

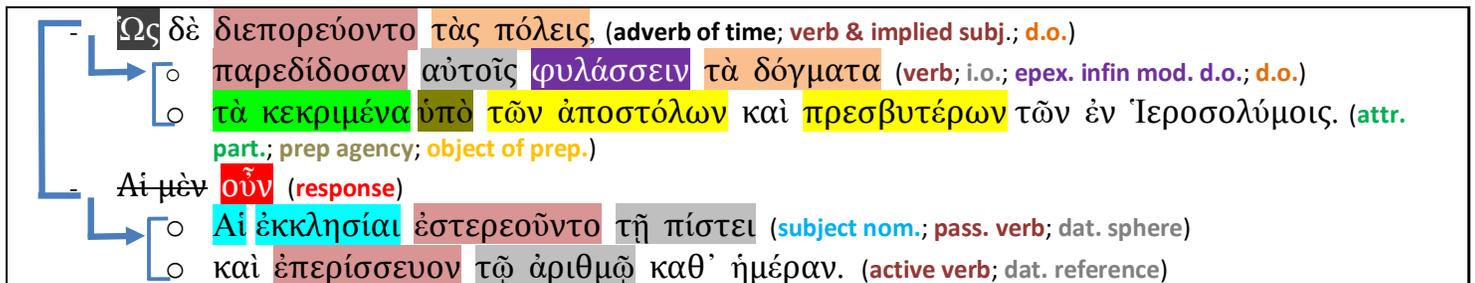
## Acts 16:4-5

An Original Translation from the UBS-5 by [Tyler Robbins](#)  
Revised February 2017

### 1. FINISHED TRANSLATION:

Then, as they passed through the cities, they handed down the orders to them to obey, which had been decided by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. So the congregations were strengthened in the faith, and they grew in number every day.

### 2. THOUGHT-FLOW DIAGRAM:



### 3. DETAILED TRANSLATION NOTES:

This translation follows the diagram, above.

Acts 16:4	Ὡς	δὲ	διεπορεύοντο	τὰς	πόλεις,
	adv	conj	3 <sup>rd</sup> ,pl,imp,m,i	apf	apf
	as, like	then, and, but	they were passing through	the	cities
	Then, as they were passing through the cities,				
Then, as they passed through the cities,					

**Ὡς.** This is an adverb of time (cf. BDAG, s.v. “8075 ὡς,” 8.d.), modifying the verb διεπορεύοντο and explaining that this action happened while they were passing through the cities.

**δὲ.** This conjunction is expressing transition (cf. Young, *Intermediate Grammar*, 183-184). Many English translations choose to not render it at all, although the NASB ops for “now.” I chose to translate it, and went with “then.”

**διεπορεύοντο.** This appears to be a deponent middle, functioning as a simple active – indicating “they” are directly performing the action of the verb. They are not performing the action reflexively on themselves, so a direct middle is ruled out. Likewise, they are not performing the action with a degree of self-interest, so the

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indirect middle is unlikely. It seems a deponent middle is the best fit here; note the next verb is in the active voice.

This appears to be a descriptive imperfect, describing a continuous, ongoing event which happened in the past. I translated it with an aorist flavor (“as they **passed**”). The NASB retains the imperfect sense (“they **were passing** . . . they **were delivering**”). A declarative indicative.

**τὰς πόλεις.** An accusative of direct object, receiving the action of the verb.

<b>παρεδίδοσαν</b>	<b>αὐτοῖς</b>	<b>φυλάσσειν</b>	<b>τὰ</b>	<b>δόγματα</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup> ,pl,imp,a,i	dpm	p,a,inf	apn	apn
they were passing on, handing down	to them	to be observing, following, obeying	the	laws, ordinances, decrees, decisions
they were handing down to them to observe				
they handed down the orders to them to obey				

**παρεδίδοσαν.** As a side note, this word has an alternate spelling in the BYZ and TR (παρεδίδουν) which is a better fit for the imperfect ending paradigm. The UBS-5 spelling is bizarre and threw me for a loop.

The verb is in the active voice, indicating “they” are directly performing the action. Like the previous verb, I take this to be a descriptive imperfect. I translated this with an aorist flavor, like the previous verb. A declarative indicative.

This word can be rendered as “handed down,” “passed down,” entrusted,” “delivered” or something similar. I chose “handed down” because it better fits the authoritarian nuances of the verse. The decision of the Jerusalem Council is not an optional matter; at least, Paul and Timothy didn’t think so. The rest of this verse makes that clear.

**αὐτοῖς.** A dative of indirect object.

**φυλάσσειν.** This is an anarthrous, simple infinitive, modifying the noun τὰ δόγματα epexegetically and explaining more about these dogmas (“ordinances”) which have been handed down (cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 607). What about them? They must be observed. It is possible the infinitive modifies the verb παρεδίδοσαν and expresses purpose. This is the practical difference:

- (1) Infinitive modifies the verb: “handed down to them **to obey** the ordinances. . .” The RSV and ESV chose this option.

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- (2) Infinitive modifies the noun: “handed down to them the ordinances **to obey** . . .” Tyndale, KJV and NKJV went with this option.

Other translations moved the infinitive to the end of the sentence, presumably for stylistic reasons (e.g. NASB, NIV). I believe the context suggests the infinitive is a descriptive present (“to be **obeying**”), although it is very tempting to make it an iterative present (“to be **always obeying**”). However, I fear that may be *over*-translating a bit. The infinitive is in active voice, indicating the recipients are expected to perform the action.

**τὰ δόγματα**. This is the direct object of the verb παρεδίδοσαν; it is what was “handed down” by Paul and Timothy. Some readers will recognize this as the English word “dogma,” referring to an authoritative ecclesiastical decree which must be obeyed in, for example, the Roman Catholic system. The word is well attested in the LXX, and the NT. Silva wrote the semantic range encompasses the concepts of *decree, ordinance* or *doctrine*.<sup>1</sup>

For example, Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree (i.e. an **order**) that all the wise men of Babylon be brought forth, to interpret his dream (LXX Dan 4:3). Later, Darius issued a decree (i.e. a **law**) that no man could pray to anyone except him for 30 days (LXX Dan 6:9; see also 6:11, 13, 14, 16, 27).

In the NT, we read about the decree (i.e. an **order**) which went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world must be taxed (Lk 2:1). The Jews in Thessalonica claimed Paul and his companions were advocating for another king, in violation of Caesar’s decrees (i.e. **laws**; Acts 17:7). Paul wrote that Christ abolished “the law of commandments and ordinances,” (i.e. **regulations**; Eph 2:15). He also stated that Christ “canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands (i.e. **regulations**; Col 2:14).

So, what should we do with the word here? It is doubtful *law* will do; the Jerusalem Council was not a civil body with legislative authority. Perhaps *regulation* or *ordinance* is best. To be even more blunt, perhaps we can bring things down to the bottom shelf, so to speak, and drop *ordinance* in favor of *order*. After all, the very word “ordinance” means an authoritative decree or a law.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a full discussion, see Moises Silva, *NIDNTTE*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 1:752-753.

<sup>2</sup> *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2003), s.v. “ordinance,” 1a, 1b.

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The word originally meant *opinion* or *belief* in the early classical period, and its usage gradually morphed into something like *judgment*, *decision* or *resolution* (NIDNTTE, 1:752). But, I see no evidence to suggest Luke was using the word to convey this weak of a meaning.

Kittell wrote that “In Ac. 16:4 the word signifies the resolutions and decrees of the early church in Jerusalem which are to be sent out to the cities of the first missionary journey. In the post-apostolic fathers the word comes to be applied to the teachings and prescriptions of Jesus.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Ignatius wrote that Christians must “be diligent therefore to be confirmed in the ordinances (i.e. **commands, orders**)<sup>4</sup> of the Lord and the Apostles,” (*Magnesians* 13.1). Barnabas wrote, “there are then three doctrines (i.e. **teachings, commands**) of the Lord,” (*Epistle* 1.6). The *Didache* reads, “and concerning the Apostles and Prophets, act thus according to the ordinance (i.e. **command, order**) of the Gospel,” (11.3).

I don’t think you can escape the fact that this was not a suggestion from the Jerusalem Council; it was a decree, an order. Some might seek to soften it and say *decision*, but I don’t believe you can justify that weak of a translation from the word’s usage in the LXX, the NT or the early apostolic era (contra. NASB, RSV, ESV, NIV).

κεκριμένα	ὑπὸ	τῶν	ἀποστόλων	καὶ	πρεσβυτέρων	τῶν	ἐν	Ἱεροσολύμοις.
perppapn	prep	gpm	gpm	conj	gpm	gpm	prep	dpn
they had been judged, decided	by	of the	apostles	and	elders	of the	in	Jerusalem
the ordinances which had been decided by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem								
which had been decided by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.								

**τὰ κεκριμένα.** This is an adjectival, attributive participle, modifying the noun τὰ δόγματα, which it matches in number and gender. Context suggests this is an intensive perfect, indicating a new state of affairs. The Jerusalem Council reached its decision, and now Paul and Timothy are “handing down the orders to obey which **had been decided.**” Simple passive voice, indicating the “deciding” had been done *to* the orders.

**ὑπὸ.** The preposition is expressing agency; “[t]he usual preposition expressing the agent of passive verbs is ὑπὸ with the genitive,” (Young, *Grammar*, 102).

<sup>3</sup> Gerhard Kittel, “δόγμα, δογματίζω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 2:231.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Holmes (*The Apostolic Fathers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989]) translated this as “precepts.”

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**τῶν ἀποστόλων.** The object of the preposition

**καὶ.** This conjunction is a simple additive.

**πρεσβυτέρων.** The object of the preposition

**τῶν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις.** The preposition is expressing special position.

Jerusalem is in the dative because it is the object of the preposition.

Acts 16:5	Αἱ	μὲν	οὖν
	npf	part	conj
	the	indeed	so
	So		
So			

**οὖν.** A conjunction which conveys a response; “a narrative link that introduces an action in response to a previous action or utterance,” (Young, *Grammar*, 191).

Acts 16:5	Αἱ	μὲν	ἐν	ἐκκλησίαι	ἐστερεοῦντο	τῇ	πίστει
	npf	part	εἰη	npf	3 <sup>rd</sup> ,pl,impf,pass,i	dsf	dsf
	the	indeed	se	congregations	they were being strengthened	the	faith
	the congregations were being strengthened in the faith						
	the congregations were strengthened in the faith						

**Αἱ . . . ἐκκλησίαι.** The subject nominative of the sentence.

**μὲν.** A particle I left untranslated.

**ἐστερεοῦντο.** The verb describes an action being done *to* the congregations; note the simple passive voice. Like the other verbs from v.4, this one is also a descriptive imperfect. I translated with an aorist flavor (“**were** strengthened”) for stylistic reasons. The NASB translated it as a descriptive (“**were being** strengthened”). A declarative indicative.

**τῇ πίστει.** It seems best to take this as a metaphorical dative of sphere, describing the sphere in which this strengthening occurs (“**in** the faith”). It could also be a dative of reference, limiting the action of the verb to the concept of “faith.”

καὶ	ἐπερίσσευον	τῷ	ἀριθμῷ	καθ’	ἡμέραν.
conj	3 <sup>rd</sup> ,pl,impf,a,i	dsm	dsm	prep	asf
and	they were abounding, growing	to the	number	according to	day
and were abounding in number every day					
and they grew in number every day					

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**καὶ**. This conjunction is a simple additive.

**ἐπερίσσευον**. This verb also modifies the noun ἐκκλησία. It is a simple active, indicating the congregations are doing the growing – although I think it would be a bit much to conclude they are making themselves grow. A descriptive imperfect. Declarative indicative.

**τῷ ἀριθμῷ**. I think a dative of reference, limiting the verb, is best here.

**καθ' ἡμέραν**. The preposition with this noun is expressing the idea “every day” (cf. BDAG, s.v “3938 κατά,” 2.c.).