

## The Acts and Torah of the Apostles Study Guide

### Chapter 16

#### 16:1-3

When Paul and Silas reached Lystra, they encountered a believer named Timothy who had a Jewish mother and a Gentile father. Intermarriage was not as common then as it is today. But the likelihood was far greater the further away you were from Jerusalem.

According to modern *halakah* (Jewish law), Jewishness is based on the identity of the mother. But, in early biblical times when intermarriage was condemned and extremely rare, Jewish identity was based on patrilineal descent. That is consistent with Zipporah, the wife of Moses, being a Midianite, without affecting the status of his sons Gershom and Eliezer being Jews of the tribe of Levi (1 Chr 23:14-15). That also explains why Yeshua can have Gentile female ancestors like Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth, and still be Jewish.

But by the time of the writing of the Mishnah (the written form of the Oral Tradition), the status of children of intermarriage was said to follow the mother (*Mishnah Kiddushin 66b*).<sup>1</sup> But since the Oral Tradition was already in effect during the timeframe of the book of Acts, it is reasonable to conclude that Timothy would not have been considered to be Jewish.

Normally circumcision was the responsibility of the father, but since he was a Gentile, it makes sense that his father would not follow through on that practice.

v. 3 – The Greek language of this verse describes the father of Timothy not in the present but in a form of past tense. Another way of saying it is, “His father had been a Greek.” So whether it was a divorce or he had died, the father was not involved in Timothy’s life.

Many years later, Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy when he was imprisoned in Rome. There, we learn that his Jewish mother and grandmother were responsible for his spiritual upbringing (2 Tim 1:5). In this same letter, Paul exhorts Timothy to continue in the sacred writings that he knew from childhood, which is clearly a reference to the *Tanakh*/Old Testament (2 Tim 3:14-17), and he would have learned them from his mother and grandmother. As a young man, he would have been able to hear them read in the synagogue. But, since he was initially uncircumcised and considered to be a Gentile, he didn’t have the privilege of reading them publicly. That is similar to the way that the Torah (Ex 12:48) only permitted circumcised males to participate in the observance of Passover.

With all of these things in mind, we can have a good idea of Paul’s reason for having Timothy circumcised. First of all, we know for certain that it had nothing to do with Timothy’s salvation. That point was clearly settled in the previous chapter, and Paul was at the forefront of that discussion. Circumcision was the outward sign of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 17:9-14) and inclusion among the Jewish people as a nation. So, by honoring that sign, it was an indication that Paul believed that God’s covenant with the Jewish people was still valid, unlike the way that some people believe today.

Moreover, when Paul had Timothy circumcised, it affirmed his place in the Jewish community as

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<sup>1</sup> That position was further strengthened during the time of the Crusades when rabbinical authorities ruled that large numbers of children born to Jewish women who were raped by the Crusaders were considered to be fully Jewish, not illegitimate *mamzers* (“bastards”) who had no legal rights in the community.

being legitimate, and thus enabled him to have complete rights that were previously forbidden to him, like being able to read from the Torah. He also wanted Timothy's testimony to be unhindered to other Jews who might discredit him if he did not respect his heritage.

#### 16:4-12

- v. 6-8 – Leaving Lystra, Paul desired to minister in central Asia Minor and Bithynia on the northern coast, both in present-day Turkey, but the Spirit prevented him from doing that, so they just passed through those regions.
- v. 9-12 – We learn that instead of delaying in those regions, God was calling them in a vision to go to Macedonia. So, after crossing the Aegean Sea, Paul found himself suddenly in Europe. They finally paused their journey for an extended period of time in the Greek city of Philippi, which had become a major Roman colony. That meant Roman military veterans were given land to settle there, and the city was given special rights and privileges in the empire.

#### 16:13-21

- v. 13 – This account took place shortly after Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in 49 A.D. and it is likely that major cities controlled by Rome like Philippi did the same, or at least made it difficult for Jews to assemble. So there was no synagogue for him to visit on the Sabbath, as was his custom. But he went to the place where a synagogue would be found if possible—beside a river where the living water could be used for a *mikvah* for ritual immersion. It is there that he encountered some Jewish women who had gathered to pray.
- v. 14 – One of the women praying there on Shabbat was Lydia, who had a Gentile name and was identified as “a worshiper of God,” which would be a reference to a Gentile God-fearer.
- v. 15 – She listened to Paul's witness and became a believer in Yeshua, and so did the people of her household.
- v. 16 – After staying at her house, they returned to the place of prayer on a subsequent Sabbath. This time they encountered a slave girl who was demon-possessed and able to practice divination, which is the ability to communicate messages supernaturally. They were also called oracles. And they were very popular, which meant the masters of this slave were able to exploit her financially.
- v. 17 – Being connected to the spiritual realm, she kept crying out that Paul and Silas were “bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.”
- v. 18 – Paul was annoyed by this truthful declaration because she was interfering with their ability to witness to the community and they did not want any confusion to exist between their message and her ungodly demon-inspired powers. So he exercised his apostolic authority and cast out the demon within her.
- v. 19-21 – This did not please her masters because that destroyed their ability to use her powers to make money. So they convinced the local authorities to have Paul and Silas punished.

#### 16:22-40

- v. 22 – 28 – There was no trial, but they were beaten with rods and put in prison. The actions of Paul and Silas differ significantly from typical prisoners. Paul did not demand his rights as a Roman citizen. They prayed and sang hymns of praise. And when the

opportunity came for them to escape after the earthquake, they stayed in the prison because the jailer would be wrongly held responsible and killed according to Roman law. These are all actions that are not self-serving, but sacrificial and purposeful.

- v. 29-34 – The jailer became a believer in Yeshua and, a short time later, his whole household did the same, and they were all baptized.
- v. 35-39 – When the city officials tried to get Paul and Silas out of town quietly, Paul decided to take a stand and invoke his Roman citizenship and also to force them to release them publicly. According to Roman law, it was illegal to beat or whip Roman citizens. This was not about demanding personal restitution, however. By forcing the officials to admit the error of misusing their authority, it would help to protect the new religious faith that was had begun to spread throughout the Roman Empire. It is an example of the importance of having the big picture of God's purposes in mind, not just our own personal rights or prosperity.