

Unit 4, Lesson 31: Paul sets out again

Memory verse: 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. (Acts 17:11)

Remember when John Mark left Paul and Barnabas? A time came when Paul asked Barnabas to go with him to visit all the believers they had won to Jesus in all the towns they visited on their first journey. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark again, but Paul didn't want him along because he felt that John had deserted them before. Luke records that their disagreement was sharp and that they decided not to travel together.

Barnabas took John Mark and went to Cyprus, while Paul took Silas and went to Syria and Cilicia. They eventually got to Lystra and Derbe. Here they met Timothy. Paul wanted Timothy to join them. They went from town to town, taking the message about the decision made in Jerusalem, and Luke reports that the churches were strengthened and grew daily in numbers.

Paul and Silas wanted to go into "Asia." The Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to go where they wanted, however. Luke gives us no details on how this was done, only that Paul and Silas got the message. Then Paul had a vision of a man begging, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." (Acts 16:9) So Paul made immediate plans to follow this leading.

And here there's a change in the narrative. Luke starts using the term "we."

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.

From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 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 the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. (Acts 16:10-15)

This leads us to conclude that for this portion of the journey Luke accompanied Paul, Silas, and Timothy. But Satan saw light being brought into places where he had spread darkness, and he found a way to make trouble for these men. There was a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She made a lot of money for her owners.

She began to follow Paul and the others saying something that you might at first think was good. "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." (Acts 16:17). But this troubled Paul, who probably understood that the girl was possessed by a demon as well as being a slave. Eventually, out of compassion for the girl, he commanded the spirit to leave her in the name of Jesus Christ. The spirit left and the girl lost her power of fortune-telling.

The girl's owners saw their easy money ticket wiped out and were angry. They got Paul and Silas

arrested, severely beaten, and thrown in prison. The jailer, having been commanded to guard them carefully, put them in the inner prison with their feet in stocks. Paul and Silas reacted by praying and singing hymns. No doubt they, like the apostles the Jews had beaten years before, were rejoicing that they had been counted worthy of suffering for the name of Jesus.

About midnight a violent earthquake shook the prison, throwing all the doors open and loosening everyone's chains. The jailer ran out and assumed that the prisoners had fled. He drew his sword intending to kill himself when Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" (Acts 16:28)

This led the jailer and all the members of his household to be converted, and all were baptized that very night. The next day the city magistrates sent word that Paul and Silas should be released. Paul demanded that the magistrates escort them out personally. He and Silas were Roman citizens and had been punished without a trial. This news alarmed the magistrates who did what Paul asked. They did ask Paul and Silas to leave the city, which they did after visiting the brothers at Lydia's house.

The next city they worked in was Thessalonica. For three Sabbaths Paul went to the synagogue and won many Jews, a lot of God-fearing Greeks, and some prominent women. The Jews got jealous again and stirred up a riot against Paul and Silas, accusing them of promoting Jesus as a rival king to Caesar. Of course this wasn't true. Pilate had confirmed that when he examined Jesus before his crucifixion.

But the brothers in Thessalonica sent Paul and Silas on to another city, Berea. The Jews there checked what Paul was saying against the scriptures (the Old Testament, then), and Luke commends them for this. The lesson; you should always check what a preacher or teacher says against the Bible. Good preachers and teachers won't mind this. If someone gets upset when you check what they say against the Bible, there's a pretty good chance they're teaching something wrong and don't want you to find out. Don't let such persons threaten you into believing them.

The Jews in Thessalonica learned what Paul was doing in Berea. The brothers sent Paul away while Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea a little longer. Paul went to Athens and there was distressed to see that city full of idols. As usual, Paul worked in the synagogue, but he also spoke in the marketplace. A group of philosophers began to dispute with him. They brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus.

Paul tried to meet these people of ideas with logic, using their image to an "unknown" god to introduce them to the Jewish creator God and to the gospel of Jesus Christ. When he got to the resurrection, however, most Athenians began to scoff, and Paul had few converts out of his efforts. From there he went to Corinth, and in a later letter to the church there Paul seemed to regret what he had done in Athens.

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

Possible thought papers:

1. Write a Psalm of thanksgiving from the viewpoint of the jailer at Philippi.
2. Read Paul's speech to the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-31). What might Paul have changed?
3. Are you acting like a Berean when studying these lessons? Why or why not?