



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

Introduction

Undaunted by the problems, persecution, and physical pain he experienced at Philippi, Paul pressed on through Macedonia, preaching the gospel. Although he always preached in the synagogues first, 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 established 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 there for over a year and a half.

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

As usual, Paul went first to the Jews. For three Sabbaths he preached in the synagogue proclaiming Jesus as the Christ. He explained 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 believed, but the majority of the believers were *devout Greeks* (God-fearing Gentiles) and *not a few of the leading women* of the city.

B. Jealous Jews - Acts 17:5-9

1. Gathering a mob - 17:5-6

The unbelieving Jews were envious of Paul's success, and stirred up the rabble (KJV reads *certain lewd fellows of the baser sort*) of the city to oppose Paul. The angry mob went to the house of Jason looking for Paul and Silas.

2. Charges - 17:6-7

When they didn't find the missionaries, they dragged Jason and other new believers to the *rulers of the city* or "politarchs." Thessalonica was not a Roman colony but a free city. 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

When the rulers heard the charges, they insisted that Jason and the others post a bond. If Paul and Silas did not leave town, the bond money would be forfeited.

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 Received - Acts 17:10-12

The Jews at Berea were more reasonable and *noble-minded* (NASB) than those in Thessalonica. They listened to what Paul had to say and searched the Scriptures daily to compare his teaching with God's written word. After verifying 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 to Athens with an escort. Silas and Timothy remained in Berea to build up the church. They rejoined Paul at a later date.

III. At Athens - Acts 17:16-34

Athens was in the Roman province of Achaia. As the intellectual and cultural capital of the world, it was famous for its university and philosophical schools: the Academy of Plato, Lyceum of Aristotle, Porch of Zeno, and the Garden of Epicurus. Athens was filled with philosophers and scholars who loved to debate, yet the city 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 compelled Paul to speak out.

1. He reasoned in the synagogue - 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 - 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 as well as a gathering place for philosophers 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 of the 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. They sought 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 referring to a person who picked up scraps of learning here and there. I. Howard Marshall, in 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*. They assumed that the word *resurrection*, the Greek "anastasis," was the name of a female deity. Thus *Jesus* and *anastasis* were a foreign god and goddess. The philosophers did not believe in a bodily resurrection.

B. Paul Preaches - Acts 17:19-31

Paul was taken to the Areopagus, also known as Mars Hill, the ancient meeting place of Athens' aristocratic council (also called the Areopagus). There he addressed 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, 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 truth. They just wanted to 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 the intellectual pagans by introducing the true and living God. His message was that God, creator and controller of 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*." So religious, in fact, 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 "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 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. The creator of all things 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 "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. 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 pointed out 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 be a gold, silver, or stone idol created by man.

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

In the past, when men devised idols, God overlooked their ignorance. But now "*God commands all men everywhere to repent*" because He has appointed a day of judgment. Repentance is not an option or an invitation. Repentance is commanded. "*The man whom He has ordained*" will "*judge the world in righteousness*" and we can be assured that He will do so because God has raised Him from the dead. The resurrection is 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

Preaching of the resurrection led some to mock Paul.

Others put Paul off, saying they would hear him some other time. But two people believed: Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus council, and a woman named Damaris. Nothing further is known of either.

IV. At Corinth - Acts 18:1-18

Paul's next stop was the commercial city of Corinth, 50 miles from Athens. Situated between two seaports, Cenchrea on the Aegean Sea and Lechaenum on the gulf of Corinth, the city was always filled with travelers and merchants. Corinth was also the center of Aphrodite (goddess of love) worship. Over 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. To "corinthianize" was a euphemism for any act of immorality.

Arriving in Corinth, Paul may have been 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 of Paul's needs.

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

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

1. 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. God led him to a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who had recently been evicted, along with all Jews, from Rome. Being tentmakers, they invited Paul to live and work with them. Aquila and Priscilla later became Paul's faithful partners in ministry (Romans 16:3-5).

2. Support for Paul's ministry - 18:5

When Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Corinth, they brought both moral and physical support: 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. A place to preach - 18:6-7

When the unbelieving Jews *opposed him and blasphemed*, Paul *shook his garments*, a sign of breaking fellowship with them. He had preached the gospel and

warned 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 seen previously in Acts 13:46).

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

4. 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. Personal encouragement - 18:9-11

Through a vision, the Lord spoke to Paul, encouraging him to speak the gospel boldly, and assuring him that no one would hurt him.

As a result of God's provision, Paul stayed in Corinth, teaching the word of God for another year and a half. God had many in Corinth who would believe.

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

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

1. The accusation - 18:12-13

They accused Paul 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 refused to be involved in the case, concluding that Paul's alleged crime was not against Rome. Paul's guilt was a matter for the Jewish law and the Jewish community. Gallio dismissed the case and sent the accusers 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, Crispus' successor as ruler of the synagogue. Gallio refused to intervene.

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

Paul stayed on to minister in Corinth, writing 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 haircutting and sacrificial offerings, had to take place in Jerusalem. Paul's 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 province of Asia. Paul 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 longer but he refused, promising 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 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 can you do to keep God central in your life? How will you begin?
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. What is God 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 travelled the world preaching the gospel. 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?