

## Acts Chapter Seventeen

### Acts 17:1-4

**Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 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." And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.**

- During 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary—Paul moves to Thessalonica (another name: Nine Ways). It is about 100 miles and a three day walk from Philippi. It is an important city—commercially and strategically. It is a port city—38 miles west of Apollonia, on the Egnation Road (an important station on the Vis Egnatia—a prominent Roman thoroughfare).
- City was built as a round circle—with a circular wall around it.
- This city was built by Cassander in 315 BC—named after step sister to Alexander the Great. Cassander was one of the generals in his army.
- Paul's custom takes him to synagogue first—for 3 Sabbaths he reasoned (dialogued with Q & A)—from the scriptures (OT)—explaining and giving evidence (persuasive proof).
- The Christ had to suffer—consider Isaiah 53, Ps 22, Gen 22, and Zechariah—doctrine of suffering was in the text of OT—and suffering and resurrection were included as central message.
- When Paul was in Thessalonica—he received financial support from Philippi.

### Acts 17:5-9

**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 coming upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. And 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; and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." And they stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these**

**things. And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.**

- Jews became jealous—at root of conflict—religious zeal
- Formed a mob—this also happened in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:45,50)—at Iconium (Acts 14:2,5)—and at Lystra (Acts 14:19).
- Jason and the brethren bear the brunt of this uproar. Their suffering is addressed in I Thes 2:14, 3:1-5.
- These men have upset the world (turned the world upside down---or as we would see it—right side up)—this accusation is really affirming—a compliment.
- Saying there is another king—their behavior is called into question because allegiance of church is given to Jesus as King. Dogma of Caesar—he alone was supreme.
- When Christianity penetrate Roman Empire—we are watching a revolution take place.
- An uprising could be perceived as the beginning of another civil war (Anthony and Octavian).

### **Acts 17:10-15**

**And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 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. Many of them therefore believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men. But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there likewise, agitating and stirring up the crowds. And then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. Now those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.**

- In Acts 1-12—Jesus is hailed as Messiah for the Jews—King of the Jews—now the claim begins that He is/will be the Lord of the whole earth.
- Paul and Silas sent away at night to Berea—avoids further persecution of believers in Thessalonica.
- Sent to Berea—not an obvious choice—off the normal flow of traffic.
- Bereans became known for their diligent search of the scriptures—they received the word with eagerness.
- Sent away—this is the 5<sup>th</sup> city he is persecuted in.

- Silas and Timothy remain to attend to the work. (there is a church planted here—but the greater the persecution—the stronger the church).

## Acts 17:16-21

**Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols. 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. And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. And 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 they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? "For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; we want to know therefore what these things mean." (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)**

- While Paul waits in Athens—his spirit is provoked by the abundance of idolatry.
- Athens is the cultural center of the world—capital of Roman world religions and capital of Greece.
- **Epicureans:** pursued pleasure as chief purpose in life—desired to live in peace—free from pain and fear. They lived with excess—hedonism.
- **Stoics:** were pantheists who emphasized moral sincerity and duty—proud dignity—believed that all things, both good and evil, came from god. They believed in restraint.
- Paul faces an intellectual, educated, cultured audience—proud of its history. He is invited to speak in the center of this city—the Areopagus—the rock formation where the Parthenon stands.
- We have watched when Paul brings the gospel to the Jews who are zealous for the Law—also when he confronts pagan gentiles. Now we see him address the prevailing ancient philosophies that these people embraced (they continue to dominate our thinking today).
- Athens is used to processing all they hear/know with their mind. This is an audience that already 'thinks it knows' (kind of like talk radio).

## Acts 17:22-28

**And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. "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.' What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. "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; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.**

- Paul sees the Parthenon as a temple—built in Athens to worship Athena—the virgin goddess.
- Altar to an unknown god—By starting with this altar—he assumes that their agnosticism would allow for the introduction of new information. He found a place in their culture that he could use as a bridge.
- He addresses them as though they had been ignorant on this matter—but the time has come to change—God is calling them to repent.
- 'you are very religious'—religion can lead people away from God.
- When he begins to share—he presents the basis for only One God—the God who is Creator—then shares how He will also be Redeemer and Judge.
- This message is most likely a synopsis of a longer message.

## Acts 17:29-34

**"Being then the offspring 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. "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, 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."**

**Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." So Paul went out of their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among**

**whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.**

- God is now declaring to men—God has intervened and is bringing this season of ignorance to an end.
- Doesn't directly use the name of Jesus—but calls Him the Resurrected One.
- The idea is in direct opposition to Greek thought—their god Apollo had stated in a play by Aeschylus in the Areopagus—man dies and there is no resurrection.
- Paul states that resurrection is not only about the divinity of Jesus—but it also makes Him Judge. (they are to turn from their idolatry to the Living God).
- Greeks like the idea of the immortality of the soul/spirit—but not the resurrection of the body.

# Acts Chapter Seventeen—Workbook

## Key Words:

## Harmonize:

Read I Thessalonians

## Dig:

- 1) What does Paul emphasize in his teachings to the Thessalonians? Why would this be the first thing he covers with them?
- 2) In those 3 weeks, what responses took place in this city?
- 3) What is at the heart of the conflict in Thessalonica? Where have you seen this response before?
- 4) What compliment is paid to the apostles in Thessalonica?
- 5) What sets the people in Berea apart in their reaction to the gospel?
- 6) How does the spiritual climate differ from Thessalonica to Berea to Athens?
- 7) What does and epicurean believe?
- 8) What is stoic philosophy?
- 9) What foundation does Paul begin to address as he speaks to his audience in Athens? What understanding about God does he start with?

10) In verse 28, Paul uses a familiar poet to relate a spiritual truth—what scripture supports this verse of poetry?

**Discuss:**

- 1) Consider the strategy Paul takes as he begins to minister in Athens. How aware is he of the spiritual climate? How does this form his response?
- 2) Discuss what secular songs or movies might open the door to a spiritual discussion.
- 3) How is verse 17:21 like our culture today?

**Point of Prayer:**

Ask the Lord for a prayer strategy concerning one of the strongholds we face in our city.

**Integrate:**

What other scriptures come to mind as you read this chapter?

**Application:**

- 1) How do you make scripture reading a consistent practice in your life?
- 2) What makes you hungry for the Word?
- 3) In Thessalonica—Paul is forced once more to leave (6x so far). Have you been forced away from any group due to your commitment to Christ?
- 4) How does your conversation change when you are around unbelievers?

- 5) What current mindset in our culture seems most opposed to Christ?
  
- 6) Do you fear public speaking? When are you most likely to share your testimony?
  
- 7) What statement of Jesus is the hardest one to share with unbelievers? Why?