Chapter 9

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

(Continued)

Paul and Silas Preach to the Beroeans.—On leaving Thessalonica, Paul and Silas not only were forced to depart from friends and converts but were obliged suddenly to give up the work by which they had sustained themselves. Luke says nothing about their manual labor while they were in Thessalonica, but months later, when he writes back to the Church branch there, Paul reminds us of it in these words:

For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. I Thess. 2:9; cf. 2 Thess. 3:8-10.)

Paul doubtless labored at his trade as a tent-maker, and Silas may have helped him, but on this point we cannot be certain. It is also of interest to us to learn that although Paul would receive no help from the Thessalonians, yet he did accept assistance from the Philippian saints, possibly because he knew them better and also because they may have been more well-to-do. Notice these words in Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians:

For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. (Phil. 4:16)

Paul must have felt sad to leave his very successful labors in Thessalonica, but he and his companions could cheer themselves at the thought that they had left behind them a fine nucleus of converts who would carry on successfully after their departure. The missionaries had to retreat;
nevertheless, they had the satisfaction of victory even in withdrawal.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy made their way, possibly for a short distance to begin with, upon the Egnatian Road, some forty-five miles west and south of Thessalonica to Beroea, one of the most populated cities in Macedonia. The journey must have taken at least two days.

On their arrival, according to Luke, they “went into the synagogue of the Jews.” (Acts 17:10) Paul never failed to give the Jews their opportunity to receive the gospel, and this was no exception. But the missionaries found the Jews and Greeks in Beroea to be unusually open-minded and amenable to their preaching:

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed: also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. (Acts 17:11-12)

Paul had come in contact with so many persons having closed minds and lean intellects (what missionary hasn’t?) that the Beroeans must have seemed to him like beings from a better world. An open-minded man may not be the greatest of the creations of God, but he is certainly among the greatest. Luke says that not only did these people receive the word with “all readiness of mind,” but they also “searched the Scriptures daily” in order to verify for themselves the truth of what was told them. (Ibid.) No wonder the author of the Acts brands the Beroeans as “noble”! We call the attention of all Latter-day Saints, particularly the younger generation, to the emphasis placed here upon the Scriptures as a basic spiritual source. The Beroeans used it to test Paul and his companions. So we ought to test the truth of the various doctrines of our day.

The missionaries converted not only Jews but also prominent Greeks, who had been previously attracted to the high...
the high moral teachings of the Jews and to their Scriptures. We ought never to forget how indebted were the early Christian missionaries, men like Paul, Barnabas, and Silas, to the presence of Jewish centers of worship in the great centers of Asia and Europe. In these centers were converted to the Church many Jews and Gentiles.

How long the missionaries continued their successful ministry under ideal conditions we do not know, but it must have been relatively short, possibly two or three months at the most. Word of Paul’s success reached Thessalonica in due time, either by Jews from Beroea or by Jews who came from Thessalonica and saw for themselves. In any event, angry Jews from the synagogue in Thessalonica made haste to Beroea and repeated the infamous tactics that had proved so successful against the missionaries in their own city. (Acts 17:13) It appears that Paul was the special object of their fury, because “the brethren” found it possible to engineer his escape only by employing a ruse: an escort of them made as if to send him away by sea and, when clear of the city, seem to have changed their course southward and accompanied him all the way to Athens. (Acts 17:14-15) Silas and Timothy were left in Beroea for the time being.

Paul Faces the Philosophers in Athens.—When Paul’s friends had seen him safely in Athens, they returned bearing a message from him to Silas and Timothy to join him as speedily as they possibly could. (Acts 17:15) While waiting for them, Paul had ample opportunity to observe Athens and her people at close range. We have no reason to believe that he was insensible to the greatness of the city as the chief center of culture in the world of that day. It was true that her golden age was now long past, but she had a great university, and learned men from all over the Mediterranean flocked there. And Romans often sent their sons there to visit and be educated. The Greeks were the
intellectual elite of the day. A great tradition of art, architecture, literature, and philosophy still hovered over the city in spite of its decadence. The mute evidence in stone of a great talent in sculpture and architecture was all about Paul. Everywhere he looked were to be seen glorious statues and buildings. Here was the Jew eyeing the Greek and taking stock.

While on visits to the Acropolis, the author has often wondered what Paul’s thoughts of the Greeks were. As one wanders through the Parthenon and other ruins, one cannot help but marvel and wonder at the genius of the Greeks and their sense of beauty. Nor should we Westerners forget the great debt which our civilization owes to the Greeks.

Paul the Jew was doubtless impressed by the outward evidence of Greek talent, but spiritually he was roused to anger within himself for, as Luke reports, “his spirit was stirred [Greek: roused to anger] in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.” (Acts 17:16) What the people of this city desperately needed, he had to give, the “good news” of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So he repaired to the synagogue, where he reasoned with the Jews and the “God-fearers” who were in the congregation.

In the meantime, Silas and Timothy seem to have joined Paul in Athens. These two brethren had doubtless labored hard, but quietly, to put the work in Beroea on a firmer foundation after Paul’s flight. But Paul was concerned with the branches that had been raised up in Macedonia. He concluded that it was wiser to send Silas and Timothy back, rather than to labor with them in Athens, where the prospects of establishing a healthy branch of the Church were slim. So young Timothy, inexperienced as he was, was sent to Thessalonica:

Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; and sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow-laborer in the Gospel of
Christ, to establish you [Greek: buttress, or strengthen you], and to comfort you concerning your faith. (1 Thess. 3:1-2)

These words of Paul, months later, do not tell us where Silas was sent, but it is highly probable that he was sent to Philippi, because in due time contributions seem to have reached Paul from there. (Phil. 4:15)

Once more left alone in Athens, Paul continued his labors with members of the synagogue; and to the market-place, day after day he resorted and struck up discussions with any and all whom he happened to meet there. It was the custom of the day for philosophers to frequent the market-place and discourse to the public. Paul simply imitated them so as to get an audience, but he had something far more valuable to give to his audience than philosophic jargon. During his rounds in the market-place Paul encountered some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who, in their intellectual conceit, asked, “What has this sperma-logos [i.e., seed-picker, or retailer of second-hand information] to say?” (Acts 17:18) Others answered on this wise, somewhat literally translated, “He seems to be a reporter of foreign demons [evil-spirits].” (Ibid.) They said this because he had announced to them the glad tidings of Jesus and the Resurrection. (Ibid.) The Greek word Anastasis (Resurrection) they took for a goddess and supposed that when Paul was speaking of “Jesus and Anastasis,” he was referring to two foreign divinities. The philosophers then led Paul to the Areopagus, “Mars’ Hill,” before the Council of the Areopagus, saying:

May we know what this new doctrine [teaching] whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears; we would know therefore what these things mean. (Acts 17:19-20)

It is supposed by some authorities that Paul had to have his competency as a religious lecturer passed on by the Council at this time, but such is doubtful, in view of Luke’s amusing comment on the above passage:
For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing. (Acts 17:21)

It is more than likely that the Council, such as it was, was more interested in hearing novel points of view in Paul’s teaching, and in amusing themselves at the expense of this foreign “hay-seed,” than in trying to prove his competency.

Paul was too sensitive and intelligent a person not to recognize the spirit that moved his audience, but he determined, if possible, to penetrate the callousness and condescension of its members and appeal to any latent spirituality that they might possess. It was his duty to appeal to the honest in heart, if there was but one such person in the crowd. Paul had never had such an audience as this, and never did he need to marshal all of his spiritual and intellectual resources as with this mixed array of curious spectators. He was in a sense on trial before the Greek philosophers and intellectuals, not to mention a possible scattering of strangers from various parts of the Mediterranean world.

Paul’s address, as far as he was able to proceed with it, was a masterpiece and eloquently delivered. It dealt with the true nature of God, the greatest of all the themes known to man. The theme was tactfully introduced and developed in such a way as to appeal to the Greek yearning after God. In the words of A. T. Robertson:

He [Paul] waves aside the worship of idols by an argument from nature and represents God as near those who are groping in the dark toward him (cf. in Rom. 1 and 2, the other side, the heathen going away from God). He presents God, the living God, as the centre of life and the Father of all men, as spirit and to be worshipped in spirit. This God commands repentance from sin and will judge all by the man whom he has sent and raised from the dead."

With this brief introduction, the reader is urged to consider the address in detail:

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' Hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. (Acts 17:22-31)

This was as far as Paul got in his address. He was about to proclaim the heart of the Christian message, Christ and Him crucified, but his mention of anastasis, resurrection, was more than his audience could bear, and some mocked at him either by word or gesture. Still others, more polite but none the less bored by his talk, turned to him and said, "We will hear thee again of this." (Acts 17:32) So the proceedings broke up, to what would have been Paul's complete humiliation, had not a few persons attached themselves to him, "and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite [a member of the Council], and a woman named Damaris, and others with them." (Acts 17:34) Perhaps one of the "others" was Stephanas of Corinth, who must have been visiting in Athens at the time. He is prominently mentioned by Paul in his letter
to the Corinthians as the “first-fruits of Achaia.” (I Cor. 16:15-17)

Paul’s experiences with the philosophers and intellectuals in Athens taught him what so many of God’s servants have found out, that when men are smug in their intellectual conceit, the word of God cannot touch them. “But to be learned is good,” said Jacob, a Book of Mormon prophet, “if they hearken unto the counsels of God.” (2 Nephi 9:29)

Paul now determined to leave Athens, and it is by no means impossible that Stephanas persuaded him to go to Corinth.

Paul Departing From Athens and Proceeding to Corinth.
—Paul could have traveled overland on foot to Corinth, but it is highly probable that he took the much more direct and convenient water route through the Saronic Gulf and landed at Cenchreae, a port about eight miles east and a little south of Corinth. Burned to ashes in 146 B.C., Corinth was rebuilt in 44 B.C. by Julius Caesar and became the political and commercial capital of the Roman Province of Achaia. The town was built around the Acro-Corinthus, a rocky hill, whose summit served as a citadel and as a temple site. The strategic commercial position that Corinth held on the narrow isthmus between the Gulf of Corinth and the Aegean can best be realized from an airplane, as the writer can attest, and today a great canal connects these two bodies of water. But in Paul’s day, goods had to be unloaded from ships, hauled across the isthmus, and reloaded in order to avoid the long and dangerous voyage around the Peloponnesus. The commerce through Corinth was so great that the city was possibly the richest in Greece. Not only that, but the famous Isthmian games attracted great crowds and considerably enlarged the city’s income.

Paul may well have attended these games, to judge from one of his letters to the Corinthians. (I Cor. 9:24) It should
be noticed that Corinth was not unknown as an intellectual center, and her art was especially prized.

But vice often attends great wealth and prosperity, and Corinth was in the throes of Aphrodite worship, with all its licentiousness and vicious immoral practices. So widespread and brazen was the immorality of the city that it gave birth and meaning to a verb, “to corinthianize.”

Despite the wickedness of Corinth, Paul’s ministry there was to prove far more successful than the one at Athens, where the arrogant philosophers were so disdainful of spiritual matters.

Paul Works at His Trade with Aquila and Priscilla.—On coming to Corinth, Paul had become acquainted with a Jewish couple, Aquila (native of Pontus) and Priscilla, and because he plied the same trade as they—that of tent-making—he lodged at their home and worked with them. (Acts 18:1-3) Apparently Aquila and Priscilla were already members of the Church, for no mention is made of Paul’s converting them. They had but recently come from Italy because of Claudius’s edict banishing all the Jews from Rome. This edict had been issued about A.D. 50, and it is quite possible that Aquila and Priscilla had been converted in Rome and were members of the Church there when the order of expulsion came. The Romans would look upon the Christians as merely members of a Jewish sect. The names of this prominent Christian couple (Acts 18:18-19; I Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19), Jews though they were, are Roman, because it was common and understandable for Jews living outside Palestine to assume such names. Because of the fact that the New Testament several times mentions Priscilla’s name before that of her husband, it has been conjectured that she was originally a woman of high station, who became a proselyte and afterward married Aquila.
Paul Preaches to Jews and Greeks.—Sabbath after Sabbath, following his tent-making during the week, Paul entered the Jewish synagogue in Corinth and preached earnestly, seeking to persuade both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 18:4)

After a time Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia. In this book we are assuming that this is the second time that these brethren joined Paul from that field of labor, the other time being while he was in Athens. Many writers on Paul believe this to be his first meeting with Silas and Timothy after leaving Beroea. The author finds it somewhat difficult to believe that Paul would ask his friends, who had accompanied him to Athens, to return and send Silas and Timothy “with all speed” (Acts 17:15) and then be able to countermand the order in time to prevent their coming to him. He could possibly have done it in some way, but we should keep in mind that the sending of mail was not the simple and speedy affair then that it is now. Furthermore, it is more than likely that his friends would have nearly reached their homes before Paul came to the conclusion to remain in Athens alone. (I Thess. 3:1) The friends would have Silas and Timothy well on their way to join him, before Paul could countermand the previous order and direct them instead to proceed to Thessalonica and Philippi.

But whatever the truth may be regarding a previous meeting in Athens, the fact remains that Silas and Timothy had now reached Corinth in time to find Paul “pressed in the spirit” and giving solemn evidence that Jesus was the Christ. (Acts 18:5) Silas had probably left Philippi with several of his brethren and a generous contribution to give Paul (cf. 2 Cor. 11:9), and, by pre-arrangement, met Timothy in Thessalonica, from whence all came on to Corinth together. The coming of the brethren tended to relieve Paul’s anxieties respecting the Church branches in Macedonia, for although there had been persecution,
severe enough at least in Thessalonica to match the difficulties in Judea, still the people had remained firm and steadfast in the faith. (I Thess. 2:14-16) But after hearing Timothy’s report, Paul was aware that the Thessalonians needed some advice and counsel by letter from him.
PAUL'S LIFE
AND
LETTERS

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