



Acts of the Apostles
A DEEP DIVE INTO THE BOOK OF ACTS.

WEEK 9
 CLASS BY PASTOR GLYN NORMAN

Acts 15:36-18:22 – Paul’s Second Missionary Journey

1. Disagreement and two missionary teams (15:36-41)

- Luke presents Paul as taking the initiative for another missionary journey. Paul intended only to strengthen the believers that had been converted on the first missionary journey, but God had a wider mission in mind.

- Paul will not take John Mark with him, because he abandoned them in Pamphylia and Paul saw him as unreliable and did not want him with them day after day. However, later in his life we do see that Paul and John Mark become reconciled, and that Paul has some positive things to say:

My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) Col. 4:10

Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. 2 Tim. 4:11

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers. Phlm. 23,24

- Mark is believed to be the writer of the second Gospel, recording the words and thoughts of Peter, so he did come good in the end

- the fact that Paul records this “sharp dispute” between Paul and Barnabas shows his honesty. Again, a book, written as propaganda just to promote the early church would hardly mention disagreements between major figures as Luke does here. We see too that this relationship is also restored later and they work together again:

Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas?

Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? 1Cor. 9:5,6

- God providentially thus divides the missionary force with Barnabas taking Mark and returning to Cyprus (which they previously visited, see Acts 13:4-12)

- Paul and Silas set out for the Antioch congregation and strengthen the churches in Syria and Cilicia, which presumably Paul had founded. Silas was a leader in the Jerusalem congregation, and could speak with authority on the attitude of the Jerusalem church to the new believers (about the decisions reached in the Jerusalem council of Acts 15).

2. Paul adds Timothy to the team in Galatia (Acts 16:1-5)

- Timothy had never been circumcised. His mother was Jewish and since religion in that culture is passed on through the mother (she married a Greek, probably because the Jewish influence in that town was small and didn't forbid it), Timothy should have been circumcised and raised as a Jew.

Discussion Question:

- Why does Paul circumcise Timothy, if he believes that faith in Christ is all that is necessary for salvation?

- a summary statement in v5 that the churches were strengthened and grew. This ends the crucial last section where so much of the initial significant events for the early church (the conversion of Saul/Paul, acceptance of Gentiles, the rules which they still should obey in order not to offend believing Jews) were set in place.

We now enter a section (16:6-19:20) where there is wide outreach through two missionary journeys and we will see three main emphases presented by Luke:

1. God's direction and supervision of the gospel's outreach
2. Christianity's right to be a *religio licita* (officially recognized legal religion)
3. Paul preaching in different circumstances, with proclamation and persuasion

3. Providential Direction for the Mission (Acts 16:6-10)

- an amazing combination of strategic planning and sensitivity to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in working out the main goals

- note the progression of terminology in verses 6-10 which reveal the beginnings of a Trinitarian faith:

“the Holy Spirit” to “the Spirit of Jesus” to “God”. All three refer to God giving direction for the mission, but we are not told exactly how the Spirit guided them.

- the call to Macedonia. This is a key turning point in missionary history. Paul's obedience to this vision means that the gospel went westward and ultimately Europe and the Western world were evangelized.

- at Troas, the first of the “we” sections appears (16:10-17) and stops at Philippi. This indicates a time when Luke himself was a fellow traveler with the missionaries. The

second “we” section occurs in 20:5-15 also in Philippi and it could be that Luke lived there, since so much attention is given to that city by Luke, even though Paul and Barnabas only stayed there a brief while.

4. At Philippi (Acts 16:11-40)

- Luke devotes more space to Philippi than he does to any other city on Paul’s second and third missionary journey, and seems to reflect his own pride in the (his?) city by calling it “a leading city of that district”.

- the conversion of Lydia. (16:13-15)

In Jewish law, a congregation was made up of 10 men. When there were ten male heads of households who could be in regular attendance, a synagogue was to be formed. Failing this, a place of prayer under the open sky or near a river or sea was to be arranged for. (Longenecker, *Acts*, 460). This town does not seem to have had the necessary quorum (minimum number necessary) and so there is no synagogue. Paul and his companions wander outside the city in search of a Jewish place of prayer, and come upon a group of women holding a type of Sabbath service. They would not have taught the Scriptures themselves (at least not officially) but would have hoped some Jewish traveling preacher could assist them. Paul and his companions sit down with them and speak to them. Lydia receives the message and becomes a Christian. The women with her were probably relatives or members of her household, such as servants. They stay at her home, and thus the small church in Philippi is formed. Sociological note: the church comprised a (probably single) businesswoman, her servants, a demon-possessed girl, a jailer and his family – breaking many social barriers.

Discussion: What are the advantages of having such a mixed congregation? In modern church planting theory, the advice is to plant churches aimed at one type of people e.g., young families, or Gen X-ers. What is gained and what is lost through this approach?

- the demon-possessed girl (16:16-18). She was regarded as demon-possessed and able to tell the future. Her screaming at the presence of the Christians recalls similar situations in Jesus’ own ministry (Mk 1:24; 3:11; 5:7; Lk 4:34,41; 8:28) where there is a compulsive acknowledgement of the true character of those confronted. The demons cannot help but acknowledge the truth about Christ. See James 2:19:

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that —and shudder.

She tells the truth that the men are offering the way to salvation. A Jew would understand that term differently than a Greek, but it was not unfamiliar to Greeks. They would understand salvation to mean “release from the powers governing the fate of man and of the material world” (Longenecker, *Acts*, 462). Her demon-inspired words gained some free publicity for the missionaries but at a certain point it became a nuisance, and her words were perhaps interrupting their preaching of the gospel, so Paul commands the evil spirit “in the name of Jesus Christ” to come out of her, and she is delivered, and presumably became a Christian.

- Paul and Silas in prison (19-34)
 - the anger of the owners – their source of income is ruined (never mind that the girl is free of the demon!)
 - the charge of advocating an illegal religion (*religio illicita*)
 - Paul and Silas singled out (rather than Luke and Timothy, more Greek in features and clothing) because they had a Jewish appearance (anti-Semitism?)
 - they are stripped, flogged and jailed with their feet in stocks. Technically they should be exempt from such treatment as Roman citizens, but the frenzy of the mob perhaps caused a hasty judgment and actions from the magistrates
 - the reaction? Instead of whining about their unfair treatment, they are praying and singing hymns to God – earthquake happens and loosened the chains, enabling them to escape, if they so wished. (Is v25-34 a “miracle story” added later for effect – many ancient traditional stories about prison doors opening and miraculous escapes – and v35 can be read following v24 without any real break in the story (try it!) – BUT – difference, they do NOT escape from the prison).

Discussion:

Many psalms are written from a place of pain and despair (see Ps 27, 42, 43). How do you react when you are in pain? Do you cry out to God, ignore God, seek comfort elsewhere? How do you think writing down or singing may be helpful?

- jailer’s reaction – he could be put to death for letting prisoners escape, but they do not escape
 - the praying and singing, earthquake, opening of the doors, loosening of the chains all serve to convince the jailer that these men are God’s servants, divine messengers, bringing him to the point of asking, “What must I do to be saved?”
 - he and his whole family come to faith, with the result of joy
- Paul and Silas leave the city (16:35-40)
 - why do they not leave when they are able?
 - appeal to legality, their rights as Roman citizens
 - an attempt to gain *religio licita* status for Christianity?
 - protection gained for the new converts meeting at Lydia’s home?

5. At Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9)

- Paul’s usual approach, to the synagogue first, with the usual reaction:
 - some Jews believed, and many God-fearing Greeks causing Jewish jealousy and opposition to Paul – they stir up a riot
 - the charges – causing trouble, defying Caesar (by talk of the kingdom of God and Jesus as king). Note: in Paul’s letters, he avoids using the words “king” and “kingdom” perhaps to avoid just this type of trouble and confusion
 - they are able to post bond and promise no repeat of this trouble

6. At Berea (Acts 17:10-15)

- famous as “more noble” than the Thessalonian Jews because they examined Paul’s claims according to the Scriptures, rather than simply judging it by cultural and political considerations. On examining the Scriptures, many believed.

(The visit to Athens, Acts 17:16-34 will be dealt with in the next lecture)

7. At Corinth (Acts 18:1-17)

- Paul came in much fear and trembling to Corinth:

I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power,

so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.

1Cor. 2:3-5

- It could be that he was dejected after his “failure” in Athens, where he had failed to get the right to preach in the city, and had been dismissed with polite contempt rather than a riot, even though a few believed. He may also have been worried about the fate of the Thessalonian believers who he had left behind under the threat of persecution:

But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you.

1Ths. 2:17

We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God’s fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith,

so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know.

1Ths. 3:2-4

- Here in Acts 18, Luke is interested in the proceedings before Gallio:

1. To demonstrate that one of the wisest proconsuls had declared Christianity to be a *religio licita*

2. To warn that if Rome started to persecute the church it would be acting contrary to Gallio, a respected proconsul