

ACTS 16-18

This is Paul's second missionary journey.

1) As much as he has received the green light with regard to the gentile mission, Paul continues to try to appease Jewish religious concerns (that is: he has Timothy circumcised 16:3, and he has his hair cut in adherence to some religious vow 18:18).

2) Paul continues his practice of going into the local synagogue and trying to persuade both Jews and gentile adherents about the gospel that Jesus is the Messiah and that forgiveness and new life come by believing him and receiving his Spirit into one's life. His greatest opponents are other Jews who see him as a threat to their religion. Gentile authorities get involved when social unrest becomes an issue but they resist getting in the middle of what they consider to be a religious squabble. Clearly, the conflict, and the persecution that follows, is an intra-Jewish one. Christians were one sect within Judaism over against other more mainline beliefs and practices of the faith. Jewish leaders in these communities had some power to discipline other Jews within the communities even though these communities were situated in gentile territory.

3) Many of Paul's converts include women, and many women are named as being prominent in status and in business (Lydia being one and Prisca another). There is no sense of discrimination against women in this early movement, and this is part of the liberation the Holy Spirit has inspired.

4) Paul experiences both success and failure. Even though he offers a most eloquent sermon in Athens, he has little success there. In Corinth, however, he experiences much greater success and stays there 18 months. Moreover, his message to the Athenians (Chapter 17) is very different than his message to the Corinthians (Chapter 18). Or more accurately, the substance of the message is not different, but the ways it is expressed and the audience to whom it is addressed are different. To pagan Greeks raised on philosophy, Paul speaks differently than to those exposed to Jewish faith. To the Greeks Paul begins with the universality of the one God and then zeros in on Jesus as God's appointed representative. To Jews and pagan adherents to Judaism, he speaks of Jesus as the Messiah, for this would have been where the key issue was for them.

5) Although adherents to the teachings of John the Baptist continue to co-exist, the gospel of Jesus as the Messiah is progressively superseding it. John's message of repentance as preparation for forgiveness is superseded by the gospel message that forgiveness has been given through Jesus' death, and his resurrection signals the gift of the Holy Spirit's empowering indwelling within the heart of believers. The idea that the risen Christ becomes present and active as the hands, feet, voice and heart of believers through the Spirit's empowering was the

final stage of the gospel story people needed to learn and internalize.

6) At one point in the narrative (chapter 16) it changes from the 3rd person to the second person, indicating that the narrator is now part of Paul's travelling group. Later we may identify the author as the physician Luke. It is also clear that the narrative now takes on more specific details in terms of places, names, incidents and confrontations. The narrator is now an eyewitness.

Learning the biblical story and then telling your own story of redemption are both important. Have you ever shared your story with anyone? How would you tell the biblical story? What parts are especially relevant and compelling for you? What parts of the story would you emphasize according to who you were telling it to?