

The Historical Stories of the Acts of the Apostles

Lesson 11 Acts 17:1 – Acts 18:22

Paul's second missionary journey began in Antioch. He wanted to return to the churches he had established on the first journey to see how they were doing. Because of a falling out with Barnabas concerning John Mark, Paul selected Silas as his new partner. Barnabas and John Mark set sail to Cyprus while Paul and Silas took the northern route back to the Galatian area. Silas had been commissioned in Jerusalem to relay the information from the Jerusalem council to all the churches in Syria and Cilicia. The northern route took the team through these two areas and Silas was able to accomplish the task assigned to him by James.

In Lystra, Paul met Timothy, the son of a Jewish mother and a Gentile father, and allowed him to join the team. Because Paul was still interested in Jewish converts, he circumcised Timothy so he would not offend the Jews in the synagogues. The Lord did not allow the team to minister in the Asian area and directed Paul to the port-city of Troas where he had a vision about a man's calling him to Macedonia. The next day, the team set sail for that country and the city of Philippi.

In Philippi, Paul changed his habits and spent his Sabbaths at the riverside in prayer. There he met Lydia, a well-to-do woman in the city who invited the team to stay in her home. Each time the team went to the river to pray, a demon-possessed girl annoyed them with her constant talking. Paul cast the demon out of her and the men who used her for profit were furious so they had Paul put in jail. That night an earthquake occurred at midnight and the jailer thought his prisoners had escaped. Paul called to the jailer and kept him from committing suicide. The jailer was saved along with his entire family.

The next morning the city magistrates sent word to let the team go free, but Paul demanded that they apologize for beating them since they were Roman citizens. The judges did as Paul asked and the team left town.

From Philippi they headed for Thessalonica, 150 miles away. The reception there was as painful and difficult as in Philippi.

Through Amphipolis, Apollonia and to Thessalonica

Acts 17: ¹How when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ²And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ." ⁴And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. ⁵But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and coming upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. ⁶And when they did not find them, they *began* dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also; ⁷and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that

there is another king, Jesus." ⁸And they stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. ⁹And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.

Second Missionary Journey (Complete)

Departure	Arrival	Miles	Via
Antioch	Through Syria and Cilicia to Derbe	225	land
Derbe	Lystra	60	land
Lystra	Iconium	20	land
Iconium	Troas	475	land
Troas	Philippi	150	water & land
Philippi	Thessalonica	150	land
Thessalonica	Berea	80	land
Berea	Athens	150	land
Athens	Corinth	75	land
Corinth	Cenchrea	20	land
Cenchrea	Ephesus	150	water
Ephesus	Antioch	900	Water and land

Luke's report that the team traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica indicates that they traveled the famous Egnatian Way, a Roman highway that stretches more than 500 miles from Brysantium to Dyrrachium along the eastern seashore.

Amphipolis stands about 32 miles from Philippi. Although it is a greater distance than a normal day's journey, it is conceivable that the team spent the night there. Apollonia is another 32 miles down the Egnatian Way and it is possible that the team spent another night in this town. Luke's record becomes so sketchy at this point that it is difficult to know how much ministry takes place as they travel from place to place.

Eighty-six miles down the road, the team arrives at Thessalonica. Only one synagogue stands in Thessalonica, a significant indication that few Jews are living in the city. Paul resumes his normal habit and visits this synagogue for three Sabbaths. Each week, although the Jews become more agitated with the team, many become converts. The team is accused of breaking the same law that the Philippians had used to throw them in jail. In Thessalonica, Jason and a few others are able to pay a pledge, or bond, to keep them out of jail. As we will see later in this letter, Paul's work in Thessalonica is not in vain. Paul loves the church there and will write two letters to them within the next two years.

To Berea

Acts 17: ¹⁰And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so. ¹²Many of them therefore believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men. ¹³But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there likewise, agitating and stirring up the crowds. ¹⁴And then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. ¹⁵Now those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

In fear for their lives, the team leaves the city and proceeds 80 miles to the city of Berea under the cover of night. The reception in Berea is much different from that in Thessalonica,

at least for a short time. The labor in Berea is fruitful for the Lord until the Jews in Thessalonica hear about the whereabouts of the team and arrive in the city with the purpose of stirring up trouble for them. Once again, Paul is sent out of town for safety reasons. Silas and Timothy remain in Berea but this situation does not make Paul happy.

One hundred-fifty miles away in Athens, Paul sends a message to Silas and Timothy to catch up with him as soon as possible. The men leave Paul in Athens and return to Berea with the message. For the first time in the first two missionary journeys, Paul has only Luke by his side.

To Athens

Acts 17: ¹⁶Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols. ¹⁷So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing *Gentiles*, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. ¹⁸And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. And some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"-- because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? ²⁰"For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; we want to know therefore what these things mean." ²¹(Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.) ²²And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. ²³"For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; ²⁵neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; ²⁶and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.' ²⁹"Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. ³⁰"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, ³¹because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." ³²Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." ³³So Paul went out of their midst.

In Athens, Paul spends his time touring the city and reading the inscriptions on the idols. Athens was the home of the Agora of Socrates, the Academy of Plato, the Lyceum of Aristotle, the Porch of Zeno, and the Garden of Epicurus. Although the glory days of Athens were long in the past, men still talked about philosophy, poetry, politics, religion, anything

and everything. It was still the art center of the world. The Parthenon, the most beautiful of the temples, crowned the Acropolis. More than 30,000 idols/sculptures decorated the city.

Paul's normal routine in the synagogue and his preaching in the market place cause a stir among the people and they drag him to the Areopagus for questioning. Paul's appearance at the Court of Areopagus is not for a trial as if Paul had committed some criminal act; but it is simply for examination of his teaching. Athens was a university city which fostered the idea of exploring new taught. After all, what does it matter if one more god is added to the thousands of gods worshipped in the city? The Court of Areopagus is very different from the magistrates of Philippi and the mob of Thessalonica. In this polite setting, Paul uses the statue to an unknown god as a transition to the gospel which he hopes will convert them all to Jesus Christ.

Paul's message interests them to a point. The Athenians believe in an afterlife, so they are interested in any new information they can obtain about it, but the idea of a resurrected body is strange to them. After a while, they decide to resume the conversation another day.

Significant converts were added to the church in Athens. Dionysius the Areopagite held one of the twelve seats of the Court of Areopagus that had made Athens famous in earlier years. He will become the pastor of the church in Athens and later die as a martyr.

Evidently, Paul does not give the men at the Areopagus the opportunity for another conversation, but makes his way to Corinth, 50 miles away. At this point, we need to know that Timothy does catch up with Paul in Athens, but Paul sends him back to Berea to continue the ministry there.

To Corinth

Acts 18:1 after these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. **2** And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, **3** and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent-makers. **4** And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

In Corinth, Paul needs to earn a living. He begins working as a tent-maker and meets two Jewish converts named Aquila and Priscilla. Since Aquila was from Pontus, it is possible that he was one of the converts on the Day of Pentecost.¹⁶⁰

Late in AD 49, Claudius was tired of the dispute and constant tumult among the Jews involving the argument over Chrestus or Christ. He ordered all the Jews to leave Italy. Aquila and Priscilla made their way to Corinth and established a church in their home there.

A gift from Macedonia

Acts 18:5 but when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. **6** And when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads! I am clean. From now on I shall go to the Gentiles." **7** And he departed from there and went to the house of a certain man named Titus Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the

¹⁶⁰ Acts 2

synagogue. ⁸And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.

Luke does not mention the gift brought by Silas and Timothy that allows Paul to devote himself to the ministry, but Paul does in his letters to Thessalonica, Corinth, and Philippi.¹⁶¹ Paul's ministry in Corinth on the Sabbaths was one thing, but now his daily ministry to Jews is another. Like all other synagogues, there are some who will convert and there are those who will not. After a while, the Jews who do not convert begin to lie, just as they do in the other cities. Offended, Paul threatens to minister only to the Gentiles.

Paul's labor in the synagogue is not in vain. Two significant converts include Titus and Crispus. Titus' home actually shared a common wall with the synagogue. Crispus also becomes a believer with all his family. Most of the converts are baptized by Silas and Timothy, but for some reason Paul baptizes Crispus.

A night vision

Acts 18:⁹ And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; ¹⁰for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." ¹¹And he settled *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Unsettled by the Jewish problem, Paul might have left Corinth had it not been for the Lord's intervention. Comforted by the Lord's message, Paul settles in Corinth for 18 months. Within a few days of the message, the Lord provides an example of his divine protection for Paul.

A supporter named Gallio

Acts 18:¹² But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, ¹³saying, "This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." ¹⁴But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; ¹⁵but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters." ¹⁶And he drove them away from the judgment seat. ¹⁷And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and *began* beating him in front of the judgment seat. And Gallio was not concerned about any of these things.

Gallio, whose birth name was Annaeus Novatus, was the brother of Seneca the Stoic, the tutor of Nero, and the uncle of Lucan, the author *Pharsalia*. He was adopted into the great Spanish Gallio family and was chosen to be the proconsul of Achaia because of his culture and refinement. Seneca reported that "no one of the mortals is so pleasant to one person as he is to all." A white limestone has been found in Achaia recording Gallio's service as proconsul under Claudius beginning in AD 51, setting the stage for the reason he was so unconcerned with the Jewish matters at the time.

Evidently, Sosthenes was beaten by his own people because he was unable to evoke the desired response from Gallio. Sosthenes had taken the place of Crispus who became a

¹⁶¹ 1 Thes. 3:6; 2 Cor. 11:9; Phil. 4:15

believer. The beating of Sosthenes was for his ultimate good. Enraged by his own people, Sosthenes became a Christian and a co-worker with Paul.¹⁶²

Paul writes two letters to Thessalonica

While in Corinth Paul writes two letters to the church in Thessalonica, the town that had treated him so poorly just the year before. When Silas and Timothy arrive in Corinth the whole report concerning Thessalonica is generally good; however, some errors have crept into the teaching and Paul need to make corrections. In AD 52, he sends the letter addressing the issues with Timothy, exhorting the people to live pure lives. Later that year, or perhaps in AD 53, Paul hears of another problem in Thessalonica. The first letter was misunderstood, especially the part concerning the second return of Christ. The Thessalonians were teaching that the day of Christ was about to happen. Paul corrects that teaching, announcing that two other things must take place first.¹⁶³ The great apostasy of belief must come first. If it matches up with the great harlot of the Revelation, Islam is the great apostate religion about which Paul is speaking. Next, the man of lawlessness, the antichrist or beast as John calls him, must arrive.

Acts 18: ^{18a}And Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila.

To Cenchrea, Ephesus, and Antioch

Acts 18: ^{18b}In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow. ¹⁹And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰And when they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, ²¹but taking leave of them and saying, "I will return to you again if God wills," he set sail from Ephesus. ²²And when he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch.

Paul travels with Aquila and Priscilla to Cenchrea where they board a ship headed for Ephesus. In Cenchrea, Paul cuts his hair because of a vow that he keeps. It is not a Nazarite vow as many have taught. The Nazarite vow can be ended only in Jerusalem and he is in Cenchrea. Paul may have just had his hair cut shorter. Most likely, it is a thank offering, a regular observance in the Jewish faith, for the wonderful ministry in Corinth. Paul kept the observances of the Jewish ceremonial laws even though he never forced them on the Gentiles.

In Ephesus, Paul leaves Aquila and Priscilla to begin a church in their home after acquiring some converts in the synagogue. Ephesus is in Asia, the area the Lord would not allow him to minister to on his way to Troas just several years before. Now his ministry is well received in that city. Leaving Ephesus, Paul boards a ship headed for Caesarea, over 600 miles away. In Caesarea, he worships with the church and then travels by land to Antioch and his home church. He will give a full report of his second journey and then set out on his third missionary trip.

¹⁶² 1 Corinthians 1:1

¹⁶³ 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12