

Paul's Witness in Four European Cities

Part 2 of the 2nd Missionary Journey

Paul and Silas, having been urged to leave Philippi by the city officials (16:39) now make the 100 mile journey southwest along the main Roman road, the Via Egnatia to Thessalonica. While most of us would have preferred to take a few days off to recuperate from such a beating, Paul and Silas, along with Timothy, had to hit the road.

Note: The "we/us" references in Acts stop at 16:17; the third person "they" is used until 20:5. Therefore it is assumed that Luke was among those who stayed behind to assist the Christians at Philippi, and later rejoined Paul there.

Bow in Prayer: Our Mighty Lord Jesus, will You motivate us to understand the people and cultures of those to whom You have called us to witness. Make our hearts to beat like Yours for the lost souls of men and women.

Witness at Thessalonica ~ Acts 17:1-9

As the largest city of Macedonia, boasting a population of 200,000, Thessalonica was one of the most important seaports on the northern Aegean Sea. It was a "free city," which means that it was self governing. There was not a Roman garrison at Thessalonica and it had its own board of governing officials.

1. **Read** the account of Paul's initial contact with the people of Thessalonica in Acts 17:1-9.
[Trace the journey of Paul and his companions from Philippi to Thessalonica on Map 5 from Lesson 15.]
2.
 - a. Upon arrival the missionary team needed to find a place to stay. According to Acts 17:7a, who opened their home to them? (Romans 16:21 offers further detail.)
 - b. Additionally, they needed to secure some means of supporting themselves financially. What does Paul tell us in his first letter to the Thessalonians, written shortly after this visit? (See chapter 2 verse 9.)
3. **Mark** the verbs in Acts 17:2-3 that describe Paul's approach when he opened the Scriptures in the synagogue. Think about the meaning of each verb and record your insights below.
Who was convinced by the power of the truth?

4. As you reflect on what you learned from question 3, how might Paul's methods and approach to witnessing be helpful in your witnessing endeavors? Give an example.

5. What accusations did Paul encounter from the unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica (17:6-7)? What lay behind these accusations?

The pattern of events in Paul's travels and preaching was a pattern of upheaval. The mob scenes provide a graphic picture of the internal struggle of the lives of individuals when confronted with the truth of the Gospel. This was the sixth time since his conversion that Paul had been forced to leave an area. The ministry of Paul and Silas in Thessalonica was cut short, from a human point of view, forcing Paul to minister to these saints "by mail" (1 and 2 Thessalonians). Through the providence of God we also profit from Paul's teaching and exhortation at Thessalonica. *Scan 1 Thessalonians chapters 1 and 2 for a more detailed account of Paul's relationship with this New Testament church.*

Witness at Berea ~ Acts 17:10-14

Berea was a much smaller, quieter place—nestled at the foot of Mount Bemius. It was 50 miles southwest of Thessalonica, off the main Roman highway, the Via Egnatia.

6. Summarize the events that resulted in the flight of Paul and his companions to Berea (Acts 17:5-10). [*Trace their journey from Thessalonica to Berea on Map 5 from Lesson 15.*]

Thoughtfully **read** the record of Paul's ministry among the Bereans in Acts 17:10-14. **Mark** the verbs that describe the Bereans' response to Paul's teaching in the synagogue (verses 11-12).

7. Describe the Bereans' engagement with Paul's preaching of the Scriptures.

This had to be a special moment for Paul, working with ideal Bible students. These words also provide a paradigm for us as to how preaching ought to be heard. They teach us how we should listen to a sermon.

8. If you were a "Berean" what changes would it require in your life? Be honest.

9. Contrast the response of the Bereans and the Thessalonians to the message of the Gospel.

10. For what reason did Paul need to leave Berea? Who stayed behind?
11. What role did Paul's brothers in Christ play both in Thessalonica and Berea? (See Acts 17: 10, 14.)

Witness at Athens ~ Acts 17:15-34

In Paul's time, the city of Athens was renowned for its cultural sophistication. It was the center of philosophy, literature, science and art. Its stunning architecture was immediately visible upon entry into the city. It was also famous for its plethora of idols representing pagan deities. It has been said that Athens was a blend of superstitious idolatry and enlightened philosophy. How does one communicate Jesus Christ to such a city? Paul gives us a marvelous example when he visits Athens. **Read** Acts 17:15-34 keeping this question in mind.

12. When Paul entered Athens he was traveling alone. As he stood in the midst of this teeming city—taking in all the grand sites, what really caught Paul's attention? How did Paul feel about what he saw?

Stop and Ponder: The Greek form of the verb in Acts 17:16 is also used in the Greek version of the Old Testament to describe God's reaction to Israel's idolatry. *How does your heart respond to idolatrous behavior?*

13. What did Paul's reaction lead him to do (verse 17)? What is there about this record of Paul's ministry in Athens that is unique or new?

Key words to know and understand:

Philosophy: The love and pursuit of wisdom by intellectual means and moral self-discipline.

Epicurean: A school of philosophy that considered the gods to be so remote that they took no interest in human affairs. Epicureans denied creation altogether. Pleasure was the chief end of life.

Stoic: A school of philosophy that acknowledged a supreme god but in a pantheistic way. They did not separate the Creator from creation. Great emphasis was put on moral sincerity.

The modern equivalents of the groups Paul spoke to in Athens are Deism, Pantheism/New Age Movement.

14. a. How would you describe the Athenians' reaction to the Gospel message (Acts 17:18-21)? Can you identify the cause of this response?

Paul's message created such a stir among the Epicureans and Stoics that they brought him before the Areopagus (Greek for Mars' Hill). The Areopagus was also the name of the court that met on it. "The court was very select, perhaps only thirty members. Here, in the most learned city in the world and before the most exclusive of courts, Paul was able to share his faith." - Barclay

- b. How does Paul reach across the cultural barrier in his opening remarks (verses 22-23)?
- c. Consider the comprehensiveness of Paul's message to the Areopagus. What truths does Paul emphasize about God, repentance and judgment (verses 24-31)?

As Paul stood there and spoke about the one true God, his audience could look down on the city and see the many idols representing gods that Paul knew were worthless. *What is the spirit of God showing you about idols in our nation, our churches, and our personal lives?*

- d. Note how Paul quotes from Greek philosophy and poetry in verse 28. Why do you think he does this?
 - e. How does Paul introduce the concept of Jesus?
 - f. In what *three* ways did the Athenians react to Paul's message (verses 32-34)?
15. What does Paul's approach model to us as we seek to reach those with similar philosophies in our culture?

Witness at Corinth ~ Acts 18:1-17

Corinth was the great commercial metropolis of Greece and was served by two separate harbors, which gave it the status of an international crossroads of commerce—a gateway between Asia and Europe. A city with a population well over 100,000, Corinth was also notorious for its immorality and had an infamous reputation as the foulest, least moral city in the ancient world.

[Trace Paul's journey from Berea, to Athens, to Corinth on Map 5 from Lesson 15.]

16. From 1 Corinthians 2:1-3 what do we learn about Paul's state of mind when he came to Corinth?

When he arrived in the bustling metropolis, Paul went looking for an opportunity to pursue his trade as a tentmaker. **Read** Acts 18:1-17.

17. a. The spread of the Gospel requires a team effort by individuals with different gifts. List the main people in Paul's life that you see in this passage.

- b. What did Paul's new friends have in common with him? Why were they in Corinth?

- c. Acts 18:2 implies a Christian community had already formed in Rome. Further evidence can be found in the fact that Paul wrote the book of Romans from Corinth around A.D. 56-57. Explain how the Gospel could have reached Rome even though no apostle had ever been there.

18. When Silas and Timothy arrived in Corinth, what did they bring with them? (See 2 Corinthians 11:9.) How did this gift affect Paul's ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:4-5)?

19. What drastic action did Paul take when the Jews resisted his message this time (18:6-7)?

Stop and Think: It would have taken an act of extraordinary courage for Paul to set up his headquarters for his Corinthian ministry in the adjoining building to the synagogue! The reaction among the Jewish community next door must have been one of outrage and horror.

20. Considering the opposition described in verse 6, what did Crispus' faith demonstrate (verse 8a)?

21. What was the response from the Corinthian populace at large to Paul's ministry (verse 8b)?

For the remainder of Paul's Corinthian ministry the home of Titius Justus was the gathering place for the church in Corinth, a home spacious enough to hold church meetings. Even though Paul was no longer involved at the synagogue, a continual witness remained to Corinth's Jewish community by the very proximity and high visibility of the Corinthian church!

22. In what special way did the Lord encourage Paul at this time (Acts 18:9-10)?

Paul may have been thinking of moving on at this point, fearing that the familiar riots were about to erupt. But God was not ready for Paul to leave Corinth. Paul stayed at Corinth for _____ and established a strong church in this wicked, decadent city. Sometime later the Jews tried to drive Paul out (verses 12-17) but Paul was not harmed—the Lord fulfilled His promise (18:10). The favorable ruling handed down by Gallio paved the way for the Gospel's unhindered progress.

Read Acts 18:18-22. [Trace the final movements of Paul's second missionary journey using Map 5 from Lesson 15.]

Stop and Ponder: *After an estimated 2,800 miles of travel through the Roman Empire, Paul must have been exhausted in body and mind when he arrived back at his home church in Antioch. The persistent hostility of the Jews confronted him wherever he went. Each city presented a different problem, and the stress and difficulties of travel on these long journeys is hard to comprehend. Yet, many infant churches were established throughout Europe as a result of Paul's preaching and perseverance.*

The great apostle possessed a sense of urgency—a focus—and an unending compassion to see others meet the Christ he knew so well. He tried to make every moment count for eternity.

23. Are you making the most of the days God has allotted to you? The clock is ticking. . . .

What commitments are you prepared to make to God regarding the way you spend your time? Write a prayer to God below, expressing your heart's desire to surrender the remaining days of your life to Him. (Consider changes you need to make in activities that have no eternal value.)