

The Second Missionary Journey



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 16, Rom. 3:28, Gal. 2:16, Acts 17, 1 Cor. 1:23, Acts 18:1–10.*

Memory Text: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” (*Acts 18:9, 10, NIV*).

Back in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas nurtured the church and engaged in further evangelistic work. This was seemingly the last time they worked together, as a sharp disagreement led to their separation. The reason for Paul and Barnabas's disagreement was Mark, Barnabas's cousin (*Col. 4:10*). When Paul invited Barnabas to return to the places they had evangelized in their previous journey, Barnabas wanted to take his cousin along, but Paul was against it because of Mark's past failure (*Acts 13:13*).

Paul and Barnabas's separation, however, was turned into a blessing, because in dividing their efforts they could cover a wider area than they had first planned. Barnabas took Mark and returned to Cyprus, Barnabas's homeland (*Acts 4:36*). Meanwhile, having invited Silas to join him, Paul went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches there. Before coming to Antioch the first time, Paul had spent several years in Tarsus (*Acts 9:30; 11:25, 26*). Now he had the opportunity to revisit the congregations he had established there. Nevertheless, God's plan for him was much greater than Paul first conceived.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 1.

Back in Lystra

Luke's selective choice of events brings Paul almost straight to Derbe and Lystra. About Syria and Cilicia, the only thing he says is that Paul went through those regions confirming the churches (*Acts 15:41*).

Read Acts 16:1–13. What does Paul's action here teach us about how sensitive he was in seeking to reach others?

Though Timothy's father was a Gentile, his mother was a Jewish Christian; her name was Eunice. Despite being uncircumcised, Timothy knew the Scriptures from childhood (*2 Tim. 3:15*), implying he was also a pious person. As a Christian, he already had earned the respect and the admiration of all the local believers.

Because Jewish identity was passed on through the mother's line rather than the father's, Timothy was a Jew. He had not been circumcised on the eighth day after birth, perhaps because his father, a Greek, viewed circumcision as barbaric.

Wishing to have Timothy as a co-worker and knowing that, as an uncircumcised Jew, he would be forbidden to enter the Jewish synagogues under the charge of apostasy, Paul had him circumcised. Paul's motivation for doing so, therefore, was entirely practical and should not be seen as a contradiction to the gospel he preached.

After revisiting the places that he had been in his first journey, Paul decided to go southwest, possibly to Ephesus, in the province of Asia, but the Holy Spirit prevented him from doing so. He then moved north, trying to go to Bithynia, but again in some undisclosed way the Spirit prevented him from going there. Because he already was passing through Mysia, Paul's only option was to go westward to the seaport of Troas, from where he could sail in a number of directions.

In a night vision, however, God showed him he should sail across the Aegean Sea to Macedonia. When his companions learned about the vision, they concluded that God had indeed called them to share the gospel with the Macedonians.

Think about why Paul circumcised Timothy. What should this teach us about being willing to do certain things that we might not always agree with or deem necessary, but that will serve a greater cause?

Philippi

Once in Macedonia, Paul and his companions traveled to Philippi, where they established the first Christian congregation in Europe.

Read Acts 16:11–24. Where did the missionaries go on Sabbath, and why? What ultimately happened to them there?

Whenever Paul arrived in a city, his practice was to visit the local synagogue on Sabbath in order to witness to the Jews (*Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 17:1, 2; 18:4*). That in Philippi he and his group went to a riverside to pray—together with some women, both Jewish and Gentile worshippers of God—probably means there was no synagogue in the city. The significance of this is that Paul did not go to Jewish synagogues on Sabbaths only for evangelistic purposes, but also because this was his day of worship.

Read Acts 16:25–34. Review the story of the jailer’s conversion. What did he need to do to be saved?

Paul and Silas’s answer to the jailer’s question is in full harmony with the gospel, since salvation is entirely through faith in Jesus (*Rom. 3:28, Gal. 2:16*). What we cannot conclude from the episode, however, is that belief in Jesus is all that is necessary for baptism, at the expense of the proper doctrinal and practical instruction.

What do we know about the jailer? Was he a Jew or a Jewish proselyte? In either case, what he needed was to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. What if he were a Gentile who already knew and worshiped God, such as Cornelius, Lydia (*Acts 16:14*), and several others in Acts? What if he previously had attended Paul’s evangelistic meetings in the city? Whatever the facts about him, the brevity of the account should not be used as an excuse for quick baptisms.

Read Acts 16:31–34. What does this teach us about just how complete and full Christ’s sacrifice was for us? How can you learn, day by day, to rest in the assurance of Christ’s righteousness covering you as your only hope of salvation?

Thessalonica and Berea

When Paul and Silas were released from prison, the missionaries departed from Philippi (*Acts 16:35–40*). From Philippi, Paul and his companions went straight to Thessalonica, the capital city of Macedonia.

Read *Acts 17:1–9*. How did the Thessalonian Jews react to Paul’s successful preaching among the Gentiles?

Once again we see Paul looking for the synagogue where he could share the gospel. Many devout Greeks and not a few prominent women were persuaded by Paul’s message. That these converts “joined Paul and Silas” (*Acts 17:4, NKJV*) seems to mean they formed a separate group and met apart from the synagogue, probably in Jason’s house.

Moved with jealousy, their opponents started a riot. Their intention was to bring Paul and Silas—Timothy is not mentioned—before the city’s assembly and accuse them. As they could not find the missionaries, Jason himself and a few other new believers were dragged to the local authorities under the charge of sheltering political agitators.

Read *Acts 17:10–15*. What was the response of the Berean Jews in comparison to that in Thessalonica?

The term *eugenēs* (*Acts 17:11*) originally meant “well born” or “of noble birth” but came to denote more generally a “fair-minded” attitude, which is likely the case here. The Jews from Berea are praised not simply because they agreed with Paul and Silas but because of their willingness to examine the Scriptures for themselves and on a daily basis to see if what the missionaries were saying was correct. A merely emotional response to the gospel, without the necessary intellectual conviction, tends to be superficial and short-lived.

Before long, however, persecution interrupted Paul’s productive ministry in Berea, compelling him to move farther south, to Athens.

When was the last time you diligently searched the Scriptures in order to find out “whether these things [whatever they were] were so”?

Paul in Athens

Athens, the intellectual center of ancient Greece, literally was given to idols. Marble statues of persons and gods were found everywhere, especially at the entrance of the agora (public square), which was the hub of urban life. Paul was so distressed about such dominant idolatry that he changed his usual practice of going first to the synagogue, and pursued a dual course of action: he disputed weekly in the synagogue with Jews and devout Gentiles, and daily in the public square with the Greeks. (See *Acts 17:15–22*.)

As the Athenians were always ready to hear something new, some philosophers took interest in Paul's teaching and invited him to address the Areopagus, the high council of the city. In his speech, Paul did not quote from the Scriptures or recap the history of God's dealings with Israel, as he did when speaking to a Jewish audience (*compare with Acts 13:16–41*); this approach would not make much sense with this audience. Instead, he presented some important biblical truths in a way that cultured pagans could understand.

Read Acts 17:22–31. In his Areopagus speech, what great truths about God and salvation and history and humanity did he preach to these people?

Most of Paul's words sounded ridiculous to that sophisticated pagan audience, whose concepts about God and religion were distorted greatly. We do not know how Paul intended to end his message, for he seems to have been interrupted the very moment he referred to God's judgment of the world (*Acts 17:31*). This belief collided head on with two Greek concepts: (1) that God is utterly transcendent, having no dealings whatsoever with the world or concern in human affairs, and (2) that when a person dies there can be no resurrection at all. This helps to explain why the gospel was foolishness to the Greeks (*1 Cor: 1:23*), and the number of converts in Athens was small.

Yet, among those who came to believe were some of the most influential people of Athenian society, such as Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, and Damaris, whose mention by name implies she was of some status, if not also a member of the council herself (*Acts 17:34*).

Paul's different approach before the Areopagus shows his awareness of social and cultural differences. He even quoted a pagan poet (*Acts 17:28*) in order to make his point. What should this teach us about how we can use different methods to reach different people?

Paul in Corinth

Acts 18:1–11 recounts Paul’s experience in Corinth, where he would stay for one and a half years. Aquila and Priscilla would become Paul’s lifelong friends (*Rom. 16:3, 2 Tim. 4:19*). The account implies they were already Christians when they came to Corinth, probably because of the deportation of Jews from Rome by the Emperor Claudius. Roman historian Suetonius seems to indicate that the deportation occurred due to disturbances in the Jewish community associated with the name of “Christ” (*Claudius 25.4*), which would perhaps be the result of the preaching of the gospel by local Jewish believers. Thus, it is possible that Aquila and Priscilla themselves had been involved in such activities. In any case, besides sharing the same faith and the same Jewish background, Paul and his new friends also shared the same trade.

Read Acts 18:4–17. What was the result of Paul’s missionary activities in Corinth?

When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, they brought some financial support from the churches there (*2 Cor. 11:8, 9*), which allowed Paul to devote himself entirely to preaching. Paul’s policy was to live at his own expense during his ministry, though he also taught that “those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (*1 Cor. 9:14, NKJV*).

Despite the strong Jewish opposition to Paul’s message, some Jews did believe, as well as some Gentile worshipers of God. Among the converts were Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household. Many Corinthians also believed and were baptized. The situation among the Jews, however, was rather tense, as the following episode demonstrates (*Acts 18:12–17*), and Paul possibly was planning to leave Corinth soon, but in a night vision he received divine encouragement to stay on (*Acts 18:9–11*).

On his way back to Antioch, Paul took Aquila and Priscilla with him and left them in Ephesus, where he spent a few days before resuming his trip. While there, he had the opportunity to preach in the local Jewish synagogue, whose positive response made him promise that, God willing, he would come back (*Acts 18:18–21*). This happened right in his next journey.

Paul, frustrated by his reception, needed encouragement from the Lord in regard to the salvation of souls in Corinth. What do the Lord’s words to him (*Acts 18:10*) say to us when we might feel something similar to what Paul felt?

Further Thought: “Those who today teach unpopular truths need not be discouraged if at times they meet with no more favorable reception, even from those who claim to be Christians, than did Paul and his fellow workers from the people among whom they labored. The messengers of the cross must arm themselves with watchfulness and prayer, and move forward with faith and courage, working always in the name of Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 230.

“If, in the closing scenes of this earth’s history, those to whom testing truths are proclaimed would follow the example of the Bereans, searching the Scriptures daily, and comparing with God’s word the messages brought them, there would today be a large number loyal to the precepts of God’s law, where now there are comparatively few. . . .

“All will be judged according to the light that has been given. The Lord sends forth His ambassadors with a message of salvation, and those who hear He will hold responsible for the way in which they treat the words of His servants. Those who are sincerely seeking for truth will make a careful investigation, in the light of God’s word, of the doctrines presented to them.”—Page 232.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In the context of the last paragraph of Monday’s study, discuss in class the implication of the following statement: “There is need of a more thorough preparation on the part of candidates for baptism. . . . The principles of the Christian life should be made plain to those who have newly come to the truth.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 91, 92.
- 2 Dwell more on Wednesday’s final question. How can we as a church show the same understanding Paul had of cultural differences and the same willingness to meet the people where they are without compromising the gospel or our own religious identity?
- 3 Read Acts 17:32–34. What can we learn from the three responses that met Paul’s message in Athens? “(1) Some mocked. They were amused by the passionate earnestness of this strange Jew. It is possible to make a jest of life; but those who do so will find that what began as comedy must end in tragedy. (2) Some put off their decision. The most dangerous of all days is when a man discovers how easy it is to talk about tomorrow. (3) Some believed. The wise man knows that only the fool will reject God’s offer.”—William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), p. 133.
- 4 Paul actually quoted a pagan writer (*Acts 17:28*) in order to make his point with the Athenians. What should that tell us about how, at times, using sources like this could be of value? What dangers are there, as well?

Not Rich, Not Poor

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Chang dreamed of money and wealth in China.

He thought his backpack-producing factory would make him rich, so he felt perplexed when the business fell on hard times. An online friend offered some unusual advice: “Go to church.”

Chang was too busy for church until after his factory went bankrupt, but he was not impressed with what he saw on his first visit. Then someone told him that if he went to church, God would bless him. “I wanted God to bless me with more money, so I went back a second time,” he said.

Around that time, Chang was hired to work as a restaurant cook in another city. Upon his arrival, he immediately began to look online for a church. “I wanted to find a church so I could earn more money,” he said.

He found the addresses of two churches—a large Sunday church and a small Seventh-day Adventist house-church. “I don’t know why, but I decided to go to the small church,” he said.

One day, a church member spoke with Chang about the Sabbath. “If you keep the Sabbath, you will get more blessings,” he said.

Chang wanted more money, so he asked the church to pray for him to keep the Sabbath. The next day, he told his manager that he wanted Sabbath off or he’d quit. “Don’t quit,” the manager said. “Keep your Sabbath.”

When the restaurant owner heard about the arrangement, he angrily ordered Chang to work on Sabbath. Chang promptly quit. Remarkably, all the restaurant’s employees also quit in a show of solidarity.

Almost immediately, church members proposed that Chang take health courses at an Adventist sanatorium. Chang liked the idea. With a nutritionist certificate, he could land a high-paying job. But he also had a growing desire to know God. He prayed for Bible training. The next day, two people from different churches called him separately to recommend that he attend an upcoming Bible training in another city. The training changed his heart. He lost his desire for money and became a Bible worker.

Chang, 34, said his life can be summed up by Isaiah 55:8, which says, “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD” (NKJV).

“I don’t feel rich now, but I don’t feel poor, either,” he said. “A preacher once told me that she lacks nothing. I said, ‘Really, you have so much money that you lack nothing?’ Now I can understand what she meant. I lack nothing.”

Your Sabbath School mission offerings help support Global Mission pioneers such as Chang.



The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Texts:** *Acts 16:6–10; 18:9, 10*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize the cooperation between God and Paul in their missionary work: God encourages Paul and directs him as to where he should minister, and Paul shares and fine-tunes the gospel message according to his diverse audiences.

Feel: Sense the thrill and confidence in knowing God was present every time he or she shared the gospel.

Do: Move confidently but sensitively in his or her respective mission field.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: A Thrilling Partnership

Ⓐ Even though God granted Paul visions for direction and encouragement, what do we have that can give us both of those elements?

II. Feel: Never Alone

Ⓐ Like Paul and Silas singing to God in the Philippian jail, how can we feel that close to God in difficult settings, missionary or otherwise?

Ⓑ Which part of Paul's second missionary journey particularly motivates you and gives you the confidence to follow in his footsteps?

III. Do: Just Go.

Ⓐ What is the top reason you can think of right now that keeps you from actively sharing your faith in Christ?

Ⓑ Whatever the above answer may be, why not pray with a friend that God would remove such an obstacle?

► **Summary:** Knowing we are coworkers with God can move us from fear or lack of confidence to courage in sharing the gospel. In addition, we can learn principles of sharing from the record of Paul's mission trips.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Acts 16:1–4, 22–24*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Paul's second mission trip is worth our attention for at least two reasons: (1) *that he continued to labor under extreme circumstances is motivating, and (2) how he ministered to diverse audiences is instructive.*

Just for Teachers: Paul's second missionary journey is filled with a fascinating array of diverse experiences: exorcisms, quiet witnessing on a riverside, beatings, conversions, rejections, public evangelism, jail time, chaotic mob attacks, and so on. There's a tendency to assess God's presence and His will in our lives based on a spectrum of good or bad results. The chronicle of Paul's exploits challenges that notion and shows that we, like Paul, can be at the center of God's will, and yet still be undergoing horrendous challenges and outright pain. Share the story below, and afterward reinforce that, as much as we like to see ourselves as the wise old man, we instinctively respond like the neighbors.

Opening Discussion: An ancient parable tells of an old man whose horse escaped from his stables. His neighbors came to console him. "Such bad luck," they bemoaned. But the old man seemed unaffected and replied, "Whether it is a bad or good thing, I cannot tell." A bit confused, the neighbors went home. Later that afternoon, the neighbors returned upon hearing the news that the escaped stallion had returned, bringing with it a herd of horses that filled the old man's stalls. "What amazing good luck you have," gushed the neighbors. The old man again mused, "Whether it is a bad or good thing, I cannot tell." Again, the neighbors went home, only to return later to console the man because his son had injured his foot riding one of the new horses. The neighbors and the old man exchanged the same metaphysical reflections as before over the latest happening. Finally, the local army marched through town, compelling all able-bodied young men to join them in a dangerous tribal assault. The old man's son was exempt because of his injury. The neighbors once again returned and congratulated the old man's good fortune, but of course, they were met again with a wisdom they did not possess.

Discussion Questions:

① Imagine being Paul’s companion and having the “neighbors” mentality; how long do you think you would last on any of his mission trips?

② Do we have to nuance our description of God’s character to accommodate the fact that He allowed Paul to be stripped and beaten with rods (*Acts 16:22*)?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: This lesson engages two relatively different themes in Paul’s experience: (1) reflection on the hardships he endured and (2) an underlying strategy of missions he used. Feel free to focus on one or both of these themes. Thus far, Paul’s personal trials have been the topic. For the sake of keeping in biblical sequence, his missionary strategy will be discussed first in the Bible Commentary section, followed by the difficulties he endured.

Bible Commentary**I. Removing Unnecessary Obstacles** (*Review Acts 16:1–5 with your class.*)

The irony is conspicuous as one moves from the circumcision verdict of the Jerusalem Council (*Acts 15:19, 20*) to the very next mention of circumcision (*Acts 16:3*). With a letter nullifying the need for the covenantal rite in one hand, and a cutting instrument in the other, Paul performs Timothy’s circumcision. The reason given is “because of the Jews” (*Acts 16:3*). It was one matter to release believing Gentiles from circumcision, but an entirely different matter to release Jews themselves from the ancient rite. Paul, on the other hand, personally holds circumcision as a nonissue, repeating in multiple letters that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision “counts for anything” (*1 Cor. 7:19, Gal. 5:6, 6:15*). However, Paul certainly doesn’t want the reputation of being someone who told the Jews “not to circumcise their children” (*Acts 21:21*).

But right here, at the nexus of theological conviction and missionary practice, Paul shows that he is ever cognizant and considerate of the convictions of his audience. With an assumed recognition of essentials

and nonessentials, Paul invokes a criterion of offense in a number of issues. Paul and Timothy clearly believe circumcision unnecessary, but for the sake of not offending their target audience, they comply with convictions other than their own. Should one eat food offered to idols? Theologically, Paul knows that “an idol is nothing” and admits that one is no “better” if they eat or “worse” if they abstain from such food (*1 Cor. 8:4, 8*). However, not all Christians are convinced, so Paul explicates that it is not what you eat, but whom you eat with, that becomes determinative (*Romans 14*).

Being sensitive to another’s conscience, not unilaterally exercising your own convictions, not being a stumbling block—these are the considerations that undergirded the effective ministry of the apostle Paul.

Consider This: Timothy deserves recognition too. He was the one who endured real physical pain for the sake of simply not offending fellow Jews. Can you think of analogous ways Timothy’s example needs to be followed today?

II. Finding Providence in Chaos (*Review Acts 18:9, 10; 2 Cor. 11:16–29 with your class.*)

We have no doubt that God accompanied Paul throughout his missionary journeys. If Paul had had any doubt, it would have dissipated before God’s visionary affirmation, “ ‘I am with you,’ ” which Paul received in Corinth (*Acts 18:10, ESV*). This unadorned construction of God being “with” someone is a hallmark of divine intimacy and providence. Jacob’s son Joseph is abused by “the patriarchs,” but Stephen reassures that “God was with him” (*Acts 7:9*). Peter’s explanation to Cornelius and his family of Jesus’ miraculous healing power and good works was that “God was with him” (*Acts 10:38*). Like bookends in the New Testament, Jesus comes as Emmanuel, that is, “God with us” (*Matt. 1:23*), and foreshadows the eternal new heaven and new earth, where “God himself shall be with them” (*Rev. 21:3*).

But what can one expect in a “with God” life? Does such partnership convey special protection, divine leading, or inner peace? Perhaps all three, but note Paul’s summary of what his “with God” ministry included: five whippings, each including 40 lashes minus one; or put another way, 200 lashes minus five, totaling one 195 lashes; three beatings with rods; one stoning; three shipwrecks, including a night and day adrift at sea; multiple dangers; sleeplessness; hunger; thirst; cold and nakedness (*2 Cor. 11:24–27*) . . . and eventually martyrdom.

The extensive description of Paul’s life in Acts, a life that is *known* to be under the care of God, provides opportunity to rightly align our expectations of Christian service with the reality of a “with God” life. First, it should be noted that Paul’s extensive suffering does not negate the personal protective

care of God. Unfortunately, we are mostly ignorant of the events that God prevents. It is interesting to note that God did promise Paul in Corinth that “no one will attack you to harm you” (*Acts 18:10, ESV*). Letting Paul’s wounds from Philippi heal and providing a psychological reprieve from—by today’s standards—torture shows that God can, and does, set limits on suffering. (*Compare with Job 1:12, 2:6.*)

Second, suffering can serve greater ends. Paul’s beatings and imprisonment in Philippi led to the conversion of an unnamed Roman jailer and his family. Additionally, Paul’s afflictions set up a chain of events that led Roman magistrates to apologize to a Christian apostle (*Acts 16:39*). In effect, Caesar paid homage to Christ. Last, suffering can serve to authenticate our commitment to Christ. Paul recounts a litany of sufferings that he endured, defending his ministry against the attacks of false apostles (*2 Cor. 11:13–29*). Words are cheap, and religious profession can be transient. Jesus predicted that “rocky ground” hearers who immediately and joyously receive the “word of the kingdom” can just as readily “fall away” when tribulation or persecution arises. Inversely, enduring tribulations would serve to prove authenticity. Paul passes the test, and by God’s grace, we will too.

Discussion Question: How would you answer someone who felt that trials were the result of God’s displeasure?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Pain and suffering in the world is the number one fact used to deny the existence of God. Though Christians may not succumb to that exact argument, they may similarly deny God’s *presence* in their lives because of pain and suffering. Communicate to the class that suffering is a complex issue and that we should be slow to assume that suffering means being abandoned by God.

Application Question: How many reasons for suffering can you think of, and how is God involved in each case?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: If the mood is right, foster an environment of vulnerability in which you volunteer first to do the activity below.

Activity: Share an experience of personal suffering that you now see differently in light of God’s providence.