

Acts

Bible Study

Second Apostolic Journey Part 3

Acts 17:15–18:17

Paul was told by the Lord to travel to Troas where he was given a vision of a man from Macedonia pleading with him to come over to help them. Before this, the Lord first told Paul not to travel into the region of Asia (modern-day western Turkey), and then told him not to travel to the north. This gave him only one option, to travel west to Troas, located on the Aegean Sea coast (western modern-day Turkey). This so-called Macedonian call is often used today to explain a special “calling” from the Lord. However, Paul knew exactly what the Spirit wanted him to do, unlike people today who act upon urgings, unctious, feelings, promptings, proddings, impressions, and other immaterial forces they blame on God. When God spoke to Paul, there was absolutely no doubt what God wanted him to do.

The vision of the man from Macedonia was a real person who was reaching out to Paul through God. This man is sometimes said to be Luke because in Acts 16:10 the narrative suddenly says that “we” endeavored to go. The “we” indicated that Luke was not with them until after Paul saw the vision. This explanation does not seem very plausible since the man Paul saw was a vision, not a person. The man was also said to be from Macedonia, and it appears that Luke is not from that area. It’s more probable that Luke was in Troas at that time and met up with Paul to continue with the group into Macedonia. I believe the man Paul saw in the vision lived in Macedonia and was most likely visited by Paul.

Athens (verses 17:15–34)

Having been beaten, jailed, and imprisoned in Philippi, Paul and Silas, upon release, traveled to Thessalonica. The unbelieving Jews forced them out of Thessalonica so they traveled to Berea. Once again Paul had to run for his life, and he was sent safely out of the city by the believers. He sailed down to Athens and waited there for Silas and Timothy to join him. While in Athens, he was overwhelmed with how idols were so prevalent within the city. This provoked him to preach in the synagogue and marketplace. This piqued the interest of the local philosophers who wanted to know more about what he had to say about Jesus, the resurrection, and his other strange ideas. They brought him to the Areopagus, also known as the hill of Ares or Mars’ Hill (named after the Greek and Roman god of war respectively). They loved to hear new ideas, and so Paul was welcomed with great interest and curiosity.

Paul began by stating that he noticed how they fear the gods. Some translations makes it sound like Paul was criticizing them (they were too superstitious), but he was actually stating the fact that they were well aware of the gods and that they respected or, more likely, feared them. In trying to convince someone of the soundness of your belief, it certainly is not a good idea to immediately berate their belief system. Paul got their attention by telling them that he knew who the unknown God was.

They worshiped many different gods and had altars set up for them. In order not to offend a god they inadvertently missed, they had set up an altar to the unknown god. Paul’s message introduced them to the unknown God, Jesus Christ. This God was the creator of all things (including the materials they had used to fashion idols of their gods) making him Lord over all things, including their gods. This unknown God cannot be contained in any inanimate object. He is completely self sufficient, has given life to all people, and is in control of them. He cannot be compared to any of their hand-made gods which are merely images created by man out of gold, silver or stone. God once allowed them to go their own way (Acts 14:16; Roman 3:25), but He will hold them accountable, on the day of judgment, for their actions. Paul warned them that they needed to turn from serving worthless idols to the God powerful enough to raise the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was proof given to all people that He is the one and only true God worthy of worship (Revelation 4:11). There were some in the crowd who became believers.

Day of judgment (verse 17:31)

Paul warned them about a day of judgment coming by the hand of Jesus Christ (John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42). God had allowed the Gentiles to go their own way in times past, but there will come a time of reckoning when God will demand that all unbelievers explain their actions (Romans 3:25). This judgment will happen at the end of the Millennial Kingdom, specifically at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11–15). All who stand before God at that judgment will attempt to prove that their actions were good enough for them to receive eternal life. Unfortunately, godly perfection is the standard, and no one will be able to reach that mark on their own.

Corinth (verses 18:1–11)

After preaching in Athens, Paul moved on by traveling 50 miles almost straight west to Corinth. He first met Aquila and Priscilla, tent makers who were banished from Italy by Claudius (emperor from A.D. 41–54 and preceding Nero). While waiting for Silas and Timothy, Paul would go to the synagogue to persuade the Jews and Gentiles about Jesus Christ. During this time he was working with Aquila and Priscilla making tents to earn a living, desiring not to be a burden to the believers in Corinth (1 Corinthians 9:11–15). This was a continuation of what he did in Thessalonica and probably other cities previous to this (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 3; 8–10).

To the Gentiles (verse 18:6)

Paul's message was met with great resistance from the unbelieving Jews as he taught in the synagogue. When they rejected his teaching in Antioch in Pisidia, Paul declared that he was going to turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46). In Corinth the same thing happens. Paul told them that from now on he will go to the Gentiles. Paul treats unbelieving Jews as Gentiles, so his ministry now was to all unbelievers (Romans 2:28–29; 9:6–8). These declarations to go to the Gentiles are geographical, not chronological. Paul needed to make sure the Jews heard the Gospel of Grace (Acts 13:46). Once the Jews heard in a certain area, he was no longer bound to specially seek them out, although he still preached to the Jews.

To the building next door (verses 18:7–11)

Instead of preaching and teaching at the synagogue, Paul and company begin meeting at the house of Justus, who owned a building with a common wall to the synagogue. Meanwhile, there were a number of people from the synagogue who became saved and began attending the little side church, including Crispus, the former leader of the synagogue. With him came his family and a number of others.

The Lord came to Paul in a vision to encourage him to continue to speak boldly, as he was already doing. The Lord promised Paul that He would keep him safe, and that no one would attack him. Paul continued his ministry in Corinth for 18 months.

Opposition (verses 18:12–17)

Toward the end of his stay in Corinth, the unbelieving Jews brought Paul before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, the region where Corinth is located in southern Greece. Their complaint was that Paul had been trying to persuade men to worship God contrary to the Mosaic Law. Gallio had no time for their dispute since it did not involve Romans law. He told them to settle it themselves.

They settled it by taking Sosthenes, the current leader of the synagogue, and began to beat him in front of Gallio, perhaps because Sosthenes failed to get rid of Paul. Gallio remained unengaged throughout the whole ordeal.

A man called Sosthenes was named by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:1. He was a believer who apparently helped Paul pen 1 Corinthians. It is unknown whether or not these are two separate men, or the same person. I would like to think that Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, became a believer and joined the Corinthians church.

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