

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 15:1-18:22

Key Verse: 17:3

“...explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,’ he said.”

Today's passage covers the council at Jerusalem and Paul's entire second missionary journey. In this passage the Jerusalem church accepts Gentile believers as the same Christians as they are, overcoming their traditions and cultural differences. Paul, on his second missionary journey, does his best to explain why Jesus is Christ the Lord.

I. The Jerusalem Council (15:1-41)

In Acts chapter 10 God showed Peter through a vision that he should accept Cornelius, a Roman officer and a Gentile, into the church. Through this vision Peter learned that he should accept Gentiles into the church unconditionally, regardless of circumcision, if they call on the name of Jesus (11:18). Since then ten years had passed. But it was still hard for most Jewish Christians to accept Gentiles as fellow Christians, for to do so meant losing their pride as chosen people, which had enabled them throughout history to overcome adverse situations and grow as a strong people. So some of the mossbacked Jews went to Antioch and taught the Gentile Christians, "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved" (1). It implied that Gentiles should become Jews first, before becoming Christians. At the same time, the Antioch Christians had begun an intensive campaign to evangelize Gentiles without requiring circumcision. The Jerusalem church could hardly find the solution to this problem. In the Jerusalem Council, God through his Spirit let Peter and James give formal approval that circumcision was not necessary for Gentiles to become Christians.

Peter said in verses 7b-9, "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith." Peter concluded in verse 11: "No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." This is the last mention of Peter in the book of

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Acts. On the basis of the vision in chapter 10, Peter decided to accept Gentiles as fellow Christians without requiring circumcision. But James had to make the final decision, since he was the leader of the Jerusalem church. He was the brother of Jesus himself. His spiritual leadership was outstanding. They say he was so constant in prayer that his knees were as hard as a camel's, because he had knelt so often and for so long. How could a strict and orthodox Jew consort with a Gentile? James, by the help of the Holy Spirit and based on the Bible's teachings and on the facts of God's work at Antioch, agreed with Peter's decision to accept Gentiles without requiring circumcision. But he did suggest certain regulations for Gentiles to keep, such as abstaining from food sacrificed to idols, from eating blood-stained meat or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality (15:28-29). The Jerusalem church leaders were indeed great men of God; they broke their pride as the chosen people in order to accept Gentile Christians into the church.

Verses 36-41 mention the separation of Paul and Barnabas. Paul wanted to visit the brothers in all the towns where they had preached the word of the Lord, to see how they were doing (36). Barnabas wanted to take Mark along. But Paul was not convinced that Mark, who had once deserted the company, was qualified to be a partner (13:13). Paul was a man of principle. On the other hand, Barnabas was a man of encouragement in any situation. Barnabas was the one who had first invited Paul to Antioch to start pioneering work. He admitted that he needed Paul's help to establish the church. But now, Barnabas shows that he could do God's work without Paul. So he separated from Paul. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus. Paul chose Silas and they left on the second missionary journey with the prayers and support of the church.

II. Paul's vision of a man of Macedonia (16:1-40)

First, Paul's vision (1-10). Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Christian Jewess and whose father was a Greek. Paul decided to take him along on the journey, not because he was big leadership material but because he was faithful. In choosing coworkers, Paul saw faithfulness as the most important quality, more than human ability (2Ti 2:2). This is what God saw when he chose Abraham and David. The same was true with Jesus when he chose the Twelve. Paul's mission team traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the

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word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to (7). So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. "During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us'" (9). After Paul had seen the vision, they decided to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called them to preach the gospel there (10). Paul had thought that he should preach the gospel to Asian countries first, where Satan's stomping noise was more vociferous. But God planned to send him to European countries first. It was to conquer Rome, so that the whole world could be conquered through Roman roads. Acts 2:17b says, "Your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams." We must be men of God's vision, not men of petty desire.

Second, Paul's one-to-one Bible study with Lydia at Philippi

(11-15). Paul's mission team put out to sea from Troas and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day to Neapolis. From there they traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. From God's point of view, Paul was the commanding officer of world evangelism. But he had no place to sit down and pray. So on the Sabbath his mission team went outside the city gate to the river, where they expected to find a place of prayer. When they sat down, they saw several women who had gathered there. Obviously Paul spoke a gospel message. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and her household were baptized, she invited them to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." In this way God provided room and board for them. Lydia became the founder of the church at Philippi, Paul's first European church and one of the most faithful churches. From this church Paul received financial support while pioneering other churches.

Third, Paul and Silas sang in prison (16-40). Once when Paul's mission team was going to the place of prayer, they were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners. She nagged Paul to heal her. Paul drove out the spirit in the name of Jesus. Then her owners realized that their income source was gone. They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. Paul and Silas were stripped

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and beaten. After being severely flogged, they were thrown into prison (16-24).

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying for God's help and singing hymns to God for thanksgiving, and the other prisoners were listening. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword to cut himself to death. Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" Then the jailer exclaimed, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household" (25-31). We note several things here. Where there was a work of God, there was a hindrance of Satan. We also see the powerful spirit of Paul and Silas; in jail they could pray and sing, while the other prisoners were groaning. Also, they were ready to preach the gospel even to the jailer, despite their physical wounds. When the Spirit of Jesus was with them, they were victorious. 2 Corinthians 3:17 says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

III. The Lord spoke to Paul in a vision (17:1-18:22)

As we studied, Paul and Silas received physical abuse which required at least one month of treatment and mental restoration. But Paul continuously traveled around to reach out to the remaining cities on the Greek peninsula. In this part Paul travels to Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth.

First, the work of God in Thessalonica (17:1-9). When Paul's mission team had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica. There Paul went into a Jewish synagogue. What did Paul teach at the synagogue? Look at verses 2,3. "As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. 'This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,' he said." Paul taught two main points of the gospel: First why Jesus had to suffer for our sins, and second, how God raised Jesus from the dead and made him Christ the Lord. First Paul taught that the Christ suffered for our sins. The Thessalonians had no concept of sin because they lived on the animal level, like tigers or lizards. So Paul reasoned,

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explained and proved that man is both body and spirit, that man has both an animal nature and God's nature, that man's body is mortal but his soul is immortal. These days many people suppress the truth of God that man is both animal and divine, and they encourage others to live only on the physical level. Likewise, it was not easy for Paul to explain the concept of sin to such animal people. Nonetheless, Paul did his best to reason with them that Jesus had to suffer for man's sins. Here we learn that one who knows that he is a sinner is already a great man. Paul knew what kind of sinner he was, and who Jesus was. He said in 1 Timothy 1:15, "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst." When he said this, he really meant it.

Next, Paul reasoned and proved that God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus, the one and only Son of God, died for man's sins in obedience to God's will for world salvation. Then God exalted Jesus, who obeyed his will, to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Christ the Lord (Php 2:9-11). All Christians must know how to explain and prove based on the Scriptures why Jesus had to suffer for our sins, and why Jesus is Christ the Lord, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Because of Paul's message, a large number of God-fearing Greeks accepted Jesus as Christ the Lord.

What happened next? The Jews were jealous--so much so that they rounded up some bad characters and together with them they accused Paul of causing trouble all over the world, and of defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus. They made Jason a scapegoat, for he offered Paul's team hospitality (5-9).

Second, noble Bereans (17:10-15). Paul and Silas were sent away at night. On arriving in Berea they went to the Jewish synagogue and preached the gospel of Jesus, overcoming the hardships they had received in Thessalonica. What was the Bereans' response to Paul's preaching? Look at verse 11. "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." They must have heard the bad news about Paul's mission team, but they were not disturbed; they listened to Paul's message. Noble people are those

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who study the Bible eagerly and prayerfully.

Third, the work of God among the sophisticated people at Athens

(17:16-34). As we know well, Athens is the home of Hellenism and of the world famous philosophers. Denying God's existence, the Athenians started their thinking based on humanism. But when they did not fear God, everything became an object of fear to them. So they made their own kinds of gods and worshiped them. There were two groups of philosophers: one was the Epicureans, who, in contemporary terms, were "hedonists;" the others were Stoics who were too moralistic. These Athenians were curious about Paul's new ideas and wanted to hear him. They spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas, to please their ears. Paul stood up and said, "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious...I even found an altar with this inscription: 'To an unknown God.'" Paul then proclaimed that God is the Creator, and that men, who are God's children, must seek God, not idols (24-28). Men must not worship idols made by human hands, but repent, so that they may be pardoned on the day when God will judge the world with justice. Paul also preached the resurrection of Jesus. But his preaching in accordance with the Athenians' way of thinking (28) was not so effective. Some Athenians mocked the resurrection, though a few believed.

Fourth, the work of God in Corinth (18:1-22).

Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met Aquila and Priscilla, who were tentmakers as Paul was. After Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia to join him, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying that Jesus is Christ the Lord. But the opposition of the Corinthians was unbearable. Probably Paul felt lonely and was afraid. But the Risen Christ visited him and encouraged him. Look at verses 9,10. "One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: 'Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.'" So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God (11). Then Paul left Corinth accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken. Leaving Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, Paul went back to Antioch, completing his second missionary journey.

In this passage we learn that in every place, to both Jews and Gentiles, Paul proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ. May God help us to

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explain and prove why the Christ had to suffer and why Jesus is Christ the Lord.