

**1184 Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus - Acts(17)1–(18)28
(by Whirlwind)**

First, we discussed Paul and Silas’s ministry in Thessalonica, including the arrest and release of Jason and several brothers. Second, we covered the Bereans’ daily examination of the Scriptures and one of the Holy Spirit’s marvelous ways of leading. Third, we discussed Paul’s mention of the “unknown God” during his ministry in Athens, seeing how he provided us with a method for evangelizing non-Christians. Fourth, we covered Paul’s one-and-a-half-year ministry in Corinth and introduced the man named Aquila. Fifth, it discusses the indifference of Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, and some events that occurred in Ephesus. Finally, it addresses Apollos’ ability to expound on the Scriptures, though he knew only the baptism of John, thereby providing a meaningful example of the significance of the order of precedence.

Please note that this article is an expansion of the topicwise Bible study held on Sunday (4/5/26). Unless otherwise specified, verses refer to those in NASB95. If this article refers previous articles, they can all be found on our website, ‘<https://a-christian-voice.com/>’; click on ‘Understanding Spiritual Life’.

1. Paul and Silas preach in Thessalonica

"Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul’s custom (G1486), he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures (the Old Testament), explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.” And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have upset the world have come here also; and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them." (Acts 17:1-9)

It is made very clear from the beginning that when there was a synagogue, they would go there on the Sabbath to preach, because the word “custom” is used. This word appears only four times, and its meaning is consistent with this verse. For example, another Scripture passage conveys the same meaning: "Now at the feast the governor was accustomed (G1486) to release for the people any one prisoner whom they wanted."(Matthew 27:15) Here, Paul’s preaching primarily focused on proclaiming the message of the Lord’s death and resurrection.

Thus, there were believers and unbelievers. The unbelievers, out of jealousy, stirred up some wicked men with great zeal to bring Paul and Silas before the people. They deliberately

claimed that there was another king on earth named Jesus. Consequently, Jason and several brothers were arrested. Finally, "...when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them."(Acts 17:9) Of course, we now understand clearly that Jesus is one of the three Persons of the Trinity and is the spiritual King on earth.

2. The Bereans' daily examination of the Scriptures

"The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men. But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left."(Acts 17:10–15)

We see that Paul and Silas fled to Berea by night, so when Christians have the opportunity and should flee, they should do so. For example, when "...a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."(Acts 8:1), the apostles knew they should not flee, even if it meant risking their lives. Indeed, when King Herod began to persecute some members of the church, "...he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword."(Acts 12:2). Meanwhile, "So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord."(Acts 11:19–21) You see, those people were right to flee, for the gospel was thus spread, and this fulfilled God's will.

They fled to Berea because they had work to do there. There, they also realized that the Scriptures (the Old Testament) needed to be examined, for the Scriptures say that the people of that place were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica. And because the Scriptures stood up to such scrutiny, some came to believe in the Lord as a result. Today, there are also people who begin reading the Scriptures (both the New and Old Testaments) looking for errors, yet end up believing in the Lord as a result; the work of the Holy Spirit is truly marvelous. But the Jews in Thessalonica eagerly went to Berea to stir up and disturb the people, so Paul fled to Athens. The reason he asked Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens quickly is made clear in the text: "Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols."(Acts 17:16).

Here we see that they seemed to be constantly on the run, fleeing from place to place, but this is from a human perspective. The Triune God is all-knowing; He had foreseen that such a

situation would occur, and this fulfilled His will, so there was truly no need for Him to intervene. When necessary, He does intervene. Did we not see the Holy Spirit leading them to Europe through a vision? (See Acts 16:6–12) Therefore, from God’s perspective, this was one of the Holy Spirit’s marvelous ways of leading. Since Christians believe that both the New and Old Testaments are inspired by God, viewing the Bible from a biblical perspective is the same as viewing it from God’s perspective; thus, we must read the Bible from God’s perspective.

3. Paul speaks of the Unknown God while preaching in Athens

"Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. And also some of the Epicurean (G1946) and Stoic (G4770) philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean." (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.) So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." So Paul went out of their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them."(Acts 17:16–34)

Paul was anxious, but he did not sit idly by; he also encountered scholars from the Epicurean (G1946) and Stoic (G4770) schools. The Epicureans advocated hedonism in Paul’s time, while the Stoics advocated asceticism—the exact opposite. Paul had to debate with both of them. Finally, "...they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?"(Acts 17:19). Yet their attitude was,

"(Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)(Acts 17:21)

Paul understood very clearly that to preach to the Gentiles, he must begin with things they were familiar with. So he started with the altar in Athens inscribed with "To an Unknown God," explaining that this was the God who created the universe and everything in it, and describing some of His attributes. He also said that He made all nations from one man, etc., with the purpose "that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, ..." (Acts 17:27) He then went on to say that He is not far from any of us, as even their own poets have attested. Since the "unknown God" is such a God, we should not worship idols, just as Jeremiah said, "There is none like You, O LORD; You are great, and great is Your name in might. Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? Indeed it is Your due! For among all the wise men of the nations And in all their kingdoms, There is none like You. But they are altogether stupid and foolish In their discipline of delusion—their idol is wood! Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, And gold from Uphaz, The work of a craftsman and of the hands of a goldsmith; Violet and purple are their clothing; They are all the work of skilled men. But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, And the nations cannot endure His indignation." (Jeremiah 10:6–10)

In times past, when people were ignorant, God overlooked their sins; but now, through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus—which serves as a reliable proof for all—He calls people everywhere to repentance, for "...God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:3-4) He truly does not want anyone to perish. Although Paul did his utmost to tell them the truth, because of their attitude, only a few believed in the Lord. In particular, "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." (Acts 17:32). Regardless, he provided us with a method for evangelizing to non-Christians.

4. Paul's one year and six months of ministry in Corinth and the person Aquila

"After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers. And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue. Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized. And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm

you, for I have many people in this city.” And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”(Acts 18:1–11)

This is the first mention of Paul taking refuge with Aquila and Priscilla, who were tentmakers by trade, and living and working with them. Before Silas and Timothy arrived, “...Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.”(Acts 18:5) At that time, with the exception of a few, most Jews did not believe that Jesus was the Christ, and this remains true today. Because of their resistance and slander, Paul once again asserted his identity as the Apostle to the Gentiles. So he moved into the home of Titus Justus, a worshiper of God who lived near the synagogue, resulting in “Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.”(Acts 18:8) We see that while he was in Corinth, the Lord intervened in a vision, giving him a guarantee that he could preach there for a year and six months.

5. Gallio, the Proconsul of Achaia, and Ephesus

“But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, saying, “This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.” But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters.” And he drove them away from the judgment seat. And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things. Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow. They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, but taking leave of them and saying, “I will return to you again if God wills,” he set sail from Ephesus. When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch. And having spent some time there, he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.” (Acts 18:12–23)

Gallio adopted an indifferent attitude toward the Jews’ attacks on Paul, even to the point of allowing them to strike people in front of the judgment seat—an action that could be considered unlawful. Please read the Scripture passages that describe this clearly for yourself. However, this also signaled that it was time for Paul to move on, so he stayed there for many more days, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him. Note that at this point, Priscilla’s name is listed first; we will soon see why. He understood very clearly that “If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!”” (Colossians 2:20-21) He prioritized preaching, and in doing so, he wanted the Jews to know that he also followed the optional laws; therefore, having made a vow, he had his hair cut off in Cenchreae.

This was Paul's first visit to Ephesus. Although the people asked him to stay longer, he declined, saying only, "...I will return to you again if God wills, ..." (Acts 18:21) He knew clearly that God wanted them to move on at that time. But God did indeed grant him permission to return later. The Scripture says, "It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, ..." (Acts 19:1) And it adds, "This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." (Acts 19:10)

He left Ephesus by ship, "When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch. And having spent some time there, he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples." (Acts 18:22-23) He fulfilled the desire he had first expressed to Barnabas: "...Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." (Acts 15:36)

6. Apollos could explain the Scriptures but knew only the baptism of John

"Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ." (Acts 18:24-28)

The Scripture provides a clear introduction to Apollos. Please take a look at the passage, which highlights his many strengths; his weakness was that he knew only the baptism of John. Although he did not yet have a correct understanding of salvation at that time, "...he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." (Acts 18:26) Note that Priscilla's name is listed first; this indicates that she had a clearer understanding of spiritual matters, so this is a meaningful example of the order of precedence. Later, when Apollos arrived in Achaia, "...he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ." (Acts 18:28)