

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Acts 16:1-15

New American Standard Bible

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, November 15, 2015

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The **[International Bible Lesson](#)** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, November 15, 2015**, is from **Acts 16:1-15**. Please Note: Some churches will only study **Acts 16:1-5, 8-15**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Acts 16:1-15

(Acts 16:1) Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek,

Derbe and Lystra were in Galatia in Asia Minor (the western part of Turkey). Paul and Barnabas had planted churches in Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium during Paul's first missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas had led Timothy, his mother Eunice, and his grandmother Lois (Jewish women) to faith in Jesus Christ. After they left Galatia, Timothy became known as a sincere follower of Jesus Christ. As Paul was visiting the churches he and Barnabas had founded, he met Timothy again. Timothy was a Jew by birth, because his mother was a Jewess. Her marriage to a Gentile would have been contrary to Jewish law.

(Acts 16:2) and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium.

Because of his noteworthy Christian character, Timothy would be just the person the Apostle Paul would want as a missionary to accompany him. Timothy would understand both Jews and Gentiles in the region very well as they traveled further from Jerusalem as evangelists. As they traveled and served together, Paul could train Timothy further, and later Paul wrote letters to help Timothy in his work in the church.

(Acts 16:3) Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

Paul and Timothy wanted to serve the Lord Jesus as effective witnesses to both Jews and Gentiles. When Paul circumcised Timothy, they showed that Jews did not need to give up their Jewish custom of circumcision in order to be saved, be Christians, and be members of the Church. Circumcision has nothing to do with anyone's salvation, only faith in Jesus the Messiah as the Son of God and Savior. However, as followers of Jesus, Jewish Christians would need to associate and eat with Gentiles, and that is why God made all foods clean (as God told Peter before he went into the home of Cornelius and led Cornelius, his family, and friends to saving faith in the Lord Jesus).

(Acts 16:4) Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.

Paul, Timothy, the apostles, and the elders preached that people are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ through faith in Him and not by works of the law. Furthermore, even as we learn from the Jerusalem Council that circumcision is not necessary for salvation, so we see that Jews can still practice circumcision and Jews are not required to stop circumcision as a way of identification (not separation). In Christ Jesus the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles is broken down, and keeping or not keeping Jewish customs makes no difference with regard to the salvation of Jews or Gentiles. But the law of Moses can no longer be used to separate Christian Jews and Gentiles. Paul later wrote: "For Christ is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:14—see all of Ephesians 2). The indwelling Holy Spirit helps all Christians obey the Lord Jesus and keep the moral law of God—the law of love for God and others—and enjoy peace.

(Acts 16:5) So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.

The people in the churches Paul visited obeyed the decisions of the apostles and elders, the leading of the Holy Spirit, and the Scriptures (the Old Testament and the New Testament as it was being written); therefore, their faith was strengthened, nonbelievers were drawn to them and faith in Christ (even as they reached out to unbelievers), and the churches increased in numbers of believers. Because both Jews and Gentiles were welcomed with love into the churches on the basis of a common faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior, the churches grew numerically.

(Acts 16:6) They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia;

Doing further evangelism, Paul and Silas (now joined by Timothy) traveled among the churches that Paul and Barnabas had founded in that region of Galatia. The Phrygians were related to the earlier Trojans, and were sequentially subject to the Persians, the

Greeks, and the Romans. Luke does not tell us how the Holy Spirit told them not to go into Asia; God's timing is perfect and Asia would be evangelized at the right time. Unreached people were ready to learn about Jesus from them elsewhere, and that is where God would send them.

(Acts 16:7) and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them;

Mysia was a province in the northwest region of Asia Minor. Bithynia was a province with the Black Sea as the northern border. The Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of Jesus," and they were to follow the Holy Spirit even as the first disciples followed Jesus during His public ministry. The Spirit of Jesus would lead them to hearts and minds that He had prepared to listen to them. Very soon, they would meet Lydia, who prayed as Cornelius prayed, and whom God prepared in advance to listen to the Apostle Paul.

(Acts 16:8) and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.

Troas was a port city founded by Alexander the Great. Paul and his companions did not sit and wait until they heard a command from God to move. The Lord had already commanded them to preach the good news, so they prayed, planned, and pursued all the places that seemed the most reasonable to them. They moved until God told them to stop, and without arguing they changed directions when the Lord pointed a better way.

(Acts 16:9) A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

Paul received a vision to go in a new direction, which reminds us of the vision God gave Peter when He sent Peter to preach to the Gentiles—also a new direction. The Macedonian in Paul's vision said "Come help us," and the Holy Spirit did not say "No," as He had previously. Therefore, Paul and his companions left immediately to preach the good news where they found people both needing and wanting help, having been prepared by God to hear and believe the good news of Jesus Christ.

(Acts 16:10) When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Macedonian tribes were united under Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. In 148 B.C., Macedonia became a Roman province. Because "we" is used for the first time in this verse, most believe Luke joined them at this point and began writing a first person account in the Book of Acts. Luke could have learned much that he wrote about the early church in Acts, chapters 1-15, during his travels with Paul from this point forward.

(Acts 16:11) So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis;

They left the port of Troas, and sailing on the Aegean Sea they traveled to the mountain island of Samothrace. The next day they arrived at Neapolis in Macedonia. Such a fast and uneventful trip after the Holy Spirit had prevented them from going elsewhere must have encouraged them. When they returned, the same trip took five days instead of two.

(Acts 16:12) and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.

Philippi was a major city and Roman colony. Following Paul's earlier practices, they went to a major city where they hoped to find a synagogue to begin teaching about Jesus. Then, after founding a church, that church would do evangelism in the nearby towns and farms. They were there several days and did not find a synagogue. Since it took 10 Jewish men to found a synagogue, we may assume the Jewish population of Philippi was small at that time. The role of women was such that no women, no matter how many, could form a synagogue.

(Acts 16:13) And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.

Without a synagogue, Paul learned about and expected to find Jewish and God-fearing women meeting and praying by the river outside the city. They would eagerly welcome a travelling Jewish rabbi who would teach them the Scriptures. Paul sat down to teach (the way of Jewish rabbis): Jesus sat down to teach (Matthew 5:1). Just as Jesus taught the Samaritan woman at the well and surprised her and His disciples (see John 4:9), so Paul sat down and taught these women as beloved by the Lord—the first time in the Book of Acts that an apostle teaches women directly instead of through a man to his household—another new direction.

(Acts 16:14) A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

Before Paul met her and spoke, Lydia was prepared. She prayed and worshiped God (she was probably a God-fearer and not a Jewess). As Paul spoke, the Lord opened her heart (salvation is by grace) and she responded to Paul's message (through faith). She worshiped the true God, as did Cornelius, but she needed to be saved. She needed to learn the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, who would be her Lord and Savior. She needed the Holy Spirit to comfort, guide, and empower her. She needed all the blessings of eternal life that would begin the moment she believed.

(Acts 16:15) And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

They were meeting by a river. Members of her household were probably at the river too and listening to Paul preach. As in the home of Cornelius, they probably all believed at the same time. They all were baptized that very Sabbath in the river. Lydia did not need to do or say more to be saved, and Paul considered her a believer, because they did go to her house and stay. As a seller of purple goods, Lydia was probably wealthy with royal and wealthy customers, so her house was large enough for Paul and his companions to begin a church in Philippi that very Sabbath. And so we see a tremendous work of God begun because Paul and his companions obeyed the Holy Spirit when He said “No” and later when the Holy Spirit indicated “Yes.”

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why was Timothy a good choice for Paul to add to his missionary team? Give three possible reasons.
2. According to the Jerusalem Council, Timothy did not need to be circumcised to be saved or welcome in the Church. Why do you think Paul circumcised Timothy?
3. Why do you think Paul and his companions needed to teach churches in every town to obey the decisions of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem? What was the result?
4. When the Spirit refused to let them go into the province of Asia or Bithynia, how did Paul and his companions react?
5. What impressed you most about the conversion of Lydia and her household?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.
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