

Acts Chapter 17

b. Thessalonica, 17:1-9

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

Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia,

Amphipolis is about thirty-two miles southwest of Philippi and was a Roman military station. Apollonia was another thirty miles further. From here it was approximately thirty-seven miles to Thessalonica

Luke changes from using the second person pronouns “we” and “us” to the third person pronoun “they”. This indicates that Luke did not depart with Paul and Silas, but stayed in Philippi. Paul does not reconnect with Luke until Acts 20:6 where they sail from Philippi to Troas.

It also appears likely that Timothy stayed in Philippi with Luke, at least until Paul and Silas go to Berea. In Acts 17:14 we find that Timothy in Berea, but in Acts 17:4 we find that it was Paul and Silas in Thessalonica and in Acts 17:10 the brethren only send Paul and Silas away from Thessalonica. Timothy must have joined Paul and Silas after this.

they came to Thessalonica,

Thessalonica was the largest city in Macedonia as such it became a perfect place to spread the gospel into the Gentile world, 1Thess. 1:8

where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

This seems to indicate that there were no synagogues in the other two cities they had passed through.

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

And according to Paul's custom, he went to them,

Although Paul was given the work of taking the gospel to the gentiles, Gal. 2:7,8, it was his custom to visit the Jews first, Rom. 1:16,17.

Acts 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."

explaining and giving evidence

Paul did not use flowery speeches or crafty words to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Christ, he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, the OT.

that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying,

Paul was seeking to convince the Jews that their Messiah was not to be an earthly king as they supposed. He was not coming to reign on the earth, but to reign in heaven. No doubt he reasoned from Isaiah 53 as proof of this claim. As well, this would remove any question of reproach that accompanied the crucifixion.

"This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

His next step was to tie what had happened with Jesus to what the Scriptures had said would happen to the Christ.

Acts 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.

The work of Paul was having its successes. He was able to persuade **some** Jews, and a **large** number of God-fearing proselytes. It is unclear whether the leading women were proselytes or simply gentile women who were converted. But, by the fact that Paul was preaching in the synagogues, it is possible they are wealthy proselyte women.

The word join indicates an allotment – *proskleroo* – they were given to Paul and Silas by God's grace, Acts 2:47. A new congregation was established.

Acts 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.

But the Jews, becoming jealous

They were jealous because of the followers Paul had acquired. This is reflective of what happened to Jesus, Matt. 27:17,18.

and taking along some wicked men from the market place,

These wicked men were individuals who had no profession, but could be found in the market place hoping to pick up some work, good or bad.

formed a mob and set the city in an uproar;

It is unlikely these wicked men had any real concern over what was taking place, but they were easily convinced to create a riot.

and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.

This would indicate that Paul and Silas were probably staying with Jason. We have no other information about him that what is here, although Rom. 16:21, lists Jason as a kinsmen of Paul, but this could be a different person altogether.

Acts 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;

Either Jason and the other brethren had been evangelizing or this is guilt by association. This also indicates what lengths a mob will go to get what they want.

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

This was the same type of charge leveled against Jesus, Mark 12:14; Luke 23:2. Although the Jews do not realize it they are renouncing their Messiah, John 19:15

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

Once again they seek to silence the word of God through intimidation

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

We are uncertain what the pledge is. It might be that they agreed not to house Paul and Silas, because according to the next verse Paul and Silas leave Thessalonica. It is even possible that they requested they stop teaching the gospel. Although it would seem unlikely that Christians would agree to this. It could even be a financial bond. The word pledge means “sufficient” or “enough”

Still, the charge was that they were acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar. Which in fact they were not, so they could have agreed to not act in ways contrary to Caesar, which they were already doing. This seems possible, since if they were doing what they were accused of the punishment would have been greater.

c. Berea, 17:10-15

Acts 17:10 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 was persistent in his actions. He understood that the Jews were to receive the gospel first, Rom. 1:16,17; 2:9,10

Acts 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.

Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica,

The word noble-minded means “well born” and literally “high in rank.” This seems to be the meaning here. They were “high minded” in that they were willing to consider Paul’s words.

for they received the word with great eagerness,

What a contrast to those in Thessalonica. The Bereans, with zeal, were ready to hear what Paul had to say. They did not close their ears to the word, but received it.

examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

They did not simply accept what Paul had to say, they wanted to see it for themselves. They investigated the Scriptures (Old Testament) to see if what Paul was teaching was correct.

This also establishes that the Bereans believed in the authority of God's word. They saw it as the final judge in things being taught. If what was said did not agree with what was already written in God's word it would have been rejected. 2Pet. 1:20,21

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

When one examines the Scriptures with an honest open-heart conversion will take place. In this case both Jews and Greeks were being converted. Paul and Silas' work extended beyond the local synagogue.

These conversions did not just extend to the illiterate, but to men and women of prominence. Even the educated believed.

Acts 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.

Berea is fifty miles from Thessalonica yet the Jews heard of what had happened. When they did they went there as well to cause more trouble.

To agitate is like the motion produced by winds, storms and waves, even like an earthquake. "Stirring up" is the idea of taking away calmness of mind. These Jews were nothing but troublemakers.

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

Just like in Thessalonica Paul is sent away to safety. When they arrive at the Aegean Sea Paul departs and goes on to Athens. Silas and Timothy stay in Berea. We have not heard of Timothy's whereabouts since Paul and Silas left Philippi but now he is united with them once again. It is likely that Timothy has been with Luke in Philippi.

Acts 17:15 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.

Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens;

Paul is escorted to Athens. By land this is about a 250 miles and would take almost two weeks to complete. If he went by sea this would have been about a three-day journey.

and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.

Paul desired to have his coworkers with him. Because Athens was such a large religious city it seems extra help is needed.

We find out later that Silas and Timothy don't make it to Athens. They eventually meet up with Paul in Corinth, Acts 18:5, having come from Macedonia. Some believe that 1Thess. 3:1-6 indicates that Timothy was in Athens, but the text says that Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica. It doesn't say from where he sent him.

5. Paul in Greece, 17:16-18:22

a. Athens, 17:16-34

(1) The Areopagus, 17:16-21

Acts 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.

his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.

Paul understood the condition of these people. It is obvious they are very religious. They were seeking spiritual things. But, their beliefs were misguided. They worshipped idols, man made religion and not the One true God. The reason for the provoking of Paul's spirit is two-fold, (1) the people of Athens were not bringing glory to God, Rom. 1:21-25, (2) these people were lost and they needed to hear the truth.

as he was observing the city full of idols.

It has been said that Athens had more idols than the rest of Greece. The phrase "full of idols" is literally - utterly idolatrous: - wholly given to idolatry

Acts 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 was reaching out wherever he could. Wherever there was an audience he spoke, even to the extent that he just went to the marketplace and spoke to whoever showed up.

Acts 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.

And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him.

These were the two prominent systems of philosophy in the Roman world. The Epicurean school of thought founded by Epicurus 342-270 B.C., and was atheistic at its core. Life was not regulated by the spiritual or morality. The Epicureans focused on pleasure as the highest end of human existence. (Boles) Man simply lived the way he was inclined – good or bad. Epicureans saw gods as phantoms, with no real influence. (Lenski)

The Stoics were pantheists. They taught that God was the soul of the world, or the world was God. (Boles) They believed reason was their guide and decided what was good and what was evil. He who followed reason was perfect and sufficient in himself. This is similar to what we refer to as humanism. For the Stoics, when reason saw no more in life, it dictated suicide as the most reasonable thing, (Lenski).

Both of these groups were diametrically opposed to an after life, sin or redemption. Christianity would have been utterly strange to them.

were conversing with him.

Their attitude was not hostile. Philosophers of the time had developed a way to converse with each other in a civilized manner.

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 word babbler means a “seed picker.” It refers to a bird that picks up seed. So they liken Paul to a man who has picked up some seeds of knowledge.

Acts 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?"

They do not take Paul by force, but rather guide him to the council.

The word Areopagus refers to the Hill of Ares or Mars hill. Named after this place is the supreme Council of Athens, the Areopagus. This council most commonly met on Mars hill, but they carried the name Areopagus with them wherever they met. Thus they became known as the Areopagus.

It is uncertain whether Paul was taken to a meeting with the Areopagus or stood on it (Mars Hill), and gave his speech, (see v.22)

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

They are very polite to Paul and really want to know what it is he is speaking about.

Acts 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.)

(2) Paul's address, 17:22-31

Acts 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.

A crowd has gathered to listen and so Paul speaks. He begins by referring to them as "very religious." This has a good and bad sense. In the good sense they are pious and reverence the gods. In a bad sense they are superstitious. So, they either wanted to show piety towards the gods or they were worried they might offend one.

Acts 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.

This is what Paul basis his "very religious" statement off of. It is a great opening. By your own admittance you don't know him, so let me speak of Him to you.

Acts 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;

"The God

Paul speaks of a single God as compared to their multiple gods.

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;

The God Paul speaks of is a living and active God. Being the creator he rules over his creation as Lord. The God Paul speaks of does not live in man-made structures. He is much bigger than that.

Acts 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;

The God Paul speaks of does not need mans assistance. Nothing man does or offers adds to who He is. Our worship is to God, but it adds nothing to Him. It simply acknowledges His deity and demonstrates gratitude.

Their Gods needed mans invention and attention even to exist. But the God Paul speaks of causes all things to exist. He is the sole life giver.

Acts 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,

Paul takes them back to the creation. This is where we first encounter God when He brings man into existence. This God created the brotherhood of man. For the Greeks this was a different way of thinking. They saw man as coming from different origins, with different gods, different religions for different nations.

Here the lines of separation between all men are torn down. All men are the same because they come from one man, Adam. This came from God.

Acts 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;

God being the One source of the creation, including the brotherhood of man, did this so man would seek Him and find Him, Acts 14:14-17

Acts 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.'

for in Him we live and move and exist,

Paul makes it clear that our existence was no accident; it was planned and ordained by God. *As He exists so do we, or we could not exist if He did not.*

This also shows how near God is to each of us. Our very existence depends upon Him and is found in Him.

as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'

Here Paul appeals to them through some of their own writers. This statement was originally made by Aratus, 320-240 B.C. He was a student of Zeno the founder of Stoicism.

Paul used the plural “poets” which means others have said similar if not the same thing. Cleanthes, another Stoic in his hymn to Zeus, saying, “From him we are offspring.”

Acts 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.

"Being then the children of God,

We are children of God because He created us, as their own poets have said.

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.

Paul uses tact when he includes himself with them. They have set a low standard for God, their Father, when they form Him according to their own desires and craft. They should see God as much more than this. His Divine Nature – “Godhead” is not like what they have made.

Acts 17:30 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance,

God has “winked at” their past ignorance, but this will no longer be the case.

God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,

Now God is expecting all mankind to turn from their sinful ways. A declaration has been made and man cannot simply ignore it. He must make a decision on what He will do with God.

Acts 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."

because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness

Mankind needs to make a decision because a day of judgment is coming. It is a day that was appointed long ago. It has been set and there is not escaping it. Ignoring the existence of God or persisting in worshipping multiple gods will not save you.

When this judgment comes it will be in righteousness. God created all man to seek and find Him. He provided the means and the messenger. To ignore this will only result in condemnation. All mankind will know that their "sentence" is just because God will judge in righteousness. Did you accept His will or not?

John 5:25-32

through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

He will judge through Jesus. As God has appointed the times and boundaries of mans habitation, he has also appointed a day of judgment. Things will not go on forever. God has also appointed a judge.

The proof of all of this is the resurrection of Jesus. One look at the resurrection and man should acknowledge that all other things God has said are true, Rom. 1:1-4

God does exist and He created us and He will judge us through His Son, we can count on it, because He raised Him from the dead

A day of judgment is coming; mankind needs to prepare itself by repenting of living apart from God.

(3) The response, 17:32-34

Acts 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 Epicurean did not believe in life after death, and the Stoic believed that all life would be absorbed in the Godhead. Neither schools of thought believed in a resurrection.

Some quickly turned against him by mocking (Acts 2:13), but others were willing to listen to more of what Paul had to say. (Acts 24:25)

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

Acts 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.

The work he did in Athens was not fruitless. There were some who believed. Dionysius the Areopagite was a member of the Athenian Council. He would have some influence on people.

Also consider that since, *"the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new."* Acts 17:21, a seed had been planted.