

## ACTS 17

### *Paul in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens*

#### *Paul in Thessalonica*

1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 And Paul went in as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned (διαλέγομαι, aor.) with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining (διανοίγω, pres.) and proving (παρατίθημι, pres.)<sup>1</sup> that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead and saying,

This Jesus, whom I am proclaiming (καταγγέλλω, pres.) to you, is the Messiah.<sup>2</sup>

4 And some of them were persuaded (πείθω, aor.) and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.

5 But the Jews were jealous,<sup>3</sup> and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. 6 And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers (ἀδελφούς) before the city authorities shouting,

These men who have turned the world upside down (ἀναστατόω, aor.)<sup>4</sup> have come here also, 7 and Jason has received them. And they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

8 And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. 9 And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

#### *Paul in Berea*

10 The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. 11 Now these Jews were more noble (εὐγενής) than those in Thessalonica. They received the word with all eagerness (προθυμία), examining (ἀνακρίνω, pres.) the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. 12 Many of them

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<sup>1</sup> The gospel message is rational. It can be reasoned about, explained, and proved. It is something people may be persuaded about it.

<sup>2</sup> Paul's main argument to Jews was always: (1) Scripture says the Messiah had to die and rise again; and (2) Jesus of Galilee is that Messiah.

<sup>3</sup> See *Envy*.

<sup>4</sup> “[T]o upset the stability of a pers. or group, *disturb, trouble, upset*” (BDAG, 72). Christians upset the world, not by revolution, but by preaching the gospel.

<sup>5</sup> This is the same accusation the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem made against Jesus.

therefore believed (πιστεύω, aor. act.),<sup>6</sup> with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.

13 But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed (καταγγέλλω, aor.) by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. 14 Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. 15 Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command (ἐντολή) for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.<sup>7</sup>

### *Paul in Athens*

16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.<sup>8</sup> 17 So he began reasoning (διαλέγομαι, imperf.) in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.<sup>9</sup> 18 Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also began to converse (συμβάλλω, imperf.)<sup>10</sup> with him. And some said,

What does this babbler wish to say?<sup>11</sup>

Others said,

He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities (ξένων δαιμονίων)<sup>12</sup>

—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. 19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus saying,

May we know what this new teaching (διδαχή) is that you are presenting? 20 For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This is a great pattern. Hear the gospel message, examine the Scriptures daily to verify the message, and then believe the message.

<sup>7</sup> Here we see clearly Paul is the main character of *Acts*, not Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Luke, or anyone else.

<sup>8</sup> Idolatry provokes the spirit of the godly man so that he must speak against it.

<sup>9</sup> Paul wasn't afraid to evangelize alone, when necessary. He doesn't waste time.

<sup>10</sup> "(1) To engage in mutual pondering of a matter, converse, confer; (2) to give careful thought to, consider, ponder; or (3) to draw a conclusion by comparing, compare" (*BDAG*, 956).

<sup>11</sup> See F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

<sup>12</sup> "[T]ranscendent incorporeal being w. status between humans and deities, *daemon* (as distinguished from demon, which in Eng. gener. connotes inimical aspect), *semi-divine being*, *a divinity*, *spirit*, (*higher*) *power*; without neg. connotation. The subst. was freq. used by Hellenes in a gener. sense esp. of independent numinous beings or divinities, as distinguished from a more personalized θεός" (*BDAG*, 210).

<sup>13</sup> It is a great thing when unbelievers are asking questions about the gospel. See Ac 2. We must be prepared to give an answer.

21 Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. 22 So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus said:

Men of Athens, I keep perceiving (θεωρέω, pres.) that in every way you are very religious (δεισιδαίμων).<sup>14</sup> 23 For as I was passing along and carefully observing (ἀναθεωρέω, pres.) the objects of your worship, I found (εὕρισκω, aor.) also an altar with this inscription:

To the unknown god (Ἄγνωστον θεῶν).<sup>15</sup>

What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim (καταγγέλλω, pres.) to you.<sup>16</sup>

24 The God who made the world and everything in it,<sup>17</sup> being Lord of heaven and earth,<sup>18</sup> does not live in temples made by man,<sup>19</sup> 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, because he himself gives to all mankind life, breath, and everything.<sup>20</sup> 26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined (ὀρίζω, aor.) allotted (προστάσσω, perf. pass. part.) periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,<sup>21</sup> 27 in order that they may seek (ζητέω, pres. inf.) God and perhaps feel their way (ψηλαφάω, optative) toward him and find (εὕρισκω, optative) him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, 28 for:

In him we live, move, and have our being.

As even some of your own poets have said,

For we are indeed his offspring.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The Athenians' religious intuition shows they recognize a god or gods exist.

<sup>15</sup> From the Greek term ἄγνωστος we get the English term agnostic.

<sup>16</sup> Paul does a great job of grabbing their attention with something familiar to them.

<sup>17</sup> See *God as Creator*.

<sup>18</sup> See *The Sovereignty of God*.

<sup>19</sup> See *The Transcendence of God*.

<sup>20</sup> See *The Self-Existence of God*.

<sup>21</sup> Ge 9:19.

<sup>22</sup> See *The Image of God in Man*.

29 Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold, silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.<sup>23</sup> 30 The times of ignorance (τοὺς... χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας) God overlooked (ὑπεροράω, aor.), but now he commands (παραγγέλλω, pres.) all people everywhere to change their minds (μετανοέω, pres.), 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge<sup>24</sup> the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed. And of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.<sup>25</sup>

32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said,

We will hear you again about this.

33 So Paul went out from their midst. 34 But some men joined him and believed (πιστεύω, aor.), among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> **Ro 1:22-23** 22 Claiming to be wise, [people] became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, animals, and creeping things.

<sup>24</sup> Paul definitely talks about judgment when preaching to Gentile unbelievers.

<sup>25</sup> Because of Jesus' resurrection, there is no longer any reason for ignorance. Agnosticism is not a valid excuse. Agnosticism will not shield anyone from God's judgment.

<sup>26</sup> The gospel message will always get a mixed reaction. Some will reject, others will want to hear more, and still others will believe.

## *Biblical Worldview*

- 1. Enter spaces where people come together and share the gospel. For Paul, it was synagogues and marketplaces.**
  - a. **Ac 17:2** 2 And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days [in Thessalonica] he reasoned with them from the Scriptures.
  - b. **Ac 17:10** 10 The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue.
  - c. **Ac 17:16-17** 16 Now while Paul was waiting for [Silas and Timothy] at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.
  - d. Always pick the low-hanging fruit first. For Paul, the low-hanging fruit was Jews and Gentile God-fearers who met regularly in Jewish synagogues.
  
- 2. When the gospel message is in you, every moment is an opportunity to share it.**
  - a. **Ac 17:16-17** 16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.
  - b. Let's stop wasting our time and preach the gospel!
  - c. Paul had a burden for Athenian unbelievers who were religious but did not know the true God.
  
- 3. Like Paul, exegete the culture. Observe and interpret it. Discover its core beliefs.**
  - a. **Ac 17:16** 16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.
  - b. **Ac 17:22-23** 22 So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.
  - c. Find out what people really believe. What do you believe about the past, present, and future? What's the purpose of your life?
  
- 4. Build bridges with unbelievers by beginning to discuss things familiar to them.**
  - a. **Ac 17:22-23** 22 So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: To the unknown god. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.
  
- 5. The Church needs an army of apologist-evangelists, like Paul, who are able to make a persuasive case for the gospel.**

## *Notes*

See John Stott on jealousy.