

Presentation 7—Acts 15-17

The Decision for the Gentiles—Paul’s Second Missionary Journey



Paul’s First and Second Missionary Journey (Map: Public Domain)

- Acts 15.1-35—*Watershed Decision for the Gentiles*. Paul and Barnabas go from Antioch to meet the Jewish Jesus leadership group, witness to God’s action among Gentiles, address the criticisms of their practice. An orthopraxis emerges. Peter affirms his witness of God’s reception of the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas narrate their experience. James, the brother of Jesus, affirms this new direction of including Gentiles into the Jesus movement. Decision ratified by the rest, affirming the observation of ritual and ethical practices by the Gentiles to ensure communion with Jews. The ‘apostolic decree’ received positively by those in Antioch.
- Acts 15.36-16.5—*Paul’s Third Missionary Journey*. Paul and Barnabas separate. Paul takes Timothy (from Cyprus) who has a Greek and Jewish background, and Silas. Remind their addressees of the Apostolic Decree.

- Acts 16.6- *Mission Continues into Europe*: Paul and companions journey from Asia Minor to Europe and the Greco-Roman world.
 - v14-15: Lydia attracted to Paul’s preaching and is baptised
 - v16-38: *The exorcism* of a female diviner lands Paul and company in prison, divinely released, the jailer becomes a follower, and Paul and Silas move on from Philippi.
- Acts 17.1-15—*Paul in Europe*. Paul and companions arrive in Thessaloniki, then on to Beroa—similar pattern: preaching in synagogue, some attracted to the Jesus movement, though resistance from others. Paul is sent on to Athens.



The Areopagus in Athens, as viewed from the Acropolis

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- Acts 17.16-34 —*Paul in Athens*. Paul discussion with philosophers and thinkers in Athens, a city of culture importance. He affirms the God of Creation, an ecological attestation of God's presence and action in the world. Paul gets, again, a mixed reaction from his listeners. The Athens story reflects Luke's positive, affirming stance to the Greco-Roman world, philosophy and culture.
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FOR FURTHER REFLECTION & CONVERSATION

- Paul is controversial amongst his own Jewish co-religionists. His interpretation of the Scriptures is suspect. Have you experienced anything similar? Do you know of people who have experienced rejection in the church?
- Luke reveals an important 'orthopraxis' through Paul and the Jerusalem Council that decides in favour of the Gentiles. What approach in decision-making have you experienced that reflects something similar: listening to the experience, reflection in silence and ponder the Scriptures, and then a final pastoral decision?
- In Philippi, Paul affirms the prayer-life and practice of Lydia, an industrious and religious woman. What are some of the ways that the local faith community could deepen an inclusive spirit to welcome all into its life and worship?

IN PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT PRESENTATION

- The next session will focus on Acts 18-20. In preparation for this session, spend time with this section of the *Acts of the Apostles*.

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