

Acts Chapter 17

Theme of Acts: The Holy Spirit and the Birth of the Church

Personal Reflection

Complete this section in one sitting or little by little during the week. Begin with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit into your time. Spending time in the Bible, studying the original intent, meaning and cultural context helps you to understand how it applies to you now.

Further Study

Complete on your own or with your small group.

Personal Reflection

Song for the week: That's Who I Praise - Brandon Lake

Song links: <https://youtu.be/Hv9nQ2rOu6g?si=xbu5m5CFnKA6AZZp>

Read Acts 17 Click on any Bible verse in the study to read it or use your own Bible.



Paul, Silas and their companions arrived at Thessalonica, the capital of the Kingdom of Macedonia which was a small kingdom in the northeastern part of Greece.

When they arrived there, they went to the synagogue as was their custom and taught about Jesus. Paul both explained and proved that Jesus was the Messiah. Some were persuaded including Jews, God fearing Greeks and prominent women. (God fearers: Believers in the Jewish God who were not circumcised nor followed the law and customs.)

If you had to explain and prove that Jesus was the Messiah, what would you say?

“The position of women in Macedonia seems to have been exceptional ... Macedonian women were permitted to hold property, and were treated as mistresses of the house ... their prominence in church affairs is indicated by Paul's special appeal to two ladies in the church at Philippi to reconcile their differences, which had caused disturbance in the church, and by his commending them to his colleagues as women who had labored with him in the Lord (Vincent's Word Studies).” *Optional, read Philipians 4:2-3*

Luke includes the word “prominent” to describe the women in Thessalonica. What reasons might he have had to include this description?

Women were treated differently in different regions. Where do you notice this to be true still today?

Some jealous Jews who did not believe what Paul was teaching found others to create a mob and sought Paul and his companions at Jason’s home. “It does not appear that they felt any particular interest in the subject; but they were, like other mobs, easily excited, and urged on to any acts of violence. The pretense on which the mob was excited was ... that they violated the laws of the Roman emperor. It may be observed, however, that a mob usually regards very little the cause in which they are engaged (Barnes’ Notes on the Bible).”

Today we still witness people excited to mob action, sometimes not caring about the cause but engaging with enthusiasm. What should our response as Christ followers be? How are we to interact regardless of if we agree or not?

Paul and Silas next went to Berea in central Macedonia. Again they went to the Jewish synagogue to preach. The Berean Jews “examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” “The litmus test of any idea or practice is whether it accords with God’s word (Life with God Bible).” Luke wrote that Berean Jews, prominent Greek women and Greek men believed.

Some of the Jews in Thessalonica heard Paul was preaching in Berea and stirred up the crowds against him again. Rulings in one city had no effect in another so the accusers followed him to continue trying to silence him.

When was the last time you “examined the Scriptures” to see if what you were being taught or what you read was true?

Have you ever found a teaching in a message, song or book to be contrary to Scripture? How did that impact you?

Were there any conversations that you had as a result of the contradiction? If so, how might those conversations have strengthened your knowledge of the Word of God?

Paul waited for Silas and Timothy in Athens, a city where “their hospitality to strangers extended to the gods too, being very ready to receive any strange objects or forms of worship ... It was easier to find a god than a man there (Benson Commentary).”

Paul preached both in the synagogue and marketplace this time as the latter is where sages and orators practiced their skills. Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were two of the most influential schools of thought. Epicureanism taught that the goal in life was to seek pleasure and avoid pain. Stoicism taught that the purpose was to live in harmony with nature and develop self control. A group from these philosophers began to debate with Paul, which was their normal way of discussion.

Based on the above, what were ways that they would have agreed or disagreed with Paul’s teachings about Jesus?

Read [1 Timothy 6:20-21](#). Timothy was with Paul on this journey. How would you paraphrase Paul’s words to Timothy? How does this align with debate?

Luke again purposefully noted the name of both a male and female believer in Athens. What might have been his reason to continue doing this? Consider that Luke never mentioned these two again, nor did Paul ever mention them by name in his letters.

Paul wrote letters to many churches but none that we know of were addressed to Athens. However in his second letter to Corinth, he wrote, “To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia.” As Athens was in Achaia, he may have included the believers in Athens with this greeting.

Paul was treated with more civility in Athens than the other Macedonian cities, but his message of salvation was treated with more indifference. People wanted to talk about it more than believe it. The last words the people in Athens spoke as recorded by Luke was “We want to hear you again on this subject.” Paul chose to leave instead of continuing to debate with human wisdom.

“It would almost seem as if he felt that little was gained by entering into a discussion on the great questions of natural theology; and therefore he came to Corinth, determined to know nothing ‘but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified’ (Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers).”
Optional, read 2 Corinthians 1:1, 1 Corinthians 2:1-6

Putting it into practice:

Is there someone you know who enjoys the debate of what the Bible says but avoids the good news of Jesus and making it personal? Spend time praying for wisdom in how to speak to them about “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” and ask the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts to receive the message of forgiveness and salvation.

Further Study

Discuss as a group (from your Personal Reflection time):

Paul both explained and proved that Jesus was the Messiah. If you had to explain and prove that Jesus was the Messiah, what would you say?

While Peter, Stephen and Phillip had similar patterns of presenting the good news, anchoring it to Old Testament scripture, Paul’s was different. Paul used Greek philosophy and poetry. “The gospel is most persuasive when presented in terms its hearers understand (Life with God Bible).”

One such example is Paul’s quoting “ ‘For in him we live and move and have our being” which has been attributed to either the Cretan philosopher Epimenides or Cilician poet Aratus. In his letter to Titus, Paul quotes again from Epimenides when he says, ““Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.” *Optional, read Titus 1:12*

How might you present the gospel using what people understand or relate to today?

Prayer

Ask God to provide you with divine appointments this week. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you show others the love of Jesus from the overflow of His love for you and for Him to give you wisdom in how to share the gospel.

Follow Up

Is there anything from this week’s personal reflection time which you would like to discuss more with your small group?