
6. Paul in Europe

Acts 17:1 – 18:23

Acts 17:1-18:21

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” ⁴ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. ⁵ But the Jews^[a] were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, ⁷ and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” ⁸ And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. ⁹ And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

¹⁰ The brothers^[b] immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. ¹² Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. ¹³ But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. ¹⁴ Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. ¹⁵ Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

¹⁶ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰ For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” ²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,^[c] ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for

“‘In him we live and move and have our being’;^[d]

as even some of your own poets have said,

“‘For we are indeed his offspring.’^[e]

²⁹ Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” ³³ So Paul went out from their midst. ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

After this Paul^[a] left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³ and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

⁵ When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. ⁶ And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” ⁷ And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸ Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. ⁹ And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” ¹¹ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

¹² But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews^[b] made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, ¹³ saying, “This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.” ¹⁴ But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. ¹⁵ But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things.” ¹⁶ And he drove them from the tribunal. ¹⁷ And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.

¹⁸ After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers^[c] and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. ¹⁹ And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. ²¹ But on taking leave of them he said, “I will return to you if God wills,” and he set sail from Ephesus.

²² When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. ²³ After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Witnessing

It would not be correct for us to spend four weeks in Paul's missionary journeys and not to discuss sharing our faith. The purpose of Paul's journeys was to tell others about Christ. He endured hardship, hunger, persecution, stoning, lashes, and shipwreck to spread the Gospel, and in here is some good examples of how to share our faith today.

For many of us, myself included, witnessing is a fearful thing. We get scared and nervous at the proposition of sharing our faith. It is something that we do not enter into lightly, and feel the weight of the conversation, and simply put, feel like we are unqualified to represent Christ in a discussion on the merits of our faith. Jesus promised to the Disciples (and by faith to us as well) that He will make us His witnesses into all of the Earth.

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Why is it that we look at the first part of that verse as a promise and the second as a command?

Jesus also promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit will provide the words that we need to share the Gospel.

Luke 12:11-12

And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

This is not to say that we do not need to study, or learn how to defend our faith. But in the day of trials, the Spirit is there to give us the words that we need.

II Timothy 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved,^[a] a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

God is not defended by the lips of man, but uses the words that He provides to accomplish His purpose.

Isaiah 55:11

so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

To the Jew first

Five times in these two chapters, we learn that Paul went to the synagogue to proclaim Christ. We saw this approach in His first missionary journey as well. This was Paul's default mode for proclaiming the Gospel. He started with a common belief (all of the Old Testament) and showed how Christ fulfilled the promises contained there-in.

Acts 17:1

Acts 17:10

Acts 17:17

Acts 18:4

Acts 18:19

Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Paul's message was simple – The Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ.

Acts 17:2-3

And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ."

We have some good examples of this type of witnessing in Peter's dialogue in Acts 2:14-41 & Acts 4:8-22 as well as Stephen's Address in Acts 7:1-53

Paul's message was always to the Jews first. The Jews were the children of the promise, the ones who were the heirs of the covenant with Abraham, but more than that they were God's method to accomplish Salvation throughout the world. The Jews were not special because of who they are, but because of God's promise to Abraham. God promised in Genesis that through Abraham's children all of the nations of the earth will be blessed. Because this promise was given to Abraham, the children of Israel were blessed.

The Bible is a story of God's redemption of man – His story working through His people. God doesn't ignore the rest of the world because He was so enthralled with the Israelites, He tells His story, and shows us how His divinely preserved remnant became the line through which the Christ – the fulfillment of His promise goes.

I had a conversation with an employee the other day in which he said, "The Bible is like a bubble, ignoring all of history outside it. What I would like to know is what is happening in the world around it?" Good question.

We shouldn't treat the Bible as a bubble, but learn how these historic stories relate to the surrounding nations and empires. The Bible is God's story of redemption of mankind, and as it intersects other nations and people it contains historic information, but the Bible is not a history book.

There are resources that we can use to help make these connections:

- Timelines
- Historical dates
- Christian Historical books – (see Jackie)

To the Greeks

Paul witnessed to the Greeks in the Areopagus (Mars Hill). He followed the same basic pattern that he used with the Jews in looking for a common belief then illustrating Christ from there, but watch how this unfolds in this passage as Paul shares Christ with the philosophers on Athens.

Paul followed four basic steps in sharing the Gospel that are extremely relevant to us today.

Observed his Surroundings

Acts 17:16 - Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.

He was not afraid to be among them

Acts 17:17; 22-23a - So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship....

Reasoned with those around him

Acts 17:17 - So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

Paul Looked for what was missing

Acts 17:23 - For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

Romans 1:20-25

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Paul found a connection to share the Gospel – as the fulfillment of what is missing

Acts 17:24 - The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,

Acts 17:28-29 - for "'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, "'For we are indeed his offspring.' Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

A Call to Repentance

Acts 17:30-31 - The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."