

Acts Chapter 17

- Paul and Silas had been beaten and jailed in Philippi but in the process the Philippian jailer, his family, and their cell mates had all come to know the Lord and got baptized.
 - Upon their release from jail the magistrates escorted them out of jail and asked them to leave. Before leaving he confirmed the believers and the church in Philippi was established.
 - Paul would later write a letter to the church in Philippi - Philippians.
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V: 1 (Map) Having left Philippi then passes through Am-hip-olis and Apollonia which then onto Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia about 100 miles away from Philippi, where there was a synagogue.

- Am-hip-olis and Apollonia are mentioned as waypoints, but no mention of any particular ministry there.
- There wasn't a synagogue in Philippi, a minimal Jewish presence, but in Thessalonica there was an established Jewish presence and synagogue. They had to have at least 10 observant Jewish men to establish a synagogue.

V: 2-3 As was his custom, Paul went to the Jews first where he knew they'd be gathered, at the synagogue.

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."

- It was a normal Jewish custom that in the synagogue, when there was a visiting Rabbi, they would be given an opportunity to address the congregation - and Paul readily took advantage of this.
- Paul spent 3 weeks reasoning and debating with the Jews. No doubt taking them through **Isaiah 53**, **Psalms 2, 16** and **22** amongst others.

Paul reasoned with them:

Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

- Christianity is a reasonable proposition, it's a reasonable faith. It's actually unreasonable to reject it.

- Paul reasoned with them “out of the scriptures.” So often people present their opinions or ideas - but God’s Word is the final authority on every issue and they need to be addressed in light of God’s Word.

“*Opening and alleging...*” The modern use of the word “alleging” is usually connected with a criminal accusation, which sounds funny in this translation.

NKJV: “Explaining and demonstrating, that Christ had to suffer...”

NASB: “Explaining and giving evidence that Christ had to suffer...”

NIV: “Explaining and proving that Christ had to suffer...”

- “**Alleging**” (G3908) “Paratithemi” to put or place near some one, as in serving food; to lay before.
- Presenting the Gospel, the “good news”, how that Jesus needed to suffer on our behalf, the crucifixion, and the resurrection three days later - all as foretold.

Romans 12:1 “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

- Paul is preaching to Jews, so Paul presents Him as the Christ, the Messiah, the One they’ve all been looking for, waiting for, He’s here!
- One of the problems that the Jews faced in that day, and now was trying to reconcile two seemingly divergent lines of Messianic prophecy.
- **Isaiah 53** speaks of a suffering Messiah, and **Psalms 2** speaks of a ruling Messiah. They couldn’t reconcile these different accounts so they developed a theology to match the two.
- They refer to the suffering Messiah as “Messiah Ben Joseph” because of the suffering he endured at the hands of his brethren.
- They refer to the ruling Messiah as “Messiah Ben David” after Israel’s mightiest king.
- Paul sought to reconcile this for them. It’s not the coming of two Messiah’s, it’s the two comings of one Messiah!
- Paul taught them that this was all fulfilled in Jesus, the Messiah who suffered and died on the cross, but who also rose from the grave three days later in fulfillment of scripture, now to reign, who ascended into heaven, but who is also coming back.

V: 4 The Holy Spirit is moving and some of them believe - some not all.

- There were many in the Grecian culture that had become disillusioned with the pantheism around them in which people worshipped just about everything. It's hard to please more than one boss, and all the much harder to please more than one god.
- They were drawn to monotheism and the Jewish concept of one true God.
- There were many who were described as "devout Greeks" meaning proselytes, or Greeks who were converts to Judaism. Now as they heard the testimony and teaching of Paul and Silas they converted to Christianity, amongst whom were "chief women" perhaps the wives of politicians or rulers of some sort. We're seeing the Holy Spirit at work.

1 Corinthians 12:3 "... no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."

V: 5-9 "But" - contrast. The Jews which heard the Gospel presented and rejected it immediately began to work against the Gospel.

Matthew 12:30 "He that is not with Me is against Me;..."

- They were motivated by envy, jealousy over the fact that people would leave the synagogue and join the church. They had no problem engaging dishonest men to subvert the Gospel and Paul.
- Kind of like a typical courtroom tactic, if you don't like the evidence, then attack the witness, create a distraction.
- The false witnesses stir up a mob and assault the house where Paul had been staying.

"^{6a}They found them not..." The Holy Spirit must have warned Paul and company to get going!

- Paul and company were now accused of "turning the world upside down..." I like that!
- Many would say that they were actually turning the world right side up!
- There was an impact, there was quite a stir - life was not going on as usual because of the Gospel!
- Things were different, they were different.

Romans 12:2 “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Ephesians 4:22-24 “²²That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; ²³And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; ²⁴And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

- Part of that turnover was the idea and understanding that Jesus is Lord, as opposed to Caesar being Lord - which was contrary to the decrees of Caesar.
- Citizens of Rome were required to say “Caesar is lord,” or in other words the government is lord over our lives. Sound a little too familiar to me.
- It was a capital offense to refuse to acknowledge that Caesar was lord. There are estimates that as many as 6 million Christians refused to confess Caesar and or reject Jesus as Lord and were martyred for their faith in the first two centuries.
- So the Judaizers brought this controversy to light and created an uproar.
- Apparently they forced Jason to post bail before letting him go.

V: 10-12 Paul and Silas are sent away, forced out of Thessalonica.

- Forced out by men, yes - ushered out by the Holy Spirit as He was using this as a means of spreading the Gospel to other places.

Romans 8:28 “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purposes.”

- (Map) Arriving in Berea, Paul goes right back into evangelizing witnessing mode and heads to the nearest synagogue.
- Luke draws a distinction between the Jews of Thessalonica and those of Berea.
- Paul reasoned with and alleged / presented Jesus as the Christ for 3 weeks; but in Berea they readily received the Word of God - and were diligent to go home and check it out for themselves, searching the scriptures to make sure that what Paul was saying checked out.
- I find this interesting because the believers in Thessalonica weren't slouches either:

1 Thessalonians 2:13 “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the

word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”

- Paul wasn't talking about the believers in Thessalonica, he was talking about the Jews who weren't even willing to check it out, they were closed minded already, whereas the Jews in Berea were more noble in that they were willing to at least look.
- They searched the scriptures “**daily**, whether those things were so.”
- Being a disciple of Jesus is not a part time or weekend occupation, it's full time, every day!

Jesus said:

John 8:31-32 “... if ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; ³²And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

2 Timothy 2:15 “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.”

- Because of that many of them came to faith:

Romans 10:17 “So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”

V: 13-15 The Jews or Judaizers of Thessalonica took an active role in opposing the Gospel and went to Berea (60 miles on foot) to stir up the people in opposition, again this persecution being used of God to further spread the Gospel.

Matthew 5:11-12 “¹¹Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. ¹²Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

- Persecution, opposition is often an indicator that you're on the right track!
- We have an interesting contrast here: The Jews had a great animosity and hatred towards Paul, they've pretty much tried to kill him wherever he's been, yet Paul has this great love for them and he's desperate to see them saved.

Romans 9:3 “For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsman according to the flesh.”

- Even though the Jews are doing their best to destroy Paul and his ministry yet he loves them still to the point where he was willing to be accursed for them if it would bring their salvation.

Paul later wrote:

Romans 12:20-21 “²⁰Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. ²¹Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”

- Jesus teaches us to love those that hate us. We have to be careful at times not to treat people the way they treat us, that is the temptation.
- (Map) Paul was sent to the sea where they caught a boat that took them to Athens.
- Silas and Timothy stayed behind and further encouraged and taught the new believers, they later join Paul in Athens.
- Athens: the intellectual capital of the world, home to Plato, Aristotle, Socrates.
- Our faith is not in a philosophy, or a principal - our faith is in a person - Jesus Christ.
- Paul is always talking about Jesus, who He is, and what He's done - and that's what he'll do in Athens.

V: 16-17 Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy to arrive and while he was waiting his spirit was stirred up for the lost in that city, he could see the idolatry that was prevalent, and he knew what would result, they would be lost.

1 Corinthians 9:16 “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!”

- Athens was truly a city of idols. As a pantheistic culture, they had deified just about everything.
- They had the gods of war, the gods of peace, the gods of anger, the gods of love, the gods of hate and just about every emotion a person could feel. It was said that there were more idols than people, there were over 3,000 altars.
- At one time there was a great plague that came over Athens, so they released herds of sheep and watched where they went. Wherever a lamb stopped, they would kill it and sacrifice it to whichever god was nearest that spot, hoping to appease the god that had caused the plague.
- If there was no known god near the spot where the lamb stopped, they would sacrifice it to the “unknown god.”

- Plato and Socrates were long gone by the time Paul got there, the glory days of Athens had since passed by, but Athens still drew philosophers and thinkers who liked to get on their soap box and declared their doctrines, and debate endlessly.
- It's sad to see intelligent people get caught up in idolatry, like Paul would later write:

Romans 1:22 "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."

- Paul couldn't just stand by and watch people go to hell so he started off again in the synagogue disputing with them - sounds contentious from the start.
- Paul also met with devout people in the market place, speaking publicly, debating, discussing the Gospel with those who would listen.

Pictures: Parthenon & Mars Hill.

- Just above the "agora" or market place in Athens is Mars Hill, a large rock on the top of which is a flat spot of about 10 acres. This is where the Greeks built the Parthenon and dedicated a temple to Athena, the patron goddess of Athens.
- From the top of Mars Hill you can look right down into the marketplace where the various philosophers would gather for their debates, and no doubt they were able to see and hear parts of what Paul was speaking about as he brought this new doctrine concerning the resurrection of the dead. So they invited him up so they could hear him out.

V: 18-21 Then by divine appointment Paul encounters a group of philosophers, Gentiles, also in the market place.

- These philosophers were divided into two groups: The Epicureans and the Stoics.

Epicureans: believed that everything happened by chance and that death ended it all, that there was nothing beyond death. Sounds like Darwinian thought.

- Therefore, to the Epicureans, the chief goal of life was to extract as much pleasure from life as you possibly could.
- They believed that the gods were so remote from man that they really didn't care what men did, so they were very hedonistic, trying to get as much pleasure as they could.

Hedonistic: engaged in the pursuit of pleasure; sensually self-indulgent. A hedonistic existence of drink, drugs, and parties.

Stoics: The Stoics were pantheistic and believed that everything was a god. Things happened by the will of the gods and you couldn't stop them, so you might as well accept it, everything happened by fate with no ability to change it.

- Neither the Epicureans or the Stoics believed in eternal life, thus Paul's doctrines were strange to them.
- The Greeks prided themselves in learning new things, the Athenians spent much of their time in these debates and in looking for new ideas or thoughts to explore and now here comes Paul bringing this new doctrine, new to them, but these are old truths that have been with us from the beginning.
- Sadly people are always looking for "new truths" - because they don't want to face the old ones.
- It's been said: "... if it's true it's not new. And if it's new, it's not true."
- We need a return to the old truths that have been with us from the beginning. If you're searching for some new book, DVD, or teaching that will suddenly unlock the mystery of spirituality, you'll be on a wild goose chase.

Paul warned:

2 Timothy 4:3 "3For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

V: 22 Paul first declared to them that they were too "superstitious," all the newer translations use the word "religious" they're too religious.

- People so often equate religion with godliness, but they are two different things.
- Religion is one of the greatest curses in the world today because so often it keeps people from a personal relationship with Jesus - so many won't even consider Jesus because of their "religious" experiences.
- Religion is man's attempt to reach up to God, almost always on man's terms. Christianity is a relationship that begins with our infinite God reaching down to finite man.
- The word used here indicates that they were fearing the gods, religiously disposed, describing a piety that leads to fear as opposed to worship.
- Religion is in it's nature mechanical, even thoughtless - going through the motions. It is always the invention of man, man made and conceived.

- In this case, in the sense of superstition, it's motivated based on fear or compulsion, almost like having a gun to your back or a knife to your throat.
- Religion or superstition is the opposite of a relationship which is based on love and a genuine desire to please God. That love originates with God and is poured out upon us, we then respond in kind and seek to genuinely love Him back.

1 John 4:19 "We love Him, because He first loved us."

- Paul notes that they are worshipping this multitude of lesser gods compelled by fear, superstition - including the "unknown god." The just in case, fire insurance deity, just in case they missed one.

V: 23 Paul's approach to the Greeks is very different than his approach to the Jews in the synagogues. With the Jews all he has to say is "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," and they know instantly who he's talking about and a great deal of the background.

- The Greeks / Gentiles have no such back ground, he's starting from scratch. So Paul starts to talk about the "Unknown God" who created the sun, moon, stars, the heavens and all the things that they currently worship. He's introducing them to the true and living God.

V: 24-25 Paul will now proceed to inform them about the "unknown God" who is the True and Living God, the Creator of all things who is not worshipped the same way as all the lesser gods, who really aren't gods at all, are worshipped.

- Our God, the True and Living God doesn't dwell in temples; as Solomon declared there is no building that can contain Him
- Paul is standing within sight of the Parthenon with it's white columns, a massive structure, 280 feet long, 170 feet wide, 60 feet tall. Below that was the temple to Zeus - and here's Paul telling them that God doesn't dwell in temples.
- Through the centuries men have sought to worship gods that were the creation of their own hands - which is the opposite of worshipping the God that created us! That is what Paul is telling them.

[Isaiah describes how men cut down trees in the forest:](#)

Isaiah 44:16-17 "16He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: ye, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: 17And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, deliver me; for thou art my god."

- God doesn't need anything from us, He is completely self sufficient:

Psalm 50:10-12 “¹⁰For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. ¹¹I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. ¹²If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof.”

- God doesn't need anything from us, because all things come from Him.

James 1:17 “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

- This “Unknown God” has given life and breath to all things.

V: 26-27 The “Unknown God”, the True and Living God has created all men equal - one blood.

- What Paul said has been affirmed by science today, that we're all descended from the same family.
- The differences in facial features, skin, and hair pigmentation are simply the result of the adaptation to the various environments and mutated gene pools, but that basically we are all one.

Galatians 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

- Paul is contradicting both the Epicureans and the Stoics. Paul is saying that we are exactly what God made us to be. We are not who or where we are by chance or accident. God has appointed our habitations and our boundaries.
- God ordained or appointed that whoever we are, wherever we are whether we be Greeks, or Romans, or Jews, we are all appointed to seek after the Lord, and to find Him because He wants to be found, because He wants to have that relationship, fellowship with His creation.

Jeremiah 29:13 “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”

- It's ingrained in our very nature to find our completeness in Him, we are incomplete without Him.

Psalm 42:1-2 “¹As the deer panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. ²My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?”

- Man is not complete without God, and we are conscious of that void which is why we try to fill it, to fill that emptiness with excitement, danger, entertainment, and every other kind of diversion we can think of.
- The philosophers Paul was addressing knew this all too well, which is why they had filled their lives with so much idolatry, but nothing can actually fill that void except God Himself.
- That is why Paul told them “... *He is not far from each of us.*” He is a God that is near at hand, in other words - accessible.
- That is why we read in V: 28

V: 28-29 In Him we live, and move, and have our being - In Christ Jesus is true life, real life, true fulfillment. Not the false, temporary life of this world - living in deception and denial of the truth.

- Paul quoted one of their own poets declaring that we are His / God's offspring:
- We were all made in the image of God. He breathed His Spirit into Adam and Adam became a living soul.
- We were related to God in the beginning, and one of these days as the Spirit of God works in us we will awake in His likeness.

1 John 3:2 “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.”

- ²⁹Paul is saying “Your poets were right!” But God can't be captured, portrayed, or limited to gold, silver, or stone, or anything of man's design.
- The Greeks and Romans were incredible artists but nothing they could create could accurately represent God in any way.
- People still like to fashion gods for themselves. So often we see these composite gods, or smorgasbord gods. They'll take a little bit of Buddhism, and a little Hinduism, a slice of Islam, and maybe a dab of Christianity.
- The question is how you can you really worship a god you've made with your own hands? Like we read earlier in Isaiah.
- The Bible teaches us that God is not man-made; men are God-made. He is not a creation of our imagination; we are a creation of His.

V: 30-31 God is patient, He is and has been exercising that patience; but take note - there is a coming time of judgment. He will judge the world in righteousness.

- People ask: “what about all those people in Africa or Australia who live and die in the jungles without ever hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ? What will God do with them?”
- I could refer you to **Psalm 19** or **Romans Ch. 1** - but the bottom line is that “**God will judge the world in righteousness.**” Whatever He does we will all say at some point - “wow, that was perfect!”
- Jesus will be that judge, God the Father defers to Jesus in this:

John 5:22 “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.”

- Paul then further identifies Jesus as having been raised from the dead.
- Paul declares that God assures all men that He is able to do what He has promised pointing to the resurrection of Jesus as proof of His power over life and death.

V: 32 As soon as he began talking about the resurrection of the dead, they tuned him out, the meeting was over.

- “We’ll hear you some other time...” Procrastination is a well used tool of the enemy.

Later we see the same thing with Felix:

Acts 24:25 “And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come, Felix trembled, and answered, go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.”

- We don’t read that there was ever a more convenient time for Felix.

Psalm 95:7-8 “⁷For He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today if ye will hear His voice, ⁸harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness:”

V: 33-34 So Paul departed, he didn’t force the door open that was obviously closing. It is interesting how two people or a group can hear the same message and some believe while others don’t.

- Among those who chose to believe was Dionysius, described as an Areopagite.

- The Areopagites were a special group of select men who were considered to be the intellectual giants of the day, the intellectual leaders.
- There were others who believed including a woman named Damaris. In the Greek culture, no proper woman would be found in a public gathering like this. Because of that many think she was possibly a woman of the street, or an imoral woman of some sort.
- I don't know if that is true or not, but if it is then it sort of represents a truth that we seen lived out in that the gospel appeals to a wide spectrum of people, from all walks of life, because we all face pretty much the same problems - death and eternity, and where we'll spend it.
- As Paul visited different cities, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and later Corinth - in each of these places churches were established, but not in Athens.

1 Corinthians 1:22-30