

Acts 17:1 ¶ Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:

Acts 17:2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,

Acts 17:3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

Acts 17:4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

After leaving Philippi, Paul and Silas traveled about 100 miles passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia before arriving at Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia. Ray Stedman points out that, "Paul and Silas were following the famous Roman road called the Egnatian Way which crossed Macedonia and connected the Adriatic Sea with the Black Sea."

In Thessalonica there was a Jewish synagogue; and as was customary for Paul, he began his witness in that city at the synagogue among the Jews.

Romans 1:16 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

He spent three Sabbath days at the synagogue reasoning with the people from the scriptures. The Greek for "reasoning" implies dialogue or discussion with those at the synagogue. He used the Old Testament scriptures to teach and explain that the Messiah, the Christ, had to suffer death and resurrect to new life in fulfillment of that scripture. He then declared the risen Jesus to be the Messiah prophesied in the scripture and taught about the rapture and His return as king as revealed by his letters to them.

Luke reports that some of the Jews became believers as well as many of the devout Greeks that believed in God and many of the important women of the city.

Acts 17:5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

Acts 17:6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;

Acts 17:7 Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, *one* Jesus.

Acts 17:8 And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.

Acts 17:9 And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.

Again, the Jews that rejected Paul's teaching were so jealous at the number of

people that chose to believe him that they decided to cause trouble and get rid of him. They gathered up a bunch of troublemakers and incited a riot. They attacked the house of Jason thinking to find Paul and Silas there—but they weren't. So they took Jason and some of the other believers that were with him to the city leaders and accused them of harboring men that were causing a lot of trouble in the city. They declared that Jason and his friends followed the teachings of these men that had “turned the world upside down” and promoted things that were contrary to the decrees of Caesar. In other words, these men (Paul and Silas) were causing trouble everywhere they went. They, in fact, were declaring another king by the name of Jesus. The city leaders were not pleased, but decided to defuse the situation by making Jason and the “other” post bond before letting them go. Commentators conclude that this money was a guarantee that they would see that Paul and Silas left town.

I liked David Guzik's comment on this section: “Actually, God was working through Paul and Silas to turn the world *right side-up* again. But when you yourself are upside-down, the other direction appears to be upside-down!”

It was interesting to note that the Greek for “rulers of the city” is the word “politarches,” which must be a root word for politician. It seems that politicians have just been troublemakers from the get-go.

Acts 17:10 ¶ And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming *thither* went into the synagogue of the Jews.

Acts 17:11 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.

Acts 17:12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

Luke notes that the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night. I am sure that the nighttime departure was to ensure that they got away safely.

The next stop for Paul and Silas was Berea, a city about sixty miles southwest of Thessalonica. Again, they went first to the Jewish synagogue. Luke notes that those in Berea readily received Paul's message, but they were careful to search the scriptures daily to make sure the message was indeed supported by scripture. The wording implies that those in Thessalonica were not as careful.

This is an important principle that every believer should use in response to the teaching of the word. Diligently following this one principle would go a long way toward preventing the spread of false teaching in the professing church. It is a principle I take very seriously—no matter how popular or charismatic or learned the teacher. I believe God holds me personally accountable for upholding the truth of His word. May I say once again, that these journals are a record of my current understanding of the truth of God's word; and I know that there is much yet for me to learn and revisions made accordingly.

Again, there was a wonderful response to the gospel message delivered by Paul

and Silas; many believed. It seems that those having hearts most open to the gospel message were among the Greeks—honorable women and many of the men.

Acts 17:13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

Acts 17:14 And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

Acts 17:15 And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

Not content with running Paul out of Thessalonica, the Jews that had opposed him there came to Berea to stir up trouble when they heard that Paul was preaching the gospel there. They were evidently successful enough that the believers in Berea sent Paul away with an escort that appeared to be headed to the seacoast; however, Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea. (I had forgotten that Timothy was with them.) Paul's entourage traveled on to Athens. He then sent his escort back to Berea with a command for Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens as soon as possible.

Acts 17:16 ¶ Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

Acts 17:17 Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

Ray Stedman makes this observation about Athens at that time: "At the time of Paul's visit to Athens, that city was no longer important as a political seat; Corinth was the commercial and political center of Greece under the Roman Caesars. But Athens was still the university center of the world."

While waiting for Silas and Timothy, Paul observed how idolatry dominated the culture. Luke tells us that his spirit was provoked; the Greek implies that he was exasperated by the observation. Webster defines "exasperate" as "irritated to a high degree...to enrage...to inflame the anger of." (Note: The next chapter indicates that Silas and Timothy eventually joined him in Corinth.)

McGarvey's commentary give us the following insight: "In Athens, where flourished the most profound philosophy, the most glowing eloquence, the most fervid poetry, and the most refined art which the world has ever seen, there was the most complete and studied abandonment of every vice which passion could prompt or imagination invent."

JFB informs us that, "Petronius, a contemporary writer at Nero's court, says satirically that it was easier to find a god at Athens than a man."

Again, in keeping with his custom, Paul showed up at the synagogue to share the gospel in light of the truth of scripture; and, as usual, this resulted in lively

discussion with the leading Jews and other devout people. He also shared his message with those that he encountered daily in the marketplace.

Acts 17:18 Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

Acts 17:19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?

Acts 17:20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

Acts 17:21 (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.)

In time, Paul came in contact with the philosophers, the Epicureans and the Stoics. According to the NIV Commentary: The Epicureans followed the teachings of Epicurus (342-270BC) who held that “pleasure was the chief goal of life, with the pleasure most worth enjoying being a life of tranquility free from pain, disturbing passions, superstitious fears, and anxiety about death. He did not deny the existence of gods but argued in deistic fashion that they took no interest in the lives of people.” The Stoics followed the teachings of Zeno (340-265 BC) who focused on “living harmoniously with nature and emphasized one’s rational abilities and individual self-sufficiency. Theologically, he was essentially pantheistic and thought of God as “the World-soul.”

The responses of the philosophers varied; some considered Paul a babbler spouting nonsense. Others just thought him presenting some strange gods as he declared the gospel and the death and resurrection of Jesus. McGarvey notes that, “...the prominence in his arguments of the name of Jesus and the resurrection suggested to the inattentive hearers that these were two foreign demons whom he was trying to make known to them.”

According to Easton’s Dictionary, the Areopagus, also known as Mars Hill, was the designated seat of the court of justice. It was located on a rocky hill to the west of the Acropolis where the Parthenon was located. It was to this court that the philosophers took Paul to be questioned about his teaching. Research indicates that this council’s approval was needed for Paul to continue teaching in Athens. The council specifically wanted him to explain the new doctrine he was teaching and what it meant because they had never heard anything like it before.

Luke notes that the people of Athens and those that visited there loved to discuss the latest ideas and philosophies.

Acts 17:22 ¶ 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.

Acts 17:23 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.

“too superstitious” = more religious than others (from the Greek)

Paul opens his explanation to the council with words they would consider complimentary. He notes that he has observed that the people of Athens are more religious than most. Among the many altars in the city he had even found one dedicated “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.” Paul then declares that he is going to make that god known to them.

**Acts 17:24 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;
Acts 17:25 Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;**

Paul naturally begins at the beginning; he declares this God to be the Creator of the world and everything in it. Though he is using the same Greek word, “theos,” in reference to God, the context of his teaching will prove Him to be the God that is unique and sovereign over everything. This God is Lord of heaven and earth and is too big to be contained in a temple made with hands. Man cannot serve Him by giving Him anything that He needs. In fact, He is the One that gives man life and breath and everything that he needs to live.

**Acts 17:26 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;
Acts 17:27 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:
Acts 17:28 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.**

Paul goes on to explain that all men are descendants of one blood, one source, one man. God has in fact determined the rise and fall of nations, the men that would form these nations, when they would exist, how long they would exist, and where they would be located. JFB states, “The apostle here opposes both Stoical Fate and Epicurean Chance, ascribing the *periods* and *localities* in which men and nations flourish to the sovereign will and prearrangements of a living God.”

Paul declares that God’s desire is that men would seek to know Him, and He is near to be found for those that are seeking. Paul goes on to explain that it is the Lord Who is the sustaining force of life. He reminds them that even their own poets supported his teaching.

The NIV Commentary informs us that, “‘For in him we live and move and have our being’ comes from the Cretan poet Epimenides (c. 600 B.C.); ... ‘for we are his offspring,’ from the Cilician poet Aratus (c. 315–240 B.C.... In his search for a measure of common ground with his hearers, he is, so to speak, disinfecting and rebaptizing the poets’ words for his own purposes.”

Acts 17:29 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.

Acts 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

Acts 17:31 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.

Paul concludes that since we are the children of God, why should we think of Him in context of an idol made of gold, silver or stone that has been created by man.

I like the CJB translation of verse 30: "In the past, God overlooked such ignorance; but now He is commanding all people everywhere to turn to Him from their sins."

Paul goes on to explain that God has appointed a day of judgment that will determine one's future, and that His chosen representative will execute that judgment. His resurrection from the dead testifies to His righteousness and rightness in serving as the judge.

We know from the context of Paul's speech that he is referencing Jesus, but it is interesting to me that he never mentions his name before the council.

I liked David Guzik's summary statement: "Paul went from knowing who God is (our Creator), to who we are (His offspring), to our responsibility before Him (to understand Him and worship Him in truth), to our accountability if we dishonor Him (judgment)."

Acts 17:32 ¶ And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this *matter*.

Acts 17:33 So Paul departed from among them.

Acts 17:34 Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which *was* Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Once Paul mentioned resurrection from the dead, some of the men immediately began to mock him; others decided that they wanted to hear more at another time. So, Paul left; he didn't stay to argue his case further.

Ray Stedman makes a pertinent observation: "Some mocked. That means their pride was threatened. Mocking is always the defense of pride when it feels itself attacked but has no logical defense; it resorts to ridicule."

Sadly, these men would not get another chance to hear Paul again. Since the council's approval was needed for him to be allowed to continue to teach in Athens, and he did not get that approval, the next chapter tells us that Paul headed out to Corinth.

Luke tells us that there were some men who became believers and chose to follow him—Dionysius the Areopagite (one of the members of the council), a woman named Damaris and a few others.