

SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 17:1-34 / April 50 – Sept. 52

In April 50AD, about six months after the Jerusalem Council, Paul set out on his second missionary journey. His partner was Silas. Paul and Silas started by visiting the churches Paul had planted on his first missionary journey: Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia. They likely read the letter from the Jerusalem Council to strengthen the gentile believers against the Judaizers. In Lystra, Timothy joined the team. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the team eventually reached Philippi in late April or early May 50AD. Following the events in Philippi, they eventually arrived in Thessalonica¹, a beautiful seaside city in Macedonia.

Acts 17:1–9 (ESV) Paul and Silas at Thessalonica

In Thessalonica, Paul followed his typical pattern: he first preached in the Jewish synagogue. Both Jews and God-fearing Gentiles believed. But in Thessalonica, another typical pattern played out; unbelieving Jews became jealous of Paul's influence and they set out to stop Paul. In this case, Paul's enemies went to the marketplace in the center of Thessalonica, also known as the *forum*, and recruited some ne'er do wells to kidnap Paul. Fortunately, someone caught wind of the scheme and hustled Paul into hiding. When the mob came to Jason's house, where Paul had been staying, they didn't find Paul so they hauled Jason and some of his friends before the city magistrates.

They probably took them to the *odeon*, a small amphitheater located at one end of the marketplace. The Jews accused Paul of sedition, of promoting Jesus as a rival king to Caesar. The city magistrates had to take this accusation seriously or they risked being seen by the Romans as complicit in a possible revolt. They forced Jason and the others to pay a fine as a guaranty Paul wouldn't preach anymore. That night, the team left Thessalonica heading west and south until they came to the city of Berea.

Acts 17:10–15 Paul and Silas in Berea

Berea must have been a breath of fresh air for Paul. The Jews in Berea were open to Paul's teaching. They studied the Scripture for themselves and found Paul's interpretations correct. As a result, many Jews and God-fearers believed and a church was planted. It was not long before Paul's Jewish enemies in Thessalonica got wind of Paul's success in Berea. Not content to just drive Paul from their city, the Jews from Thessalonica drove Paul from Berea as well.

The Berean brothers took Paul clear down to Athens². Silas and Timothy remained in Berea to disciple the new believers and to stay in touch with the believers in Thessalonica.

Acts 17:16–34 Paul in Athens

¹ Thessalonica was located at the intersection of two major Roman roads, one leading from Italy eastward (Via Egnatia) and the other from the Danube River to the Aegean Sea (north-south). Thessalonica's location and use as a port made it a prominent city. In 146B it was made the capital of the whole Roman province of Macedonia. Today the modern city of Thessaloniki is the second most important city of Greece and home to a million residents.

² In ancient history, Athens was the most significant of all the cities of Greece. However, it does not get much attention in the Bible since few people in Athens responded to the gospel. In addition, Athens did not hold the political or economic significance in Roman times that it had in earlier periods of Greek history, though it remained an important cultural center.

Acts 17:16–31 Paul's Presentation

Paul presented a two-point message to the members of the Areopagus:

Point #1: The one, true God created you.

Point #2: The one, true God will judge you.

God's judge is the man whom God raised from the dead.

We tend to think that every time Paul preached, he hit a home run, but in this case his preaching was met with a very limited response.

Acts 17:32-34 The Athenians' Response

There were only a few who responded positively to Paul in Athens. There is no mention in the rest of the Scriptures that a church was planted there.

Here in Acts 17, we see clearly Paul tailoring his Gospel presentation to his audience. When with fellow Jews, he shows them from the Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah, that it was prophesied He would suffer and that He would be resurrected from the dead. When dealing with the Greeks of Athens, Paul started with creation and concluded with judgment.

The minimal response in Athens also teaches us to have realistic expectations. Even one of the greatest evangelists of the Church did not always enjoy a large harvest. Our job is to faithfully tell Jesus' story in as relevant a way as possible that will connect with our audience. We then trust God with the response.

Voice of the Martyrs Needs for November: bath towels, wash cloths, disposable antiseptic wipes.

David Burney Memorial, Saturday, November 12th, 11AM, Grace Church.

Pam Bueno Memorial, Saturday, November 19th, 11AM, Grace Church.

