The Early Church of Jesus Christ

A Bible teaching commentary on the Acts of the Apostles in easy-to-read English

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Paul is taken to court

Acts Unit 10 of 12

Chapters 17:16-20:16

Manna Publications

Bite-size Manna

Unit 10, Acts Chapters 17:16 to 20:16

Only a Few Believe in Athens.

Athens was the centre of culture and learning at the time of Paul. He was greatly troubled to see all the idols in the city. He preached the Good News about Jesus and His resurrection. In the synagogue he talked with those who worshipped the One True God (17:17). He explained to them how Jesus was their Messiah. He also spoke about Jesus to the people in the market place.

Some men took him to a meeting where their law court met. "What is this new teaching?" they asked him (17:19).

The Greeks had many gods, but did not know the One True and Living God and Jesus Christ, His Son. Paul shared his faith with them in this way:

1. The One True God made the world. He is not a god made by the hands of people (17:24).
2. "God does not need anything." It is God Almighty, Creator of the Universe who gives life and everything else (17:25). He is Lord of all.
3. All people on Earth come from one man (Adam) whom God made (17:26).
4. God decided when and where they should live. God did this so that we should look for Him, the One True God, reach out for Him and find Him (17:27). He is never far from any one of us.
5. God is the creator of life. We live because of Him (17:28). We were created to be His children.
6. God is not made out of gold or silver or stone. Do not think about Him in this way (17:29). It is wrong to worship Him in this way.

7. Now is the time to repent and turn away from your sins and false religions (17:30).
8. God sent His Son to save us and He will judge us at the end of the age (17:31; John 3:17; 12:48).

Paul sees the altar to the unknown god

Paul saw that they were 'very religious' people yet they did not know God. When the Greeks heard about Jesus being raised from the dead, some laughed. Others said, "We want to hear you again on this..." (17:32).

The people of Athens were rich, clever and well-educated. They loved to talk about religion and they worshipped different gods. But not many people believed in the One True and Almighty God and His Son, Jesus Christ. But some did believe (17:34).

Acts Chapter 18.

God Encourages Paul to Preach in Corinth.

Paul did not stay long in Athens. He went to Corinth and stayed with Aquila and his wife Priscilla who were tentmakers (18:1 to 3). In Rome, Claudius was emperor at that time. The Jewish leaders there made trouble for all those who believed in Christ as Messiah, so Claudius made all believers leave Rome. Aquila and Priscilla were Jews who believed in Jesus, so they left Rome. This is why they were living in Corinth. So Paul stayed with them and they made tents together to earn money. Aquila and Priscilla later lived in Ephesus and the believers met together in their house (1 Corinthians 16:19).

Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia to join them. Then Paul spent all his time preaching (18:5).

Paul 'gave witness to the Jews that Jesus was [and is] the Christ... They treated him badly and this upset Paul (18:5 to 6). It was in Corinth that Paul decided to preach to the Gentiles only.

Soon after this, God spoke to Paul in a vision. "Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking. Do not be silent. I am with you. No-one will harm you." God had many people in Corinth who might believe the Good News of Jesus and be saved (18:9,10). 'So Paul stayed there for a year and a half. He taught them from God's word in the Old Testament' (18:11).

The Jews attacked Paul but the Roman governor did not listen to the Jews (18:12 to 16).

It was in Corinth that Paul wrote his letters to the Thessalonians which later became part of the New Testament. Paul praised them, encouraged them and corrected them.

Priscilla, Aquilla and Apollos in Ephesus.

After some time in Corinth, Paul sailed to Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila. Paul left them there and went back to Jerusalem and then returned to his home church in Antioch-in-Syria (18:18 to 22).

After some time in Antioch, Paul returned to the churches in Galatia and Phrygia. 'He gave strength to all the believers there' (18:23).

During this time, Apollos arrived in Ephesus (18:24) from Alexandria, in Egypt. His knowledge of the Old Testament was good and he spoke with great power about Jesus. But he only knew the baptism of John the Baptist (18:25). Priscilla and Aquila helped Apollos to gain 'a better understanding of the way of God' (18:26). This included the teaching about the gift of the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus for all believers (Acts 1:4 to 5; 2:38).

'Apollos wanted to go to Achaia. The brothers and sisters agreed and wrote to the believers in Achaia. They asked them to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who had become believers by God's grace' (18:27).

Acts Chapter 19.

The Third Missionary Journey of Paul.

When Paul returned to Ephesus, he found some believers who were baptized by John after repenting (19:3). Then Paul baptized them in the name of Jesus (19:5). Paul also laid his hands on them and prayed for them (19:6). The Holy Spirit came down on them. Some spoke in different languages and some began to prophesy. Certain gifts of the Holy Spirit are given by God to each believer.

Paul spoke in the synagogue at Ephesus for three months. When some people began to speak against him and 'The Way' of

Jesus he went to a different teaching room and he spoke there every day for two years so that all the Jews and Greek-speaking Gentiles who lived in that region heard the word of the Lord (19:10).

While Paul was in Ephesus, he wrote letters to the church in Corinth and these became part of the New Testament. He explained the teachings of Jesus to stop them going the wrong way in life. He strengthened their faith and warned them about false teachings. When Paul planted new churches he tried to write to them or visit them.

God did many miracles through Paul, especially healing people who were ill and driving out demon spirits (19:11,12). The sons of a pagan priest were evil magicians. When they saw Paul casting out demons in the name of Jesus, they tried to do the same.

One day they tried copying Paul. They found a man with a demon spirit and shouted "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out" (19:13).

The demon spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know Paul, but who are you?" (19:15). Then the man jumped on them and beat them, so that they ran out of the house 'naked and bleeding'.

Because of this, many people in Ephesus believed and were sorry for the bad things that they had done. They burned their books and objects used in witchcraft. 'The word of the Lord spread everywhere' (19:20).

The Work of The Holy Spirit in Ephesus.

The work of the Holy Spirit in Ephesus was very powerful. The Good News spread everywhere around (19:20).

During this time Paul decided to visit the new churches in Macedonia and Achaia. He also wanted to visit Jerusalem and Rome (19:21). Jerusalem was the centre of the Jewish religion

and also the followers of Christ at that time. Rome was the centre of the Roman Empire. Achaia was the centre of the former Greek empire. Paul knew that these were important places to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ and to teach and encourage the new believers.

Paul stayed in Ephesus a little longer but sent two of his helpers to Macedonia (19:22). Paul followed them later (20:1).

At this time, the people who made silver idols in Ephesus encouraged the crowds to cause trouble for the followers of Jesus (19:23-29). The city clerk calmed the crowds down, knowing that the Roman governor would want to know why there was trouble in that city (19:35 to 41). Therefore, Paul did not move away from Ephesus at that time. He stayed with the believers. He wanted to help and support them.

Acts Chapter 20.

Paul Decides What to Do.

Paul knew when to stay and when to move on. He was a busy preacher and teacher but he listened to the Holy Spirit to guide him. He stayed with the Ephesians until the trouble was over. Paul encouraged them when it was time for him to leave (20:1). He left to visit the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (Greece) before planning to return to Troas in Asia Province (20:3 to 6).

Paul knew that he must:

- fulfil his divine calling to preach the Good News to the Gentiles;
- be guided by the Holy Spirit to know when to move on;
- plant new churches and teach and encourage the new believers;
- obey his church leaders in Antioch-in-Syria who regularly prayed for him.

Paul also hoped to visit Jerusalem and then Rome and then Spain.

Paul was prevented from going back to his home church in Antioch. He heard that the Jewish leaders wanted to arrest him (20:3) Instead he travelled through Macedonia to the Roman Province of Asia but sailed past Ephesus. Paul never saw Greece or Syria again, including his home church.

Seven of the Christian brothers went with him to Macedonia then went on to Troas to wait for Paul to arrive. He joined them there and stayed just seven days.

The believers met in an upper room and Paul talked to them until midnight. It was hot and the room filled with smoke from the oil lamps. A young man sat in the open window. He fell asleep and fell to the ground below. When they reached him, he was dead. Paul went down and threw his arms around the body of the young man and his spirit came back into him again (20:10).

After this miracle, Paul went back upstairs, shared food and taught the people until it was morning. He broke and shared bread with the believers in the way Jesus instructed His disciples at the Last Supper (20:11; Matthew 14:19; Luke 22:19). Then Paul went by boat to Miletus. In this way he saved time on his journey to Jerusalem (20:16).

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