

Acts Chapter 16 Notes from Interpretation Acts, Willimon and New Interpreters Bible Commentary Acts.

Well – what an interesting beginning for Chapter 16. Paul not only picks Silas but Timothy to go with him Timothy – son of a Jewish Christian woman and a Greek father.

What does he do, demands Timothy be circumcised to not offend Jewish Christian sensibilities. This shows Paul knows his audience and also shows himself to be a loyal Jew who securely joins himself to the traditional Jewish practices before he fully launches his mission.

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Timothy is instrumental in helping Paul and is a leader in the Pauline church. It is implied that he is the recipient of the letters 1 and 2 Timothy, which are resources for organizing and nurturing congregations. His parental description is confirmed in 2 Tim. He is said to have learned the sacred writings (Hebrew Scripture) in his childhood.

It appears even though of Jewish heritage, his Greek father prevented his circumcision. The circumcision of Timothy seems an accommodation to James. Even though the council says the Gentiles need not be circumcised Timothy is a Jew and in order to proclaim his Jewishness in the synagogue it is the prudent thing to do. It is also contested the Paul actually performed the circumcision although as a Pharisee and Rabbi he would have known how to do it.

So the circumcision is a political issue – not that the church would ever be political-- it restores Timothy's identity in the eyes of the faithful Jews.

Vvs 6-12

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This section begins with a brief summary



The Holy Spirit is responsible for the plotline of the Church's mission. It leads by divine speech or by heavenly visions.

In Paul's case here the Spirit blocks doors in Asia thus leading in other directions.

The Spirit guides and empowers.

In baptism the Holy Spirit comes to us and in the explanation to the third article of the creed we come to know:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all

believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.

In these few short verses we get a glimpse into how the Spirit works for Paul. He has a vision and immediately responds.

It seems to many commentaries that the rest of Acts hinges on this text. Luke joins Paul's mission to underscore the dramatic importance. The Spirit overcomes barriers. We don't always know how, but we are called to trust it is the Spirit's work. Please note that the language begins a shift here to "we" language. We do not know if it because the writer was with Paul, if the we is found in a source used by the writer or if it is simply a literary device. It does add a sense of drama and community.

Vvs 11-40

Freedom. Freedom of speech, of religion, to think, teach and on and on. Or as Willimon says: surrounded by our burglar alarms, medicine cabinets and our fears are we truly free?

This section of Acts tells stories of Philippi.

Lydia is free. A rich business woman who worshipped the one God. Her conversion is God's work.

Paul meets her in the community equivalent of the synagogue. She was probably a God-fearer (convert to Judaism). Lydia is a unique woman, a business woman who owns her own home. No mention of a husband. She dealt in purple cloth destined for the elite and royal in Rome.

The church is not afraid to put women in leadership roles and to show them as taking a prominent role in the life of the congregations. This must have been very radical for the time and place.

Willimon reminds us of the views of the world toward the early church – he says: “Celsus, the first pagan author who took the trouble to write a book to discredit Christianity, alleged that the church deliberately excluded educated and wealthy people because this faith appealed only to the foolish... slaves, women and little children, who gathered at the wool dresser's shop or to the cobbler's or washerwoman's shop.

Next Paul encounters a slave girl who can divine – predict the future – much like the story of the slave girl in Mark.

Paul's Holy Spirit is greater than the unholy spirit which speaks thru the girl.

So, guess what happens next. The Spirit leaves the girl in the name of Jesus and Paul and Silas are beaten and set upon because they are Jews.

The people who own the slave don't want to admit they profit from a demon so the case is anti-Semitic in nature and the charge that they were proselytizing in town is wrong because they spoke outside the city limits, but that didn't matter. They weren't from around here so it is okay to punish the outsider.

Of course you have to love the end of the story.

The jailed and shackled are singing, praying and having a celebration in the jail.

The earth shakes the doors fly open and all the chains fly off. No hand of God here???

The jailer wakes, and when he sees the doors open he knows he is in for it.

He prepares to kill himself rather than face Roman justice, but Paul says – don't do it. We are all here. I love the turn of events and somehow the jailer senses that iron bars don't make a prison and the prisoners offer a different kind of salvation and the jailer wants that. So the jailer is baptized.

So what is freedom? The tables turn

There is freedom and then there is freedom.

If the Son makes you free you will be free indeed.