

The Gospel Spreads to Macedonia

*“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. And
after he had seen
the vision,
immediately we
endeavoured to go
into Macedonia,
assuredly
gathering that the
Lord had called us
for to preach the
gospel unto them.”*
—Acts 16:9,10

THE BOOK OF ACTS WAS

written by the physician, Luke, one of the many Greek Gentiles called by God. Up to this point he had described the events of the Early Church in the third person. In the preceding verses of Acts chapter 16, Luke tells how Paul, Silas, and Timothy had traveled through the land of Asia Minor. Apparently, it was about the time that Paul received the vision cited in our opening text to come to Macedonia, that Luke joined him, Silas, and Timothy, because Luke then switches to the first person “we” in his narrative.

From this time forward, Luke became a very active part of Paul's missionary work in the search for God's people. "Immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia," Luke writes. "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."—vss. 11,12

WORK IN PHILIPPI

On the Sabbath, after Paul and his three companions had arrived at Philippi, they went to a place outside the city by a riverside where devout women were gathered together to pray. (vs. 13) It was not unusual for Jews to use such places for devotional services. As Paul began to speak to the women, Luke records, "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."—vs. 14

What depth of meaning is shown in the statement that Lydia's heart was opened by the Lord. He is the one who opens the heart of those who desire to understand his word of Truth. Lydia was one being sought by God. She, as well as her family, were baptized at the river, and formed the nucleus of the new church in Philippi. Being very hospitable, and no doubt yearning to learn more about the Truth, Lydia entreated Paul and his companions to lodge in her house, to which they agreed.—vs. 15

DAMSEL FREED FROM EVIL SPIRIT

Paul continued going to the riverside outside of Philippi, speaking with others gathered to pray. One day, as he walked, Paul had a most peculiar

experience. A female servant, who had powers to foretell events because of being possessed by an evil spirit, met Paul and those with him. (Acts 16:16) Her masters profited a great deal from her powers, and because of this she was considered a valuable property. As she followed Paul's party she cried out, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation." (vs. 17) This continued to occur for several days—each time Paul would be seen by her in the town.

Finally, Paul, being upset by her behavior, commanded the evil spirit to come out of the woman. The spirit obeyed him, thereby making this maid-servant of little use to her owners, since she had lost her special powers. The masters of the slave were so incensed they seized Paul and Silas and took them before the local magistrates, accusing them of disturbing the city and of preaching customs unlawful for Romans to observe. (vss. 18-21) The large crowd that had assembled to observe the proceedings agreed with the accusations. Consequently, the magistrates had Paul and Silas beaten, and then commanded that they be put into the "inner prison"—its most secure and dark section—and have their feet fastened in stocks.—vss. 22-24

MIRACULOUS RELEASE FROM PRISON

Paul and Silas, perhaps unable to sleep from the pain of their wounds, began to pray and to sing hymns, which was a powerful witness to the other prisoners who heard them. As they did this, there was suddenly an earthquake, so severe that it shook the prison to its very foundations, broke open the prison doors, and loosened the chains that bound

the prisoners. The jailer, awakened by all this commotion, saw the open prison doors and assumed that all the prisoners had escaped. Fearful of the consequences, he drew his sword to kill himself. However, Paul cried in a loud voice that he should not harm himself, because all the prisoners were still there. This was due, no doubt, to the leadership of Paul and Silas, and the great witness given by their prayers and singing of praises to God.—vss. 25-28

The jailer asked for lights, and upon seeing all the prisoners still there, fell down in humble gratitude before Paul and Silas. Convinced that there was no risk they would escape, the jailer led them out and took them to his home, which probably was next to the prison. He then asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul told him, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” (vss. 29-31) This scripture is often quoted by Christians as the formula for obtaining salvation—simply believe in Jesus. However, the jailor must have overheard an earlier discussion between Paul and Silas and the prisoners on the matter of being saved, as well as the prayers they uttered, or he would not have asked the question in the way he did.

As a further indication that more than mere belief in Jesus was required for salvation, a detailed study of “the word of the Lord” and God’s plan for salvation was presented by Paul and Silas. (vs. 32) This resulted in the jailer and “all his house” accepting the full message of the Gospel. After they had dressed the flogging wounds of Paul and Silas, the jailer and his family were all baptized, following which everyone in the house stayed for a meal

and fellowship. The occasion was a joyous one, as they spoke together of God's wonderful plan until the next day.—Acts 16:33,34

In the morning, the magistrates sent word to the jailer to release Paul and Silas. However, Paul refused to leave, rightly contending that he and Silas were Roman citizens who had been beaten and imprisoned unlawfully, not having been convicted by a court trial. There was great fear on the part of the magistrates when they heard this, knowing that they had put Paul and Silas in prison illegally. They went personally and entreated Paul and Silas to leave the city. The two eventually complied, but not before they finished their work in Philippi.—vss. 35-40

CONGREGATION AT PHILIPPI

The jailer and his family were now members of the ecclesia at Philippi, along with other brethren who are mentioned by Luke, but not named. Later, in his epistle, Paul identifies some of these. He speaks of Euodias, Syntyche, Clement, and "those women which laboured with me," a reference which undoubtedly includes Lydia. He lovingly spoke of all "my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life." (Phil. 4:2,3) We also hear of Epaphroditus, a Greek brother from Philippi who journeyed to Rome with a gift for Paul.—vs. 18

Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke had spent much time in Philippi. A congregation had been started, and the brethren were learning much about God's Word. Even so, they needed further help. Luke was left with the church at Philippi to assist them. We believe this to be the case, since Luke once again resumes the use of the third person in his writing.

Later, he returns to the first person, when Paul stops again at Philippi during his third missionary journey. (Acts 20:5,6) Thereafter, it appears from the record that Luke continued with Paul to Jerusalem, and then on to Rome.

ON TO THESSALONICA

Paul, Silas, and Timothy once again went on their way, their next destination in Macedonia being Thessalonica. In that city, Paul knew someone whom he referred to as a kinsman, or fellow countryman, named Jason, who opened his home to the travelers. Paul mentions Jason later, saying, “Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you.”—Rom. 16:21

At Thessalonica, they found a synagogue, which they went to on three successive Sabbaths. There Paul reasoned with the Jews from the Scriptures. His preaching was fruitful in convincing several men and women, both Jews and Greeks, of his doctrine. (Acts 17:1-4) Soon they began meeting together as an ecclesia in Jason’s home. Paul’s success, however, was resented by unbelieving Jews, and as time went on they enlisted the aid of mischief-makers in the town to harm Paul, forcing him and Silas into hiding. Going to the home of Jason to lay hands on Paul and Silas, and finding them gone, they took Jason and several other brethren captive and brought them before the city authorities. They accused them of disturbing the peace and threatening the sovereignty of Caesar by claiming no other king than Jesus. Although Jason and the brethren were released, it was quite evident that it would be unwise for Paul to remain. Therefore, he,

Silas, and Timothy were sent under cover of night to the neighboring town of Berea.—Acts 17:5-10

“MORE NOBLE” BEREANS

In Berea, Paul found the Jews in the synagogue much more responsive to the message. Apparently, their leaders had taught them to study and prove their beliefs by the Scriptures. This prepared them to consider Paul’s teaching with a sincere desire to learn. The Bible record commends them with these words: “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.”—vss. 11,12

Today, we often hear the terms, Berean Bible Students, or Berean studies. These names are derived from the noble Jews of Berea, who diligently searched the Scriptures to determine whether that which they were being taught was supported by the Word of God. We should do likewise, as only a “thus saith the Lord” should be considered clear support for any doctrinal teaching. God rewarded the Berean Jews by bringing many of them into the body of Christ. These formed the nucleus of another congregation of the Lord’s people, to which were added Gentiles as well.

Soon, however, the unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica who had previously caused trouble there, heard of the success that Paul, Silas, and Timothy were having in Berea, and came to incite the townspeople against them. Again Paul, who was the main target of their attack, was compelled by the brethren

to leave. They were so concerned about Paul's welfare that they advised him to leave the province of Macedonia by sea and travel to Achaia, or Greece, and the city of Athens.—vss. 13-15

Paul was reluctant to leave these two new congregations at Thessalonica and Berea, as they needed to be further strengthened and established in the faith. He left Silas and Timothy at Berea for that purpose, but soon called them to Athens to assist with the work there. Later, however, we have record that Paul sent Timothy from Athens back to Thessalonica to further establish the brethren in the faith. (I Thess. 3:1,2) Indeed, we can see that the work of searching for God's people was "great, but the labourers . . . few."—Luke 10:2

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS

The remarkable way in which God's Holy Spirit guided the lives of these new brethren becomes evident when we read Paul's epistles to the Thessalonians. Most Bible historians believe he wrote his first letter to them while he was in Greece, either from Athens or Corinth, not long after he had left Macedonia. Reading Paul's letter gives us insight into the fine character of these brethren. "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." (I Thess. 1:2-4) Here we particularly note Paul's reference to their "election of God," signifying to us that the call to be of the "body of Christ" is not an indiscriminate one.

Paul also speaks of how they had turned away from idols to worship the true God. This informs us that the ecclesia was composed mainly of Gentiles, since Jews were not idol worshipers, and, as indicated previously, most of the Jews of Thessalonica had not been receptive to his teachings. Paul's words to these new Gentile brethren were: "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit: So that ye 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. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."—I Thess. 1:5-10

ZEALOUS BRETHREN

The zeal demonstrated by these brethren is surely marvelous to note. They had learned of God's plan in only a matter of months, and under difficult circumstances—as a result of trouble from unbelieving Jews. Yet in a very short time they were preaching to others throughout their province and in other places as well. By doing so they were assisting Paul, and the Lord, in the work of searching for God's

people. Indeed, this was God's way of spreading the message, and would continue to be so throughout the Gospel Age.

Paul continues, saying, "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. For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us."—chap. 2:1-8

SUFFERING FOR CHRIST

Paul desired to see these brethren again, but he could not do so at that time. He recognized that this situation was influenced by the Adversary, saying: "We would have come unto you, even I Paul, . . . but Satan hindered us." (vs. 18) The evil circumstances in Thessalonica did not abate. With Paul gone, the brethren there received the brunt of the persecution. It was as bad for them in Thessalonica as it was in *(Continued on page 36)*

(Continued from page 31) Jerusalem for the brethren residing there.

This situation is made clear by Paul earlier in the chapter, when he wrote: “Ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved.”—I Thess. 2:14-16

PAUL’S CROWN OF REJOICING

These brethren were especially dear to Paul. He further wrote: “We, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. . . . For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.” (vss. 17,19,20) Continuing, Paul says: “Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the Gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith. . . . Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith.”—chap. 3:1,2,7

Thus, at that time, it was not possible for Paul to see these brethren again. It was not until his third missionary journey that Paul visited the churches in Macedonia again. Among those he met at that

time were Aristarchus and Secundus. They were from Thessalonica, and accompanied him after leaving Macedonia for the final time. (Acts 20:4) Little is written of Paul's last visit to Macedonia, but we feel confident that he found the brethren progressing well in the service of the Lord and in their development, thus confirming their "election of God." ■