

# Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens

## Acts Chapter 17

Act 17:1 **1) Thessalonica** vs 1-9

Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.



- Paul and Silas have left Philippi and they pass through 2 cities and went to Thessalonica. Possibly passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia because he measured the size of a city by whether there was a synagogue.

Act 17:2 And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

Act 17:3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and {saying,} "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

Act 17:4 And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.

- Do I use scripture or is that reserved for trained ministers? Do I use my testimony? Jesus said rejoice that they are sharing the Gospel.
  - 2 Corinthians 1:12 "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward."
  - Revelation 12:11 "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."
  - Prov 14:25 "A true witness delivereth souls:"
  - Acts 22:15 Annanias told Paul at his conversion "For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard."
- What we see is that Paul was able to do both. Reason from the scriptures when he needed to and proclaim from his testimony when he needed to.
- In Thessalonica, Paul begins in a very good place. He reasoned with the Scriptures. These Jews understood the Scriptures to be divine.
- Paul uses the Scripture to proclaim Jesus. Why"
  - **The Perfect Resource.** The Scriptures speak of Jesus. (John 5:39) "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."
  - **The Perfect Example.** Jesus opened the understanding of the 2 on the Emmaus Road with the Scriptures (Luke 24:27+31+44-45) "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself...And their eyes were opened, and they knew him;... And he said unto them, These [are] the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and [in] the prophets, and [in] the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,"
- Some people were believing; Jews, Greeks and Leading Women.
- But as always there were those who would not believe and their reaction.

Act 17:5 But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.

- Some Jews were Jealous. It wasn't that they were defending truth or righteousness. They were jealous.
- When a man desires to do wickedly, he can usually find plenty of wicked support. Here these men could form an entire mob.

Act 17:6 When they did not find them, they {began} dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also;

Act 17:7 and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

- In Thessalonica, it seems that Jason was the host for Paul's team. Possibly the church met in his home. Paul and his team were not there when the mob arrived. They needed to fulfill their wicked intent so they grabbed Jason and some others who were there and took them before the authorities.
- These men used truth and falsehood to accuse the brethren.
  - True these men have turned the world upside down
  - False that these men proclaimed another king usurping Caesar.
  - Jesus taught in **John 18:36** "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world then my servants would be fighting..."
- An accusation that was really a complement. These Jews trying to slander Paul and his group actually pay them a complement. They tell of how effective God is through their ministry. The whole world is upset (turned upside down). Or in Gods perspective "turned right side up!"
- Jesus made statements that were powerful for turning the world right side up.
  - **Luke 18:22** - To the Rich Young Ruler he said "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."
  - **Matt 23:11** - "The greatest among you shall be your servant."
  - **Matt 23:12** - "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."
  - **Mark 10:15** - "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will not enter it at all."
  - **Mark 8:35** - "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it."
- James wrote in **James 4:4** "...Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."
- Two questions:
  - Are we being turned upside down by the world or are we turning the world right side up?
  - Are others affected by the difference in your life?

Act 17:8 They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things.

Act 17:9 And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.

- Jason before the mob and authorities pledged (paid a bond) not to preach Jesus, or not to host Christian meetings or to turn over Paul and his group. (Some commentators speak this of a fine / money)
- The authorities released him.
- Contrast to Jason is Peter when he was in jail Acts 5 was released by a divine act and immediately went out and preached when he was told not to. When brought before the authorities again and reminded about what they commanded him he said "We ought to obey God rather than men."
- The wonderful thing I see here is that even though we see this contrast what I do not see is a condemnation towards Jason. God doesn't hold Jason, a new believer to the standard that He brought Peter, an apostle, to.
- You might be a Jason, you have freedom. You might be a Peter, more is expected from you.
- Within three weeks these Thessalonians were soundly saved and had a ministry mindset.
- **1 Thessalonians 1:2-8** "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake."

*And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing."*

Act 17:10 **2) Berea** vs 10-14

The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.

- Paul and company were sent to Berea - Some 50 miles away.
- Jesus said in Matthew 10:23 "If they persecute you in one city, flee to another."

Act 17:11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily {to see} whether these things were so.

Act 17:12 Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.

- In our culture we have many things called Berean. Berean Christian Ministries, Berean Bible College, The Berean Call, Berean Books, and Berean Academy. The name "Berean" has a connotation for being good or excellent.
- The reason is that Luke declares that the Bereans were MORE NOBLE MINDED
  - Noble - Greek "*eugenos*" "*eu*" = well; "*genos*" = born So this translates "well born"
  - Speaks of race or born with a greater integrity or character.
- This passage lists their greater quality.
  - They **Received the Word**  
*(they received the Word not listened to a good speaker or a funny entertaining orator)*
  - They received the Word with **Eagerness**  
*(they listened with readiness. They expected to hear from the Lord as they were taught)*
  - They **Examined the Scriptures**  
*(it wasn't just a casual perusal. They looked into the Scriptures)*  
1 Thessalonians 5:21 "Examine everything carefully, hold fast to that which is good."
  - They examined the Scriptures **Daily**  
*(it wasn't one quick glance. It was daily)*
  - They examined the Scriptures daily to **See if These Things Were So**  
*(the authority wasn't the teacher, the authority was the Scripture)*  
Isaiah 8:20 "To the Law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to the word it is because there is no light in them."
  - They **Believed**  
*(after hearing & studying the matter out, they yielded their life to the truth and lived accordingly)*
- The Bereans have set the standard for you and me.
- "If the great apostle Paul was worthy of this kind of close examination, how much more should teachers and preachers today be carefully compared with the Scriptures!" (Guzik)
- We should not be afraid of people searching the scriptures after we have taught unless we have not previously studied ourselves.

Act 17:13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds.

Act 17:14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there.

- The angry Jews in Thessalonica heard Paul had gone to Berea and they came to Berea to persecute Paul there. Again they traveled some 50 miles to harass Paul.
- A similar thing happened on Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey. In Acts 13 and 14 Paul started in Antioch Pisidia, was run out then to Iconium, was run out then to Lystra and Derbe. Some angry Jews from Antioch and Iconium came and caught Paul and stoned him leaving him for dead.
- We noticed at that passage that those who oppose the truth can show themselves quite diligent in their opposition. And that they also can be dangerous.
- It is interesting that these Jews are not very creative in their attack. Here they do the same thing they did in Thessalonica. They stir up a crowd.
- Paul was put on a ship to Athens. But Paul had Timothy and Silas stay to build up the new believers. This shows that Paul wasn't simply interested in converts alone. He was interested in planting churches that would strengthen the new believers.

Act 17:15 **3) Athens** vs 15-34

Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.

- This was approximately 200 miles.
- When Paul arrived, those who had brought him completed their business and were headed back. Paul gives them an instruction for Silas and Timothy to get to Athens ASAP.

Act 17:16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.

- Athens was the intellectual center of the Roman / Greek Empire. (Plato, Aristotle)
- There were over 3000 temples to various gods.
- Paul's spirit was provoked. The question is: "Is our spirit provoked as we observe our cities?"

Act 17:17 So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing {Gentiles,} and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.

- Paul would reason and debate with every one. **PAUL DIDN'T NEED A PULPIT.**
  - Jews in Synagogue
  - God Fearers
  - Any one in the marketplaces

Act 17:18 And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"--because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

- **The Epicureans** pursued pleasure. They strived to be free of pain, free of stress, free of fear. Pleasure was their God. Now they may have acknowledged God but He had no interest in man, man could do as he pleased.
- **The Stoics** were pantheist. They believed in a duty to care for all these things that are gods. The trees, the mountains the rivers are gods and man has a duty to protect them.
- What is this babbler wish to say? These people were hearing Paul preaching and had their attention grabbed.
- Paul preached Jesus and the resurrection.
  - **The Epicureans** believed after death an existence as a free spirit (a ghost) or nothing after life.
  - **The Stoics** believed that man is absorbed into the elements of those things that they had called god. (the river, the mountain, the wheat field)
  - **But Paul** preached something different **RESURRECTION**
- This new concept won him an invitation to the Areopagus.

Act 17:19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?"

- Areopagus was also called Mars Hill. This was so called because the Greeks believed that this was the place that Mars was put on trial for killing Neptune's son.
- The Athenians loved to hear philosophy. To hear thoughts and beliefs of everyone. It was a real treat to hear things that was new and fresh. But they were conditioned to hear, enjoy the rush of thinking about ideas, but they were also conditioned to dismiss it and leave it once they grew tired of it.

Act 17:20 "For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean."

Act 17:21 (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)

- What we see is the fruit of intellect as being God.
  - Idolatry out of control (Many Gods)
  - Tolerance (Any God) - Broadminded **Matthew 7:13-14** "*Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*"
  - No Absolutes.
  - Information is more important than relationship.
  - Pleasure is chief pursuit.
  - God is all things. The planet and animals are more important than man.
  -

SOUNDS LIKE OUR WORLD TODAY

## BUT PAUL STANDS UP IN THE MIDST OF ALL THIS

- Act 17:22 So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.
- This is an amazing sermon. All others written out have been preached to Jews. This time we get to see how Paul spoke to the Gentiles.
  - We will see it is the same message except that there is not the emphasis on the scripture. Acts 17:2
  - Paul doesn't humiliate the people of Athens.
  - Paul acknowledges to them that he see them as very religious. (KJV uses superstitious - a better translation is religious)
  - He explains how.
- Act 17:23 "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.
- Paul is kindly letting them know that they really do not have knowledge of Who God Is. The evidence is their securing assurance by having an altar to the unknown God. They were hedging their bets. Hoping that this covered that which they do not know.
  - Paul uses their weakness as the place to present the One and Only True God.
- Act 17:24 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;
- Act 17:25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all {people} life and breath and all things;
- Act 17:26 and He made from one {man} every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined {their} appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,
- Act 17:27 that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;
- Grope or KJV is feel. This is the only place in the NT where feel for Him is used. It is in context of those who are lost. Our relationship isn't about our feelings of God.
- Act 17:28 for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'
- These two quotations Paul uses from Greek poets are attributed to Epimenides the Cretan [600 BC] (who Paul quotes again in Titus 1:12) and Aratus [310 BC].
  - Paul did not quote these men because they were prophets or because all their teaching was of God. He quoted them because these specific words reflected a Biblical truth, and by using them he could build a bridge to his pagan audience. (Guzik)
- Act 17:29 "Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.
- Act 17:30 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all {people} everywhere should repent,
- Act 17:31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."
- Let's see what Pauls said about this God who is unknown to the Athenians:
    - God made the world. v 24
    - God made all things in it. v 24
    - God is Lord of heaven and earth. v 24 (Lord = kyrios means possessor, sovereign, emperor)
    - God does not dwell in temples. v 24
    - God is not served by man. v 25
    - God gives breath and life to man. v 25
    - God made all men from one family. v 26
    - God determines mans boundaries, time of life, length of days and where he is born. v 26
    - God is not far away. v 27
    - God is our live and living. v 28
    - God is declaring to you to repent. v 30 (Is repent part of the gospel message? Yes per Paul)
    - God will judge in righteousness. V 31

- God judges through His appointed Man (Jesus). v 31
- God proved this by raising Him from the dead. v 31

**At this point those listening interrupted Paul's message.**

Act 17:32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some {began} to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this."

- The resurrection was the point on which these who were listening shut down.
- They dismissed Paul and the message

Act 17:33 So Paul went out of their midst.

Act 17:34 But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

- Paul left Athens.
- Scholars believe that this was one of Paul's lowest points in ministry.
  - Paul left and spoke no more
  - He didn't wait for Silas & Timothy. He wanted to get out of town.
  - There was no church established in Athens
  - Paul never went back there.
  - Paul didn't send no letters to Athens.
  - Paul didn't go anywhere alone again.
- But Paul's preaching was not in vain. Some believed.
- Two specifically are listed Dionysius and Damaris.

Does God intend us to be alone?

Genesis 2:18 "It is not good that man be alone"

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

"Two [are] better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him [that is] alone when he falleth; for [he hath] not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm [alone]? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

2 Kings 6:15-17 Elisha with his servant

"Fear not: for they that [be] with us [are] more than they that [be] with them."

Jesus himself gathered disciples to his ministry

Mark 6:7

"And he called [unto him] the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits;"

Luke 10:1

"After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come."

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