

How to Read the Bible for All its Worth

Lesson 6g: Acts 15:36 – 18:22 – Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Introduction

Paul's burden to let others throughout the world know about the good news of Jesus Christ would not be subdued. He had to get back on the mission field. The decree from the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem needed to go out to the churches and that was just the excuse Paul needed to gather his team and get back to work.

Acts 15:36-41 – The Separation of Paul and Barnabas

What was to be the purpose of this second missionary journey?

They wanted to go back to the churches they had established and see how they were doing. Perhaps they were hoping to do some more teaching to help them be established.

What caused the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas?

They disagreed over whether to allow John Mark to be part of their ministry team.

Why didn't Paul want John Mark to go on the journey? See also Acts 13:13.

John Mark had deserted them in the middle of their journey and headed for home. He apparently got scared and didn't want to risk his life. Paul probably didn't think enough time had passed since John Mark's last defect to allow him to come on what would probably be another dangerous journey.

Why do you think Barnabas wanted to give John Mark a second chance? See also Col. 4:10

Barnabas was a sucker for the underdog. He took Paul in when no one else would. He also was a strong advocate for the Gentiles in a church with Jewish leadership. It fits his character to see him push so hard to have John Mark restored to their team. Also, Barnabas was related to John Mark. It appears that they were cousins.

Do you think they reached the right decision by parting ways? Who do you think was right?

Although it is hard to say definitively, it appears that they could not be reconciled so it was easier to part ways. They didn't disagree over the content of the message but on how to conduct the ministry. This is the last time we hear of Barnabas in Acts.

What do we learn from this passage that may help us in making decisions about leaders?

God blessed Paul's ministry, so it seems that he made a good choice at this point in time. After a Christian has a serious sin failure, a significant amount of time should pass to reestablish their track record before they are put into a leadership capacity, if ever.

Acts 16:1-10 – The Addition of Timothy & The Macedonian Call

Why did Paul want Timothy to be circumcised?

If Timothy was circumcised, he wouldn't cause any Jews they evangelized to stumble.

What was part of Paul's purpose in revisiting the churches established in his first journey?

To relate the decree made by the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

In verses 6-9, we see that Paul desired to preach in Asia and Bithynia but the Spirit of God did not allow them to go there. What could this mean?

It could either mean that things just didn't work out for them to get to those areas or the Spirit didn't burden them or give them the spiritual okay to go into those areas.

What answer did Paul receive in his vision?

Paul was told to go to Macedonia to preach the gospel to those people over there.

How does Paul's vision help us to better understand what is meant by the Holy Spirit not allowing him to preach in Asia and Bithynia?

Paul received a spiritual sign to initiate his ministry in Macedonia. That indicates that he may have received a spiritual sign to keep him from ministering other places

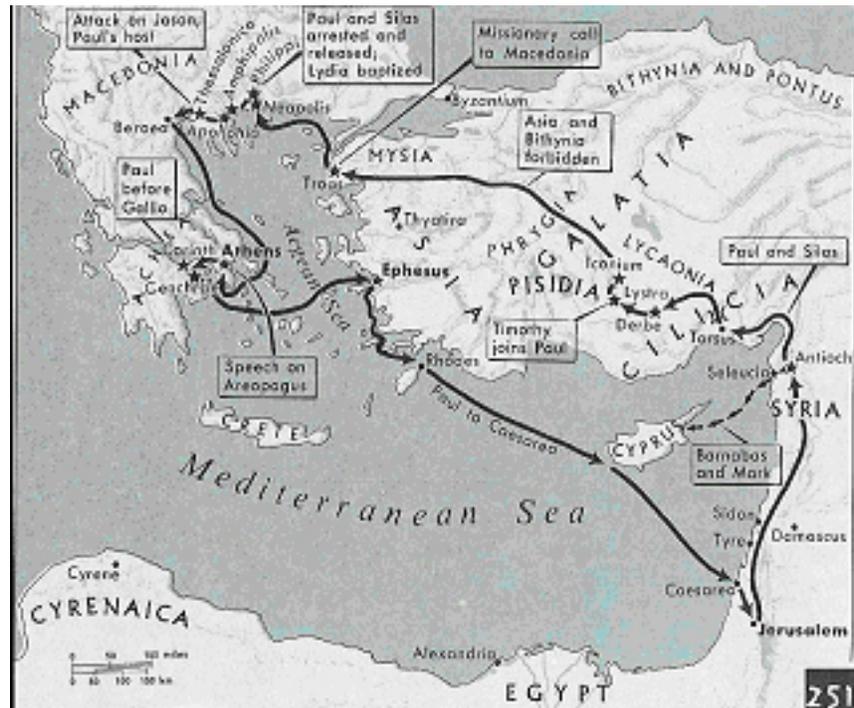
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Acts 16:11-15 – Paul in Macedonia

As Paul crosses over from Troas to Neapolis, he begins his ministry in Europe. His first destination was the city of Philippi, in modern day Greece. Philippi was named after Philip of Macedon, Alexander the Great’s father and was a Roman Colony. It was at the end of the great Roman Highway, the Egnatian Way. The map below details their journey.¹

The first thing we notice that is different about Paul’s ministry in Macedonia is that he didn’t run to the synagogue. Why didn’t he go and find one? The answer is probably that there was not a synagogue to attend. According to Jewish custom, a synagogue could not be formed unless there were 10 Jewish men who were heads of households. Based on what we learn of Lydia, it appears that she was a semi-Jewish proselyte and that the people Paul gathered with on the banks of the river were those who followed the Jewish religion and met together collectively each week to pray and worship. He would have been viewed as a visiting rabbi, a rarity for them, and would have been given the opportunity to teach, just the opportunity he needed.



What do we learn about Lydia in verses 14 and 15?

- Lydia was an independent business woman and probably very wealthy. The purple dye used to make clothes was very expensive and normally reserved for royalty. She obviously had a large enough house to accommodate her family and the ministry team of Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Dr. Luke.
- She was a seeker of God. It appears that, like Cornelius, she was a semi-Jewish proselyte, worshipping the Lord, but not having fully converted.
- She was a bright woman, understanding the teaching the Lord gave concerning traveling missionaries in Matthew 10:10-14

What does Lydia’s conversion teach us about those who seek God but don’t yet have the truth?

Lydia is another example, like Cornelius, of individuals who were seeking God based upon the revelation He has presented in their life. They didn’t have the gospel. They weren’t saved, yet God had placed a hunger in them for truth. The Lord supplied the truth!

What do the details of Lydia’s conversion teach us about God’s role in salvation? (John 6:44-45 and Romans 9:16)

It says that the Lord opened Lydia’s heart to the gospel. The Scripture references make it clear that salvation is wholly and completely of and by God. It is not something we get because we have initiated the search. The Lord is the author and finisher of our faith.

¹ Map taken from the Macmillan Bible Atlas, Macmillan 1993, p. 184

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Acts 16:16-24 – *Trouble in Macedonia*

What was the slave-girl’s occupation and what is its equivalent in modern times?

She was a soothsayer, which is now known as a fortune teller.

How did Paul view her ability? Was it a gift or was it something else?

Paul saw that she didn’t have a special gift for telling the future. She was possessed by a demon that easily fooled many gullible humans into believing its twisted predictions.

Discuss God’s teaching concerning mediums and fortune tellers. (See Deut. 18:9-12, Isaiah 8:19)

They are an abomination to God because people seek the wisdom of the dead (actually demons) rather than the wisdom of God. They draw people away from the truth and towards grave error. Why go to the bottom when you can go to the top?

Why did the spirit lift up Paul and Silas as servants of God that proclaimed the gospel? There are at least a couple of possible answers that offer some explanation.

What was the reaction of demons to Christ and what might this have to do with their response to Paul? (See Mark 1:23-28, 34; Matthew 8:28-34; James 2:19)

Demons are fallen angels that spent the first part of their existence bringing honor and glory to God and heralding His presence. Their reaction to Christ was a natural reaction. Just like the demons that saw Christ proclaimed His identity, this demon proclaimed the identity and purpose of Paul and his company.

What is one of Satan’s most popular methods of attack and how might this apply to the situation in Phillippi? (See 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; Revelations 2:18-22)

Satan tries to infiltrate the church. Paul was hoping to set up a strong church there in Phillippi, and this may have been his ploy to have a “false prophetess” that seems to be a very spiritual person but in fact is a servant of Satan. In doing so, many could be led away from the truth.

Why did the slave-girl’s masters become upset with Paul and Silas and what was their accusation to the authorities? (See 1 Timothy 6:10)

They were upset because once the demon was gone, she was no longer able to tell fortunes and was therefore no longer a source of income. They accused Paul and Silas of preaching a message that they as Romans could not receive (only state approved religions were allowed), but their motivation was money.

Acts 16:25-40 – *Conversion of the Philippian Jailer*

Describe Paul and Silas’ physical condition in prison?

They had been severely beaten with rods and cast into the innermost prison, usually the stockade where they were in harsh conditions.

What was their spiritual and emotional condition? Why the big difference? (See 2 Cor. 4:18)

They were rejoicing and praising God. They learned to separate their spiritual and emotional condition from the circumstances around them. They set their eyes on what they could not see rather than those things which appeared around them.

Why would the jailer kill himself? Why did he become so immediately grateful to Paul and Silas and attentive to their message? (See Acts 12:18-19)

Losing all of the prisoners would have meant almost certain death for the jailer. Paul and Silas had somehow persuaded everyone to stay in the prison, saving the guard’s life.

Why did Paul appeal to his Roman citizenship? What good did that do him?

As a Roman citizen, Paul had to be afforded a fair trial before punishment could be administered. He was not tried but simply punished as a foreigner. Paul made it clear that he could get the chief magistrates in the city in a lot of trouble if he wanted.

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Acts 17:1-9 – The Gospel preached in Thessalonica

Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia with an estimated population of 200,000. It was a major port with an important commercial center. It is known today as Thessaloniki and is still a significant city in Greece.

What was the main thrust of Paul’s message in the synagogue and why was it important?

Paul was preaching that Christ was the Messiah (Christ) and that they needed to put their trust in Him. What was confusing to the Jews was that they expected the Messiah to come on a white horse and victoriously lead them to victory. Jesus didn’t meet their expectations. Rather than conquering the oppressors, He was put to death by Rome and the Jews that called for His death. Paul explained why His death was necessary and how through His resurrection we all gain true victory and freedom.

What type of people got saved there in Thessalonica?

There were Jews, devout Greeks (Jewish proselytes), and some of the influential women of the city.

What type of people did the Jews get to cause in insurrection against the Christians?

They got “lewd fellows of the baser sort” to help them. A better translation is “wicked men of the marketplace”. This isn’t a prejudiced statement against certain types of people but a statement of the men’s character and their origin.

What was the charge brought against Jason and why would it cause problems?

Declaring any King but Caesar was an act of treason that could be harshly punished.

Acts 17:10-15 – The Gospel preached in Berea

Berea was a much smaller town than Thessalonica. The Roman writer Cicero described it as being, “off the beaten track”.

The Bereans were said to be “more noble” than the Thessalonians. Why? What does this imply about the basis for the Thessalonian’s beliefs? What can we take away from this?

The Bereans were nobler than the Thessalonians because they took the message preached by Paul and went to the Scriptures to see if it was true. The Thessalonians were a people that had been spoon fed their convictions by rabbis and they didn’t regard the Scriptures as something they could understand or apply. This malady is still present today among many Christians. They are told what to believe by persuasive preachers and they haven’t really searched the Scriptures to know what is right and what is wrong. When presented with something new, they don’t have a foundation for discernment.

Acts 17:16-21 – Paul in Athens

Prior to the rise of Rome, Athens was the greatest city in the world. Such prolific philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and Zeno (founder of Stoicism) had taught there. Although Rome was now the chief city, Athens was still prominent as a religious center. The pagan writer Petronius remarked that it was easier to find a god in Athens than a man. There were idols and buildings dedicated to hundreds of gods all throughout the city.

What was Paul’s reaction to what he saw in Athens?

Paul was “stirred”. This means provoked or exasperated to see such wicked idol worship. His heart broke inside him to see such foolishness.

How did Paul put his emotion into positive action? What door did God open for Paul?

Paul used his anger (emotional energy) to provoke him to preach and teach the truth to everyone he met. He began speaking in the synagogue and to those who taught in the marketplace. He found opportunities to witness to the truth. God used his boldness to afford him the opportunity to speak before the court (Areopagus) on Mars Hill.

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Acts 17:22-34 – Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill

This sermon is one of the few recorded sermons of Paul in Scripture. We see that on this occasion it was very short and to the point. He didn’t get to go very far, but was able to make some powerful points during those few moments. Let’s break this sermon down into 3 sections:

Verses 22-23: Paul Bridges the Gap between their Culture and Scriptures

How does Paul connect them to the gospel message?

Paul notices their idol to the “Unknown God” and uses it as a way to connect them to the God that He is proclaiming.

How does this differ from his method with the Jews and what does this teach us about evangelism? (See 1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

With the Jews, Paul usually preached Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT Scriptures. These Athenians didn’t have the OT Scriptures as a basis for belief or practice. Therefore, Paul had to find some other way to relate to them. Likewise, we must find a way to connect to our audience with the truth. The same method won’t work for everybody!

Verses 24-29: The True God is Greater than Idols

What was confused or turned around in the Athenian’s thinking?

They acted as if their gods depended upon them and were contained within physical idols. The true God is above all of these things and is dependent upon no one for his existence.

If God doesn’t dwell in a temple, why did the Jews construct a temple for Him?

The word, “dwelleth” in this passage means to permanently abide or reside in something. Israel’s temple was a place where God manifested His presence in a special way to His people and assured them of His continuance with them. However, it did not contain God, neither did the Jews believe that they could only communicate with God at the temple. In fact, the temple was an earthly representation of the things in Heaven, where God most clearly manifests Himself. Through the temple, God was pointing them to heaven.

Verses 30-31: God’s Call to Repent

What is the extent of God’s call for salvation?

God desires that all men be saved.

What does Paul consider to be proof of God’s existence and call to judgment?

The life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the greatest proofs of God’s existence and plan of redemption. It is also the pivotal event of human history. Without knowledge of the cross, there is no salvation.

Acts 18:1-11 – The Gospel preached in Corinth

Corinth had replaced Athens as the most important city in Greece. It was a large city and strategically located between the Northern and Southern portions of Greece so that anyone who traveled from North to South had to go through Corinth. It was also a major seaport, gathering visitors from all over the Roman Empire. In addition, Corinth was the home of the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. The temple of Aphrodite was located on the Acropolis, about 1,500 above Corinth. Each evening, the temple’s one thousand priestesses, who were ritual prostitutes, would come down into the city to seduce the men and work all sorts of evil. Corinth was well acquainted with sin and was in great need of the gospel.

What compelled Paul to join up with Priscilla and Aquilla?

They had similar trades. They were all tent makers. This was how Paul provided for himself and others when they needed to raise sufficient funds to survive.

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How was Paul able to devote himself to the ministry after Silas and Timothy arrived? (See 2 Corinthians 11:9 and Philippians 4:15)

Silas and Timothy brought down support collected from the church in Philippi. This allowed Paul to focus on ministry more than earning money to supply for his needs.

What do we learn from Paul’s response to the Jew’s continual rejection of the gospel (vs 6)?

There comes a point at which we must shake off the dust of our feet and go on to others who may be willing to hear the message of Christ. Not everyone will respond the message and it isn’t good for us to be brought down by their unbelief.

Did Paul’s response to the Jews help or hinder his ministry in Corinth? What about the Jews?

Paul turned from the Jews but remained a strong presence, staying with a convert that lived next to the synagogue. Paul’s rejection may have been the straw that broke the camel’s back for Crispus, because he turned and got saved. Sometimes the best thing we can do for people is to move on and leave them to the Lord. The fear of being ultimately rejected may draw them to Christ.

Acts 18:12-17 – Trouble in Corinth

What was the accusation made against Paul by the Jews? Why was it a big deal?

He was teaching a form of worship contrary to Jewish law. Judaism was one of the few alternate religions tolerated by the Roman government at that time and initially, the Romans viewed Christianity as a “brand” of Judaism. The Jews wanted to separate Christianity from Judaism and have it banned from the Roman Empire. If they won this case, it would become much more difficult for Paul to openly preach.

What was the response of Gallio to the Jewish accusations?

He refused to hear the Jews because it was a question of their religion, which he regarded as meaningless. He was only interested in hearing cases about real crimes.

Who was Sosthenes and why was he beaten before the judgment seat? (See 1 Corinthians 1:1)

Sosthenes was probably the heir to the synagogue after Crispus converted. At some point, he evidently became a Christian. The Jews either beat him out of frustration because he was a Christian or because he didn’t win the case against Paul.

Was God faithful to his promise to Paul (see verses 9-10)

Yes. God promised that he would not be hurt in the city and he was spared here.

Acts 18:18-22 – Paul completes his second journey

Why did Paul shave his head? (See Numbers 6:1-8, 13-21) What was his motivation for this?

Paul made the vow of a Nazarite, probably as an act of thankfulness for the Lord’s blessing over him in Corinth and the prosperity of the ministry there.

Why would Paul practice a Jewish ritual as a Christian?

Paul was raised as a devout Jew and fulfilling a Jewish ritual was a natural way for him to express his love and thanksgiving toward God. He didn’t have to, but he wanted to.

Why did Paul leave Ephesus after having some initial success and an invitation to stay?

Paul had to fulfill his vow, which meant going back to Jerusalem. This is why he landed in Caesarea (south of Antioch) and went up (to Jerusalem) before going down to Antioch.

Assignment:

Read Acts 18:23 – 21:17 in preparation for the next lesson