

PAUL'S CORPORATE EVANGELISM IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

George W. Murray

In 1971 my wife and I went to the largely unevangelized country of Italy as church planters with a mission agency that at that time had six church-planting couples in the country. Each couple was located in a separate city. Because so many Italian cities and towns were (and are) totally unevangelized, our mission leadership reasoned that its personnel should be spread out to cover more unreached territory. We, however, resisted this strategy, because we felt inadequate to do the work of evangelism and church planting by ourselves. After much discussion we persuaded our mission leadership to let us recruit a team of eight other missionaries to work with us in the unreached province of Pordenone, with a population of 300,000. We had a wonderful experience with that team, evangelizing together in a way that none of us was capable of doing alone, and planting a church in the capital city of the province.

During that time articles about teamwork in pioneer evangelism began appearing in missionary publications. Some articles questioned its validity,¹ while others strongly supported the concept.² Reading other missionary literature, I discovered that Jonathan Goforth, at the turn of the century, was convinced of the importance of doing evangelism corporately. "Now we have

George W. Murray is General Director, The Evangelical Alliance Mission, Wheaton, Illinois.

¹ Dan Bacon, "Should Mission Boards Send Teams as Well as Individuals?" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 14 (April 1978): 95-99.

² Edward F. Murphy, "The Missionary Society as an Apostolic Team," *Missiology: An International Review* 4 (January 1976): 103-18; and Paul Thompson, "Synergism: A New Word and a New Way for Missions," *Harvest Today* 31 (July-September 1976): 11.

proved it so often that we have the conviction that we could go into any unevangelized center in North China with an earnest band of male and female workers and within a month have the beginning of a church for Jesus Christ."³

But most of all, my own experience in Italy convinced me of the importance of engaging in evangelism and church planting corporately. During that time, however, I kept asking myself if we had a strong biblical basis for how we were working. I was sure teamwork was good, because it worked! But does the Bible say anything about corporate evangelism? I decided to take a closer look.

Besides looking at data concerning corporate spiritual activity in the Old Testament and at Jesus' practice of having disciples and sending them out two by two, I examined the practice and teaching of Paul, the prominent New Testament missionary apostle. I concentrated my biblical research on Paul's practice of corporate evangelism in the Book of Acts and on his teaching about corporate witness in his Epistle to the Philippians. This article discusses the relevant data about Paul's practice in the Book of Acts.

An examination of Acts reveals that Paul was certainly not a "loner," but had extensive association with others during his life and ministry. There are a number of reasons why Paul lived, traveled, and worked together with other believers, one of which was to engage in the ministry of evangelism (Acts 9:28-30; 13:1-5, 13-16, 44-46; 14:1, 7, 20-21, 25; 17:1-15; 18:5-8). A close look at Acts reveals that other believers were often present when Paul engaged in evangelism, and in quite a few cases he and other believers actually evangelized corporately.

PAUL'S ASSOCIATION WITH OTHERS IN ACTS

Although the Bible never states that Paul had disciples, clearly he had many close friends and associates with whom he lived and worked. Ellis points out that in the Book of Acts and Paul's epistles approximately one hundred individuals were associated with the apostle.⁴ "In summary, the picture that emerges is that of a

³ Jonathan Goforth, *Foreign Missions Conference Report* (Washington, DC: China Inland Mission, 1925), 77, quoted by Alexander Rattray Hay, *The New Testament Order for Church and Missionary* (Buenos Aires: SEMCA, 1947), 90. Also B. Broomhall wrote about a famous missionary team called "The Cambridge Seven" (*The Evangelization of the World: A Missionary Band* [London: Morgan and Scott, 1887]).

⁴ E. Earle Ellis, "Paul and His Co-Workers," *New Testament Studies* 17 (October–July 1970–71): 437. Also see D. Edmond Hiebert, *Personalities around*

missionary with a large number of associates. Indeed, Paul is scarcely ever found without companions."⁵ In the concluding reflections of his overall treatment of Paul's life, Bruce says,

Paul has no place for the solitary life as an ideal; for all his apostolic energy he would have scouted the suggestion that "he travels the fastest who travels alone." He emphasizes the fellowship, the togetherness, of Christians in worship and action; they are members one of another, and all together members of Christ.⁶

A chronological survey of the Book of Acts makes Paul's emphasis on togetherness clear.

After conversion Paul spent several days with believers in Damascus (Acts 9:19).⁷ Later, when he went to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples (v. 26). There he stayed with some apostles (v. 28)—namely, Barnabas, Peter, and James (v. 27; Gal. 1:18-19)—until they were constrained to send him off to Tarsus for his own protection (Acts 9:29-30).⁸ He ministered together with Barnabas for a year among the believers in Antioch (11:25-26), went with Barnabas to Jerusalem with the famine relief (v. 30), and then went out on his first missionary journey with Barnabas and John Mark (13:2-5). Then he traveled with Barnabas and other believers to the Jerusalem Council (15:2).

On his second missionary journey Paul set out with Silas (15:40) and recruited Timothy in Lystra to join their team (16:3). In Troas, Paul and his companions were joined by Luke—at-attested by the abrupt change in the Lucan narrative from "they" (v. 8) to "we" (v. 10)—and all four of them went to Philippi together (16:12-18).⁹ From Philippi, Paul, Silas, and Timothy went together to Thessalonica, leaving Luke in Philippi, as attested by the return to the use of "they" in the narrative (17:1-15). The three

Paul (Chicago: Moody, 1973), 5-6, for a list of Paul's most prominent friends and coworkers. Also see Roy B. Zuck, *Teaching as Paul Taught* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 133-42.

⁵ Ellis, "Paul and His Co-Workers," 439.

⁶ F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 458.

⁷ Of interest is the observation that even before his conversion and call, Saul of Tarsus worked with others (see Acts 9:7).

⁸ It is not known exactly how long Paul was in Jerusalem (cf. Gal. 2:1), nor what he did during that time, nor whether he was alone or with others. This period may have included trials mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, the experience recorded in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, and most certainly a ministry to Gentiles in that region (cf. Acts 22:17-21). See Richard N. Longenecker, "Paul the Apostle," in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 4:632.

⁹ For a discussion on the authenticity of the "we" sections of the Book of Acts, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1970), 367-68.

men ministered together in Thessalonica and Berea until the believers were compelled to send Paul to Athens in order to escape danger (vv. 13-15). Arriving in Athens, Paul instructed those who accompanied him, asking "for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible" (v. 15). Though Paul ministered alone in Athens, he did so while waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him (v. 16). Paul went on to Corinth, where he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla, perhaps for reasons of ministry as well as material reasons (18:1-3).¹⁰ Silas and Timothy eventually joined Paul in Corinth (v. 5).¹¹ From 1 Thessalonians 3:6 it seems that when Silas and Timothy arrived in Corinth, they brought Paul a good report of the situation in Thessalonica, occasioning Paul's first letter to the church there. Paul's second letter to Thessalonica was probably also written from Corinth, not too long after the first letter.¹² Both of these letters were sent by Paul, Silas, and Timothy, as seen from the opening verse of each letter, and from the fact that both letters were completely written in the plural (with the exception of 1 Thessalonians 2:18 and 2 Thessalonians 2:5; 3:17). In fact in all but two of his letters to churches (Romans and Ephesians), Paul included others with him in the opening salutations. Even in his letter to Philemon, Paul included Timothy in the salutation (Phile. 1). Aquila and Priscilla accompanied Paul to Ephesus, where he left them and went on to Antioch via Caesarea (Acts 18:18-22).

On Paul's third missionary journey he went through Asia Minor to Ephesus (18:23; 19:1).¹³ Because of opposition in Ephesus he moved from the synagogue to the lecture hall of Tyrannus, taking the disciples with him (19:9). Timothy and Erastus were with

¹⁰ See Ronald F. Hock, "The Workshop as a Social Setting for Paul's Missionary Preaching," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (July-September 1979): 438-50, on how Paul's tentmaking activity may have been not only for meeting his material needs but also a natural setting in which to share the gospel.

¹¹ First Thessalonians 3:1-8 seems to indicate that Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Athens and then were sent by him on missions elsewhere before they met him again in Corinth (F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954], 347-43).

¹² See F. F. Bruce, "II Thessalonians," in *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, ed. Donald Guthrie, J. A. Motyer, A. M. Stibbs, and D. J. Wiseman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 1161; and Longenecker, "Paul the Apostle," 4:644.

¹³ Longenecker conjectures that "the missionary party came to Ephesus" ("Paul the Apostle," 4:645), probably basing his assumption on the fact of Paul's previous practice of traveling with others. W. J. Coneybear and J. S. Howson make a plausible case for the inclusion of Timothy on this trip, and perhaps even Titus (*The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950], 362-63). Frequent mention is made of Timothy in Acts and Paul's letters in connection with Paul's stay at Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:22; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:1; Rom. 16:21; Acts 20:4). And Paul often mentioned Titus in 2 Corinthians (2:13; 7:6, 13-14; 8:6, 16, 23; 12:18 [twice]).

Paul in Ephesus where they "ministered to him" (v. 22). Gaius and Aristarchus were also with Paul in Ephesus and were called his "traveling companions" (v. 29). When Paul went from Greece to Macedonia, he was accompanied by seven men (Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, and Trophimus; 20:4). Joining Paul again at Philippi (20:5-6), Luke stayed with Paul on his trip back to Jerusalem (21:15) and on to Rome (27:1; 28:16). In his farewell discourse to the Ephesian elders Paul referred to "my companions" (20:34, NIV), for whom he provided by working with his own hands.

Arriving in Jerusalem, Paul was received by the brethren, James, and the elders (21:17-18). Later in Caesarea, Felix told a guard to "permit [Paul's] friends to take care of his needs" as a prisoner (24:23, NIV).¹⁴ Besides Luke, Aristarchus accompanied Paul on his trip to Rome (27:1-2).¹⁵ In Sidon the centurion guard allowed Paul to go ashore so that "his friends . . . might provide for his needs" (27:3, NIV). In Italy Paul was met and cared for by the brethren in Puteoli (28:14), and on his trip to Rome he was met by brethren who came down from the capital city to accompany him (v. 15). At the sight of these companions Paul thanked God and was encouraged (v. 15). Although the Acts narrative ends with Paul in Rome, Paul's epistles reveal three other people who were closely associated with Paul in his first Roman imprisonment. They were Epaphras (Col. 1:7; Phile. 24), Onesimus (Phile. 10, 16), and Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25-30; 4:18).¹⁶

From this brief survey of Paul's ministry the picture emerges of a man who spent much of his Christian life and work in the company of other Christians. Paul's love and need for the company of others are evident in his own words in 2 Timothy 4:9-11, written during his second Roman imprisonment: "Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry."

¹⁴ There was a church in Caesarea (18:22; 21:16) and Philip the evangelist lived there and had previously entertained Paul in his house (21:8).

¹⁵ Longenecker suggests that Timothy was also present, probably because of the inclusion of Timothy's name at the opening of Paul's epistles to the Philippians, the Colossians, and Philemon ("Paul the Apostle," 4:651).

¹⁶ Nine people continued in rather close association with Paul, though not without interruptions, to the end of his life. They were Mark, Titus, Timothy, Priscilla, Aquila, Luke, Erastus, Trophimus, and Tychicus (Ellis, "Paul and His Co-Workers," 439). With the exception of Erastus, Trophimus, and Tychicus, all of these were called "co-workers."

REASONS PAUL JOINED WITH OTHERS

From the Acts narrative a number of reasons for Paul's corporate relationships can be observed. He lived and worked with others for these reasons: (a) to have fellowship (Acts 9:19, 26-28); (b) to have companionship (18:18; 19:29; 20:34; 27:1-2; 28:15); (c) to have protection (9:30; 17:15; 20:2-4);¹⁷ (d) to have encouragement (28:15); (e) to form an official delegation to attend the Jerusalem Council (15:2) and to deliver famine relief (11:30; 20:4);¹⁸ (f) to provide for material needs (18:1-3; 19:24:23; 27:3; 28:14); (g) to engage in the ministry of edification (11:25-26; 14:21-23; 15:35; 15:40-41; 16:4-5; 19:9; 20:6-38); and (h) to engage in the ministry of evangelism (9:28-30; 13:1-5, 13-16, 44-46; 14:1, 7, 20-21, 25; 17:1-15; 18:5-8).²⁰

PAUL AND CORPORATE WITNESS IN ACTS²¹

Paul's practice of corporate witness as seen in Acts²² includes instances in which he evangelized when others were present, and instances in which he and others evangelized together (though it is sometimes difficult to distinguish these two).

¹⁷ James Stalker mentioned "castles of robbers, who watched for passing travelers to pounce upon" in Asia Minor (*Life of St. Paul* [New York: Revell, 1912], 68).

¹⁸ Bruce believes the seven men who accompanied Paul (20:4) were representatives of the churches in Macedonia, Galatia, and Asia, delegated to take relief to the Jerusalem Christians (*Commentary on the Book of Acts*, 405-6).

¹⁹ Adolf Deissmann discusses Paul's tentmaking activities (*Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History* [New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926], 48-51).

²⁰ Some of the same references have been included under both the ministry of edification and the ministry of evangelism. As Gene A. Getz says, "In some instances evangelistic activity and edification activity are so interrelated in Luke's records they are indistinguishable" (*Sharpening the Focus of the Church* [Chicago: Moody, 1974], 23 [italics his]).

²¹ This study is not seeking to show that Paul never worked or evangelized alone, but rather that he often evangelized together with others. Passages that report Paul's working alone are these: 9:19-25: Paul apparently preached alone in the Damascus synagogue (yet he was "with the disciples," v. 19, and "his followers," v. 25 [NIV], helped him escape); 17:16-34: Paul was preaching alone in Athens, yet while he was "waiting for" Silas and Timothy (17:15-16); 18:19: he preached in the synagogue in Ephesus alone; 18:23: he traveled in Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples; and 20:2-3: he traveled in Macedonia and Greece, encouraging the believers.

²² Not only did Paul evangelize corporately, but he also engaged in a team ministry of edification: with Barnabas in Antioch (11:25-26); with Barnabas in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (14:21-23); with Barnabas again in Antioch (15:35); with Silas in Syria and Cilicia (15:41); with Silas and Timothy in Lystra and Iconium (16:4-5), and with Luke and seven others in Troas and Miletus (20:6-38).

PAUL EVANGELIZING WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS PRESENT

Acts 9:27-28. When Paul went from Damascus (where he had been proclaiming in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God, v. 20) to Jerusalem, he was with the apostles (v. 27) and was "moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord" (v. 28). The words "moving about freely" are literally "going in and going out." This may suggest that he ministered in the presence of the apostles.

Acts 13:16-41. In Pisidian Antioch (v. 14) Paul stood up in the synagogue (v. 16) and preached an evangelistic message. He told the Jews that "through [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you" (v. 38). Though Paul was the only one who spoke, it is clear that Barnabas was with him (v. 42).

Acts 14:8-20. In Lystra Paul was the one who spoke (v. 12). That Paul was preaching the gospel can be seen by the immediate context ("they continued to preach the gospel," v. 7) and from the apostles' words to the crowd: "We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God" (v. 15, NIV). Although Barnabas was present (vv. 1, 12, 14, 20), Paul did the speaking. In fact the people called him "Hermes" because "he was the chief speaker" (v. 12).

Acts 17:1-5. In Thessalonica Paul went into the synagogue, as was his custom, and reasoned from the Scriptures regarding Christ's death and resurrection (vv. 2-3). That his intent was evangelistic can be seen from his statement, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming [**kataggelion**] to you is the Christ" (v. 3). That Silas was present is clear from 16:40 and from the fact that those who were persuaded by Paul's preaching joined Paul and Silas (17:4).²³ Although the text does not say that Silas verbally evangelized, it is significant that the people identified the gospel message with both Paul and Silas.

Acts 17:10-12. In Berea Paul again spoke in the synagogue (vv. 10-11). That his intent was evangelistic can be seen by the result that many believed (v. 12). Both Silas and Timothy were present (vv. 10, 14).²⁴

Acts 18:1-18. In Corinth Paul again engaged in evangelistic activity. Every Sabbath he was in the synagogue "trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (v. 4). He devoted himself to preaching, "testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ" (v. 5). Many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized (v. 8). Only Paul is

²³ Timothy was probably present as well (17:10, 14).

²⁴ From Berea Paul went to Athens without Silas and Timothy (17:15). He valued their presence, for he urged them "to come to him as soon as possible."

mentioned as being involved in direct evangelistic activity. However, he was not alone. Aquila and Priscilla were there, working with Paul in his trade of tentmaking (vv. 2-3).

Acts 19:8-10. In Ephesus Paul again engaged in evangelism in the synagogue, "arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God" (v. 8, NIV). When opposition arose, he took the disciples with him to Tyrannus's lecture hall where he ministered for two years (vv. 9-10). Although "disciples" were with him, nothing is said about whether they too did evangelistic work. At any rate, they were present with Paul.

All these passages reveal that the apostle Paul often evangelized in the presence of other believers and in most cases in the presence of other Christian workers.

PAUL EVANGELIZING TOGETHER WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS

Acts 13:1-5. The calling of Barnabas and Saul and their first missionary activity in Cyprus reveal the importance of corporate witness. Their call came from God, for the Holy Spirit said, "I have called them" (v. 2).²⁵ The fact that God called them to joint participation in a common activity is clear, for He called them (**αὐτοῖς**, plural) to the work (**τοῦ εὐαγγελίου**, singular). The work to which they were called was evangelism. This can be seen not only from their actual involvement in evangelism during the trip, but also from their report when they returned. Arriving in Antioch they reported all "that God had done with them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (14:27). And later in Phoenicia and Samaria they told how the Gentiles had been converted (15:3).

Recognizing this call of God to evangelistic work, the spiritual leaders in Antioch sent Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary journey (13:3). At Salamis they proclaimed (**καθῆγγελλον**) the Word of God together (13:5). John Mark was with them as their helper (**ὑπηρέτην**).²⁶ Paul expected John Mark to be involved with them in evangelism, as seen from his later ac-

²⁵ The verb **προσεκλήμαί** is in the perfect tense, indicating that this call from God had already come to them before this word came from the Holy Spirit.

²⁶ Bruce suggests that Mark's role as "helper" may have been in imparting to Paul and Barnabas his special knowledge of certain important phases of the story of Jesus, in particular the passion narrative (*Commentary on the Book of Acts*, 263). This word for "helper" (**ὑπηρέτην**) is the same word used in Luke 1:2 ("servants of the word"). Luke may have had Mark in mind as one of his sources. B. T. Holmes confirms this by explaining that **ὑπηρέτην** signified, in the language of the time, a person whose function involved looking after documents ("Luke's Description of John Mark," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 54 [1935]: 63-72). Later Paul said of John Mark, "He is helpful to me in my ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11, NIV).

cusation in 15:38 that John Mark had not continued with them in "the work" (**to e~~l~~gon**, cf. 13:2).²⁷

Acts 13:13-52. Corporate witness is evident in this account of Paul and his companions in Pisidian Antioch.²⁸ That their intent was evangelistic can be seen from Paul's message, particularly the statement, "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you" (v. 38). This is also revealed by the Lord's instruction, which they related to the people: "I have placed you as a light for the Gentiles, that you should bring salvation to the end of the earth" (v. 47).

That they were corporately involved in witness can be seen from the fact that they entered the synagogue, and the fact that the synagogue rulers addressed them in the plural ("brethren"), asking them to speak a message of exhortation (vv. 14-15). Though Paul was the one who preached at the end of the synagogue service, the people invited them to speak further about these things (v. 42). When the crowd was dismissed, many of the people followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God (v. 43).²⁹ On the next Sabbath Paul and Barnabas boldly told the Jews that since they rejected the gospel, Paul and Barnabas were "turning to the Gentiles" (v. 46), for that was what "the Lord has commanded us [plural]" (v. 47). Persecution was stirred up against both of them, and they were expelled from the region (v. 50).

Acts 14:1-7. In Iconium Paul and Barnabas went together into the synagogue (v. 1) and spent considerable time there speaking boldly for the Lord, who enabled them to do miraculous signs and wonders (v. 3). Discovering a plot to stone them, they went to Lystra and Derbe (vv. 6-7), where "they continued to preach the gospel [**kakei~~u~~ggel izomenoi h~~s~~an**]," v. 7).

Acts 14:20-28. In Derbe Paul and Barnabas preached the good

²⁷ Albert Barnes comments that "the work" means "preaching the gospel" (*Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* [reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel], 315). Ernst Haenchen says "the work" is "the work of mission" as in 13:2 and 14:26 (*The Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971], 474).

²⁸ The phrase "Paul and his companions" is literally, "those with Paul" (**oi~~l~~peri~~u~~paulon**, 13:13). This denotes "persons who are standing, sitting, working, or staying close to someone" (Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979], 651).

²⁹ John Calvin suggested that the talking and urging were done by the people, not by Paul and Barnabas (*Acts of the Apostles*, trans. W. J. G. McDonald, *Calvin's Commentaries*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], 1:387-88).

news (**euḡgel isamenoi**) and won a large number of disciples (v. 21). Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch for a ministry of edification. In Perga, they preached the word (**lalhsantej . . . ton logon**) again (v. 25). These Greek verbs that describe their activity in Derbe and Perga denote evangelism and both verbs are in the plural. Back in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas reported to the church what God had done through them (v. 27).

Acts 15:35. This verse gives a clear picture of Paul and Barnabas evangelizing together in Antioch. They were teaching (**didaskontej**) and preaching (**euḡgel izomenoi**) the word of the Lord.³⁰ "Many others" also engaged in this work.³¹ The fact that this verse is a summary statement indicates that evangelism and edification were being carried out regularly.

Acts 15:40-16:12. On his second missionary journey Paul took Silas with him (15:40) and later he took Timothy along (16:1-3). When this missionary team was in Troas, Paul was led by God through a vision to go to Macedonia (v. 9). Of interest here is the fact that Luke was also part of this group, for he used "we" and "us" in 16:10-11, 13, and 15-17. In verse 10, Luke wrote, "And when [Paul] had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called³² us to preach the gospel to them."

Acts 16:13-33. Three incidents in Philippi demonstrate the apostle's corporate evangelistic work. On the Sabbath Paul and his companions went to the riverside, where they assumed some Jews would be gathered for prayer.³³ Luke recounted, "We sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled" (v. 13). All of them—Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke—were involved in witnessing. After she responded to Paul's message (v. 14), Lydia invited the entire group to stay in her home (v. 15). That their message was evangelistic is seen from the results: Lydia believed, and she and her household were baptized.

A slave girl with a spirit of divination shouted, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming

³⁰ Alford observes that "**didaskontej** [was] to those who had received [the Word, and] **euḡgel izomenoi** [was] to those who had not" (*The Greek Testament*, 2:172).

³¹ The Greek word order is of interest: **didaskontej kai euḡgel izomenoi meta kai eferwn pollw ton logon tou kuriou** ("teaching and preaching with many others the word of the Lord").

³² The verb "called" (**proskal ew**) is also used in 13:2 in reference to God's call to Barnabas and Saul. In both instances the verb is in the perfect tense.

³³ Bruce suggests the women met there because there were not enough male Jews in Philippi to establish a synagogue (*Commentary on the Book of Acts*, 331).

[**kataggeilousin**] to you the way of salvation" (v. 17). She (or the demonic spirit in her) acknowledged the witness of the men as a group. It was Paul, however, who commanded the demon to come out of her (v. 18). Then Paul and Silas were arrested, having been accused of advocating unlawful customs (v. 21).³⁴ At midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns to God, as the other prisoners listened (v. 25).

After an earthquake the jailer rushed in and addressed Paul and Silas. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (v. 30). Luke recorded that they replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household" (v. 31). Then they spoke "the word of the Lord" to the jailer and his family, and immediately they were baptized (vv. 32-33).

From this brief survey of Paul's activities recorded in the Book of Acts, several things stand out. First, Paul lived and worked closely with others. He seldom ministered alone. On numerous occasions he engaged in team evangelism. He was burdened to share the good news of salvation through Christ with as many people as he could possibly reach. Third, divine initiative was behind the apostle's corporate witness activities. Twice Luke wrote that God called Paul and his companions to evangelize together (13:2; 16:10). On their first missionary journey Paul and Barnabas told the people God was the one who commanded them to "bring salvation to the end of the earth" (13:47). Twice Paul and his fellow workers reported back to the church everything God had done through them (14:27; 15:4).

REASONS FOR TEAM EVANGELISM

Why did Paul engage in corporate evangelism? What scriptural and practical reasons suggest this kind of evangelistic activity should be carried out in missions today? One answer some give is that corporate witness models the end product being sought, namely, the corporate community and fellowship of believers in local churches.³⁵ The increased credibility that stems from mul-

³⁴ Their reference to Paul and Silas's proclaiming unlawful customs probably referred to their gospel preaching, since there were laws prohibiting foreign religious propaganda among Roman citizens (*ibid.*, 335-36). Pliny the Younger, writing about Christians in Pontus, referred to the banning of foreign cults (*Epistolae* 10.96.2; cited in A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978], 79-80).

³⁵ Dominic Grassi notes that Paul believed in corporate evangelism because "he felt it necessary to present a visible picture of the Church in action" (*A World to Win*, 74). Hay states that "a single believer cannot function as the Church" (*The New Testament Order for Church and Missionary*, 132).

multiple witnesses is another reason for corporate evangelism.³⁶ Other reasons for carrying out evangelism by teams include the sharing of spiritual gifts,³⁷ mutual support among the evangelizers,³⁸ accountability to each other,³⁹ and increased results because of additional workers.⁴⁰

IS THE EVIDENCE IN ACTS ENOUGH?

It is clear from the Book of Acts that Paul engaged in corporate evangelism as part of his missionary strategy. But is that reason enough for missionaries now to do it? Some would question the wisdom of using the historical account of the early church in Acts as a guide for normative experience in the church today. While a case can be made for recognizing that Luke wrote the Book of Acts with didactic intent as well as to give an accurate account of history,⁴¹ it is always helpful if the rationale for ministry practice can be buttressed by teaching given in the New Testament epistles.

A subsequent article will examine Paul's clear teaching about the importance of corporate ministry in the Book of Philipians, as well as sharing some reasons for such a practice and how it is being implemented in missionary work today.

³⁶ Darrell Fledderjohann, "North American Missions in Italy Today" (M.A. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1979), 143.

³⁷ Arnold Dittberner, "Who Is Apollos and Who Is Paul?" *Bible Today* 71 (1974): 1549-52.

³⁸ "Missionary Loneliness . . . It's Only Human," *Team Horizons* 54 (July-August 1980): 11.

³⁹ Paul Thompson, *The Challenge of the City* (Coral Gables, FL: Worldteam, 1978), 23.

⁴⁰ Waldron Scott, "Teams and Teamwork," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 7 (Winter 1971): 112—13.

⁴¹ See I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

This material is cited with gracious permission from: x
 Dallas Theological Seminary
 3909 Swiss Ave.
 Dallas, TX 75204
 www.dts.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu