

“Wherefore comfort  
one another with these  
words.”

Acts 13-18:22; 1 & 2 Thessalonians

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# “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

Acts 13-18:22; 1 & 2 Thessalonians

## Introduction to Acts Chapters

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The missionary journeys of Saul/Paul take up the rest of the book of Acts, starting in these chapters. We label them First Journey, Second Journey, Third Journey, and Journey to Rome (see the map in the back of the LDS scriptures) but Paul would likely not have counted them that way. First, we don't know how many 'missionary journeys' he went on before Acts 13—it could have been several (at least Damascus, Arabia, Tarsus, and Antioch). Secondly, he would probably have considered it all one single mission—in the service of his new master, Jesus Christ. We divide and name them to make it easier to recount the story and keep it all straight and because each of the first three journeys around the Mediterranean world ended up back in Jerusalem (indicating Luke may have intentionally organized it that way).

It can be very profitable to study Paul's journeys in conjunction with his letters, so that is what we will do in this course of study. To aid an individual effort to study them all as a chronological unit, see “A Paul Chronology” provided separately that outlines Paul's journeys and activities, his letters, and more, in a suggested chronological sequence.<sup>1</sup> It's also very helpful to study a map of Paul's travels or (even better) get a blank map of the Mediterranean world at that time (such as [this one on Wikipedia](#)) and draw them yourself as you study them, perhaps using different colors for each journey. This activity will help you appreciate and better remember the details of the journeys. There are also many sources that provide excellent pictures of these locations, also helping to give context and reality to the stories.

It is important to note that Luke's goal was to present the work of the spreading of the gospel, not provide a doctrinal discussion of early Christian teachings. Still, he did an excellent job laying out the important principles of the gospel—faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost—but typically not all in one place. Luke unfolded these gospel teachings as he unfolded Paul's mission. Commenting on this, one author noted: “Paul's message was consistent, but Luke features different parts of it on different missions. . . . He stresses Christ and faith in him on the first mission, make baptism prominent in the second, and features the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost in the third.”<sup>2</sup>

Luke recorded seven speeches by Paul, one on each of the three journeys away from Jerusalem and Antioch and four during his imprisonment in his own defense. Those speeches are (with two covered in this lesson):

1. Acts 13:16-41 (In the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, first mission)
2. Acts 17:22-31 (Mars Hill at Athens, second mission)
3. Acts 20:18-35 (Farewell to church leaders at Miletus, third mission)
4. Acts 22:1-21 (Public defense, Fortress Antonia steps, Jerusalem)
5. Acts 24:10-21 (Defense before Felix, Caesarea)
6. Acts 26:1-29 (Defense before Agrippa, Caesarea)
7. Acts 28:17-28 (Before Jewish leaders, Rome)

An overall outline for the book of Acts is as follows (with this week's lesson material in bold):

- The Ascension (1:1-11)
- In Jerusalem and Judea (1:12 – 6:7)
- From Jerusalem to Antioch (6:8 – 12:23)
- **In Syria and Galatia (12:24 – 15:35)**

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<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to know exact dates of many events, especially when all the letters were written, but Luke and Paul provide enough hints in their writings to allow the construction of at least a chronological framework.

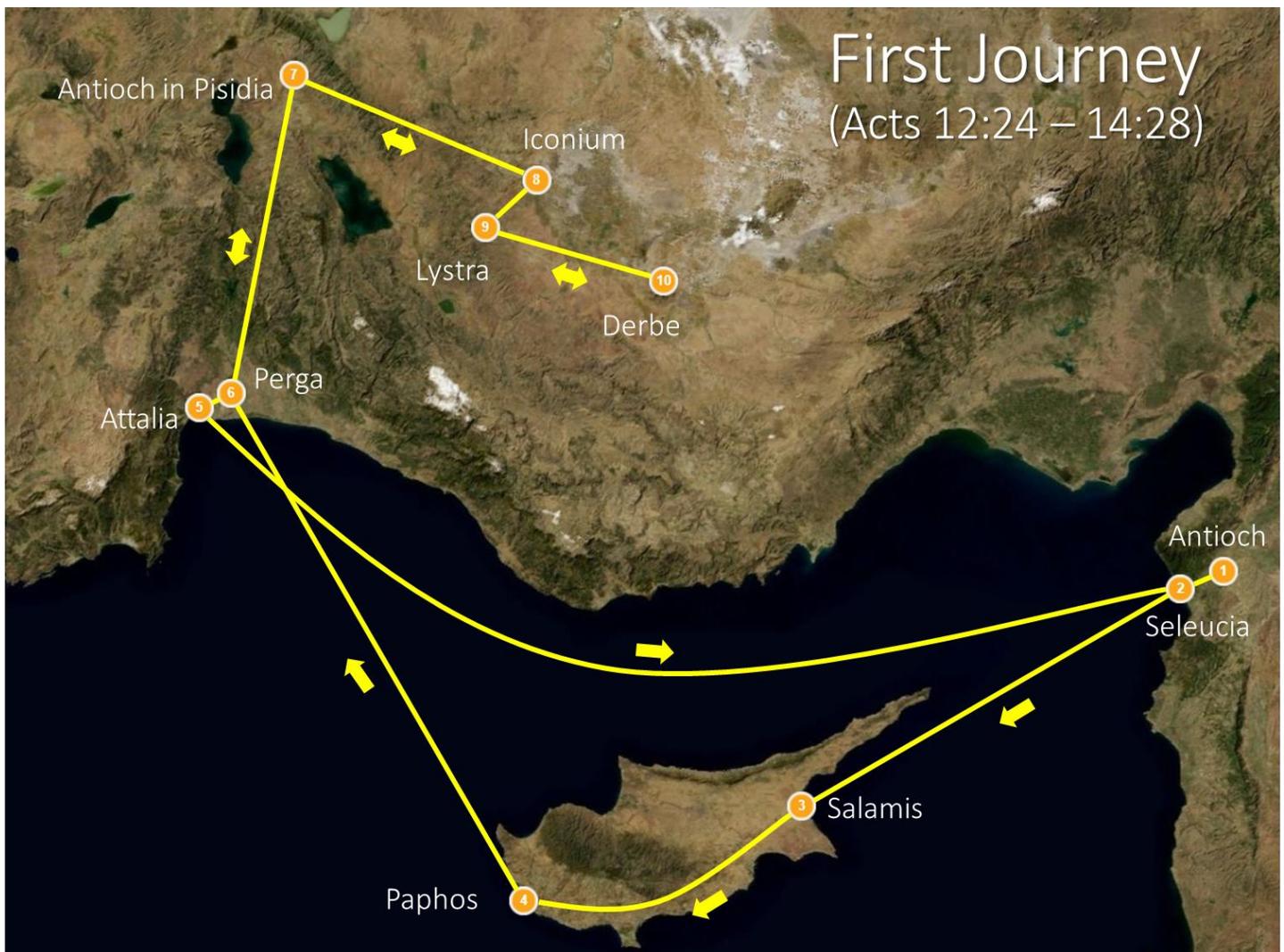
<sup>2</sup> Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 48.

- **First journey (13:1 – 14:28)**
- **Jerusalem Conference (15:1-35)**
- **In Western Asia and Europe (15:36 – 21:14)**
  - **Second journey (15:36 – 18:22)**
  - **Third journey (18:23 – 21:14)**
- **Paul's Imprisonment (21:15 – 28:31)**

## In Syria and Galatia (Acts 12:24 – 15:35)

### First journey (Acts 12:24 – 14:28)

After laboring in Antioch for several years, Saul and Barnabas were called to take the gospel to Cyprus, Barnabas' place of birth. Their mission then extended into Pamphylia and Galatia where they converted many Gentiles while suffering hardships. They finished by retracing their path through Galatia and Pamphylia, strengthening their earlier converts, then sailed back to Antioch. The dates were probably spring 47 to fall 48.



The first journey can be outlined as follows:

- Barnabas and Saul set apart (12:24-13:1-3)
- Ministry in Cyprus (13:4-12)
  - Salamis (13:4-5)

- Paphros; encounter with Elymas (13:6-12)
- Psidian Antioch (13:13-50)
  - Perga; John Mark leaves (13:13)
  - Speech in Antioch in Pisidia (13:14-43)
  - Gentiles accept the gospel (13:44-49)
  - Jewish persecution (13:50)
- Iconium (13:51 – 14:5)
- Lystra and Derbe (14:6-20)
  - Heals cripple (14:6-10)
  - People proclaim them gods (14:11-18)
  - Paul stoned but healed (14:19-20)
- Return trip to Antioch (14:21-28)

## Barnabas and Saul set apart – Acts 12:24-13:1-3

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12:24 **the word of God continued to spread and multiply.** This is Luke’s summary of the previous section, as we remember that we have seen thousands baptized in Jerusalem and Judea, many in Samaria, and the first Gentile converts under Peter’s hand. The persecutions of Saul and others have driven followers of the Way out of Jerusalem and into the cities of the Diaspora, creating pockets of Christians in many parts of the Roman world. One of those is Antioch, to whom our attention will turn next.

12:25 **Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem.** In 11:29-30, Barnabas and Saul were sent by the brethren in Antioch to Jerusalem with “relief” funds to help those suffering from famine.

13:1 **certain prophets and teachers.** The five men mentioned seem to be the leaders of the church in Antioch (modern Antakya in Turkey), which at that time may have been the ‘edge’ of the church northward and westward. None were originally from Antioch or even the region of Syria where they now lived. **Barnabas** (‘son of rest’ or ‘son of consolation’) was from Cyprus; **Simeon** (called “Niger” meaning ‘black’) and **Lucius** (‘light’) from North Africa; **Manaen** (‘comforter’) from Galilee (and raised in the royal or Herodian household); and **Saul** (‘desired’) from Tarsus. Barnabas was listed first, perhaps meaning that he was the senior leader of the group.

13:2 **Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work.** Being so far removed from Jerusalem, the brethren fasted and prayed for the guidance of the Spirit, and as a result Barnabas and Saul were called to preach the gospel. It would appear that the two were first sent to Cyprus because that was Barnabas’ home and he could find places to stay and had ready contacts. From all indications, they seem to have intended only to visit that island when they left Antioch.

13:3 **laid their hands on them.** This could either be a setting apart for missionary service, or perhaps a call to something like the Quorum of the Seventy or the apostleship.<sup>3</sup> A call to missionary service seems most likely to me; as we’ll see below, in Paul’s first letters he doesn’t yet refer to himself as an apostle. Either way, Barnabas and Saul were called by revelation and set apart to their service by duly authorized and inspired priesthood leaders.

## Ministry in Cyprus – Acts 13:4-12

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### Salamis – Acts 13:4-5

13:4 **departed unto Seleucia.** This was the port city of Antioch which was about fifteen miles away. Located near the mouth of the Orontes River, Seleucia was the home port for a fleet of Roman navy vessels.<sup>4</sup>

13:5 **Salamis.** The largest city of Cyprus, Salamis was on the eastern coast of the island and was the natural entry point from the eastern Mediterranean.

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<sup>3</sup> McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 2:120.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:334.

13:5 **preached the word of God in the synagogues.** With a large Jewish population, Salamis had more than one synagogue. Barnabas and Saul followed the pattern that worked well at Antioch and which Saul used throughout his missionary career—go first to the synagogue and preach Christ to the Jews, then go to Gentile audiences.

13:5 **they had also John to their minister.** This was John Mark, Barnabas' cousin (12:25) and the potential author of the gospel of Mark. He was their 'junior companion,' brought along to help carry burdens and otherwise serve the missionaries. There is no record of John Mark teaching, but he may have done that, too.

#### Paphos; encounter with Elymas – Acts 13:6-12

13:6 **gone through the isle unto Paphos.** A journey of one hundred and six miles westward from Salamis took them to Paphos, the capital city of the island.<sup>5</sup> To get there, they would have passed through several towns. Luke doesn't tell us if they stopped or taught in these cities, though those are the kinds of details he provided once he joined the group himself in chapter 16.

Although today the scene along the coast near Paphos seems peaceful and pastoral—the small harbor of Paphos is quiet except for a few fishing boats and beachside hotels—in Paul's day it was a bustling center of activity and seat of the Roman proconsul. Paphos was an important city in antiquity for more reasons than its location as a jumping-off point for western sea voyages. Most notably, it was the center of the cult of Aphrodite ("Venus" to the Romans). According to ancient myth, Aphrodite rose from the seafoam in the waters—off this stretch of coast near Paphos.

13:6 **Bar-jesus.** Meaning 'son of Joshua.' Jesus, of course, is the English transliteration of the Greek name *Iesus*, which is the same name as Aramaic *Yeshua* or Hebrew *Yehoshua*, which becomes Joshua in our Old Testament. This son of Joshua is called a "sorcerer (see v. 8), a false prophet, a Jew."

13:7 **the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus.** An inscription discovered in Rome gives us his whole name, Lucius Sergius Paullus, where he was a director of water management for the Tiber river. From an inscription found at Pisidian Antioch (not the one Barnabas and Saul left), his son appears to have had influence there later.<sup>6</sup> It is likely the family had connections there, which is interesting because the missionaries went there next, seemingly unexpectedly. It seems likely that Sergius Paulus opened the door for them with letters of introduction and contact names.

13:7 **Deputy.** "Deputy" is *anthupatos* or proconsul, the Roman position of highest authority in a senatorial province.

13:8 **Elymas the sorcerer.** "Elymas" seems to be *elumas* or something similar in Aramaic, meaning 'wise.' "Sorcerer" is *magos*, the same word used in Matthew 2 for the wise men.

13:9 **Saul, (who also is called Paul).** This is the first mention of the name 'Paul,' and the last of 'Saul.' (except when he refers to himself in his conversion stories in 22:7, 13; 26:14). It would seem that Saul was his Hebrew/Aramaic name (*Saulos*), and Paul his Roman name (*Paulos*; Paulus in Latin). *Saulos* was a good Hebrew name, like Israel's first king, but in Greek it has an odd meaning ('how courtesans walk'); *Paulus* was a respected Roman name. It was probably Paul's cognomen, the Roman name most commonly used in addressing a person, while Saul was his Jewish name. Both would have been given him at birth as a Diaspora Jew. That he switched to his Roman name at this time could have been to facilitate his acceptance among Gentiles, such as Sergius Paulus.<sup>7</sup>

13:9 **filled with the Holy Ghost.** As has been mentioned, when Luke uses this expression, it demonstrates God's support and positive judgment on the person, and that they are acting in God's authority.

13:10 **thou child of the devil.** His arguments with Barnabas and Paul were not productive; in fact, what happened next was more than the punishment of a bad man. The good news is, it appears to have converted a prominent Roman leader and triggered the beginning of the full Gentile travels.

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<sup>5</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:336.

<sup>6</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:337-338.

<sup>7</sup> McKay, *Paul*, 115; Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 42; Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:338-339.

13:11 ***thou shalt be blind***. From his own experience, Paul certainly knew what it was that he inflicted on Elymas. Fortunately for the sorcerer, it seems to have been only temporary, “for a season.” The record is silent as to whether he later ‘saw the light’ and joined the church.

13:12 ***the deputy . . . believed***. Seeing Paul’s curse on Elymas come to pass, Sergius Paulus believed in their words. His baptism is not recorded but that is the probable outcome of the encounter.

### [Pisidian Antioch – Acts 13:13-50](#)

Leaving Cyprus, they sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, which is now south-central Turkey (Acts 13:13). They sailed to the coast of Asia Minor and up the Kestros River (modern Aksu River) to the city. Why the missionaries decided to take this apparently unexpected course was likely due to the conversion of the Proconsul in Paphos. Sergius Paulus had a family estate in Pisidian Antioch and could have paved the way for them to go there with letters of introduction and even family influence.

Perga has extensively preserved Hellenistic-Roman ruins. Turkish excavations conducted since the Second World War have been uncovering such typical features of the Roman city as its theater, stadium, forum, baths and city walls. The city was founded in the time of Alexander the Great (4th century BCE). By Paul’s time, Perga was one of the two most populous and prosperous cities in the province of Pamphylia, along the coast of Asia Minor.

### [Perga; John Mark leaves – Acts 13:13](#)

13:13 ***Perga in Pamphylia***. Leaving Cyprus, the three sailed north to Pamphylia, what is today southwest Turkey.

13:13 ***John departing from them returned to Jerusalem***. We are not told the reason for John Mark’s departure. Perhaps he was homesick; perhaps he didn’t want to journey and teach among the Gentiles; perhaps the original mission was just to go to Cyprus and it was now extended to Asia, so John Mark felt he had been gone long enough; perhaps he just feared the robbers and other very real dangers in this territory. Whatever the reason, we later learn (Acts 15:38) that Paul felt very strongly that it was an abandonment.

### [Speech in Antioch in Pisidia – Acts 13:14-43](#)

13:14 ***Antioch in Pisidia***. It was called this to distinguish it from other Antiochs in the region (this one was near the border to Pisidia). Antioch (right) was an important Roman colony with a large, mixed population of native Anatolian people and Romans. A tremendous building project was near completion when Paul and Barnabas arrived, including a triple-arched gateway completed in 50 CE.

At 3,600 feet above sea level, the men had a climb to get to Antioch. The road was physically challenging as well as dangerous. Later Paul mentioned being “in perils of robbers” (2 Corinthians 11:26) as one of his challenges. He doesn’t say where this happened, but this road is a very likely place.

The sturdy arches of an aqueduct were built to carry water to Antioch, the regional capital of Pisidia. Other Roman remains of the city uncovered in excavations just before and after the first World War include public squares dedicated to Augustus and to Tiberius, and a temple dedicated to the chief local god, Men.



Like the more famous Antioch in Syria from which Paul started his journey, this Antioch was one of sixteen cities founded by Seleucus I and named for his father. Comparatively speaking, this Antioch was hardly more than a

hamlet. Situated on an upland plateau, it could be reached from the coast only by an arduous trek, and therefore never grew to any great size. But this was nevertheless the capital of its region.

13:14 **went into the synagogue on the sabbath.** Paul continued his pattern of first going among the Jews.

13:15 **if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.** After reading the scriptures, a prominent rabbi like Paul, trained by Gamliel himself, would have been accorded the honor of commenting on the scriptures and speaking a few words to the people.

13:16-41 Paul's first speech, summarized as follows:

- God chose Israel, brought them out of Egypt, and gave them Canaan in which to dwell (16-19).
- They had judges, then Saul and David as kings (20-22).
- A descendant of David, Jesus, is the Savior (23).
- John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus (24-26).
- Those at Jerusalem killed him but God raised him from the dead (27-37).
- Through Jesus is forgiveness of sins and justification before God (38-41).

In these verses, Paul quoted a string of scriptures (and alluded to many more)<sup>8</sup>, very appropriate for the oral commentary during a synagogue service. The quotes are from the Septuagint (LXX) version of the scriptures:

- 18 "suffered he their manners in the wilderness – Deuteronomy 1:31 (paraphrase)
- 19 "destroyed seven nations" – Deuteronomy 7:1 (paraphrase)
- 22 "I have found David" – Psalm 89:20
- 22 "a man after mine own heart" – 1 Samuel 13:14
- 33 "Thou art my Son" – Psalm 2:7
- 34 "sure mercies of David" – Isaiah 55:3
- 35 "see corruption" – Psalm 16:10
- 41 "I work a work" – Habakkuk 1:5

13:16 **Men of Israel, and ye that fear God.** Paul spoke both to the Jews of the synagogue and the god-fearers, those who believed but were not circumcised. See also v. 26.

13:17 **with an high arm brought he them out.** Or, "with uplifted arm [to represent power] he led them out" (NRSV, ESV).

13:18 **suffered he their manners.** Some manuscripts have 'cared for them,' base on the Deuteronomy 1:31 LXX, which says, "the Lord thy God will bear thee as a nursling."

13:20 **four hundred and fifty years.** In some manuscripts, this period of time refers to the time of being in Egypt and the Exodus, while others have it applying to the period of the judges.<sup>9</sup> Both agree essentially with OT scripture, though the period of the Judges is more traditional than text-based.

13:23 **a Saviour, Jesus.** Paul got to the heart of his message—a descendent of David was the *soter* (deliverer, rescuer) of Israel, a man named Jesus (*īēsous* in Greek, *Yeshua* in Aramaic).

13:27 **they knew him not.** The Jews in Jerusalem didn't recognize who Jesus was, even as they read about him in the scriptures each Sabbath day. Instead, they fulfilled the very scriptures about him that they misread by killing him (v. 28).

13:29 **took him down from the tree.** Meaning, the cross, but using the language of Deuteronomy 21:23.

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<sup>8</sup> See Beale, *Commentary*, 582f.

<sup>9</sup> Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 511.

12:30 **God raise him from the dead.** Though it would seem that Jesus was cursed of God by being hung on a tree (v. 29), God showed that he was not cursed but rather justified, by raising him from the dead. Paul did not use the word used elsewhere in the NT for resurrection (*anastasis*) but used a word Jesus often used, *egeirō* (e.g., Matthew 17:23; Luke 7:22), referring to the raising of the dead. Note that in v. 33, however, he used *anistēmi*, which is related to *anastasis*, but then reverts to *egeirō* in v. 37.

12:37 **he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.** “Corruption” refers to the decay of the body after death. Jesus did not experience that, because he was raised on the third day. Paul contrasted this to David (v. 36) who died and whose body fully decayed.

12:42 **the Gentiles.** Many manuscripts do not have “Gentiles” here but just speak of the people in general.

13:43 **Jews and religious proselytes.** In this verse we see the third category—those who had fully converted to Judaism, called “proselytes.” Paul had merely addressed them as Jews, but Luke calls them out here to indicate that among those wanting to hear Paul and Barnabas again.

#### Gentiles accept the gospel – Acts 13:44-49

A week after the speech, the Gentile proselytes and god-fearers gathered their families and friends and overwhelmed the synagogue with their numbers. The Jewish leaders, “filled with envy,” spoke out against Paul’s and Barnabas’ doctrine. But having offered it to the Jews first and been rejected, they went to the Gentiles.

13:44 **the next sabbath day came almost the whole city.** A bit of hyperbole, no doubt, but the point is well-made that the synagogue was overcrowded with the large numbers that gathered there to hear the missionaries.

13:45 **they were filled with envy.** The Jews in the synagogue were filled with *zēlos*, meaning zeal, intense indignation, or fierceness.

13:46 **we turn to the Gentiles.** Though Gentiles were in the audience, they had some association with Judaism, as either proselytes or god-fearers. Now the men will turn to the larger Gentile population, happy to preach Jesus Christ to them.

13:47 **a light of the Gentiles.** Paul quoted Isaiah 49:6 as a scripture they were fulfilling by turning to their new expanded audience.

13:48 **and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.** The JST clarifies that this verse is not about predestination but faith, by moving one word: “...and as many as **believed** were ordained to eternal life **believed.**” The word “believed” here is *pisteuō* which means ‘to have faith,’ while “ordained” is *tassō*, meaning ‘appointed’ or even ‘devoted to service.’ The Greek word order supports the JST word shift, that the appointment to eternal life comes after and as a result of belief, though almost all modern translations follow the KJV pattern. The glaring exception is William Tyndale’s 1534 NT, the first translation from Greek to English, in which he wrote: “The getyls [Gentiles] hearde and were glad and glorified the worde of the Lorde and beleved: even as many as were ordeyned vnto eternall lyfe.” First they believe, then they have eternal life.

13:49 **published.** Or, spread, carried, referring to missionaries teaching, not using written or printed words.

#### Jewish persecution – Acts 13:50

13:50 **devout and honourable women.** Better translated, ‘the prominent worshipping [god-fearing] women,’ meaning women of prominence in the city (probably Romans) who worshipped with the Jews, were enlisted again Paul and Barnabas.

13:50 **expelled them out of their coasts.** A formal, legal action taken against them by the prominent men and women at Antioch. Verse 51 tells us that Paul and Barnabas “shook off the dust of their feet against them,” as Jesus had taught his disciples to do (Matthew 10:14; Luke 9:5).

## Iconium – Acts 13:51 – 14:5

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The pattern continued of going to the synagogue first, then reaching out to the Gentiles when rejected. Though they had much success at Iconium, the Jewish leaders devised a plan to have them stoned. Hearing about the plan, Paul and Barnabas left, going first south to Lystra and later southeast to Derbe.

13:51 **came unto Iconium.** Iconium (modern Konya, the seventh largest city in Turkey) lay about ninety miles southeast of Antioch along the *Via Sebaste*, a major Roman trade route linking Syria to Ephesus. Part of the province of Galatia, the town was not a Roman colony in Paul's day and many still spoke the native Phrygian dialect. The city prospered with rich farmlands and plentiful water.<sup>10</sup>

14:1 **Jews and also of the Greeks believed.** Paul and Barnabas were received well in Iconium, with many converts among Jews and Gentiles.

14:2 **unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles.** The Jews were not secular Jews but “unbelieving” in the messages of the Christian missionaries.

14:3 **Long time therefore abode they.** Luke is not precise about the length of time the men spent in Iconium, except that it was “considerable” (NIV) to allow them to teach many and do “signs and wonders.”

14:4 **part with the apostles.** This is the first time Luke referred to Paul or Barnabas as apostles. It does not necessarily mean they were members of the Quorum of the Twelve at this time, since the term generically means ‘sent one’ in Greek, but rather refers to their missionary efforts as being sent by God.

14:5 **there was an assault made.** “Assault” here means ‘attempt.’ The Jews, their rulers, and some of the Gentiles who didn't like the message being preached rallied together to plan to stone Paul and Barnabas.

## Lystra and Derbe – Acts 14:6-20

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Twenty miles (one day's travel) south of Iconium was Lystra, the eastern-most town of significance in Galatia. Three days (about sixty miles) away was Derbe, in the district of Lycaonia. Both ancient cities are just mounds today, with very little excavated.

### Heals cripple – Acts 14:6-10

14:6 **They were ware of it.** Paul and Barnabas were somehow made aware of their threat against their lives in Iconium, and went southwest to Lystra.

14:6 **fled unto Lystra.** A small town about a day's journey off the main road southwest of Iconium, Lystra was a recently-formed (AD 6) Roman colony focused on livestock and farming.<sup>11</sup> Paul was surely inspired to go here if for no other reason than that his efforts would lead to the conversion of a family which included a young man who will become Paul's lifelong friend and fellow laborer, Timothy (Acts 16:1-3).

14:8 **a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet.** Paul healed a man crippled from birth at Lystra. Luke was certainly intentionally echoing Peter's healing of a similarly crippled man from Acts 3, showing that Paul was not behind Peter in any way.

14:9 **perceiving that he had faith to be healed.** “Perceiving” is more certain in the Greek than the English word might indicate—Paul knew the man had faith, probably because he confessed belief in their words about Christ.

14:10 **he leaped and walked.** Like the man in the temple in Acts 3, this man, who had been crippled since birth, immediately stood and jumped up for joy, something he had never done in his whole life.

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<sup>10</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:347.

<sup>11</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:348.

### [People proclaim them gods – Acts 14:11-18](#)

14:11 **in the speech of Lycaonia.** Though they generally spoke Greek and probably Latin, they also spoke the native language of the area, which Paul and Barnabas did not understand.

14:12 **Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius.** These are Latin (Roman) names for the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes. Zeus was the head of the gods and Hermes his spokesman/messenger. The names probably reflect who looked older and who did most of the talking.

14:13 **brought oxen and garlands.** The oxen were for sacrifice; the garlands adorned the oxen. The people, led by the priest of Jupiter (Zeus) were going to make a sacrifice for the ‘gods’ come among them.

14:15 **why do ye these things?** The missionaries had not at first understood what the people said in their native language. But by now they either found a translator or could figure it out from the context, so they tried to put a stop to it. Paul made it clear that they were not gods (they both tore their clothing in protest; v. 14) and pointed them to the “living God” who made all things, gave man agency, and bore witness of his love in the rain and crops. 17). With those words they were able to convince the people not to offer sacrifice to them (v. 18).

14:15 **which made heaven, and earth.** Paul quoted Exodus 20:11.

### [Paul stoned but healed – Acts 14:19-20](#)

14:19 **Jews from Antioch and Iconium.** Jews from both cities where the men had previously preached joined forces and tracked them down in Lystra to build a case against them.

14:19 **having stoned Paul.** Paul’s enemies managed to stone him (what the Iconians had tried to do in their own town but succeeded in doing in Lystra), ironically in the town where he and Barnabas were just proclaimed as gods. Believing him dead, they dragged his body out of the city and left it.

14:20 **the disciples stood round about him.** The disciples made a circle around Paul and he rose up, evoking the image of a prayer circle of united voices (see Acts 1:14). The text doesn’t explicitly say it, but the implication is that Paul’s recovery was miraculous. “The natural presumption is that Barnabas raised him from death or near death. But however the miracle occurred – stoned, bruised, and deemed dead – Paul would not have been ready to travel the next day without divine intervention.”<sup>12</sup> The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

### [Return trip to Antioch – Acts 14:21-28](#)

Just beyond Derbe are the mountains of the Taurus range. Beyond them was Paul’s hometown of Tarsus, and a short distance farther on was the city of Antioch in Syria, from which Paul and Barnabas had begun their journey. Continuing east would have been the shortest route home. But when they left Derbe and returned instead to Syrian Antioch, they did not take this more direct route. Perhaps it was the wrong time of year to attempt the climb to the high pass through these mountains. More likely, the men were anxious to visit the churches in the other Galatian cities they had been forced to leave so hurriedly. This they did, and then turned south to revisit Perga and to return home by ship (Acts 14:21–25).

14:21 **preached the gospel in that city.** In verse 20, Paul and Barnabas went to Derbe, traveling about sixty miles southeast from Lystra. Little is known about the town beyond the location of the site by two inscriptions. Derbe was a small town that later became a Christian stronghold until the persecutions of the emperor Diocletian, who destroyed the town, leaving it empty for hundreds of years (it is only a small farming village now).

14:21 **returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch.** After apparently teaching peacefully in Derbe, the brethren bravely reversed their trip, though probably traveling much more quietly since they had been severely persecuted in these towns. Their goal was support their recent converts, so they likely only met privately and avoided public preaching.

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<sup>12</sup> McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 2:133.

14:22 **through much tribulation enter into the kingdom.** This is the first mention of a significant Pauline teaching—that the path to heaven is lined with persecution and challenges, for the righteous. Compare 1 Corinthians 4:9; Philippians 1:29.

14:23 **ordained them elders.** During their first pass through the area, they preached and baptized. Now on the return trip, they more formally organized the church, calling local leaders and giving them authority.<sup>13</sup>

14:25 **Attalia.** This was the port city of the region of Pamphylia (v. 24; right). The missionaries probably landed here on their arrival as well, though Luke only mentioned it on the return trip.

Antalya is the modern name for Attalia, the main port on the southern coast of Asia Minor west of Perga. The town had been named for the second-century BCE king Attalos II of Pergamum, who presented Athens with the Stoa Paul would see on his next journey.

14:26 **thence sailed to Antioch.** Paul’s first journey concluded back where it had started, after covering about fourteen hundred miles by boat and on foot over challenging terrain.<sup>14</sup>

14:27 **rehearsed all that God had done with them.** What a fascinating reunion that must have been with Paul and Barnabas telling the marvelous stories of their converts and the painful stories of their persecutions! Most significantly, they related how they had preached to the Gentiles and “opened the door” to the work among those people as well as the Jews.

14:28 **there they abode long time.** Back home in Antioch, the journeyers rested for a season, perhaps about a year. Though the English sounds similar to 14:3, in the Greek, this one is ‘not a short time,’ the negative phrase suggesting a more lengthy stay than other locations on their journey.



## Jerusalem Conference – Acts 15:1-35

A controversy arose because of the large number of Gentile converts coming into the Church who had not been circumcised (proselytes) or otherwise embraced the Jewish faith first at some level (god-fearers). Some Jewish Christians felt they should go through that intermediate step to become a Christian while others thought it was too great of a burden to ask. A conference was called in Jerusalem to work through the issues. This was a pivotal moment in the history of the early Church, and though the issue was decided for Gentiles at the conference by a reasonable compromise, it was also left undecided for Jews joining the Church—in other words, how much of the Law of Moses did followers of Christ still need to live? That open question proved to be troublesome for the church for many years and was a particular source of concern for Paul through much of his ministry.

## The gathering in Jerusalem – Acts 15:1-21

15:1 **certain men which came down from Judea.** A group of men came from Judea to Antioch and met with the leaders there, including Paul and Barnabas, who had just returned from their journey converting many Gentiles in Galatia and other regions. “They came from the headquarters of the Church, probably had been sent by the apostles (v. 24), and were good and acceptable brethren; but on the issue of circumcision they erred, teaching false doctrine and not being led by the Spirit. Since the Lord often leaves his servants to struggle with and work out solutions for

<sup>13</sup> Robert J. Matthews, “‘Unto All Nations’: Acts,” in Millet, *Acts to Revelations*, 38.

<sup>14</sup> Matthews, “‘Unto All Nations’: Acts,” in Millet, *Acts to Revelations*, 39.

difficult problems, before they finally receive his mind and voice by revelation, similar situations arise in the Church today. For instance, brethren who go forth today to preach and to confirm the churches sometimes take it upon themselves to advocate political, educational, and social philosophies which seem right to them—on occasions even claiming such are essential to salvation—which in fact are not the voice of God to his people.”<sup>15</sup>

15:1 **Except ye be circumcised . . . ye cannot be saved.** Though circumcision is mentioned many times, it is a ‘code word’ for someone who obeys the Mosaic Law. These particular men are advocating that some elements of the Mosaic Law are required for salvation.

15:2 **go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders.** The “disputation” was very strong between these visiting men and the Antioch saints, especially Paul and Barnabas, that the Antioch members determined to seek the counsel of the church leaders in Jerusalem in resolving this disagreement. Paul and Barnabas led the group from Antioch. This was Paul’s fourth visit to Jerusalem since his conversion (the third not being recorded in Acts but mentioned in Galatians 2). He probably made the 300-mile journey in the spring of 49 CE.

15:3 **passed through Phenice and Samaria.** “Phenice” is Phoenicia, such as the cities of Sidon and Tyre. The brethren would likely have sailed down the coast, stopping at one of these cities along the way before passing through Samaria (the home of many Christians by this time) and arriving in Jerusalem.

15:3 **the conversion of the Gentiles.** As the Antioch group traveled south, they argued their case, shared their missionary experiences, and according to Luke “caused great joy” among those who heard them. Of course, as we’ll see throughout Acts and Paul’s letters, not everyone felt joy at Gentiles coming into the church without the intermediate step of Mosaic obedience. The word “conversion” (*epistrophē*) is a ‘turning around’ or ‘turning toward’ something, representing a change of beliefs. This term was used in the NT to describe the radical change Gentile converts had to make to their lives to be a Christian, but is not typically used in relation to the change Jews made to believe in Jesus as Messiah.

15:4 **declared all things that God had done.** Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem and also shared their experiences, probably in several venues and to multiple audiences.

15:5 **certain of the sect of the Pharisees.** These are not Pharisees such as argued with or persecuted Jesus during his ministry, but Christian Jews that still considered themselves of the philosophy of the Pharisees. These church members strongly believed that a Gentile could not be a Christian unless they first were fully obedient to the Law of Moses, which included circumcision for male converts. People of this philosophy are often referred to in the NT literature as “Judaizers.”

15:6 **the apostles and elders came together.** This is the first recorded conference of the young church. It may reflect the same meeting in Jerusalem that Paul describes in Galatians 2:1-10, though some scholars believe that passage is more aligned with Paul’s Jerusalem visit in Acts 11.<sup>16</sup> At this stage in the church, apostles is a broad term that refers to those who teach and carry the message of Jesus, while elders is used in the Jewish sense, meaning those who live in a city and are respected, senior leaders.

15:7 **Peter rose up.** Peter spoke out as the disputing went on for a time, reminding them of his vision which resulted in the opening of the gospel to the Gentiles. “Even though the Brethren had settled the matter doctrinally a decade before [Acts 11:18], considerable time passed before the matter was settled culturally and emotionally in the minds of some Jewish Christians.” Even ten years *after* this conference, “many Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were still following the law of Moses.”<sup>17</sup>

15:8 **giving them the Holy Ghost.** Peter’s persuasive argument was that the Gentiles he taught received the Holy Spirit just as they had all experienced in Acts 2 and on other occasions. If they were not meant to be included in the

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<sup>15</sup> McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 2:139.

<sup>16</sup> Witherington, *The Acts*, 440-443 covers the arguments well; also Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 282-284.

<sup>17</sup> Matthews, “‘Unto All Nations’: Acts,” in Millet, *Acts to Revelations*, 39.

church, why would God give them that gift and blessing? In his mind, this “put no difference between us [Jews] and them [Gentiles]” (v. 9).

15:10 **a yoke upon the neck.** Peter portrayed the Law of Moses as a yoke that no one was able to truly bear. In other words, time and experience had shown that no one could perfectly keep the Law, especially in the Pharisaic interpretation of it. Since it was fulfilled in Christ anyway, why should they impose it on new Gentile converts?

15:11 **through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved.** Peter refuted their earlier statements that circumcision was required for salvation—the gift of salvation came only through Jesus himself. “Grace” is a significant word in the remainder of the NT. It is *charis* in Greek, broadly meaning kindness, favor, a gift, an enabling power. It brings joy and God’s favor but is not something that can be earned or obtained except through the generosity of the giver.

15:12 **gave audience to Barnabas and Paul.** The name order is interesting; during the latter part of first journey (after Cyprus), Paul was mentioned first, implying that he was the senior companion. Here Barnabas was first again. Paul was likely deferring to Barnabas’ more senior and established position among the church leaders. They stood and declared the great miracles they had seen while teaching the Gentiles in their recent journey.

15:13 **James answered.** This was James, the brother of Jesus, who was “now one of the Twelve” according to McConkie,<sup>18</sup> perhaps replacing the other man of the same name who was killed by Herod Agrippa I (12:1-2). James appears to be the leader of the church in Jerusalem itself, respected by all sides in this controversy.

15:14 **Simeon.** Or, Simon Peter. James acknowledged Peter’s leadership in taking the gospel to the Gentiles first.

15:17 **and all the Gentiles.** James quoted Amos 9:11-12 in verses 16-17, which prophesied of the Gentiles joining the Jews in worshipping the Lord. James used this scripture to declare that this was always in God’s plan (v. 18, which itself perhaps points to Isaiah 45:21).

15:19 **my sentence is.** Or, “It is my judgment” (NIV). The sense in the Greek is ‘interpretation’ or ‘judgment.’ James offered his conclusion to the matter, which was to “trouble not” the Gentiles with obeying the full Law of Moses.

15:20 **we write unto them.** However, James proposed a compromise that included four things for new Gentile converts to avoid (see also v. 29 and 21:25):

- “pollutions of idols” – anything associated with idolatry, including eating sacrificed meats
- “fornication” – adultery or other sexual sins
- “things strangled” – animals eaten without the blood being first drained
- “blood” – bloodshed, murder

All of these were commandments that (conceptually, at least) pre-dated the Law of Moses, though even circumcision, which is not on the required list, started with Abraham (Paul called them “the invisible things of him from the creation of the world”; Romans 1:20). The third one is related to eating practices and was not, of course, salvific but was considered required of all humans because it was given to Noah (Genesis 9:1-7). At least the first and third may have been intended just to allow Jewish and Gentile Christians to share meals together.<sup>19</sup>

## The decision of the conference – Acts 15:22-35

15:22 **Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church.** The conference acted by counseling together and relying on revelation and the Spirit. “Few Christians today see the implications of this powerful ruling of the Twelve. Conservatives today search the Bible for answers, but had the apostles done this, they would have required circumcision for the Gentiles, since it is commanded in the Bible. The apostles were inspired to go beyond

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<sup>18</sup> McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 2:143.

<sup>19</sup> McRay, *Paul*, 128-129; Bruce McConkie also suggests that the last two were not part of the original decree but were added later; see McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 2:144.

the Bible, to reverse the lesser law given earlier and to extend the higher law through Christ. In other words, not past scripture but new revelation was the foundation of the Church of Christ. What guided the apostles was not the New Testament, for their acts created it. The Bible does not make the true church, but the true church makes the Bible. Past scriptures are a guide to truth, but living prophets give new scripture.”<sup>20</sup>

15:22 **Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas.** The first man is *not* the man of Acts 1:23, who was a potential replacement for Judas Iscariot, though both have the surname “Barsabas,” meaning ‘son of the sabbath.’ We know nothing about him. Silas, also called Silvanus (2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1), on the other hand, will shortly become a companion of Paul on his second journey, showing his clear support of converting Gentiles. Perhaps the two were chosen to go back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas because they represented both sides of the discussion.

15:23-29 These verses contain the text of the letter (or at least the portion of it that is recorded here) went out to the Gentile churches, as delivered by the group sent from the Jerusalem conference.

15:30 **they delivered the epistle.** Arriving back in Antioch, the men gathered the church members there and read them the letter that declared the decision of the conference.

15:31 **they rejoiced for the consolation.** “Consolation” is *paralkēsis*, meaning something that offers comfort or encouragement. In contrast to the requirement to live the Law of Moses, the Gentile converts found these requirements very encouraging.

15:32 **Judas and Silas, being prophets.** “Prophets” in the NT church was not an office but a role where one spoke the word of the Lord, just as in the OT the term is ‘spokesman,’ someone who said God’s words.

15:34 **it pleased Silas to abide.** When the rest of the Jerusalem contingent left (v. 33), Silas decided to stay behind for a time, perhaps encouraged by the spirit of the work he experienced at Antioch.

## In Western Asia and Europe – Acts 15:36 – 21:14

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### Second journey – Acts 15:36 – 18:22

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Paul wanted to go back and visit their converts from the first journey but had a disagreement with Barnabas about taking John Mark. So instead, they formed two teams and split their efforts up. Paul started by going back to his converts in Derbe and Lystra but his travels led him unexpectedly into Greece, expanding the gospel message into Europe for the first time. He traveled about three thousand miles.<sup>21</sup> The date was summer 49 CE to summer 51.

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<sup>20</sup> Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 53.

<sup>21</sup> Matthews, “‘Unto All Nations’: Acts,” in Millet, *Acts to Revelations*, 42.



The second journey can be outlined as follows:

- Paul and Barnabas go their separate ways (15:36-41)
- Derbe and Lystra: Timothy travels with Paul (16:1-5)
- Journey to Troas (16:6-8)
- Paul's vision of man from Macedonian (16:9-10)
- Philippi (16:11-40)
  - Lydia's conversion (16:11-15)
  - Paul's imprisonment (16:16-24)
  - Earthquake; prison keeper converted (16:25-34)
  - Magistrates release them (16:35-40)
- Thessalonica (17:1-9)
  - Teaches in the synagogue (17:1-4)
  - Jason assaulted (17:5-9)
- Berea (17:10-14)
  - Many believe (17:10-12)
  - Thessalonian Jews stir up people (17:13-14)
- Athens (17:15-34)
  - Brought to Areopagus (17:15-21)
  - Speech on Mars' hill (17:22-34)

- Corinth (18:1-17)
  - Aquila & Priscilla (18:1-3)
  - Preaches to Gentiles (18:4-8)
  - Vision of the Lord (18:9-11)
  - Paul arraigned before Gallio (18:12-17)
- Ephesus (18:18-21)
- Caesarea, Jerusalem, Antioch (18:22)

### Paul and Barnabas go their separate ways – Acts 15:36-40

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15:36 **Let us go again and visit our brethren.** Paul did not want to just drop by for a social call. From his letters, we can clearly see how apostasy was a real problem. He wanted to go back and help keep them faithful. “If conversion were salvation,” noted one commentator, “following up of converts would not be necessary.”<sup>22</sup>

15:37 **Barnabas determined to take with them John.** John Mark was Barnabas’ cousin, according to Colossians 4:10 (“sister’s son” is a mistranslation of *anepsios*, which means ‘cousin’). Family loyalty surely played a role in Barnabas’ desire to have John Mark join them again on this second journey.

15:38 **who departed from them.** Though the details are sketchy, Paul apparently felt that Mark left them too soon on the previous journey and did not have confidence in his ability to see yet another journey through to the end.

15:39 **the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other.** The language of the KJV is perhaps too strong. A better translation would be: ‘The disagreement was such that they separated from one another’. That they disagreed is clear, but the parting certainly could have been cordial, as in: ‘Barnabas, I really don’t feel good about going with Mark. So how about if we split our efforts. You take Mark and go to Cyprus, and I’ll take Silas and go to Galatia. We’ll both meet back here when we’re done. How does that sound?’ Still, this wasn’t the only time Paul had been frustrated with Barnabas—or perhaps this one was an extension of the disappointment in Galatians 2:11-14.

15:40 **Paul chose Silas.** Silas proved to be a worthy companion for the energetic Paul. He figures prominently in this second journey and in the letters written during and shortly after this time but is not mentioned again in Acts.

### Derbe and Lystra: Timothy travels with Paul – Acts 16:1-5

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Instead of sailing this time, Paul and Silas travelled by land up through Syria, to Cilicia and Tarsus (15:41), through the Cilician Gates, then to Derbe and Lystra. The journey could have taken them many weeks as they passed through very rugged country.

16:1 **came he to Derbe and Lystra.** Paul was taking a risk coming back here, since he had been stoned and left for dead the first time (14:19). But he was determined to revisit the churches (congregations) where he had taught and baptized before.

16:1 **a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus.** Timothy’s mother was Eunice and his grandmother Lois (2 Timothy 1:5), both Jews. We don’t know his father’s name, but he appears to be a Gentile (*Hellēn*, v. 3) and probably deceased by this time. Timothy’s addition to the team was very welcome as he came highly recommended by the locals (v. 2). From the text (Paul seems to be introduced to Timothy here), it doesn’t appear that Paul converted him on the first journey, though he could have converted his mother and grandmother. Timothy was a life-long companion and supporter of Paul, with Paul writing him two letters later in life (1 and 2 Timothy) and mentioning him in other letters (1 Thessalonians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; 2:19-22; Philemon 1:1).

16:3 **circumcised him because of the Jews.** Because Timothy’s mother was Jewish but he had not been circumcised by his Greek father, Paul thought it would be important for Timothy to have this done, so he could freely associate with other Jews. “This action provides an insight into Paul’s thinking. He saw a difference between necessity and convenience. With Titus [see Galatians 2:3], the question was whether or not circumcision was

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<sup>22</sup> Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 50.

essential for salvation; thus, Paul opposed it. With Timothy it was a matter of rendering him acceptable to the non-Christian Jews where he would do missionary work. Paul was willing to allow circumcision as a concession, but not as a requirement, so that the Jews would be willing to listen to Timothy teach the gospel.”<sup>23</sup>

16:4 **they delivered them the decrees.** Paul and Silas gave everyone copies of the letter from the Jerusalem conference so they would know the decision and abide by it.

16:5 **the churches established in the faith.** The congregations in Derbe and Lystra were faithful and well-established. Later, Paul will write them a letter, Galatians.

### Journey to Troas – Acts 16:6-8

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16:6 **throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia.** Areas where Paul worked during the first journey.

16:6 **forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia.** Asia was the northwestern province in modern-day Turkey. They were forbidden by the Spirit to go there (Iconium and Antioch, where he had been on Paul’s first mission) or Bithynia (northern Galatia).

16:7 **Mysia . . . Bithynia.** When they arrived near Mysia, they expected to enter that city, then go to Bithynia, but again, the Spirit directed them not to go to these specific areas in northwest Turkey. Peter will later labor there (1 Peter 1:1).

16:8 **came down to Troas.** Troas was a port city on the western shore of the Aegean Sea, a busy hub of activity between Greece and Asia. The stop in Troas was important to Paul for two reasons. First, this was apparently where Paul met Luke, another example of an inspired itinerary. Like Timothy, Luke proved to be another faithful, life-long companion to Paul, a physician who could have served him in that capacity as well, and an excellent historian and story-teller. The reason it appears that Luke joined the group in Troas is that at this point in the text (Acts 16:10), the pronouns change from third person (he and they) to first person (we). The second reason is outlined in the next two verses.

### Paul’s vision of man from Macedonian – Acts 16:9-10

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16:9 **a vision appeared to Paul in the night; . . . a man of Macedonia.** We never learn who this man was who appeared and appealed to Paul in vision, but he answered Paul’s question about what to do next. The Spirit had told him not to go north or south from here, so he surely wondered, should he preach in Troas for a while or start for home? Going west doesn’t seem to have been in his plans; it took a vision to get him to do it. Macedonia was the name for northern Greece. See 2 Corinthians 2:12, where Paul describes this as “a door” being opened to him.

16:10 **immediately we endeavoured.** This is the beginning phrase of the “we” passages where the personal pronoun shifts from “he” and “they” to “we” and “us.” This is the indication that the author of Acts, Luke, joined Paul on his journeys, and was engaged as a participant, not just a compiler of someone else’s experiences. The details in the account increase dramatically when Luke enters the scene, which would be expected from a first-hand record. The “we” passages continue through verse 17, pick up again in 20:5-15 and 21:1-18, then nearly finish the book with him in 27:1-28:16. Of course, Luke could well have been there for other parts from this point on and just not used the “we” pronoun, but because he never used it before this verse, it appears that Luke was from or at least living in Troas (though some believe, from the increased details in Acts during the Antioch ministry and because of an early Christian tradition, that he may have been from Antioch).<sup>24</sup>

### Philippi – Acts 16:11-40

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Paul’s first stop of interest in Greece was Philippi. Archaeological excavations have confirmed that at Philippi, where only a small town had existed in earlier periods, the Romans created a major administrative center (below). The reason for the site’s importance was that, at this point, the Roman *Via Egnatia* was constricted between the hill of the earlier settlement on the right of the aerial view below and an adjacent marsh to the left. Indeed, the present

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<sup>23</sup> Matthews, “Unto All Nations’: Acts,” in Millet, *Acts to Revelations*, 41.

<sup>24</sup> McRay, *Paul*, 135, n14; Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 41.

road, seen here, has no choice at this point but to follow the same line as the ancient Roman highway. Doing so, it cuts directly through the middle of the modern excavations. To the right of the road in the foreground can be seen the theater and a large later Christian church. To the left of the road is the Roman-period forum and another major church.

On the far left side is visible a sixth-century CE basilica church, one of three large churches uncovered at the site. These churches provide visible reminders of the Christian congregation that Paul founded at Philippi and to which he later wrote the warmest of his letters preserved in the New Testament. Looking from the forum to the church we also are reminded of the growing confrontation with the Roman authorities that Paul's missionary activity was to generate on this second journey.



### Lydia's conversion – Acts 16:11-15

16:11 **Samothracia**. An island partway between Asia and Greece. "Samo" means mountain, and it has a 5,000+ foot mountain at the center of the small island, making it a natural landmark and overnight stopping point for ships.<sup>25</sup> Today many recognize the name as the origin of a famous statue in the Louvre, Winged Victory of Samothrace.

16:11 **Neapolis**. The port city of Macedonia. Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke landed here and took the Egnatian Way (*Via Egnatia*), the highway that stretched across Macedonia and Thrace, all the way from the Adriatic coast to Byzantium, to link Rome to its eastern provinces. to Philippi.<sup>26</sup> They would have been able to make the short walk to Philippi in one day.



Roads such as this one constructed in the 2nd century BCE helped to create and maintain the "Pax Romana" (Roman Peace). They also created a new condition in the ancient world that Paul soon learned to exploit to great advantage. Ideas as well as people and messages as well as missionaries, could now travel quickly and safely between the Roman provinces along these roads. Paul made increasing use of these roads to carry letters of encouragement and admonition back to churches founded in Galatia during his first missionary journey and to the church he had just begun at Philippi.

16:12 **Philippi**. A Roman colony in northern Greece, Philippi (below) was the site of a major battle between Octavian (Augustus Caesar) and Brutus and Cassius, Julius Caesar's killers. Octavian founded the colony and

<sup>25</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:368.

<sup>26</sup> McRay, *Paul*, 142.

renamed it after his daughter. There were productive gold mines nearby, and it was a commercial center located on the main road, the *Egnatian Way*.<sup>27</sup>

16:13 **on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side.** There may not have been a synagogue at Philippi, so the small group of Jews there resorted to going to the river for prayer, probably so they had access to running water for their ritual washings. The number of Jews must have been very small; Luke only mentioned women, and it required only ten men to form a synagogue.

16:14 **Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira.** The cloth dying of Thyatira is well-known in ancient sources, especially purple dying which comes from the ink of a Murex shellfish. Lydia was successful in her business, having a house large enough to accommodate Paul's traveling company and the meetings of the new members he will shortly make.

16:15 **when she was baptized.** Lydia is the first person mentioned from Europe that was baptized.

### Paul's imprisonment – Acts 16:16-24

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16:16 **damsel possessed with a spirit of divination** Literally, a 'python spirit' (*pneuma pythōn*), meaning the Python dragon associated with the oracle at Delphi.<sup>28</sup> She followed Paul and his company around, harassing them (v. 17) until Paul finally cast the evil spirit out of her in the name of Jesus Christ (16:18).

16:19 **they caught Paul and Silas.** Angry that they had lost their source of income, the owners of the girl that Paul healed brought him before the magistrates at the *agora/forum* where they were accused of breaking Roman laws and customs (vv. 20-22). The magistrates tore their clothes to signify the depth of their anger.

16:23 **laid many stripes upon them.** Paul and Silas were beaten and put into prison. Luke and Timothy are not mentioned, for unknown reasons. The prison keeper put them in the darkest inner room in the prison, in stocks (v. 24).

The most puzzling part of this is that Paul and Silas, both Roman citizens, should not have been beaten or imprisoned in this way. Why they did not invoke their rights as citizens is not known. Perhaps they were following the Spirit again, because the result was a whole household converted, but the beatings alone would have been very painful price to pay for doing nothing wrong.

One author notes that as much as 25% of Paul's ministry may have been spent in prison.<sup>29</sup> This was the first but not the last time; he also suffered the same fate in Caesarea, Rome (twice), and several others not detailed in scripture (2 Corinthians 11:23).

### Earthquake; prison keeper converted – Acts 16:25-34

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16:25 **at midnight, Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises.** Nearly naked, bleeding and swollen, suffering in cramped, dark, and dirty conditions, and chained by their feet, Paul and Silas nevertheless found it in themselves to pray and sing praises to God.

16:26 **a great earthquake.** This is an area of active earthquakes, but this one targeted the prison, opened the doors, and broke their chains—a very specific quake!

16:27 **would have killed himself.** Thinking the prisoners were all gone and he would be held accountable for his failure, the jailer prepared to kill himself. Death was the penalty for letting a prisoner escape.

16:28 **Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.** Paul assured the jailer they were present. When the stunned man confirmed it, he fell down in gratitude.

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<sup>27</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:370.

<sup>28</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:373.

<sup>29</sup> McRay, *Paul*, 146.

16:30 **what must I do to be saved?** The jailer must have heard the missionaries teaching at some point. He recognized their power and knowledge, even in these terrible conditions.

16:31 **Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.** This doesn't mean this is the only thing that needs to be done. In fact, the jailer's subsequent actions show that is not true. But Luke is emphasizing faith in this part of the story, and will build on that with other fundamental doctrines throughout the remainder of the work.

16:32 **the word of the Lord.** They taught him the principles of the gospel, including faith, repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and other key doctrines necessary for salvation, to the jailer and his whole house (family, servants, etc.).

16:33 **washed their stripes; and was baptized.** The jailer first served them, then they served him through the priesthood. This all had to happen during the night or the early morning hours.

16:34 **he set meat before them.** After their baptisms, the jailer and his family fed the missionaries ("meat" just means 'food') and continued to listen to their teachings.

### Magistrates release them – Acts 16:35-40

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16:35 **Let those men go.** Early the next morning, the magistrates instructed that Paul and Silas should be released. They were not being kind but wanted the two men to leave town (v. 39), probably because they associated the earthquake with them as a bad omen. The jailer was the one that brought the missionaries the message (v. 36).

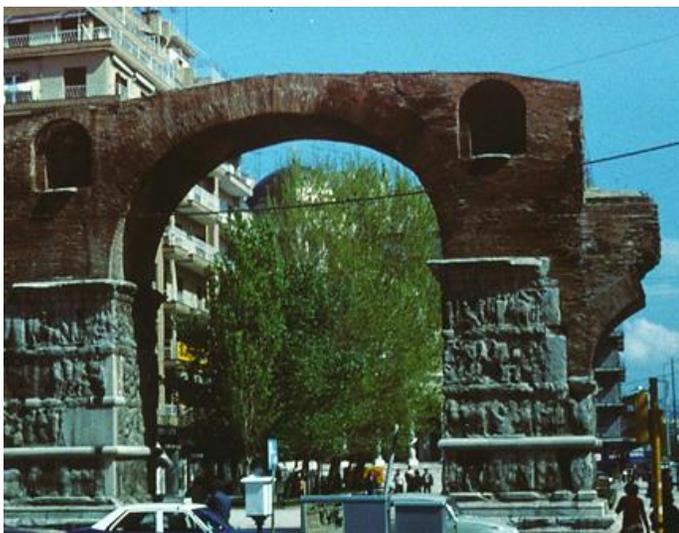
16:37 **being Romans.** Paul and Silas now informed them that they were Roman citizens and that their treatment was illegal. Hearing this, the magistrates had to personally come to the prison and release them (v. 39). This was no doubt for the benefit of his converts at Philippi, so it could not be said that the men who converted them were criminals that slipped away during the night.

16:40 **entered into the house of Lydia.** The two men returned to the house of Lydia, comforted the people there (ironically, since they're the ones that were beaten and imprisoned), and left Philippi and Luke, who appears to have stayed behind because the "we" passages stop for a time.

### Thessalonica and Berea – Acts 17:1-9

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Passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they traveled over one hundred miles and came to Thessalonica. Thessalonica was the capital city of the Roman province of Macedonia. The city's name was shortened to Salonika in the Middle Ages; the modern Greek city over its ruins is named Thessaloniki.



Thessalonica stood at a major crossroads of the empire. Its strategic position was symbolized by the arch (left) erected after the Emperor Galerius made the city his capital for the eastern half of the empire in 305 CE. The arch straddled the Egnatian Way at its midpoint. The main east-west street of modern Thessaloniki that passes next to this arch is still called the *Odos Egnatia*.

West from here, the road led to the Adriatic Sea and on to Rome (via ship and the Apian Way); to the east, the road led to Byzantium (Constantinople, now Istanbul) and on to Asia. North from Thessaloniki a major pass leads through the mountains to the regions of the Danube; its route is still marked by a modern auto road and railway line, which link northern Greece to Europe beyond. To the south, from the harbor only a few hundred feet away from

the Arch of Galerius, ships continue to carry goods between those northern regions and ports round the Mediterranean. As it appears today, so was Thessalonica in Roman times—a bustling cosmopolitan center. The

Greek geographer Strabo, writing a century before Paul, described the city as “populous, easy-going, and open to everything new—good or bad.”

### [Teaches in the synagogue – Acts 17:1-4](#)

17:1 **they came to Thessalonica.** Thessalonica was the largest town and the capital of Macedonia. An important seaport, it was founded in 315 BCE by the sister and brother-in-law of Alexander the Great and named after her.<sup>30</sup>

17:2 **three sabbath days reasoned with them.** Paul taught in the synagogue for three weeks and converted some Jews and Gentiles, and “chief women not a few” (v. 4). He probably stayed about two months, long enough to get a gift from the Philippians (Philippians 4:16) and to work to support himself (1 Thessalonians 2:9).

### [Jason assaulted – Acts 17:5-9](#)

17:5 **assaulted the house of Jason.** Paul and his group were apparently staying with a man named Jason (v. 7). When a group of hired thugs came to get them, Paul was not home, so the thugs instead took Jason and some other brethren before the city rulers and accused them of associating with “these that have turned the world upside down” (v. 6). Their crime was to teach that there is another king besides Caesar—Jesus (v. 7).

17:6 **rulers of the city.** The Greek term is *politarkēs* which critics used to say showed the unreliability of Luke as an historian since the term was not believed to be in use until the second or third century. In recent years, however, hundreds of inscriptions have been discovered, most from Thessalonica and some dating back to almost 300 BCE, using that term for the leaders of the city. These finds not only vindicate Luke, but show his strength as a record keeper, because he used the precise term at the right time and place.<sup>31</sup>

17:9 **when they had taken security of Jason.** Jason and his companions were required to post a bond to keep them from leaving town until their case was resolved, and then let them go.

### [Berea – Acts 17:10-14](#)

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Berea was about forty-five miles southwest of Thessalonica.<sup>32</sup>

### [Many believe \(17:10-12\)](#)

17:10 **sent away Paul and Silas by night.** Fearing what could happen to Paul, Silas, and Timothy (not mentioned here but in v. 14), the members in Thessalonica sent them away at night to Berea. There they also preached in the synagogue.

17:11 **more noble than those in Thessalonica.** “Noble” (*eugenēs*) typically refers to birth status but here more likely means ‘good natured,’ and implies that the people in Berea were more receptive to the message.

17:12 **not a few.** Luke noted that their success was better than in Thessalonica and that the people “received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily” (v. 11). One convert was Sopater who traveled with Paul later (20:4).

### [Thessalonian Jews stir up people \(17:13-14\)](#)

17:13 **stirred up the people.** Paul’s success in Berea angered the Thessalonian Jews, so they sent a delegation to Berea and stirred up the people so that Paul had to leave.

17:14 **sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea.** Perhaps making some kind of announcement or otherwise letting it be known, they pretended that Paul was going to take a ship. This was probably done to throw off his

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<sup>30</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:378-379.

<sup>31</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:381; McRay, *Paul*, 151-152.

<sup>32</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:382.

enemies. Instead, they secretly got him out of town and on the way to Athens (v. 15). Silas and Timothy were able to stay in Thessalonica a bit longer.

## Athens – Acts 17:15-34

Splitting up, Paul pretended to go toward the sea but secretly turned south instead and made a 317-mile trip to Athens (Acts 17:15). Silas and Timothy remained at Berea for a time. Paul probably spent the winter in Athens, the historic capital of Greek philosophy and a prominent city in the region of Achaia.

According to Acts 17:17, Paul passed much of his time while in Athens here in the *agora*, the town’s “market place,” at the base of the Acropolis, which rises at the right in the image (right). Paul was doing what he could never stop doing, discussing with anyone who would listen his beliefs.



Extensive excavations in Athens since the 19th century have uncovered the main public center of the ancient city. Beginning in the 6th century BCE, a large open area was set wide for public use, surrounded by shrines to the gods, buildings for civic administration, and long stoas which provided shady promenades in front of rows of small shops. Here the Athenians had invented

democracy and in doing so had elevated the Greek love for debate to an official art form. In the council halls of Athens, common citizens gathered to deliberate the fate of cities. By the time Paul reached Athens, democracy had long since given way to autocratic rule, but Athenians’ zest for argument had not abated. The *agora* continued to flourish as a marketplace where one could shop, among other things, for new ideas.

Athens had, in fact, gained an international reputation since the Classical Age as a center for learning. Although the city had lost most of its political importance after the 5th century BCE, Athens became increasingly well known for its schools of rhetoric and philosophy, as well as for the theater, poetry, art and other intellectual pursuits that flourished here. Kings and aristocrats in other regions sent their sons to Athens to be educated, and the city became a kind of Oxford on the Aegean Sea.

## Brought to Areopagus – Acts 17:15-21

17:15 **Athens**. No longer the great city of Greece it once was, Athens was mostly a university town, though temples and monuments abounded.<sup>33</sup> There were so many idolatrous temples that Paul’s spirit grieved (v. 16).

17:17 **disputed he in the synagogue . . . and in the market daily**. Paul had very little success in this city, but spent his time teaching in the synagogue and the *agora* or market.

17:18 **philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks**. Epicureans were those who followed the teachings of Epicurus (about 300 BCE). While rejecting notions about God, they instead focused on pleasure, which they believed was achieved through modest living. Stoics were founded by Zeno (died 270 BCE). They focused their lives on the pursuit of virtue and balance in all things.

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<sup>33</sup> McRay, *Paul*, 157.

17:18 **this babbler**. The Greek term is *spermologos* or ‘seedpicker.’ It refers to a little bird that would follow food carts around, picking up small bits of food that fell as the cart bumped along. They believed that Paul could only offer them scraps of information that had fallen off their own carts of superior thinking.<sup>34</sup>

17:19 **Areopagus**. The hill of Ares where there was a large marble courthouse used by the ruling council of the city. It was also used for open discussions, such as those in which Paul is engaged. This is the same location as “Mars’ hill” in v. 22, Mars and Ares being the Roman and Greek names for the god of war.<sup>35</sup>

17:20 **certain strange things to our ears**. The council wanted Paul to explain his teachings, though Luke notes that it was mostly to satiate their own curiosity with something new to discuss (v. 21).

### Speech on Mars’ hill – Acts 17:22-34

Paul’s second speech was fairly short as it was recorded in these verses; it may have been longer in actual delivery. The text of this speech in Greek is inscribed on a metal plate on the side of the Areopagus hill (below). Because of the audience, he did not cite any scriptures though scriptural allusions and principles abound. The speech can be summarized as follows:

- Athenians are so religious, they even built a monument to the unknown god (22-23a).
- Paul declares this god to them, who created us all and gives us life (23b-28).
- God is not an idol, but has ordained one whom he raised from the dead (29-34).

That is apparently as far as he got. The Athenians cut him off when he started talking about the resurrection (a contentious issue with them) and said they would hear him again, but Paul saw it as the delay tactic that it was, and left the city, probably shortly after Silas and Timothy arrived.

17:22 **ye are too superstitious**. Or, “I see how extremely religious you are in every way” (NRSV). It is not a criticism but an observation of their lengthy discussions on religious topics.

17:23 **beheld your devotions**. Or, “examining the objects of your worship” (NASB). There were monuments to various gods all over the city.

17:24 **dwelleth not in temples made with hands**. Greeks believed that the gods visited or even lived in the temples that men made for them. We see this even today in our naming the temple as “The House of the Lord.” Paul’s point is that the God he declared to them was higher than their gods and did not need an earthly home—he made the earth and “all nations of men,” so doesn’t need them to build him a temple.



<sup>34</sup> McRay, *Paul*, 161.

<sup>35</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:389.

17:26 ***hath made of one blood all nations***. Or, “he made from one man every nation of mankind” (ESV). The “one man” here is a reference to Adam, from whom all nations arise.

17:27 ***if haply they might feel after him***. This archaic KJV phrase means “and perhaps reach out for him” (NIV). The JST makes it: “...if haply they might feel **they are willing to find him, though for he be is not far from every one of us.**”

17:28 ***in him we live, and move, and have our being***. This is a quote from Epimenides of Crete. Compare D&C 45:1.

17:28 ***For we are also his offspring***. Paul also quoted from Aratus (died about 245 BCE), in his poem *Phaenomena*.<sup>36</sup> Both of these quotations show Paul’s impressive knowledge of Greek philosophy and poetry and how he used their own writers in his arguments.

17:29 ***like unto gold, or silver, or stone***. A god is not the object in the temple, a statue of precious metals or carved stone, as beautiful as those things may be.

17:30 ***the times of this ignorance God winked at***. Or, “In the past God overlooked such ignorance” (NIV). God let much go because of the ignorance of people who did not know him or his plan, Paul says. But now he calls on all men to repent.

17:31 ***he hath raised him from the dead***. The assurance that what Paul is teaching is true—that there is a judgment day coming soon—is manifest in Jesus’ resurrection.

17:32 ***when they heard of the resurrection***. The members of the council were dismissive of Paul’s claim of a resurrection. These people generally did not believe in a physical existence, though they could embrace the notion of an immortal soul.<sup>37</sup>

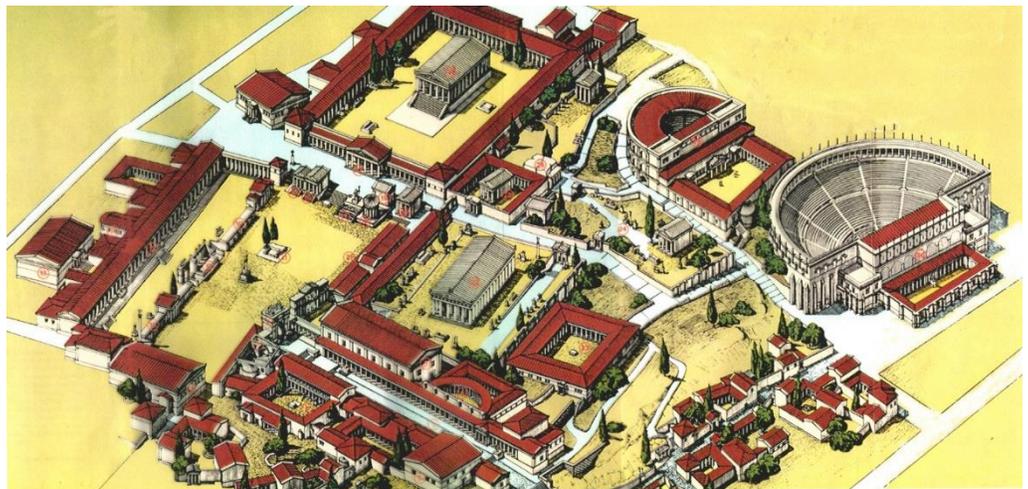
17:32 ***We will hear thee again of this matter***. Scholarship is mixed on whether they were sincerely inviting him back or being dismissive (‘that’s enough for now; perhaps another time’). The latter seems more likely, given that Paul left Athens shortly after the speech (v. 33).

17:34 ***Dionysius the Areopagite***. At least one of the members of the council Paul addressed took and interest and because a disciple of Paul, and one woman, Damaris, along with a few others.

## Corinth – Acts 18:1-17

From Athens, Paul traveled apparently alone to Corinth, the capital of the region of southern Greece called Achaia.

Why Corinth? One of Paul’s converts in Athens was Stephanas of Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:15). He was probably visiting Athens and was ready to return home. Inviting Paul to join him, the two may have made the short trip and given Paul a place to stay until he made other



<sup>36</sup> Witherington, *The Acts*, 530.

<sup>37</sup> Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 343.

arrangements—and a few new converts.

Corinth sat at the isthmus between mainland Greece and Peloponnesus. Boats were loaded on sleds and dragged across the isthmus to save many days going around it. The city was destroyed in 146 BCE by the Romans but then rebuilt in 44 BCE by Julius Caesar because of its prime location. The city was best known for its immorality, with the phrase ‘to act the Corinthian’ meaning to have illicit sexual contact. Paul spent more time here than in any other city so far—a year and a half (Acts 18:1, 5, 11).



In Paul’s day a stone-paved sledway, called the *Diolkos*, was used to haul ships and their cargoes across the isthmus. At both ends of the road the pavement continued down beneath the waterline, allowing the shallow-draft ships to be floated onto and off of the sleds. The sleds were then pulled out of the water and across the isthmus by mule-power.

The small image of the Diolkos (left) is near the western end, looking beyond to the Gulf of Corinth (and the mountains along its northern coast sheltering the oracle shrine of Apollo at Delphi). The stone pavement of the Diolkos clearly shows the ruts formed by sled runners over centuries of use. Corinth, of course, controlled the Diolkos traffic. Moreover, since ship crews and passengers using this route had to leave their vessels temporarily at Corinth anyway, they had less reason to make an additional port-call at Athens’ harbor on the Piraeus. Thus, many more travelers of the Roman era passed through Corinth than through Athens. Today a modern canal has replaced the ancient sled track, allowing ships to cut through Greece and in essence making southern Greece an island.

Paul quickly realized that at Corinth he could spread the Christian gospel faster by remaining stationary himself. The converts he made here would carry the Christian gospel with them to the far corners of the Mediterranean world. At Corinth, Paul also discovered that he could be in frequent and efficient communication with the churches he had already founded. It was apparently at Corinth that Paul began the letter-writing activity that was to become his greatest contribution to the Christian movement in the years to follow. The earliest of Paul’s letters preserved for us—and thus the oldest documents in the New Testament—were written from here to the church he had founded in Thessalonica (1 and 2 Thessalonians), his recent converts in the north (note the footnote in the LDS scriptures that corrects this at the end of both letters in the KJV).

The Temple of Apollo at Corinth was 700 years old by Paul’s time. On the hill directly overlooking the Roman city’s main forum (right), its sturdy Doric columns served as a dramatic reminder of Corinth’s ancient grandeur. But the temple was already in ruins in NT times; to Paul it would have served merely as a sermon illustration of the impotence of the Greeks’ “pagan” gods.

The Romans had shown their appreciation of Corinth’s strategic position, first by destroying it in 146 BCE when it posed a threat to Rome’s expansion eastward, and then by rebuilding the city in 44 BCE and establishing it as capital of the Roman province of Achaia. In the present century, American excavators have



been uncovering the center of the bustling city the Romans rebuilt. This (above) is the view that would have greeted Paul as he arrived in Corinth. Against the sky in the background of the upper picture can be seen the hill of Acrocorinth. The walls now visible at its top date to the Byzantine and medieval periods, but this easily defensible height had provided protection for the city since its earliest settlement.

A famous temple to Aphrodite had stood on the summit of Acrocorinth in the Classical Age, near the left end of the peak as seen above. As mentioned, it had fallen into ruins by Paul's time, but successors to its 1,000 cult prostitutes continued to ply their profession in the city below. Many of them were no doubt housed in the lofts above the thirty-three wine shops uncovered in the modern excavations. Corinth was a city catering to sailors and traveling salesmen. Even by the Classical Age it had earned an unsavory reputation for its libertine atmosphere; to call someone "a Corinthian lass" was to impugn her morals.

### [Aquila & Priscilla – Acts 18:1-3](#)

18:1 **came to Corinth.** Paul spent more time here than in any other city so far.<sup>38</sup> During this time, Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians and perhaps Galatians (some believe the latter was written later with Romans).

18:2 **Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla.** Aquila and Priscilla appear to have been wealthy, Jewish leather merchants from Italy (though Aquila was originally from Pontus in northern Asia Minor). They left Rome in 49 CE when Claudius forced all the Jews to leave, which is what brought them to Corinth. They had operated or at least opened businesses in Corinth and Ephesus. They worked closely with Paul throughout much of his life both occupationally and spiritually, supporting the local church and preaching the gospel themselves.

18:3 **he was of the same craft . . . tentmakers.** Paul and Aquila were *skēnopoios* which is more than a tentmaker but one who works with leather and canvas for a variety of products. Tents, sails, and awnings were in big demand in Corinth because of the many ships that passed through and the Isthmian Games in 51 CE that brought thousands to the city.

### [Preaches to Jews and Gentiles – Acts 18:4-8](#)

18:4 **he reasoned in the synagogue.** As usual, Paul started in the synagogue teaching the Jews, then when he was rejected by the majority of them, moved out to teach the Gentiles.

18:5 **Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia.** Silas and Timothy had stayed behind in Berea when Paul first went to Athens. They appear to have expected to join Paul in Athens and perhaps went there looking for him without success, because he had moved on to Corinth. They finally found each other in Corinth.

18:5 **pressed in the spirit.** Or, "Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching" (NIV). The better manuscripts have 'with the word [preaching]' not 'in the spirit.' With the arrival of Silas and Timothy, Paul could spend less time doing tentmaking and more time preaching.

18:6 **when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed.** Or, "when they opposed and reviled him" (NRSV). The KJV language is confusing—it was Paul they were opposing and reviling. Paul's reaction was to shake his clothing and declare that their blood was upon their own heads.

18:6 **from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.** Paul had already taught Gentiles in other cities and continued to teach Jews in future efforts, so this was not a universal declaration but one specifically for the Corinthian Jews.

18:7 **entered into a certain man's house, named Justus.** Though he first lived with Aquila and Priscilla (v. 3), Paul soon moved in with Justus (called Titius Justus in many ancient manuscripts; he is also called Gaius in Romans 16:23) whose house was next door to the synagogue. In spite of the general opposition to Paul's message among the Jews, Luke related that Crispus, the ruler of synagogue, and all his family joined the church (v. 8).

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<sup>38</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:395-396; McRay, *Paul*, 164f.

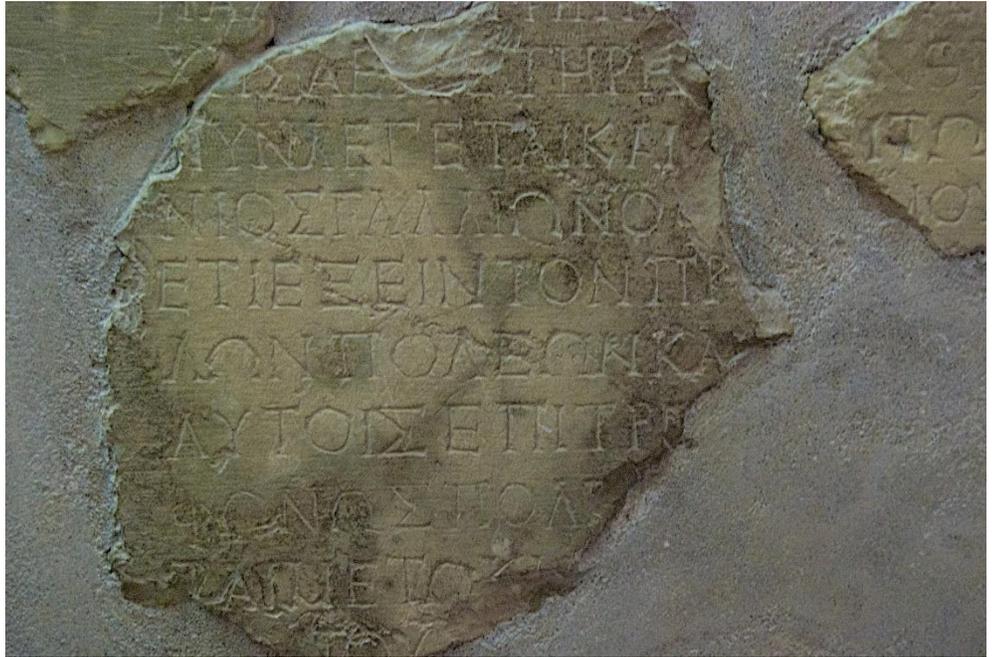
18:8 **Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue.** Paul baptized this man (1 Corinthians 1:14), which surely caused him to lose his position in the synagogue. The new leader of the synagogue was probably Sosthenes (v. 17).

#### Vision of the Lord – Acts 18:9-11

18:9 **Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision.** The Lord appeared to Paul “in the night by a vision” and assured him of his safety in Corinth, promising him much success—“I have much people in this city” (v. 10; also Doctrine and Covenants 100:3). With that promise to bolster him, Paul stayed eighteen months (v. 11).

#### Paul arraigned before Gallio – Acts 18:12-17

18:12 **Gallio was the deputy of Achaia.** This section acts as a ‘hook-date’ for Acts because we can accurately tie it to the Roman, and therefore our, calendar. Lucius Iunius Gallio Annaeanus was the brother of the famous Stoic philosopher Seneca. He was appointed proconsul of Achaia starting in the late spring (perhaps May but probably June) of 51 CE.<sup>39</sup> An inscription at the shrine of Delphi (right) provides us with the dates of Gallio’s proconsulship at Corinth. The inscription reproduces a letter of Emperor Claudius that refers to Gallio, as proconsul of Achaia in 51–52 CE. We can pinpoint Paul’s time at Corinth to that period since he appeared before Gallio shortly after the proconsul’s arrival in spring 51 CE. This means we can date the rest of his ministry with a fair degree of certainty by counting backwards and forwards from this secure date.



Paul’s arrival in Corinth gave Paul’s Jewish enemies a fresh chance to take action against him, but their plan backfired.

18:12 **the judgment seat.** Along the south side of the forum at Corinth stands the *bema* (platform) on which Roman officials stood when making public appearances and judgments. Since the American excavations uncovered remains of a later church built over the ruins of this structure, some scholars have concluded that this is the spot where that episode occurred. (See picture above of *bema* with Acrocorinth in the background.)

18:14 **If it were a matter of wrong.** Gallio stopped the proceedings before Paul could even begin his defense. He was not going to step in the middle of a religious squabble between what he viewed as Jewish sects.

18:15 **I will be no judge of such matters.** Gallio reasoned that Paul was not breaking any Roman laws but only Jewish customs (“words and names”), so he declined to rule on any wrongdoing. This ruling had the unintended effect of giving Christianity legal status in the Roman Empire, something it did not have before, as it was now determined to be a sect within Judaism, which was already an accepted and legal religion.

18:17 **Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him.** Gallio condoned roughing up the new ruler of the synagogue (or of another synagogue) who probably led bringing charges against Paul. This was tragic but not

<sup>39</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:399-400; McRay, *Paul*, 170f.

surprising given the emperor's recent persecution of Jews in Rome. Sosthenes may be the same one that Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:1. If so, persecutor here became friend and convert later.

### Ephesus – Acts 18:18-21

18:18 **took his leave.** After staying the year and a half (“a good while”), Paul finally left Corinth behind, sailing for Syria (Antioch and home), taking with him Aquila and Priscilla whom he dropped off at Ephesus. He traveled 1,500 miles in this return trip to Antioch, which Luke covered in five verses.

18:18 **having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.** Jewish law allowed for Nazarite vows where the person would shave off his hair and then offer it at the temple in Jerusalem. We don't know the nature of Paul's vow but it may simply have been one of thanksgiving for success and protection in Corinth.<sup>40</sup> Cenchrea was the eastern port of Corinth.

18:19 **came to Ephesus.** Paul only stayed a few days this time but left Aquila and Prisca here to carry on the work. Note that there were already Christians in Ephesus, even though this was Paul's first visit. Rome, too, had a sizable Christian population well before he went there. This demonstrates that other missionary efforts were going on all around the Roman world, even though Luke doesn't explicitly mention them. Paul was determined to get to Jerusalem to “keep this feast” (v. 21), probably Tabernacles.

18:20 **they desired him to tarry longer.** Paul was invited to stay at Ephesus, and while he would not give up his plan to travel on to Jerusalem, he promised his new friends in the Ephesus synagogue that, if possible, he would return (v. 21). Aquila and Priscilla stayed there where they would later meet Apollos (Acts 18:19, 26).

### Caesarea, Jerusalem, Antioch – Acts 18:22

18:22 **landed at Caesarea, and gone up.** Paul sailed from Ephesus to Caesarea. “Gone up” means to go to Jerusalem. Once he completed his vow at the temple, he returned to Antioch, having been gone at least two years in total.

Many have proposed that this was the time when Paul was ordained a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, given that in 1 and 2 Thessalonians he does not refer to himself as an apostle in the introductions but in all later letters, he does apply that title to himself.<sup>41</sup> It could be the reason he was in such a hurry to return for the feast as well—he had perhaps received his ‘call’ in a letter, requesting him to come back for ordination as soon as he was able. It is speculative, but reasonable, if Paul was indeed a member of the Twelve.

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<sup>40</sup> McRay, *Paul*, 174.

<sup>41</sup> Of course, *apostolos* means something different than “apostle” does today, typically being applied to people preaching the word of Christ as missionaries or traveling ministers. Paul's lack of use of the term in the Thessalonian letters could be related to his sense of calling as a missionary as much as some new calling among the Twelve.

# 1 Thessalonians

The two letters to the Thessalonians were both written in Corinth during Paul's second mission (50-51 CE; Acts 17-18). Paul passed through Thessalonica, a prosperous town in Macedonia (northern Greece) after leaving Philippi. For three weeks he taught Christ in the synagogue, and made many converts among the Greeks and "chief women." He was probably staying with a man named Jason, because when a mob of angry Jews were unsuccessful in finding him at Jason's house, they dragged Jason out and took him before the judges. Fearing for his safety, the saints in Thessalonica sent Paul away. He journeyed first to Berea, then Athens, then Corinth. From Berea he sent Timothy back to check on things at Thessalonica. When Timothy met up with Paul in Corinth with his report, Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, and a few months later followed it up with 2 Thessalonians.

The two Thessalonian letters are Paul's oldest letters in the New Testament, which actually makes them the first recorded Christian documents.

## Outline

1. Salutation and Praise (1:1-10)
2. Paul's Ministry to Thessalonica (2:1-16)
3. Concerns After Paul's Departure (2:17 – 3:5)
4. Timothy's Encouraging Report (3:6-13)
5. An Upright Life (4:1-12)
6. The Return of the Lord (4:13-18)
7. The Day of the Lord (5:1-11)
8. Final Encouragement (5:12-28)

## Salutation and Praise – 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

1:1 **Paul**. Paul did not refer to himself in the opening of this letter as an apostle as he did in most of his writings. However, he did declare his authority in 2:6. The JST does strengthen the opening authoritative sentence, shifting the phrase about God and Christ to Paul and his companions:

1 Thessalonians 1:1 KJV	JST
Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians <del>which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ</del> : Grace <i>be</i> unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.	Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, <b>servants of god the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ</b> , unto the church of the Thessalonians: Grace <i>be</i> unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Interestingly, some early manuscripts omit the phrase that the JST deleted (though not moving it to another part of the verse and did Joseph Smith).

1:1 **Silvanus, and Timotheus**. "Silvanus" is Silas, Paul's companion on his second mission. "Timotheus" is Timothy.

1:1 **Grace be unto you, and peace**. Many of Paul's letters start with such an introduction, evoking both a Gentile ("grace") and Jewish ("peace") form of greeting. Many opening greetings are longer but in this first letter, he kept it succinct.

1:3 **your work of faith, and labour of love**. Paul thought highly of the members of Thessalonica (see next verse).

1:4 **your election of God**. "Election" is *eklogē*, meaning to be picked out or chosen. Romans is the only other letter where Paul used this particular word, and there he taught that to be 'elected' by God meant to be chosen to do his work and spread the gospel—it was a responsibility far more than a privilege (Romans 9:11; 11:5, 7, 28; also Acts 9:15). This is reflected in verses 7-8 here as well.

1:5 **in power, and in the Holy Ghost**. Paul reminded the Thessalonian Saints that they didn't just come preaching words, but acting with power and authority, and had their words confirmed by the Holy Spirit.

1:6 **having received the word in much affliction.** The saints in Thessalonica had suffered for the conversion to Christianity, probably socially, financially, and politically. Believing in Christ in that time and place was a sacrifice.

1:7 **ye were ensamples.** “Ensamples” is often rendered ‘example’ or ‘model,’ but the word *tupos* means ‘the effect of a blow’ or ‘the impress of a seal.’ It is used in metal and stonework when the hammer strikes the object to change its shape. Paul’s meaning is that the Thessalonians received the word of God “in much affliction” (verse 6) and were thus shaped by the pounding as powerful examples to others in Greece. (John had Thomas use the same word in John 20:25 when Thomas said he would not believe until he saw and felt the *tupos* [“print”] of the nails in Jesus’ hands.)

1:7 **Macedonia and Achaia.** This includes Philippi, Athens, Corinth, and Berea, among other potential locations.

1:8 **we need not to speak any thing.** The powerful example shown by the Thessalonian saints to others in the region spoke louder than Paul’s best sermon.

1:10 **delivered us from the wrath to come.** Paul spoke in other letters of God’s coming wrath, related to the judgment around the Second Coming (Romans 1:18; 2:16; Colossians 3:6). There is a strong Second Coming theme throughout both Thessalonian letters and a great sense of urgency about it.

## Paul’s Ministry to Thessalonica – 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

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2:1 **brethren.** Like many cases in the NT, this is not just addressed to men. The Greek term here can mean both men and women.

2:1 **our entrance in unto you.** Or, “our coming to you was not in vain” (NRSV).

2:2 **we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as you know, at Philippi.** Paul was beaten and imprisoned at Philippi (see Acts 16). That was shameful treatment because he was a Roman citizen.

2:3 **not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile.** Paul contrasted how he, Silas, Timothy, and Luke came and taught them (see Acts 17) to how missionaries of other gods behaved. This passage and others indicates that Paul’s credibility was being challenged and he felt the need to defend his actions. Those preaching false gods “taught and spoke only to receive money and praise.”<sup>42</sup>

Why would someone think poorly of Paul? On the surface, his acts could have been interpreted in a negative way. First, he received money from other churches (Philippians 4:16). Second, in Thessalonica he converted wealthy (“chief”, Acts 17:4) women and Jason, wealthy enough to have a large home (Acts 17:5-9). Third, he left town abruptly (Acts 17:10) and had not returned or even written them until now. To someone on the outside, this kind of activity might appear not different than the charlatans of other gods that sometimes passed through town.

But in verses 3-7, Paul said that he and his companions suffered, were persecuted and insulted, and still delivered their message; they taught “without deceit or guilt, without flattery or covetousness, and only to please God, not for the glory of men. . . they labored for their own support, disavowing any financial motives.” And they expressed tender concern for their converts.<sup>43</sup>

2:8 **also our own souls.** Paul proclaimed that the saints at Thessalonica were so dear to him that he and the others were willing to give their very breath (*psyche*) for them.

2:9 **labouring night and day.** Paul was perhaps preaching by day and doing leatherwork by night (or vice versa) to support himself so that he would not be “chargeable” (a burden) to anyone there.

2:11 **as a father doth his children.** Paul thought of his relationship to his converts as a father caring for his children.

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<sup>42</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 3:414.

<sup>43</sup> Jo Ann H. Seely, “Hope for the ‘Children of Light’ as the Darkness Descends,” in Millet, *Acts to Revelations*, 6:153.

2:14 **ye have also suffered**. Other church members, such as the Jewish Christians in Judea, suffered much for their belief in Christ. Paul should know—he was one of the leading persecutors at the beginning. Paul compared the struggles in Thessalonica to those of the Jewish Christians, both to give them confidence in their trials and to bring the Jewish and Gentile elements of the church together; they shared a common challenge to their faith.

## Concerns After Paul's Departure – 1 Thessalonians 2:17 – 3:5

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2:17-18 Paul tried to return to Thessalonica but was stopped by Satan. There is no record that he ever returned to the city, though it is possible it happened during his travels in Macedonia during his third mission.

2:17 **taken from you**. Literally, 'orphaned from you.' Paul felt like a child ripped from his parents in relation to having left the Thessalonian saints so suddenly. He greatly desired to see them again.

2:18 **Satan hindered us**. *Enkoptō* means how one army destroys a road so another army cannot use it.

2:19 **Jesus Christ at his coming**. Paul considered the people who had embraced the gospel his "glory and joy" (v. 20) as he had prepared them for the Second Coming of the Lord through teachings and ordinances.

3:1 **we thought it good to be left at Athens alone**. Paul was comforted after going to Athens, then sending Timothy back to Thessalonica to return with good news of their continued faithfulness; see Acts 17:13-15; 18:1-5. The sequence was probably: Paul, Silas, and Timothy left Thessalonica for Berea; Luke had stayed behind in Philippi (the 'we' passages end in Acts 17). When the Thessalonian Jew came to Berea to give them problems, Paul went to Athens; Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (v. 2) and Silas somewhere else in Macedonia (Philippi?; Acts 18:5); Paul continued on to Corinth where Timothy joined him with news from Thessalonica (v. 6).

3:4 **we told you before that we should suffer tribulation**. Paul was concerned that the testimony of the Thessalonians saints would be impacted by his afflictions—perhaps because of the common notion in their society that suffering is only brought on by sin. He was clear that he had anticipated persecution and so was not surprised when it came (it had been the pattern in his entire first journey). He wanted them to understand that it was because of Satan's opposition to the work, not some sin on his part.

## Timothy's Encouraging Report – 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

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3:6 **when Timotheus came from you unto us**. Acts 18:5 reported that Timothy (and Silas) returned with reports for Paul. This tie to Acts indicates that this letter was written from Corinth.

3:7 **we were comforted**. Paul and his companions had left under distress, fearing that the persecutions they had faced would still be raging against the Thessalonians and would cause them to fall from the faith. But Timothy confirmed that it was not so—they remained faithful and strong. This news brought Paul great joy (vv. 8-9).

3:10 **Night and day praying exceedingly**. Paul's tender feelings are candidly expressed by his constant prayers in behalf of the saints and his great desire to see them again to strengthen their faith.

3:11 **direct our way unto you**. Or, 'Clear the way for us to come to you.' This refers back to Satan blocking their path in 2:18.

3:12 **increase and abound in love**. Paul desired above all else that the saints support each other in love, and share that same love with others. He held up his sacrifice and that of his companions as examples to them.

3:13 **stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness**. Or, "may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God" (NRSV).

3:13 **at the coming of our Lord**. Another reference to Paul's sense of the imminent Second Coming.

## An Upright Life – 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

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4:1 **ye ought to walk and to please God.** God calls us to holiness and sanctification through obedience. Any close study of Paul’s theology, even at this earliest stage, shows that obedience to commandments is a critical part of his teachings.

4:3 **sanctification.** *Hagiasmos*; the same word is translated “holiness” in verse 7, meaning to ‘consecrate’ or ‘dedicate something to God.’ Thus ‘to be made holy’ means to be committed and devoted, to surrender ourselves to the will of the Lord. In the Old Testament, it had the meaning of being separate and distinct, set apart by a boundary.

We are sanctified by denying ourselves all ungodliness while loving and serving God with all our abilities. Then the grace of God brings the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost into our lives, and we become holy (see Moroni 10:32-33; 2 Nephi 27:19-21; also McConkie, 3:49).

4:3 **fornication.** *Porneia*, meaning any form of sexual sin. Sexual acts were commonly part of the worship of other gods. It was also common for men to have relations with other women “for sexual and intellectual companionship.”<sup>44</sup> One ancient writer, Demosthenes, matter-of-factly explained: “Mistresses we keep for our pleasure, concubines for our day-to-day physical well-being, and wives to bear us legitimate children and to serve as trustworthy guardians over our households.”<sup>45</sup> Paul condemns these Roman practices, telling them to abstain.

4:4 **possess his vessel in sanctification and honor.** Or, “learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable” (NIV).

4:5 **the lust of concupiscence.** Or, “lustful passion” (NRSV, NASB, NLT).

4:6 **no man go beyond and defraud his brother.** Or, “no one wrong or exploit a brother or sister” (NRSV).

4:7 **God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.** ‘God didn’t call us to moral or personal impurity, but to consecration.’

4:8 **He there that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God.** “whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God” (ESV).

4:9 **taught of God to love one another.** Not taught by man but by God through the gift of his Spirit.

4:11 **study to be quiet.** ‘strive to live a quiet life,’ one without controversy or confrontation.

4:11 **work with your own hands.** As he explained, Paul had already “commanded” them about this (see also v. 2), so this was a reminder. However, this problem of idleness was a major focus of 2 Thessalonians, so it must have been a deeply-rooted problem there.

4:12 **them that are without.** ‘those who are not members of the church.’

## The Return of the Lord – 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

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4:15, 17 JST

1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17 KJV	JST
For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that <del>we which</del> are alive <del>and remain unto</del> the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them <del>which</del> are asleep	For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that <b>they who</b> are alive <b>at</b> the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them <b>who remain unto the coming of the Lord, who</b> are asleep

<sup>44</sup> Seely, “Hope for the ‘Children of Light’” in Millet, *Acts to Revelations*, 6:155.

<sup>45</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 3:419.

Then ~~we which~~ are alive ~~and remain~~ shall be caught up together ~~with them~~ in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Then **they who** are alive shall be caught up together **into** the clouds **with them who remain**, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we **be** ever be with the Lord.

In the KJV, Paul appears to believe that the Second Coming was very soon. In the JST, both verses 15 and 17 are changed from “we” to “they,” adding some distance to the event. Thus in the JST, Paul’s intention was not to imply that people of his day would be alive at the return of Jesus but rather that those who died before the Second Coming would be resurrected just like those who will be alive at that time. This reflects a broader pattern on Joseph Smith’s part to reconcile such references to an imminent Second Coming in the NT to the reality that nearly 2,000 years later, it had not yet happened.

4:15 **by the word of the Lord**. Paul spoke by revelation, not just his own opinion.

4:15 **prevent**. Not ‘to stop’ something, but to ‘come before’ or ‘precede.’ The meaning is that those alive will not be resurrected before those who are dead.

4:17 **caught up together**. This verse is a key scripture that pre-tribulation rapturists (such as those who created the popular *Left Behind* series of books and movies) use to support their view (if anyone asks, Latter-day Saints are post-tribulation rapturists). The word ‘rapture’ comes from the Latin Vulgate translation (*rapiemur*, in this verse; *rapto* in the root form) of the Greek term here, *harpazō*, which means to be ‘snatched’ or ‘taken away.’

4:17 **meet the Lord in the air**. The verb Paul used is the same one the Savior used in the parable of the Ten Virgins when they meet the bridegroom. It also applied to a delegation of citizens welcoming a visiting dignitary (as with Paul in Acts 28:15). The concept is that the resurrected saints and the ones alive who are caught up together and escort the Savior back to earth to welcome him home.<sup>46</sup> Compare Doctrine and Covenants 45:45 and 109:75.

## The Day of the Lord – 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

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5:2 **as a thief in the night**. Jesus used this analogy (Matthew 24:43-44; Luke 12:39); the way Paul presented this idea shows that it was common knowledge among church members. Paul and the rest of them surely got it from some of Jesus’ teachings that they learned from Peter, Mark, or others (though the gospels were not yet in written form).

5:3 **Peace and safety**. This was a Roman mantra, that the empire brought peace and safety. Paul refutes that claim, predicting coming destruction associated with the Second Coming.

5:5 **Ye are all the children of light**. Another image from Jesus, as taught in John 12:35-36.

5:6 **watch and be sober**. Though it is a day of darkness (v. 7), they must stay awake. “Watch” is the same word Jesus used when asking his disciples to stay awake with him in the garden of Gethsemane, another allusion to Paul’s understanding of Jesus’ teachings. The saints should not indulge in drunkenness or other activities that would distract them from vigilance.

5:8 **breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation**. This is the first mention of the armor of God, more fully developed in Ephesians 6:11-18. Here he spoke of faith, hope, and love, Paul’s triad of virtues; like Isaiah 59:17, “he mentions only defensive armor, and these three traits are the defense par excellence against the darkness.”<sup>47</sup>

## Final Encouragement – 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

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These verses contain a catalog of exhortations to righteous behavior.

<sup>46</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 3:423.

<sup>47</sup> Seely, “Hope for the ‘Children of Light’” in Millet, *Acts to Revelations*, 6:157.

5:12 **know them which labour among you.** The practice of calling local leaders is hinted at here. After the church was established in a region, leaders would be called to keep watch over (the meaning of “bishop”) the saints.

5:14 **comfort the feebleminded.** We typically define this word in terms of mental capacity, but *oligopsuchos* means ‘fainthearted.’ Paul calls on them to comfort anyone struggling with the faith or their own trials.

5:19 **Quench not the Spirit.** Or, “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire” (NIV). The feelings of the Holy Spirit are often compared to a fire burning within us; don’t do any sinful thing to pour water on that fire.

5:25 **pray for us.** An appropriate request for Paul and his companions, and a reminder for us to pray for our leaders and missionaries.

5:26 (JST) “Greet all the brethren with an holy ~~kiss~~ **salutation.**” Like other letters, the JST changes “kiss” to a more generic “salutation” or greeting. Though greeting another man with a kiss was common in the first century (and still is in many parts of the world today), Joseph’s translation captures the sense of Paul’s message without the possible discomfort “kiss” creates for modern westerners.

## 2 Thessalonians

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The issues raised in the second letter are similar to those in the first, so these notes will highlight key differences or unique insights. Paul and his companions responded to the continued persecution being suffered by the Thessalonian saints, misunderstandings about the Second Coming, and the problem of idleness.<sup>48</sup> This letter was written very shortly after the first one. Paul still clearly is working under the idea that the Second Coming is soon but that certain things must first happen.

### Outline

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1. Salutation (1:1-4)
2. The Coming Judgment (1:5-12)
3. Signs Preceding the Second Coming (2:1-12)
4. An Eternal Comfort (2:13-17)
5. Pray for Us (3:1-5)
6. Warning about Idleness (3:6-15)
7. Final Remarks (3:16-18)

### Salutation – 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

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1:1 **Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus.** The same people from Corinth as in the first letter. The JST changes this verse similarly to 1 Thessalonians 1:1, calling the three men “servants of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

### The Coming Judgment – 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

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1:5 **a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God.** “All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right” (NIV). God was preparing them for his kingdom through their sufferings (verse 4), so they could be “counted worthy.”

1:6 **recompense tribulation to them that trouble you.** ‘One day, Jesus will come in power and those who persecute you will be judged by him.’

1:7 **you who are troubled rest with us.** Opposite of the experience of the persecutors in verse 6, those who have suffered under their hands will find rest; Paul adds “with us” to signify that he and his companions have also suffered such persecutions and were patiently waiting for that judgment to make all things right.

1:9 (JST) “Who shall be punished with ~~everlasting~~ destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his **everlasting** power;” The simple moving of a word in this verse shifts the focus from the punishment back to the Lord, whose power is everlasting.

1:10 **to be glorified in his saints.** At his Second Coming, Christ will receive the praise of those who worship him and have patiently awaited that day.

### Signs Preceding the Second Coming – 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

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2:2 (JST) “That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled **by letter, except ye receive it from us**; neither by spirit, nor by word, ~~nor by letter as from us~~, as that the day of Christ is at hand.” Some letters had apparently arrived among the church members that were not from Paul and were teaching differing doctrines.

2:3 (JST) “Let no man deceive you by any means: for ~~that day shall not come, except~~ there **shall** come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;” The JST makes the prediction of the apostasy stronger.

2:3 **a falling away.** The Greek is even stronger: *hē apostasia* (‘the apostasy’) means a ‘mutiny,’ ‘rebellion,’ or ‘revolt.’ The definite article indicates a specific event. The New Jerusalem Bible translates this “the Great Revolt.” Other translations use ‘the apostasy’ (NASB); ‘the rebellion’ (NIV); ‘a great rebellion’ (NLT). Many have

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<sup>48</sup> Seely, “Hope for the ‘Children of Light’” in Millet, *Acts to Revelations*, 6:158.

(unsuccessfully) tried to tie this to a specific event in the Roman period, such as the destruction of Jerusalem. But Paul's very words imply a general rebellion against the doctrine of Christ. It is not a slow, accidental slide into darkness but a willful mutiny against the truth.

2:3 **that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.** The "man of sin" is Satan, of course. He is also "the son of perdition," meaning destruction. The adverb can be seen in two ways: he either "brings destruction" (NLT) or he is "doomed to destruction" (NIV). Both fit him well.

2:4 **he as God sitteth in the temple of God.** Paul used the temple figuratively almost every time, as he did here. In spite of attempts to bend this scripture to fit some historical event in or near Paul's life, this was a metaphor for the church (as is Ephesians 2:21). God at first dwelt in the church, but after the apostasy, Satan will dwell in it as if he were God.<sup>49</sup>

2:5 **I told you these things.** The verb tense is one of an action repeated many times; 'I told you these things over and over.'

2:6 "And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed" (NASB).

2:7 (JST) "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work, **and only he it is who now worketh, and Christ suffereth him to work** ~~letheth will let~~, until **the time is fulfilled that he shall** be taken out of the way." The meaning of the verse in the JST is enhanced by being explicit that Christ is the one that allows Satan a certain amount of power now but still maintains control and will, in the end, put the devil "out of the way."

2:9 (JST) "**Yea, the Lord, even Jesus him,** whose coming is **not until** after **there cometh a falling away, by** the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders." Bringing back the notion of the falling away from verse 3, the JST confirms that the apostasy is the work of Satan and precedes the Second Coming.

## An Eternal Comfort – 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

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2:13 **from the beginning chosen you to salvation.** The Greek word translated "beginning" here has many connotations but perhaps the most relevant in this passage is 'the first person in a thing or series.' In other words, Paul is not saying that the Thessalonians were chosen to be saved before they were born or any such doctrine. Rather, he is saying that they were the among the first to accept the gospel in that dispensation and are the "firstfruits for salvation" (NAB) among the people of their region.

2:15 **hold the traditions which ye have been taught.** It is always a challenge to set aside traditions or beliefs that conflict with gospel truth when you have been raised differently. Paul invites the saints to "stand fast" in the new traditions he has shared with them in conjunction with their conversions.

## Pray for US – 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

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3:1 **pray for us.** As in 1 Thessalonians, Paul requests the prayers of his converts to help him wage war against darkness and teach the truth with effectiveness.

3:5 **the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God.** To "direct" is to 'make straight,' as Isaiah called for and John the Baptist recited (Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:3). God doesn't just call to us, he clears the road and makes the journey as easy as he possibly can.

## Warning about Idleness – 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

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3:6 **withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly.** People we spend time with influence our behavior. Paul was concerned that his new converts might return to their old ways if they continued to be with those who violated God's commands, so he counseled minimizing the time spent in such company. See also verses 14-15.

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<sup>49</sup> Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 86; Seely, "Hope for the 'Children of Light'" in Millet, *Acts to Revelations*, 6:160-161.

3:10 **if any would not work, neither should he eat.** Apparently many believed that the Second Coming was so close that they quit their jobs and were sitting around waiting for Jesus to appear. Paul said that only those who work get to eat (a likely reference to the *agapē* meal or extended sacrament feast that the saints often shared in their worship), that those walking “disorderly” like soldiers marching out of line, being “busybodies,” and worrying about other people’s affairs (verse 11) would eat alone.

3:15 **admonish him as a brother.** Coming back to his point not to spend time with sinners (verse 6), Paul clarified that he didn’t want to make enemies even of unbelievers but continue to work with them as a good brother would who was trying to set things right.

## Final Remarks – 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18

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3:17 **with mine own hand, which is the token.** At the end of many of his letters, Paul added a short note of authentication, so the listeners would know it was truly from him. We do not know what the “token” or sign was but it had to be something anyone who knew him would immediately recognize to legitimize his letters.

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### Abbreviations:

- AT – Author’s translation
- BYU – BYU New Rendition
- CJB – Complete Jewish Bible
- ESV – English Standard Version
- JST – Joseph Smith Translation
- KJV – King James Version
- LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
- NASB – New American Standard Bible
- NIV – New International Version
- NJB – New Jerusalem Bible
- NLT – New Living Translation
- NRSV – New Revised Standard Version
- TNT – William Tyndale 1534 New Testament

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