

IV. Biblical Biographies from the Bible
Biblical Biographies: Who? Why? How?
“Portrait #3: Silas”

Acts 15:36–41

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We are looking at background characters in this study of Biblical biographies. You wouldn't understand Noah, 10th generation, without Enoch, 7th generation and in our first portrait that is who we studied, Enoch. You wouldn't understand David unless you understood that Prophet Nathan who we studied in the second portrait. In acting they call these background actors the character actors who are the sinew of the story. These people connect things and bring some meaning that highlight the characters we're all familiar with, like the Daniels, Noahs, Davids etc. They are those behind the scenes and in this study we'll look at one who connected across the board with a number of those headlining characters, like Barnabas, Paul and Peter and his name is Silas. What can we learn and know of him?

By one count there are 349 biographies in the Bible and 67 finish strong. We are told that everything in the Scripture is for our profit and that would include these biographies. God puts them there for a purpose. He lets us see what He does in the lives of men and women and for us to see the shortcomings because God's Word is honest about everybody. It shows us not only their beauty marks but their warts and pimples. We get the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and what was appropriate and focused upon in the Lord from their lives. Secondly, they point us to the history of redemption so that we see Christ at work in the metanarrative in the work of the Bible through these smaller narratives in the Bible. Thirdly, many of them are part of narratives of what we call types of Christ, prophetic statements of Christ and are pointing to Christ in a very significant way. These are ways we can grow in Christ as we learn from them.

We learn even from the negative. Why does the Bible say 'remember Lot's wife'? This is one to learn some negatives lessons from. Why does the Bible say 'imitate me as I imitate Christ'? Why do we have that hall of faith chapter in Hebrews 11 where these snippets of biographies are given to us? It all there for us to learn from. We will look at a few Scriptures concerning Silas to find out the who, why and how of his life which is his origin, his calling and his legacy.

First let's look at Acts 15 where Silas appears on the pages of Scripture. Let me put this in context for you. Paul and Barnabas have been on the first missionary journey with John Mark. When they arrived in Galatia John Mark washed out, so to speak. He left before they got into the work there. When he comes back it seems as if he gives some reports that concerning the Christians at Jerusalem. What exactly is Paul preaching? They decided to solve this issue with a general assembly so that the various local churches sent representatives to meet at Jerusalem. They solved a couple of issues during this meeting.

One issue they solved was that you don't have to become a Jew to become a Christian. You don't have to be circumcised to be saved. You have to simply come to Christ and Christ is your circumcision. Secondly, they looked at how to deal with the Old Testament ceremonial laws as they are fulfilled in Christ. Thirdly, they taught them how to be sensitive to the sensibilities of the Jewish people that you are reaching in the synagogues as the Gospel message goes to the world and how Jew and Gentile believers can unite in the Lord.

While the Apostles would understand Jewish and Gentile evangelism where for one you would go to the synagogue and the other to the marketplace, they wouldn't have a Jewish church or a Gentile church. On the contrary they would expect them to live as one in Christ, for there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ. So this council sends out a letter with exhortations. They didn't have the technology we do today so they would have to send people out with the letter and those people had to be of the caliber to be able to explain it. Also Antioch was a key church outside of Jerusalem. So this is where we start up in Acts 15.

Acts 15:22–41 says [22] *Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers,* [23] *with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. [24] Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, [25] it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, [26] men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. [27] We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. [28] For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: [29] that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."*

[30] *So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. [31] And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. [32] And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with **many words**. [33] And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. [34] [But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.] [35] But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.*

[36] *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." [37] Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. [38] 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. [39] And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, [40] but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. [41] And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.*

The phrase 'many words' in Acts 15:32 is synonymous with a sermon. Judas and Silas were not only leaders but they were preachers. After all this was done Paul wanted to go on a second missionary journey. What did they do on the first missionary journey? They did four things. They did Gospel evangelism and discipleship. Secondly, they did Gospel church planting. Thirdly, they did Gospel deeds of love and mercy. Fourthly, they developed Gospel leaders in the churches. Paul wanted to go a second time and add church revitalization in order to strengthen the churches they had planted.

Barnabas agrees to this idea of Paul's but Barnabas may have been one of those guys where it was hard to turn down an opportunity. His name means son of encouragement. He wanted to go back and get John Mark to go with them yet Paul didn't want to take him. I would

suggest that there are two reasons Paul doesn't want to take John Mark. One is obvious for he didn't stay the course the first time. Paul is always for developing leader but on this journey they will be going behind enemy lines and he doesn't want a possibility leader who has potential, he wants a proven leader. He wants those who have been tested and tried to go with him.

I believe the second reason why Paul doesn't want John Mark to go is that it looks like John Mark came back from Jerusalem with a report that caused Paul and others a lot of trouble that could only be addressed by that general assembly. In other words, the trust factor probably wasn't there either. Paul wants someone he can trust. Judas and Silas had been sent back to Jerusalem but Paul calls for Silas to come and join him, which he does and now they end up with two missionary teams of Paul and Silas and the second being Barnabas and John Mark. In a later study we'll take a closer look at John Mark and Barnabas in one of my character studies.

Now in the book of Acts, Luke does not give any more attention to Barnabas and John Mark after this. He follows Silas and Paul. At this point a couple of other passages of Scriptures might be helpful. Let's look at Acts 16:1-3 which says *[1] 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. [2] He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. [3] 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.* So Paul and Silas pick up Timothy and become a team of three.

You might be thinking I just skipped over this division here between Paul and Barnabas but I'm going to try and show you by the end of this study that even with disagreements they find a way to have unity and Silas was a part of that. Divisions happen and that's why you may pull into a city and see a first and second Baptist church or a first and second Presbyterian church.

Or you see the guy who went out sailing one day in a boat when a storm carried him away to an unchartered island. He ended up being on that island 30 years by himself because nobody came by it but finally a ship came by. The crew saw the man by himself and couldn't believe it when they had heard he had been there by himself that long. The then crew saw three buildings behind the man and asked him what they were. The man said that one was his home because he had been there so long he built himself a home. The second one the man said was his church and he said 'you have to have a church.' They asked him about the third building and the man said 'That's where I used to go to church.' Divisions happen in a broken world.

It will be interesting to see the final analysis as we work our way through these 30 plus years that are represented in the book of Acts. Now I want to look at II Corinthians 1 to show you what Paul writes about Silas. II Corinthians 1:18-19 says *[18] As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. [19] For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus (formal name for Silas) and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes.* In other words, Paul is saying 'we preached Christ in Corinth.' The 'we' refers to all three of them preaching the Word in Corinth.

Now let's look at I Peter 5:12 which says *[12] By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.* In other words, Peter writes this epistle with a secretary, the person taking the letter for him and that is Silvanus, Silas. So Silas is taking this letter for Peter. How does that happen? I want to back up a little and start by giving you a little bit about Silas' origin.

Silas first appears to us in Acts 15 and the first place we see him is in Jerusalem. We are given no information about his father or mother or his place of birth for it may just as well have

been Jerusalem for all we know. So we first see him there in the church in Jerusalem. He is well known and selected for an important task. He is preaching, leading and is a part of the team of leaders there. He obviously well acquainted with the Apostles who are the elders at the church in Jerusalem. He is very well acquainted with Peter.

When they are finished with this general assembly meeting in Jerusalem that Silas is so trustworthy that they can entrust to him the letter to explain to the churches how and what they have done with this theological issue. He can do this by preaching it and explaining it to wherever he would take it. He goes to Antioch with it and has some time of ministry there along with Judas, Paul and Barnabas. Then as far as we know he eventually goes back to Jerusalem and gets back into his ministry there. Then someone tells him that Paul needs him on his next missionary journey so he goes back to Antioch.

Silas is right with Paul as Paul goes into a synagogue to do evangelism and as he goes into the market place to evangelize the Gentiles. Silas is with Paul as they plant churches and revitalize churches Paul planted on the first missionary journey. Silas is with Paul all through Galatia which was a place that was disturbed by what was going on in Jerusalem. Silas goes with Paul all the way to the coast of the Aegean Sea and it's a place called Troas. They have also picked up Timothy in this missionary journey so it is Paul, Timothy and Silas. At Troas they pick up another key person and his name is Luke.

From there Paul gets what is called the Macedonia call where they want him and his team to come there. Paul and his team go across the Aegean Sea and in less than 25 years after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus the Gospel goes to Europe by way of Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke. Paul goes to Samothrace and then to Neapolis as he begins to do Gospel ministry. Then he goes to large royal colony named Philippi with his team. He goes to the river since there was no synagogue which is where the Jewish proselytes would meet for ritual cleansing. There he meets Lydia and she and her household come to Christ.

Here they also meet a slave girl who is filled with demons. The Apostle Paul casts the demons out and she is converted by the grace of God. The owners of this slave girl had their industry ruined when she was converted because they were making a lot of money off of her. Sin roots into a culture and one of the ways you know it is a lot of people make a lot of money – whether it's pornography, abortion, sexual immorality etc. Sin had rooted into this culture. When Paul had done his work for having set this girl free, they don't give him a parade but they assault him, beat him and bring charges against him. He and Silas are arrested and beaten the Roman preferred way, which was with rods. They were thrown into jail and God decided to deliver them out of that jail with an earthquake. The Philippian jailer thought he was going to be killed because if you work for Rome and lose your prisoners it costs you your life. As the jailer pulls the sword to kill himself Paul tells him 'we're all here.' Paul and Silas had already started their prison ministry.

I am so excited about the prison ministries we have and I think God is blessing us but I don't think we have gotten to the point that if an earthquake came and all the walls came down that all the prisoners would just hang in there. Somehow Paul's ministry had produced that and the Philippian jailer said 'what must I do to be saved?' The Word of the Lord comes to the Apostle Paul who says to him 'believe on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved, you and your household' (Acts 16:25–34) and that very night he and his household were saved and baptized. Let's look at what happened next.

Acts 16:35–39 says [35] *But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go."* [36] *And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates*

*have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace.” [37] But Paul said to them, “They have beaten **us** publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown **us** into prison; and do they now throw **us** out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take **us** out.” [38] The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that **they** were Roman citizens. [39] So they came and apologized to **them**. And they took **them** out and asked them to leave the city.*

Again, we see Paul was not alone in prison. Silas was also a part of this. Perhaps this was another reason Paul wanted Silas to come with him for he was a Roman citizen like Paul was. Some maybe thinking ‘why didn’t Paul just move on?’ but it is similar to what is happening in our culture today where people are appealing to the first amendment when their rights as a citizen have been infringed upon. I think it’s right to do this and not so much that we’re afraid to suffer for Christ’s sake but Paul does this three different times where he appeals to his right as a Roman citizen yet two times it will be to his detriment. So why does he do it? Paul is carving something out for the next generation for the church in Rome and the Roman Empire after him. So he does with Silas here in the jail as they claim their rights as Roman citizens.

Then they leave Philippi and go to Thessalonica. There they begin to have a profitable ministry yet they also get beaten here and are asked to leave. So Paul, Timothy and Silas leave and head to Berea. Paul says the Bereans are more noble-minded than the Thessalonians. Acts 17:10–11 says *[10] The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. [11] Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.* Luke was left back at Philippi.

Then the people who brought the riot against him in Thessalonica track him down in Berea as they try to produce another riot. This Paul leaves but Silas and Timothy stay in Berea and Paul goes down to Athens. As he is there God is doing some wonderful things but he longs for Timothy and Silas so he sends word to them but they didn’t get there in time to join him in Athens but they joined him a little further south in a place called Corinth. There they served with Paul for 18 months. It is there you hear of the great preaching of Paul, Timothy and Silas as they preach Jesus. Paul refers to the 18th month ministry in II Corinthians 1:19. After this Paul send Silas back up for a temporary ministry in Thessalonica and send Luke back up to assist in Philippi. Then they all go with him as he makes his way to Ephesus and all the way back as the end of the second missionary journey comes to a conclusion. Paul also took him on his third missionary journey.

After Paul’s third missionary journey the only thing we can find out is that Silas stays in Jerusalem as Paul goes off where he has his imprisonments in Rome and eventually he loses his life. Paul will forever think of how close he was with Silas but now Silas is back in Jerusalem. So who is he with now? He is with Peter and he helps Peter write I Peter. Then it looks like Silas might have been the one to take that letter of I Peter to the churches at Galatia. It is likely that if he showed up with a letter he spent some time preaching that letter to the churches of Galatia which is what we call Turkey today.

Another thing we know about Silas is that he had a Roman name, Silvanus, and what is interesting is that Paul, in his epistles, always referred to him as Silvanus and never Silas. Luke in the book of Acts always refers to him as Silas. I think Paul is emphasizing one of Silas’ values for he is not only a Roman citizen but he has a Roman name and that becomes helpful for the Apostle Paul to the Gentiles.

What was Silas' calling? One, is that he was a leader in the church and we saw that in Acts 15. Two, he was a prophet and a preacher and spoke forth the truth of God's Word. Thirdly, he was a discipler for Paul left him and Timothy behind in Berea to do some discipling in the church because he wasn't able to be there. Then Paul sent him to Philippi to do some discipling back at the church there. Fourthly, he is a secretary. He is able to support to some degree Paul as he writes his letters and to a big degree he becomes the primary secretary for Peter as I Peter is written and taken to the Galatians.

What is Silas' legacy? Here is how we will conclude this study. Silas was a man whom God has prepared in His providence. This is a sovereign God who gives this man a Roman name as well as a nickname. God gives him status as the church in Jerusalem which by the way some people had left that church and gone to Galatia and claimed to be sent by the church in Jerusalem which brought all kinds of confusion. After the general assembly they sent one of their own up to tell those people they were not sent by the church of Jerusalem. Silas is a man who can preach and declare the truth of God's Word. He is a trustworthy leader which is his legacy.

There is a small group of theologians who claim Silas wrote the book of Hebrews. He did not. How do I know? I am convinced Luke wrote the book of Hebrews so he could not but evaluate their arguments on this. I don't think their arguments are supportive enough. They say if Silas is with two Apostles who are overseeing him then under their oversight he could have written this epistle that bridges to Jew and Gentile. I don't think that is true for a number of reasons but that is what they say. He was a secretary and a preacher but he was something else and this is where I want to conclude.

Silas wasn't a rabble rouser or a man for his own benefit would create friction. When he left Jerusalem he was able to work with Paul. He not only went on two missionary journeys with Paul but when he went back to Jerusalem he was with Peter and was able to work with him even though Paul and Peter had, had disagreements, as Silas never compromised truth but always working with both. Silas went back and forth working with both of them and was able to work with Peter on one of the most profound epistles in your Bible which is I Peter. John Mark is also with Peter with whom Paul had some issues with yet John Mark will end up back with Paul and there is Silas with Peter and John Mark having been with Paul. The man Paul took in place of John Mark is now able to work with John Mark on the team with Peter. At every point Silas could have created discord to his advantage, he not only refused to do it but he was a bridge builder. Silas went from Peter to Paul and back to Peter and in between was John Mark. That was the ministry of Silas.

Some of you know about where I grew up in North Carolina and my family's association with the Grahams (Billy Graham's family). I had the chance to meet some amazing people. Many know about Billy, George Beverly Shea and Cliff Barrows who were a part of Billy's ministry but I want to tell you about some people you don't know. I want to tell you about T.W. and Grady Wilson who were on that team that most never know and they never wanted to be known, but they were always faithful, building bridges and always helping the work of the Gospel. There was loyalty that never transcended a commitment to Christ but that honored his commitment to Christ. There was an ability to build bridges between people that very easily could have been divided, but they were able to make that kind of redemptive communication.

Very few of us are going to be monuments in the Kingdom of God but I think all of us can be bridge builders. All of us can be like Silas. Lord, where is my place? Part of my place is to connect those whom God is using. I not only want to be useful for how He is going to use them, but I want to be useful in how they can work together and I want to be part of that team. It

is amazing how many of us might have that opportunity. There is more to find out about concerning Silas but at least start where we started in this study. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much for the opportunity to be in Your Word and to see what You do in the lives of men and women in such wonderful, glorious ways, how You honor Yourself in their lives, how they honor You and how they honor each other. I'm grateful I have eternity because there are so many of these people I want to talk to but I also thank You for Your Word that gives us a head start so that we can find out about them. When we find out about them we don't worship them but we worship You. We don't exalt them but we exalt You because they wouldn't have done what they did apart from the grace of God and we rejoice in that because that same grace is available to us. God, we rejoice in the grace that You send to us and we simply ask that from us would flow rivers of living water. Help us to be bridges of redeeming grace, not only to the lost so that they can come to Christ, but to one another so that we can serve Christ together, for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

Silas' Origin

Silas' Calling

Silas' Legacy