

VICTORIES AND VIOLENCE IN MISSIONARY WORK

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

These two chapters complete Luke's record concerning Paul's second missionary trip. Paul established many churches on this trip, but he suffered much violence while doing it. One can readily see that "he who lives godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim 3:12). The providential hand of God led Paul through this persecution to fulfill His command to teach all nations (Mt 28:19-20) and to witness for Christ unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

I. Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica — 17:1-9

A. Presentation of the Gospel — 17:1-4

1. His Ministry — 17:1-2

17:1 — Thessalonica was a very prominent city on the Thermaic Gulf. The Via Egnatia (road) passed through it which linked it to all the important Macedonian cities. It was a great seaport and with its land and sea affinities, it was an excellent city from which the gospel could be sent forth (1 Thess 1:8, 9).

17:2 — Paul ministered first, as was his custom, in the synagogue. Many think that his whole ministry in this city was three Sabbaths in the synagogue, but it seems that Paul's ministry actually lasted much longer, only he moved the center of his ministry from the synagogue to some other place.

2. His Message — 17:2-4

17:2-3 — Paul's message was simply an exegesis of the Old Testament Scriptures and their relationship to Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. Note Paul's method: first, he reasoned from the Scriptures by teaching or preaching them - v. 2; second, he opened the Scriptures by explaining them (cf. Lk 24:32 where the same word is used of Jesus' teaching); and third, he alleged the Scriptures by giving evidence of their relationship to Christ.

17:4 — A few Jews were persuaded to become Christians (cf. Acts 20: 4; Col 4:10) but a great number of the converts were devout or God-fearing Greeks and some of these were leading women in the city. Paul's later reference to the Thessalonian church indicates that the greatest number were pagan idolaters (1 Thess 1:9).

B. Persecution by Jealous Jews — 17:5-9

17:5 — It is understandable that the Jews could have legitimate questions concerning the Old Testament prophecies to that of Jesus being the Christ (Messiah) - v. 3. However, Scripture indicates these Jews were void of any spiritual discernment or desire to know the truth. First, they were moved with jealousy, quite contrary to spiritual maturity even by Old Testament standards (Prov 6:34). Moreover, this jealousy was not over concern for Old Testament Scriptures, but jealousy over those who responded to the gospel (cf. Acts 13:45). Their spiritual depravity was further evidenced by the manner in which they opposed Paul. They did not leave the matter with God to settle if perchance Paul were wrong (Acts 5:34-39), but they hired lewd fellows (wicked men) to aid them in rioting against the believers.

17:6-9 — When these vicious Jews could not find Paul, they dragged Jason (and other believers) to the city rulers in an attempt to have him punished for receiving Paul and Silas. First, the missionaries were charged with having "turned the world upside down"; second, they were charged with doing things contrary "to the decrees of Caesar," but nothing was stated specifically; and third, they were accused of promoting Christ over Caesar. Jason was forced to put up a bond that would guarantee that no further disturbance would be caused by his friends or else he would lose his money. Then he was released.

The Thessalonian believers should be commended for their evangelistic zeal even amidst threats and further persecution (1 Thess 1:8, 9; 2:14).

II. Paul's Ministry at Berea — 17:10-14

A. Presentation of the Gospel — 17:10-12

17:10 — The Thessalonian believers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night following the Thessalonian uproar. He came to Berea, about 50 miles southwest of Thessalonica and again began his ministry in the synagogue.

17:11, 12 — The Jews in Berea were more noble than the Thessalonian Jews. The idea of "noble" is not used in a social sense to indicate greater education but that they were open-minded (NOT high-minded). Hence, they desired to know the truth of Paul's message and carefully scrutinized it in accordance with the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit ministered through the Word of God and these Bereans were convicted of their sins and accepted Christ as their Savior. Also, many honorable women and men among the Greeks believed as well. The importance of searching the Scripture with an open heart will open the truth of the Scriptures to a person's mind.

B. Persecution by the Thessalonians — 17:13-14

17:13 — When the jealous Jews from Thessalonica **heard of** Paul's ministry in Berea, they immediately evidenced the hardness of their hearts by hurrying to Berea to drive away the missionaries.

17:14 — Paul left, but Silas and Timothy remained. Perhaps Paul felt he would soon return. Perhaps these uproars against Paul's ministry served as further proof of his divine call (Acts 9:14, 15; 13:46) and thus encouraged him.

III. Paul's Ministry in Athens — 17:15-34

A. Preparation for His Work — 17:15, 16

17:15 — Paul was escorted to Athens and then he sent for Silas and Timothy. Athens was a new opportunity of service for Paul. It was not a chief commerce center but rather it was enjoying the "late afternoon" of her 5th and 6th century B.C. glories. Athens had been the intellectual center of the world during that time. Even today, Athens (in Greece) is remembered for her literature, philosophy, art and democracy.

17:16 — This was no vacation for Paul while he awaited for Silas and Timothy to rejoin him. Instead, his heart was stirred (provoked, deeply moved) by the idolatry so prominent in such an intellectual culture. His appreciation for the external human achievements took second place to the recognition of their spiritual condition. This city was dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1).

B. Presentation of the Gospel — 17:17-31

17:17-19 — Paul witnessed for Christ in three areas: in the synagogue where he disputed (reasoned, argued with the Jews – v. 17; in the market place where he dealt with all comers – vv. 17-18; and in the Areopagus, a special court, where he spoke to the intellectual leaders in the city – vv 19-31.

17:18 — Paul was determined to present the Gospel to all people—even to the elite of the Greek culture. He conferred with the Epicureans and Stoics - two basic groups of philosophers. The Epicureans were named after their founder, Epicurus (311-270 B.C.), and basically believed that even though gods existed, they had no personal interest in men. They refused to believe in life after death and were basically materialistic. A later perversion of this philosophy emphasized pleasure - "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die." The Stoics, founded by Zeno (about 300 B.C.), were essentially pantheistic. They believed the world itself was god and they found god in nature and sought to enjoy nature. It was a system based on man's ability to take care of his own needs.

17:18 — They called Paul a "babbler," a picturesque term that portrayed birds fluttering here or there in the market place looking for a scrap of food upon which they could pounce. Hence, Paul was looked upon as one who was trying to pick up seed bits of knowledge as opposed to what they termed "genuine knowledge." In their ignorant spiritual condition they thought Paul was just propounding strange deities.

17:19-21 — Paul was invited to speak further of his "new" doctrine at the Areopagus. The Areopagus was really a court, which met on the hill west of the acropolis (hill of Ares) or sometimes in the royal court. Originally, this court had great power in the democracy but by Paul's time it was chiefly limited to moral and religious matters. Paul was given a hearing here but he does not seem to be on trial as such.

17:22, 23 — This is the first recorded message of Paul in which it was not necessary for him to give an Old Testament text for his message. Note that Paul fitted his message appropriately to his crowd. In his introduction, he gained their attention by speaking of their religion and said they were too religious (not "superstitious" as we use the term now). He said they had an altar to an unknown god whom they worshipped in ignorance. This was the God that he worshipped with knowledge and presented this true God to them.

17:24 — He is the Creator God. God is the creator of all things (Ps. 19; Is 40). This teaching was directly opposed to the Greek idea which regarded the physical universe as eternal.

17:25 — He is the Sustainer God. God does not need men to supply His needs, but to the contrary, men are dependent upon Him to supply their needs, even life and breath.

17:26 — He is the Sovereign God. The whole world, including each nation and individual, is determined and controlled by God.

17:27-28 — He is the Omnipresent God. Even though many people do not find God, He is not far from any one of them. In fact, He is so close that it is by His presence that each person is able to live and move and exist. He is everywhere present.

17:28-29 — He is the Personal God. All men are the offspring of God in the sense that He created them in His image. This does not support universal salvation, but rather universal creation. He personally formed each person in his mother's womb (Ps 139:13-16; Jer 1:5). Since each person is made in the image of God, it is foolish to think that God should be made by man in the form of a gold, or of a silver, or of a stone image.

17:30 — He is the Savior God. God commands that everyone repent (change his mind). He must change his mind about sin and hate it (Acts 8:22). He also must change his mind toward God and have faith in His Son (Acts 20:21). When a sinner looks to God for the strength to repent and does it, he is saved.

17:31 — He is the Judge God. Paul declared that God will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, Whom He raised from the dead. The proof of this day of judgment is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is only one God and one human race; there is only one way of salvation and one Judge to Whom every man must give an account of his life.

C. Perception of the Message — 17:32-34

Luke only gave a summary of the message but he records three responses: some mocked or sneered, others wanted to hear more, and some believed the message of the resurrection. Paul did not fail in this message for several were saved, among them, Dionysius and Damaris. In addition, patristic writers indicate that a church was established at Athens.

IV. Paul's Ministry in Corinth — 18:1-18

A. Presentation of the Gospel — 18:1-8

1. In the Synagogue — 18:1-6

18:1 — Corinth, Paul's next place of ministry, was a city fifty miles west of Athens. This city was noted for commerce, wealth and corruption.

18:2-3 — When Paul arrived at Corinth he met Aquila and Priscilla, Jews who had been evicted from Rome by Claudius in 49 A.D. They were fellow tentmakers with Paul and presumably they were Christians when Paul met them, though this is not certain. Tentmakers were either manufacturers of heavy cloth from goat hair or they were leather workers. Paul's hometown, Tarsus, was noted for the production of a cloth made from goats' hair.

18:4 — Paul's synagogue ministry was limited to the Sabbaths and began before Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia. He sought to persuade both Jews and Greeks to put their faith in Jesus Christ as he ministered in the public services.

18:5-6 — When Silas and Timothy arrived, a crisis of some sort occurred and Paul was strongly constrained to testify to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. This caused strong opposition from the Jews and ended in a complete break between Paul and the Jews of Corinth. When Silas and Timothy rejoined Paul at Corinth, they brought a report from Thessalonica and a gift from them (1 Thess 3:6; 2 Cor 11:8-9; Phil 4:15). This report, no doubt, pressed upon Paul to urge the Jews of Corinth to make their decision concerning Jesus as their Messiah. Most likely this was the time that Paul authored 1 Thessalonians and shortly thereafter 2 Thessalonians.

2. In Justus' House — 18:7-8

18:7 — Paul continued his ministry in Corinth among the Gentiles. He held his meetings in the house of Justus, which was next door to the synagogue.

18:8 — Paul was quite successful among the Corinthian people in his new location. He even won Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and his household to the Lord.

B. Perseverance for His Ministry — 18:9-18**1. Through Divine Revelation — 18:9-11**

18:9-10 — Apparently Paul entertained thoughts of departing from Corinth as persecution increased. However, the Lord revealed to him through a vision that he should continue in the city and boldly preach the gospel because (1) God was with him; (2) God would protect him; and (3) many people would respond to the gospel.

18:11 — Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and six months -- one of his longest ministries. Only his ministry in Ephesus was longer, where he stayed three years (Acts 20:31).

2 Through Divine Providence — 18:12-18

18:12-16 — To further demonstrate His watch care over His work, God allowed Paul to be delivered up to Gallio and then set free. The Jews united in an effort to have Paul judged before Gallio (the brother of Seneca who was the tutor of Nero). Paul was accused of anti-Roman activities, but Gallio quickly recognized the charge as a religious matter and dismissed Paul. This was the providence of God for had Gallio ruled otherwise, the early church could have been greatly hindered.

18:17 — Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, was then taken by the Greeks and given a beating before Gallio, but he did nothing to the Greeks. The Jews had lost their power to stir up persecution against the Christians through the rulers of Corinth as they had done in Thessalonica and Berea. Thus Paul was able to carry the work of the Lord forward in Corinth without persecution from the Jews.

V. Paul's Ministry Enroute to Antioch — 18:18-23

18:18-23 — Paul was determined to return to Jerusalem, perhaps for a feast or to report his accomplishments to that church. At any rate, before leaving Cenchrea and return to Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice, he shaved his head according to the Jewish custom (Num 6:1-21). Aquila and Priscilla accompanied him to Ephesus where he began a good work. He told them he would return according to God's will and left Aquila and Priscilla to minister there. He went to Caesarea, to Jerusalem, and then to Antioch.

VI. Apollos' Ministry at Ephesus and Corinth — 18:24-28

18:24-28 — Apollos was a Jew who was able to expound the Scriptures as they related to Jesus Christ. However, he only had the training and baptism of John the Baptist. He was not aware of the finished work of Christ on Calvary and so Aquila and Priscilla privately tutored him. He then took the full gospel into Achaia where he ably presented Christ to the Jews in Corinth. He took the Old Testament Scriptures and mightily used them to convince the Jews that Jesus was their Messiah.