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Doing God's Work
16: 5-12

Doing God's work DIG: Why did Paul go out of his way to explain his travel plans to the Corinthians? Why did Paul make his "painful visit?" Why didn't he ever go back to Corinth for his extended visit? What was Timothy's part in Paul's work? Given what you have learned about the Corinthians, what might Timothy have had to fear when he visited them (16:10)?

REFLECT: What great and important door has been opened for you? What or who is your adversary? Who do you wish you could spend some time with ministering in the Lord? Are you a team worker in ministry? What is preventing you from doing so? Who do you need to have a "painful visit?" What can you learn about God's will from the revisions of Paul's travel plans?

A great and important door has opened for my work, and there are many opposing me.



I will visit you after I have gone through Macedonia. Paul begins **his** itinerary by telling **the Corinthians** that **he** is taking the overland route **through Macedonia**, the Roman province that included the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Although these churches by and large seem to have maintained **his**

teachings, it had been several years since **he** had visited them, so at that time **he** apparently planned to leave **Ephesus** after **Shavu'ot** (in the spring), travel through **Macedonia** during the summer and fall, and arrive in **Corinth**, where **he** would spend **the winter** before being sent on **his** way to **Jerusalem**. **And I may stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me continue my travels wherever I may go. For I don't want to see you now, when I am only passing through; because I am hoping to spend some time with you, if the Lord allows it (16:5-7).** However, **Paul** didn't say **he** *was* coming for sure. **He** said **he** was **"*hoping* to spend some time with them,"** and qualified **his** statement with, **"*If* the Lord allows it."**

Paul's opposition, led by **the false teachers** (see the commentary on **Second Corinthians Af – The Problem of the False Apostles**), seized upon **his** change of travel plans to attack and accuse **him** of being untrustworthy (see the commentary on **Second Corinthians An – God's Seal of Approval**). Therefore, **Paul** ended up making a brief, unscheduled visit directly across the Aegean Sea to **Corinth**, but one that was unsuccessful in reducing the level of opposition against **him**, especially from one particular individual (whom **Paul** does not name). **He** called the visit **painful** (see the commentary on **Second Corinthians Ao – Paul's Painful Visit**). While there, **he** evidently told **the Corinthians** that **he** was planning to visit **them** on the way to **Macedonia** and then return to **them** again later on **(Second Corinthians 1:15-16)**. When this didn't pan out, **some** in **Corinth** added to **their** opposition by charging **Paul** with being double minded, saying **"Yes,"** when **he** didn't really mean it. What seemingly changed **his** mind was the fact that the second visit was so **painful** that **he** needed to be certain that things had calmed down before **he** dared to come again – and it was left to **Titus** to bring the whole situation under control **(Second Corinthians 2;12-13, 7:5-7, 13b-16)**.[521]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that all **Your** promises are **"yes** in **Yeshua" (second Corinthians 1:20)**. How wonderful that **You** can always be trusted. **You** have promised to never leave me: **For God Himself has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5c)**. That means that there will never be a time when **You** are not right by my side – no matter how far away from home I am, or how late into the night it is, nor even if **You** are dealing with a world crisis – **You** are ever-present and **You** will take the time to be with me. What a comforting thought.*

*Thank **You** for focusing on my eternal future when **You** guide me through problems*

*and trials when I am doing **Your** work. It gives me relief to know that even though my struggles seem to last so long and are so hard – that there is a purpose to them. The purpose is to bring glory to **You, so that the tested genuineness of [my] faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Yeshua Messiah (First Peter 1:6c-7).** Praise and thank **You** for being such a wise and loving father who always keeps **His** promises and who lovingly and wisely guides and purifies my life . In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

But I will remain in Ephesus until Shavu'ot (see the commentary on **Leviticus, to see link click Ec – Hag Shavu'ot**). Twenty-years earlier on that day **God** had poured out **His Ruach** on the Messianic Community in Jerusalem (see the commentary on **Acts Al – The Ruach Ha'Kodesh Comes at Shavu'ot**). Not every Jew in the Diaspora was able to go to Jerusalem for the appointed times (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Db – The Three Pilgrimage Festivals**), and hence would have had some kind of synagogue service in their local communities to suffice. **Paul** directed **the Corinthians** to observe **the Passover** in the Diaspora context **(5:7)**, and would seemingly have honored **Shavu'ot** in a similar way **(16:8).**[522]

Paul did inform **the Corinthians** how a significant difference was being made in **Ephesus because a great and important door had opened for his work, and there were many people opposing him** (see the commentary on **Acts Ch – Idol-Makers Start a Riot in Ephesus**). Consequently, **First Corinthians 16:9** goes well with **Revelation 3:8, Messiah's** message to the church of Philadelphia: **See, I have placed before you an open door.** This is true today for all who labor for **the Lord**. But it is also true today that there **are many adversaries**. Anyone who will stand for **the Word of God** will have many **adversaries**. However, **ADONAI opens the door that no one can shut.** Thank **God** for that![523]

But for **Paul**, the situation got far worse before it got better. We get a glimpse into the suffering that **he** endured shortly after writing **First Corinthians**. In **Second Corinthians 1:8-10, he** wrote: **For, brothers, we want you to know about the trials we have undergone in the province of Asia. The burden laid on us was so far beyond what we could bear that we even despaired of living through it. In our hearts we felt we were under sentence of death. However, this was to get us to rely not on ourselves but on God, who**

raises the dead! He rescued us from such deadly peril, and he will rescue us again! The one in whom we have placed our hope will indeed continue to rescue us.

We can take comfort in the fact that someone as faithful as **Paul** was constantly embroiled in an ongoing spiritual battle. When **he** wrote to the church in Thessalonica **he** acknowledged: **We wanted so much to come to you – I, Sha'ul, tried more than once – but the Adversary stopped us (First Thessalonians 2:18).** So now, in **Ephesus**, **Paul** was making headway as **he** labored night and day for three years to establish a church in that influential **city**. But **he** was challenged by **many adversaries.** And we should expect the same.[524] As someone once said, "If you have no opposition in the place where you serve, you're serving in the wrong place."

Paul was a team **worker**. Though **he** was an apostle and was privileged to receive great revelations from **the Lord**, **he** always **worked** closely with other believers in whatever **he** did. **He** was never an ecclesiastical superstar, lording over those "below" **him**. **Timothy**, along with **Titus**, was one of **Paul's** special co-laborers, usually sent to the most difficult places. **Timothy** had been brought up in a godly home **(Second Timothy 1:5)**, but it was **Paul** who had led the young man to **Messiah**. **Paul** usually referred to **him** as **my own son in the faith (First Timothy 1:2).** When **John Mark** left **Paul** and returned to Jerusalem, it was **Timothy** who was called to **work** as **Paul's** assistant (see the commentary on **Acts Bw – Timothy Joins Paul and Silas**).

Timothy learned **his** lessons well and made great progress in **his** walk and ministry to **the Lord (Philippians 2:20-22).** Eventually, **Timothy** took **Paul's** place at **Ephesus**, a most difficult place to minister. Replacing a giant in **the faith** is never easy! At one point, **Timothy** wanted to leave **the city**, but **Paul** encouraged **him** to stay **(First Timothy 1:3)**.[525]

The advice **Paul** gave **the Corinthians** about **Timothy** would suggest that because of **Timothy's** young age, **he** may have been particularly sensitive to criticism and opposition **(1 Tim 4:12; 2 Tim 1:7)**. Not only that, when **Timothy** went to **Corinth, he** found **himself** thrown into a very tense, unstable situation. If **the Corinthians** listened to **Paul's** letter then **Timothy's work** there would not be too hard, but if – as was likely – **they** rejected **Paul's** appeals, it was **Timothy** who would take the brunt of the flack. The most direct way for any of **them** who were offended by **Paul's** remarks was to demonstrate **their** displeasure by attacking

Timothy.[526]

Paul warned **the Corinthians** that when **Timothy comes, see that he has nothing to be afraid of while he is with you. Timothy** was **God's** servant and a trusted and respected fellow worker of **Paul's, for he is doing the Lord's work so let no one treat him with disrespect.** Evidently this was a persistent problem for **Timothy (First Timothy 4:12)**. **Paul** was an apostle and was **Timothy's father in the faith**, yet **he** considered **his** young friend to be **the Lord's** faithful worker, **as I also am. They** were equal in the faith, and because **Timothy** was doing **the Lord's work, he** was worthy of honor and respect, just as was **Paul**. No one was to think little of **him**. On the contrary, **help him on his way in peace, so that he will return to me, for the** appointed **brothers (16:3) and I are expecting him (16:10-11).**[527]

Apollos was an eloquent Jew who was brought into the full understanding of the gospel by **Priscilla** and **Aquila** (see the commentary on **Acts Cf – Priscilla and Aquila Teach Apollos**). He had ministered with great power at **Corinth**, and there was a segment of the church that felt great attachment to **him**. **Apollos** never promoted any division within the body, for **his** great concern was solely to preach the gospel. In spite of the division, and the presence of the "**Apollos** fan club" within the church at **Corinth** (see **Ak – Splits and Division in the Church at Corinth**)**, Paul** didn't hesitate to encourage **Apollos** to return there for further ministry. **As for brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to go and visit you along with the other brothers.** It is clear that there was no envy on **Paul's** part or sense of competition on the part of **Apollos**.[528] **Paul** argued strenuously that the Church belongs to **God** through **Messiah**, and all of its **workers**, including the apostles, were merely servants. This final word about **Apollos** is living evidence that **Paul** was as good as his word. If **Paul** considered the church at **Corinth his**, the last person in the world **he** would want to return would have been **Apollos**.[529]

Although Paul strongly urged **Apollos** to visit **Corinth,** the gifted Alexandrian **desired not to come at that time,** but decided to stay on in **Ephesus** with **Paul** and not join **Timothy** in **Corinth**. This verse bears eloquent tribute to the fact that **Paul** conducted **himself** not as a master, but as a partner with others who labored in ministry doing **God's work**. **Paul** didn't have the authority to tell everyone what to do and where to go. **Apollos** didn't feel **he** should go to **Corinth** at that time and **Paul** agreed with **his** decision. **He would come when he had the opportunity (16:12).** It was wonderful the way these different men worked together. That is a

lesson for all of us.[530]