

2nd MISSIONARY JOURNEY--PAUL & SILAS IN THESSALONICA, BEREIA, ATHENS & CORINTH (Acts 17-18)—PART TWO

In Acts 16, Luke shows three different people the gospel touched.
In Acts 17 he shows us three cities the gospel touched.

MOST SPIRITUAL GROWTH MUST BE _____

Paul planned for church growth. He had a strategy. He focused on starting churches in the big cities. His eye was on Thessalonica. It was the chief city of Macedonia.

The person who tries to do everything will not do well at anything. So Paul focused on the big cities. He planted churches in key cities like Thessalonica.

Each believer needs a plan for spiritual growth. If we do not plan our schedules for spiritual growth, we will not grow much. Paul is a good example for us. He succeeded because of goals and plans. Very little happens in the kingdom of God unless believers plan.

WE SHOULD HARVEST THE RIPEST GRAIN _____

We should witness first to those who are the most ready for the gospel.

- Synagogue
- a place where people were praying.
- Courtyards/outer courts

Paul went straight to the synagogue in Thessalonica.

- He reasoned with them (Acts 17: 2).
- He explained and proved that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 17: 3).
- He persuaded some.

“Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women” (Acts 17: 4).

Many people in the synagogue were close to God. Thus Paul did not need to lead them very far to find the Father. Others in Thessalonica were jealous. They opposed Paul and the gospel (Acts 17: 5-9). These enemies of Christ caused Paul to flee by night (Acts 17: 10). He traveled to Berea.

TO FIND SOME LIKE THE BEREANS (Acts 17:10-15)

11Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. 12Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men (Acts 17: 11-12).

Some seed falls on the hardened path. Some falls on rocky soil. Other seed falls among thorns. But there is always some seed that falls upon good ground (Luke 8: 4-15).

**ADAPT THE GOSPEL MESSAGE TO THE _____
(Acts 17:16-34)**

- Athens < 10,000.
- It was famous for its stone carvings, buildings, books, and speakers.
- Famous Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and Zeno called Athens home.
- This city had its greatest glory in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. But even in Paul’s day, it was known for its culture.
- Athens, Tarsus, and Alexandria had the top universities of the world. Those who visit Athens today admire its sculptures and buildings. But in Paul’s day the stone carvings were idols. And the buildings were temples for demons (1 Cor. 10: 20).

“While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols” (Acts 17: 16).

Marketplace (**agora**)--he met the idol worshipers and the philosophers.

- The **Epicureans** followed the teachings of Epicurus. They believed God was in everything. Also, they thought pleasure was the main goal in life. They said *“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”* (1 Cor. 15: 32).
- The **Stoics** had a contrasting view. They followed the teachings of Zeno. He used to speak in Athens on a **stoa** or covered porch (**portico**) that was decorated with paintings and had large stone columns. The Stoics taught that man should not pay attention to pleasure or pain.

These two groups, the Epicureans and the Stoics, brought Paul to a meeting of the **Areopagus**. The Greek word Areopagus means “the hill (pagus) of Ares.” Ares was the Greek god of thunder and war. In Paul’s day, the word Areopagus referred to a council or group of leaders. They examined religious teachings.

One message--different methods.

- In the synagogue, people knew the Scriptures. So he explained, reasoned, and persuaded from the Scriptures they knew (Acts 17: 17). He showed that Jesus fulfilled the Jewish prophecies.
- But the people in the marketplace did not accept the Jewish Scriptures. Therefore, Paul did not quote from them.
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To persuade people, we must refer to things they understand and accept. It is not enough to have the right message. We must also have the right method to present the message. All learning must be related to what people already know. The new must be tied to the old.

“For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN

GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you” (Acts 17: 23).

The people of Athens did not want to offend any god. So they put up an altar to the unknown god. Thus they hoped to avoid offending a god they didn't know.

Paul praised the people of Athens for being religious (Acts 17: 22). Still, he spoke clearly against their temples and idols (Acts 17: 24-31).

A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others (Acts 17: 34).

THE CHALLENGE OF _____ LEARNING IS KEEPING IT LOW ENOUGH TO HELP PEOPLE ON EARTH.

“All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas” (Acts 17: 21).

The people at Athens did not have strong beliefs. They listened to everyone's ideas. They tolerated what everyone said. But they did not take a stand for what was right or wrong. Studying too much may cause some people to lose their beliefs.

They responded in two ways.

- First, they scoffed at him.
- Second, they closed the discussion. *“When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject’ ” (Acts 17: 32).*

Corinth

“To act like a Corinthian” meant to commit sexual sins. Paul reminds the Corinthians of their life before they met Jesus. Read 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11.

Jesus made some big changes in people at Corinth. Corinth was famous for sin and also for business. Locate Corinth on the map from last week. Athens may have had a population of less than 10,000. But Corinth was much larger. Estimates range from 100,000 to several hundred thousand people.

Scholars of the NIV Study Bible think Corinth may have had 250,000 free people and as many as 400,000 slaves. Most scholars agree that the most populated city of Paul's day was Rome, followed by Alexandria, and then Antioch. But cities like Ephesus, Philippi, and Corinth were also large.

Now, there are over 400 cities larger than a million. Over half the world lives in big cities. But there have not always been so many large cities. In 1850, there were only four cities in the world with populations over one million.

In Corinth, **friendship** stands out as a theme of Paul's ministry. Let us look at four examples of Paul's friends.

A. PAUL MAKES TWO _____ FRIENDS (Acts 18: 1-4)

Christian friendship is a great treasure. Jesus called His followers friends (John 15: 14-15). Since that time, believers have understood better the value of friendship.

How to make friends:

1. _____. Paul saw a man. Then he met him (Acts 18: 2). He found out that the man's name was Aquila. This was the first step toward friendship.
2. _____--Talking, Paul learned that Aquila and his wife Priscilla were from Italy. Aquila was a Jew. And the Roman Caesar Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome (Acts 18: 2). This probably refers to Jewish Christians. History tells us that Claudius expelled Jews because of trouble related to Christ. It appears that the unbelieving Jews stirred up trouble for Jewish believers. As

a result, the Roman Emperor Claudius made Jewish believers move from Rome. Thus, Aquila and Priscilla had to leave their home and friends. A new friend would mean a lot to them.

3. _____ -- Paul learned that Aquila and Priscilla made tents. Since Paul also made tents, this gave them something in common.
4. _____ -- Next, Paul took the fourth step. He “*went to see them*” (Acts 18: 2). Paul worked side by side with Aquila. They sewed tents together.
5. _____ -- He studied the Scriptures and worshiped with his new friends. It is almost certain that they attended the synagogue with Paul (Acts 18: 4). In fact, they became such close friends that they went with Paul when he traveled to Ephesus (Acts 18: 18-19).

He who wants friends must act friendly (Prov. 18: 24 KJV).

Friendship is a great tool of evangelism. Do you take steps of friendship toward the lost around you? Influence increases with relationship. It is easier to lead a friend to Christ than it is to lead a stranger.

B. PAUL’S _____ FRIENDS HELP HIM IN THE MINISTRY (Acts 18:5-8)

Silas and Timothy were two of Paul’s friends.

- They joined him in Corinth about A.D. 50. They had stayed in Berea for a time (Acts 17: 14).
- Then they visited Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3: 2).
- They brought a good report about the faith of the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3: 6). The Thessalonian believers had stood firm against their enemies. Thus Paul’s friends brought a very encouraging message.

A Study of the Book of Acts

Class 9 – Student Notes

- And they brought a financial gift from some of Paul's other friends (See Phil. 4: 14 and 2 Cor. 11: 8-9). This gift enabled Paul to stop making tents for a while.

Then he began to preach every day (Acts 18: 5). Also, he wrote 1 Thessalonians shortly after Silas and Timothy came to Corinth. We know this from 1 Thessalonians 3: 6-10.

Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13: 51). This sign was a protest against the unbelievers. To the outward sign, Paul added a spoken testimony. He declared he was innocent of their blood. He said the guilt of their blood was upon their own heads, not his (Acts 18: 6).

These terrible words remind us of Ezekiel 33: 1-6. Read these verses.

Paul moved next door to the house of Titius Justus. His full name was probably Gaius Titius Justus (Acts 18: 7; Rom. 16: 23; 1 Cor. 1: 14). Thus Paul shifted his ministry from the Jews to the Gentiles. Crispus believed. Paul baptized him and his household (1 Cor. 1: 14). Also, many others, probably Gentiles, believed (Acts 18: 8). Note the emphasis here and throughout Acts on households and house churches. The churches in Acts met often in homes for prayer, Bible study and fellowship.

Acts	Scripture
2:46	<i>They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.</i>
9:11	<i>Go into the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul.</i>
10:6	<i>He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.</i>
10:25	<i>As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet...</i>
12:12	<i>He went to the house of Mary, ...where many people...were praying.</i>
16:15	<i>When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home.</i>
17:7	<i>Jason has welcomed them into his house.</i>
18:7	<i>Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus.</i>
18:26	<i>When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home.</i>
28:7	<i>Publius, the chief official of the island, ...welcomed us to his home...</i>
28:30	<i>Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.</i>

C. PAUL'S _____ FRIEND COMFORTS HIM (Acts 18:9-11)

One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city” (Acts 18: 9-10).

Jesus has promised to be with us always (Matt. 28: 20; Heb. 13: 5-6). He is the friend who sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18: 24). So Paul stayed in Corinth for about 2 years!

**D. PAUL FINDS A NEW FRIEND IN THE _____
(Acts 18:12-17)**

While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. “This man,” they charged, “is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.” Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, “If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law— settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things.” So he had them ejected from the court (Acts 18: 12-16).

Recall Luke’s purposes for writing Acts. One of these was to defend Christianity and show it was friendly to the government. Thus, Luke had a big reason to include this court case under Gallio.

CONCLUSION

We are near the end of Paul’s second missionary trip. From Corinth, he travels 6 miles (10 km) southeast to the port city of Cenchrea. There, he had his hair cut (Acts 18: 18). Shaving his head meant he had completed a vow. Nazirite vow. This involved not drinking wine or cutting one’s hair for a period of time (See Num. 6: 1-21 and Acts 21: 24).

Paul sailed from Cenchrea to Ephesus. This time the Spirit did not forbid him. A door that God closes today may be open tomorrow. Timing is important in God's work.

Paul did not stay long in Ephesus. Some Greek versions of the Bible explain why Paul was in a hurry. He wanted to go to a feast in Jerusalem. This was probably the Passover Feast. He met with the church in Jerusalem. No doubt he told about obeying the Church council of Acts 15. He strengthened relationships for a time. Then he sailed back to Antioch, Syria. This completed the second missionary trip.

HOMEWORK:

1. Hearing that the Early Church met in homes, how does that affect your perspective of using your own home for the sake of the Gospel? Is this easy or difficult for you? Explain.
2. What were the Corinthians like before Jesus changed them?
3. Realizing that over half of the world lives in big cities, what do you feel the plan for evangelism should include? Be as specific as possible.