

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 32

Acts – Part Six

Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Chapters 15:36 – 18:22

I. BACKGROUND

As we resume our study of Acts, we pick up with Paul's second missionary journey. It is useful to pause for a moment and reflect on the significance of the mission trip itself. Religion prior to this time notes little or no recorded missionary work merely for the effect of converting people to a faith, at least apart from warring. Certainly cultures used the excuse of proselytizing to justify conquering foreign lands, but a personal journey for conversion purposes is rarely seen before the advent of Christianity.

Luke related Paul's first missionary journey into the island of Cyprus and the region of south Galatia in Acts 13:1 – 14:28. Paul and Barnabas completed that missionary journey together. John Mark, Barnabas's cousin, started on the trip, but bailed out mid-way through (to Paul's disapproval.) After that journey, Paul wrote his Galatian letter and went to Jerusalem for an apostolic conference on the issues of Gentile requirements for salvation. After the conference Paul returned to Antioch where he stayed teaching and preaching about Jesus.

II. TIMELINE

A reasonable timetable of key New Testament events relevant to Acts¹ is:

Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost	April-May 30
Conversion of Saul of Tarsus	c. 33
Paul's first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem	c. 35
Death of James, son of Zebedee; imprisonment and escape of Peter; death of Herod Agrippa I	Spring 44
Famine in Judea; Paul and Barnabas sent with relief from Antioch	c. 46

¹ The timeline is derived with modification from that given by F.F. Bruce in his commentary, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 1951.

First Missionary Journey (Paul and Barnabas to Cyprus and Asia Minor)	47-48
Paul writes Galatians	c. 48
Apostolic Council at Jerusalem	c. 49

WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY COVERED ACTS 1:1 THROUGH ACTS 15:35 IN CLASS. THAT BRINGS US TO THIS POINT IN THE TIMELINE. THE EVENTS COVERED TODAY RANGE FROM ABOUT 49 A.D. (AFTER THE APOSTOLIC COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM OCCURS) TO ABOUT 50 A.D., WHERE WE WILL INTERRUPT THIS SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY AT A POINT WHERE PAUL LIKELY WROTE HIS LETTERS TO THE THESSALONIANS.

Second Missionary Journey (Lystra, Derbe, Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth)	c. 49-50
Paul writes Thessalonian Epistles	late 50
Paul in Corinth	Fall 50-Spring 52
Gallio becomes proconsul of Achaia	July 51
Paul's hasty visit to Palestine	Spring-Summer 52
Paul at Ephesus	Fall 52-Summer 55
Paul writes First Corinthians	Spring 54
Paul's sorrowful visit to Corinth	Spring or Fall 54
Murder of Silanus, proconsul of Asia	late 54
Paul writes Philippians	late 54 or early 55
Paul sends Titus to Corinth and Timothy to Macedonia	early 55
Paul in Troas	Fall 55
Paul in Macedonia and Illyricum	Winter 55-Fall 56
Paul writes Second Corinthians	56
Paul in Corinth	Winter 56-57
Paul writes Romans	Early 57
Paul's arrival and arrest in Jerusalem	May 57
Paul detained at Caesarea	57-59
Paul sails for Rome	Sept.-Oct. 59
Paul in Malta	Winter 59-60
Paul arrives in Rome	February 60
Paul writes Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians	c. 60-61
Death of James the Just in Jerusalem	61

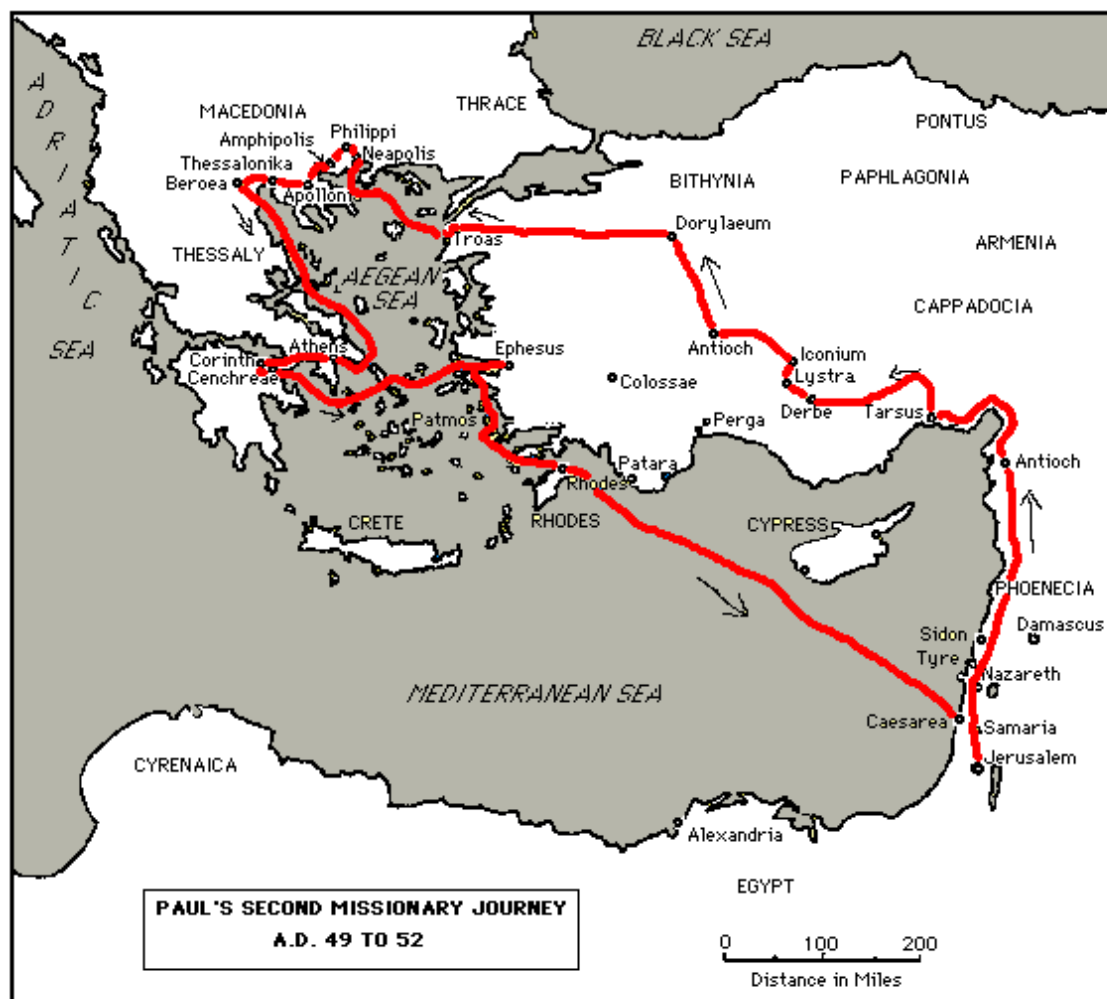
End of Paul's Roman detention
Destruction of Jerusalem

Late 61 or early 62
70

III. THE TEXT

Acts 15:36 records that “some time later” Paul asks Barnabas to go back to the towns they visited in their earlier missionary journey. Barnabas agreed but wanted to take John Mark. Paul disagreed with the wisdom of taking Mark in view of Mark's earlier desertion. The disagreement was sharp enough to cause Paul and Barnabas to separate, with Paul taking Silas and headed north to the land that churches has earlier establisher, while Barnabas took Mark and headed back to the island of Cyprus.

Instead of sailing, Paul took the land route through his hometown of Tarsus. Paul then came first to Derbe and then Lystra, two Galatian towns where he previously set up churches.



Acts 16 notes that in Lystra Paul spent time with Timothy, a man whose mother was Jewish and father was Greek. Paul decided to bring Timothy with him on the remainder of the journey. Before leaving with Timothy, Paul had him circumcised.

This circumcision seems a bit odd after the stand Paul took against necessary circumcision of Gentiles both in Jerusalem and Antioch and also in his Galatian letter. In Jewish eyes, however, Timothy was not Greek, but was Jewish. Jewishness was passed on through the mother, not father. (While it could always be questioned who fathered a child, there could never be a question on who gave birth. Hence true Jewishness could never be questioned through a maternal lineage.) Paul circumcised Timothy to allow Timothy access to the Jewish synagogues and fellowships where they were heading. Timothy's circumcision was not part of a legalistic obedience in contravention of Paul's teachings elsewhere.

Paul and crew traveled from town to town delivering the decisions reached by the apostles at the Jerusalem conference and encouraging the churches. Luke notes the growth was consistent in these churches both from a maturity level and in numbers. (16:5).

Paul traveled on through Phrygia and Galatia but was "kept from the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia" (16:6). Paul's sensitivity to the Spirit is consistent. The Spirit's ways of leading, however, vary greatly. Paul discerns the Spirit through his own reasoning, through visions (coming up next) and through counseling of others. Regardless of how the Spirit led, Paul would hear and follow. In this fashion, Paul had intended to go into Bithynia (north central Turkey) but again the Spirit would not allow it. So Paul went to Troas (northwestern coast of Turkey). While there, Paul had a vision at night of a man calling Paul to come over to Macedonia to help folks (16:9). Luke then changes his writing from third person to first person plural. We see where Luke himself joined the missionary troupe as they continued on to Macedonia (north of Greece.) "After Paul had seen the vision, *we* got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." (16:10) (Emphasis added). Historically Macedonia's fame was as the homeland of Alexander the Great.

Luke records specifics of the boat trip into Macedonia and the resultant stay for a few days in Philippi, the leading city of that area of Macedonia. (Incidentally, Philippi drew its name from Phillip, the King and father of Alexander the Great).

In Philippi, Paul and crew stayed several days. On the Sabbath they went outside the city proper to a river where they expected Sabbath prayers to be offered. Jewish law instructs that it took ten Jewish men to establish a necessary quorum for a synagogue. Since there was no synagogue, we can assume that there were not enough men. Luke doesn't detail that, but he does tell us that they encountered Jewish women who had come together. The missionaries spoke to the women, including one named Lydia who was from nearby Thyatira. Lydia was a believer in God whose heart opened in faith to the messiah Jesus. Lydia was baptized along with her household. She had the missionaries come stay at her house.

One day as Paul and crew were heading to the place of prayer, they were met by a slave girl who had a spirit "by which she predicted the future" (16:13). For days this girl followed Paul shouting in a most bothersome manner. Paul finally was troubled enough by this that he turned around and cast the spirit out of the slave girl. Luke records "when the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone" they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities in the marketplace (16:19).

The indictment against Paul and Silas was that they were Jews who were throwing the city into an uproar by advocating non-Roman customs that were against the law. These trumped up charges were sufficient for the city magistrates to order Paul and Silas stripped, beaten, and thrown into prison. The jailor was told to guard them carefully, and so put them into the inner cell, fastening their feet in stocks.

Around midnight, Paul and Silas were singing away to God with hymns and prayers to the ears of the other prisoners. An earthquake then shook the foundations of the prison throwing open all the doors, releasing everyone's chains.

The jailor awoke with recognition that prisoner's escape would mean his own life. He was about to impale himself on his sword when Paul called out. Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" (16:28).

Greek Du Jour

The Greek word translated "hope" is *ἐλπις* (*elpis*). The word does not mean our English idea of "wishing." Instead, the word conveys a confident expectation of what is coming. So when the Bible speaks of our hope for eternal life, it is not speaking of our wishing. It speaks of that which we confidently expect. This passage does a splendid job of showing this meaning of the word. The owners of this girl had already made daily money from her. The loss of her power removed their "hope" of future money in the sense that they had relied and confidently expected the income to continue.

When the jailor realized that indeed no one had chosen to escape, he fell before Paul seeking salvation. Paul explained the faith in Jesus that the man lacked, and the jailor and his household believed and were baptized that very night. The jailor washed their wounds from the flogging and kept Paul and Silas at his house for the night.

The next day, the magistrates sent orders to release Paul and Silas. When the jailor gave them news of this release, Paul refused to leave. Paul then declared Silas and his Roman citizenship which made the beating an illegal action and Paul declared they would not leave unless those guilty of wrongfully flogging them came and escorted them out. The magistrates were alarmed to hear that Paul and Silas were Romans who were flogged, and did come and appease them politely requesting that they leave the city. Paul and Silas left, but not before going back to Lydia's house and encouraging the Christians.

Acts 17 notes the towns Paul and crew (minus Luke again) took to their next stop of note – Thessalonica. For three successive Sabbaths, Paul preached and taught in the synagogue about the Christ. Paul explained from the Old Testament how the Messiah was going to have to suffer and die, followed by a resurrection. A number of Jews and Greek God-fearers accepted the message in faith. A number of the believers were prominent citizens. This caused a great deal of jealousy among the non-believing Jews. Some of the new believers were forced to post bond, and Paul and crew were sent out at night to the nearby town of Berea.

In Berea, the Jews and Greeks poured over the scriptures to determine whether Paul's teaching was right. A great number put faith in Jesus among the Jews and Greeks. But word soon came from Thessalonica about Paul and non-believers came down to agitate the Bereans and stir them up against Paul. Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea, but Paul was escorted down to Athens, Greece. Paul sent the escorts back to Berea to instruct Timothy and Silas to join him as soon as they could. (16:15).

While Paul was awaiting Timothy and Silas in Athens, he grew distressed seeing the large number of idols throughout the city. As usual, Paul reasoned with the Jews and God-fearing Greeks in the synagogues, but in Athens, Paul did more. Paul went to the marketplace and spoke with those there. This marketplace (the "*agora*") is near the foot of the Parthenon and the ruins can still be seen in Athens today. While at the *agora*, Paul debated with some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who were intrigued enough to invite Paul to the Areopagus to probe the merits of his "new teaching." Luke adds the editorial comment that Athenians "spent all their time doing nothing but talking and listening to the latest ideas." (17:21).

Epicureans subscribed to the philosophy that the gods were detached and uninvolved in human affairs and lives. They believed that life was best lived detached with an understanding that death would bring dissolution to their bodies with no view of any afterlife. Epicurus himself lived from 341 B.C. to 270 B.C. He established his school in Athens and his philosophy grew through his school after his death. The best-known Epicurean whose works can be read today was the Roman poet Lucretius.

Stoics, including the notable Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, believed in an overriding reason behind the universe. Happiness and purpose for mankind was believed to be found in aligning one's will with the natural order of things. Once one found his place in this natural order, it was to be pursued with disinterest – lest one get discouraged or disappointed by unfulfilled desire.

At the Areopagus, Paul commences to speak in ways that were both biblical and sensible to the Greeks listening who had no knowledge of Hebrew Scriptures. Paul referenced an altar he had found inscribed “to an unknown god” and explained that he knew of the God that the Greeks did not know. This God made all heavens and earth and everything in it. This God is not detached, as the Epicureans thought divinity must be, but had his hands directly in human affairs. From creation onward, god worked so men would reach out and seek God. God is our source and sustenance of life. Paul then quotes two Greek poets, Epimenides (600 B.C.) and Aratus (315-240 B.C.)

Epimenides wrote of Zeus, “In thee we live and are moved, and have our being.” Aratus (who was from Cilicia, hence a compatriot of Paul's!) wrote a poem honoring Zeus entitled *Phenomena* where the fourth and fifth lines note, “In every way we have all to do with Zeus, for we are truly his offspring.”

Paul quotes these Greek poets with precision as noted by Luke in Acts 17:28. Paul says God is “not far from each one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being [Epimenides].’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ [Aratus].” Paul is not using these passages to confer significance on Zeus. Rather, he is taking what these Greeks have studied and learned and showing its proper application to the real God, not the idols of man's hands or imaginations. Paul drives his point home by teaching that God in fact raised Jesus from the dead. At this some sneered, but Luke records that others believed Paul and embraced the faith.

In Acts 18, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. The distance is not great, and it was in Corinth that Silas and Timothy rejoined Paul. Paul spent 18 months or so in Corinth. Paul was able to convert a number of Jews (including a

synagogue leader) and Gentiles even though the Jews had him beaten and persecuted. Among those converted were Aquila and Priscilla. These two Jews were recent arrivals to Corinth. They were Jews from Rome who had recently been ejected from Rome by the Emperor Claudius who ordered all Jews out of the City. This reference by Luke along with the later reference that Paul was brought before the “Proconsul” Gallio allows us to date this time Paul was in Corinth by comparing the dates we have from the secular record. Hence we put Paul in Corinth from the fall of 50 to the spring of 52.

From Corinth, Paul sailed to Ephesus where he stayed briefly teaching about Jesus before returning to Antioch with a promise to return, “if it is God’s will.” (18:21).

At some time after Athens, Paul composed the letters to the churches he had founded and left in Thessalonica. Those letters will be dealt with next before we go to Paul’s third missionary journey.

IV. POINTS FOR HOME

1. Christianity has history.
2. The Spirit has a plan.
3. Embrace God’s plans.
4. Hope in God.