

# “And So Were the Churches Established in the Faith”

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

Lesson  
**31**  
Summary

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## Scripture Summary:

*Paul chooses Silas as his companion. Paul directed in a vision to preach in Macedonia—He casts an evil spirit out of a woman—He and Silas are imprisoned, and convert the jailor—They admonish all to believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved. Paul and Silas preach and are persecuted in Thessalonica and in Berea—Paul, in Athens, preaches on Mars' hill about the Unknown God—He says: 'We are the offspring of God.' Being rejected by the Jews, Paul turns to the Gentiles—He preaches, ministers, and travels. The gospel comes both in word and in power. True ministers preach in a godly manner—Converts are the glory and joy of missionaries.*

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## Supplemental Holy Land and Jewish insights:

**Synagogue Means Meeting House:** A look at Jewish life at the time of the early Saints helps to understand the setting of these chapters. The temple of Jerusalem and the priestly government in Jerusalem were no longer the focal point of worship. Synagogues were becoming more autonomous centers of local leadership and community discussion, as well as worship centers. The common term “synagogue” comes from the Greek language. It means “meeting house,” or Bet Knesset, in Hebrew. Meeting houses existed before the second temple was destroyed, although there were few of them that have been uncovered archaeologically. Several synagogues were mentioned in Jesus’ ministry. (Matthew 12:9; Matthew 13:54; Mark 1:21; Luke 4:16; John 12:42)

**Synagogues Began to Replace Temple Worship:** After the Temple destruction, many synagogues were built similar to previous synagogues in that they had three meeting areas. The outer area was for the congregation, usually divided into two parts or two sides, one for women and one for men. The second part had a “Bimah” (usually a raised platform) with a table for Torah scroll as it was being read. The third part of the meeting house contained the ark that held the sacred scrolls. The ark was usually decorated with a “sun stone” or sunburst design above it and had a curtain (veil) that had to be parted as the scroll was retrieved. The “Bimah” sometimes had moon decorations around it. The congregational area had stars decorating it. The Temple had similar decorations of sun, moon and stars. Modern day LDS temples still carry on this symbolic design. “When the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E., many of the rituals formerly conducted there were transferred to the synagogue, and organized prayer became the substitute for sacrifice. The sages referred to the synagogue as *mikdash me’at* (“little sanctuary”), viewing it as a miniature Temple where Jewish congregations all over the world could gather and, to some extent, fill the void left by the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.” “The remains of numerous synagogues dating back to the first few centuries of the Common Era have been uncovered, attesting to the widespread acceptance of the institution at that time.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

**As Community Centers, Synagogues Also Became Hotbeds of Disagreement:** It was in many of these synagogues that fervent discussions ensued about the future of Jewish worship now that the temple had been destroyed and the priestly cast had become so divided and fraught with wickedness. Various executions and death attempts had been planned for believers in Jesus of Nazareth. The true believers in the restoration of ancient covenants as preached and administered by the Twelve and the Seventy grew in multitudes well beyond the borders of Israel. Many non-Jews also felt the true spirit and believed. Their conversions bothered some of the Jews because the Jews wanted to hold on to past customs and social traditions. Soon, the growth of the Church became an even greater threat for the Jewish community leaders. “And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,” (Luke 4:28) “Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing . . .” (Acts 6:9) “And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.” (Acts 26:11)

**Seekers of Truth Were Blessed:** Yet, in many cases there were those who believed in and sought after truths. When Jesus and later the Apostles and Seventies taught, the congregations were ready to listen and follow the spirit. “And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.” (Matthew 9:35) “And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.” (Luke 4:15) “And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.” (Acts 14:1) “And Crispus,

the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." (Acts 18:8)

**Letters and Religious Writing:** Another part of Jewish life included writing letters to various congregations or synagogues when personal visits were too difficult. "The letter holds an honored place in Jewish history and literature. Since the form includes earliest diplomatic and state correspondence, business and private mail, discussions and arguments between communities on local or religious questions, polemics and controversial issues, letters have also provided for scholarly research. Letters were often written to leading rabbis on questions of Jewish law, a practice that prevails even today. Collections of the answers, authoritative rabbinic opinions, are in a body of literature called *Responsa*). Jewish letters were written mainly in Hebrew, even after Jews adopted the languages of the countries of their exile. Hebrew was the language common to all Jews and remained the vehicle of all scholarly communication. The form of the letters included the date in Hebrew and the *sedra* of the coming week. At a later stage, Yiddish occupied a similar position for European Jews." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

"Writing usually required a professional to execute it. In ancient times a royal court officer, the *sofer* (scribe), was undoubtedly the letter-writer as well. The professional letter-writer was an important post even into the 20th century. Seals which were used to sign and close the documents of antiquity as well as letters, are displayed in the Israel Museum, and in other collections. Throughout the Middle Ages letters served as a major Jewish literary form. They were widely used as a means of publishing the writers' statements and views and were not necessarily private communications. They were delivered by a messenger whose errand was often interrupted on the journey so that the letter could be read to the public. Messages of importance were copied for reference and often read aloud in the synagogue or other gathering place." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

**Formula for Recognizing Truth:** The truth as it was being taught by the Lord's chosen added to the rich culture and tradition that many people still followed. Truth always builds rather than destroys. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, God revealed a three-point standard by which truth is recognizable. "Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together. And that which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness. That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day." (Doctrine & Covenants 50:22-24)

**Truth Has "Feet:"** "Being truthful is one of the most important virtues that a person can possess. In the Bible God is described as the "God of Truth" and truth is one of the 13 divine attributes. The rabbis taught that "truth has feet," i.e., is well founded and will endure. A sign of this was found in the very word itself. The Hebrew word for truth is *emet*; the first letter of the word is the first letter of the alphabet, the second is the middle letter of the alphabet and the last is the last letter of the alphabet. Thus, the three "feet" of truth are spread out and form a solid base. The Hebrew word for falsehood, however, is *sheker*, which is formed from the three letters of the alphabet before the last letter. The letters are not in their alphabetical order and represent feet which are too close together and not properly fixed. Falsehood has no foundation and will not last." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

**Wise Counsel:** Paul's mentor and teacher, Gamaliel, had wise counsel for those who wanted the erstwhile Pharisee Saul, now an Apostle of the Lord, brought to death. "Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men." "And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." (Acts 5:34-35,38-39)

It is important to realize and remember that many are prepared before they embrace the truth. In their best efforts and faith, they respond to the Spirit that directs all open-hearted people. They need not reject their former teachings. Yet, making corrections when needed and building upon the truths they already perceive, these faithful people were edified in former days and are in the latter-day – so were the Churches established in the faith.

Daniel Rona, born in Israel and living in Jerusalem has authored Old & New Testament and Book of Mormon Supplement Study Materials to be used in conjunction with the weekly LDS Gospel Doctrine Lesson study. NOTE: Three versions of the supplemental study materials are available **FREE** at [www.HolyLandsRevealed.com](http://www.HolyLandsRevealed.com). (Just click "LDS SUPPLEMENTS")

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