

# The Book of Acts / The History of the Apostles

## Lesson 61 – Acts 16-18 – What in the World is Going On?

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### INTRODUCTION

Our recent lessons have thoroughly explored Paul's second missionary journey, spanning approximately AD 50-52, as detailed in Acts 15:36-18:22. This journey marks a pivotal expansion of the Gospel into Europe, with Paul, Silas, and later Timothy and Luke, traversing significant regions of Asia Minor and Greece. Throughout this period, the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit was evident, often dictating their path and preventing them from preaching in certain areas to direct them elsewhere. This journey consistently showcased Paul's remarkable adaptability in engaging diverse cultures and confronting various forms of opposition, highlighting the impact of the Gospel message.

From their departure from Antioch, through Syria and Cilicia, we tracked their path to Derbe and Lystra, where Timothy was recruited. Following the Macedonian Call in Troas, which signaled God's intent to bring the Gospel westward, the team reached Philippi. Luke was picked up at this point. Lydia became Europe's first recorded believer, and the amazing account of the Philippian jailer occurred after divine intervention. Their ministry then extended to Thessalonica, marked by reasoning in synagogues and subsequent intense opposition from jealous Jews, before moving to Berea, where the 'noble-minded' diligently examined the Scriptures. Finally, Paul engaged the intellectual elite of Athens, debating Epicurean and Stoic philosophers at the Areopagus, where he contextualized the Gospel by referencing their "unknown god" and Greek poets.

The journey culminated in an eighteen-month stay in Corinth, a robust yet morally challenging commercial hub, where Paul worked as a tentmaker alongside Aquila and Priscilla. Despite persistent Jewish opposition leading Paul to focus on Gentiles, the Lord assured him of safety and many believers through a vision. The dismissal of charges against Paul by Proconsul Gallio underscored God's protection and Roman policy of non-interference in Jewish religious disputes. As Paul concluded this monumental journey, returning to Antioch via Ephesus, Caesarea, and Jerusalem, we also saw the introduction of Apollos, an eloquent Alexandrian Jew, who, after being further instructed by Aquila and Priscilla, powerfully continued to prove Jesus as the Christ. This transition effectively sets the stage for the Gospel's continued expansion and the next phase of Paul's ministry.

### ACTS 16-18 SUMMARIZATION OF WORLD EVENTS IN 50-52 AD

#### **Rome: Power and Intrigue**

In the heart of the empire, Emperor Claudius presided over a period of significant administrative and social change. By 50-52 AD, Claudius had been in power for nearly a decade and had consolidated his authority, undertaken ambitious public works, and continued the conquest and Romanization of Britain.

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While no single cataclysmic event is recorded in Rome for the years 50-52 AD, the political landscape was one of constant, often subtle, power struggles within the imperial family and between the emperor and the Senate. The reports of Paul's missionary journeys throughout the eastern Mediterranean also highlight the growing presence and spread of new religious ideas within the vast and diverse Roman Empire.

### **Jerusalem and Judea: Unrest**

During AD 50-52, Jerusalem and Judea saw significant religious and social unrest while under the rule of procurator Ventidius Cumanus. Tensions were high between the Jews and Roman occupiers, especially after incidents like a Roman soldier exposing himself at the Temple and another burning a Torah scroll—acts that deeply offended the Jewish population and nearly led to riots.

Violence continued to grow, especially between Jews and Samaritans. The murder of a Galilean Jewish pilgrim in a Samaritan village and Cumanus's alleged acceptance of a bribe to ignore the crime provoked Jewish militants to retaliate by attacking Samaritan villages. This cycle of violence overwhelmed Cumanus, prompting intervention from the governor of Syria, Ummidius Quadratus. The unrest and inability to restore peace led to Cumanus's removal in AD 52, after which Antonius Felix became procurator. He inherited a province rife with tension and on the brink of open rebellion.

Lingering effects from an earlier famine (44-48 AD) may have exacerbated economic strains, with aid from Queen Helena of Adiabene still influencing relief efforts. These events highlight growing anti-Roman sentiment, foreshadowing later revolts and the eventual wars that led to the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, which also led to the mass dispersion of the Jews, which lasted for nearly two millennia.

### **Mesopotamia: Contested Frontier**

During this time, Mesopotamia was a volatile frontier between Rome and Parthia, with Armenia as the main flashpoint. In 52 AD, Parthian King Vologases I asserted control by placing his brother Tiridates on the Armenian throne, directly challenging Roman influence. Rome, distracted by internal issues, was slow to respond, marking the start of a prolonged struggle over Armenia that would shape regional politics for years to come.

### **Egypt: The Emperor's Granary**

Egypt, a province of immense strategic and economic importance to Rome, was under the administration of the prefect Gnaeus Vergilius Capito from 48 to 52 AD. As the primary supplier of grain to the city of Rome, maintaining stability and efficient administration in Egypt was a top priority for Emperor Claudius.

The governance of Egypt during this time was heavily influenced by its unique status as a personal possession of the emperor. The material culture was a blend of Hellenistic and

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Roman influences, with the ancient Egyptian traditions gradually receding into the background. While specific major events on the scale of those in Judea are not prominently recorded for these years, the province was in full operation. An edict issued by Vergilius Capito during his tenure highlights a key concern of Roman administrators: combating the corruption of local officials. This edict sought to curb the practice of officials extorting supplies and transport from the local population for their personal benefit, a perennial problem in the provinces of the empire.

### **Greece and Macedonia**

We have the information we need about what is happening in Greece and Macedonia.

Now I missed something obvious in review. Timothy and Silas actually did meet up with Paul in Athens before Paul went to Corinth.

1 Thessalonians 3:1-2 – Silas and Timothy do eventually meet Paul in Athens, but Paul, anxious for the new believers in Thessalonica, immediately sends Timothy back to Thessalonica to strengthen them. Silas may have been sent on a similar mission elsewhere, probably to Berea.

Then Paul goes to Corinth, and when Timothy and Silas arrive with financial support and a report from Thessalonica. In response to the report, Paul sends a letter with Timothy to Thessalonica to “complete what was missing.”

Paul settles in Corinth, and when Timothy comes back, Paul sends another letter to Thessalonica. He may have sent it with Timothy, but that is unclear.

Silas is not mentioned again, and I agree with the theory that he went on to be instrumental in Macedonia.

### **1 Thessalonians (3:10-13, 5:23-24)**

The Apostle Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians from Corinth around 51 AD, during his second missionary journey. The letter is addressed to the church in Thessalonica, a group of believers praised for their faith amidst “much affliction” and for becoming examples to others. They were imitators of the churches in Judea, having also suffered significant physical and social persecution from their own countrymen for their faith.

The primary occasion for the letter was Paul's deep concern for the new converts. He had only been with them a short time and was prevented by “the adversary” from returning, so he sent Timothy to check on them. The letter's purpose was to “complete what is lacking in your faith,” providing necessary doctrinal content, particularly concerning the end times. The Thessalonians were worried about believers who had died before Jesus's anticipated return, a concern Paul addresses directly.

Despite the persecution they faced, the Thessalonians remained steadfast in their faith. Paul's letter reflects his profound care, love, and gentle nature, even when delivering

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precise doctrinal truths. A leading idea of the book is love for the brethren, which Paul prayed would increase and abound among them.

The letter also served as a confirmation of Timothy's teachings, as the church seemingly wanted assurance that what he taught was consistent with Paul's message. The central truth revolves around Paul's earnest prayer to see the believers again, to establish their hearts in holiness, and for God to sanctify them completely in spirit, soul, and body, preserving them without blame until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **2 Thessalonians (2:15-17)**

Written by the Apostle Paul from Corinth around 51-52 AD, 2 Thessalonians is a follow-up letter to the church of the Thessalonians. While the church's faith and love had grown significantly since the first letter, a dangerous deception had taken root.

The primary occasion for this letter was a new report that reached Paul, indicating that a false doctrine was being taught. The believers were wrongly led to think that "the day of the Lord has come". This poor theology had practical consequences, leading some members to give up on their worldly responsibilities and live in idleness, encouraging others to do the same.

The purpose of the letter was threefold: to continue encouraging the church for what they were doing well, to correct the false teaching about the end times, and to provide clear instructions on how to handle unruly brothers within the congregation. Throughout these events, the believers were still enduring significant physical and social persecution.

This letter reveals a more direct and stern side of Paul. He confronts the poor doctrine fiercely, demonstrating a sharp indignation when believers are distracted from the truth. The letter's characteristics include straightforward condemnations and instructions for church discipline, yet it is all framed with love, compassion, and a desire for restoration. The central truth of the book is an urgent plea for the believers to "stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught," so that God would comfort and strengthen their hearts in every good work and word.

### **Onward to Acts 19-20 – Paul's Third Journey (53-57 AD)**

In Acts 19, Paul's powerful ministry in Ephesus becomes so successful that it threatens the local economy built on selling silver shrines of the goddess Artemis. This leads a silversmith named Demetrius to incite a massive city-wide riot.

After the uproar, Acts 20 follows Paul's farewell journey toward Jerusalem. He miraculously raises a young man named Eutychus back to life after he falls from a window during a late-night sermon. The journey ends with an emotional and tearful goodbye to the Ephesian elders, whom he warns of future dangers before departing.