

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

A LARGER MISSIONARY PROGRAM

(Acts 15:40-41; 16:1-10)

OUTLINE

Key verse - 16:31

1. The missionaries were commended to the grace of God (40).
2. They started out to visit the Christians where they had preached on the former journey (15:41; 16:1)
3. They fulfilled their mission (16:4-5).
4. They saw the churches grow (5).
5. They helped to establish the church in the faith (5).
6. They secured a new missionary (16:1-3).
7. In order that the church may be supplied with Christian workers young Christians should be trained (Example of Timothy in his early training).
8. One who is fitted for larger service does all he can where he is. (Timothy had already made a splendid reputation, v. 2).
9. The missionaries should be adapted to the work which they undertake. (This was true of Paul and Silas and Timothy).
10. The Holy Spirit should be our guide in all Christian work (6-10).
11. When God calls we should respond (9-10).
12. A closed door temporarily may mean an open door eventually (6-9).

When Paul proposed the second missionary journey, the missionary band was divided over the personnel of the company. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark, but Paul would not consent to that because Mark had turned back during the former journey when he faced difficulties and danger. The two pioneer missionaries, because of this difference of opinion, decided to separate. Though there was a breach in the band of workers, the work of the Lord was not hindered.

PAUL AND SILAS

Paul chose Silas as his companion. They were commended of the brethren to the grace of the Lord. "**Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus**" (15:39). Thus, in place of one missionary band there were two. In place of two missionaries there were four.

The four soon increased to six, the field was enlarged and extended beyond the bounds of Asia, and the missionaries crossing the Aegean made rapid inroads upon the continent of Europe.

STARTING POINT

The starting point of the missionaries was from Antioch in Syria. This was the starting point of all of Paul's missionary journeys. It was not only a great commercial center, but it had become the great center of missionary activity.

EXTENSION OF THE FIELD

The rapid extension of the field was not according to the plan of Paul, zealous as he was in the work of the Master, and eager though he was to take new communities for Christ. Paul would have extended the bounds of the church by covering first the provinces adjacent to those where the work was already established. But the Spirit made clear to him that he would have the Gospel carried forward by larger leaps and bolder marches.

TO VISIT CHURCHES

However, before the call came to go to Europe, Paul was permitted to go through some of cities of Asia Minor where the churches were already established, to confirm the Christians in the faith and gather new recruits to carry forward the message of the Gospel. Silas made an excellent companion for Paul in his new and greater work. Like Paul, Silas was a Roman citizen. His full name was Silvanus though his friends commonly called him Silas. As they were starting out to visit Roman cities Silas would be especially helpful to Paul. If any of the Christian Jews should say that Paul was mistaken about circumcision, or any other points of the Gospel, Silas would be there, a messenger from the church at Jerusalem, to tell them the decision of the apostles and to show them the letter which they had sent defining the position of the church concerning Gentile disciples.

As the first rays of the morning sun were reflected from the water of the Orontes, on their right, they crossed the bridge on their way to the plain which stretched away to the north. A long hard journey of many weeks lay before them. They must trudge across desolate plains, wade rivers, climb mountains, face danger and endure many hardships. They would, no doubt, take with them their hooded cloaks that they might be protected from the rain and the mountain snows, and have a covering at night as they camped by the way. In the bags slung across their backs they would carry their water bottles, oil, cheese, olives, and possibly an iron kettle for cooking their corn and meat at night. As they went up into the mountains which divided Syria from Cilicia, knowing as they did that brigands infested the ravines, they would probably join a company of traders that they might the better defend themselves against robbers.

AT TARSUS

They would pass through Tarsus where Paul was reared. No mention is made of a pause there.

No doubt Paul's mind would be rent with feelings of joy and sorrow. His father and mother were likely dead before this and most of his old school mates would have nothing to do with him. We have good reason to think, however, that there were many who had found Christ at Tarsus. Evidences have been found recently, which seem to show that there were several churches, at one time, in the neighborhood of Tarsus. In all probability many had been won to Christ by Paul during the years that he labored there before Barnabas brought him back to Antioch. The Christians would rejoice that they had known Paul and would count it a privilege to give him a new supply of food for the coming mountain journey and send him forward with a hearty blessing.

THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS

To the north of them there lay the great ridge of the Taurus mountains, and to reach the plateau and the cities beyond they must pass over them, though it was a hard journey of several days. As they toiled up the mountain side they came to a place where it seemed that they could go no further. The fierce looking grey crags seemed to rise perpendicularly for six hundred feet before them and shut off all progress. But a narrow pass opened in front of them, leading right into the heart of the great rocks. What is said to be the narrowest pass in the world lay before them. The path was so narrow that a loaded camel brushed the rocks on the one hand while the swift mountain torrent rushed by on the other. On either hand the great precipice seemed to soar up into the very sky, hundreds and hundreds of feet above.

This deep canon is called the Cilician Gates. When Alexander the Great set out to conquer the world, he with all his armies poured through this narrow ravine. Alexander made what has been called a successful expedition and at the time of his death was the ruler of most of the then known world. But in the person of Paul, an unassuming, hard-working Jew, with hands hardened from the rough work of tent-making, and muscles toughened from long hard travel, there stood a man greater than Alexander. In his intellect, in his power of self-control, in his leadership, in his faith, and in the place he was to hold in the future history of the world, he was far greater than Alexander. Paul was proclaiming the authority and love of a King who was to rule more nations than Alexander ever saw, and was leading forward in a campaign that was to continue to grow after Alexander was known only to the few who delve into the pages of ancient history.

FULFILLING THEIR MISSION

Paul and Silas went through Syria, Cilicia, Derbe, Lystra and Iconium confirming the churches. They were establishing them in the faith and delivering the decision of the apostles and elders which had been sent out to the Christian churches. This makes evident the fact that there were churches in Cilicia and we have reason to think that some of them were in and about Tarsus, where Paul had been reared and where he had spent his early years in the Christian ministry.

Paul would feel very much at home also, as he reached Derbe. The brethren would rejoice to see him and to make the acquaintance of Silas, his new companion.

As they trudged on over the stones of the old Roman road, toward evening, they would see the temple of Jupiter towering before them at Lystra. Paul would tell Silas how the priests had prepared to offer sacrifices to Barnabas and himself, thinking they were gods. When they came near to the wall of the city Paul would point out the spot where the mob had left him, after they had stoned him and dragged him out, supposing he was dead.

THE CHURCH GROWS

Under the ministration of Paul and those with him the churches grew in number daily: “**And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily**” (16:5). Though there were many difficulties in the way, and in some cases persecutions, the churches had not lost their enthusiasm. They had maintained their faith and had continued to labor in the absence of Paul. The churches grew, as they ought always to do, as the result of work and faith. In Jerusalem, after the outpouring of the Spirit, the church grew in numbers daily. Far out from Jerusalem, in the very midst of heathenism, the same power was manifest and the same blessed results followed. It is always a wonderful encouragement, both to the church on the frontier and the church at home, to know that her numbers are constantly increasing.

THE CHURCH ESTABLISHED IN THE FAITH

When Paul and Silas delivered the decrees of the church at Jerusalem, and ministered to them, the churches which they visited were strengthened in the faith. The decrees which they delivered to the churches were brief, they contained merely the beginning of a creed, and yet they were helpful. They helped the Christians to understand the Lord’s will and to stand fast in the faith. That a church is well established in the faith does not hinder its growth, but stimulates it. To add members is not enough for any church. Isaiah saw, in prophecy, the church strengthening her stakes and lengthening her cords. She was growing more steadfast in the faith, and enlarging her bounds. That is as it should always be; firm faith and earnest evangelism should go together. If there is not a desire to win men to Christ there is a weakness of faith though there may be a nominal steadfastness. If men do not desire to grow in grace and the knowledge of God, we may properly doubt whether they have been really won to Christ.

A NEW RECRUIT

As the news spread about the city of Lystra that Paul was there, Timothy would hasten to meet him and would extend to both Paul and Silas a hearty welcome. They would be especially delighted when they heard the reports of brethren concerning him. Paul asked him to go with him as they continued to move forward in the missionary work. I can imagine that I hear Timothy reply: “That is what I have longed to do every since you and Barnabas were here and showed such admirable courage and submission in the midst of the mob. I would be glad, from the depth of my heart, to have a part in doing for others what you have been able to do for me and for many others in Lystra.” Paul would probably reply: “I am glad to hear that Timothy, but remember when you decide to go with us you must be prepared to meet with all sorts of opposition.

There will be before you long hard tramps, hunger, fatigue, possibly robbers by the way, envy, suspicion, enemies without and within, and perhaps even mobs to throw us out of the city as they did when I was here the first time.” Timothy would likely look down with an anxious face, remembering what an old prophet said about the man boasting who puts on his armor; then he would look up and with fixed countenance would say: “Yes, I know a little of what you have had to face and what awaits me when I go with you, but I remember what you told us Jesus had promised, **‘Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.’**” You told us so tenderly of how Jesus had died for us and surely I ought not to fear lest I suffer for him. We have always found him sufficient for our needs, and I have faith to believe that he will always remain so. It will be hard to leave mother and grandmother, both of whom I love dearly, and who have spent so much effort in teaching me, but I believe nothing will please them better than the thought that I am serving our glorious Saviour and I will count it an honor to do anything to minister to you in your toilsome journeys.”

When Timothy told Eunice, his mother, of Paul’s request, she would readily give her assent. She would likely mingle tears with her joy and pride as she thought of her son going out with the noblest of all the missionaries. As Lois, his grandmother, mended his clothes and filled his wallet with bread, cheese, dates and salted olives, she would remember how the little lad, years before, had sat on her knee and asked questions about the old prophets who told of the day when the ends of the earth should be brought to the Lord, and had wondered how that would ever come true. She would thank God now that her prayers would keep the young man and make him a faithful and zealous missionary worthy of the great apostle and of his Lord.

When Paul explained to Timothy that it was not necessary to be circumcised, but that it was expedient that he should, in view of the fact that he would be more cordially received among the Jews in the various places on their missionary journeys, he evidently consented without hesitation. Paul had recently been in a conference of the church in which he had opposed the contention that circumcision was necessary, and now was teaching that doctrine to all the churches where he went; nevertheless, as a matter of expediency, that he might become all things to all men, he advised Timothy to be circumcised. Paul also conferred on Timothy the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit: **“Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands”** (II Timothy 1:6), and saw that he was ordained to the office of the ministry: **“Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery”** (I Timothy 4:14), before they went forward on their journey. Paul recognized that the source of all power is in the Holy Spirit, and that order should be established and recognized in the church.

Timothy was not a source of disappointment to Paul as Mark had been. He was his faithful, and almost constant companion, through the remainder of his life and work.

TIMOTHY WELL PREPARED

Timothy had experienced a handicap in that his father was a Greek. Notwithstanding this, he had been well trained, for he had a godly mother and grandmother. They were careful to train him in the Scriptures from his childhood. They were women of strong faith.

In order that the church may be supplied with ministers and missionaries, young Christians should be trained in the home. The Sunday school may be helpful but it cannot take the place of the Christian home. The Sunday school lasts but a few minutes during one day of the week, while children are in the home, and should receive Christian training from their parents, every day of the week.

The historical account of the early training of Philip Doddridge is a very interesting one. His mother taught him Bible stories from the pictures on the Dutch tiles on the chimney of the room where they often sat together. There were pictures of Noah building his great ship, of Elisha and the bears, and of many of the well-known incidents of the Bible. When the days and evenings were cold and the fire burned clearly, and little Philip sat in the arm chair beside his mother, it afforded him great joy to hear the stories which were suggested in the colored porcelain. Though his mother could not foresee the results of those early lessons, yet in later years when the little boy had become famous and was publishing the Family Expositor, we are told that he could not forget the nursery Bible in the chimney tiles.

In these days men are inquiring why it is that so few young men offer themselves for service in the Gospel ministry. They do not need to seek long for an answer. If, however, parents would give their time, their earnest and devout attention to the training of their children, not merely occasionally, but daily; if they would instill into their minds the Word of God and set them a godly and prayerful example, and if they would guard their reading and conduct, placing in their hands interesting good books; if they would hold before them as those who are great and noble, not the passing politician, not the master of wealth, but the consecrated missionary of the cross, they would see their sons and their daughters led in that direction and the church well supplied with ministers and missionaries. The greatest preparation does not come, as a rule, in the few years of college or in the theological seminary, but at the mother's side and under the father's instruction and inspiration.

READY FOR A LARGER SERVICE

If one is fitted to be called to a larger service he should first show his interest and ability where he is. Timothy was known to be a Christian worker at home. In his home city of Lystra and even as far as Iconium he had earned a splendid reputation.

Sometimes men advocate the reversal of this principle. Sometimes the advice is given, give the man a position of honor who is not interested. In that way you get him started to work. You may, but if you place him in a position of responsibility where the guidance and teaching of others is concerned you run a great risk. Do you operate upon such a principle in your business? Do you promote the employee who is irregular in his work? Do you give a larger salary and more responsibility to the man who takes little interest in your work? You know that such methods would likely bankrupt a man in a short time. The same principle carries over into the religious field. It is the devout, earnest, energetic Christian who should be promoted to an office of greater responsibility, or a place of leadership in the church; and if the church reverses this principle she does so at the peril of her growth and steadfastness.

A REMARKABLE PARTY

The group of three starting on to Iconium and to regions beyond constituted a party remarkably well fitted to bear the Gospel to both old and new fields. Paul and Silas were Hebrews, though both seem to have been Roman citizens. Timothy was the son of a Greek father and Jewish mother. Paul also had Greek training. Therefore, there were in the missionary party, Jew, Greek and Roman, a group of men well fitted to bear the Gospel to the various parts of the great Roman Empire. The brethren at Iconium knew and loved Timothy, and this would add to their interest in Paul and his second missionary journey.

THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDING

Paul had been led of the Spirit in the first instance as he set out as a missionary. Under that guidance, up to the present time, Paul was led to stop and preach in almost every important city and province through which he passed. On this second journey his plan had been to visit the churches which had been established on the first journey. As it seems, he was not permitted to complete that work until the Spirit led him elsewhere. Paul was evidently perplexed for a time concerning his future field of work. The Spirit's guidance may have been by some providence which closed the door for the time to the various fields into which Paul desired to enter. He may have been guided by a voice from on high; as to the method which the Spirit used we are not told.

The missionaries were led to pass through the provinces of Phrygia and Galatia. As they passed by the province of Mysia, they desired to turn north into Bithynia, but the Spirit forbade them to go there. Therefore, without pausing to preach in any of the cities of that region they went on to the western coast to Troas. As we read the record today, knowing as we do the sequel, we can understand why the Spirit led them as He did. But in those days, as they journeyed on past cities and provinces which were ignorant of the Gospel, when they desired to pause for a while and preach to the people, their faith must have been severely tried. They did not understand what was in view for them or why they were not permitted to preach in the various provinces through which they passed.

AT ASIA'S WESTERN COAST

As Paul and his company neared Troas, when they came down the valley and toward the plains, Timothy would probably remark that he had never seen such a wonderful city as this great Roman seaport. Great walls with many towers surrounded the city. The great marble stadium glittered in the light of the setting sun. A great aqueduct ran over the plain carrying water from the slopes of Mt. Ida which lay on their left. This water was supposed to have remarkable healing powers. Timothy would probably recall a story that his fathers had often spoken about, since all true Greeks loved the epic of Homer, which told of the great armies of the Greeks and Trojans being marched in a fearful battle. He would be reminded that the siege continued for year after year about the towers of Ilium for the sake of Helen, and of the great Achilles the warrior-hero who killed Hector of Troy in battle.

But Timothy had already learned to admire Paul more than Achilles, and we who know more of Paul than Timothy did at that time, know that on that day there walked on the plains of Troy a nobler and greater leader than Achilles. Paul was not so foolish as Alexander had been, to put on the armor of Achilles in order that he might be clothed with his spirit, for Paul had already put on a coat of armor which covered him from head to foot and which meant far more to him than the armor of Achilles could possibly mean. He had the sword of the Spirit, the breast-plate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, and above all he had taken the shield of faith wherewith he was able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

At Troy there was a physician who, it appears had come from the great city of Philippi. His name was Luke. One day while the three missionaries were in Troy they evidently met Luke. Whether Paul had called him on a professional visit, or whether in some other way he had come in contact with the missionaries and had learned the Gospel we do not know. At any rate, the change of the pronoun in the tenth verse, from “they” to “we,” indicates that Luke was with Paul from that time through much of this journey. Whether Luke was a worshipper of Jesus Christ before this time, or whether he worshipped Aesculapius, the Greek god of healing, we do not know. One thing we know, that he was not long with Paul until he became a follower of the Lord Jesus. It is to him more than any other that we are indebted for the record of the great apostle, which comprises the major part of one of the greatest books the world has ever seen.

GOD’S CALL AND OUR RESPONSE

One would have thought that after that long weary tramp of over six hundred miles Paul would have been so weary that it would have been impossible to awaken him during the night. But Paul was never too weary to listen to the voice of God. That night he saw a vision. Aside from the time of his conversion, it was perhaps the most important vision which he ever saw. He saw “**a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us**” (16:9). This has since been one of the greatest missionary slogans of the ages.

They agreed that the vision was the call of God pleading with them to cross the Aegean and to go over to Philippi and onward, bearing the glad tidings of the Gospel of Christ. They responded at once and going down to the harbor of Troas, they secured passage on a coasting vessel, which when it had lifted anchor, was rowed out beyond the great granite piers of the harbor, and as its sail was spread went rocking out into the Aegean sea. After stopping over night at Samothracia, they came the next day to Neapolis, the seaport of Philippi, when Lo! they were on a new continent, and more truly than any before had ever been, foreign missionaries!

The Holy Spirit never grows weary. He never ceases to make progress. He leads ever onward. He leads on to new places and at times when man would think it impossible to go forward. God’s call should always guide the path of the Christian. These missionaries heard the call. It was to an unexplored field, but they did not decline, they did not hesitate to go. God’s call ought always to receive first attention. It may be that friends will urge us to refuse to accept. It may be that there seems to be great need elsewhere, as there was in Asia. All other inclinations ought to be laid aside and we should heed the call of God. We should go at His bidding. The call may be to give up a lucrative position for trial and sacrifice. This seems to have been true of Luke.

There was an opportunity, even in that day, for a physician to make a handsome living. Luke did not refuse to go with Paul. There is a large place for physicians on the mission field. They can find openings which others cannot secure. Because men of ability, training and talents do not go, multitudes are languishing for the Gospel. Millions are going down to eternal death.

One of the missionaries of the Southern Presbyterian church tells the following affecting story, showing the terrible neglect of Christians in the homeland in sending the Gospel to the poor people in Africa who have lived so long in darkness. Some years ago two men from the northwestern part of the Transvaal traveled about seven hundred miles to work at Port Elizabeth. While working they attended a Wesleyan night school. They were both converted, baptized and joined the church. When they were ready to return to their own people they asked the missionary if he would not send a teacher to their country. They said they felt as little children and unable to teach their people the “good news.”

The missionary promised he would do his best and would send the first available man. Time passed by, missionaries were few, and each one seemed needed elsewhere more than there. After twenty-five years a young man by the name of Lowe was passing through the district to open up a new work under the Wesleyans. The people came thronging out to meet him with shouts and excitement so that he was in doubt whether it meant peace or war.

Through his interpreter he asked the cause of the demonstration. He thus learned the story of the two men who had been at Port Elizabeth. “We knew God would send us a missionary,” they said with deep emotion. “All these years we have been praying for a teacher to come and every day we have watched this trail for him. We knew he would come, and now he is here.” Their delight knew no bounds.

He found that the huts were unusually clean and comfortable and that all the women were neatly and decently dressed in calico. He found that the men and boys had been taught to read and write and that they had kept the Lord’s Day, and that they had refrained from having more than one wife. It was a Christian village.

There Bibles were literally worn out. The remnants of them had to be tied up in handkerchiefs to keep them together. They knew the pages which they loved by heart. They asked for new Bibles which had larger print because their eyes were getting dim. They had seen the missionary whom they knew God would send and now their hearts were glad. They returned grateful thanks for His loving kindness to them. We know there are millions in darkness, and yet how slow are we to respond. May we not wait until their eyes grow dim with watching, or what is worse, until they go to the grave without having found the light of life.

CLOSED AND OPEN DOORS

A closed door temporarily may mean an open door eventually. The door was closed to these missionaries in Asia. It was opened to them in Europe. God was sending His servants with His message to the distant parts of the world. He was preparing Paul to take the Gospel to Rome and the very throne of the Caesars.

Even western Asia possibly received the Gospel more quickly because the Gospel was taken into more distant fields. Not many years after that there were flourishing churches in Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Philadelphia, Laodicea and other cities.

There are fields which seem closed today. It may be that the Lord has more in store for those fields though they were not providentially closed at the present time. It may be that the church is not entering the doors which are open - yes we know that in many cases this is true. May God give the church a new vision! May she not only hear the men of heathen nations calling, "**Come over into Macedonia, and help us,**" but may she like the early missionary band, recognize in it the call of God and go by "**a straight course**" over to take them the Gospel. May her sons, her daughters, her money, her strength and her energy be consecrated to take them the good news of the saving love of Jesus Christ before they shall go down to a dark and hopeless eternity!

“It is nothing to you, O ye Christians,
That millions of beings today,
In the heathen darkness of China,
Are rapidly passing away?
They have never heard the story
Of the loving Lord who saves,
And ‘fourteen hundred every hour
Are sinking to Christless graves.’
Can you say you have naught to do?
Millions in China are dying unsaved;
And is it nothing to you?

Is it nothing to you, O ye Christians,
That in India’s far-away land
There are thousands of people pleading
For the touch of a Saviour’s hand?
They are groping and trying to find Him,
And although He is ready to save,
Eight hundred precious souls each hour
Sink into Christless graves.

“Is it nothing to you, O ye Christians,
Can you say you have naught to do?
Millions in India dying unsaved!
And is it nothing to you?

Is it nothing to you, O ye Christians,
That Africa walks in the night?
That Christians at home deny them
The blessed Gospel light?
The cry goes up this morning
From a broken-hearted race of slaves,
And seven hundred every hour

Sink into Christless graves.
Is it nothing to you, O ye Christians,
Will ye say we have naught to do?
Millions in Africa dying unsaved,
And is it nothing to you?"

QUESTIONS
(Acts 15:40-41; 16:1-10)

1. Who composed the missionary band on this second journey?
2. From what place did they start?
3. Through what provinces and in what direction did they go?
4. Show how Paul and Silas were well suited for the work?
5. What valuable missionary joined the band at Lystra?
6. What evidence that Timothy had been a home missionary before he became a foreign missionary?
7. What is said of the growth of the churches which were visited?
8. Why did Paul advise Timothy to conform with the rite of circumcision?
9. Where had Timothy gotten his theological training? What lesson for us?
10. Where did Paul and his company desire to go? Where did the Spirit lead them?
11. What other member was evidently added to the company of missionaries at Troas?
12. About how far had they journeyed when they came to Troas?
13. Does Paul manifest any hesitation about going forward on this account?
14. What means did God use to call the missionaries forward?
15. Why was the entrance into Macedonia a decidedly forward step?
16. How long did it take the missionaries to decide to obey the call?
17. What lesson may we learn from this?
18. In what way does God guide missionaries today?
19. If there is a closed door temporarily need we be discouraged? Why?
20. Is our missionary program large enough today?

~ end of chapter 27 ~

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