

To The Ends Of The Earth

LESSON 18: **PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY, PART 3** **(ACTS 17:22-18:22)**

After preaching in Thessalonica and Berea, Paul was sent to Athens to escape the agitators who had caused problems. While he was waiting for his travel companions in Athens, he saw that the city was full of idolatry. Then, he would have the opportunity to preach at the Areopagus.

MORE PREACHING IN ATHENS (ACTS 17:22-34)

17:22-23. At the Areopagus (Mars' Hill, a hill overlooking the marketplace), Paul addressed the Athenians as being very religious (both devoted to their gods and superstitious), as they worshiped many gods (Acts 17:16). He noticed one altar specifically as he traveled through the city with the inscription: "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." Perhaps they wanted to seek the favor of and not anger any god they may have missed. This gave Paul an opening to teach about the true God they did not know and worshiped in ignorance!

17:24-31. The God they did not know was the One who made the world and everything in it (as Lord/Master of heaven and earth, Genesis 1)! Yet, in a city surrounded by idols, altars, and temples (including the Parthenon), Paul declared that the God they did not know does not live in shrines (temples) made by human hands (1 Kings 8:27)! For, any god who could be contained in a temple built by people cannot be the God who made all things! Furthermore, God gives life, breath, and all things to people and is not dependent on people serving and taking care of Him (Psalm 50:9-15; contrary to their gods, Psalm 115). God created all people to have a common ancestor (from one blood, Adam, Genesis 2:7). So, He is not just the God of a single nation (i.e. the Jews). All people over the whole world live and breathe at the times and in the places according to God's design. God has created these so they might recognize and seek Him (Romans 1:18-23; Hebrews 11:1-3, 6). If they would do so, they could reach out and find Him (become acquainted with Him and His will for our lives, unlike the idolaters who were searching for someone they would never find). For, God is not far from us. He is the One in Whom we all live, move, and have our being (working in and around us every day). Even their own poets (e.g. Aratus) had concluded that people are the offspring of a god (though they were not referring to Jehovah). Paul

demonstrated that living and reasoning beings cannot be the offspring of a god who can be properly represented by an image made of earthly substances, devised by human skill and imagination! In a bold conclusion, Paul declared that God had overlooked the times of such idolatrous ignorance (allowing it to continue though not approving of it, Acts 14:15-17; Romans 1:18-32) but was now commanding all people everywhere to repent! For, there is a day coming when God will judge the world according to His perfect righteousness (Romans 2:5-11). This judgment will be carried out by the Man God has appointed and proven as the Judge by His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10)!

17:32-34. Paul's preaching received three different responses. First, hearing about the resurrection of the dead caused some to reject the message and mock (ridicule) Paul. Second, some wanted to hear more about the things Paul was teaching (perhaps indifferent but interested). Third, as Paul left, some joined him (evidently to continue learning) and believed. Dionysius (the Areopagite, perhaps a judge in the court held at the Areopagus), a woman named Damaris, and others were among them.

PREACHING IN CORINTH (ACTS 18:1-17)

18:1-4. After leaving Athens, Paul traveled to Corinth (about 40 miles westward). Corinth was a large, commercialized city, the capital of Achaia, and known for its great immorality. When Paul arrived, he found a Jewish man and wife (Aquila and Priscilla) who had fled Rome under the Jewish banishment of Emperor Claudius (around 49 A.D.). These shared Paul's occupation as tentmakers and provided lodging for Paul while he worked there (to provide for himself, 1 Corinthians 4:12; 9:11-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9). Though we don't know whether these were Christians already, Aquila and Priscilla would be diligent disciples of Christ (Acts 18:24-28; Romans 16:3-5). In addition to tent-making, Paul reasoned with both Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) in the synagogue every Sabbath, trying to persuade them concerning Jesus (Acts 17:3-4).

18:5-8. Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Corinth after their work in Macedonia. Along with encouragement (1 Thessalonians 3:1-10), they apparently brought financial assistance from churches to Paul (Philippians 4:15-16; 2 Corinthians 11:8-9), allowing Paul to devote himself fully to preaching the word. He continued preaching Jesus as the Messiah among the Jews, but they largely resisted and blasphemed. Paul shook out his clothes as a sign of their rejection (Acts 13:50-51; Nehemiah 5:13). He declared himself innocent of their blood (i.e. not responsible for the doom that would

come on them for rejecting the Messiah, Ezekiel 3:16-21) and said he would go to the Gentiles. He left the synagogue and went next door to a house belonging to Titius Justus (a worshiper of God, perhaps a Gentile), who evidently offered a place for Paul to preach. Crispus (the leader of the synagogue) and all his household came to saving faith in Jesus (obedient faith). Many in Corinth heard the gospel, believed, and were baptized!

18:9-17. The Lord revealed to Paul in a night vision that he should not be afraid and continue speaking the word in Corinth (promising no one would hurt him) because He had many people in the city (who would obey the gospel, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11)! Paul then stayed for a year and a half teaching the word of God. The Jews in Corinth united against Paul and brought him before Gallio (the proconsul of Achaia, 51-52 A.D.). The Jews accused Paul of persuading people to worship God contrary to the law (perhaps God's law or Roman law). Before Paul could answer, Gallio dismissed the charges as being insignificant for his consideration and as being questions relating to Jewish law, and drove them away from the judgment seat. After this, the Jews apparently blamed Sosthenes (leader of the synagogue, perhaps taking Crispus's place and the spokesman before Gallio) and beat him in front of Gallio, who paid no attention to it.

RETURN TRIP TO ANTIOCH (ACTS 18:18-22)

18:18-22. Paul eventually left Corinth and began his return trip to Antioch of Syria. Aquila and Priscilla left with him. Paul had taken a vow (his reason is not disclosed), which involved shaving his head (perhaps a form of the Nazarite vow, Numbers 6). They arrived in Ephesus (capital of Asia), and Paul debated with the Jews in the synagogue there. Though they wanted him to stay longer, Paul said he would return if it was God's will, and then sailed away from Ephesus. However, he left Aquila and Priscilla there, who labored in Ephesus to further the gospel for a time (Acts 18:24-28; 1 Corinthians 16:19). Paul arrived in Caesarea, went to Jerusalem and greeted the church there, and then went to Antioch.

CONCLUSION

Having arrived back in Antioch, Paul's second missionary journey had come to a close. He had traveled through the areas visited on his first journey to strengthen them. Furthermore, Paul and his companions had worked to spread the gospel into Macedonia and Achaia.

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

What altar did Paul talk about noticing in Athens?

Why were the Athenians guilty of ignorant worship even though they were extremely religious?

How did Paul contrast the true God with the Athenians' idols?

How did Paul urge the Athenians to respond to his message?

Who were Aquila and Priscilla, and what connection did they have with Paul?

How did the Jews respond to Paul's preaching in Corinth?

How did others respond to the gospel in Corinth?

What did God reveal to Paul about the work in Corinth?

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