

### Second Apostolic Journey

Acts 15:35–16:3

Paul and Barnabas had finished their first apostolic journey and settled back into the church at Antioch. While they were gone, kingdom believers from the Hebrew church in Jerusalem came to Antioch to encourage the Body of Christ believers to follow the Law and become circumcised. This caused quite an uproar within the church, and they were quite concerned about what they were being told from these believers out of Jerusalem. With the prodding of the assembly, and by the command of the Holy Spirit, Paul, along with Barnabas, went to the church at Jerusalem to defend the message that he had been preaching. At the end of their contentious and argumentative meeting, Paul was given the right hand of fellowship by the leadership of the Hebrew church, fully acknowledging Paul's apostleship and message.

Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch bringing with them representatives of the Hebrew church, Judas and Silas. They read a letter from the leaders of the Hebrew church which apologized for members of their assembly causing so much trouble, and made it clear that they were not required to follow the Law, obviously bowing to what Paul had been telling them about his Gospel of Grace. They also warned them not to get involved in any form of idol worship. The church rejoiced at the reading of the letter and the words of encouragement from the prophets Judas and Silas.

With that issue settled, Paul stayed in Antioch with Barnabas and Silas for quite a few days. There was a gap of approximately two years between journeys one and two, so perhaps a year had passed since Paul returned from his Jerusalem meeting to when he desired to return to the churches he visited earlier. Because of a sharp disagreement with Barnabas over bringing John Mark with them, Paul chose Silas to be his traveling companion. His mission was to strengthen the churches.

#### **First stop—Turkey**

Paul and Silas first traveled through Syria and Cilicia, and probably visited Paul's hometown of Tarsus. They continue on to Derbe and Lystra where they meet up with Timothy. Timothy had a good reputation, and Paul wanted him to travel with them. However, even though Timothy was Jewish (his mother was a Jew), he had never been circumcised. Paul stipulated that he must become circumcised if he were to journey with them.

This brings up a big question about why Paul would do that. Just one chapter ago, Paul brought Titus with him to Jerusalem to defend his teaching that the Gentiles did not need to be put under the Law, including circumcision. Titus was an example for all the leaders of the church in Jerusalem that a believer did not need to be circumcised in this Dispensation of Grace. Now, a couple of years later, Paul wants Timothy to be circumcised. Did Paul change his mind about the importance of being circumcised?

Titus and Timothy are actually demonstrations of the liberty we have in Christ in this dispensation. There were actually two different reasons for why Paul did what he did. Titus was not circumcised because Paul was making a doctrinal statement to the Hebrew church. It strengthened his argument that it was no longer necessary for believers to follow the Law. Titus established that a believer was no longer required to demonstrate his faith by adhering to the Mosaic Law, as James demands, through the Holy Spirit, of Israel (James 2:14–26). This is in contrast to the Kingdom believers who were saved under the Gospel of the Kingdom. If they did not do the works demanded by God to prove their faith, then they did not have a genuine faith. That all changed with the apostle Paul.

Timothy, on the other hand, was circumcised, not for doctrinal issues, but for the furtherance of the ministry. If the Jews to whom Paul was ministering found out that Timothy was not circumcised, they

would treat him like a Gentile. The message of the gospel would fall on deaf ears because they wouldn't listen to what a Gentile has to say. Timothy's circumcision was so that they would not be an offense to the Jews (1 Corinthians 9:19–23). Paul was doing what was necessary so as not to hinder the dissemination of the gospel.

Many churches today try to follow Paul's example by doing everything possible to not offend the world. This, unfortunately, is carried to an extreme, leading to a watered down, or perverted message. Paul never compromised the message to avoid offending anyone. This can be seen by how many times he was beaten, whipped, or imprisoned for what he was teaching. Most churches today measure success by how many people are attending, or how much they are giving, and they accomplish this by preaching a message that is non-offensive, and often non-biblical.

### **Man from Macedonia**

As they continue westward, it is interesting to see how the Lord guides them to go exactly where He wants them to go. They are first forbidden to go into the region of Asia, modern-day southwestern Turkey. The seven churches listed in Revelation are located in that region. They were also stopped by the Holy Spirit from going into the northern region of Bithynia. They had no other choice but to continue westward until they came to the city of Troas, a city on the far western coast of modern-day Turkey on the Aegean Sea.

While in Troas, God continues to guide them by giving Paul a vision of a man from Macedonia pleading with Paul to come over to Macedonia and help them. Paul understood that it was God leading through this vision to travel to the area of Macedonia (northern Greece) and preach the Gospel.

Many Christians use this account as their guide to determine what God's will is for their life. They call this their Macedonian call. They claim that just as Paul had learned to hear the Spirit of God, that we too need to learn to hear what the Spirit is saying to us as He gives us guidance. They talk about needing to learn to hear the Spirit, as if the Spirit isn't capable of clearly and distinctly telling a person what He wants them to do, if that were the way God operated today. People who are straining to hear what the Spirit says usually mistake their own voice whispering their own desires into their ear as words coming from God.

By studying this account, we can learn several things. We see that Paul had his agenda laid out according to what he thought was best. There is nothing wrong with making plans. However, in Paul's case, when God had a specific destination, He clearly intervened. This shows that Paul normally had a certain level of freedom to decide where he would go and how long he would stay. This freedom is demonstrated a number of times, and it is especially interesting to note what happened on his third apostolic journey as recorded in 2 Corinthians 2:12–13. Here, Paul came back to Troas and there was a door of opportunity for him to preach the gospel there. But because he was so concerned about the whereabouts of Titus, he continued on into the region of Macedonia, ignoring the door of opportunity in Troas. In this case, he had the free will to go where he felt he needed to go. He could have taken advantage of this open door if he desired to do so. An open door in the Bible is nothing more than an opportunity that can be taken or ignored.

We can also see that Paul did not determine God's will by a feel in his heart that the Holy Spirit wanted him to go into Macedonia. When God communicated to Paul, it was always perfectly clear what God wanted him to do. Feelings and inner urges were never a part of discovering what God's will was. Today, God communicates to us exclusively through Scripture (Ephesians 1:8–9). Here are some additional examples of Paul exercising his free will in deciding what he was going to do: 1 Corinthians 16:3–6; 1 Thessalonians 3:1–2; Titus 3:12.

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