

The Acts of the Apostles

LESSON 20

Lesson 20
Chapter 16-17

Because we will have to cover multiple chapters in each session from here on in the course, we will only be able to summarize the journeys of Paul and highlight the most interesting features of them as we go forward.

Timothy Joins Paul and Silas (Acts 16:1-5)

Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. 2 He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. 3 Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. 4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.

Paul filled out his traveling team. Silas was a good choice for a couple of reasons. He was a respected leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:22). This would lend authority to the letter that they were carrying. He was a prophetic ministry which would add balance to Paul's apostolic ministry (Acts 15:32).

Timothy was a good choice for a couple of reasons. He had a strong Christian heritage through his mother (II Tim. 1:5). He understood the suffering associated with ministry (Acts 14:19). He had proven his ministry at home (Acts 16:2). He had a Gentile father.

Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3). This seems a little strange after the big stir in the previous chapter. But Paul knew that they would be entering into many synagogues of the Jews and he did not want circumcision to be the issue, he wanted Jesus to be the issue (I Cor. 9:19-23; II Cor. 6:3).

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you. I Corinthians 9:19-23

We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed.
II Corinthians 6:3

Paul began retracing his steps to follow-up on previous work he had done.

Paul and the Macedonian Call (Acts 16:6-10)

Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. 7 After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. 8 So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” 10 Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Paul functioned in his sanctified wisdom and sound judgment. He decided to visit the churches he had founded because it was wise to do so. He set his course for Bithynia because it seemed like the next logical move.

Paul believed that it is easier to guide a moving ship than one that is docked in the harbor. Paul was not stubborn but sensitive to the Holy Spirit at all times. Paul’s sensitivity to the Spirit caused him to lay his own plans aside.

He was guided by the inner voice of the Holy Spirit and the peace of God (Acts 16:6-7; Col. 3:15). He was guided by a vision from the Lord (Acts 16:9). He was guided by natural wisdom (Acts 16:11-12). The vision gave him Macedonia which is a region. His natural wisdom gave him Philippi which was the foremost city of that region.

Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days.

Paul’s response was immediate (Acts 16:10). Once he knew the direction of the Lord he wasted no time getting on with it.

Paul Ministers at Philippi (Acts 16:11-34)

It should be noted that Luke seems to have joined the team at this point. Some have conjectured that he was the man of Macedonia that Paul saw in his vision. In any case all of the pronouns are now “we” instead of “they” in the narrative.

Paul entered this city the same way he would enter many cities (Acts 16:13-15). He followed the leading of the Lord. He went to the chief cities. He looked for spiritual activity.

If the city had no synagogue he looked for other things. In this case it was a woman by the name of Lydia who met with other worshippers of God. She received his message and her whole household was saved (Acts 16:14-15).

He responded to every situation as if God was in it. God had a key to every city. The key was not always obvious. In Philippi it would be their imprisonment. In Athens it would be Mars Hill.

In Corinth is would be his money running out and starting a tent-making business with Aquilla.

He relied on the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would give him discernment just as He did with the slave girl. Often it was a miracle that would set things in motion.

He utilized his Roman citizenship to his advantage. Paul knew that this was one of the tools that God had given him in his tool kit for church planting. He would call upon this on a few occasions when necessary (Acts 16:37; 25:11, 16).

Paul cast out a spirit of divination from a slave girl (Acts 16:16-18).

Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." 18 And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.

Paul functioned in the gift of the Spirit called "discerning of spirits." There was no way that Paul could tell from the natural signs that there was a problem. The woman seemed normal. She was not out of control or frothing at the mouth. Her message was right, but her spirit was wrong. Paul did not need the endorsement of a notorious fortune-teller.

Paul understood that all free advertising is not good advertising.

Paul and Barnabas were beaten and put into jail (Acts 16:19-24). Paul's deliverance ministry to this woman ruined her for her masters who gained monetarily from her demonic possession. Paul would have to get used to upsetting the economy of Satan with the power of the Gospel (Acts 19:24-29). Paul and Barnabas were identified as Jews and accused of sedition against the Romans (Acts 16:20-21). Paul and Barnabas were hastily arrested, beaten with rods and put in stocks without a trial (Acts 16:22-24; II Cor. 11:25).

Paul and Barnabas ministered freedom from their prison cell (Acts 16:25-34). They responded to their circumstances with prayer, singing and worship (Acts 16:25). The other prisoners heard their singing (Acts 16:25). God sent a supernatural earthquake that caused their chains to fall off and all of the doors to swing opened (Acts 16:26).

A normal earthquake would not do these things. The keeper of the prison assumed everyone had escaped and was about to kill himself (Acts 16:27). He knew his superiors would have had him killed when it was discovered that all of the prisoners were gone. Paul called out to him and told the jailor that no one had escaped (Acts 16:28).

Under normal circumstance every prisoner would have been gone. The jailor was so touched he gave his life to the Lord and brought Paul and Barnabas to his home to bring the Gospel to his whole family (Acts 16:34). The jailor took them back to prison to wait until the morning (Acts 16:35, implied).

Paul was concerned that if they did not go back to jail the jailer would lose his life. Paul had

another plan for getting out. It was called the Roman “trump card.”

Paul Departs from Philippi (Acts 16:35-40)

And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, “Let those men go.” 36 So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, “The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace.” 37 But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.” 38 And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. 39 Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city. 40 So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

Evidently Paul felt that his presence in Philippi would hinder the work. Most of the time the persecution that the team experienced was aimed more directly at Paul. He was evidently a man that people loved to hate.

Before he left he needed to be cleared by the Romans for the sake of the Gospel. Paul could have demanded the heads of the magistrates who had beaten a Roman citizen without a trial. He knew it and they knew it. Paul used this knowledge to his advantage.

Before he left he needed to organize the new converts (Acts 16:40). These two households would become the foundation for the great Philippian church. Many believe this jailor was Stephanus who is later referenced in Paul’s letter to Corinth (I Cor. 16:15). Paul evidently left the work because he felt that his presence might hinder the work.

Before he left it appears that he left the work in the hands of Luke. From this point all of the “we” references go back to “they” references. Any time Paul gets near Philippi in the future Luke appears to link up with him and his team.

Paul Ministers in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9)

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” 4 And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas. 5 But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. 6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside

down have come here too. 7 Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king--Jesus.” 8 And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. 9 So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

Paul continued his journey in a logical order. He left Philippi traveling through Amphipolis and Appolonia until he came to another chief city, Thessalonica.

Paul and Silas ministered in the synagogue. They followed their usual method of going to the Jew first. They always went to the synagogue first when the city had one. There had been no synagogue in Philippi. They had an opportunity to preach in the synagogue for three weeks.

It was common for the leader of the synagogue to invite visiting rabbis to share with them when they were traveling through. Obviously, Paul's reputation had not preceded him. The focus of their teaching was on the Messiah, what he would be like and that Jesus was the awaited Messiah.

They had some good fruit from their ministry in the synagogue (vs. 4). Some of the Jews of the synagogue were persuaded. Many more devout Greeks responded. A few of the leading ladies joined their ranks.

Paul and Silas faced opposition. Unfortunately the favor did not last long. Soon many of the Jewish leaders came against them. Notice the pattern that is becoming all too common.

- The unbelieving Jews were motivated by envy.
- The unbelieving Jews opposed Paul and Silas.
- The unbelieving Jews formed alliances with their enemies to oppose Paul and Silas.

The King James Version of verse 5 describes the men they that entered into league with as ***“certain lewd fellows of the baser sort.”*** Not the kind of people with whom you want to associate. The unbelieving Jews stirred up the city against Paul and Silas with false charges. The unbelieving Jews gave testimony to the success of Paul and Silas (vs. 6b).

These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. The unbelieving Jews took out their venom on the first likely suspect—the house of Jason. The violence of the unbelieving Jews forced Paul and Silas to leave for the sake of the fledgling work.

Paul Ministers in Berea (Acts 17:10-15)

Paul, Silas and Timothy left Thessalonica and proceeded to Berea. At Berea they had both positive and negative results.

Many of the Jews of the synagogue believed. The thing that characterized these Jews is that they were “more fair-minded” than the Jews in Thessalonica (Acts 17:11-12) These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and

searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.

Other translations say:

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.—NIV

A teacher never has to be afraid of students who search the scripture to see if the things that they are teaching are truly scriptural. They are not “rebels”, they are “of more noble character.”

There are different reactions that we can have to new truth. We can reject immediately without even giving it a fair hearing. This is folly (Pro. 18:13). This is skepticism. We can accept it immediately without any examination of testing of the truth. This is dangerous. We are to prove all things (I Th. 5:21). This is gullibility. We can be like the Bereans. We can receive it with a good spirit and search it out to discover if it is true. This is wisdom.

The Jews from Thessalonica came behind them and stirred up the synagogue against them. As a result of this Paul had to leave Berea leaving Silas and Timothy to help ground the new converts in both Berea and Thessalonica (I Th. 3:1-2). Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith...

Paul Ministers in Athens (Acts 17:16-34)

Paul went to Athens and left word for Silas and Timothy to join back up with him as soon as possible (Acts 17:15). Meanwhile Paul did a tour of Athens to see the sights. He was not able to see the city through the eyes of a tourist who might admire the architecture, the sculpture and the art. All that he saw was a city steeped in idolatry and philosophy. The streets were lined with statutes of Greek and Roman gods. They even had a statue to “the unknown god.”

Paul’s heart was stirred by this idolatry. Ancient writers have said that there were more idols in Athens than in all of the rest of Greece. The city contained over 3000 public statues in addition to the many that people had in their homes. Entire streets were lined with them in places. One ancient writer said, “It is easier to find a god than a man in Athens.” Athens was the philosophy capital of the world where their favorite pastime was debating the latest theories.

Listening to strange philosophies had become the favorite sport of the Athenians (vs. 21).

For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

The true golden age of Greek philosophy was past now that the Greek were under the Romans who cared very little about philosophy. The philosophy of Paul’s world had come down to two

main streams of thought characterized by two representative groups.

The Epicureans

The Epicureans were really the atheists of the day who believed that the world was an accident and that all we had was what we could enjoy in this life. To them seeking pleasure was the main purpose in life. While they accepted the gods of the Greek pantheon, they did not feel that these gods had anything to do with the affairs of men. As a movement the Epicureans became a group given over to gross sensuality.

The Stoics

The Stoics were opposite in many ways. They were the pantheists of the day who claimed that God was in everything and everyone. They did not believe in the immortality of the soul but that if one would live a life of moral excellence they would be swallowed up into deity when they died. The lives that they lived tended to be virtuous as opposed to that of the Epicureans.

Paul accepted the challenge of the Athenian philosophers (Acts 17:18).

Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, “What does this babbler want to say?”

Paul may have used brilliant tactics. He used their own “unknown god” as a springboard to preach about the true God (Acts 17:23). He quoted their philosophers more than the scriptures to lead them to Christ (Acts 17:28).

For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, for we are also his offspring.

This was a statement made by Plautus referring to Jupiter.

Paul may have made an error in judgment. Paul had been trained in philosophy and was a well-educated man. For him to speak at the Aeropagus would be the height of his worldly dream. When they called him “a babbler” or, literally, “a seed-picker” he may have been challenged to prove himself.

The term “seed-picker” was a small bird or crow that picked up seed for its food. It came to refer to an ill-educated person who picked up scraps of knowledge and retailed them to others with a pretention of learning. When these people challenged Paul they were suggesting that he was such a person.

- He allowed the spirit of the age to challenge him to authenticate himself.
- He tried to win the world on its own ground.
- He may have trusted in the arm of the flesh.
- His hearers only seemed to make sport of his reference to the resurrection (Acts 17:32).

He may have been vulnerable at this point because he was alone, violating the team principle.

Notice what he determined when he came to Corinth (I Cor. 2:1-5). And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

He blasted worldly wisdom (I Cor. 1:18-31). Paul preached on Mars' Hill or the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-32). Paul had minimal results in Athens and moved on to Corinth (Acts 17:34).

Paul's Second Missionary Journey Mapped Out



The above map covers the second missionary journey from Acts 15:40 to Acts 18:22