

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 15:36—18:22

Opening Thought

1) If you were going to design the ideal pastor, what qualities (gifts, abilities, character traits, etc.) would you consider to be absolutely essential? Why?

What about the ideal Sunday school teacher or small group leader?

How about the ideal missionary?

Background of the Passage

Luke records that when the time came for a second missionary journey, Barnabas and Paul had a sharp disagreement concerning John Mark. Barnabas wanted to take his nephew, but Paul refused, citing the young man's desertion during the first evangelistic endeavor. Thus, in the sovereignty of God, two missionary teams were formed: Paul and Silas, and Barnabas and Mark. Even though no further word is given regarding the results of Barnabas's and Mark's evangelistic efforts, we see kingdom messengers departing Antioch in two directions.

The Apostle Paul and Silas returned to the churches of Asia Minor. At Lystra Paul met Timothy, who proved to be a beloved and dependable colleague. Forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go into the provinces of Asia and Bithynia, Paul and his companions were directed, instead, through Mysia to the city of Troas. There Paul had a divine vision instructing him to go to Macedonia.

In response to this Macedonian call, Paul and his assistants immediately set sail. At Philippi (in what is now northern Greece) they encountered a group of God-fearing women. Among these was Lydia, a wealthy cloth merchant, who embraced the gospel. She became the first European convert and hosted Paul and his entourage in her home during their ministry in Philippi. Despite opposition and a run-in with the authorities, Paul and his team continued to spread the gospel powerfully to every strata of society.

Leaving Luke in Philippi, Paul, Silas, and Timothy journeyed to Thessalonica. The response was typical—a revival among the Greeks and a riot at the hands of the Jewish leaders! But God continued to use persecution and opposition to spread the good news of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus Christ. The ruckus in Thessalonica pushed Paul and Silas to Berea where they found a very teachable and receptive Greek audience. In a short time, hostile Jews came from Thessalonica to attack Paul’s work in Berea. This succeeded only in getting the great evangelist to Athens.

At Mars Hill, Paul demonstrated his ability to be all things to all people, preaching the gospel of the resurrected Christ using concepts and terms the Athenian philosophers could easily grasp. Some scoffed at his message, but others indicated their interest in hearing more.

Moving on to Corinth, Paul met Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple (and fellow tentmakers) who proved to be faithful partners in the gospel (see Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19). Paul’s ministry in this decadent city was long and fruitful (verse 11). Not even a concerted effort by the Jews could stop him from teaching the word.

Eventually Paul set sail for Syria with Priscilla and Aquila. He made a brief stop in Ephesus, leaving his faithful colleagues there. Next, he continued on to the church at Jerusalem to report on his activity. Then he departed for Antioch. This marked the end of Paul’s second missionary journey.

Bible Passage

Read 15:36—18:22, noting the key words and definitions to the right of the passage.

Acts 15:36—18:22

³⁶ *Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.”*

³⁷ *Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark.*

³⁸ *But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.*

³⁹ *Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus;*

⁴⁰ *but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God.*

⁴¹ *And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.*

^{16:1} *Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek.*

² *He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium.*

³ *Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.*

⁴ *And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.*

5 *So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.*
6 *Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.*
7 *After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them.*
8 *So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.*
9 *And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."*
10 *Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.*
11 *Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days.*
12 *And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.*
13 *Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.*
14 *And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.*
15 *Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by—fortune-telling.*
16 *This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."*
17 *And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.*
18 *But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.*
19 *And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe."*
20 *Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods.*
21 *And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.*
22 *Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.*
23 *But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.*
24 *Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.*
25 *And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.*
26 *But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."*
27 *Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.*
28 *And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*
29 *So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."*
30 *Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.*
31 *And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.*
32 *Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.*
33 *And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go."*
34 *So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace."*
35 *But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into*

38 *prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.”*
39 *And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were*
40 *Romans.*
39 *Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city.*
40 *So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they*
encouraged them and departed.

17:1 *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was*
a synagogue of the Jews.
2 *Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the*
3 *Scriptures,*
4 *explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This*
5 *Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.”*
6 *And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading*
7 *women, joined Paul and Silas.*
8 *But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace,*
9 *and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them*
10 *out to the people.*
11 *But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out,*
12 *“These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.*
13 *“Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is*
14 *another king—Jesus.”*
15 *And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things.*
16 *So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.*
17 *Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went*
18 *into the synagogue of the Jews.*
19 *These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness,*
20 *and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*
21 *Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.*
22 *But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they*
23 *came there also and stirred up the crowds.*
24 *Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there.*
25 *So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to*
26 *come to him with all speed, they departed.*
27 *Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was*
28 *given over to idols.*
29 *Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the*
30 *marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.*
31 *Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, “What does this babbler*
32 *want to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,” because he preached to them*
33 *Jesus and the resurrection.*
34 *And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new doctrine is of*
35 *which you speak?*
36 *“For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things*
37 *mean.”*
38 *For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or*
39 *to hear some new thing.*
40 *Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you*
41 *are very religious;*
42 *“for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this*
43 *inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I*
44 *proclaim to you:*

24 *“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in
temples made with hands.*

25 *“Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath,
and all things.*

26 *“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has
determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,*

27 *“so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is
not far from each one of us;*

28 *“for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are
also His offspring.’*

29 *“Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or
silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.*

30 *“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,*

31 *“because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He
has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”*

32 *And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, “We will hear you
again on this matter.”*

33 *So Paul departed from among them.*

34 *However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named
Damaris, and others with them.*

18:1 *After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.*

2 *And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife
Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.*

3 *So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were
tentmakers.*

4 *And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.*

5 *When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the
Jews that Jesus is the Christ.*

6 *But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon
your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”*

7 *And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God,
whose house was next door to the synagogue.*

8 *Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the
Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.*

9 *Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent;
for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.”*

10 *And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.*

11 *When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to
the judgment seat,*

12 *saying, “This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.”*

13 *And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or
wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you.*

14 *“But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a
judge of such matters.”*

15 *And he drove them from the judgment seat.*

16 *Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But
Gallio took no notice of these things.*

17 *So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla
and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow.*

18 *And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the
Jews.*

- ²⁰ *When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent,*
²¹ *but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus.*
²² *And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch.*

see how they are doing (15:36)—Paul recognized that he had a responsibility to help new believers grow in the faith.

contention ... parted (v. 39)—This sharp disagreement resulted in two ministry teams. The men eventually reconciled.

Silas (v. 40)—An ideal companion for Paul, Silas had prophetic gifts, Jewish credentials, and Roman citizenship.

Syria and Cilicia (v. 41)—Paul may have founded churches in these cities before his association with the Antioch church (see Galatians 1:21).

a certain disciple ... Timothy (16:1)—Paul's "true child in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2) who eventually became Paul's right-hand man; he too had a Jew-Gentile heritage (an asset for a missionary)

circumcised him (v. 2)—in order to make him more acceptable to the Jews and give him access to the synagogues

decrees (v. 4)—the ruling of the Jerusalem Council

Holy Spirit ... Asia (v. 6)— Paul was divinely prohibited from carrying out his plan to minister in Asia Minor.

vision (v. 9)—the second of six visions that Luke records Paul as having received

Macedonia (v. 9)—across the Aegean Sea from Troas, on the Greek mainland (that is, in Europe)

we (v. 10)—Luke had obviously joined Paul, Silas, and Timothy by this point in the journey.

Philippi (v. 12)—Located ten miles from the port city of Neapolis, this Roman colony was named for Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great.

to the riverside (v. 13)— Evidently the Jewish community did not have the minimum of ten men required to form a synagogue, so the group met near the Gangites River.

seller of purple (v. 14)—Purple dye was expensive, so purple fabrics were bought by the wealthy at a premium price. Lydia was a prosperous businesswoman.

The Lord opened her heart(v. 14)—proof of the sovereignty of God in salvation

a spirit of divination (v. 16) —literally, "a python spirit," an expression from Greek mythology where a python guarded the oracle at Delphi; this girl was a medium involved in demonic activities

the Most High God (v. 17)— literally, El Elyon, an Old Testament title for God referring to His absolute sovereignty

Jews ... trouble our city(v. 20)—Such anti-Semitism may have been a factor in the Emperor Claudius's edict that expelled all the Jews from Rome (see 18:2).

magistrates ... commanded them to be beaten (v. 22)— These judges illegally punished Paul, as they had not been given a hearing, nor had they been convicted of a crime.

inner prison ... in the stocks (v. 24)—in the most secure part of the prison with their legs spread apart and locked in a painful position

about to kill himself (v. 27)—Roman soldiers who allowed a prisoner to escape were executed; this man obviously preferred suicide over such a fate.

you and your household (v. 31)—that is, all who were old enough to comprehend the gospel and believe it **were afraid when they heard they were Romans** (v. 37)—Roman citizens enjoyed great privilege and protection by law; these magistrates had trampled the rights of Paul and Silas.

as his custom was (17:2)—Paul would begin his ministry in each place with the Jews.

three Sabbaths (v. 2)—the length of public ministry; though Paul ministered privately there for several months

contrary to the decrees of Caesar (v. 7)—To acknowledge allegiance to any king but Caesar was a serious crime in the Roman Empire.

security (v. 9)—They posted bond, forfeitable in the event of further trouble.

Athens (v. 15)—the cultural, religious, and philosophical center of Greece

idols (v. 16)—Athens was a hotbed of paganism.

Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (v. 18)—The Epicureans sought to avoid pain and seek pleasure; the Stoics advocated self-denial.

babbling (v. 18)—Literally, “seed-picker;” the label means they viewed Paul as a shallow person who borrowed bits and pieces from many different philosophical systems.

THE UNKNOWN GOD (v. 23) —The Athenians at least acknowledged the existence of some kind of supernatural power or force; Paul used this fact as a springboard in his attempt to introduce them to the one true God.

God, who made the world (v. 24)—This teaching contradicted both Epicureanism (which stated that matter is eternal) and Stoicism (which stated that God was one with the universe and could not, therefore, have created Himself

seek the Lord (v. 27)—in response to God’s self-revelation as creator, ruler, and controller of the world

in Him we ... have our being (v. 28)—a quote from the Cretan poet Epimenides

offspring of God (v. 29)—a quote from Aratus, who hailed from Paul’s home region of Cilicia

resurrection of the dead (v. 32)—a doctrine flatly rejected by Greek philosophy

Corinth (18:1)—The leading commercial and political center in Greece on a major trade route, Corinth was a city seething with immorality.

Priscilla and Aquila (v. 2)—a husband and wife team who became two of Paul’s most valued colleagues in ministry; probably already believers when they met Paul

commanded (v. 2)—This decree was issued in A.D. 49.

Your blood be upon your own heads (v. 6)—Paul held his enemies completely responsible for blaspheming Christ and rejecting the gospel.

Justus (v. 7)—a Roman, possibly Gaius Titius Justus (see Romans 16:23) who was interested in the gospel

vision (v. 9)—Paul’s third in a series of six recorded by Luke

I have many people in this city (v. 10)—God had appointed a number of people in Corinth for salvation; these elect would come to faith through Paul’s preaching.

a year and six months (v. 11) —Paul’s longest stay anywhere, except Ephesus

contrary to the law (v. 13)—a charge that Christianity, viewed then by the Romans as simply a sect within the tolerated religion of Judaism, was actually an aberration and should not be tolerated; a serious charge that could have resulted in a ban on Christianity throughout the Roman Empire; Gallio refused to get caught up in what he viewed as an internal squabble within Judaism

Sosthenes (v. 17)—The Greeks may have been venting general hostility or they may have been angry at his unsuccessful prosecution of Paul; Sosthenes later became a believer (see 1 Corinthians 1:1).

taken a vow (v. 18)—an expression of gratitude (see Numbers 6:2–5, 13–21) lasting a predetermined amount of time

down to Antioch (v. 22)—the official end of Paul’s second missionary journey

Understanding the Text

2) What motivated Paul to go on a second missionary journey? Where did he go and what did he do?

(verses to consider: Matthew 28:18–20; Ephesians 4:12, 13; Philippians 1:8; Colossians 1:28; 1 Thessalonians 2:17)

3) How did Paul and his team end up in Philippi and what key events happened there?

4) What strategies did Paul use to speak to the philosophers at Athens? How is this address different from the message he preached to the devout Jewish audience as recorded in 13:16–41?

Cross Reference

Read Isaiah 44:9–20.

Exploring the Meaning

5) What does the Isaiah passage say about idolatry? Why is it so foolish? Why do you think idols were so popular everywhere Paul went?

6) In what ways is idolatry practiced today?

7) Paul spoke to the Athenians about God as Creator. Why is this such an important truth? What are the practical implications of disbelief?

8) It seems as though everywhere Paul went either a riot or a revival broke out. Acts 17:6 confirms this, recording that the apostolic band was described as men “who have turned the world upside down.” Why do you think Paul was such a lightning rod? What was his secret for ministerial success?

Summing Up ...

“Courage must be coupled with the proper content if a believer is to shake the world. To have the right message, but not the boldness to proclaim it, renders it useless. On the other hand, to boldly proclaim error, as the cults do, causes even greater harm. Proclaiming the truth with great boldness, as Paul did, cannot help but change the world.” —*John MacArthur*

Reflecting on the Text

9) Re-read 16:22–25. What strikes you about this account? How can a Christian choose joy in the midst of unpleasant circumstances?

10) Who of your friends and acquaintances, and relatives are blinded and trapped by Satan, like the fortune-teller of 16:16–18 or the philosophers of 17:16–32? As you ponder their spiritual state, what thoughts and feelings do you have? What can you do about their situation?

11) What one or two qualities from the life of Paul (or one of his colleagues) would you like to see God build into your life? What can you do to make this a reality?

Recording Your Thoughts

For further study, see the following passages:

Genesis 1:1	Genesis 14:18–22	Deuteronomy 4:35
Deuteronomy 18:9–12	Deuteronomy 32:8	Judges 13:5
1 Samuel 1:1	Psalms 9:10	Psalms 78:35
Psalms 145:5–6	Daniel 2:36–45	John 20:31
Acts 13:48	Acts 20:31	Romans 16:3–4
1 Corinthians 1:14	1 Corinthians 4:17	1 Corinthians 9:6
1 Corinthians 15:3–4	1 Corinthians 16:19	2 Corinthians 11:9, 25
Philippians 4:15	2 Corinthians 12:12	1 Thessalonians 3:1–6
2 Timothy 1:2, 6	Titus 1:1	