

Nov 19-25

## **Week 47**

This week as we continue with Act 3, scene 4, we will finish Paul's second missionary journey and transition to the third. Continue to watch for the dynamics surrounding the advance of the gospel across the Mediterranean world. Follow a map at the back of your Bible as you walk with Paul through his mission trips.

This week we will also read Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, which he wrote shortly after founding the congregation in Thessalonica, and we will begin reading 1 Corinthians, written from Ephesus on his third journey. As you read the letters of the New Testament, it will help to have a study Bible or a Bible dictionary. Read an introductory article on each letter to get a basic orientation to what is going on.

Recognize that these wonderful letters were written directly to Christians about what it means to live as followers of Christ in the world. We can be encouraged even through their struggles, and we can be grounded by the theology in these books, even as we are exhorted about our behavior. Continually ask yourself, How will I live differently this week as a result of reading these letters?

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**Day 1**

**Read Acts 17:1-18:18**

**Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 11**

Paul's second missionary journey (AD 50–52) continues today. Notice again Paul's pattern of ministry, as well as the combination of success and opposition. Churches were planted, but the mission continued to be opposed. Also watch for the unique dynamics in the various communities in which Paul preached. The Bereans were wonderfully open to search the Scriptures, while the Athenians lived in a context of intellectual arrogance.

Paul spent a lengthy time (eighteen months) in Corinth, the largest city in Greece and a cosmopolitan economic center of commerce. Notice again that the gospel advanced the kingdom in the hearts of people while drawing a good deal of opposition.

*Why do you think this kind of conflict results from the preaching of salvation?*

*Where do you see conflict over the gospel today?*

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**Day 2**

**Read 1 Thessalonians**

**Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 12**

Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians from Corinth while on his second missionary trip (about AD 50; see Acts 17:1-9). The city was the capital of the province and a major seaport, as well as a main stop on the Via Egnatia, a Roman highway stretching about seven hundred miles from the Adriatic Sea to the city of Byzantium near the Black Sea. The apostle had to leave Thessalonica shortly after establishing the church in that city.

As you read, you will pick up on struggles that church members were having, as well as theological questions. Understand that this was a church of new Christians, many of whom had come from a pagan background (see 1 Thessalonians 1:9). For instance, it seems they were experiencing continued persecution and had questions about the second coming of Christ. They needed encouragement to live pure lives. Yet they were standing for the Lord and had a strong witness among the churches of the Mediterranean world. Watch for notes of encouragement, instruction, and thanksgiving in this letter.

*How does 1 Thessalonians give you encouragement for living the Christian life?*

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**Day 3****Read 2 Thessalonians****Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 13**

Second Thessalonians continued Paul's correspondence to the young congregation in Thessalonica. Paul offered encouragement and instructed them about the coming of the Lord and about appropriate behavior in their community.

There are intriguing passages here. For instance, someone seems to have spoken in Paul's name, proclaiming that the day of the Lord, Jesus's second coming, had already taken place (see 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). Paul told the Thessalonians this was not the case and went on to instruct them about Jesus's second coming. Paul was clear that believers should stand firm in sound teaching as we await the Lord's coming. Paul also taught that believers should live responsibly, providing for their needs by working.

*How do you view work today? Do you see it as a basic component of Christian discipleship?*

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**Day 4****Read Acts 18:19-19:41****Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 14**

Today we transition from the second to the third missionary journey of Paul (AD 53–57). At the end of the second trip, the apostle briefly visited Ephesus, foreshadowing where he would focus his mission in Asia during the third missionary trip. When Paul went back to Ephesus, having traveled back through the Galatian region, he had a very fruitful ministry there for a period of about 2½ years (see Acts 19:8-9), “so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord” (19:10).

As you read about the success of Paul’s ministry and the crisis that arose from it, keep the following facts in mind:

1. As the gospel moved into new territory, God powerfully demonstrated the truth of the gospel by the miraculous. Asia Minor was permeated with cultic, pagan practices, and the gospel confronted this superstitious orientation head-on. God directly bore witness to the truth of the gospel, so he is the real hero of the story.
2. The gospel brought about conflict.

*What relational turbulence do you see around you that results from the gospel’s confronting a different view of the world?*

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**Day 5****Read 1 Corinthians 1-4****Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 15**

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in about AD 54 while in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. He wrote to respond to a letter he had received from the Corinthians (see 1 Corinthians 7:1) and to reports from some in that congregation (see 1:11; 5:1). In the letter he dealt with numerous problems and questions about the behavior of believers in the Corinthian church. In these first four chapters of the book, we see the church as horribly divided, in part due to a faulty understanding of spirituality and a deficient view of the gospel.

*How does a right view of the gospel aid in building church unity?*

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**Day 6****Read 1 Corinthians 5-8****Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 16**

In 1 Corinthians 5–6 the apostle continued to address troubling information he had received through reports about the situation in Corinth. He dealt with incest (see 5:1-13), Christians who took each other to pagan courts (see 6:1-11), and encounters with prostitutes (see 6:12-20). It will help to have a study Bible handy as you read these sections so that you can understand the cultural backdrop, as well as the detailed, logical development of Paul's arguments.

In chapter 7 Paul began to address issues about which the Corinthians had written him, and he started with the question of whether it was appropriate for believers to marry. Evidently, some in the congregation argued that young women who were betrothed to be married should not marry. Paul argued that singleness can be a good gift for some, but God gives many the gift of marriage.

First Corinthians 8 is the first of a couple of passages in which Paul addressed the topic of idolatry. Here he answered the Corinthians' question about whether it is appropriate to eat food that had been offered to an idol.

*Although you may not struggle with the worship of pagan idols, many principles in this passage are very relevant for us today. Which of these principles strike you as powerfully relevant for your life at this time?*

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**Day 7**

**Reading Summary for Week 47**

Two cities where Paul established churches on his second missionary journey were Thessalonica (capital of Macedonia) and Corinth (capital of Achaia). Both these congregations later received multiple letters from the apostle. The Thessalonians especially needed instruction on the coming of the Lord and encouragement in the face of persecution. The Corinthians faced a host of challenges, including divisions and sexual immorality. Paul's letters blended doctrinal insight and behavioral exhortation.

**Prayer/Meditation**

Lord Jesus, I long for your return. I'd like to be in the group that lives until then. I'd like to be caught up "in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Yet so many generations of believers have already died, and if I die before your second coming, I praise you that "the dead in Christ will rise first" (v. 16). As I live in light of your future return, help me see that Paul's teaching was given so that your people might "encourage one another with these words" (v. 18). Amen.

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