

Article 12

Acts of Apostles 16:6-17:15

1. Introduction:

Luke continued to narrate how the preaching of the Gospel spread from Asia Minor to the West. God gave Paul a vision about a Macedonian man, and that led Paul to bear witness for the Gospel concerning Jesus in Greece. This time round the guidance of the Lord had been relatively strong: Initially, they were prevented to speak messages in Asia Minor; and later they were guided by the vision to Macedonia.

From then onwards, Paul began his ministry in a heathen region and a cross-cultural context. The situations encountered and their effects were different from what he had experienced before during his first missionary journey. Let us read in detail how he coped within a new context. We shall also see how God continued in His guidance.

2. Summary

As per his usual practice, Paul would first look for a place where the Jews gathered, and testify about Jesus. Shortly after that, the household of Lydia became believers of Jesus and invited Paul and his companion to stay in their house.

After an evil spirit was cast out from a servant girl, God's glory was manifested. However, it resulted in Paul getting into deep trouble. Paul was charged before the Magistrate by the heathens, accused for advocating customs that were "not lawful for Romans to accept or practice" (Acts 16:21).

Hence, despite a strong and clear calling, the newly-started mission work was under severe attack. Not only did the Magistrate not follow Roman law in conducting a trial, he even ganged up with the misinformed crowd to abuse Paul and Silas in a violent manner. The evangelists were stripped and beaten with rods, and imprisoned. Had it not been for God's intervention, Paul and Silas might have bled to death.

The crisis was critical and the attack was severe, yet with the intervention of God the situation turned around. No one expected that under such a circumstance, a gentile jailer and his household would come to believe in Jesus. You can imagine, from then onwards, that household became a place where people gathered to hear of God's gospel. Who would imagine that an almost fatal crisis could be turned around, and enable God's gospel-work to establish a fort in a cross-cultural city.

The situation turned around for good, as well as for the worse, at Thessalonica. Paul faced opposition from the Jews who were in cahoots with some vicious hooligans who gathered around the market square. Together, they accused the evangelists of creating trouble elsewhere and then coming here. In short, Paul and Silas were branded as anti-Roman rebels (Can you remember that Jesus also came under the same accusation earlier?).

Luke reported that this mission in Greece had a few prominent people who became believers. On one hand, Paul was persecuted by his fellow-Jews; on the other, he was well received and had gained new believers. Thus, this was good news. After this, Paul went alone, by himself, to the city of Athens in Greece.

3. Reflection and discussion

3.1 Re-play the events narrated in this passage in your mind once through, perhaps now you will have a stronger conviction that God was the One who was directing the frontiers of the gospel ministry. Perhaps, all that had happened were totally beyond one's expectation, particularly the good outcome that resulted from an unfavorable circumstance. Let us reflect on the incidents that had occurred — which event was of a normative nature, and which event was of a “break-through”(barrier-crossing) nature?

3.2 The effect of this mission work was that non-Jewish people from different backgrounds came to believe in Jesus. Indeed every situation can enable the gospel to sprout and grow, even when people's social status are different.

3.3 The oppression that Paul and his companions encountered came from their fellow-Jewish people and that hurt worse. Those who opposed him managed to gather larger and larger mobs, and it was really getting out of hand. When Paul went for this mission, he had to deal with cross-cultural differences, the people's negative emotive reactions that sprang from their respective religious worldviews. He was perceived as being intrusive into their cultures. Paul was not merely rejected occasionally; his life was on the brink of danger all the time.

3.4 However, God led them out of all the hardship and crisis in one piece, and even led others to believe in Jesus.

3.5 Up to this point, what are some of your thoughts and feelings towards the proclamation or the spreading of the gospel? Please share your opinions on: What kind of attitude or perception should you or the church cultivate concerning mission? What are some activities that need to be introduced or carried out?

Article 12 Notes for cell discussion

The emphasis of this lesson should be on leading the cell members to see that there is a breakthrough (barrier-crossing) here —crossing the Aegean Sea, and branching out from Turkey to Greece. So it is a breakthrough from one region to another!

There is no need to set limitations, and even if you do, God will break your self-imposed limitations. Do lead your cell members to see that **God** is present and **is actively involved** in all these.

Verse 31 is often regarded by Chinese churches as a “promise-to-claim”. Is this verse a ‘promise concerning salvation’ in the first place? What does it actually say or mean? Note the **life-context** of the jailer – he was in great fear, for the doors of the prison were opened and the shackles of all the prisoners became loose. If any of his entrusted prisoners ran away, other than his personal accountability to be judged by the law, it would also be inconceivable how life would become for his entire household after he was gone (imprisoned or executed). Then Paul, with his high faith-quotient (F.Q.), told the jailer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus; you and your household shall be saved....”. Paul had faith that if this jailer were to trust in Jesus, God would protect his family from harm.

If someone from the cell group should mention verse 31, and regard it as a sure “promise of salvation”, then be prepared to deal with it; otherwise, do not bring up that issue.