



Completion of Paul's Second Missionary Journey Acts 17:1-18:22

Introduction

Paul was undaunted by the problems, persecution, and pain he experienced at Philippi. He pressed on through Macedonia preaching the gospel. As was his custom, he went to the synagogues first but the majority of the converts were God-fearing Gentiles.

From Macedonia, Paul traveled south to the province of Achaia where he debated with philosophers and preached the gospel at Athens, the intellectual capital of the world at the time. Although some Athenians heeded Paul's message and believed, there is no record of a church being started in that city. From Athens he went to Corinth where he again faced opposition by the Jews but received encouragement from the Lord. He stayed for over a year and a half before returning to Antioch by way of Ephesus, Caesarea, and Jerusalem.

Outline of Acts 17:1-18:22

- I. At Thessalonica - Acts 17:1-9
- II. At Berea - Acts 17:10-14
- III. At Athens - Acts 17:15-34
- IV. At Corinth - Acts 18:1-18
- V. Returning to Antioch - Acts 18:19-22

I. At Thessalonica - Acts 17:1-9

Paul's first stop after Philippi was Thessalonica, the capital of the province of Macedonia. He traveled the Roman highway, the Via Egnatia, passing through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia. *The fact that they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia indicates that Paul was following the definite plan of planting the gospel in strategic cities. He did not aim simply to preach the gospel wherever he could find an audience. Rather, he was a missionary statesman with a program for establishing churches in key centers from which the surrounding countryside could be evangelized.* (The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Moody Press).

A. Persuasive preaching - Acts 17:1-4

Again Paul went first to the Jews. For three Sabbaths he preached in the synagogue proclaiming Jesus as the Christ. He showed them how the Old Testament prophets predicted the suffering and resurrection of the Christ (the Messiah). He explained how this clearly pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. Some of the Jews heeded Paul's preaching and believed, but the majority of the converts were *devout Greeks* (God-fearing

Gentiles). Luke notes that many of the leading women of the city also became believers.

B. Jealous Jews - Acts 17:5-9

1. Gathering a mob - 17:5-6

As usual, the unbelieving Jews caused trouble. Envious of Paul's success, they stirred up the rabble (KJV reads *certain lewd fellows of the baser sort*) of the city to join in their opposition. The angry mob went to the house of Jason (apparently where Paul and Silas were staying) looking for the missionaries in order to take them out to the local assembly of the people.

2. Charges - 17:6b-7

When they didn't find Paul and Silas, they settled for Jason and some of the other new believers, taking them to the *Greek rulers* or *politarchs*. Thessalonica was not a Roman colony but a free city and the people chose their own *politarchs*, unlike the colonies which were ruled by *magistrates* (Acts 16:22) selected by Rome. Jason and the others were charged with harboring seditious men who had *upset the world* (NASB). Paul had preached about the spiritual kingdom of God, but those who opposed him twisted it into a political charge saying the Christians supported a rival king. This was treason against the Roman emperor, a serious charge.

3. Bond posted - 17:8-9

The crowd and the rulers were troubled when they heard the charges. They insisted that Jason and the others post a bond, probably to insure that Paul and Silas would leave town. If they didn't leave, Jason and the rest would forfeit the money they had put up as security. Perhaps this is the reason Paul did not return to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:18).

II. At Berea - Acts 17:10-14

Berea must have been a breath of fresh air for Paul. Although he went there under cover of night to escape the persecution in Thessalonica, his reception at Berea was warm and welcoming.

A. Gospel message readily received - Acts 17:10-12

The Jews in the synagogue at Berea were more reasonable and *noble-minded* (NASB) than those in Thessalonica. They were willing to listen to what Paul

had to say and they searched the Scriptures every day, comparing his teaching with God's written word. After studying the Scriptures to verify the truth of Paul's teaching, many believed, both Jews and Gentiles, women and men. They found that the Scriptures truly did testify of Jesus (John 5:39).

Are you like the Berean believers? Do you foster your faith by searching the Scriptures daily? Do you test the things you are taught against the Scriptures so you will not be *tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine* (Ephesians 4:14)?

B. Jews from Thessalonica stir up trouble - Acts 17:13-15

When the jealous Jews from Thessalonica arrived in Berea and began to agitate the crowds, the new Berean believers sent Paul with an escort to Athens. Saul and Timothy remained in Berea to build up the church, rejoining Paul at a later date.

III. At Athens - Acts 17:16-34

Athens was in the Roman province of Achaia. It had been the intellectual and cultural capital of the world, famous for its university and philosophical schools: the Academy of Plato, the Lyceum of Aristotle, the Porch of Zeno, and the Garden of Epicurus. Athens was filled with philosophers and scholars who loved to debate, yet the city also abounded in idolatry. *The world through its wisdom did not come to know God* (1 Corinthians 1:21).

A. Paul provoked by idol worship - Acts 17:16-18

The art and architecture of Athens was beautiful but it reflected the worship of idols. Paul's spirit was oppressed by the darkness of the idolatry he saw all around him: the temples, altars, and statues of gods. The city was so filled with pagan art that one Roman poet wrote that in Athens it was easier to find gods than men (Word Studies in the New Testament, Marvin R. Vincent). The overwhelming presence of idols everywhere he turned compelled Paul to speak out.

1. He reasoned in the synagogues - 17:17

On the Sabbath he went to the synagogue to speak to the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles.

2. He reasoned...in the marketplace daily - 17:17

Every day he went to the public marketplace, or *agora*, to speak with anyone who was there.

3. He debated with the philosophers - 17:18

The marketplace (*agora*) was the civic center and where

the philosophers gathered to debate. The Epicureans and the Stoics, philosophers with quite diverse views, debated with Paul.

a. The Epicureans - 17:18

These men were followers of the materialistic philosophy of Epicurus (341-270 B.C.). They believed that pleasure, especially intellectual pleasure, was the supreme good and main goal in life.

b. The Stoics - 17:18

Stoicism was the most influential philosophy in Paul's day. The Stoics, followers of Zeno (320-250 B.C.), were pantheistic, believing that the Divine Reason or Logos ordered the world and was in all things. Rather than seeking a life of pleasure, they sought a virtuous life in order to conform to the divine order of the universe.

c. Their assessment of Paul - 17:18

The philosophers called Paul a *babbler*, literally a *seed picker*, a term which referred to a worthless loafer or a person who picked up scraps of learning here and there. I. Howard Marshall, in his commentary Acts, describes it as, *the kind of person who today would pick up cigarette ends and smoke them*.

Some thought Paul was a proclaimer of foreign gods because he preached about *Jesus and the resurrection*. The philosophers may have assumed the word resurrection, in the Greek *anastasis*, was the name of a female deity. Thus *Jesus and anastasis* were a foreign god and goddess. Neither the Epicureans nor the Stoics believed in a bodily resurrection.

B. Paul preaches - Acts 17:19-31

Paul was taken to the Areopagus, also known as Mars Hill. This was the ancient meeting place of Athens' aristocratic council (also called the Areopagus). There he was called upon to address the philosophers and members of the council,

1. Request to know about the new doctrine - 17:19-21

Because Paul's teaching was *new* and *strange* to them, the philosophers wanted to hear more. *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*. In Athens, once a new thing was told, it became worthless and something newer had to be sought after. The Athenians were not really concerned with the truth. They just wanted to constantly titillate their minds with new ideas.

2. Paul's speech - 17:22-31

Their desire to hear anything new gave Paul the perfect opportunity to preach the gospel. He directed his speech to intellectual pagans beginning with an introduction to the true and living God. His message was simply that God, who created and controls all things, requires all to repent of their ignorant ways before the day of judgment.

a. Paul introduces God - 17:22-23

Paul began on a courteous and conciliatory note, expressing that he perceived the Athenians to be *very religious*. In fact, they were so religious that they wanted to make sure that no god was left out of their worship. Therefore they had erected an altar *TO THE UNKNOWN GOD* (17:23). *The inscription had a purely pagan meaning; but the phrase was a fine one; it was capable of a higher sense, and in this higher sense, Paul made it the text of his sermon* (A Commentary on The Holy Bible, J. R. Dummelow, ed.) Paul used the inscription to the unknown God to introduce them to the one true God.

b. God is the creator - 17:24-25

The *UNKNOWN GOD* is distinct from all other gods, high and powerful above all others. He created the world and all that is in it. He gives life and breath to all things and is, therefore, Lord of heaven and earth. He does not live in man-made temples or need to be served by human hands. As the creator of all things, He needs nothing.

c. God is the ruler of history - 17:26

Not only has God made all things, He has made the people of every nation. All are unified through one common ancestor, *one blood* (referring to Adam). He has also determined the times and boundaries of all the nations. History is literally "His story."

d. God desires man to seek Him - 17:27

God revealed Himself in creation and in history so people would seek Him. His goodness as seen in the created world should lead men to seek after Him diligently to find the reality of His existence. After all, God is not far from each one of us.

e. Idolatry is foolish - 17:28-29

We are all the *offspring of God*. He is our creator and life-giver. Paul noted that even the Athenian poets had perceived that truth having written *in Him we live and move and have our being and for we are also His offspring*. Paul concluded that since all men are created by God, He cannot possibly be in the form of a gold, silver, or stone idol created by man.

f. Repent of your ignorance - 17:30-31

In the past when men made idols to worship, God overlooked their ignorance. But now God *commands all men everywhere to repent* because He has revealed the full knowledge of truth in *the Man whom He has ordained* and raised from the dead. Repentance is not an option or an invitation. Repentance is commanded.

Repentance is necessary because God has appointed a day of judgment (Revelation 20:12-15) when the Lord Jesus Christ, whom He has raised from the dead, will righteously judge the entire world. Paul presented the resurrection as an historical fact and proof that Jesus is the appointed judge. Those who reject Jesus will be rejected by Him on the day of judgment.

C. The Athenians respond - Acts 17:32-34

The preaching of the resurrection from the dead caused some of the men to mock Paul. Others just put Paul off, saying they would hear him some other time. Luke mentions two who responded in belief: Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus council, and a woman named Damaris. Nothing else is known of either.

IV. At Corinth - Acts 18:1-18

Paul's next stop was the major commercial city of Corinth 50 miles from Athens. Because Corinth was situated between two seaports, Cenchræa on the Aegean Sea and Lechaëum on the gulf of Corinth which opened to the Adriatic Sea, the city was always filled with travelers and merchants. Corinth was also the center of worship for Aphrodite, the goddess of love. More than 1000 religious prostitutes served the temple and contributed to an immoral atmosphere throughout the city. Corinth had become known far and wide for its immorality. In fact, to *corinthianize* was a euphemism for any act of immorality.

When Paul arrived in Corinth, he was probably tired and discouraged. He had been chased out of three cities by the Jews and had experienced little success with his preaching in idolatrous Athens. He was alone in a strange city and needed to find work to support himself. God faithfully provided all Paul's needs.

A. God provided for Paul - Acts 18:1-11

God encouraged Paul by providing him with work, new friends, support for his ministry, a place to preach to the Gentiles, many converts, and a vision.

1. God provided work and friends - Acts 18:1-4

All Jewish men, even rabbis, were skilled in a trade. In fact, there was a Jewish saying that whoever did not

teach his son a trade brought him up to be a robber. Paul was a tentmaker. He probably went to the marketplace in Corinth hoping to find someone he could work with. God provided a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla who had recently left Italy because of an edict evicting all Jews from Rome. They were also tentmakers and invited Paul to live and work with them. Paul made tents during the week and preached in the synagogue on the Sabbath.

It is not known whether Aquila and Priscilla were Christians when Paul met them, but later they became his faithful partners in ministry (Romans 16:3-5).

2. God provided support for Paul's ministry - 18:5

Paul must have been overjoyed when his friends and co-workers, Silas and Timothy, joined him again. In addition to physical and moral support, they brought good news from Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:6-10) and financial support from Philippi (2 Corinthians 11:9 and Philippians 4:15). As a result, Paul was able to concentrate on his preaching. By the power of the Spirit *he testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ*.

3. God provided a place to preach - 18:6-7

When the unbelieving Jews *opposed him and blasphemed*, Paul *shook his garments*, a sign of breaking off fellowship with them. He had done his part in preaching the gospel and warning them of the judgment to come, but they had not heeded. They were now responsible for their own fate and he would move on to preach to the Gentiles (as previously in 13:46).

Right next door to the synagogue lived a God-fearing Gentile, Titius Justus, who opened his home so Paul could continue preaching. The Jews had slammed the door in Paul's face, but God had opened a window to the Gentiles.

4. God provided many converts - 18:8

Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, and all his family were converted. Many of the Corinthians heard the gospel message, believed, and were baptized.

5. God provided personal encouragement - 18:9-11

Through a vision in the night, the Lord spoke to Paul and gave him assurance: Paul was not to fear but to speak the gospel boldly, the Lord would be with him, no one would hurt him. He had many in the city who would come to saving faith.

As a result of God's generous and courteous provision,

Paul stayed on in Corinth, teaching God's word for another year and a half.

B. Jews abused Paul - Acts 18:12-17

During the time of Paul's stay in Corinth, Gallio was appointed as proconsul (provincial governor) of the province of Achaia. The Jews hoped to take advantage of Gallio's inexperience and get a verdict against Paul which would discredit him throughout the province. They seized Paul and took him to the *judgment seat or tribunal*, a stone platform in the agora.

1. The accusation - 18:12-13

They accused him of persuading men to *worship God contrary to the law*. The law they had in mind was the Roman law which forbade the practice of any religion not legally recognized by Rome. Judaism was a legally recognized religion and since Christianity had originated in Judaism, it had legal protection under the law. But these Jews protested that Christianity was not a form of Judaism and therefore an illegal religion.

2. The verdict - 18:14-16

Gallio wanted no involvement in the case. He concluded that Paul's alleged crime was not against Rome. If Paul were guilty, it was a matter for the Jewish law and the Jewish community. He dismissed the case and sent them away. God's promise that Paul would not be attacked or hurt while in Corinth (18:10) held firm.

C. Gentiles beat Sosthenes - Acts 18:17

This episode shows the anti-Jewish feelings which were prevalent in the Roman provinces. The spectators in the agora took advantage of Gallio's rejection of the Jews' case and beat Sosthenes who had succeeded Crispus as ruler of the synagogue. Again, Gallio refused to intervene.

V. Returning to Antioch - Acts 18:18-22

Paul stayed on to minister in Corinth even after the incident before Gallio. He also wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians while there. When he left, he took Priscilla and Aquila with him.

A. At Cenchrea - Acts 18:18

Cenchrea was Corinth's seaport on the Aegean Sea from which Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla sailed for Syria. While there, Paul had his hair cut because he had taken a vow. This was probably not a formal Nazarite vow as described in Numbers 6:1-21 because the completion of the vow, involving the haircutting and sacrificial offerings, would have had to take place in Jerusalem.

This was most likely a private vow of dedication or gratitude to God.

B. At Ephesus - Acts 18:19-21

Paul's ship sailed from Cenchrea to Ephesus, capital of the Roman province of Asia. Paul still went to the synagogue first, in spite of what had happened at Corinth. The Jews were interested in what he had to say and asked him to stay with them longer, but he refused. He did promise to return, God willing. This is a reminder that our plans and promises should always be qualified by the will of God.

C. From Caesarea to Antioch - Acts 18:22

Paul sailed south from Ephesus to the port of Caesarea. From there he traveled by land to Jerusalem where he greeted the church. The final leg of his journey took him back to Antioch for a time of rest, rejuvenation, and relating the adventures of his second missionary journey.

Applications

1. The Athenians were very religious people, but they did not worship the one true God. We too can get caught up in religion and religious service and lose sight of God and His will. What will you do to keep God central in your life?

2. After listening to Paul's speech, the Athenians refused to respond and repent. They put Paul off, saying they would hear him again another time. How often do you put off what God wants you to do? What is He calling you to do right now that you have been putting off? Will you respond to God's call by obeying Him at once?

3. God provided all of Paul's needs as he traveled the world preaching the gospel. This was illustrated in a beautiful way during his stay in Corinth. How has God provided for your needs in the past? How is he providing for your every need right now? Will you thank Him that He is Jehovah-jireh, the Lord who provides (Genesis 22:14)? Will you thank Him for all His provisions?