

Lesson 16: The Second Missionary Journey Continues

Acts 17:1–18:22

Paul’s second missionary journey began with a disagreement. From there, Paul, Silas and Timothy, went on to meet with rejection, beatings and imprisonment. Sprinkled throughout their struggles, though, were beacons of hope – moments of rejoicing as the Lord’s Spirit came in power, and men and women received the truth of the gospel. Things won’t get much easier for Paul and company as their journey continues, but they will continue to find moments of joy in the midst of their trials.

One such moment comes in their reception at Berea, where the Jews “received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things [the message of the gospel] were so” (Acts 17:11). You can almost see Paul smiling as they pulled out the scrolls to check his claims. As you open up the ancient words of Scripture to seek His presence and His truth for yourself, I hope you can feel the Lord’s pleasure. He loves to be sought. Our Father delights to be found!

“Now these [Jews in Berea] were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.”

Acts 17:11

Thessalonica and Berea

Read Acts 17:1-9. Continue to plot Paul’s journey on your map: *The Second Missionary Journey of Paul*.

Paul and his companions ended up in Thessalonica, a Macedonian city that dominated the government and commerce at the time. It was a major metropolis with a population of around 200,000.²³

When Paul, Silas and Timothy first arrived in Thessalonica, where did they go and what did Paul teach?

²³ Longman, Tremper, III and David E. Garland, Eds. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Revised Edition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007. Page 974.

1. Why was it necessary for Christ “to suffer and rise again from the dead” (Acts 17:3), as Paul taught? See Isaiah 53.

Paul testified: “Jesus... is the Christ” (Acts 17:3). When we proclaim Jesus as Lord and Christ, we do so partly based on knowledge, on understanding of the Scripture. We have brains, and we can reason. However, our *experience* of the truth is often as important a witness as our *knowledge* of it. Remember, Paul knew all the same Scriptures before his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-18).

2. How have you *experienced* the truth of the love and mercy of Christ in your own life?
3. Another important factor in Paul, Silas and Timothy’s ministry to the Thessalonians was their genuine care for the people. How did they feel about the Thessalonians according to 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, which was sent from Paul, Silas and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 1:1)?
4. How did the Thessalonians initially respond to Paul’s message according to Acts 17:4?
5. From Acts 17:5, what fueled the Jews when they rejected Paul and his companions? What did they accuse Paul, Silas and Timothy of having done in Acts 17:6-7?
6. What did those jealous Jews do when they couldn’t find Paul in Acts 17:6-9?

Read Acts 17:10-15.

7. How did Paul and his traveling companions leave for Berea? What did they do when they arrived, and how was their message received?

8. What might it look like in your own life to both “receive the word with great eagerness” and “examine the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11)? Share some practical ideas as a small group.

From Acts 17:14-15, add this next leg of the journey to your map.

Athens

Read Acts 17:16-34.

9. In Athens, Paul’s approach to ministering was a little different. What provoked Paul in Athens? How did he respond to his irritation in Acts 17:17?

Paul bumped up against some of the pagan philosophers of the day. The Stoic and Epicurean philosophers that are mentioned in Acts 17:18 “both attempted to escape the futility of life with their vain philosophy.”²⁴ The Epicureans promoted self-indulgence and emphasized pleasure, while the Stoics placed importance on self-deprivation.²⁵

10. How have you attempted, like the philosophers of that day, to find meaning apart from the Lord by either over-indulging or stringently depriving yourself? What happened?

The philosophers brought Paul before the Areopagus, the moral and religious court of Athens.²⁶ Focus on Paul’s words to the pagans in Acts 17:22-31.

11. In verses 22-25, how did Paul frame the gospel in the Athenians context?
12. What is man’s purpose according to Paul’s words in verses 26-28? What would it look like to really live with that purpose in view as you go about your life? What would change?

²⁴ Wong, John-Michael. *Opening Up Acts*. Opening Up Commentary. Leominster: Day One Publications, 2010. Page 116.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Walvoord, John F. and Roy B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*. Bible Knowledge Series. Colorado Springs, CO: David Cook, 1983. Page 403.

13. In Acts 17:28, Paul quoted a Greek poet. Very often our culture might attempt to draw us away from God, but sometimes things of this world can point us *to* God. When did you last encounter something in the world (something that was not overtly Christian) that drew you closer to the Lord?

14. In Paul's speech, he emphasizes God as Creator and man as created (Acts 17:26 and 29). In whose image is man created according to Genesis 1:27?

15. Paul went on then to point out the impossibility of man fashioning God into man's image (Acts 17:29). In building shrines and idols for their many gods, the Greeks had essentially created gods in their own image.²⁷ What are some ways that we try to set God up in our own image?

16. What action did Paul call for in Acts 17:29-31?

17. What three responses do the Athenians have to Paul's speech at the Areopagus according to Acts 17:32-34?

Corinth and the Conclusion of the Journey

Read Acts 18:1-17.

At this point, Luke's travel log gets a little vague as far as Timothy and Silas are concerned. We will try to piece together what we can from Paul's letters, but we can't be sure of the exact timing. Luke seems to have been primarily concerned with recording Paul's travels. At some point, Silas and Timothy must have joined Paul in Athens because Paul tells us in his letter to the Thessalonians that from Athens, they decided to send Timothy back to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:1-2). From Acts 18:5, we see that sometime after that but before Paul's departure from Athens, Silas also traveled back to Macedonia, possibly meeting up with Timothy. Some time after Paul arrived in Corinth, Timothy and Silas joined him there.

²⁷ Polhill, John B. "Acts". *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*. Ed. David S. Dockery. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998. Page 525-526.

18. Where did Paul stay and what did he do when he arrived in Corinth in Acts 18:2-4?

Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians while he was in Corinth, after Silas and Timothy joined him.

19. How did their arrival affect Paul according to 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10?

20. In Corinth, the gospel message is again rejected in large part by the Jewish population, but who *did* accept the gospel message according to Acts 18:8?

21. Who did the Jews bring Paul before in Acts 18:12-17? What was his response?

Refusing to involve himself in the affairs of the Jewish Law, Gallio set the stage for Christianity to remain legal – for the time being – in the Roman Empire. Judaism was a recognized religion and could be practiced within the Roman Empire. By recognizing Christianity as a sect of Judaism, Gallio effectively declared it legal and protected the spread of Christianity around the Empire.²⁸

Read Acts 18:18-22. Finish charting the second missionary journey on your map.

22. When Paul shaved his head at Cenchrae, he was probably fulfilling the Nazarite vow, which is explained in detail in Number 6:1-21. According to Numbers 6:1-2, what was the purpose of the vow?

23. Search your heart. Is the Lord prompting you to dedicate yourself to Him in any intentional way? What are some ways that you might honor Him in that?

²⁸ Walvoord, John F. and Roy B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*. Bible Knowledge Series. Colorado Springs, CO: David Cook, 1983. Page 407.

Prepare for Life

In Acts 18:9-10, the Lord Himself appeared to Paul and encouraged him. Things were going relatively well for Paul at this point in his journey. By that I mean that no one was bleeding or imprisoned! So why would the Lord have chosen this time to appear and encourage Paul?

I don't presume to know Paul's emotions. But he was as human as we are, and I can imagine how I might feel. Sometimes we get caught up in fear, even when circumstances are okay, by dwelling on what has happened in the past or by looking ahead and waiting for the bottom to fall out of our present circumstance. Sometimes even we can't understand the motive for our fear, and ten-thousand *fear not*'s from well-meaning voices can be in vain unless we hear those words from the Lord Himself, unless we know He is speaking straight to our circumstance.

24. Are you dealing with fear in your own life? Cry out to the Lord in the midst of it, and ask Him to speak straight into the situation. Confess your fears before Him. Speak them aloud to Him if it helps. Then wait for Him to respond.

Lecture Notes: Lesson 16