

Paul Has A Vision

“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.”

—Acts 16: 9, New American Standard Bible

THE DIVINE ORDER AND

ultimate purpose in preaching the Truth and making known the invitation for the heavenly calling is shown by the manner in which the Apostle Paul’s ministry was being directed by our Lord Jesus. This was manifest to the faithful followers of our Lord Jesus whose hearts had been opened to the special

invitation during this present Gospel Age to share as members of the spiritual body of Christ in our Lord’s future kingdom. We will consider some of the remarkable events that were taking place at that time, and that immediately preceded the vision given to Paul.

FORBIDDEN BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Luke, the historian, was a companion to the apostle. He carefully recorded the unusual circumstances that eventually led to what Paul saw and heard as a result of the Lord’s direct intervention in his ministry. He writes, “They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been

forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.”—Acts 16:6-8, *NASB*

It is apparent from the scriptural account that Paul’s intentions were to preach the message of Christ to as many prospective brethren in Asia Minor, Phrygia, Galatia, Bithynia and wherever else he could possibly reach. However, we learn that in some manner that is not explained to us, the Spirit of Jesus did not allow him to continue with his ministerial plans. Although there were no details given to him at that time, he would soon receive a vision as to what our Lord’s instructions were. He would learn that there were some of the Lord’s people in Macedonia, and they were waiting anxiously to hear about the heavenly call as it was being proclaimed by the apostle to the class of believers in Christ Jesus.

DIRECTED BY THE LORD

It is important to realize from this brief record that the Gospel message was not to be preached everywhere indiscriminately in an effort to find hearing ears for the Truth. This dramatically indicates that the Truth work was being carefully directed by the Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus. Paul had no way of knowing that there was a serious need for him to go to Macedonia and to minister to them. This redirection of his service to the Truth was revealed to him only when he and his companions had reached the western side of Asia Minor, and had arrived at the port city of Troas. It

was there that he experienced the vision, and where he saw a man of Macedonia entreating him to come there to help them.

At a later time, the apostle was again permitted to go into the other areas of Galatia, Phrygia, and Bithynia, but at this particular time it was necessary for him to help those who were then being prepared by God to receive the invitation of the heavenly call, and to become members of the body of Christ.

COME AND HELP US

Luke's record confirms, "A vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us." (Acts 16:9) The apostle wasted no time in preparing himself to make the journey as requested. "And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days."—vss.10-12

GOD'S WILL MANIFEST

There are various instances in the Scriptures where certain servants of God received visions, some of which were given for assurance of Divine favor. On one occasion, we read, "After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." (Gen. 15:1) At another

time it is recorded, “Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac. And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I. And he said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.”—Gen. 46:1-4

At other times, visions were more specific and gave direction in the doing of God’s will. This had occurred earlier in connection with the Apostle Paul’s experiences. After the glorified Jesus had appeared to Saul of Tarsus, Saul had a vision in which he saw a man named Ananias lay his hands upon him so that he might recover his sight. (Acts 9:10-12) In the context of this same chapter, we read about Ananias being directed to the very house where Saul was staying in Damascus. (vss. 11-19) When the apostle later went to Corinth, he preached to both Jews and Gentiles; but, when opposition arose among them, he decided to preach only to the Gentiles. (Acts 18:1-6) God spoke to reassure him. “Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.”—vss. 9,10

THE JOURNEY TO MACEDONIA

Having received the special instructions from the Lord, Paul and his travelling companions prepared

to leave for Macedonia. (Acts 16:10-12) From the record, we learn that Luke accompanied the apostle on his journey. In proof of this, we note in the above scripture text where the historian states, “we endeavored to go” (vs. 10), “we came with a straight course” (vs. 11) and “we were in that city abiding certain days.” (vs. 12) From this point in time it becomes apparent that Luke became a more active member of the apostle’s missionary activities, and the Heavenly Father wanted him to record Paul’s ministry.

When they arrived in Philippi—the chief city of Macedonia—they found that there was no synagogue, but instead there was an open park area by a river where the Israelites could gather for prayer. It was not unusual for Jews to use such places for devotional services. A similar place was used for prayer by Jesus when he was in Galilee. “It came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.”—Luke 6:12

HEARTS WERE OPENED

Paul and the others made their way to this riverside gathering place on the Sabbath Day and found certain women of Israel assembled there for worship. We read, “A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.”—Acts 16:14

We are immediately impressed by the fact that Lydia’s heart had already been opened by God. He is the one who opens the heart to understand and

appreciate his word of Truth, and Lydia was one of those who had especially been seeking him. She and other members of her family had formed the nucleus of a small ecclesia in her city. "When she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us."—vs. 15

Being given to much hospitality and no doubt yearning to learn more about the Truth, Lydia invited Paul and his companions to stay in her house during their visit at Philippi. Paul was hesitant to accept her kind invitation, not wanting to impose upon her, but she encouraged them and opened her home to them. In the meantime, the apostle continued to go to the place by the river to preach to others who were seeking knowledge of the heavenly call and to learn more about having a place in the body of Christ. We are not told how many interested people responded to the apostle's message, nor their names.

WOMAN WITH A SPIRIT

As Paul walked to the place of prayer one day, he was met by a woman who had powers of divination. She was able to foretell events because she was possessed by a familiar spirit, and her masters had profited a great deal from her special powers. (Acts 16:16) "The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus (Continued on page 35)

(Continued from page 31) Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.”—vss. 17,18

The spirit quickly obeyed the apostle, thereby making this maidservant of little use to her owners since she had lost her peculiar powers. The masters of the slave girl were so angry that they seized Paul and Silas. They took them before the magistrates of the city, and accused them of creating a disturbance, and of preaching customs that were unlawful for Romans to observe.

“The multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.” (vss. 22-24) These two faithful servants of God were not able to sleep that night because of the pain of their wounds. They had been thrown into the ‘inner prison’ or dungeon which was usually reserved for the vilest of criminals. There they were confined by stocks which further added to their discomfort.

A MIRACLE AT MIDNIGHT

Luke records, “At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one’s bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his

sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.”—vss. 25-28

The jailor had been awakened by all of this commotion, and saw the open prison doors and assumed that all the prisoners had escaped. Fearful of the consequences, he drew his sword and was ready to kill himself. But Paul encouraged him to not harm himself. All the prisoners were still there, no doubt due to Paul and Silas who had convinced them all to stay. The jailor asked for lamps; and then in gratitude fell down before Paul and Silas, subsequently leading them out of the prison and into his home, which was probably nearby the prison.

THE JAILOR AND HIS HOUSEHOLD

The jailor then asked what he must do to be saved. Paul and Silas answered him by saying, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” (vs. 31) The jailor must have overheard an earlier discussion between these two servants of God and some of the other prisoners on the matter of being saved. Otherwise it is not likely that he would have asked this particular question.

The apostle and Silas convinced the jailor and his entire family to accept the provisions of the heavenly call. “They spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.”—vss. 32-34

BLESSINGS AT MACEDONIA

Paul and his companions were surely rejoicing in the wonderful manner in which they had been directed to make their pilgrimage to Macedonia. They were richly blessed by travelling to Philippi where they received Lydia and her household's warm welcome. They were again unexpectedly blessed in their experience with the jailor and his family who desired to know the Truth and God's wonderful plan of salvation for the human family.

The next morning the magistrates of Philippi sent word to the jailor to release Paul and Silas, but Paul refused to leave. He contended that he was a Roman citizen who had been beaten and imprisoned unlawfully, and that he had been condemned without a court trial. There was great fear on the part of the magistrates when they heard this, and they went to entreat Paul and Silas to leave their city in peace.

The scriptural record described what happened. "The serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed." (vss. 38-40) The two faithful servants of God eventually complied, but not before they had finished their preaching activity in that particular city. The jailor and his family were now new members of the congregation, along with other brethren who are mentioned by Luke, but not named.

THE CHURCH AT PHILIPPI

We learn a little more about some of these brethren and their names through the letter that the apostle wrote to the church at Philippi. It was written when he was a prisoner at Rome, and of which he makes mention. "So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace [Caesar's court, *Marginal Translation*], and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."—Phil. 1:13,14

His letter included greetings to all of the bishops and deacons who were at Philippi. (vs. 1) Paul said to them, "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you." (vss. 2,3) Paul referred to some of the brethren, and we thus learn who a few of them were. He said, "Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved. I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life."—Phil. 4:1-3

THE SISTERS AT PHILIPPI

It is interesting to note that Paul included the names of some of the more prominent sisters who were members of the ecclesia at Philippi. He evidently singled them out because of his deep appreciation for their loving spirit for the Lord, as well

as for their special and untiring service to the other brethren in the ecclesia. During Paul's day, the general position and respect for women in Macedonia was quite different than that found in other places where he had visited. At that time, monuments had been erected to women by public bodies in Macedonia. As well, women were also permitted to hold property.

When Paul and his companions arrived in Philippi, we learn from Luke's record that they first sat down in the park area to speak with a group of women who had gathered there for prayer on the Sabbath. (Acts 16:13) It was Lydia who soon separated herself from the rest of the women and identified herself. She was one of the sisters whose heart the Lord Jesus had especially prepared for the apostle's arrival. (vs. 14) Later on, it is recorded that it was to Lydia's home that the apostle and his companions went, after they had been released from prison. It was also from there that they departed Philippi, and set out on their way to Thessalonica.—vs. 40

It is suggested, therefore, that the apostle, when writing his letter to the church at Philippi, included a special greeting in which he said, 'I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel.' This may have been addressed to Lydia, and he wanted to be especially remembered to her in his letter written to the congregation there. We note that Paul also sent Christian greetings to several of the sisters, and included their names when he sent his letter to the church at Rome. (Rom. 16:1-15) We learn that the apostle had dictated his thoughts to Tertius who in

turn wrote the letter, and who also sent his greetings to the brethren at Rome.—vs. 22

EPAPHRODITUS

In this letter to the church at Philippi, Paul also remembered Epaphroditus. He was a very dear brother, and had made the long journey to Rome with a gift to the apostle from the Philippian brethren. He reveals the great love and appreciation that he had for this brother in Christ and said, “Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.”—Phil. 4:14-18

RECOLLECTIONS OF MACEDONIA

Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke had spent many weeks preaching the Truth and helping to establish the ecclesia at Philippi. A congregation had been started there, and the brethren were learning much about the heavenly call and other important subjects in relation to the wonderful Word of God.

This is revealed to us when he wrote to the church at Thessalonica. Paul spoke of their also having assisted the new brethren in Christ who were at Macedonia. “Ye became followers of us, and

of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit: So that we were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.” (I Thess. 1:6-8) The apostle again said, “Yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.”—chap. 2:1,2

While Paul and his companions were at Thessalonica they found a synagogue, which they attended on the Sabbaths. There he reasoned with the Jews from the Scriptures for a few weeks. (Acts 17:1,2) His preaching was fruitful in encouraging several of them, both men and women, of the heavenly call and the wonderful words of Truth. They soon began meeting together as an ecclesia in Jason’s home. (vs. 5) The message concerning the wonderful invitation of the heavenly calling was being sent out as designed by our loving Heavenly Father for his ultimate blessing of the whole human creation, and the promise that all of the willing and obedient will be lifted up to the joys of Christ’s kingdom. ■

Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.”—Proverbs 30:5