

Women's Bible Study

A TWO-YEAR JOURNEY THROUGH
THE STORY OF GOD

Week 6 | Unleashed through the Plot Twists | Acts 15:36-18:22

We closed last week's passage with Paul and Barnabas back in Antioch, the home base, where they continued to teach and preach the Word of God. This week's lesson begins with their decision to embark on a second missionary journey. They experienced so many unanticipated plot twists on this trip—plot twists with purpose, as we will see.

1. PLOT TWIST #1: Travel Companions. Read Acts 15:36-16:5.

- a) As Barnabas and Paul prepare to travel back to the towns visited on their first journey, they almost immediately hit a “snag.” What happened? (15:36-41; also see 13:13)

If you are concerned that two different perspectives caused division, notice how Paul refers to both of these men in later letters. (1 Corinthians 9:6; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; and 2 Timothy 4:11)

- b) Who now comprised the two “missionary teams” that headed in opposite directions? (15:39b-40) Who was added to Paul's team along the way? (16:1-4)
- c) The plot twist sent two missionary teams instead of one. What was the result of this development? (16:5) What do you imagine could have been the unintentional benefits of this twist?
- d) Personal Reflection: When have you experienced unexpected benefits of a plot twist in your life?

2. PLOT TWIST #2: Redirection to Macedonia. Read Acts 16:6-10

- a) Check out the map to locate where Paul and his men were traveling. Where were they prevented from preaching and entering? Who prevented them? (16:6-7)
- b) When Paul's team came to Troas, what direction did Paul receive? (16:9-10)

Also, note in verse 10 the shift from “they” to “we,” indicating a new member had joined their team—none other than Luke, who would go on to write the gospel of Luke and this book of Acts. Nice plot twist!

- c) Personal Reflection: Sometimes our plans encounter obstacles that we can't seem to overcome. What is your typical reaction? How does Paul and his team's perspective and experience challenge or encourage you?

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3. PLOT TWIST #3: Crazy times in Philippi. Read Acts 16:11-40.

- a) Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke set sail for Macedonia, arriving ultimately at the leading city of Philippi. Looking for a place of prayer on the Sabbath, they went to the riverside. There, they met Lydia. How did Luke describe her? (16:14)

Describe her conversion experience. (16:14-15)

- b) Describe the next sequence of events that brought Paul into the center of public awareness—a dramatic way “to get the word out!” (16:16-21)
- c) The scene became very ugly and violent among the crowd and the authorities. How did Paul and Silas suffer as a result of the false charges against them? (16:22-24)

What miraculous “plot twist” brought deliverance to Paul and Silas? (16:25-28)

How did this painful experience powerfully advance the spread of the gospel? (16:29-34)

- d) The impact of the plot twist continues the next day with a bold move by Paul. How did he get a final interaction with the city leaders before they left Philippi? (16:35-40)
- e) Personal Reflection: A horrible experience turned amazing as Paul and Silas prayed and sang and trusted God. “Impossible” people to reach were reached with the gospel. Has there been a time in your life when a painful experience unfolded eventually as a great blessing?

We have a distinct feeling that these men were constantly aware that they were a willing part of a much bigger story, one in which they were players but not the stars. How would viewing your life through this lens change you—your attitude, your responses, your handling of hardship, your view of people, etc.?

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4. PLOT TWIST #4: Chaos in Thessalonica and Berea. Reads Acts 17:1-15

- a) Thessalonica: Paul and Silas traveled to Thessalonica. Where did Paul go to teach? What was his message to them? (17:2-3)

What was their response? (17:4)

What opposition did Paul and Silas encounter? How does the mob stir up the city? (17:5-9)

- b) Berea: Having escaped from Thessalonica at night, Paul and Silas came to Berea. How did the Bereans receive the message of Jesus? How did they evaluate the truth of what they heard? (17:11-12)

Personal Reflection: In light the Berean's eager and daily evaluation of truth in light of Scripture, how could you incorporate their example into your daily life? How would that prepare you to discern truth from error?

- c) This portion of their journey did not go well. Or did it? How did the opposition arriving from Thessalonica, intent on harming Paul and Silas, actually "help" Paul get to Athens? (17:13-15)

Note what these passages indicate God was doing in the midst of the chaos?

Acts 20:4 –

1 Thessalonians 1:4-10 (Paul's letter to the Thessalonians) –

- d) Personal Reflection: Even when life seems chaotic on the surface, underneath the surface, God is steadily shaping people and furthering His Kingdom. Do you more often keep your eyes on and live in the chaos of life or in the steady progress of God in your life and those around you?

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5. PLOT TWIST #5: Amazing Sermon in Athens. Read Acts 17:16-34

- a) When Paul came to Athens, he found a cosmopolitan city full of people who worshiped many gods. Where did he go to reach these Gentiles with the good news of Jesus? (17:17)

How did the philosophers in Athens react to his message? (17:18-20)

Why did they not reject Paul's message immediately? (17:21)

- b) Paul now gives a famous and ingenious sermon at the Areopagus (a hill in the shadow of the Acropolis, home of the pagan temples and crowned with the Parthenon, overlooking the marketplace; also refers to the Athenian council that met there). How did he connect with his audience? (17:22-23)
Once he has connected with their worldview and piqued their interest, He describes the grandeur and the glory of the Creator God. Bullet point below the qualities of God Paul describes. (17:24-29)

What does Paul say is the message of God to men? Express it in your own words. (17:30-31)

Many sneered; others wanted to hear more. But what happened with a few? (17:34)

- c) Personal Reflection: Verses 26-27 gives us a very profound insight into when and where we live. It's not random. It's part of God's storyline. What are the implications for your life and the lives of those placed around you?

6. PLOT TWIST #6: Settling in at Corinth and Passing through Ephesus. Read Acts 18:1-22.

- a) Arriving in Corinth, Paul finds a key ministry couple with whom to live and work, Aquila and Priscilla. He works as a tent-maker by day and persuades in the synagogue on the Sabbath. His message was opposed by the Jews, so Paul turned to the Gentiles. What effect did Paul's preaching to the Gentiles have in Corinth? (18:7-8)

One night, God spoke to Paul in the form of a vision. In a twist, God opens the door for effective ministry. What did the Lord promise him and why? (18:9-10)

What did Paul do in response? (18:11)

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The Jews did rise up against Paul during his stay; however, Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, refused to get involved. His reaction resulted in a toleration of Christianity in that city apparently until the time of Nero.

- b) When Paul finally left to return home, taking Aquilla and Priscilla, God opened the door to Ephesus, in the part of Asia that God had previously closed (see 16:6). Though he was not there long, what did Paul do in Ephesus, and how did he set them up for further spiritual nurturing? (18:19-21)
- c) Personal Reflection: Who are the people in your life who you assume are “closed doors” spiritually that God may eventually open to the reality of Jesus? How do the plot twists in Corinth and Ephesus encourage you?

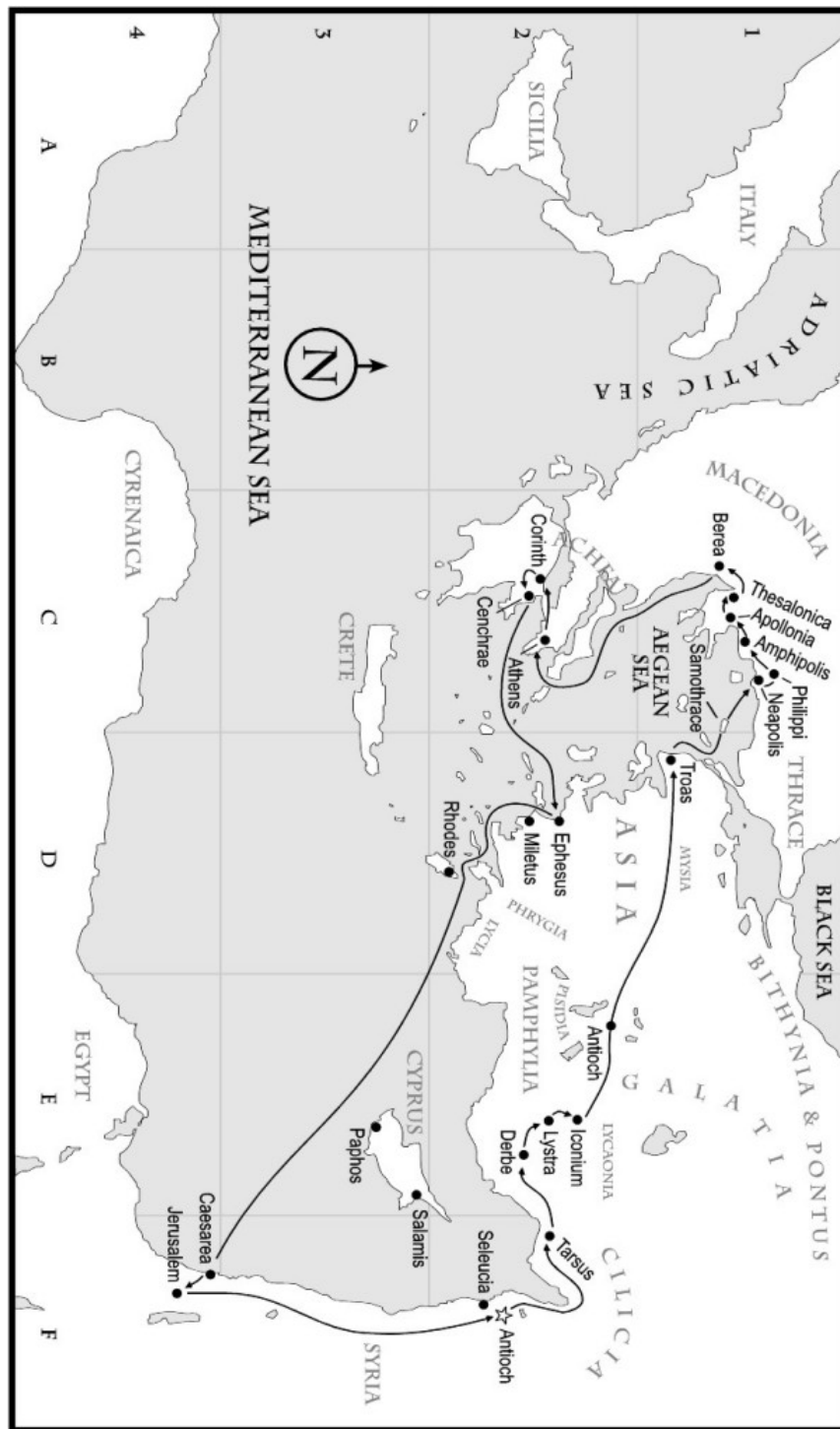
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