

Sunday, January 11, 2026 | Missio Dei

Week 6 | Acts 16:1-15 | "Going Intercontinental"

READ: Acts 16:1-15 (ESV)

¹ Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named **Timothy**, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. ² He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. ³ Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and **circumcised** him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were **strengthened** in the faith, and they **increased** in numbers **daily**.

⁶ And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, **having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit** to speak the word in **Asia**. ⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into **Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them**. ⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went **down** to **Troas**. ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately **we** sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called **us** to preach the gospel to them.

¹¹ So, setting sail from Troas, **we** made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to **Philippi**, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. **We** remained in this city some days. ¹³ And on the Sabbath day, **we** went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.

¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named **Lydia**, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. **The Lord opened her heart to pay attention** to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she **prevailed** upon us.

Luke leaves Barnabas and John-Mark behind and focuses on the travels of Paul and Silas. This section is a classic Lukan overview, covering a lengthy period and many miles in only a handful of verses. Please reference the map I've included in your handout as we go along.

Paul travels the *Via Sebaste*, or "Imperial Road," and the narrative passes through almost every



major city along this famous route. Bear in mind that, on a good travel day, a person would cover roughly 15 miles on foot, 20 if pressed, less if the terrain was rugged and/or the weather unfavorable.¹ In light of this, the travel time alone in this section spans at least two months. But considering Paul often had lengthy stays in a variety of cities along the route, it likely took him about half a year to travel from Antioch to Philippi.

But what's truly remarkable about this relatively small portion of Acts is that, by the end of it, Paul will *officially* set foot on a new mainland: *Europe*. And so, for the first time, his missionary

¹ Dunn, James D. G., *Beginning from Jerusalem*, Christianity in the Making (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 2:514.

travels are *international*, spanning two continents.² The gospel transcends borders, reaching all who answer God's call.

This passage is divided into the different legs of Paul's journey:

1.) Vs. 1-5 – The First Leg | 305 miles (15-20 days by foot) | Antioch to Lystra³

Vs. 1-5 – Paul and Silas would've passed through the famed **Cilician Gates**, a natural pass through the Taurus Mountains. This was a notoriously treacherous portion of the *Via Sebaste*, impassible during the winter months and a haven for robbers during the rest of the year.⁴ Paul said that he was frequently in "**danger from robbers**" (2 Cor. 11:25), and given the areas he traversed, it's not surprising.

Once in this region, he meets a young believer, **Timothy**, whose mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, were of Jewish descent (cf. 2 Tim. 1:5), and whose father was a Greek. Paul had likely led him and his mother to the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:2) when he was in Lystra before, sometime between being **mistaken for Hermes** and being **stoned** (cf. Ac. 14:8-19) or maybe on his return trip (cf. Ac. 14:21). Did Paul see something in Timothy? Perhaps. But Luke says, "**He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.**" **Timothy already had a good reputation, something John-Mark lacked.**

Because of his good testimony, Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him on his journey, but there was a problem. Due to his mixed heritage, **Timothy hadn't been circumcised.** The Jews, the very people Paul wanted to reach with the gospel, would've looked down on, and then likely disregarded, anyone who did not follow the customs of the OT. So, Paul circumcised Timothy, "**because of the Jews who were in those places.**"

To be clear, circumcision wasn't necessary for salvation. After all, part of Paul's objective for this missionary journey was to relay the decision reached in Jerusalem regarding how Christ had fulfilled the law, and so things like circumcision and dietary laws were no longer as binding as they once were (cf. Ac. 15:1-35). Paul's reasons for circumcising Timothy were practical, not

² To be clear, there are already Christians in Rome (cf. Ac. 28:14). So, Christianity is already an international movement.

³ Schnabel, Eckhard J., *Early Christian Mission & 2* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), [1056](#), states that Tarsus was 210km (130mi) from Antioch. Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012–2013), 3:2311, states that the distance from Tarsus to Derbe was roughly 150 miles. Youngmo Cho and Hyung Dae Park, *Acts: A New Covenant Commentary*, ed. Michael F. Bird, and Craig Keener, in *New Covenant Commentary Series* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 2:60, states that Derbe was 25 miles from Lystra.

⁴ Schnabel (2004), [1129](#).

theological. When circumcision became a theological issue, he refused—e.g., Titus (cf. Gal. 2:3-5).

So, Paul and Timothy wanted to remove any and all stumbling blocks to the gospel. As I said in week 4, **love limits its liberty for the sake of its loved ones.** Paul says in Philippians 2:3-8,

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Takeaway #1: The **soul-winner** holds **no right** so dear that they will not **relinquish** it for the sake of the gospel.

Speaking on this very topic, Paul tells the church in Corinth regarding the matter of Christian liberty,

“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might **win** more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to **win** Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might **win** those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might **win** those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might **win** the weak. I have become **all** things to **all** people, that by **all** means I might **save some**. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings” (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Paul said these words shortly after pointing out that, though he had every right to be married (cf. 1 Co. 9:5) and to draw a salary from the church (1 Co 9:6-12), he freely relinquished these rights. Why? He says, “I have become **all** things to **all** people, that by **all** means I might **save some**.” Paul remained single and a tentmaker (cf. Ac 18:3) so that he might be more effective in the ministry.

For the true evangelist, Gospel opportunities always take precedence over personal privileges.

Notably, because Paul and his companions were more concerned with reaching the lost for the cause of Christ than asserting their freedoms, Luke tells us, “the churches were **strengthened** in the faith, and they **increased** in numbers **daily**.” Interestingly, Timothy, with his mixed

heritage, is emblematic of Paul's ministry, in which he sought to see both Jews and Gentiles come to Christ.⁵

2.) Vs. 6-10 – The Second Leg | 479 miles (24-32 days by foot) | Lystra to Troas⁶

Vs. 6-8 – Troas was one of the largest cities in this region, with a population of around 100k.⁷ It is situated on the coast of the Aegean Sea, east of Macedonia (aka Greece). The region around Lystra, known as the Anatolian Plateau, is at about 3,700 feet above sea level.⁸ Thus, Luke says they went "*down* [emphasis added] *to Troas*." Interestingly, Troas is about "*10 miles south of the ancient site of Troy*," scene of the Trojan war immortalized by the poet Homer."⁹ Both cities, Troas and Troy, get their names from the Troad plain, wherein they're situated.

Curiously, while en route to Troas, Paul, Silas, and Timothy attempted to go south, into the heart of "*Asia*" (Asia Minor), and then north, into "*Bithynia*." *But both endeavors were thwarted by the Holy Spirit*. With Paul, God the Spirit didn't have the problem he often has with us, where we refuse to talk to those he wants us to. The Spirit had to intervene; otherwise, Paul would get held up, preventing him from being where he wanted him to be

Vs. 9-10 – It must've been perplexing for the Spirit to prevent them from preaching the gospel. However, soon it becomes clear why God did this, when, while in Troas, Paul gets a vision of a man who said, "*Come over to Macedonia and help us*." No doubt the gospel needed to reach Asia and Bithynia, and eventually, it did.¹⁰ But God needed the fellowship elsewhere. The Macedonians needed help more, at least at this time, than those elsewhere. Luke even says they concluded "*that God had called [them] to preach the gospel to them*." *When we follow the Lord, going often proceeds knowing—e.g., the Hall of Faith (cf. Heb 11).*

However, what's interesting about this juncture in Acts is how Luke says, "*And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we [emphasis added] sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us [emphasis added] to preach the gospel to them*." Though Luke has been our narrator since the beginning of Luke 1 through to this very passage, *this is the first time a*

⁵ Bandy, Alan S., *An Illustrated Guide to the Apostle Paul: His Life, Ministry, and Missionary Journeys* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2021), 82.

⁶ Dunn (2009), 2:513–514.

⁷ Bandy (2021), 85.

⁸ Polhill, John B., *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 92.

⁹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "*Troas*," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 2106.

¹⁰ Nearly all the churches mentioned in Revelation, save for Ephesus and Smyrna, which are on the coast, are in the heart of Asia. And 1 Peter, the apostle addresses his letter, "To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pe 1:1). What's more, Paul ends up in Ephesus, the capital of Asia Minor, in Ac. 18:19.

first-person plural pronoun is used. Thus, it was while Paul, Silas, and Timothy were staying in Toras that they first met Luke, who, apparently, joined them on their journey.

Interestingly, Luke says nothing about himself at this point, choosing instead to focus on the mission. But we know from the rest of the NT that Luke stays with Paul to the end of Acts, where he and the apostle are found in Rome (cf. 28:16), and he will be by the apostle's side shortly before he is martyred (cf. 2 Ti 4:11).

Takeaway #2: Christianity is lived in community.

When Paul left Antioch, he left behind Barnabas and John-Mark. But he did not leave alone. Silas joined him, then, shortly after, Timothy, who was, by all intents and purposes, his successor. Timothy spearheaded and guarded the fledgling church in Ephesus and the surrounding areas (cf. 1 Tim. 1:2-3). Then, far away from his hometown and in a region of the world totally unlike his beloved Jerusalem, Paul meets Luke, who arguably became his biographer and, more importantly, a “coworker” with him in the ministry (Phm 23).

And aside from Paul's companions here, Paul names several people who were side-by-side with him in the trenches of ministry. In the book of Romans alone, he mentions nearly 40 individuals who were presumably instrumental in supporting Paul's ministry, five of whom are specifically referred to as “fellow workers” (Ro 16:9, 12, 21).

In his book *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer argues that Christian fellowship is radically different from any other natural attachment. He says,

“Not what a man is in himself as a Christian, his spirituality and piety, constitutes the basis of our community. What determines our brotherhood is what that man is by reason of Christ. Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us. This is true not merely at the beginning, and though in the course of time something else were to be added to our community; it remains so for all the future and to all eternity. I have community with others and I shall continue to have it only through Jesus Christ. The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us. We have one another only through Christ, but through Christ we do have one another, wholly, and for all eternity. That dismisses once and for all every clamorous desire for something more. One who wants more than what Christ has established does not want Christian brotherhood. He is looking for some extraordinary social experience which he has not found elsewhere; he is bringing muddled and impure desires into Christian

brotherhood. Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must *realize* [emphasis added]; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may *participate* [emphasis added].”¹¹

Throughout the Bible, we’re told of the importance of community:

“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (Pr 27:17).

Heb 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ec. 4:9-12).

Paul himself commanded, “Encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” (1 Th 5:11).

If you want to **go fast**, go alone; if you want to **go far**, go together. Longevity isn't a product of our ability, but of the company we keep.

3.) Vs. 11-15 – The Third Leg | 155 miles (3 days by sea) | Troas to Philippi¹²

Vs. 11-12 – Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke set “sail from Troas,” stopping off on the island of “Samothrace,” and lading in the port city “Neapolis,” and then traveling northeast 10 miles to “Philippi.”¹³ This marks the first time the gospel has reached **a new continent: Europe**. The gospel has now gone **intercontinental**.

And as Paul traversed the *Via Sebaste* while in Asia, his feet now walked the *Via Ignatia*, named after the Roman proconsul Gnaios Egnatios, who oversaw its construction from 146BC to 120BC.¹⁴ This route connected the Adriatic and Aegean Seas, making it the most important east-west trade route in the Roman Empire.¹⁵

¹¹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Life Together* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1954), 25-26.

¹² Dunn (2009), 2:513–514.

¹³ Cox, Steven L., “Neapolis,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 952.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Myers, Allen C., “EGNATIAN,” in *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 308.

Luke mentions that Philippi was “a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. **We remained in this city some days.**” Did they meet the man in the vision? It is most likely. We have no reason to doubt that they never met the Macedonian.

Vs. 13 – Not only does this passage occur within a new continent, but this also marks a departure from Paul's routine. Usually, upon reaching a new region, he'd immediately enter a synagogue “**on the Sabbath day.**” Here, however, we're told that Paul, Silas, and Timothy “**went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.**” That the fellowship had to go outside the city limits to find Jews and that, once they found them, they were primarily women implies either that Judaism wasn't accepted by the general populace or, most likely, that **there wasn't a large enough Jewish population to establish a concrete place of worship.** Though there's some disagreement, according to rabbinic teaching, a city needed at least 10 Jewish men to establish a synagogue.¹⁶ Perhaps the man in Paul's vision told him and his friends where to go to find the Jews. At the very least, they were in Philippi for “**some days**” and likely could deduce for themselves where Jews congregated.

Vs. 14 – Coming to the riverside that day was fruitful. Luke says at least one person responded to the gospel: “**Lydia.**”¹⁷ We're told **four** things about her:

- 1.) Lydia was “**from the city of Thyatira,**” which was located in the heart of Asia. As the crow flies, Thyatira was about 300 miles southeast of Philippi. Ironically, Thyatira was part of the very region that Paul had tried to reach earlier, but the Spirit prevented him (cf. 16:6).

Thus, it was while Lydia was a pretty long way from home that God brought her into contact with Paul. As I said in Acts 3, **chance meetings are divine appointments** (cf. Jn 4). In light of God's sovereignty, there is no such thing as a coincidence. **Yes, God turns the hearts of kings like streams of water** (cf. Pro. 21:1), but God is **intimately** involved in the affairs of **individuals**—e.g., Ruth.

- 2.) Lydia was “**a seller of purple goods.**” This shouldn't be surprising considering that Thyatira was renowned for its numerous trade guilds that dealt in textiles—e.g., wool,

¹⁶ Keener (2012–2013), 3:2384.

¹⁷ In Phil. 4:2, Paul addresses two other women, Euodia and Syntyche, urging them to reconcile. Perhaps they were in attendance along with Lydia.

linen, leather, and dyes.¹⁸ No other Asian city had more tradesmen than Thyatira.¹⁹ There were two types of purple fabrics. The most expensive, referred to as “Tyrian Purple,” was dyed from the shells of murex shellfish, and the least expensive, referred to today as “Turkey red,” was derived from the madder plant.²⁰

However, whether it was the more luxurious shell-derived version or the more vegetarian bargain variety, purple was a status symbol and thus a luxury item. Most people could never afford purple-dyed fabrics.²¹ That Lydia was a “*seller* [emphasis added] of purple goods,” and not one who made or dyed purple goods, implies she was a woman of means; she was a career woman.

- 3.) Lydia was already a “*worshiper of God.*” Like the term God-fearer (cf. Ac 10:2, 22; 13:16, 26), those who were said to worship God were followers of the Jewish faith without becoming full proselytes, likely coming from a polytheistic background.²²
- 4.) Luke says, “*The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.*” It is the Lord who opens the hearts of people to receive the word of God (cf. Lu 24:31-32, 45; Ac 13:48; 14:27; 26:18; 17:3). This is why, while it is important to be ready to give an answer of the hope that lies within you, prayer is the most powerful tool for the evangelists. Writing to pastors on the topic of prayer, EM Bounds said,

“Talking to men for God is a great thing, but talking to God for men is greater still. He will never talk well and with real success to men for God who has not learned well how to talk to God for men. More than this, prayerless words in the pulpit and out of it are deadening words.”²³

Evangelism must first begin on one's knees; otherwise, it is bound to fail.

¹⁸ Kennedy, Titus, *The Essential Archaeological Guide to Bible Lands* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2023), 334–336.

¹⁹ Keener (2012–2013), 3:2395, quoting Ramsay, “More trad-guilds are known in Thyatira than in any other Asian city.”

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:2396.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 3:2401, “The wealthy paid more than a thousand denarii for a pound of the finest Tyrian wool doubly stained (though just more than a third of that price for less valuable purple hues). An entertainer might steal a purple-dyed napkin to sell it for much money. In Diocletian’s later maximum-priced edict, purple silk sold for more than twelve times the price of white silk, and roughly two thousand times the price of wool from Tarentum.”

²² Bock, Darrell L., *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 207), 534.

²³ Bounds, Edward Mackendree, *Power Through Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962), 27.

Vs. 15 – Luke says, ““And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she **prevailed** upon us.” Paul had traveled for over 6 months and a thousand miles. But here he was, preaching the gospel. And the Lord opened hearts and doors, giving the kingdom of God a foothold in Europe from which the region would soon become saturated with the gospel.

Takeaway #3: What to us is a **detour** is to God a **direct route**.

Had Paul gone into the heart of Asia Minor or Bithynia, he may have missed meeting Luke and this unnamed gentleman in Macedonia. And of his thirteen epistles, Paul wrote seven to churches in Europe—e.g., Ro, 1 & 2 Th, 1 & 2 Co, Php, Tt).²⁴

God’s paths are never linear, at least from our perspective, but they’re always right. Proverbs teaches us this lesson at multiple points throughout the book:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (Pr 3:5-6).

“The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps” (Pr 16:9).

“Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand” (Pr 19:21).

Soli Deo Gloria

²⁴ Ga, Co, Ep, Php, 1 & 2 Tim were written to churches in Asia.

Video Description:

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[1] Dunn, James D. G., [Beginning from Jerusalem](#), Christianity in the Making (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 2:514.

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