

Acts 17

- I. 17:1-9 Ministry in Thessalonica
- II. 17:10-15 Ministry in Berea
- III. 17:16-34 Ministry in Athens
 - 17:22-31 Paul's Sermon on Mars Hill

I. 17:1-9 Ministry in Thessalonica

- A. 17:1-4 Making Progress As usual Paul starts with people who know something about God.

- i. 17:1 The word *they* indicates that Luke stayed on in Philippi.

- B. 17:5-9 Trouble Begins But it's also some of these religious people who begin the persecution.

- i. *These who have turned the world upside down* The Christians have already developed a real reputation.

- Conclusion: From this lackluster beginning a strong and lasting church developed. The two letters to the Thessalonians are written to this church.

II. 17:10-15 Ministry in Berea

- A. What made the Berean Jews more fair-minded? Two things.

- i. 17:11 *They received the word with all readiness*

- a) *readiness* is *prothumos*, which is more of an “eagerness”. The word is a compound meaning a “forward passion”. They came to the synagogue with an attitude of expectation, a intentional predisposition to receive the word.

- Some might think “readiness to believe” means naivety or gullibility. But the next point shows us that this is absolutely not true.

- ii. *[They] searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*

- a) This is what made them not gullible, but fair-minded. They were passionate about receiving the word, but then examined their Bibles thoroughly. If they had found Paul to be in disagreement with the Scriptures, they would have had good reason to reject his teaching. What happened instead? “Many of them believed.” (17:12)

- The Right Attitude: Initial readiness, eagerness, forward passion toward the message, followed by a diligent searching of the Scriptures to make sure all agrees with God's Word.

III. 17:16-34 Ministry in Athens

A. 17:16-17 Paul the rabbi was irritated by the extent of the idolatry in Athens. Therefore he not only speaks in the synagogue, but in the marketplace with the general public.

- i. Though the idolatry provoked Paul's spirit, he attacked it not with **rage** but with **reason**.
- ii. He “reasoned with” the Jews and Gentile worshipers first, but also in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.

B. 17:18 These were two of the three main schools of philosophy in Greece at that time – all several centuries old. The third school was the Cynics. Descriptions from Wikipedia:

- i. The **Cynics'** philosophy was that the purpose of life was to live a life of Virtue in agreement with Nature. This meant rejecting all conventional desires for wealth, power, health, and fame, and by living a life free from all possessions. (~500 B.C.)
- ii. The **Stoics** (founded by Zeno of Citium ~300 B.C.) considered passionate emotions to be the result of errors in judgment, and that a *sage*, or person of "moral and intellectual perfection," would not have such emotions. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)
- iii. **Epicurus** believed that the greatest good was to seek modest pleasures in order to attain a state of tranquility and freedom from fear (ataraxia) as well as absence of bodily pain (aponia) through knowledge of the workings of the world and the limits of our desires. (~300 B.C.)

Babbler “seed picker” They imply that Paul is one who picks up random thoughts as a crow picks up random seeds in a field.

- iv. Their impression of Paul is that he cannot possibly have anything important to say. Bunch of elitist snobs! But whose speech are we about to read? Not one of theirs.

C. 17:19-20 *Areopagus* Mars Hill *Ares* was the Greek god of war – same as the Roman *Mars*. Pagos means “peak”. The *Areopagus* or *Mars Hill* rose straight up from the *agora* or central market place and was on the western end of the Acropolis. There was an area here where booksellers kept their stalls and philosophers would commonly speak. All the sages of Athens would congregate here to have long, learned discussions.

D. 17:21 Athens was a gathering place for all those in the empire who loved learning. The word *philosophy* itself means a “love of wisdom” and the Greeks as we have seen were known for their philosophers. People would come here from far and wide to tap into the atmosphere of thought and education.

Some new thing is literally “something newer”. Athenians had to have the freshest, the very latest. “New” wasn't good enough; it had to be “newer” than that. They had to be at the forefront of the latest trend, whatever that trend was.

- 17:22-31 Paul's Sermon on Mars Hill – A Lesson in Gentile Evangelism
 - 17:22-23 **Cultural Affirmation** Paul sought a point of contact, which here was an altar dedicated to an “unknown god.” This puts him – and God – on the same side as the listeners rather than opposed to them.
 - 17:24-28 **A Context of Credibility** Paul did the same in Lystra in Acts 14. In both places he discussed the nature of God and His relationship to the creation. Here in Athens he showed that Greek poets and philosophers have glimpsed similar truths to those he is about to present.
 - This is vital. All cultural contexts are valid and make up a huge part of who people are – or who they see themselves to be.

*Revelation 21:22-27 (NKJV) ²²But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. ²⁴And **the nations** of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. ²⁵Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). ²⁶And they shall bring the glory and the honor of **the nations** into it. ²⁷But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.*

- 17:29-31 **Contrast God with the Context's Idols** This is the meat of the message. He plainly states that God, who calls on all to reject idolatry and repent, has not only appointed a day of judgment but has proven His intervention in human affairs by the resurrection of Jesus.
- **Identifying the Idols** Everyone has them. Idols are the things that own us – the thing(s) without which our lives become unlivable – the things around which our identities are built.
- **Context can change – Content cannot** The first part of Paul's message was all about identifying with his listeners. Remember he is not in a synagogue, so proving Christ from the Scriptures would be meaningless. He had to establish a framework into which he could introduce Christ.
- **Judgment is relevant to everyone** This is perhaps the least popular aspect of the Christian message – yet judgment is indispensable to a biblical faith – as it explains what we are being saved from.

Romans 2:8 (NKJV) but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath,

Hebrews 10:28-29 (NKJV) ²⁸Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

- Of course due to sin every human being is already condemned, already under the wrath of God. Only Christ provides forgiveness and acquittal on judgment day.