

## Lesson 5    2 December, 2018

### The Gospel Penetrates Macedonia and Achaia

**Lesson Scope:** Acts 16:16 to Acts 17:34

*References in brackets refer to Acts 16 & 17 unless otherwise specified*

#### Lesson Focus

In response to a vision he had at Troas, Paul and his traveling companions boarded a ship and crossed the Aegean Sea, to proclaim the Gospel on European soil. Though Paul had begun his second missionary journey intending to visit the churches he had established on his first missionary journey, the Spirit also directed him to new frontiers of witness. Philippi, a city of Macedonia, was named for Philip, the father of Alexander the Great, who conquered this region. Paul, however, came, not to make an earthly conquest, but as an ambassador for the kingdom of heaven. As a result of Paul's labours at Philippi, the first Christian church in Europe was established.

A journey of forty miles brought Paul and his helpers to Thessalonica, where some Jews and a "great multitude" of "devout Greeks" believed. At Berea, about fifty miles southwest of Thessalonica, Paul found those who readily received the Word.

Even at Athens—the cultural centre of Achaia, noted for its philosophers and shrines to pagan deities—some believed Paul's message to those gathered on Mars' hill.

The Gospel message calls for a response from its hearers. The many who reject it incur eternal damnation, but the few who believe and obey it receive eternal life.

As Christians today, we, like Paul and Silas, are ambassadors for Christ, calling all men to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20). As you move through the lesson, note the varying responses to the Gospel and the results of those responses. While we have no control over the responses of those to whom we minister, we should understand that we will likely face rejection, false accusations, and threats.

It brings us joy when we see the power of God at work in the lives of those who receive the Gospel.

**Lesson Aim:** To teach principles concerning man's response to the Gospel.

**Theme Verses:** **2 Corinthians 2:15-16.** For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?

## Lesson Text

### Opposition and Openness at Philippi

**Acts 16:16-33**

<sup>16</sup> (KJV) And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: <sup>17</sup> The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. <sup>18</sup> And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. <sup>19</sup> And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew *them* into the marketplace unto the rulers, <sup>20</sup> And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, <sup>21</sup> And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. <sup>22</sup> And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat *them*. <sup>23</sup> And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast *them* into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: <sup>24</sup> Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. <sup>25</sup> And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. <sup>26</sup> And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. <sup>27</sup> And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. <sup>28</sup> But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. <sup>29</sup> Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell

down before Paul and Silas, <sup>30</sup> And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? <sup>31</sup> And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. <sup>32</sup> And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. <sup>33</sup> And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed *their* stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

### **Eagerness and Envy at Berea**

Acts 17:10-13

<sup>10</sup> (KJV) And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming *thither* went into the synagogue of the Jews. <sup>11</sup> These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. <sup>12</sup> Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. <sup>13</sup> But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

### **Philosophy and Faith at Athens**

Acts 17:16-18

<sup>16</sup> (KJV) Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. <sup>17</sup> Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. <sup>18</sup> Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

Acts 17:32-34

<sup>32</sup> (KJV) And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this *matter*. <sup>33</sup> So Paul departed from among them. <sup>34</sup> Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among which *was* Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

## **Questions for Study**

### **Opposition and Openness at Philippi**

1. Why did the damsel's masters oppose the Gospel Paul preached?
2. What steps led the jailer from despair to faith?
3. In what ways might materialism hinder the giving or receiving of the Gospel?

### **Eagerness and Envy at Berea**

4. In What practical ways were the Jews at Berea a noble people?
5. How do the reactions of the Thessalonian Jews typify the reactions of those who reject the Gospel today?

### **Philosophy and Faith at Athens**

- 6 How did Paul's quotation from one of the Greek poets aptly expose the faulty logic of the philosophers on Mars' Hill?
7. Why are the wealthy and the worldly-wise more likely to reject the Gospel?
8. What can we do to avoid the influence of false religion and deception today?

## **Analysing the Passage**

The damsel who was possessed with a spirit of divination followed Paul and Silas because the spirit within her recognized them as servants of God. The words she spoke about them were true, but since they came from the spirit within her, we know that they were intended to deceive and mislead sincere seekers. God used Paul to demonstrate that the power of God is greater than Satan's power. The devil does not know the future, but he deceives people who believe the words of soothsayers or fortune tellers.

The magistrates at Philippi, yielding to the mob, commanded that Paul and Silas be beaten, likely beyond the forty-stripe limit imposed by Jewish law.

The earthquake which opened the prison doors and loosed the prisoners' bonds demonstrated to the people of Philippi that there was a greater power than that of their magistrates and gods.

The philosophers who gathered to hear and tell their theories in Athens heard Paul unveil their hypocrisy and illogical conclusions. It did not make sense to believe that living, breathing human beings were the off-

spring of gods made of gold, silver, or stone. All men will stand in judgment before the God who created them.

The Epicureans (followers of Epicurus) believed that the physical universe was all there is. They sought fulfillment in the pursuit of pleasure and happiness in this life.

The Stoics tried to achieve happiness by following reason, and they sought to live detached from the appeals of the physical world. They believed that individual independence and human self-sufficiency were ideals to strive for.

## **Principles and Applications**

### **Opposition and Openness at Philippi**

1. The bondage of the devil is no match for the power of the Gospel (16:16-18). We see the slave girl first as one under the domination of the devil. She was powerless to speak or act on her own. The power of Christ that Paul preached freed her from the devil's control, bringing about a noticeable change in her. As Christians, we have God's power within. "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

2. Surrender to the Gospel often appears as financial loss (16:19).

To the masters of the girl, financial gain was more important than the worth of her soul. They were grieved about their loss of income and failed to see the benefit of this girl's deliverance. Salvation is a priceless gift worth far more than any earthly gain.

3. It is not unusual for the Gospel to bring forth a violent reaction from those who are opposed to it (16:19, 23). As Christians, we must be willing to bear persecution and be patient with those who react negatively to the Gospel message. Their initial opposition may indicate that they are counting the cost of becoming a follower of Christ. Therefore such a response should not be interpreted as a full and final rejection.

4. Singing is an effective means of reaching the lost (16:25). Many congregations today go to nursing homes, homes of the elderly and shut-ins, prisons, and street meetings to share the Gospel in singing. The ability of Paul and Silas to sing under such adverse conditions made the Gospel attractive.

5. God will not leave His faithful servants without confirmation of His

blessing and power (16:25-26). Though we do not know whether Paul and Silas prayed for their release from prison, God worked in a miraculous manner to show Himself strong in behalf of His servants. Certainly Paul and Silas were confident that God would act in their best interests.

6. The Gospel provides a message of hope to those despairing of life (16:27-28). In a sense, Paul and Silas had less to fear than the jailer did. But Paul was able to bring a message of hope to him, bringing joy to his fearful heart.

7. God rewards the sincere seeker (16:30-33). “He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). “To them that seek Thee, Thou art good, / To them that find Thee, all in all.”

8. Bible study provides a fertile seedbed for the Gospel to flourish (17:11). A thorough search of the Bible brings us to a greater understanding of God’s purposes for us. A ready mind will take fast hold of revealed truth and make practical application of it to all of life.

9. Those who oppose the Gospel seek to gain the support of the majority (17:13). They seek safety in numbers, believing that the majority surely wins. Let us not be intimidated by the size of the group who reject the Gospel. Jesus said that because the gate is strait and the way is narrow, few would find the way which leads unto life (Matthew 7: 14).

### **Philosophy and Faith at Athens**

10. The worldly-wise often mock the Gospel message (17:18, 32). It seems too simple. It requires them to place faith in the unseen. It bypasses the powers of human reasoning, which are inadequate to solve man’s spiritual problems.

11. Embracing the Gospel places the believer in the family of God (17:34). Those who believe receive the blessings the Gospel provides. One of those blessings is fellowship with other Christians in a loving, caring brotherhood, the church.

### **Important Teachings**

1. The bondage of the devil is no match for the power of the Gospel (16:16-18).

2. Surrender to the Gospel often appears as financial loss (16:19).

3. It is not unusual for the Gospel to bring forth a violent reaction from those who are opposed to it (16:19, 23).

4. Singing is an effective means of reaching the lost (16:25).

5. God will not leave His faithful servants without confirmation of His blessing and power (16:25-26).
6. The Gospel provides a message of hope to those despairing of life (16:27-28).
7. God rewards the sincere seeker (16:30-33).
8. Bible study provides a fertile seedbed for the Gospel to flourish (17:11).
9. Those who oppose the Gospel seek to gain the support of the majority (17:13).
10. The worldly-wise often mock the Gospel message (17:18, 32).
11. Embracing the Gospel places the believer in the family of God (17:34).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. Why did the damsel's masters oppose the Gospel Paul preached? They were using false religion as a means for monetary advantage. They failed to appreciate the way God's power brought deliverance to one in bondage to the devil. They valued material things above spiritual things.
2. What steps led the jailer from despair to faith? He heard Paul's reassuring words that the prisoners had not escaped. He asked Paul what he must do to be saved. He believed on Jesus and was baptized. He became an active Christian, ministering to the needs of Paul and Silas.
3. In what ways might materialism hinder the giving or receiving of the Gospel? Materialism may prevent us from giving of our money to support mission efforts elsewhere. Excessive involvement in business pursuits may leave little time to be involved in the outreach activities of our local congregation. Financial concerns may hinder some from responding in full surrender to the demands of the Gospel. Like the man who came to Jesus desiring to inherit eternal life, they may go away grieved, reluctant to part with their wealth and follow Jesus (Mark 10:17-22).
4. In what practical ways were the Jews at Berea a noble people? They were eager to hear the preaching of the Gospel. Their "readiness of mind" reveals a commendable desire, not only to hear, but also to do

what the truth required of them. They did not believe Paul's preaching merely because of who he was. They searched the Scriptures to verify that his message was in accord with what was written by the prophets. Their Bible study was ongoing. They daily searched the Scriptures so that their knowledge of God would not be shallow or meagre.

5. How do the reactions of the Thessalonian Jews typify the reactions of those who reject the Gospel today?

These Jews were self-satisfied and opposed to the idea that they had any spiritual need. It pricked their consciences to observe a change in the lives of others who accepted the Gospel. They tried to rally support to resist the spread of the Gospel, which they rejected.

6. How did Paul's quotation from one of the Greek poets aptly expose the faulty logic of the philosophers on Mars Hill?

One of their own poets, which they claimed to believe, had written, "We are also [God's] offspring." It was faulty logic to believe that living human beings would be children of gods graven from nonliving materials. Paul told them that the God who created all men is obviously a living, powerful God. All men will appear before Him in judgment in the life hereafter.

7. Why are the wealthy and the worldly-wise more likely to reject the Gospel?

The wealthy have their physical needs adequately met and therefore feel no other need. They are well satisfied to enjoy their wealth and ignore the needs of their souls.

The worldly-wise seek to solve all their problems by logic and human reasoning. They fail to realize that the sin problem cannot be solved by those means. Both the wealthy and the worldly-wise put their trust in things they can see, and this leads them to reject that which is unseen.

8. What can we do to avoid the influence of false religion and deception today?

First of all, we must respond to God's Word with a readiness of mind, ready to hear it, and ready to obey it. We should be acquainted with what the Bible says so that deceptive teachings are recognized and identified as false and unscriptural.

Second, we must exercise simple faith in the Gospel's remedy for our need. As a result, we will have no need of the world's wisdom.



## **Summarizing the Lesson**

The Gospel is available for all men, but many reject it. To the Jews it is a stumbling block, and to the Greeks it is foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:23). But to every one that believes “it is the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16).

## **Research Guide**

1. Using a Bible dictionary, research the four cities Paul visited and note how they were similar to areas of outreach we encounter today.
2. A Bible atlas may be helpful to trace Paul’s travels and to show the distances he travelled between the cities he visited.