation of Greece, or any non-Jewish person, particularly those that follow customs of worship not related to the Jews.

So, on his second missionary journey, Paul met Timothy who is a disciple, a devoted student of the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Timothy is the offspring of a Jewish woman who also trusts that Jesus is the Messiah (a believer) and a Gentile (by race) whose belief system is totally unknown. Remember, not all Jews were believers, and not all Gentiles were non-believers at this point in Lystra. Perhaps it was Timothy's dual heritage (Jew and Gentile) that made Paul so interested in this young man. Although he shared the heritage of both types of worshippers from this region, he had a good reputation among the believers, which made him useful to Paul's mission there. (Proverbs 22:1 ESV 606) Timothy's reputation among the believers was probably attributed to his mother who was Jewish and a believer. You may remember from chapter 14 that the people of Lystra and Iconium had presented a lot of problems to Paul on his first mission. The people of Lystra were idol worshippers and their neighbors from Iconium were non-believing Jews.

Verse 3- So, Paul does something that seems confusing to us or maybe even hypocritical because he took Timothy and circumcised him, the very thing that he had just gone to the council to prove unnecessary. In fact, the primary reason for this journey was to deliver the decisions handed down by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this matter. Even more puzzling is why Timothy appears to have agreed so easily to his request. Luke gives us the reason for Paul's actions. He says Paul did this because of the Jews that were in that area. You may remember that the Jews of this area were so fanatical about this issue that they tried to kill Paul over it (Acts 14:19, ESV 1022). Naturally, Paul was sensitive to how easily they might be offended. Also, he wanted to make sure that the people were willing to listen to Timothy, so since his mother was a Jew, the expected circumcision gave him credibility. Since his father was a Greek and possibly not a believer, this could have hindered his ministry. (Romans 14:13-14, ESV 1051) (1 Corinthians 8:12-13, ESV 1058) So, although Paul knew that circumcision had nothing to do with Timothy's salvation, he did it

WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY- Acts Chapter 16 (ESV 1024)

to avoid offending the Jews. Timothy's reason for compliance is not recorded, but we can speculate based on the descriptions we have of him and his family.

- 1- He was young and inexperienced (1 Timothy 4:12, ESV 1095)
- 2- He was accustomed to being a student or learner. (2 Timothy 3:14-15, ESV 1099)
- 3- He had established a reputation as a believer before he joined Paul indicating he had already spent time between the two cities speaking about Jesus. (Acts 16:2, ESV 1024)

Clearly it was a part of Timothy's personality early on to be a follower rather than a leader. He obviously sought to know as much as he could about the faith yet considered himself at this time more like an assistant or partner to Paul. This is evident in most of the letters that Paul wrote to the different churches. Also, as the two most influential people in his life before Paul were his Jewish mother and grandmother, it makes sense that he was also well versed in the traditions of his heritage. He was probably well aware of how strongly the Jews in his area felt about these traditions and the Laws of Moses. He likely felt circumcision was a small price to pay to earn their trust and respect. (Philippians 2:3-8 ESV 1084), (Proverbs 15:33, ESV 600)

Verse 4-5- Paul's decision and Timothy's compliance seem to have been correct because the message of the elders was delivered, the churches were strengthened in the faith, and the number of believers grew. This is a good example of what Jesus said about the power of agreement among the believers. (Matthew 18:19-20, ESV 913), (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, ESV 618)

It is also a good idea to consider the role of the three types of worshippers. We should think about what type of worshipper we want to be. We can be a Greek like Timothy's father who possibly worshipped idols and actually established no specific reputation with God or other men. Or we can be a true believer like Timothy's mother, who trusted God's word, was fully convinced that Jesus is raised from the dead and has paid for our salvation, and who passed on her faith to her offspring. Or we can be a disciple like Timothy who is not only a faithful believer, but a devoted student of God's word who chooses to deliberately spread the gospel of Christ by verbal means and by our reputation.

Verse 6-8- After they delivered the letter from the elders to the people throughout the regions of Phrygia and Galatia, Paul and Timothy wanted to go to nearby Asia Minor (now known as Turkey) to preach the gospel, but the Holy Spirit told them not to go there. So, they traveled to Mysia on their way to Bithynia, another nearby city. But the Holy Spirit told them not to go there either. So, they bypassed Bithynia and went south to Troas instead. We

WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY- Acts Chapter 16 (ESV 1024)

are not told why the Holy Spirit kept them from going there. The question here is how did they know that the Holy Spirit was leading them? How do we know if the Holy Spirit is leading us or if we are being influenced by others or our own desires? Does the Holy Spirit only lead us toward something or some place?

How the Holy Spirit Works	Identify That It Is the Holy Spirit Speaking
Isaiah 30:20-21, ESV 659	John 16:13-14, ESV 1000
Galatians 4:6, ESV 1076	Galatians 5:22-23, ESV 1078
John 14:16-17, 25-26, ESV 998-999	1 Corinthians 2:12-16, ESV 1054

So, from the scriptures we know that the Holy Spirit leads us in whatever direction is pleasing to God whether toward or away from someone or something. We know that He is sent to be a constant companion that speaks from inside us (if we are walking in the ways of Christ). We recognize the Holy Spirit by His fruit and his reference to “Spirit-taught” words, which means we can match our thoughts or explain them by some reference in the Bible, God’s word. Most important, the Holy Spirit leads us to what glorifies Christ or where Christ can be glorified, so if our thoughts or plans will not glorify Him or if they lead us where He cannot be glorified, we should abandon them immediately and go another way.

Again, we do not know why Paul was led away from Asia Minor and Bithynia, but we can suppose that the answer is one or more of the following reasons based on scripture. These reasons can be applied to our own lives as well.

Reasons The Holy Spirit May Lead Us Away From Something or Someone
1. God’s purpose is different from ours. (Proverbs 16:9, ESV 600)
2. God is preparing us as either the sender or the receiver of His word. (Ephesians 2:10, ESV 1079), (2 Corinthians 5:5, ESV 1068)
3. God’s timing differs from ours. (Ecclesiastes 3:1, ESV 617), (Habakkuk 2: 3, ESV 873)

Verse 9-10- Though we are not told the specific reason that Paul and his companions were led away from their original plans, we know that they were completely obedient to the leading of the Spirit. Each time the Spirit said, “no,” they tried a new direction. Finally, God directed Paul through a vision to go to Macedonia and they went right away. (Ezekiel 36:27, ESV 807), (James 1:22, ESV 1113) Note that they did not know what was waiting for them in Macedonia, but they trusted that God would direct them. They went on by faith. (Proverbs 3:5-6, ESV 588), (Psalm 32:8, ESV 512), (Psalm 143:8, ESV 582)

WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY- Acts Chapter 16 (ESV 1024)

Verse 11-15- To get to Macedonia, they had to travel by sea from the port of Troas to a small island, Samothracia, where they rested for a day, then they sailed to Neapolis, a port city in Macedonia. Then they walked another half day to get to Philippi, a Roman colony and major city of Macedonia where they stayed for several days. History books say that this was a place of retirement for Roman soldiers, so there probably weren't many Jewish men in this area. Consequently, there were no synagogues where they could worship or pray on the Sabbath, so they went outside the city looking for a quiet place to pray near the river. Paul may have also been looking for a place where they could preach the message of Jesus, as well, so he probably expected to find some Jewish men outside the city to whom he could witness. Instead, they sat down and began to speak to a group of women who were already there. Perhaps verse 14 gives us the answer to why Paul and his colleagues were led away from Asia and toward Macedonia. One of the women listening was already a worshiper of God and the Lord opened her heart to not only hear Paul's message, but to respond to it. (Psalm 145:18, ESV 583), (John 6:44, ESV 988), (James 4:8, ESV 1115) This woman, Lydia was a Gentile from Thyatira which was in Asia Minor (ironically the place that the Holy Spirit had led them away from). However, she was now living and working in Philippi. Perhaps God had led the missionaries away from Asia Minor so that they could be available to bring the message of Christ to her in this new city. She accepted Christ and was baptized along with her family, but she did not stop there. She invited the missionaries to her home and persuaded them to stay with her. She urgently requested them to stay and insisted until she persuaded them. She obviously wanted this teaching, not only for herself, but for her household and any others who would listen. But why is this woman significant? We know that she was in a position of some influence because of her profession as a dealer of purple cloth. Purple cloth was very rare and expensive so, only the rich and royalty could afford it, so we can assume she was financially well-off. This allowed her to host Paul and his associates for some time, while they continued to minister to people at the place of prayer. On the surface we might think that the most important point of this story is Lydia's hospitality, but if we take a deeper look, we realize that Lydia's conversion to Christ represents the expansion of the Christian faith into Europe, fulfilling Christ's command that his disciples spread the gospel beyond, Jerusalem and Judea to the rest of the world. When she made her offer, it was especially important that they know that she was a believer, rather than how affluent she was. She was insistent and persuasive because she needed them to come so that they could continue to teach the gospel. While Paul's plan was to start with Asia Minor to fulfill the "great commission," God's plan was to use a woman from Asia Minor to begin a church in Europe first. The purpose was the same, to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. The timing was just a little different. We now know

WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY- Acts Chapter 16 (ESV 1024)

that Paul eventually went to Asia Minor at Ephesus, but how do we know that Lydia began the church at Philippi? The evidence is found after Paul and Silas were imprisoned (Acts 16:40, ESV 1025), which brings us to the next verses.

Verse 16-18- While everything seemed to be going well with their ministry at the place of prayer, why would God allow this female slave to come and disturb their work? The answer is “to show His power and proclaim His name.” (Exodus 9:16, ESV 57) Scripture tells us that God has complete authority over unclean spirits. (Mark 1:23-26, ESV 927), (Matthew 8:16, ESV 902), (Mark 3:11, ESV 929) He allows them to be visible for a time, but always with the purpose of showing His ultimate authority and power and the intention of fulfilling His plan. Some examples of this are:

To introduce David to King Saul (1 Samuel 16:14-19, ESV 265)

To prove Job’s faithfulness (Job 1:9-12, ESV 459)

So, God allowed this female slave to harass Paul and his company by following them around and shouting out who they were. Since she was telling the truth, it probably wasn’t so bothersome at first but became annoying after it lasted several days. Though the evil spirit meant to use it to stir up the crowd, God allowed it to show His authority over the false gods and evil practices that were so prevalent in the Roman colonies. Paul knew that Jesus had given the disciples authority over these unclean spirits, so he used that power to call them out of her. (Matthew 10:1, ESV 903) The unclean spirit had no choice but to obey. Unfortunately, that was not the end of it.

Verse 19-24- The loss of their steady income from the female slave’s fortune-telling made her owners angry. They sought revenge against Paul and Silas by dragging them into the public square to be falsely accused, humiliated by public beating and put in jail. Then, the jailer was given special orders to guard them carefully, so he put them in an inner cell with their feet shackled.

Verse 25-36- Once again, God had different plans and Paul and Silas decided to exercise their faith by singing songs and praying in the middle of the night. Instead of laying quietly in fear for their lives, they were witnessing to their faith so the other prisoners could hear. (Joshua 1:9, ESV 198), (Psalm 56:2-3, ESV 527) Then came something that could only be described as an “act of God,” an earthquake. It shook the prison foundations, opened all the doors, and loosened everyone’s chains. God showed His power to free not only Paul and Silas, but every prisoner there. No wonder the jailer woke up and saw all that and

WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY- Acts Chapter 16 (ESV 1024)

decided he might as well kill himself before the magistrates came to blame him. Also, what made the other prisoners stay put? Why didn't they run while they had the chance? Obviously, there was some power here far beyond human ability. The jailor recognized this so he fell, trembling before Paul and Silas and asked what he should do to be saved. And after he was saved, he must have lost all fear because he left the jail, took them home, attended to their wounds and allowed them to minister to his family. When morning came, he was happy to tell them that the magistrates had ordered their release. It appears that the magistrates also realized that God was in this. Otherwise, what made them ready to release Paul and Silas? The bible gives several references for earthquakes being used to show God's presence, power and His anger. (Isaiah 29:6, ESV 656-657) (Matthew 27:51-54, ESV 925) (Nahum 1:5, ESV 870) The earthquake made it impossible for anyone to deny God's power and presence.

Verse 37- 40- Here, the lawyer part of Paul came out. He wasn't satisfied with just being released. He wanted justice and the truth to come out. He wanted the officials to admit that they were wrong in what they did. (Proverbs 21:15, ESV 605), (Proverbs 21:3, ESV 605), (Hosea 12:6, ESV 845) So Paul demanded the officials apologize and they did because they realized that Paul was well versed in their Roman law and they did not want to be found violating their own rules. This may well have been the first civil rights case on record. The rights of Paul and Silas as Roman citizens had been violated. According to Roman law they were entitled to a trial before facing any public humiliation, they were entitled to hear and defend the charges against them before any penalty and were protected from bodily harm by any local officials. The magistrates had to quickly take care of this to avoid embarrassment and possible public uproar if word got out about their blatant violation against these two men. They apologized and begged them to get out of town. But Paul and Silas had to finish their mission, so they returned to Lydia's house where the believers were now meeting regularly and encouraged them. Then they left because their purpose (and God's) had been fulfilled. (Psalm 138:8, ESV 579), (Proverbs 16:3, ESV 600)