

Learn to Read Acts Effectively

Distance Learning Programme

Session 9

Session 9

Introduction and summary of Acts 17 and 18	Page 1
17 v 1 to 9 Preaching at Thessalonica	1
The letters to the Thessalonians	3
17 v 10 to 15 Preaching at Berea	3
17 v 16 to 34 Preaching at Athens	5
18 v 1 to 17 Preaching at Corinth	7
The letters to the Corinthians	10
18 v 18 to 22 Paul returns to Antioch	10
18 v 23 to 28 Preaching of Apollos at Ephesus	12
Summary of Session 9	13
Questions	13
Self-study notes	14
Summary of the messages in Acts 2, 3, 10, 13 and 17	15

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version.
Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Session 9 - Paul at Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth Acts 17 and 18

Introduction

In this session we see the message spread even further, and given to people with no knowledge of the Old Testament. We notice that the basic elements of the message that we have already encountered are repeated each time. Most of the places mentioned are on Map 5 on page 3 of the *Additional Notes*.

You will find it useful to read Acts 17 and 18 before you look at the notes.

Summary

The church spreads through the Roman Empire

Paul's second missionary journey

Preaching at Thessalonica 17 v 1 to 9

Preaching at Berea 17 v 10 to 15

Preaching at Athens 17 v 16 to 34

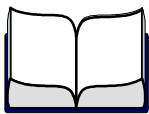
Preaching at Corinth 18 v 1 to 17

Paul returns to Antioch 18 v 18 to 22

Paul's third missionary journey

Preaching of Apollos at Ephesus 18 v 23 to 28

Acts 17 v 1 to 9 - Preaching at Thessalonica



Read Acts 17 v 1 to 9

Verses 1 and 2 tell us that Paul and Silas journeyed to Thessalonica and began their work there by going to the synagogue.

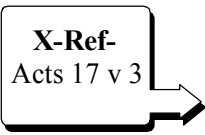
Acts 17 v 2 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."

These verses remind us that Paul's preaching was based on the Old Testament.

Learn to
Read
Acts
Effectively

Verse 3 and the cross-reference remind us of the type of message that Paul gave:



1 Corinthians 15 v 3 and 4.

- Jesus is the Christ or Messiah promised in the Old Testament (Acts 17 v 3)
- Christ died for our sins
- This was predicted in the Old Testament
- He was raised again on the third day

Acts 17 v 4 And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.

In the synagogue were both Jews and “devout Greeks”. It seems that “Greeks” were non-Jews who were attracted to the Jewish religion. The Jewish practice of worshipping one God would appeal to some who tired of the many gods worshipped by the non-Jews. Look at the cross-references and you will see that there is mention in several places through the Acts of Gentiles joining the Jews in the synagogue. The “proselytes” mentioned in Acts 13 v 43 were Gentiles who had been converted to the Jewish religion:



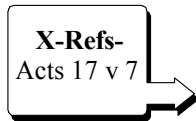
Acts 13 v 43; 18 v 4; 19 v 10.

This would mean that there were Gentiles, having a background of the Old Testament Scriptures, who were ready to be convinced that Jesus was the Messiah they had heard about in the Old Testament.

Verses 5 to 9 tell us about the problems again caused by unbelieving, envious Jews. They gathered an unruly mob together and attacked the house of a believer called Jason in an attempt to find Paul and Silas. Having failed to find them there, they then turned their wrath on Jason himself because he was known to have shown hospitality to Paul and his fellow believers.

Acts 17 v 7 "... and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus."

Look at the cross-references and they will remind you that the Jews here were using similar arguments to those that were used to bring about the crucifixion of Jesus:



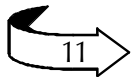
Luke 23 v 1 and 2; John 19 v 12.

Acts 17 v 9 So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

It would seem probable that Jason and the others had to ensure that Paul and Silas were not seen in Thessalonica again, because verse 10 tells us that they were immediately sent away.

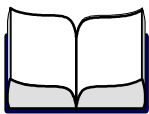
The letters to the Thessalonians

Paul wrote two letters to the new church at Thessalonica. In the first letter he had to deal with problems in the church, particularly in their understanding of the second coming of Christ. Doubts had been expressed regarding the position of believers who had already died - would they share in the glories of the second coming? Some were expecting Christ to return very soon. They had given up their jobs and were living on the generosity of others, being a burden to them. In the second letter Paul gives more encouragement and advice including a warning of a departure from the true gospel.



There are more details about the letters to the Thessalonians in the *Additional Notes*.

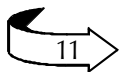
Acts 17 v 10 to 15 - Preaching at Berea



Read Acts 17 v 10 to 15

Acts 17 v 10 Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.

Paul and Silas were quickly sent to Berea, which was to the south of Thessalonica. Notice that they immediately went into the synagogue. In the same circumstances, many of us would have kept a low profile with the Jews in Berea.



The two letters to the Thessalonians

This showed the enthusiasm and commitment of Paul and Silas to tell others about the message of salvation.

Acts 17 v 11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

The Jews at Berea must have been a refreshing contrast to those at Thessalonica, because they all listened to what Paul was saying to them. The cross-references show that the attitude of the Bereans has important lessons and consequences for us:

Have a look at these references and see what you can learn
Compare your findings with those on page 14.

X-Refs-
They received
the word

Job 23 v 12; Proverbs 8 v 10; Matthew 13 v 23; James 1 v 21.

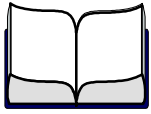
X-Refs-
Searched the
Scriptures

Psalms 1 v 1 to 3; 119 v 97 and 148; Isaiah 8 v 20;
2 Peter 1 v 19 to 21.

We read in verse 12 that this healthy attitude to the Scriptures resulted in a large number who believed Paul's message.

Verses 13 to 15 tell us that sadly the Jews from Thessalonica lost no time in proceeding to stir up trouble at Berea. So Paul was taken to Athens, while Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. Once in Athens, Paul sent a message for Silas and Timothy to join him there.

Acts 17 v 16 to 34 - Preaching at Athens



Read Acts 17 v 16 to 34

Acts 17 v 16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.

This verse shows us one of the ways in which Scripture uses the word “spirit”. Paul’s spirit was provoked, or he was motivated to act, when he saw the people of Athens worshipping idols that were of no value at all. He knew that they were putting trust in things that could not help them. He therefore wanted to help them to understand and do something about their situation.

Acts 17 v 17 Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.

Paul went to the synagogue, as he had done on past occasions, but this time he also went to the market place and spoke to those who were there. We hear nothing further of his preaching to the Jews in the synagogue, but the rest of the chapter tells us about his other preaching in Athens.

Acts 17 v 18 Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbling man want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.

The Epicureans believed that absence from pain and worry was the main aim in life.

The Stoics believed that people were happy when they accepted things in life as they were. They tried to find the reason for everything.

Neither Epicureans nor Stoics had any authority apart from their own reasoning, nor any real hope of life after death.

Acts 17 v 19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?"

Paul's message was different from anything else they had ever heard before, so they brought him to the "Areopagus" so that he could tell them more about it.



The Areopagus or Mars hill in Athens

**The New Bible Dictionary* tells us that "Areopagus" means "the hill of Ares", the Greek god of war, corresponding to the Roman god Mars. The hill, which is to the north-west of the Acropolis in Athens, is called "Mars hill" in Acts 17 v 22 in the Authorised Version. It is where the "Council of Areopagus" originally met. By New Testament times this Council was meeting in the Athenian market place, so that is where Paul was probably brought. The Council was an old established group which looked at morals and religion, so we can see why this group took an interest in what Paul was saying.

Acts 17 v 22 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious;

23 "for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you"

Here we see Paul using the principles we saw in 1 Corinthians 9 v 20 to 23 (Session 8, page 9). He adapted his teaching to the situation. In earlier speeches recorded in Acts we have seen that the basis was the Old Testament Scriptures. The Jews being addressed would all be familiar with them. Paul's current audience, however, would have little or no knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures, so Paul began by using ideas with which they were familiar.

The Athenians had so many gods that they considered it necessary to build an altar to the "Unknown God" just in case they had missed one out! Paul used this and told them that it was the "Unknown God" that he had come to tell them about. Paul then gave his message in verses 24 to 31, which is similar in basic content to the earlier speeches, the difference being that the Athenians had no Old Testament background.

We can summarise the message as follows:

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Message</u>
24	God made everything and is not restricted to man-made buildings
25	We cannot give Him anything, He gives us everything
26	All nations are from a common origin and God has organised a timetable and purpose for them all
27	God wants us to seek him
28	We owe our existence and life to God
29	Since God made us, we should not think that God is like anything we can make
30	God has overlooked past ignorance, but now He wants us to think again and repent
31	He has set a day in His planned timetable when He will send Jesus to judge our world in a just way. God has given us the evidence for this plan by raising Jesus from the dead

Have a look at the summary of the messages in Acts on page 15. You will see that the basic message is the same, but on this occasion Paul did not appeal to the Old Testament.

The “Council of the Areopagus” did not accept any notion of a life after death, which is why in verse 32 they mocked and refused to listen any more. Paul may have intended to go on and talk about the other basic teachings if he had been allowed.

In verse 28 Paul quoted from one of their poets in an attempt to make his message relevant to his hearers. It is believed that the author of the poem, Aratus, was from Tarsus, the same city as Paul. In a poem called “Phoenomena” the running of the earth is attributed to the god Zeus.

Verse 34 tells us that a few people listened to Paul’s message and believed.

Acts 18 v 1 to 17 - Preaching at Corinth



Read Acts 18 v 1 to 17



Coin of Corinth

Verse 1 tells us that Paul decided to leave Athens and then went to Corinth.

Acts 18 v 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.

From these verses and the cross-references we learn several facts about Paul and Aquila and Priscilla:

X-Refs-
Acts 18
v 2 and 3

Acts 18 v 26; 20 v 34 and 35; Romans 16 v 3 to 5.

- Aquila and Priscilla and Paul were all tentmakers (Acts 18 v 2 and 3)
- Aquila and Priscilla were sufficiently knowledgeable and confident in preaching to be able to guide Apollos to a correct understanding of the message of Scripture
- Paul worked to be able to provide for his own needs and help the poor, and as an example to others
- Aquila and Priscilla were Paul's "fellow workers", they had risked their lives to help him, and a group of believers met in their house

We may think it strange that Paul, who was destined for high things, being "brought up at the feet of Gamaliel", should work as a tentmaker. This was not uncommon among the well-educated of this time. It was wisely thought that young men should have a trade in addition to their education.

Verse 4 sees Paul reasoning with those in the synagogue at Corinth. We are now very familiar with the method of preaching used by Paul.

In verse 5 we are told that Silas and Timothy had now arrived from Macedonia. Following their arrival Paul continued to preach to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

Acts 18 v 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."

If you look at the cross-references you will see what this shaking meant:

X-Refs-
Shook his garments → Matthew 10 v 14; Luke 10 v 10 and 11; Acts 13 v 51.

Shaking yourself:

- was a sign of indignant protest
- indicated that appeals to reason had not only been ignored, they had also been strongly opposed

Have a look at the cross-references from "your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean." and see what you learn.
Compare your conclusions with those on page 14.

X-Refs-
Your blood → Leviticus 20 v 9, 11 and 12; 2 Samuel 1 v 15 and 16; Acts 20 v 26 and 27.

We can remind ourselves of some interesting information by looking at the references from the phrase "From now on I will go to the Gentiles.":

X-Refs-
I will go → Romans 3 v 29; 9 v 24 to 26, 30 to 33; 10 v 12 and 13; 11 v 11 to 15.

- Paul regarded God as the God of both Jews and Gentiles
- Paul reminds us that Hosea predicted that God would bring Gentiles into His plan
- We are saved by faith, but the Jews tried to earn salvation by keeping the law, and failed
- There is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, all can be saved by "calling on his name"
- Paul made it clear that the Jews still have a place in God's purpose

In Acts 18 v 7 and 8 we see that Paul abandoned his normal practice of using the synagogue to preach in and used the next-door house of Justus, who was probably a non-Jew attracted to the Jewish faith.

His preaching was successful, and we are again reminded of the now familiar progression:

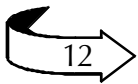
- Hearing God's message
- Believing God's message
- Being baptised

Verses 9 to 11 tell us that God encouraged Paul in a vision to stay at Corinth because there were many people there who would accept his message. So Paul stayed for at least eighteen months.

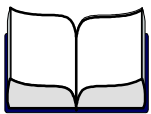
Verses 12 to 17 show that Jewish opposition arose at Corinth, just as it had done in every other place where Paul preached. We do not know at what stage during Paul's stay this incident occurred, but it seems to have been only a minor hiccup, and did not prevent Paul from continuing his work of preaching and helping to establish the Corinthian church. Probably the Jews could not do much to stop Paul as they did not have the support of the Roman Governor Gallio. Gallio clearly had no sympathy for the Jews because he turned a blind eye to the beating of the ruler of the synagogue. (The Authorised Version is maybe a little misleading in its translation of the end of verse 17, "Gallio cared for none of those things". The New King James version has, "Gallio took no notice of these things".)

The letters to the Corinthians

Corinth had a reputation for being an immoral and corrupt place, which led to many problems in the new church. Paul later wrote two letters to the believers in Corinth to try to deal with some of these problems. Have a look at the *Additional Notes* for more information on the two letters to the Corinthians.

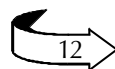


Acts 18 v 18 to 22 - Paul returns to Antioch



Read Acts 18 v 18 to 22

This section is a little puzzling on first reading, bearing in mind Paul's comments in verse 6 of this chapter where he said he was going to concentrate on preaching to the Gentiles from then on. It is possible that he meant that he was not going to preach to the Jews *in Corinth* again.



The two letters to the Corinthians

We see Paul going back to the Jews again:

- v 18 He had taken a vow under the Jewish law of Moses at Cenchrea
- v 19 He went to Ephesus and left Priscilla and Aquila there, and then reasoned in the synagogue
- v 20 He would not stay long, but promised to return, God willing
- v 21 He wanted to go to Jerusalem to keep a feast, and therefore sailed from Ephesus

Verse 22 records that he landed at Caesarea, then went up to Jerusalem to “greet the church”. It could be that Paul was conscious of the potential split that could develop in the church between Jews and Gentiles. Possibly, after spending at least eighteen months in Corinth concentrating on preaching to non-Jews, he decided to give some attention to the Jews to restore the balance.

He may also have wanted to speak to Peter and the rest of the Jerusalem church about what he had been doing and his plans for the future. This would help reduce the Jew-Gentile division.

Verse 22 also tells us that Paul then went to Antioch.

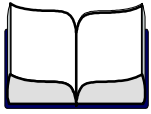
If we look at Map 5 in the *Additional Notes* we see that verses 21 and 22 represent a vast amount of travelling for Paul.

Verses 21 and 22	Ephesus to Caesarea	600 miles (960 km) by boat
	Caesarea to “the church” at Jerusalem	75 miles (120 km)
	Jerusalem to Antioch	300 miles (480 km)

So, at a rough approximation, Paul travelled 975 miles (1560 km). Once again we can see Paul’s commitment to preach to others. His trip to Jerusalem can be seen as an indication of his care and concern that this work should proceed smoothly with everyone’s approval, thus avoiding the possibility of arguments and problems.

This marks the end of Paul’s second missionary journey.

Acts 18 v 23 to 28 - Preaching of Apollos at Ephesus



Read Acts 18 v 23 to 28



Coins of Ephesus

Paul started his third missionary journey from Antioch, presumably with the blessing of Peter and the rest of the Jerusalem church. You can follow his journey on Map 6 in the *Additional Notes*.

Verse 23 tells us that he went from Antioch to Galatia - a distance of about 400 miles (640 km). He returned to the churches he had previously established and encouraged them, and no doubt sorted out any problems.

Verse 24 takes up the story of events in Ephesus following Paul's departure from there recorded in verse 21.

Acts 18 v 24 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.

Here we meet Apollos, a Jew, who had an obvious talent for public speaking and who put his talent to good use.

The cross-references tell us a little more about Apollos and give us lessons to think about:

X-Refs-
Acts 18
v 24

→ Luke 24 v 19; 1 Corinthians 1 v 12; 3 v 5 and 6; Colossians 3 v 16.

- Apollos was like Jesus in being "mighty in ... word"
- Apollos was one of the leaders of the church; he is mentioned with Peter, Paul and Jesus himself
- Even though Paul and Apollos were important workers, it was God who really prospered the work
- We should all try to let Christ's words influence our lives

Verses 25 and 26 tell us that Aquila and Priscilla had to add to Apollos' knowledge of the gospel the significance of baptism into Jesus.

Verse 27 tells us that Apollos then wanted to go and preach in Corinth because he had heard of the success of Paul's work there.

Verse 28 shows that he had obviously quickly understood the full gospel as his message was the same as that of both Peter and Paul - that Jesus was the Christ, or the anointed one, promised in the Old Testament.

In verse 23 we left Paul in Galatia and Phrygia. He eventually travelled to Ephesus, and we shall see what happened there in our next session.

Summary of Session 9

We have again seen that the first-century church believed that:

- Jesus is the Christ or Messiah promised in the Old Testament
- Christ died for our sins
- This was predicted in the Old Testament
- He was raised again the third day
- There is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, all can be saved by “calling on his name”

We have again been reminded of the now familiar progression:

- Hearing God’s message
- Believing God’s message
- Being baptised

We have seen the message and challenge that Paul gave the Athenians:



- God wants us to recognise His existence from the evidence of His Creation
- He wants us to repent
- God will send Jesus to judge the world justly
- God raised Jesus from the dead as evidence that He has a plan for our world

Questions

1. What have you learned about the beliefs of the first-century church?
2. What have you learned about the attitudes of the first-century believers?

Self-study notes

Cross-references from Acts 17 v 11 (page 4)

- Job regarded listening to God's Word as more important than his food (Job 23 v 12)
- Knowledge of God's message is more important than money (Proverbs 8 v 10)
- To receive the message we must both hear and understand (Matthew 13 v 23)
- James tells us that if we humbly receive the message of God it can save our lives (souls) (James 1 v 21)

- God will bless those who think about and act on His Word (Psalm 1 v 1 to 3)
- We should think of God regularly during the day and at night when we can't sleep (Psalm 119 v 97 and 148)
- People who do not teach what God says "have no light in them" (Isaiah 8 v 20)
- The Scriptures were given by God through the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1 v 19 to 21)

Cross-references from "Your blood" (page 9)

- In the Old Testament the expression "his blood shall be on him" meant that the person deserved to die (Leviticus 20 v 9, 11 and 12; 2 Samuel 1 v 15 and 16)
- Paul regarded preaching as a life or death matter and had done his best to prevent people from dying by giving them God's message (Acts 20 v 26 and 27)

Summary of the messages in Acts 2, 3, 10, 13 and 17

Peter's Message to the Jews Acts 2 & 3	Peter's Message to Cornelius Acts 10	Paul's Message at Antioch Acts 13	Paul's Message at Athens Acts 17
			God created all things (v 24)
Jesus was a man having our nature (2 v 22 and 30)		Jesus was a descendant of David (v 23)	Jesus was a man (v 31)
The miracles Jesus did were evidence that he was sent by God (2 v 22)	The disciples witnessed that Jesus performed miracles (v 38 and 39)		Our lives are evidence of God's existence (v 28)
It was part of God's plan that Jesus should die as a sacrifice for our sins (2 v 23; 3 v 14, 15 & 18)	Jesus was killed (v 39)	The rulers fulfilled the prophets' words when they condemned Jesus to death (v 27 to 29)	God has a plan and timetable for our world (v 26)
God raised him to life again (2 v 24, 31 and 32; 3 v 15)	God raised him on the third day - he was seen by the disciples (v 40 and 41)	God raised him to life again (v 30 to 37)	God raised Jesus as evidence of His plan (v 31)
The Holy Spirit was given as a witness (2 v 33 and 38)	The disciples witnessed that Jesus had the Holy Spirit (v 38 and 39)		
God promised David a special descendant (2 v 30)		God promised a saviour for Israel from David's descendants (v 23)	
God promised Abraham a special descendant who would bring blessings on all nations (3 v 25)	Anyone who fears God is accepted by Him (v 34 and 35)	Anyone who believes in Jesus can now be justified - or made right with God (v 39)	God wants all men to repent (v 30)
The special descendant was Jesus Christ (2 v 30 and 36; 3 v 26)	Jesus Christ is Lord (v 36)	The special descendant was Jesus Christ (v 23)	Jesus was appointed by God (v 31)
We can have our sins forgiven through Jesus (2 v 38; 3 v 19 and 26)	The prophets foretold forgiveness of our sins through Jesus (v 43)	We can now have our sins forgiven through Jesus (v 38)	
To be part of God's plan we must repent (2 v 38; 3 v 19)	God accepts those who work righteousness (v 35)	John first preached the baptism of repentance (v 24)	God wants us to repent (v 30)
We must then be baptised (2 v 38)	Baptism commanded (v 47 and 48)		
God has glorified Jesus and we must have faith in the name of Jesus the Prince of life (3 v 13 to 16)	God sent His message of peace to us through the work of Jesus Christ (v 36 and 37)	Those who believe in Jesus are justified (made right) in respect of things which the law of Moses could not do (v 39)	
All the present problems will be solved when God has "refreshed" the earth (3 v 19)	God's message to Israel included peace (v 36)		God will send Jesus to judge our world in a just way (v 31)
Jesus will return to the earth and establish his endless kingdom (3 v 20 and 21)			
	Jesus will be judge of all (v 42)		Jesus will judge the world (v 31)

Notes