

## History in the Making “Understanding the Book of Acts-Part Thirty”

**Introduction:** Acts 17 continues the 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary trip narrative (Paul and Silas). The Gospel continues to the Gentile regions-the uttermost parts of the earth.

### I. The Places the Gospel Entered

#### A. Paul and Silas leave Philippi and travel to Thessalonica

##### 1. Arrival and ministry

*Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." 4 And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas. Acts 17:1-4 NKJV*

- a. Traveled Egnatian way-west, a 2-day trip to Thessalonica, founded in 315 B.C. and named after ½ sister of Alexander the Great.
- b. As usual, taught first in the synagogue for three Sabbaths; revealing from Old Testament scriptures, Jesus as Messiah.
- c. Some Jews believed, many God-fearing Greeks, and a large company of prominent women. (Macedonia women known for their independence).

##### 2. Trouble in Thessalonica

*But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. 6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. 7 Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king — Jesus." 8 And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. 9 So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. Acts 17:5-9 NKJV*

- a. Like other cities, unbelieving Jews created a stir, or riot. Attacked home of Jason but Paul and Silas had escaped.
- b. Arrested Jason for having, aiding and abetting those who had “turned world upside down.”

NOTE: “Acted contrary to the decrees of Caesar.”

AD 49: Claudius expelled Jews from Rome due to riots, encouraging revolution against Rome.

- c. After trial-“took security”-posted bond for Jason-was released

NOTE: Quick and sudden departure from Thessalonica is probably the point of his first letter:

*But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. 18 Therefore we wanted to come to you — even I, Paul, time and again — but Satan hindered us. 19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy. 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20 NKJV*

#### B. Paul and Silas travel to Berea

*Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. 12 Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. 13 But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. 14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there. 15 So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed. Acts 17:10-15 NKJV*

1. Paul and Silas sneak out by night and travel to Berea (40-45 miles west/southwest of Thessalonica)
2. Taught again in synagogues-well received
3. They sought diligently the Scriptures to see that they were correct
4. Thessalonica antagonists came there to incite trouble and ran them off
5. Silas and Timothy remain-Paul taken to Athens-but not Silas and Timothy will rejoin him in Athens

### C. Paul arrives in Athens

*Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. 17 Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. 18 Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. 19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? 20 For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." 21 For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. Acts 17:16-21 NKJV*

1. Irked over the horrific idolatry of Athens-jealousy for God (Oratory, literature, sculpture of Athens in 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> BC days never surpassed-philosophic too, native place of Socrates, Plato and adopted home of Aristotle, Epicurus, Zeno)

NOTE: Impressed with sports teams, cities, talents-but must be a jealousy for God

2. Reasoned with the people (synagogue/marketplace)

NOTE: Athens an illustration of

*For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 1 Corinthians 1:21 NKJV*

3. False charge of Epicureans/stoics-he is a babbler!
  - a. Stoics-(Zeno founder)-individual self-sufficiency. Pantheistic-God was "world soul" God is all/all is God. Moral duty and obligation. Proud spirit. Suicide was honorable when one could no longer live with dignity, mind over emotions. Almost denial of reality.
  - b. Epicureans-Pleasure the chief end of life, greatest pleasure is peace a life free of pain

NOTE: Did not deny gods, but they took no interest in people's lives or pains

- c. Both stoics and epicureans thought Paul's gospel had no substance, no answers to life's questions
  - d. He was merely an unlearned propaganda specialist
4. Taken to Areopagus-a court that exercised jurisdiction in matters of religion and morals
    - a. They would license public speakers
    - b. Paul would have a chance to speak his doctrine

- c. Culture of Athens was new is better, new things, but the existence of the Arcopagus was an admission that their passion for new could be excessive

*But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 Timothy 3:1 NKJV*

*Having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! 6 For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. 2 Timothy 3:5-7 NKJV*

OUR CULTURE TODAY-ALWAYS SOMETHING NEW!

## II. The Challenge the Gospel Met

Relativism: There are no absolutes that define reality

- Many gods
- Always learning
- This is where we are today

### A. Two options

1. There are no absolutes that define reality-(no actual reality, no absolute authority)
2. There are absolutes that define what is real and which is not

### B. Ultimate assumptions-determined by the one we believe is the ultimate authority-or maker of all things

1. If we believe God is the maker of all things and he is a personal, all powerful, and intelligent being-absolute truth derives from understanding Him, His character, and His will.
2. If we reject the idea of a personal maker and believe in chance, then there is no standard of truth that has authority

### C. Logical problems of denying truth

1. Self-contradiction-no absolutes IS an absolute
2. Limited knowledge-there are no dogs in Alaska
3. The real world-killing is equal to kindness because everyone's truth is equal

### D. Proof that there is an ultimate authority

1. Conscience-suffering, starvation, rape, evil is wrong-all know that!
2. Science-the study of what we know and quest to know more. Its existence is founded on a belief that there are objective realities in the world

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3. **Religions**-all are trying to give meaning and definition to life. Grasping for God

This challenge of relativism is still facing the church today!

### **III. The Unveiling the Gospel Receives**

#### **A. Paul's initial observation at the Aeropaus**

*Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious. Acts 17:22-23 NKJV*

#### **B. Paul's starting point**

*For as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: Acts 17:23 NKJV*

#### **C. The created order reveals the character of God**

*God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. Acts 17:24-25 NKJV*

1. Eternal—maker of all things (John 1:3)
2. Incomprehensible—He is Lord of Heaven and all Earth
3. Uncontainable—Doesn't dwell in a temple made with hands
4. All sufficient—Nor is he worshipped with men's hands as though he needed something
5. Indispensable—He gives to all, life, breath, and all things

#### **D. The image of God (imago dei) is stamped on all humanity**

*And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings. Acts 17:26 NKJV*

1. The creator of all things in general is the creator of all humanity in particular
2. Pride is ill-founded—all one blood (Greeks were not superior)
3. No room for racial superiority

#### **E. The longing for God is universally present**

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*So that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Acts 17:27-28 NKJV*

1. Because we are His, we long for Him
2. Reason for the idols
3. Reason for the various quests—just trying to be satisfied

F. The longing can only be satisfied in Jesus

*Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. 30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." Acts 17:29-31 NKJV*

1. He will satisfy
2. He will judge
3. He has been vindicated by His resurrection

**Conclusion:** Some believed/some rejected

*And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will bear you again on this matter." 33 So Paul departed from among them. 34 However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them. Acts 17:32-34 NKJV*

1. Resurrection separated them—Greeks
2. Dualism—body is evil

Summary

1. **Seeker**—You have been groping
  - a. Reason for that
  - b. Image of God
  - c. Hungry for what only He can give

2. **Believer**—Even the lost are seeking
  - a. May take time
  - b. Can't start with the Bible
  - c. Jesus in you