

Healthy Church
Session Six: Preaching and Teaching
Commentary

Acts 2:36-37

2:33–36. Peter wanted to proclaim the whole gospel, so he could not stop at the crucifixion and resurrection. In these verses he moves on to the exaltation and the coming of the Holy Spirit, bringing his listeners right up to the moment. Another quote from the Psalms (110:1) surely must have stabbed their collective attention. The humble carpenter of Nazareth was not only the Messiah, but now he lives in heaven and has caused all the Pentecostal commotion which evoked this sermon in the first place. Showing an enormous confidence in his God and his message, Peter used a phrase appearing only here in the New Testament (all Israel) and hammered home his final point: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. In fine homiletical style he returned to his original text (v. 21) and, along with the prophet Joel, extolled the messiahship of his Lord. The one you think dead is your living Lord, Master, and Messiah!

2:37. The combination of God's Scripture and God's Spirit working through God's servant had the intended effect. From their initial question What does this mean? (2:12), the people now progressed to specific response—Brothers, what shall we do? The phrase cut to the heart translates *katenugesan* meaning “stung” or “stunned.” Had some people listening to Peter that day also screamed for blood in Pilate's hall? While the word conviction does not appear in our verse, this clearly reflects that heart attitude. The New Testament uses this word to describe the work of the Holy Spirit by which we see ourselves as we are in God's sight.¹

Acts 17:1-4, 10-12

17:1. For a long while Paul was unable to practice his basic missionary strategy of preaching first in a synagogue. Thessalonica offered him another opportunity. At this significant city (see Profile) which dominated Macedonian government and commerce, the diverse population would have included a significant Jewish component (1 Thess. 2:14–16). From the beginning it appears Paul selected this site as the base for Balkan evangelism (1 Thess. 1:7–8).

Surely they had endured a difficult three days walking here from Philippi despite the continuing pain from their beatings. Covering about thirty-three miles a day along the Via Ignatia, the missionary team must have been exhausted upon arrival. As usual, Luke leaves us with a lot of questions. Why no ministry in Amphipolis and Apollonia? Or was there ministry, and he just didn't tell us about it because Thessalonica would become an important center for the gospel? Did the missionaries have access to horses which eased the journey, or did they possibly amble through several more towns than Luke names, perhaps walking as long as a week to make the trip from Philippi? Luke cares for none of that because he wants to get Paul into that synagogue as quickly as possible.

¹ Kenneth O. Gangel, *Acts*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998).

17:2–3. Despite their experiences in pagan territory where no synagogue existed, the missionary policy had not changed—“To the Jews first, but also to the Gentiles.” Paul stayed at least three weeks, for he went on the Sabbath three times to reason (*dielexato*), explain (*dianoigon*), prove (*paratithemenos*), and proclaim (*kathangello*). This was Paul’s *forté*, his area of greatest expertise. On familiar ground in a synagogue, the former rabbi could now develop a carefully-developed messianic Christology based on a host of Old Testament texts. Today we would talk about a Christian hermeneutic, finding Jesus in key passages throughout the law, the writings, and the prophets (Luke 24:26, 46; Acts 3:18; 26:22–23; 1 Cor. 15:3–4; 1 Pet. 1:11).

17:4. A familiar strategy utilized a familiar message and drew a familiar response. A large number of Jews and proselytes believed. Luke uses the word persuaded (*apeisthesan*), an appropriate corollary to the words he has used to describe the way Paul presented the gospel. Interesting that Luke should mention they joined Paul and Silas. Silas had been in the background for most of this second journey but came into prominence again here in a Jewish setting. Perhaps we should remember that he represented Paul’s seal of approval from Jerusalem in proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles without saddling them with Jewish rituals and restrictions in their quest to come to faith.²

17:10–12. The missionaries were on the road again. In the cover of darkness they continued the fifty miles west to Berea. Much to their delight, they found a synagogue. Sneaking off to Berea had solid precedent in the Roman world. Cicero (106–43 b.c.) had written that Roman authorities were so unpopular in Thessalonica that when he visited that city on government business he sometimes found it necessary to head off to Berea to escape the heat. Perhaps Paul had the same thing in mind. Hang out for awhile in Berea; when things died down, go back inside the beltway to continue his witness.

Paul may not have been prepared for the reception God set up for him in this foothill town. Luke leaves his objective narrative to offer an opinion about the Bereans which has etched them in Christian recognition for two thousand years. How many churches have a “Berean” Sunday school class which, one would hope, attempts to model itself after these open-minded people who personally checked out Paul’s arguments in the Scriptures? Luke seems to be telling us that if recipients of the gospel can put religious, political, and social prejudice out of the way for a bit, they will understand how logical and biblical the message about Jesus really is. Luke’s reference to Greek men and women in verse 12 indicates that Greek Gentiles as well as Jews and proselytes came to faith in Berea.

Acts 18:24-26

18:24. Another Lucan meanwhile, this time with the actual word inserted. We need to know what happened in Ephesus before Paul arrived, so Luke breaks into the narrative of Paul’s ministry to tell us about a new character—Apollos. A native of Alexandria (see “Life Application”), he was well-educated and well-versed in the Old Testament text. He had become a Christian evangelist and zealously proclaimed everything he knew about the gospel.

² Kenneth O. Gangel, *Acts*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998).

How he came to faith and why he came to Ephesus, Luke does not tell us. Since Luke has repeatedly emphasized God's control over all events related to his people, he probably expects readers to understand Apollos' visit to Ephesus and his encounter with Priscilla and Aquila as very much a part of the divine plan.

18:25. Apollos understood the way of the Lord, spoke with great zeal, and curiously, taught about Jesus accurately; yet he only knew about the baptism of John (see "Deeper Discoveries"). Presumably, Luke wants us to understand that Apollos' knowledge of the gospel and the messianic truth about Jesus came through disciples of John the Baptist, thereby limiting his understanding to pre-Pentecost Christian theology.

18:26. Like many preachers, what Apollos said was quite true. What he left out demonstrated his inadequate understanding of Christian truth. We may assume that he had no idea about the coming of the Holy Spirit, the founding of the church, and certainly the now extensive mission to the Gentiles. Who better to pick up on that deficiency than these stable and mature Christians, Priscilla and Aquila. Together they invited him home, and together they taught him the Word of God. We can only imagine the astonishment and joy with which Apollos received this new information.³

³ Kenneth O. Gangel, *Acts*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998).