

ARE SILAS AND SILVANUS TWO OR ONE?

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE QUESTION

- Explanation of the apparent dual names: SILAS vs. SILVANUS.
- Importance of determining identity for biblical clarity and church history.

II. LINGUISTIC CONSIDERATIONS

- **Silas** (Σίλας) is used in Acts — a Greek environment.
- **Silvanus** is a Latin name used in Paul's epistles and 1 Peter.
- No strict etymological derivation, but usage suggests equivalence.
 - Cephas/Peter, John/Mark.
- Silas may be a shortened form or Hellenized version of Silvanus.

III. CONTEXTUAL EVIDENCE

- Both names appear in reference to:
 - A close companion of Paul (Acts 15–18; 2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1).
 - A trusted coworker who ministers in Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth.
 - A possibly trusted courier or secretary for Peter (1 Peter 5:12).
- No other figures named Silas or Silvanus appear separately in the New Testament.

IV. CHURCH TRADITION AND SCHOLARLY CONSENSUS

- Early church fathers (e.g., Jerome, Eusebius) treat them as the same person.
- No known tradition distinguishes them as separate individuals.
- Universal scholarly agreement that Silas = Silvanus.

V. CONCLUSION

- On the basis of linguistics, context, and tradition, Silas and Silvanus are one and the same.

EVERYTHING WE KNOW BIBLICALLY ABOUT SILAS

I. SILAS INTRODUCED (ACTS 15)

- A **leading man** among the Jerusalem believers (Acts 15:22).
- **Prophet and speaker**: exhorted and confirmed the brethren (Acts 15:32).
- Sent as a **delegate from the Jerusalem Council** to Antioch (Acts 15:22–27).
- Trusted to deliver doctrinal decisions from apostles and elders.

II. MISSIONARY COMPANION OF PAUL

A. BEGINNING THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY (ACTS 15:40)

- Paul selects Silas after parting ways with Barnabas.

- Described as “commended by the brethren unto the grace of God.”

B. MINISTRY IN PHILIPPI (ACTS 16:16–40)

- Imprisoned alongside Paul after casting out a spirit of divination from a slave girl, provoking the anger of her masters (Acts 16:16–24).
- Sang hymns and prayed at midnight while in prison, resulting in a miraculous earthquake that opened the prison doors and loosed their chains (Acts 16:25–26).
- Instrumental in leading the Philippian jailer and his entire household to faith, baptizing them immediately after their conversion (Acts 16:27–34).
- Demonstrated remarkable courage, joyful perseverance in adversity, and strong spiritual leadership throughout these challenging circumstances (Acts 16:25, 37–40).

C. MINISTRY IN THESSALONICA AND BEREIA (ACTS 17:1–14)

- Preached alongside Paul in Jewish synagogues in Thessalonica, reasoning from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 17:1–4).
- Faced intense opposition and mob violence instigated by unbelieving Jews, causing disturbances and persecution (Acts 17:5–9).
- Sent away under the cover of night by concerned believers to the nearby town of Berea, where they continued preaching the gospel with notable success and receptivity among the Bereans (Acts 17:10–12).
- Encountered renewed hostility when Jews from Thessalonica arrived in Berea to agitate the crowds, resulting in Paul being sent away to Athens, while Silas and Timothy remained behind temporarily (Acts 17:13–14).

D. CORINTH (ACTS 18:5)

- Rejoins Paul with Timothy in Corinth.
- Engaged in evangelism among Jews and Gentiles.

III. REFERENCES IN PAULINE EPISTLES

- **2 Corinthians 1:19**: preached Christ among the Corinthians with Paul and Timothy.
- **1 Thessalonians 1:1** and **2 Thessalonians 1:1**: co-sender of letters to the church at Thessalonica.
- Implies authority, unity of message, and active role in church planting.

IV. REFERENCE IN PETER’S EPISTLE

- **1 Peter 5:12**: “By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you...”
 - Possibly the **amanuensis** (scribe) or **courier** of Peter’s letter.
 - Shows trust from both Paul and Peter — a rare dual association.

CONSIDERING SILAS FROM A RIGHT DIVISION PERSPECTIVE

I. SILAS AS A JEWISH BELIEVER

- Scripture clearly presents Silas as a Jewish believer from Jerusalem:
 - He was “chief among the brethren” in Jerusalem (Acts 15:22).
 - Acts consistently associates him with the Jerusalem assembly (Acts 15:22–27).
 - No scriptural indication exists that Silas was Gentile or even Hellenistic Jewish in orientation—he was distinctly Jewish.
- He was also a Roman Citizen (Acts 16:37).

- This would make him ideal for being Paul's companion: two Roman Jews visiting the Roman empire with two messages.
- Silas was endorsed by the Jerusalem church and Peter. Paul was a messenger of a new message that was potentially offensive to Jewish believers. Together they became a great team.

II. SILAS' ASSOCIATION WITH PETER

- Silas (as "Silvanus") explicitly connected with Peter:

"By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly..." (1 Peter 5:12).

- This indicates Silas was:
 - Trusted by Peter.
 - Familiar with Peter's message, recipients, and audience.
 - Possibly involved in communicating Peter's gospel (the gospel of the circumcision—Gal. 2:7).

III. PAUL'S USE OF SILAS—A RECOGNITION OF PETER'S GOSPEL?

- Paul consciously chose Silas as his companion for his second missionary journey (Acts 15:40):
 - Notably, Paul selected Silas immediately following the Jerusalem Council.
 - Silas was explicitly sent from Jerusalem to Antioch to communicate the council's decisions concerning Gentiles (Acts 15:22–34).

COULD THIS CHOICE AFFIRM PETER'S GOSPEL?

- Romans 1:16 states:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

- Paul consistently affirmed the validity of the "Jew first" principle even within his own distinct ministry.
- By selecting Silas—a man closely linked to Peter—Paul implicitly acknowledged Peter's gospel (circumcision-oriented, kingdom-focused, repentance-based gospel) still stood during this transitional era.

IMPLICATIONS:

- Paul's choosing Silas was not random, but strategic. He chose someone:
 - Accepted by the Jerusalem apostles.
 - Identified with the Jerusalem assembly.
 - Trusted and respected by Jewish believers.
- This clearly implies Paul was not distancing himself from Peter's gospel at this stage, but rather recognized its continuing validity for Jewish believers.

IV. EVIDENCE OF AN OVERLAP OF GOSPELS

- Galatians 2:7-9 explicitly teaches the reality of two concurrent, distinct gospels:
 - **"Gospel of the uncircumcision"** (Paul's gospel, grace apart from the Law).
 - **"Gospel of the circumcision"** (Peter's gospel, kingdom-oriented, Torah-centric).
- The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) demonstrates that both were active simultaneously:
 - Jewish believers maintained Torah observance (Acts 21:20-25).
 - Gentile believers were free from the Mosaic Law.
- Silas, working closely with both apostles, represents a living link and a practical demonstration of this overlap.

V. SILAS: A BRIDGE FIGURE

- Silas provides a unique point of reference for understanding the transitional nature of Acts:
 - He worked with both Peter (kingdom gospel) and Paul (grace gospel).
 - He affirmed both apostolic ministries, demonstrating they were complementary rather than conflicting in that specific transitional time.
- Silas symbolizes the "overlap" of two distinct programs operating simultaneously:
 - Israel's kingdom program (headed by Peter).
 - The Body of Christ's grace program (headed by Paul).

VI. PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS

CAN SILAS AFFIRM PETER'S GOSPEL?

- **Yes**, clearly so. Paul's choice of Silas immediately following the Jerusalem Council represents a strategic and purposeful affirmation of Peter's gospel's continuing validity at that time.

DOES SILAS INDICATE OVERLAP?

- **Absolutely.** His dual ministry role underscores the unique transitional period during which two distinct gospels and two distinct apostolic missions operated concurrently:
 - To Israel, calling for national repentance (Peter's gospel).
 - To all men (especially Gentiles), offering justification apart from the Law (Paul's gospel).

WHEN DID THIS OVERLAP END?

- Right division theology typically identifies a gradual fading of the kingdom program (Peter's gospel) as Israel hardened nationally, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70), after which Paul's gospel alone remained operative.
- Silas' ministry falls clearly within this overlap period.