

## Acts 16: The Road to Macedonia

### The Second Missionary Journey - Acts 15:36–16:15

#### Going Back to the Mission Field:

#### Read Acts 15:36–41

*“And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”*

After the Jerusalem Council, Paul proposes another journey:

*“Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” ~ Acts 15:36*

Paul and Barnabas had carried the gospel through two major areas during their first journey:

- **Cyprus:** Salamis → Paphos
- **Asia Minor:** Perga → Pisidian Antioch → Iconium → Lystra → Derbe

But Paul and Barnabas sharply disagree about whether John Mark should accompany them again.

- **Barnabas + Mark → Cyprus**
- **Paul + Silas → Syria and Cilicia**

(Barnabas himself was originally from Cyprus (Acts 4:36))

- Luke doesn't tell us whether Paul and Barnabas deliberately divided the previous mission field between them. But notice the result:
  - **both major areas evangelized during the First Missionary Journey are revisited.**

#### Group Discussion

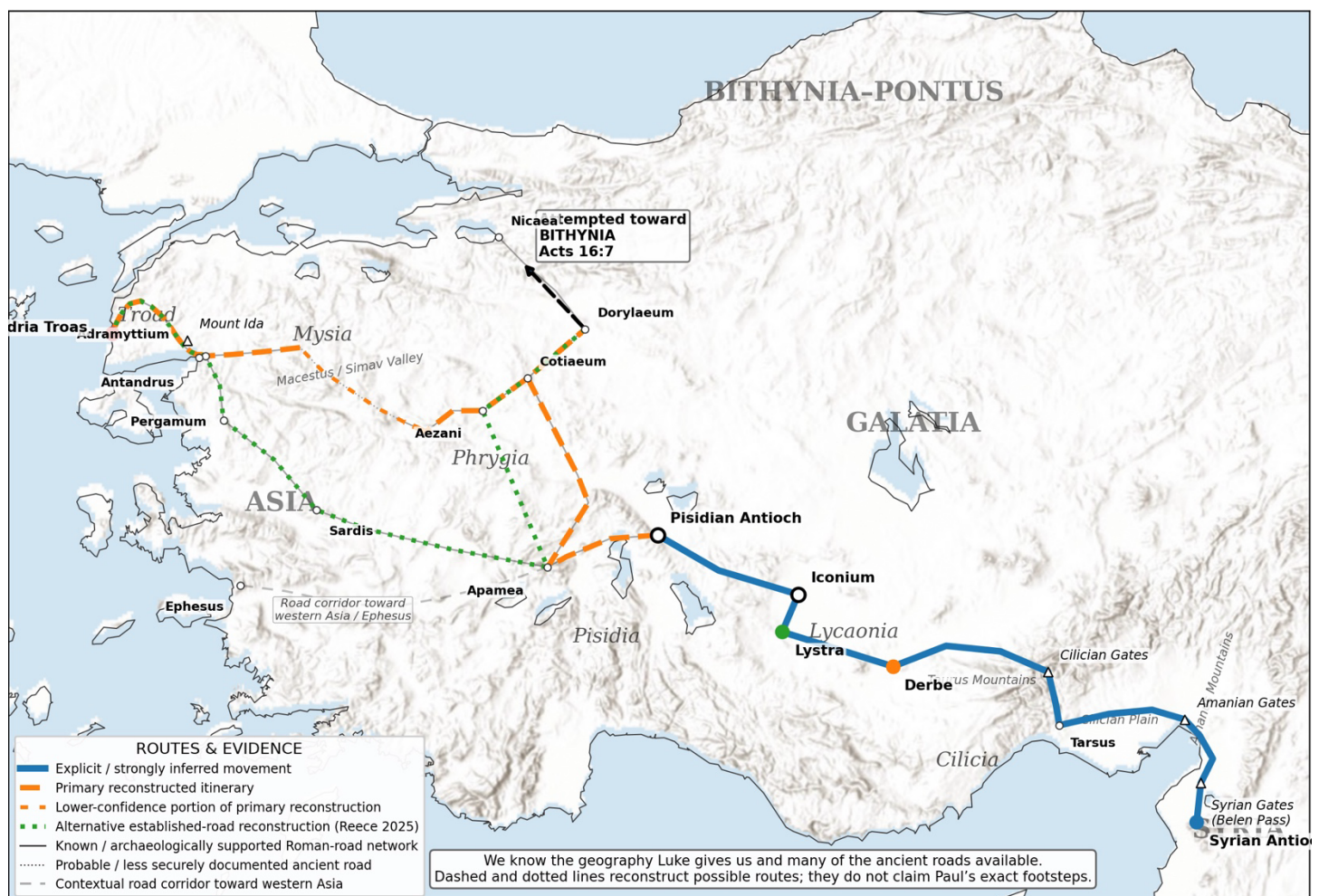
- **Look at the two routes. What do you notice about what happens to the mission after Paul and Barnabas separate?**

## Through Paul's Homeland

Read Acts 15:40–16:1

- *"...but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. '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.'"*
- Paul chose Silas and departed...
  - And he **went through Syria and Cilicia**, strengthening the churches.
- Paul came **also to Derbe and to Lystra**

This time Paul does not sail west through Cyprus. He travels **overland through Syria and Cilicia**.



The broad overland route probably carried Paul and Silas through:

Syrian Antioch → Cilicia → Tarsus region → Cilician Gates → Anatolian interior → Derbe



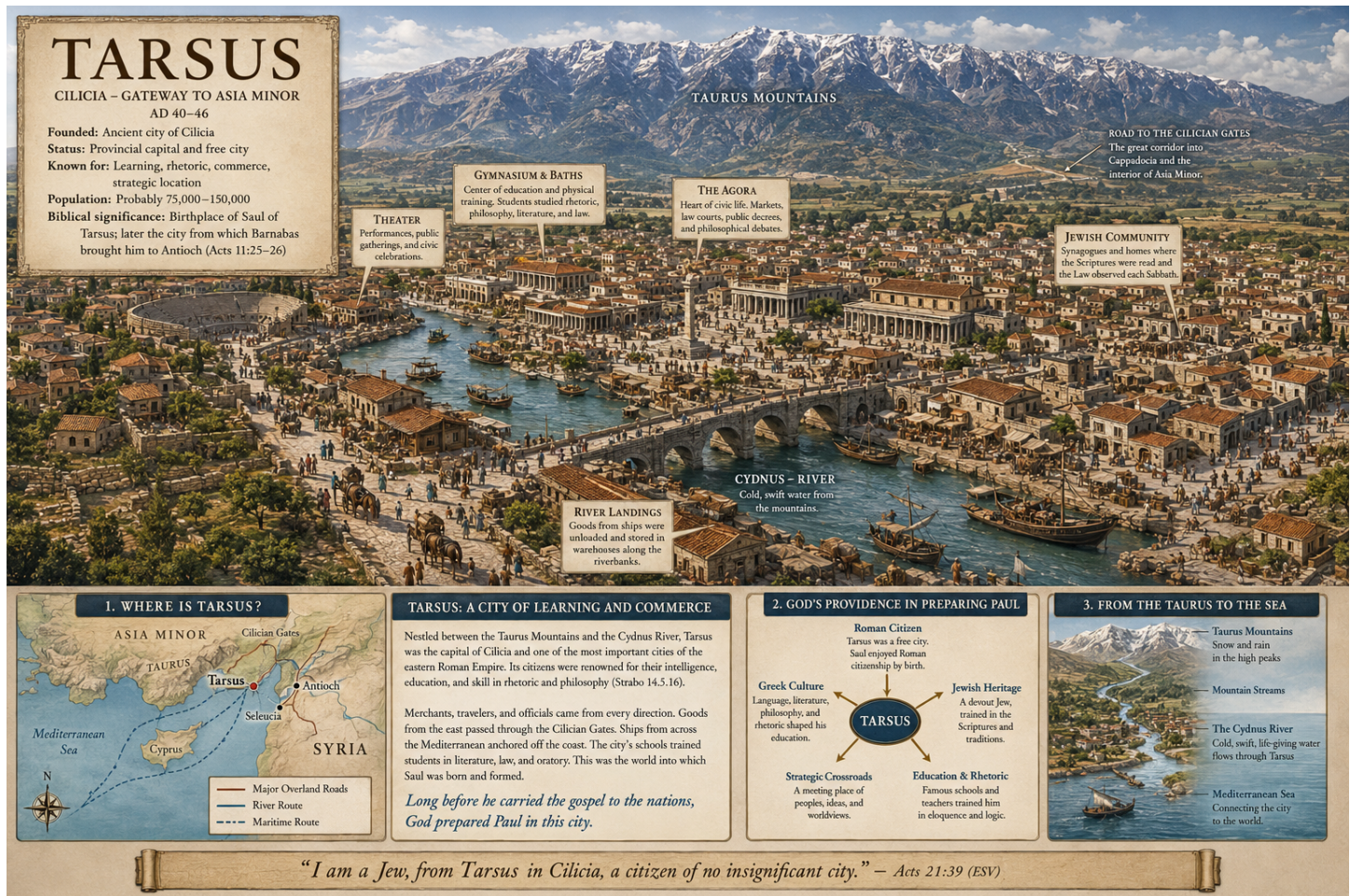
Luke doesn't specifically tell us that Paul stopped in Tarsus or that he traveled through the Cilician Gates. These are reconstructed from the geography and the ancient road network.

But Paul tells us:

***"I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city."***  
~ Acts 21:39

In traveling this direction, Paul is traveling through **his own homeland**.

## Tarsus



## Tarsus was an important city of Cilicia and Paul's hometown.

It stood on the Cilician plain beneath the Taurus Mountains and was connected to the major transportation routes of the region.

Luke does not tell us whether Paul stopped in Tarsus during this journey. But the normal overland corridor through Cilicia toward the Anatolian interior would have carried him through the region of his home city.



## Through the Taurus



The **Taurus Mountains** formed a major natural barrier between the Cilician plain and the Anatolian interior.

- For centuries, armies, merchants, officials and ordinary travelers crossed the Taurus through the narrow corridor known as the **Cilician Gates**.



Paul and Silas likely followed this ancient route as they traveled north toward the churches established during the First Missionary Journey.

- There is an interesting connection with Acts 14.
- After reaching Derbe on the First Journey, Paul and Barnabas could have continued eastward toward Cilicia.
- Instead, they deliberately turned around: **Derbe → Lystra → Iconium → Pisidian Antioch**

**Luke tells us why:**

***“strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith...”***  
***~ Acts 14:22***

- Now Paul is returning from the opposite direction.

**Back to Familiar Ground**

**Read Acts 16:1–5**

***“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. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. 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. 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. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.”***

**Remember Lystra?**

The last time Luke brought us here, Paul had been stoned, dragged outside the city and left for dead.

Now Paul voluntarily returns.

And this time Luke introduces us to a young disciple:

**Timothy**

**Luke tells us:**

- His mother was a Jewish believer.
- His father was Greek.



- He was well spoken of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium.
- Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him.

**Paul does something that might surprise us after Acts 15:**

- Paul circumcises Timothy.

### Group Discussion:

- Last week we saw Paul strongly oppose requiring circumcision for Gentile believers. Why do you think he circumcises Timothy here? Does this contradict the decision of Acts 15?

Acts tells us why:

- *“because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.” ~ Acts 16:3*

Timothy is **not** being circumcised in order to be saved.

- Compare this with Titus in Galatians 2:3–5. When circumcision was being demanded in connection with acceptance before God, Paul refused to submit.
- Here, Timothy’s circumcision removes an unnecessary obstacle to ministry among Jewish people.

**Same gospel. Different issue.**

**And notice what Paul and Timothy are carrying with them:**

- *“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.” ~ Acts 16:4*

They are carrying the Jerusalem Council’s decision that Gentile believers do **not** need to become Jews in order to belong to Christ.

### **Through the Cities**

Luke specifically names: **Derbe → Lystra**

**Then he says they traveled: *“through the cities...”***

Paul had said that the purpose of the journey was to revisit the churches established during the First Journey.

- This makes it highly likely that they continued through: **Derbe → Lystra → Iconium → Pisidian Antioch**

These are the very churches we visited together in Acts 14.

- Luke tells us: ***“So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.” ~ Acts 16:5***

Paul has accomplished the original purpose of his journey.

- **Now where?**

## **Into New Territory**

### **Read Acts 16:6–8**

***“And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.”***

**Look at the Large Mission Map again.**

***This part of Luke’s geography can be confusing*** because these names do not all describe the same kind of territory.

- **Asia, Galatia and Bithynia-Pontus** were Roman administrative provinces.
- **Phrygia and Mysia** were older geographical and cultural regions whose boundaries overlapped Roman provincial boundaries.

In particular, much of **Mysia lay within the Roman province of Asia.**

- So when Luke says that the Holy Spirit prevented Paul from **“speaking the word in Asia,”** he does not necessarily mean that Paul was forbidden from physically entering the Roman province.

**Paul apparently intended to begin missionary work in Asia.**

- The Spirit redirected him.

Paul then attempted to enter **Bithynia.**

- Again: ***“the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.”***



## Dorylaeum: A Possible Turning Point



Ancient **Dorylaeum** is identified with the archaeological site of Şarhöyük near modern Eskişehir, Turkey.

Dorylaeum stood in an important transportation region where ancient roads connected the Anatolian interior with Bithynia and the world around the Sea of Marmara.

Luke never tells us that Paul visited Dorylaeum.

However, because of its location and road connections, scholars have proposed this area as one possible location where Paul attempted to turn toward Bithynia.

### Group Discussion: When Both Roads Close

- **Put yourself in their place.**
  - You have already walked hundreds of miles from Antioch.
  - You begin moving toward Asia — and the Holy Spirit stops you.
  - You try another direction toward Bithynia — and the Spirit of Jesus stops you again.
  - You know nothing yet about Macedonia.
- **What would you be thinking at this point?**
  - Would you wonder whether you had misunderstood God?
  - Would you consider turning around?
  - Where would you go next?

### The Long Road to Troas

Luke tells us:

- *“So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.”*  
~ Acts 16:8

Exactly how they traveled from the interior of Asia Minor to Troas isn't certain.

Ancient roads didn't look like the straight lines you see on the Bible maps

- They followed mountain passes, valleys, water sources and populated settlements.

Scholars have proposed **different possible routes** through or around Mysia.

Our map distinguishes between:

- known ancient road networks,
- probable or plausible reconstructed travel corridors,
- and alternative possible routes.

We know **where Luke says Paul went**.

We often know **which ancient roads were available**.

But we do not always know **which particular road Paul walked**.

## Alexandria Troas



(ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS OF ALEXANDRIA TROAS)



After the long journey across Asia Minor, Paul and his companions finally reach **Alexandria Troas**, an important Roman city on the Aegean coast.

Substantial archaeological remains survive at the site today.

Some of the largest visible monuments were constructed after Paul's lifetime, but they demonstrate the later scale and importance of the city he visited.



**(Ancient Harbor: Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke would have sailed from here)**

Troas also possessed an important artificial harbor. Today it is silted and landlocked.

Paul has traveled across the Anatolian interior, and now he has reached the **Aegean Sea**.

The road ahead will become a sea voyage.

**“Come Over to Macedonia”**

**Read Acts 16:9–10**

*“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.” 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.”*

**After the vision:**

- *“immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”*

Notice something different in Luke's narration.

**Acts 16:8: “they” went down to Troas.**

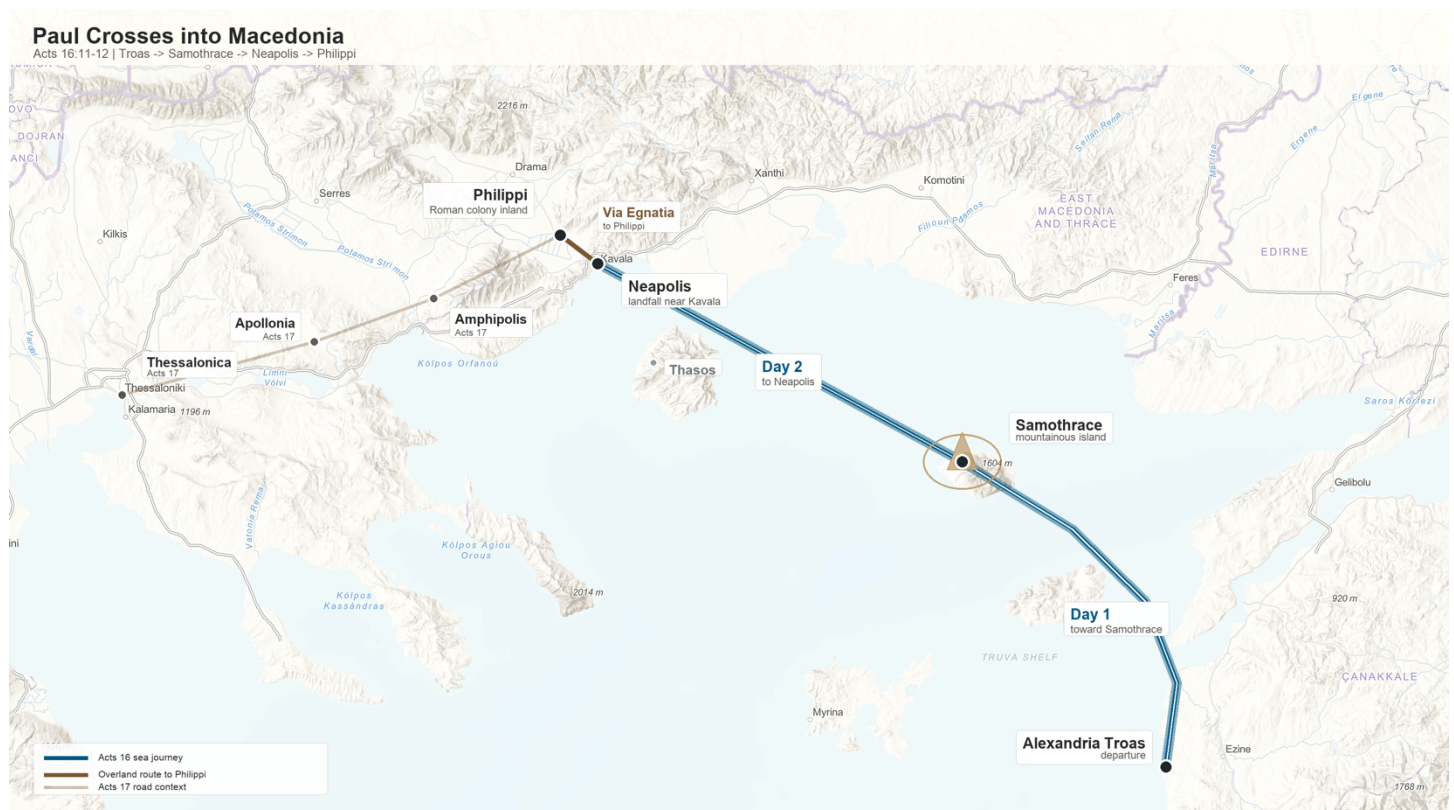
**Acts 16:10: “we” sought to go on into Macedonia.**

This begins the first of the famous **“we” passages** in Acts.

The most natural reading is that Luke himself has now joined the traveling company at Troas.

The group traveling into Macedonia therefore appears to include: **Paul → Silas → Timothy → Luke**

## Across the Aegean



## [TROAS TO PHILIPPI]

### Read Acts 16:11–12

***“So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, 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.”***

#### Day 1:

Troas → Samothrace

## Day 2:

Samothrace → Neapolis

Then overland: **Neapolis → Philippi**

### Samothrace



**Samothrace is not a small dot in the northern Aegean.**

**It is a mountainous island** whose highest summit rises more than **5,000 feet above the sea**.

For ancient sailors approaching across the Aegean, the enormous mountain mass of Samothrace would have been a prominent landmark rising above the horizon.

Luke tells us that Paul and his companions made a **direct voyage** from Troas to Samothrace, then continued to Neapolis the following day.

- Later, Acts 20:6 records the reverse crossing taking **five days**.
- Ancient sailing times depended heavily upon winds and conditions.

### Into Macedonia

Neapolis served as the port for the region around Philippi.

From the coast, Paul and his companions traveled inland toward Philippi along the great Roman transportation corridor known as the **Via Egnatia**.



After weeks of travel across Asia Minor and a two-day voyage across the Aegean:

**Paul has reached Macedonia.**

**Beside the River**

**Read Acts 16:12–15**

*“...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. 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. 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. 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 describes Philippi as:**

*“a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.”*

**We will explore the city of Philippi more closely next week.**

- For now, notice what happens on Paul’s first Sabbath there.

**Luke does not mention a synagogue.**

**Instead:** *“we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer...”*

There they found **women gathered together.**

Paul and his companions sat down and spoke with them.

One of those women was: **Lydia**

**Luke tells us that Lydia was:**

- from **Thyatira**,
- a seller of **purple goods**,
- and a **worshiper of God**.

**Then Luke tells us what happened as Paul spoke, “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” ~ Acts 16:14**

**Lydia and her household were baptized.**

She then invited Paul and his companions into her home.

### **Around the Table**

Think about the entire journey we have followed:

**Antioch → Cilicia → Taurus Mountains → Derbe → Lystra → Iconium → Pisidian  
Antioch → Phrygia → Mysia → Troas → Samothrace → Neapolis → Philippi**

**Paul had traveled hundreds upon hundreds of miles.**

- He had attempted to enter Asia.
- He had attempted to enter Bithynia.

**Both directions had been closed.**

**Then God called him across the Aegean into Macedonia.**

- And the first people Luke records him speaking to there are **a group of women gathered beside a river to pray.**

**QUESTION: What strikes you about the way this journey ends?**

- And notice again Luke's words: ***"The Lord opened her heart..."***

***Next week, we will stay in Philippi and watch what happens as the gospel begins to take root in this Roman colony.***