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Timothy Joins Paul and Silas
16: 1-5

50 AD

Timothy joins Paul and Silas DIG: Who did Timothy replace on Paul's Second Missionary Journey? Why was Timothy viewed as a Jew and not a Gentile? Since Paul was the emissary to the Gentiles, why did Paul circumcise Timothy (Romans 16:1)? How might his decision be justified?

REFLECT: When have you given up some personal rights in order to better represent Yeshua to others? How might you need to do so now? Are you more person-oriented (like Barnabas) or task-oriented (like Paul)? What are the strengths and weaknesses of your type? What does this tell you about God's use of various types of people? Think of one of your dearest friends. What are the unique qualities you most appreciate about this person? What have you learned about yourself through this rare relationship? What elements of your life and your past – things you have often deemed to be a negative or a drawback – could God use to make you more effective in ministry, even to make you a better friend?

The decision by the Jerusalem council (**to see link click Bs – The Council at Jerusalem**) to release **Gentiles** from observance of all the 613 commandments of the Torah, and **the Oral Law** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei – The Oral Law**)**,** set in motion a time of transition for the congregation of **God**. **Gentile believers** were no longer merely a sect of Judaism. Faith in **Jesus Christ** was rapidly becoming a predominantly **Gentile** movement. The story, as told in **Acts**, shifts attention to the gospel's penetration deep into the Roman world and to the widening ministry of **Paul**.[362]

According to the plan, **Paul** proceeded northward, this time on foot, through the Cilician gates to the cities where **he** and **Barnabas** had established churches on **their First Missionary Journey**. This time **Paul** and **Silas (15:40-41)** went from east to west and therefore reached the towns in the reverse order from **their** first

visit: **Derbe** first, then **Lystra**, and finally **Iconium**.



Now Paul and Silas, having crossed the rugged Taurus Mountains, **came to Derbe and Lystra** in south Galatia**. There was a disciple there named Timothy (16:1),** who was already a **believer** when **Paul** arrived, probably accepting **Yeshua** in **Paul's First Missionary Journey** to **Lystra** three years earlier. We know it was **Paul** who led **him** to **the Lord (First Timothy 1:2)** and then **he** became a traveling companion during **Paul's Second Missionary Journey**. **Timothy's** name appears seventeen times in ten different letters of **Paul**, more than any of **his** other companions. Two of **Paul's** letters, **First** and **Second Timothy**, were addressed to **him**. **Paul** wanted **Timothy** to take the place of **John Mark**, just as **Silas** took the place of **Barnabas**. **Timothy was** continually **well-spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium (16:2).** Even though he was probably only in **his** late teens or early twenties, this shows that **he** had the approval of the churches in **his** own area. In fact, the elders at the church at **Lystra** may very well have commissioned **him (First Timothy 4:14** and **Second Timothy 1:16).**[363]

We know that **Timothy**, his name meaning *God honoring*, was trained in the Hebrew Scriptures from childhood **(Second Timothy 3:14-15)**. **He** was **the son of a woman, Eunice (Second Timothy 1:5), who was a Jewish believer,** probably as a result of **Paul's First Missionary Journey**, for **Paul** called **him my dearly loved son and faithful child in the Lord (First Corinthians 4:17a). His grandmother** was also **Jewish** and **her** name was **Lois. They** were excellent spiritual models **(Second Timothy 1:5)**. Young Timothy undoubtedly witnessed **Paul's** stoning in **Lystra (Acts 14:19-20; Second Timothy 3:10-11),** but **he** was drawn to **the apostle** by **the Lord**. **Timothy** possessed spiritually valuable abilities, but **he** needed encouragement to use them **(First Timothy 4:14;**

Second Timothy 1:6). He was **Paul's** favorite companion and coworker **(Philippians 2:19-23)**, perhaps the son **Paul** never had but always wanted. **Timothy's** biological **father**, however, was **Greek**. The word **father** is in the imperfect state, which shows that **he** had already passed away.

Because **his father** was **Greek**, it put **the Jewishness** of **Timothy** into question. Many Christians believe that **Timothy** was a **Gentile**. Nevertheless, while legal responsibilities and entitlements are passed from father to son, **Jewish** and non-**Jewish** descent are always traced through **the mother**, not **the father**. The child of a **Jewish mother** and a **Gentile father** is **Jewish**, the child of a **Gentile** mother and a **Jewish** father is **Gentile**. If a **Gentile** woman converts to **Judaism**, **she** is **a Jew**, and **her** subsequent **children** are likewise **Jewish**.

In **Ezra** we read: **Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said to Ezra, "We have been unfaithful to our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Isra'el. So now let us make a covenant with our God to send away all these women and their offspring, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Torah."** The phrase **and such are born to them,** implies that the children of **Jewish** fathers and **Gentile** mothers are **Gentiles** and not **Jews**. That is why on **Ezra's** return, **the Jews** confessed **their sin** of marrying **Gentile** women **(Ezra 10:1-4)**.

Obed, **the son of Bo'az** and **Ruth** the Moabitess is **Jewish** not because of **his father Bo'az**, but because **Ruth** became a **Jew** before **he** was born, not by some formal conversion process (there was none at that time) but with **her** confession (see the commentary on **Ruth An – Your People Will Be My People and Your God My God**)**.** Because marrying outside the **Jewish** community violates **the Oral Law**, I think the most likely explanation for **Timothy's** mixed heritage is that **Timothy's mother, Eunice**, like many **Jews** today, was assimilated into the dominant **Gentile** culture around **her** and simply did not observe *halakhah*, or the rules governing **Jewish** life. The conclusion that **Timothy** was a **Jew** is important for understanding **16:3**.

Paul wanted this man to accompany him, replacing **John Mark**, **and he took him and circumcised him,** which implies that **he** had an expert ***mohel* (circumciser)** perform the operation. While **Paul** had both **Jewish** ritual knowledge **(22:3)** and at least some manual dexterity **(18:3)**, **circumcising** an adult is not a

simple operation and normally requires a specialist. So **Paul** had **Timothy circumcised for the sake of the** unbelieving **Jewish people in those places (Romans 16:1). Paul** didn't want **Timothy's** uncircumcision to provide a stumbling block for the gospel. The Good News itself contains the stumbling block of **Messiah's death (1 Cor 1:23)**, and effective proclaimers of the gospel will remove all other stumbling blocks that they can. That is the point: **Paul** anticipated a problem and solved it.[364]

Paul's pattern in the book of **Acts** was to first visit **Jewish** synagogues wherever **he** went (see **Bo – Paul's Message in Pisidian Antioch**). So without **circumcision**, it would have limited **Timothy's** ministry to **the Jews**. Therefore, **Paul** was not violating the position **he** took back in **Acts 15,** because the issue there was whether **circumcision** was required for **Gentiles** such as **Titus** . . . and the answer was no **(Acts 15:19)**. But **Timothy** had **Jewish** origins (see above) and according to **God's** covenant with Abraham, **circumcision** was required for **Jews** and **Jewish** believers (see the commentary on **Genesis El – God's Covenant of Circumcision with Abraham**). This is also a good example of **Paul** using **his** own principle of **First Corinthians 9:20, "To the Jewish people I identified as a Jew, so that I might win over the Jewish people. To those under Torah I became like one under Torah (though not myself being under Torah), so that I might win over those under Torah."** This was especially necessary **for they all knew** that **he** had **Jewish** origins on **his mother's** side, but **that his father was Greek (16:3).** This was the reason **Timothy** was not **circumcised**. **His Greek father** was against it because **Greeks** were against those kinds of practices. In fact, when **the Greeks** controlled **the Land they** outlawed **circumcision** even for **Jews**. Consequently, **Timothy's** not being **circumcised** was well known among the **Jewish** population and for the sake of obedience to the Abrahamic Covenant, and evangelism to unbelieving **Jewish people in those areas, Timothy** submitted to **circumcision**.

As they were traveling through the cities, they visited the churches that **they** established (see **Bm – Paul's First Missionary Journey**) and **were** continually **handing down the ruling** (see **Bt – The Council's Letter to the Gentile Believers**) **that had been decided upon by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, for them to keep (16:4).** The **circumcised Timothy** was also with **them** at that point. Therefore, **the ruling** said that there was no need to **circumcise Gentiles**; however, **Timothy** was traveling with **Paul** and had just recently been **circumcised**. This showed that **Paul** saw no inconsistency with what

the rulings of **Jerusalem** said about **the circumcision** of **Gentiles** and **the circumcision** of **Timothy** because **his Jewish** origins required **it.** In addition, instead of making **Timothy** a sideshow to the gospel in terms of whether he was a **Jew** or not, **Paul** permitted **circumcision** so that the gospel would remain the focus of their ministry.

In the years that followed, **Timothy** played an important part in the expansion and strengthening of the churches. **He** traveled with **Paul** and was often **his** special ambassador to the "trouble spots" in the ministry, such as Corinth. **He** became a shepherd of the church at **Ephesus (First Timothy 1:3)**, and probably joined **Paul** in Rome shortly before **the apostle** was martyred **(Second Timothy 4:21)**.[365]

This is a transition statement that provides reasonable clues to the development of Luke's material that follows, Paul's ministry in Asia and a shift to Gentile missions. The decision by the Jerusalem council, far from dividing the congregations of God, helped to unite it, for it made clear that idolatry and immorality were all that Gentile believers must avoid to have fellowship with Jewish believers. Thus, Messiah's communities were strengthened in the faith and now with the basis of salvation settled, the congregations of **God kept increasing daily in number (16:5). They** flourished. Now, more than ever, **they** were prepared to carry on when **Paul** left.