

Unexpected, Lifelong Encouragement Acts 18:1-17

Chapter 14 -> Paul is in Lystra where he had been stoned and left for dead. The next day he left for Derbe with Barnabas.

vs. 22, It is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.

Chapter 15 -> major dispute in Antioch. Paul and Barnabas travel to Jerusalem (the Jerusalem council).

vs. 19-20, We should not cause difficulties for those among the Gentiles who turn to God, **20** but instead we should write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from eating anything that been strangled, and from blood.

vs. 30, They return to Antioch to deliver the good news.

vs. 36-41, Paul and Barnabas have such a sharp disagreement that they parted company (**vs. 39**).

Chapter 16 -> Paul returns through Derbe to Lystra and Timothy joins Paul's ministry team.

vs. 6-10, forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. **vs. 10**, After he had seen the vision we immediately made efforts to set out for Macedonia.

vs. 12, arriving in Philippi

Paul meets Lydia (a beautiful house church is started and nurtured).

Paul and Silas are beaten with rods, flogged, and thrown in prison.

Paul and Silas are sensitive to the work of the Spirit in the life of the Jailer and his entire household (**vs. 34**).

Chapter 17 -> Paul arrives in Thessalonica.

Continued rioting and animosity toward the message of the Messiah.

Paul and Silas are encouraged to go to Berea for their safety (**vs. 10**).

The anger follows Paul and once again Paul is headed out of Berea and arrives in Athens (**vs. 16**).

Some success with the Philosophers and Intellectuals (**vs. 32-34**).

Chapter 18 -> Paul arrives in Corinth.

Corinth was a thriving metropolis.

- It was located 40 miles west of Athens.
- It was home to not one but two seaports.
- It was refounded by Julius Caesar as a Roman Colony in 44BC.
- It was often said that Corinth was more Roman than Rome itself.
- It became an incredibly large city (200K) - at least 20X the population of Athens.
- It's population was diverse and multi-ethnic.
- It was the center or the worship of the goddess Aphrodite.
- Additionally it was filled with multiple temples to multiple deities (Poseidon, Apollo, Hermes, and Zeus as well as the Roman Imperial Cult).
- It was the Las Vegas of its day. Filled with every enticement and pleasure humanity could imagine.
- It hosted the Isthmian Games held every two years.

Luke gives us several key details in 18:1-4. onths).

There was constant cultural, political, and religious tension in the region and throughout the Roman Empire.

- Debates had begun to emerge about "Chrestus" in the Roman Jewish communities. These were debates centered on the realities of Jesus.

Question: What was Paul's emotional state when he arrived in Corinth?

1 Corinthians 2:2-3 I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. **3** I came to you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 We don't want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of our affliction that took place in Asia. We were completely overwhelmed—beyond our strength—so that we even despaired of life itself. **9** Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death, so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.

Take a moment and ponder the everyday stresses of life (work, relationships, family, ministry...) now imagine the exhaustion Paul must have been experiencing. Perhaps he had feelings of loneliness, frustration, and doubts of purpose.

Truth: The Holy Spirit is actively involved in the emotions of our daily activities. God knows you better than the person who best knows you!

Despite Paul's emotional state...

vs. 4, He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and tried to persuade both Jews and Greeks.

Question: Despite your emotional state, are you continuing to engage in the things God has asked you to engage in? Do you trust God's presence in your life even when you are at the height of emotion and frustration?

vs. 5, Paul's ministry companions and friends return (Silas & Timothy).

vs. 6-8, Paul remains faithful.

Despite *opposition* and *frustration* the truth and the power of the message of Jesus takes root and begins to produce fruit.

- Titius Justus - neighbor to the synagogue
- Crispus - a leader of the synagogue.

vs. 9-11, Stop being afraid. Go on speaking and don't be silent.

vs. 12, Gallio - proconsul of Achaia

By Luke including Gallio in the details of Paul's time in Corinth we are able to give a clear date to Paul's stay (AD 49-51).

Luke is purposely highlighting that sometimes pagan officials do things which genuinely and thoroughly advance the cause of the **kingdom of God**.

Gallio's decision laid a clear pathway for the outreach of the gospel to the Gentile world.

- The Jews wanted the Romans to see it as a threat to Rome, they didn't want Gentiles to receive the benefits of practicing an accepted religion.
- Christians believed Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel and therefore an extension of Judaism.
- In recent history, in Athens, the issue had been left entirely unresolved.
- Gallio's decision is paramount. If he accepts the charges against Paul from the Jews then provincial governors everywhere would have precedent to severely restrict Paul's movements and ministry.
- However, Gallio's refusal to act was Rome's recognition of Christianity within Judaism.
- These policies and attitudes would of course change toward both Judaism and Christianity in the late 60's.

Luke and Paul Continuity (**vs. 8, 17**)

1 Corinthians 1:1 Paul, called as an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, and Sosthenes our brother:

1 Corinthians 1:14-16 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, **15** so that no one can say you were baptized in my name. **16** I did, in fact, baptize the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't recall if I baptized anyone else.

Question: Ask God to give you insight into what he is doing all around you. How might the Holy Spirit be working under the surface of your relationships to create an opportunity for a Jesus-centered conversation? Who are those God has placed in your life to offer you encouragement in times of overwhelming difficulty?

On this side of Jesus' return pray for steadfast perseverance because violence (vs. 17) is constant (flesh, world, enemy).