

## LESSON 9

### PART I: PAUL'S MINISTRY IN MACEDONIA

#### ACTS 16:6-17:15

##### Introduction

Studies of the spread of the Gospel by Paul usually base the divisions of the subject on three journeys, each beginning at Syrian Antioch:

Journey 1 (Acts 13:4-14:28)—The mission to Cyprus and Galatia.

Journey 2 (Acts 15:36-18:22)—The mission to Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia.

Journey 3 (Acts 18:23-21:14)—The mission to Asia and visits to Macedonia and Achaia.

Luke's summary statements indicate that he divided Paul's work according to the issues involved rather than the journeys he made. *The first division* of his work is described in Acts 13:1-16:5. Paul carried the Gospel to Cyprus and Galatia and worked chiefly through the synagogues, but he turned to the Gentiles when the Jews rejected him. During this period, the question of how Gentiles are saved developed into a serious issue which required a conference in Jerusalem. Paul's first major campaign was completed when the decrees of the Jerusalem Conference were shared with the churches.

*The second division* begins in Acts 16:5 and extends to Acts 21:14. During this period, the opposition of the Judaizers intensified in spite of the decrees of the Jerusalem Conference. Paul carried the Gospel to the provinces of Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia (Ephesus).

*The third division* extends from Acts 21:15 through Acts 28:31. During this period, the opposition from the Judaizers reached a climax with Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and his imprisonment in Caesarea and Rome. Luke indicates Paul had opportunity to share the Gospel with a king and government officials and he eventually went to Rome.

##### The Beginning of a New Campaign

Acts 16:6-10

At the close of the first great campaign (16:4), Paul, Silas, Timothy, and possibly Luke were at Pisidian Antioch. They had completed their return visit to the cities of South Galatia. Much of Asia Minor, the modern-day Turkey, was yet unevangelized. West of Pisidian Antioch was the province known as Asia. As the Apostles passed through the region of Pisidia they were on the border of Asia. Ephesus was a prominent city of the province and the centre of Hellenism. Paul may have desired to go to Ephesus during his first journey when he was forced to turn to Galatia because of a bodily ailment (cf. Gal. 4:13). Perhaps Paul contemplated going into Ephesus also on his second journey but Luke notes that he was "forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia" (16:6). Luke does not explain how the Holy Spirit prevented him from speaking the Word to anyone in Asia.

Paul next turned northward. The province of Bithynia contained a number of flourishing cities. Again, the "Spirit of Jesus" prevented Paul from visiting the cities of the province and preaching the Gospel. Peter may have witnessed in Bithynia some years later.

Match places with Paul's three journeys by placing correct letters in spaces preceding journeys.

\_\_\_ 1. Journey a. Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia

\_\_\_ 2. Journey b. Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia

\_\_\_ 3. Journey c. Cyprus and Galatia

(1.c, 2.a, 3.b)

Why was Paul finally arrested in Jerusalem?

(Because of opposition from the Judaizers)

The \_\_\_\_\_ prevented Paul from preaching in the province of \_\_\_\_\_ at that time.

(Holy Spirit, Asia)

The province of Asia is not to be confused with the continent of Asia. The provinces of Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia constituted a great Greco-Roman cultural centre. Each province bordered on the Aegean Sea. After the Apostles were prevented from entering Bithynia, they passed by Mysia, but they did not preach there (v. 8). They arrived in Troas which was the chief port of Mysia, a geographical name for the north-western section of Asia. Troas lay on one of the main routes to Rome.

After arriving in the Roman colony of Troas, Paul received divine guidance through a vision. He saw a man of Macedonia who eagerly entreated him to cross the sea and enter Macedonia with the Gospel (v. 9). Paul related the vision to his companions, and they concluded that the Lord had called them to preach the Gospel in Macedonia (v. 10).

Verse 10 contains the first undisputed "we section." The author's change to the first person plural indicates that he identified himself with the group. The author does not give his name, but it is assumed that he was Luke whose home may have been Troas. Although Luke may have just joined the party, his participation in the decision indicates that he was not a new convert or a recent acquaintance.

The missionary work of Paul and Silas was completely directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Although the term "Trinity" is not mentioned, divine guidance for the journey was attributed to the Holy Spirit (v. 6), the Spirit of Jesus (v. 7), and God (v. 10).

### Witnessing in Philippi Acts 16:11-40

#### Introduction (vv. 11-13)

Macedonia was ruled after 360 B.C. by Philip of Macedon and by his son Alexander the Great. Philip led his armies in a victorious conquest of the Greeks, and Alexander conquered the Persian Empire. Philippi was named in honour of Philip II.

The missionary group experienced a good passage. They were able to sail directly to Samothrace the first day and to Neopolis the second day, a distance of 125 miles (v. 11). Neopolis was the port of Philippi which lay ten miles inland.

The author notes that Philippi was the chief city of Macedonia and a Roman colony where retired Roman soldiers had settled (v. 12). This accounts for the strong Roman pride and influence, even though the city was closely related to Greek culture historically. As a Roman colony, Philippi enjoyed the right of self government, land ownership, and sometimes freedom from taxation.

Philippi was strategically located. Her citadel was built on a steep hill overlooking a marshy lake. The city guarded the mainland route between the East and the West.

Few Jews lived in Philippi; therefore, there was no synagogue. On the Sabbath, the Apostles joined a group of women at a riverside where they assembled for prayer. Paul and his group were invited to speak. Luke emphasizes his own part in the witnessing by using the first person plural pronoun (v. 13). Undoubtedly, the Apostles shared with the women the story of Jesus.

#### The conversion of Lydia (vv. 14-15)

One of the women received special attention in Acts because of her contribution to the Church at Philippi. Lydia was from the city of Thyatira in the province of Asia (v. 14). This city was located in the region of Lydia. The fact that the woman was named after her country indicates that she probably was not of the aristocracy but a freed woman. Often slaves were named after their countries. Lydia had accumulated considerable wealth through her occupation of selling purple fabrics. The dyeing of

According to Acts 16:9, Paul saw a man of \_\_\_\_\_ who begged him to cross the sea to preach the \_\_\_\_\_.

(Macedonia, Gospel)

Which was the chief city of Macedonia?

\_\_\_\_\_

(Philippi)

Why was there no synagogue in Philippi?

\_\_\_\_\_

Where was the place of assembly for prayer?

\_\_\_\_\_

(There were few Jews, at a riverside)

purple cloth was a Lydian industry which flourished at Thyatira.

Lydia gave careful attention to the words of the Apostle Paul. The Lord through the Holy Spirit opened her heart to respond by faith to the things spoken (v. 14). Luke notes that she and her household were baptized. This happened also in the case of Cornelius, the Philippian jailer, and Crispus at Corinth. The verse does not support infant baptism. There is no indication that "her household" referred to her children. Probably her servants and associates were included, but there is no indication that Lydia's faith sufficed for other members of her household. Probably her example and influence encouraged them to respond to the things spoken by Paul. The same Lord who opened her heart was present to open their hearts also.

Lydia's joy in her new-found faith was expressed in a desire to provide living accommodations for those who had brought the Gospel to her. The Apostles apparently had considered her faithful to the Lord because they baptized her; therefore, she insisted that Paul and his companions stay at her house (v. 15). Rackham notes that her house became the home of the four missionaries and the first church of Philippi (cf. v. 40).<sup>1</sup>

Luke dedicates a lengthy section to the description of events at Philippi; however, he gives little information about the Church. The Apostles became well known in the city because of their unique religious teachings. They were recognized as Jews with a special mission from their God. Judging from the Epistle to the Philippians, the Word made rapid progress and a church was soon organized. Clement and Epaphroditus became zealous fellow-workers in the Gospel. The Philippian letter reveals that certain women became prominent in the evangelistic work. The Church was organized under the leadership of bishops (overseers of the Church) and deacons, or servants, of the Church. Possibly Luke remained behind to work in the Church and may have acted as president of the body of church leaders.

#### Healing a slave girl (vv. 16-24)

The author moves rapidly from the initial contact with the women to the incident which forced the expulsion of Paul and Silas from the city. The first conflict between Christianity and heathen practices was not over doctrine but money. The masters of the girl used her "spirit of divination" to profit by fortune-telling. Divination comes from the word python. According to Greek myth, Python was the snake at Delphi which embodied a god. A person who possessed the "spirit of Python" would have the power of inspired speech. According to Plutarch, the priests of Python were ventriloquists. The slave girl at Philippi may have been a ventriloquist, and she lost this power of speech when the spirit of Python was cast out of her.

Day after day, the slave girl followed Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke as they went to the place of prayer. She repeatedly cried out, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation" (v. 17). She represented the heathen who desired a supreme deity and salvation which could deliver them from evil spirits. "The most high God" is the title frequently used in the Gospels by those possessed with evil spirits to refer to the Jewish God. As she listened to Paul and his associates teach, she came to the conclusion that they were proclaiming a way of liberation from fate. Luke implies that the

<sup>1</sup> R. B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles* (7th ed.; London; Methuen and Co. Ltd., n.d.), p. 283.

The first convert in Philippi was \_\_\_\_\_ of Thyatira.

(Lydia)

TRUE OR FALSE?

Lydia expressed her joy in her new-found faith by making her house the home of the four missionaries and the first church of Philippi. \_\_\_\_\_

(true)

The first conflict between Christianity and heathen practices was not over \_\_\_\_\_ but \_\_\_\_\_.

(doctrine, money)

spirit of Python within her recognized the truth of the message proclaimed by Paul and caused her to give the oracle repeatedly. She regarded Paul and Silas as being inspired slaves of the God whom they served. Her oracle annoyed or vexed Paul and Silas because it implied that the nature of their service was similar to hers and that the success of the propagation of the Gospel was dependent on the testimony of evil spirits.

Paul commanded the evil spirit in the name of Jesus Christ to depart from the girl. The name of Jesus Christ represented His power and authority. A deed done in His name acknowledged that the power came from Christ and not from the person performing the miracle. The departure of the spirit of Python from the girl was evident by her loss of the ability to foretell future events. Her masters realized immediately that their source of profit was destroyed. They had no compassion for the slave girl and no sympathy for the mission of Paul and Silas. They were totally dominated by self-interest. It may be that the preaching of Paul and Silas had affected their business by discouraging the people from turning to fortune-telling.

Luke describes the rough handling of Paul and Silas by the ruthless owners of the girl. They were dragged into the marketplace and charged before the rulers of chief magistrates (vv. 19-20). The prejudice of the Romans towards the Jews is revealed in the accusation, "These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans" (vv. 20-21). Their accusation was worded to stir up the prejudice of the people and the rulers. They succeeded in their plan. Since the Jewish nation had a reputation of being rebellious, the association of the name Jew with a riot brought immediate mob reaction (v. 22).

The message of Paul and Silas did challenge the traditional Roman religion, but Judaism with which Christianity was identified was not considered an illegal religion. The charge against the missionaries evidently involved proselyting. Jews were permitted to have their own religion as long as they did not influence Romans to embrace their beliefs. The Jewish religion had been a primary source of Jewish tensions with Rome.

Because of the potential danger of rioting if many Romans accepted Paul's preaching, the magistrates joined the crowd in judging Paul and Silas guilty. Their punishment was to be beaten with rods. The clothing of Paul and Silas was torn from them which added shame to the pain they suffered from the rods. Apparently the crowd shared in their beating. They were then secured in prison without any attention to their wounds. The jailer was instructed to give special care to their security since they were considered dangerous political prisoners. Their feet were fastened in stocks and they were put in the inner prison, a chamber most likely excavated from the rock on the side of the steep hill on which the citadel was built.

#### A miraculous deliverance (16:25-28)

In spite of their maltreatment and pain, Paul and Silas had faith in God which resulted in joy and victory. At midnight the prisoners were astonished to hear them praying and singing praises to God. The prisoners listened attentively to the words of the unusual inmates. As Paul and Silas prayed for the will of God to be done concerning their witness, they expected an answer. The answer came in the earthquake which shook the foundations of the entire building and loosened the prisoners' fetters from the walls. The shifting of the walls caused the doors to open. Perhaps the prisoners did not escape immediately because of their own fear and panic.

The earthquake awakened the jailer who rushed to the prison since he was responsible for his prisoners with his life.

Write in the blank the correct phrase (by his own power, in the name of Plutarch, in the name of Jesus Christ.)

Paul commanded \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ that the evil spirit depart from the slave girl.

(in the name of Jesus Christ)

There was potential danger of \_\_\_\_\_  
if many Romans accepted Paul's \_\_\_\_\_  
(rioting, preaching)

Choose the correct answer. (Fire, flood, earthquake)  
What came in answer to Paul and Silas' prayer while they were prisoners?

\_\_\_\_\_  
(earthquake)

When he saw that the doors were open, he concluded the prisoners had escaped. Rather than face the shame of a trial in which he would be judged a failure and sentenced to death, the jailer drew his sword and planned to commit suicide. The voice of Paul from within the prison arrested his action. Paul informed him that no prisoner had escaped.

**The conversion of the Philippian jailer (vv. 29-34)**

The shock which came from the earthquake, the fear of the escape of his prisoners, and the surprise of hearing the voice of Paul disarmed the proud, despairing jailer. Earlier in the evening when he had been given the responsibility of securing the imprisonment of Paul and Silas, he was more concerned about his position than human welfare. Perhaps he previously had heard the teachings of these two men. The answer of their prayers through the earthquake convinced him that they were men of God. After servants had brought a light, he rushed in and fell down before Paul and Silas. After he brought them out he inquired, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (v. 30). Undoubtedly his own harsh treatment of the wounded prisoners had added to his guilt.

When the pagan Gentile asked about the requirements for salvation, the Jewish missionaries answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (v. 31). Paul gave no indication that baptism, circumcision, or any other Jewish ritual was required for salvation. This statement does not imply that the faith of the jailer would save his household. The statement teaches that the same faith is required of him as for his associates, slaves, and family. There was not one plan of salvation for a Roman official and another plan for his slave or servant.

Paul and Silas probably gave a fuller explanation of the unique life and ministry of Jesus, the purpose of His death, the victory of His resurrection, and the promise of His return. Jesus Christ is God's anointed King who gives the power of the Holy Spirit to each person who believes in Him. The genuineness of the faith of the jailer and his household was revealed by his actions. He bathed the wounds of the Apostles and ministered to their needs. He was baptized immediately along with other members of his household.

A genuine salvation experience brings new life and rejoicing. The forgiveness of sin, the renewal of the inner man by the Holy Spirit, and the fellowship with those of like experience results in an abundant life. The jailer took his prisoners into his own house, no longer fearing that they would attempt to escape. His own experience had created a unique relationship of understanding and trust with his special prisoners. The willingness of Jews to eat in the house of a Gentile and the changed attitude of the jailer from that of a superior over prisoners to that of a servant to his prisoners indicate the tremendous transformations which were brought about by the Gospel.

Although the magistrates may not have fully understood the teachings of Paul and Silas, they sensed that they were men who spoke with divine authority. Perhaps the earthquake had been associated with the miracle of healing. The chief magistrates sent a message by the police for the jailer to release the Apostles. Apparently the jailer rejoiced to receive word that his special prisoners had been granted freedom. He encouraged them to "go in peace" (v. 36).

The Roman law expressly forbade the public beating of Roman citizens. The magistrates had slighted a just trial for Paul and Silas. The judges ordered their punishment without permitting them to speak. For Paul to have claimed Roman citizenship in the midst of the turmoil would have been useless. After the mob had quieted and the magistrates had become sober, Paul

Write the question of the Philippian jailer in v. 30 and Paul's answer to him in v. 31 (see next paragraph).  
Q \_\_\_\_\_  
A \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(What must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.)

List four things that happen to a person in a genuine conversion experience.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

(He receives a new life of joy, his sins are forgiven, he is renewed within by the Holy Spirit, he experiences a new fellowship with believers.)

sent word to the magistrates that they were Roman citizens and had been treated unjustly. The prisoners were in a position to charge the rulers and magistrates with violating Roman justice. The magistrates had made the mistaken conclusion that since Paul and Silas were Jews they were not Romans citizens. The rulers were required to acknowledge publicly their error and exonerate the prisoners by escorting them from the obscurity of imprisonment into the streets of the city. Realizing the seriousness of their offense, the magistrates begged the Apostles to leave Philippi. The Romans officials' positions and lives were in jeopardy because of their flagrant disregard of Roman justice.

Luke does not indicate how many church members met in the home of Lydia. When the Apostles entered the house and "saw the brethren they encouraged them and departed" (v. 40—NASB).

Although Luke went with Paul and Silas to the place of prayer, he was not taken captive and imprisoned. He uses third person pronouns (he, they) instead of first (I, we) to describe the prison experience of Paul and Silas. After the group departed from Philippi, Luke continues using third person pronouns. Apparently Timothy went with Paul and Silas, but Luke remained behind to look after the young Church.

### Evangelism in Thessalonica Acts 17:1-9

#### Introduction

The missionaries passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia without stopping to witness. Since the distance from Philippi to Thessalonica was about a hundred miles, Amphipolis and Apollonia were probably the resting places after an average day's journey of thirty miles.

Thessalonica was the capital of the province of Macedonia; therefore, she ranked with Antioch of Syria, Caesarea, Corinth, and Ephesus. Like Corinth and Ephesus, this was a flourishing commercial city. Thessalonica was a seaport on the Gulf of Salonica on the edge of the plain of Macedonia. She, like Philippi, was located on the Egnatian Way to Rome. Although the city was the place of residence of the proconsul, she was given freedom by Rome and had her own constitution. The supreme authority rested with the *demos* or people. The officers or chief magistrates of this city were called politarchs (city-rulers—cf. v. 6). Since the term was not known previously from other sources, some scholars quoted Luke's use of it to prove his inaccuracy. In more recent years, the word *politarch* has been found in several inscriptions in Macedonia. The unique term actually proves Luke's historical and political accuracy.

#### Witnessing in the synagogue (vv. 2-4)

Thessalonica had a large colony of Jews with a synagogue. When Paul and Silas entered the city, they found the synagogue and began sharing the Gospel. Luke notes that Paul followed the same plan in establishing new work in each city. First, he went to the Jewish synagogue where his national identity with his own people would establish contacts for witnessing. Also, he felt responsible for carrying the Gospel to the Jews since Jesus had indicated that the Gospel would be carried first to the house of Israel.

Second, Paul used Scriptures from the Old Testament to show that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies and promises concerning the Davidic Messiah who would establish an eternal kingdom. Jesus as the descendant of David was mortal; however, through the resurrection, God raised Him to be an eternal King. Paul also needed to show the Jews that the Messiah must suffer. According

TRUE OR FALSE?

The rulers were required to acknowledge publicly their error and exonerate the prisoners by escorting them from prison. \_\_\_\_\_

(true)

The capital of the province of Macedonia was \_\_\_\_\_ which was about 100 miles from Philippi.

(Thessalonica)

What was Paul's first step in establishing new work in a city? \_\_\_\_\_

(He went to the Jewish synagogue.)

to Isaiah 53, victory would come to God's Servant only through suffering. After Jesus was put to death by wicked hands, *God* gave the victory through the resurrection. Paul was convinced that many other Jews had not understood these Old Testament teachings. Luke notes that some believed what Paul was saying and became disciples (learners—v. 4). While "some" Jews believed, "great multitudes" of the God-fearing Greeks and "many" leading Gentile women believed.

Third, after many Gentiles responded to the Gospel and the Jews excluded Paul because of jealousy, he went directly to the Gentiles. When the Christians were expelled from the synagogue, they would find a home in which to meet.

Fourth, Paul spent some time teaching the new Christians before going to another city. If possible, he would leave a more mature leader in charge of the new work when he left.

### The turmoil in Thessalonica (17:5-9)

Paul reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue for three weeks before he was rejected by them and forced to turn to the Gentiles. The length of his ministry among the Gentiles is unknown. The Jews who were persuaded that Jesus is the Christ "consorted" (joined) Paul and Silas, and they, along with the devout Greeks and chief women, formed the nucleus of the early Church in Thessalonica. Paul and Silas found lodging in the home of a Jew who had adopted the Greek name Jason. Perhaps Jason provided facilities for the assembly of believers.

The opponents of Paul were unable to find legal ways to stop his preaching and teaching. Luke attributed the enmity of the Jews to jealousy. Perhaps they were losing some of the Jewish worshippers and God-fearers to the Christians. The Jews appealed to the emotions of the populace and enlisted wicked men (the rabble) from the market-place to assault the household of Jason. As the mob awaited in front of the house, the villains entered the house and searched for the Apostles. Since Paul and Silas could not be found, they laid hands on Jason and dragged him and other Christians to the politarchs. As they moved through the streets, they shouted: "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also" (v. 6). Although the charge was exaggerated, it does give evidence that Christianity was making a great impact on the world.

Jason and his companions were charged before the authorities with treason: "These all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus" (v. 7). Jesus was represented as the rival of Caesar, and Jason and his associates were accused of being loyal to Caesar's competitor. The charge accomplished the Jews' purpose by stirring up the crowd and the magistrates. The officials decided to postpone the case until another day; therefore, they received bond from Jason and the others and released them. The leaders and people of the city were careful to avoid the appearance of sedition since Thessalonica would have her status as a free city revoked if she tolerated treason.

Paul and Silas hastily departed from the house of Jason by night and went to Berea. The security or bond which the rulers had taken from Jason would probably have been forfeited had it been established that he had protected the accused men.

### The Response in Berea Acts 17:10-15

Berea was forty miles from Thessalonica and was also in the province of Macedonia. It had a colony of Jews and a synagogue. Luke contrasts the nobility of the Jews of Berea to the rabble of the men of Thessalonica. They had taken their citizenship

Give Paul's second step. \_\_\_\_\_

(He used Scriptures from the O.T. to show that Jesus fulfilled prophecies.)

Paul's third step in establishing new work was \_\_\_\_\_

(When he was forced from the synagogue he went directly to the Gentiles.)

His fourth step was \_\_\_\_\_

(to spend some time teaching the new Christians)

What verse in Acts 17 gives evidence that Christianity was making a great impact on the world? \_\_\_\_\_

(v. 6)

Paul had to leave \_\_\_\_\_ house in Thessalonica suddenly because the Jews stirred up the people against him.

(Jason's)

seriously and apparently participated in the activities of the city. Luke conveys the idea that they were generous, liberal and open-minded. They were eager to study the Word of God and received the words of Paul with interest; however, they were not gullible. They examined the Scriptures daily to see if Paul's interpretation and application of them to Jesus were accurate. Many of the Jews along with several Gentile aristocrats, both women and men, believed the teachings of Paul and received Christ as Lord and Saviour. The Jews who did not believe in Christ did not manifest opposition.

Word spread to Thessalonica that the Word of God, proclaimed by Paul, was receiving a ready response in Beroea. Like the Jews of Iconium and Pisidian Antioch, Jews from Thessalonica came to Beroea to turn the people against Paul. The new converts concluded that they would send Paul to another area since he was the object of the disturbance. It appears that a large number of the new believers escorted Paul towards the sea, for the sake of protection or to show respect and gratitude (v. 14). A smaller escort continued with Paul as far as Athens (v. 15). Silas and Timothy were left in Beroea to strengthen the new Church. It is interesting that Paul drew strong opposition from Jews, but Silas and Timothy seemed to continue the work without opposition. When the escorts left Paul in Athens, he sent word by them for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

The fact that Paul was accompanied by an escort from Beroea to Athens may indicate that he was not well. It was evident that he did not wish to remain in Athens without his companions who supported him in the work.

Paul also left Beroea suddenly. The Jews from \_\_\_\_\_ came to Beroea to turn the people against Paul.

(Thessalonica)

## PART II: PAUL'S MINISTRY IN ATHENS

### ACTS 17:16-34

#### Introduction

Achaia was closely related to Macedonia, both politically and socially. At times, it formed one province with Macedonia under the Romans. When Paul visited Athens, Achaia was a separate province with Corinth as its capital.

Athens enjoyed the status of being the intellectual and cultural centre of the world. Socrates and Plato were born there, and Aristotles, Zeno, and Epicurus taught in her streets. Attic Greek, which was Athens' dialect, formed the basis for the *kotne* Greek (common Greek) which became the world language as a result of the conquests of Alexander the Great.

Athens was a free city with her authority vested not in the *demos* (people) but in a council known as the Areopagus. The Areopagus appears to have referred to a council rather than a place. This council had authority over what was taught. Athens gave the impression of being a very religious city since idols, altars, and temples filled her streets. The Areopagus served as a religious court of appeal for Hellenism.<sup>2</sup>

#### Paul's witnessing in the city (vv. 16-17)

As Paul wandered about the city he was disturbed when he observed the many idols. As a Jew, he would naturally have abhorred idolatry. As a Christian, he was aware of the worthlessness and deceitfulness of idols for those who turned to them during their hours of need.

According to his custom, Paul found the Jewish synagogue and shared the Gospel each Sabbath with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles. Between Sabbaths, he spoke in the *agora* (market place) to whoever would listen to him. The agora was an open space in the centre of the city surrounded by public buildings, the temples of patron gods, the senate house, and law courts. There were also *stoas* and porticos (porches or colonnades) which were used for exchanges or concourse. People from the country brought their produce. The place was crowded with buyers, sellers, and business men. After completing their business for the day, people would exchange gossip or philosophies of life. Philosophers and rhetoricians, who desired an audience for their views, would take up their stations on the porches with their disciples gathered around them. The famous philosopher Zeno established the custom of using the ancient Painted Porch as the place for his teachings. His disciples became known as Stoics because of their association with the *stoa* or porch.

#### Paul's encounter with the philosophers (vv. 18-21)

As Paul wandered in the market-place and conversed with the people, he engaged in conversations with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Stoics believed that the meaning of life resided in duty, obedience to law, and virtue. The mature, virtuous man did not yield to his emotions or passions but lived a self-controlled and self-sufficient life. They believed that a universal spirit or universal power which was guided by reason pervaded the universe, and man's soul shared in the immortality of the universal spirit. Periodically, the human spirits would be reabsorbed into the universal reason or spirit. In their materialistic, pantheistic view of existence, they believed that spirit was merely refined (living) matter. The goal of man was to live in harmony with nature of which he was a part. The goal was reached by a life of duty,

What was the name of the council in Athens?

\_\_\_\_\_

(Areopagus)

Paul was disturbed when he observed the many \_\_\_\_\_ in Athens.

(idols)

#### COMPLETE

Stoics believed that the meaning of life was found in:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

(duty, obedience to law, virtue)

virtue, and discipline.

Epicureanism was founded by Epicurus (c. 342-270 B.C.). This view of material existence made human immortality impossible. Existence was composed of material atoms which constantly formed new combinations. The atoms themselves were indestructible, but the combinations were constantly changing. Since the human soul was composed of a combination of material atoms which dissipated at death, the soul (personality) ceased to exist at death even though the individual atoms continued to exist. Meaningful human existence was limited to this life. Immediate happiness or satisfaction was the goal of each life. Happiness was defined as absence of pain. Although pain came to man, it could be endured with happiness. Severe pains are short; lasting pains are rarely severe. Pain can never hurt if the mind is abstracted from it. Pleasure, which is the chief good of life, can be attained by those who seek it wisely. Epicureanism did not advocate sensual pleasure, but a sensual interpretation could be given to the maxim: "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you may die."

Because of intellectual pride, the Athenian philosophers were quick to belittle the Christian philosophy (view of meaningful life) expounded by Paul. Some were saying, "What will this «idler» babbler say?" (v. 18). A literal translation of babber is "seedpicker." The philosophers described Paul as an idler in the agora who, like a bird picking up seeds, made his living on what scraps he could find in the market-place. The description may have referred to the "literary idler" who picked up scraps of knowledge from others and tried to establish a reputation by parading his pickings without having understood and correlated them himself.

Other philosophers, probably the Stoics, concluded that Paul was a slave of the gods "Jesus and Anastasis" (resurrection) and was attempting to establish a cult in Athens. The Epicureans did not deny the existence of gods, but they believed that gods were removed from the world and did not interfere with man. The Epicureans had little interest in religion, but the Stoics were advocates of religion.

Since Paul was introducing a new teaching, he had to be taken before the Areopagus, and the rulers determined whether or not he would be permitted to teach his new doctrine. It is uncertain whether Paul was arrested and charged with introducing a foreign doctrine illegally or whether philosophers took him there to get permission for his address in order that they might hear his full discourse. Paul's address seems to have been a combination of a personal defence and a witness to the Gospel.

#### Paul's sermon in Athens (vv. 23-34)

Some scholars have concluded that Paul took the wrong approach in his presentation of the Gospel at Athens. This conclusion is based on the statement in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2, "And I . . . came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Paul went to Corinth after leaving Athens, and some say that his statement in the Epistle is a repudiation of his approach before the Areopagus in Athens. Actually, Paul was defending himself in 1 Corinthians against the criticism that he was not as eloquent as Apollos.

To conclude that Paul failed in Athens is to make a poor judgement. His approach in presenting the Gospel was different, but his audience of scholarly Greek philosophers differed greatly from the people to whom he had previously witnessed. The sermon does not indicate that Paul attempted to demonstrate his own wisdom in presenting the Gospel. It does reveal that Paul considered his hearers and their backgrounds and interests in

According to the Stoics, when man died he was \_\_\_\_\_ into the universal \_\_\_\_\_.

(reabsorbed, spirit)

#### TRUE OR FALSE?

Epicureanism taught that the soul ceased to exist at death. \_\_\_\_\_

(true)

Epicureanism defined man's goals in life as immediate h\_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_ of p\_\_\_\_\_.

(happiness, absence, pain)

Pain can never hurt if the \_\_\_\_\_ is abstracted from it, according to the Epicureans.

(mind)

Write the letter of the statement beside the correct philosopher.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Epicureans

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Stoics

a. were advocates of religion.

b. had little interest in religion.

(1.-b, 2.-a)

presenting Christ as Saviour.

Paul opened the address by observing that the people were very religious; therefore, it was understandable that they would be interested in his strange teachings. Their religious interest was indicated by the numerous idols surrounding the agora. Paul defended himself against the accusation that he introduced a foreign god, for he had observed an altar with the inscription "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." The unknown God who already had a place in the pantheon of Athens would be made known by Paul's teachings (v. 23).

For several reasons, Paul stressed that God is Creator:

1. The Creator of the world and all things in it cannot be contained in a temple made with human hands (v. 24).
2. The Creator is not dependent on food offered in sacrifice by human hands. He is too great to be manipulated by man and to be dependent on man. Actually, man is dependent on Him for his life, bread, and all things (v. 25).
3. Since God is Creator of all things, all nations are equal and every man is responsible to Him, including the Athenians (v. 26).
4. Every man is responsible to worship his Creator (v. 27).
5. Every person has been brought into existence by God and is dependent on Him for life (v. 28).

Paul's statements concerning God as Creator refuted at numerous places the teachings of the Stoics and Epicureans. The Epicureans believed that God did not create man's soul but that the soul was a configuration of material atoms. The Stoics did not believe that the human soul was to be distinguished from God. The Epicureans disagreed that God made the world (v. 24), but the Stoics agreed with Paul. The idolatrous practice of the Stoics was challenged by the statement that God does not dwell in temples made with hands nor is he served by human hands (vv. 24-25). The Creator is not to be identified with the idols of gold and silver which God created. Paul's statement that God "hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (v. 26) stresses His involvement in man's life in contrast to the belief of the Epicureans that the gods were un-concerned with man and were removed from the world.

Man not only originated from God, but God is the source of his existence. "For in him we live, and move, and have our being" (v. 28). God is not to be identified with the pantheism of the Stoics. According to their own poets, man is the "offspring of God." Man is created in the image of God; therefore, God is more like the nature of man than the gold, silver, or stone of the idols.

The one God who created all men requires them to live righteously and to worship Him. Although God had been patient with those who had no knowledge of Him in the past (v. 30), the time has arrived in the coming of Jesus "in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man" (v. 31). The proof that God appointed the man Jesus to judge the world in righteousness is His resurrection from the dead. Because of the teachings of the Prophets, the Jews were expecting the Day of the Lord when all the world would be judged in righteousness. Paul was convinced that that Day had arrived in Jesus since God had demonstrated by the resurrection that Jesus is His Anointed.

Probably the Epicureans scoffed at the idea of resurrection from the dead since they believed the soul disintegrates at death. The Stoics may have been more receptive and desired to "hear thee again of this matter" (v. 32). Some from both groups could have been convinced of the error of their philosophy; however, intellectual pride is a barrier to faith which is not easily broken down.

What important principle of preaching did Paul consider in presenting Christ as Saviour in Athens?—

\_\_\_\_\_

(His hearers and their backgrounds and interests.)

List the points of Paul's sermon in which he stressed God is Creator.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(Compare your answers with the text.)

A barrier to faith which is not easily broken down is

\_\_\_\_\_

(intellectual pride)

Luke notes that some men joined him and believed, "among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (v. 34). Contrary to some scholars, this information does not give the impression that Paul failed in Athens. He did not attempt to match wits with the philosophers. He gave witness that God raised Jesus from the dead, and he called upon his hearers to respond by repenting. Since he was speaking to men who had no knowledge of the Old Testament and who would not accept it as authoritative, it is understandable that he would not appeal to the Scripture nor its fulfilment in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The men to whom Paul was speaking had no knowledge of the \_\_\_\_\_

(Old Testament)

## Home Study Assignment

**Basic study** (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. In what areas did Paul visit and establish churches on each of his three missionary journeys?

(1) \_\_\_\_\_

(2) \_\_\_\_\_

(3) \_\_\_\_\_

2. What two provinces was Paul prevented by the Holy Spirit from entering on his second journey? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What is the significance of Acts 16:9? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Tell three things about Lydia. (1) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_\_

5. What caused Paul and Silas to be arrested in Philippi? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Why were Paul and Silas considered dangerous political prisoners in Philippi? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What did Paul tell a Gentile in Philippi he must do to be saved? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. What happens to a man in a genuine conversion experience?

(1) \_\_\_\_\_

(2) \_\_\_\_\_

(3) \_\_\_\_\_

(4) \_\_\_\_\_

9. Name two actions which indicate the true conversion of the Philippian jailer.

(1) \_\_\_\_\_

(2) \_\_\_\_\_

10. Why did Paul demand the magistrates to escort him from prison? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

11. List the four steps in Paul's plan of establishing new work in a city.
  - (1) \_\_\_\_\_
  - (2) \_\_\_\_\_
  - (3) \_\_\_\_\_
  - (4) \_\_\_\_\_
12. Why did Paul suddenly leave Thessalonica? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Why did Paul suddenly leave Berea? \_\_\_\_\_
14. What was the Areopagus? \_\_\_\_\_
15. According to the Stoics, how could man realize meaning and happiness in life? \_\_\_\_\_
16. According to the Stoics, what happened to man at death? \_\_\_\_\_
17. According to the Epicureans, (a) what are man's goals in life? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (b) How does man accomplish those goals?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
18. According to the Epicureans, what happens to man's soul at death? \_\_\_\_\_
19. List the points of Paul's sermon in Athens on "God Is Creator."
  - (1) \_\_\_\_\_
  - (2) \_\_\_\_\_
  - (3) \_\_\_\_\_
  - (4) \_\_\_\_\_
  - (5) \_\_\_\_\_

**Supplementary activities (Levels 2 and 3):**

1. Name and describe briefly the three main divisions of Paul's ministry.
2. Write a brief summary of Paul's work in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens, including the identification of the people to whom he witnessed, where the Church met, the circumstances causing Paul to depart, and who was left in charge of the Church.

**Advanced activities (Level 3):**

1. Read pages 165 to 187 in *The Book of Acts* by Frank Stagg.
  2. From the “we” sections in Acts, what can be known about the author?
  3. List the arguments for and against the success of Paul’s preaching in Athens.
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**Seminar Discussion**

1. What strategy did Paul follow in establishing new churches?
2. Which is the more effective approach to presenting the Gospel, the approach used at Antioch (Acts 14) or Athens (Acts 17)?
3. On the basis of what you have learned in this lesson, which of the four churches (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens) appears to have been the strongest when Paul departed? Which had the brightest future?
4. Which segments of society did Paul carry the Gospel to in the four cities?
5. Compare Christianity as a philosophy of life to Stoicism and Epicureanism.