

“And So Were the Churches Established in the Faith”

Lesson 31

Acts 15:36–18:22; 1 and 2 Thessalonians

Purpose To help class members learn from Paul’s teachings about how to share the gospel and how to live as Saints.

- Preparation**
1. Read, ponder, and pray about the following scriptures:
 - a. Acts 15:36–41; 16; 17:1–15; 18:1–22. After the dispute over Gentile converts and the law of Moses is resolved, Paul and Barnabas prepare for their second missionary journey. They disagree over a missionary companion and decide to separate. Paul takes Silas and Timothy and begins missionary labors in Macedonia and Greece. They are frequently persecuted but convert many people.
 - b. Acts 17:16–34. Paul visits Athens and sees the whole city taken in idolatry. He testifies to the Athenian philosophers and preaches on Mars’ Hill about the nature of God, the unity of people as offspring of God, and the Resurrection.
 - c. 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Paul writes two letters to the Saints in Thessalonica, a city in Macedonia. He counsels them about sharing the gospel, preparing for the Second Coming, and living as Saints.
 2. Additional reading: 1 Corinthians 2:4–5, 10–13; Bible Dictionary, “Pauline Epistles: Epistles to the Thessalonians,” 743.
 3. If the following materials are available, you may want to use them during the lesson:
 - a. A map of Paul’s second missionary journey (map 20 in the LDS edition of the King James Bible).
 - b. “The Second Coming,” a three-minute segment of *New Testament Video Presentations* (53914).
 4. Suggestion for teaching: Class members have a responsibility to come to class prepared to ask questions, contribute insights, share experiences, and bear testimony. Encourage class members to prepare for class by studying the scriptures and praying daily. Express interest in and appreciation for class members’ contributions to the class.
-

Suggested Lesson Development

Attention Activity As appropriate, use the following activity or one of your own to begin the lesson.

Tell the following story:

While living with the Heywood family in Salt Lake City during the late 1800s, John Morgan dreamed one night that he was traveling down a road in Georgia. He recognized the road because he had used it often as a soldier in the United States Civil War. He came to a fork in the road and saw Brigham Young standing there. Although the right fork led to the next town, President Young told him to take the left fork.

Mr. Morgan, who was not a member of the Church at the time, told Sister Heywood about his dream and asked what she thought of it. She told him she believed he would join the Church and serve a mission in the southern states, and that one day he would find himself on the road he had seen in his dream. When that happened, he should remember Brigham Young’s counsel and take the left fork.

Many years later, after John Morgan had been baptized and called as a missionary to the southern states, he came to the fork in the road that he had seen in his dream. He remembered the counsel to take the left fork, so he did. An hour later, he found himself at the edge of Heywood Valley—a beautiful place with the same name as the family with whom he had been staying when he had the dream years earlier.

As he traveled throughout the valley preaching, he found that the people were well prepared to hear the gospel. After hearing him teach, several families mentioned that a stranger had come through the valley ten days before, asking permission to mark their Bibles. The stranger had told them that another messenger would come and explain the marked passages to them. John Morgan had explained these marked passages as he taught the gospel. During the following weeks, Elder Morgan taught and baptized all but three of the twenty-three families in the valley. (Bryant S. Hinckley, *The Faith of Our Pioneer Fathers* [1956], 242–44.)

- What contributed to John Morgan’s success as a missionary? (Answers may include that he was willing to work hard, he listened to the Spirit, and the people’s hearts had been prepared to accept the gospel.)

Explain that this lesson is about the Apostle Paul, who, like John Morgan, listened to the Spirit and was a successful missionary. On his second missionary journey, Paul suffered many persecutions but also found many people who were prepared to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Scripture Discussion and Application

As you teach about Paul’s second missionary journey, discuss what we can learn from Paul about teaching the gospel, preparing ourselves to learn the gospel, and strengthening our testimonies.

1. Paul, Silas, and Timothy preach throughout Macedonia and Greece.

Discuss Acts 15:36–41; 16; 17:1–15; 18:1–22. Invite class members to read selected verses. You may want to remind class members that the book of Acts was written by Luke. He apparently traveled with Paul on some of Paul’s missionary journeys, because he often uses the word *we* when referring to the actions of Paul and his missionary companions (Acts 16:10).

- During his second missionary journey, Paul preached in many Macedonian and Greek cities, including Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, and Athens. (Point out these cities on the map.) How did the Spirit direct Paul and his companions during the journey? (See Acts 16:6–10; 18:9–11.) How has the Spirit directed your efforts to serve the Lord?
- The scriptures record that Lydia heard and believed Paul’s words because the Lord had opened her heart (Acts 16:14–15). Why is an “open heart” necessary for conversion to the gospel? (See Mosiah 2:9; D&C 64:34.) Invite class members to tell about experiences when the Lord has opened their heart (or the heart of someone they know) to the gospel.

- Why were Paul and his companions imprisoned in Thyatira? (See Acts 16:16–24.) How were they freed? (See Acts 16:25–26.) How did they use this experience as a missionary opportunity? (See Acts 16:27–34.) What are some other examples, from Church history or your own life, where good has come out of persecution?
- What did Paul teach the people in Thessalonica when he spent three Sabbaths in the synagogue with them? (See Acts 17:1–3.) What were the results of Paul’s teachings in Thessalonica? (See Acts 17:4–10.)
- How did the people in the synagogue in Berea receive Paul’s teachings? (See Acts 17:10–12.) How can we develop a “readiness of mind” for learning the gospel?

2. Paul preaches on Mars’ Hill to the Athenian philosophers.

Read and discuss selected verses from Acts 17:16–34. Explain that after Paul left Berea, he came to Athens, which was then a center of world culture. Philosophers there viewed God as an abstract being or power, rather than as the literal Father of our spirits. They worshiped God’s creations rather than God himself. They replaced revelation with reason and debate, valuing the wisdom of men more than the truths of God.

- The philosophers in Athens “spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21). How is this tendency evident today? What dangers could there be in always seeking “some new thing”?
- What did Paul teach the Athenians about God? (See Acts 17:22–31; see also the Joseph Smith Translation of Acts 17:27 in footnote 27*b*.) Why is it important to know that “we are [God’s] offspring”? (Acts 17:28). How does an understanding of God’s true nature and his role as our Father help us love and worship him?
- Paul countered the philosophers’ reason and logic with a sincere witness of God, our Father. In teaching the gospel, why is a sincere testimony more convincing than logic and reason? (See 1 Corinthians 2:4–5, 10–13.)
- Why did the philosophers listen to Paul? (See Acts 17:18–21.) How do you think this motive affected their response to Paul’s message? (See Acts 17:32–33.) How can we prepare ourselves to hear and understand the words of Church leaders?

3. Paul writes letters of counsel to the Saints in Thessalonica.

Read and discuss selected verses from 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

- Paul was concerned about the Saints in Thessalonica but was unable to return to visit them, so he sent Timothy (1 Thessalonians 2:17–18; 3:1–2, 5–7). After Timothy’s return, Paul wrote two letters giving counsel and encouragement to the Thessalonian Saints. What can we learn from Paul’s efforts in behalf of new members of the Church?
- What does Paul teach in 1 Thessalonians 1:5 and 2:2–12 about how to teach the gospel to others? (List class members’ responses on the chalkboard.) How has following these principles helped you teach the gospel?
- What concerns of the Thessalonian Saints are reflected in Paul’s explanations of the Second Coming? (See 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 5:1–3.) What did Paul tell the Thessalonians would happen before the Second Coming? (See 2 Thessalonians 2:1–4.) How was this prophecy fulfilled? (See D&C 1:15–16; 112:23; Joseph Smith—History 1:19.)

- What did Paul tell the Thessalonian Saints they should do to prepare for the Second Coming? (See 1 Thessalonians 5:4–8.) What should we do to prepare for the Second Coming?

If you are using the video presentation “The Second Coming,” show it now. Briefly discuss Elder Packer’s and Elder Maxwell’s counsel about preparing for the Second Coming but not worrying about when it will happen.

- What counsel did Paul give the Thessalonians about living as Saints? (See 1 Thessalonians 4:9–12; 5:11–22.) List class members’ responses on the chalkboard. As the Spirit directs, discuss some of the points of counsel you have listed. The discussion could include how we can more fully follow the counsel and how we are blessed as we do so.

Conclusion

Bear testimony of the truths Paul taught about the qualities that successful missionaries and compassionate Latter-day Saints should possess. Encourage class members to seek to develop these qualities so they can help prepare themselves and others for the Lord’s Second Coming.

Additional Teaching Idea

The following material supplements the suggested lesson outline. You may want to use this idea as part of the lesson.

Teaching the gospel with the right attitude

Have class members read 1 Thessalonians 2:2–3. Point out that Paul said the gospel should be taught with boldness and without deceit or trickery. Elder James E. Talmage added that we should boldly teach the truth without criticizing or attacking other people’s beliefs. Share the following story to illustrate this:

When he was a student, Elder Talmage was once approached by a man offering to sell him an excellent oil lamp. Elder Talmage already had a lamp he felt was satisfactory, but he allowed the lamp seller to come up to his room to demonstrate.

“We entered my room, and I put a match to my well-trimmed lamp. My visitor was high in his praise. It was the best lamp of its kind, he said, and he had never seen a lamp in better trim. He turned the wick up and down, and pronounced the judgment perfect.

“‘Now,’ he said, ‘with your permission I’ll light my lamp,’ taking it from his satchel. . . . Its light made bright the remotest corner of my room. Its brilliant blaze made the flame in my lamp weak and pale. Until that moment of convincing demonstration I had never known the dim obscurity in which I had lived and labored, studied and struggled.”

Elder Talmage bought the new lamp, and he later suggested what we can learn from the lamp seller as we teach the gospel: “The man who would sell a lamp did not disparage mine. He placed his greater light alongside my feebler flame, and I hastened to obtain it.

“The missionary servants of the Church of Jesus Christ today are sent forth, not to assail nor ridicule the beliefs of men, but to set before the world a superior light, by which the smoky dimness of the flickering flames of man-made creeds shall be apparent. The work of the Church is constructive, not destructive” (in Albert L. Zobell Jr., *Story Gems* [1953], 45–48; see also *The Parables of James E. Talmage*, comp. Albert L. Zobell Jr. [1973], 1–6).