



### The Third Journey: Acts 18:23-21:25

1. Through Galatia and Phrygia - Act 18:22
2. Ephesus - Acts 19:1-41
3. Macedonia -Act 20:1-2
4. Greece, Macedonia, Philippi - Act 20:2-6
5. Troas - Act 20:6-12
6. Assos - Ac.t 20:13-14
7. Mitylene, opposite Chios, Sanios, Trogyllium, Miletus - Acts 20:14-36
8. Cos. Rhodes. Patara - Ac.t 21:1-2
9. Tvre - Act 21:3-6
10. Ptolemais - Act 21:7
11. Caesarea -Act i:g-i
12. Jerusalem - Act 21:16-25

## ACTS CHAPTER 17

### Thessalonica

#### Acts 17:1-9

*"When they had taken the road through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Paul, as his custom was, went in to them and, for three Sabbaths, he debated with them from the scriptures, opening the scriptures to them and presenting the evidence that Christ had to suffer and to rise from the dead, 'and this man,' he said, 'is the Christ, Jesus whom I proclaim to you.' Some of them believed and threw in their lot with Paul and Silas. Thus it was with many of the worshipping Greeks and with a considerable number of women who belonged to the most influential ranks of society. The Jews resented this. They got hold of some of the low characters who haunted the market place and they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. They surged up to Jason's house and kept demanding that they should bring them before the people. When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brethren to the city magistrates, shouting, 'These men who have upset the civilized world have arrived here too; and Jason has received them as his guests. These are all teaching against the decrees of Caesar for they say that there is another emperor Jesus.' They disturbed the mob and the chief magistrates as they heard this. So they took surety from Jason and the others and let them go."*

Christianity coming to Thessalonica was a primary strategic move.

The Egnatian Way;

A primary, great Roman road from the Adriatic Sea to the Middle East

Main street of Thessalonica was actually part of that road.

If Christianity was firmly founded in Thessalonica it could spread both east and west along that road until it became the Gospel's super-highway spreading the kingdom of God.

## More ministry success in the next city, Thessalonica

**1) When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2) As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3) explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. 4) Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.**

Timothy and Luke were left behind in Philippi.

Why ???

What do you suppose Paul entrusted these 'new' brothers to do in Philippi while he and Silas went on ahead?

Paul and Silas used famous Roman road: Via Egnatia,

It crossed Macedonia, connecting the Adriatic Sea with the Black Sea. (Greek extension of the Via Appia).

Amphipolis = 33 miles southwest of Philippi, North coast of Aegean;  
Apollonia = 30 miles Southwest Amphipolis;

Thessalonica = 37 miles west Apollonia, northwest extremity of Aegean.

A main road but still a difficult walking journey of over 100 miles.

**1) When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.**

They finally stop the journey at Thessalonica

It had a Synagogue

It was a strategic center:

It was the capital city of Macedonia (pop: 200,000?).

As usual Paul began his work in the synagogue.

Paul worked at tent making during his stay in Thessalonica

Apparently he and his troop were running low in funds.

**1 Thes. 2:9** For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

**2 Thes. 3:7-8** For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; [8] Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:

When Paul was in Thessalonica, he received financial support from the Christians in Philippi.

**Philip. 4:15-16** Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. [16] For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.

**2) As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,**

Forceful teaching for 3 Sabbaths

**1 Thes. 1:8** For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

Defining the length of his stay in Thessalonica to between 15-21 days.

Not long !!!

**3) explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. 4) Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.**

Expositional approach: preaching from texts, establishing scriptural relationships...to deliver the Gospel as defined in **1 Cor 15:1-4**.

Used Old Testament (**Ps 16; 22; Isa; Hosea, etc.**)

As Jesus did with the 2 on Emmaus road after His resurrection.

This presented a large problem for the Jewish theologian who knew the Scriptures. E.G.:

**Isaiah 53** spoke of a Suffering Messiah

**Psalms 2** spoke of a Ruling Messiah.

The only way to reconcile a Messiah, who reigned with authority, with a Messiah Who suffered brutally, was to have two Messiahs.

The Jews called the Reigning Messiah 'Messiah Ben David', after Israel's mightiest king.

They called the Suffering Messiah 'Messiah Ben Joseph', after the Old Testament hero who suffered unjustly at the hands of his brethren.

In the synagogue at Thessalonica, Paul opened the Scriptures and explained how both sets of prophecies were fulfilled in one Person.

He explained how Jesus — son of Joseph — was the Suffering Messiah who was crucified on the Cross,

But also how after three days, He — Son of David — rose from the dead and that he is coming again to rule and reign forever.

He explained that Scripture did not describe 2 Messiahs

but 2 Comings of 1 Messiah fulfilling all the Scriptures fully.

**Paul preached Jesus crucified and risen and coming again to the Thessalonian Jews.**

Some of them were persuaded, most of them being devout Greeks, but also many prominent Jewish women.

His great success was among the Gentiles attached to the synagogue.

This infuriated the Jews for they looked on these Gentiles as their "trophies"

and Paul stealing them before their very eyes.

**Envious Jews instigate a riotous mob against Paul and Silas**

*5) But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. 6) But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, 7) and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." 8) When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. 9) Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.*

The Jews knew well that Christianity was a supremely effective thing.

When Christianity goes into action it should still cause a revolution both in the life of the individual and in the life of society.

The Jews stooped to the lowest methods to hinder Paul.

First they stirred up the rabble.

*5) But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.*

Jason may have been kinsman. (blood relatives or fellow Jews ???)

**Romans 16:21** **Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, [Luke] and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you.**

Jason was a Christian in Thessalonica who seems to have had a house that became a center for the church there;

When the mob does not find Paul and Silas there, they attack Jason himself.

*6) But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, 7) and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus."*

"Rulers" - (Greek) politarch, used nowhere else;

found on inscription on marble arch in Thessalonica, including seven names of founders.

Note: All the persecution that follows Paul is caused by the Jews.

They had dragged Jason and his friends before the magistrates, they charged the Paul and Silas with preaching political insurrection.

The mob gives an unintended compliment to the effectiveness of God's work through Paul and Silas:

"Those, who are upsetting the civilized world have arrived here."

(King James Version: "these men who have turned the world upside down").

Actually, God was working through Paul and Silas to turn the world right-side up again!

They knew their accusation was a lie so they couched it in very suggestive terms.

### ***8) When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil.***

Under the emperors, it was declared high treason to violate the majesty or authority of the state.

What troubled the rulers of the city was hearing that the Christians preached there is another king - Jesus;

this made them fear that their city might become a hotbed of political rebellion against Caesar.

"It may be for this reason that Paul avoided the use of 'kingdom' and 'king' in his letters to his converts, lest Gentile imperial authorities misconstrue them to connote opposition to the empire and emperor."

Their fears were unfounded, because though the gospel has definite political implications, Christians are better citizens than before, and their prayers for officials of government are more helpful than most imagine.

### ***9) Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go***

Jason was released once a security deposit (against any future riots) was posted by Jason.

Basically, Romans did not care what you believed, but when the public order was disrupted by riots, they came down with an iron hand.

So Jason has to post the bond even though he did not instigate the riot.

Paul and Silas flee Thessalonica quickly, not wanting to bring more persecution on the Christians there or to jeopardize Jason's security.

Security: to keep peace; leave town?

Paul desired and expected to return to Thessalonica very soon.

**1 Thes. 2:17-18** But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. [18] Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

After they had left suddenly after spending only a few weeks there (17:2), Paul felt he had so much more to say to these Christians, from Corinth he wrote the letter of 1 Thessalonians to them (which many feel was Paul's "first" letter).

Timothy, who had been left at Philippi, was sent to the Christians at Thessalonica.

**1 Thes. 3:5-7** For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain. [6] But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you: [7] Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:



Berea

## ON TO BEROEA

Acts 17:10-15

*"The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away to Berea by night. When they arrived there they came into the synagogue of the Jews. These were men of finer character than those in Thessalonica and they received the word with all eagerness. They daily examined the scriptures to see if these things were so. Many of them believed, as did a considerable number of well-to-do Greek women and men. When the Jews of Thessalonica knew that the word of God was preached by Paul in Berea they came there too in an attempt to stir up and disturb the people. The brethren then immediately sent Paul away as far as the sea coast, while Silas and Timothy remained there. Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and, when they had received an order to tell Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they went away."*

### More evangelistic success in Berea

*10) As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. 11) Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. 12) Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.*

*10) As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue.*

Berea was a small out-of-the-way town, off the beaten path, in foothills of Olympic Mountains,.

Beroea was 60 miles southwest of Thessalonica.

It was the first city to surrender to the Romans after their victory at Pydna in 168 B.C.

They follow their familiar strategy going to the local synagogue.

*11) Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. 12) Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.*

They found that the Jews there were diligent students of the Scriptures, who searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

Thessalonians were persuaded (by argument);

Bereans believed— spiritually apprehended;

searched (like stalking game), the Jerusalem Pharisees and Jewish leaders searched the scriptures but only to find loopholes for living their own way; not to find God's truth.

**Joh 5:37-42** And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. 38 And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. 39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. 40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. 41 I receive not honour from men. 42 But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.

It is not just the study of Scriptures that honors God – It is applying God's truth that the Scriptures reveal to our own life and way of living...

**Luk 6:44** For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. 45 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. 46 And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? 47 Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: 48 He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. 49 But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.

**If it was good to check Paul and Silas against the Scriptures, how much more anyone teaching today?**

They not only heard Paul preach on the Sabbath, but daily searched the Scriptures themselves, and compared what they read with the facts related to them.

Notice also that their research did not make them approach Paul and Silas as skeptics;

they received the word with all readiness, and then checked it against the Scriptures.

- Without a Scriptural basis, we are lost in a sea of relativism and opinion; foolish, wasted discussions ...
- Never follow a single man: whether Cephas, Apollos, Paul...or especially any Pastor, teacher or evangelist!!

We do not read of any other city where the message or the messengers were given so fair a hearing,

Where people were so honest in seeking to know whether the Word spoken was really in accordance with the Scripture or not...

One of the Berean converts is known to us by name Sopater, the son of Pyrrhus,

appears to have accompanied Paul and others to Jerusalem seven years later as a delegate from the Berean church .

**Acts 20:4 And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus.**

If he is the same person (as is probable) with Sosipater, he was a Jewish convert, (and possibly blood kin to Paul) since Paul calls him one of his "kinsmen".

**Romans 16:21 Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you.**

**Three things stand out in this short section.**

(i) There is the scriptural basis of Paul's preaching.

He set the people of Berea searching the scriptures with a new light.

The Jews were certain that Jesus was not the Messiah because he had been crucified.

To them a man who had been crucified was a man accursed.

It was no doubt Messiah's description in passages like Isa.53 that Paul set the people of Berea to find a rethink the life and work of Jesus.

(ii) There is the envenomed bitterness of Jews.

They not only opposed Paul in Thessalonica; they pursued him to Berea.

They undoubtedly thought that they were doing God's work by seeking to silence Paul.

It can be a terrible thing when a man confuses and identifies his personal aims and opinions with the will of God instead of submitting his aims to that will.

(iii) There is the courage of Paul.

He had been imprisoned in Philippi;

He had left Thessalonica in peril of his life, under cover of darkness;

Once again in Berea he had had to flee for his life.

Most men would have abandoned a struggle which seemed bound to end in arrest and death.

If Paul ever considered turning back we have no evidence of it...

## Paul is forced to leave Berea

**13) When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. 14) The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. 15) The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.**

RECAP ---

Paul had been called to Macedonia and the Via Egnatia ran through Macedonia to its Adriatic terminus at Dyrrhachium.

Paul had followed the Via Egnatia from Philippi to Thessalonica

He likely planned to continue to follow it from Thessalonica eastward following it to Dyrrhachium and then crossing the Adriatic to Italy, and on to Rome.

We know from his letter to the Roman Christians, written 6-7 years after this, that he had often intended to visit them, but had been prevented thus far.

**Romans 1:13 Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.**

**Romans 15:22 For which cause also I have been much hindered from coming to you.**

Possibly he was unwilling to go to Rome until the stigma of the charge of subversion at Thessalonica had faded;

Or news may have reached him of Claudius' s edict expelling the Jewish community from Rome (c. A.D. 49).

This would have deprived him of his natural base of operations in Rome.

Instead, Paul and Silas were forced to leave the main road, take the small back roads and make for Berea, which lay some distance south of Thessalonica.

Being off the Via Egnatia, Cicero describes Berea as "oppidum deuium", "an out-of-the-way town". [Cicero, In Pisonem 89.]

They had little choice in the matter.

But those who had stirred up trouble for Paul in Thessalonica, hearing of his presence in Berea, came and stirred up similar trouble there.

**13) When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.**

Upper classes of these European Greek and Romanized towns were probably better educated than those in Asia Minor.

The Jews from Thessalonica were not content to force Paul out of their own city; they even followed him to Berea to be a problem for him there.

**14) The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea.**

The Christians in Berea sent Paul away to Athens, fearing for his life and a total disruption of the work going on there, leaving Silas and Timothy behind in Berea.

Paul left Berea alone (escorted by some local converts from Berea to serve as helpers and guides)

Why didn't they all go?

Paul had a passion for not just making converts, but for planting churches;

If he could not stay in the city and strengthen the Christians there, he wanted his trusted associates to stay.

Luke was left in Thessalonica;

Silas and Timothy were left in Berea...

Silas and Timothy had been left behind to establish a church.

Between Berea and Athens lay the region of Thessaly. Thessaly formed part of the province of Macedonia.

The Berean Christians judged that Thessaly would not be safe for Paul and did not leave him until they had brought him to Athens.

His Berean friends got him down to the coast and accompanied him (presumably by sea) to Athens, which lay in the province of Achaia.

**15) The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.**

Then his escort, bearing instructions from Paul left Paul alone in Athens and return to Berea with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens.

When Timothy arrives, he is immediately sent back to Thessalonica.

**1 Thes. 3:1-2** Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; [2] And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:

## **ALONE IN ATHENS**

**Acts 17:16-21**

*"When Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was deeply vexed as he saw the whole city full of idols. He debated with the Jews and the worshippers in the synagogue and every day he talked in the city square with everyone he met. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers took issue with him. Some of them said, 'What would this gutter-sparrow of a man be saying?' Others said, 'He seems to be the herald of strange divinities.' This they said because he told the good news of Jesus and the resurrection. So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus saying, 'May we know what is this strange new teaching you are talking about? For you are introducing things which sound strange to us. We want therefore to know what these things mean.' (All the Athenians and the strangers who stay there have no time for anything other than to talk about and to listen to the latest idea)."*

When he fled from Berea, Paul found himself alone in Athens.

But, with comrades or alone, Paul never stopped preaching Christ.

## **SOMEONE SHARE A WITNESSING EXPERIENCE THAT WAS DIFFICULT !!!**

Paul finds himself in a difficult situation –

Alone in a strange city

Populated by a people of a different culture

Who are the intellectual and philosophical elite of their society.

What does Paul do - He introduces them to his God.

## **Athens**

At the time of Paul's visit to Athens, Corinth was the commercial and political center under the Roman Caesars.

(Athens belonged to province of Achaia, whose capital was Corinth.)

Athens was still the university center, heir to the great philosophers

- the city of Pericles and Demosthenes;
- of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Sophocles and Euripides



the men who had established patterns of thought that have affected human learning for centuries.

400 years after the golden age of Greece, Athens was still a center for art, beauty, culture, and knowledge.

Athens was still the most sacred shrine of the fair humanities of paganism...

## **Paul is provoked to preach in Athens**

***16) While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. 17) So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.***

This was Paul's 2nd Missionary journey and most likely his first visit to Athens.

A stranger alone in a major tourist and educational center, waiting for his companions, Paul went out to see the sights.

He naturally located the local synagogue to find fellow Jews and naturally presented Jesus to them.

His discussions and debates soon moved into the market place or city square.

In the Agora, the great city square, the citizens of Athens met to exchange the latest news,

there was no lack of men ready to enter into debate with him about-the nature of the divine being.

This market place or city square was located in the valley between the Acropolis and the Areopagus hills.

When in informal session the Areopagite court would meet in this city square and pass the time by debating and arguing all sorts of issues.

Paul very likely would have preferred to take a break and wait until Timothy and Silas came from Berea before he began ministry in earnest in Athens

But when he saw the city was given over to idols, he was compelled to preach the gospel immediately.

Paul was probably ready to be quite impressed by Athens (who wouldn't be?);

but when he was there, he was only depressed by the incredible idolatry he saw all around him.

Paul viewed the temples, altars and images of Athens through the eyes of one brought up in the spirit of Jewish monotheism

**1 Cor. 10:20** But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.

**Romans 1:23-25** And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. .... [25] Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever.

Paul was upset by what he saw - It offended him.

His response was to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the offenders.

Athens had long since left behind her great days of action

but she was still the greatest university town in the world, to which men seeking learning came from all over.

She was a city of many gods.

It was said that

there were more statues of the gods in Athens than in all the rest of Greece put together and

that in Athens it was easier to meet a god than a man.

The novelty of Paul's message earns him an invitation to preach at the intellectual center of the city, the Areopagus -- (the Greek for "Mars' Hill").

It was the name both of the hill and the court that met on it.

The court was very select, perhaps only thirty members.

It dealt with cases of homicide and had the oversight of public morals.

There, in the most learned city in the world and before the most exclusive of courts, Paul had to state his faith.

It might have daunted anyone else; but Paul was never ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

To him this was another God-given opportunity to witness for Christ.

## The Areopagus

**18) A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbling trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. 19) Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20) You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." 21) (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)**

The Areopagus — Mars Hill — a rocky hill northwest of the Acropolis

337 feet in elevation

located in the center of Athens.

Pausanias: the "stone of Imprudence."

(Where Socrates was tried and put to death 400 years earlier.)

Still the name of their Supreme Court today.

Whenever a new religious thought was propounded, it had to clear the council of education and religion.

The Athenians — the smartest men in history from the world's perspective — said, 'Religion and education are inseparable.'

How far we have come from that today?

**18) A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbling trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.**

Sight-seeing: temples of the Acropolis, crowned by the Parthenon; temples, theaters, marketplace (the Agora) 30,000 "gods."

There probably is no temple, altar, or idol of Athens that is not reproduced in our cities today:

Athene, the mother of the mental

Demeter, mother of the earth,

Zeus, the god of force

Rumor, the base goddess had her Scriptures issued every morning until the very life of man is made restless by her lying..

Shame, Philanthropy, et al..

We are still idolaters....

**1 Cor. 1:21** For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

**Exodus 20:3-6** Thou shalt have no other gods before me. [4] Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: [5] Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; [6] And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

**Jeremiah 10:3-5** For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. [4] They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. [5] They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good.

**Rom 1:18** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; 19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

**Isaiah 44:9-20** They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. [10] Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? [11] Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together. [12] The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms: yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth: he drinketh no water, and is faint. [13] The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. [14] He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. [15] Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. [16] He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: [17] And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god. [18] They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand. [19] And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? [20] He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?

#### 4 Major Groups at the Time

- Epicureans more popular among the Greeks;
- Stoics more comfortable to the Roman mind.  
Both are hostile to the Gospel.
- Peripatetics, disciples of Aristotle, at the Lyceum.
- Academicians, disciples of Plato, at the Academy.

(Both situated outside the city.)

Same as we find today:

Religious odd-balls, remote from life and powerless to affect it;

Thoughtless idolaters, sunken in superstition, living lives of quiet desperation;

Atheistic existentialists;

Self-sufficient fatalists...

### **The Epicureans.**

The Epicureans pursued pleasure as the chief purpose in life, and valued most of all the pleasure of a peaceful life, free from pain, disturbing passions and superstitious fears (including the fear of death).

They did not deny the existence of gods, but believed that they had nothing to do with man.

- (i) They believed that everything happened by chance.
- (ii) They believed that death was the end of all.
- (iii) They believed that the gods were remote from the world and did not care.
- (iv) They believed that pleasure was the chief end of man.

They did not mean fleshly and material pleasure; for the highest pleasure was that which brought no pain in its wake.

### **The Stoics.**

The Stoics were pantheists who put great emphasis on moral sincerity and a high sense of duty; they cultivated a spirit of proud dignity, and believed that suicide was preferable to a life with diminished dignity.

- (i) They believed that everything was God. God was fiery spirit.

That spirit grew dull in matter but it was in everything.

What gave men life was that a little spark of that spirit dwelt in them and when they died it returned to God.

- (ii) They believed that everything that happened was the will of God and therefore must be accepted without resentment.
- (iii) They believed that every so often the world disintegrated in a conflagration and started all over again on the same cycle of events.

**19) Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20) You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." 21) (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)**

Paul's audience was not a trial: it was contemptuous dilettante curiosity.

These philosophers looked on Paul's story as very different from the knowledge for many ages taught and professed at Athens;

they desire to know more of it, but only because it was new and strange.

They asked about Paul's doctrine, not because it was good, but because it was new.

Their initial reaction was to look down their noses at Paul's message

They called him a 'babbling' or a pecking bird - one who scavenges.

NEB renders it "charlatan", which is more accurate than the traditional "babbling".]

They ridiculed him as one who took pieces of others ideas and philosophies and combined those thoughts presenting it as his own new philosophy.

To them he appeared to be 'a retailer of scraps of second-hand learning (a spermologos, as they said, using an Athenian slang term);

To others he appeared to be commending foreign divinities,

which was against the law and so rendered himself amenable to the jurisdiction of the court of the Areopagus.

However, the essence of the message got through: Jesus and the resurrection.



## A SERMON TO THE PHILOSOPHERS

### Paul's sermon on Mars Hill (the Areopagus)

#### Acts 17:22-31

*"Paul stood up in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I see that in all things you are as superstitious as possible. As I came through your city and as I saw the objects of your worship, I found amongst them an altar with the inscription, 'To the Unknown God.' So then, what you worship and do not know, this I preach to you. God, who made the universe and everything in it, this God is Lord of heaven and earth and does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is he served by the hands of men, as if he needed anything, but he himself gives to all life and breath and all things. He made of one every race of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and he fixed the appointed times and boundaries of their habitations. He made men so that they might search for God, if they might perchance feel after him and find him; and indeed he is not far from any one of us. For by him we live and move and are. As some of your own poets have said, 'We too are his offspring.' Since then we are the offspring of God we should not think that the Divine is like gold or silver or stone, engraved by the art and design of man. So then God overlooked the times of ignorance but now he gives orders to men that all men everywhere should repent. Thus he has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he ordained for that task, and he has given proof of this by raising him from the dead.'"*

Paul does not begin with an exposition of Scripture (which was his custom when dealing with Jews or Gentiles who would be familiar with the Old Testament), but with general references to religion (superstition, philosophy).

The religious character of Athens was recognized by many ancient observers,

some thought that Athenians were the most religious of all human beings;

Paul doesn't necessarily use the term in a positive way here.

Although the Athenians had 3,000 altars and temples in their city, they worried that they might have missed or forgotten someone,

they dedicated a huge altar to the Unknown God.

There were many altars to unknown gods in Athens.

Six hundred years before - a terrible pestilence had fallen on the city which nothing could halt.

A Cretan poet, Epimenides, had come forward with a plan.

A flock of black and white sheep were let loose throughout the city from the Areopagus.

Wherever each sheep lay down it was sacrificed to the nearest god;

If a sheep lay down near the shrine of no previously known god it was sacrificed to "The Unknown God."

From this situation Paul takes his starting point.

#### There are a series of steps in his sermon.

(i) God is not the made but the maker; and he who made all things cannot be worshipped by anything made by the hands of man.

If a man's God be that to which he gives all his time, thought and energy, many are clearly engaged in worshipping man-made things.

It is all too true that men often worship what their own hands have made.

(ii) God has guided history.

He was behind the rise and fall of nations in the days gone by;

his hand is on the helm of things now.

(iii) God has made man in such a way that instinctively he longs for God and gropes after him in the darkness.

(iv) The days of groping and ignorance are past.

So long as men had to search in the shadows they could not know God and he excused their follies and their mistakes;

but now in Christ the full blaze of the knowledge of God has come and the day of excuses is past.

(v) The day of judgment is coming.

Life is neither a progress to extinction, as it was to the Epicureans,

nor a pathway to absorption to God, as it was to the Stoics;  
it is a journey to the judgment seat of God where Jesus Christ is Judge.

(vi) The proof of the pre-eminence of Christ is the resurrection.

It is no unknown God but a Risen Christ with whom we have to deal.

**22) Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.**

"Superstitious" - mistranslated in English,  
"very religious" would better fit Paul's intent.  
Paul begins where the people are...  
did not denounce them,  
did not attack their idolatry;  
you are "extremely devout," "very god-fearing."  
An altar to the Unknown god:  
how this voices the agony of humanity!

**23) For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD". Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.**

"Ignorantly" = "not knowing him..." Ignorance = a lack of knowledge  
STUPID IS FOREVER IGNORANCE CAN BE FIXED...

**24) "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands**

Creation testimony—Rom 1

[The idea of creation is nowhere to be found in classical literature and ancient philosophy...]

[No one is ever going to believe in the resurrection if he does not believe in creation.]

The true God – the Unknown God of Athens - is the God of all creation; yet He is distinct from His creation.

"This view of the world is very different from either the Epicurean emphasis on a chance combination of atoms or the virtual pantheism of the Stoics."

Paul recognized that these philosophers must change their conception of who God is,

Change from their own personal opinions to an understanding who God is according to Biblical revelation

**25) And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.**

God does not live in temples made with hands.

Paul probably pointed to the Parthenon, home of Athene, the goddess for whom the city was named.

God is a giver, without needs Himself.

He being the creator needs neither buildings for worship, nor human priests to minister to or care for Him with human hands.

**26) From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.**

One race, one source, one species.

God draws men; does not seek to evade them!

**Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.**

**Jeremiah 29:13-14 And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. [14] And I will be found of you, saith the Lord: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the Lord; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.**

“Hath determined”: opposes both the Stoical fate and Epicurean chance, ascribing to periods and localities his sovereign will and prearrangements.

**Daniel 2:21 And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:**

He is in control; events are neither fate or random chance.

**27) God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.**

“Feel”: only New Testament occurrence.

God is searchable (**Jer 29:13-14; Heb 11:6**).

**28) 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'**

The poets he quotes (v. 28) were Cleanthus and Aratus, whom he tactfully employs against their countrymen, whose boasted philosophy was "ignorance" (v. 30).

The first quotation is based on the fourth line of a quatrain attributed to Epimenides the Cretan, 606 B.C., in which his fellow-islanders are denounced for their impiety in claiming that the tomb of Zeus could be seen in Crete:

They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one -  
The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!  
But thou art not dead: thou livest and abidest for ever,  
For in thee we live and move and have our being.

Preserved in Syriac translation by Isho'dad of Merv; cf. Horoc Semi-icnc x, ed. M. D. Ciibson (Cambridge, 19f 3), p. 40 (Syriac).

The second line of Epimenides' quatrain is quoted in Titus 1:12.

**Titus 1:12 One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies.**

The second, “We are his offspring”: comes from the poem on Natural Phenomena by Paul's fellow-Cilician, Aratus, a poet deeply influenced 'by Stoicism who lived in 310 B.C., a most celebrated Stoic who taught at Athens

This poem opens with a celebration of Zeus, the Supreme Being of Stoic philosophy, rather than Zeus the head of the Greek mythological pantheon:

Let us begin with Zeus: never, O men, let us leave him unmentioned. Full of Zeus are all the ways and all the meeting-places of men; the sea and the harbours are full of him. It is with Zeus that every one of us in everyway has to do, for we are all his offspring.

[Aratus, Phainomena 1-5; cf. Cleanthes, Hymn to Zeus 4.]

Paul also quotes Menander..1 Cor 15:33.

**1 Cor. 15:33 Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.**

**29) "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone--an image made by man's design and skill.**

Paul preaches against the common Greek concept that God could be represented by gold or silver or stone.

Man is God's offspring.

Image of God:

Passion for life

Revolt against death, boredom, frustration...

Seize hold of life, dominion, desire to succeed, reach out and try something new, accomplish new objectives, conquer new territory...

Create, invent, produce, fashion, shape, make...

**30) In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."**

"Times of ignorance": vs. man's responsibility to God

"Call men everywhere": universal character of Christianity.

Aimed at everyone.

Man's Duty = "repent."

Paul is not speaking merely to inform, but to win decisions for Christ.

The emphasis on the resurrection is important;

Paul sees the resurrection of Jesus as the assurance of all this;

it demonstrates that the person, teaching and work of Jesus were all perfectly approved by the Father.

Paul seemed unable to preach a sermon without bringing in the resurrection of Jesus.

Man retreats to intellectual excuses for refusing moral demands...

**Psalm 14:1 To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.**

**The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.**

**Psalm 53:1 To the chief Musician upon Mahalath, Maschil, A Psalm of David.**

**The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good.**

Three key points:

1) Inescapable day: God has fixed as the time when He will judge the world. Every life will be evaluated.

2) Unchallengeable judge.

3) Irrefutable fact: resurrection

The apostle Paul used the idea of self-sufficiency in a radically different sense in <Philippians 4:11>.

**Phil 4:11-13 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. 12] I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13] I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (KJV)**

Here Paul spoke of the believer's self-sufficiency in God.

**Rom 1:19-21 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (KJV)**

God in his forbearance had passed over these and other sins previously committed, but now that he had manifested his way of righteousness "through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe " a new responsibility rested upon those to whom the gospel came (Romans 3 : 21-26).

**Rom 3:21-26 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; 22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: 23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; 24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. (KJV)**



God's purpose in making himself known to men was that they might "touch him and find him",

His forbearance and kindness are designed to lead them to repentance.

**Rom 2:4** *Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? (KJV)*

Jesus Christ, through faith in whom the divine pardon and gift of righteousness were obtainable by men, was at the same time the one through whom, on a coming day, according to Paul's gospel, God would "judge the secrets of men" (Romans 2: 16).

**Rom 2:16** *In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel. (KJV)*

The author of those words is standing in Athens: invited to expound his teaching not to fellow-believers but to cultured pagans.

Paul has now for several years been a successful evangelist in the pagan world.

A fact which implies considerable persuasiveness in speech and approach, including the ability to find and exploit an initial area of common ground with his hearers and apart from which any attempt at communication would be fruitless.

How will he address himself to such an audience?

He will certainly try not to alienate them in his first sentence or two.

It is underestimating Paul's versatility, his capacity for being "all things to all men", to think that he could not have presented the essence of Romans 1-3 to pagans along the lines of Acts 17: 22-31.

## The reaction of the crowd at Athens

### Acts 17:32-34

*When they heard of a resurrection of dead men, some mocked and some said, "We will hear about this again"; but some attached themselves to him and believed. Amongst these were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman called Damaris. together with others.*

The resurrection was not a popular concept among Greek philosophers;

There were three main reactions.

- (i) Some mocked.
- (ii) Some put off their decision.
- (iii) Some believed.

Some thought Paul foolish for even believing such a thing,

Others wanted to hear more about this new teaching.

The Greeks were fond of the idea of the immortality of the soul, but not of the idea of the resurrection of the body.

**32) When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."**

The philosophers were not greatly troubled by Paul's talking about God or God's relationship to people.

But when he spoke of the resurrection of Jesus, they mocked him.

The resurrection of Jesus was, and continues to be, a decisive element in Christian theology. It always provokes controversy among unbelievers.

If Paul had spoken of the immortality of the soul, he would have commanded the assent of most of his hearers except the Epicureans, but the idea of resurrection was absurd.

Outright ridicule and polite dismissal were the main responses to Paul's exposition of the knowledge of God.

Mocking is always the defense of pride

(University city more resistant to the Gospel).

**1 Cor. 1:23-24 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; [24] But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.**

It was typical of the Athenians that all they wanted was to talk.

They did not want action; they did not even particularly want conclusions.

They wanted simply mental acrobatics and the stimulus of a mental hike - they just liked to debate and argue.

### **33) At that, Paul left the Council.**

Paul had no patience with intellectual flippancy and moral dishonesty.

The apostle was treated with more outward civility at Athens than in some other places; but none more despised his doctrine, or treated it with more indifference.

### **34) A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.**

It would seem on the whole that Paul had less success in Athens than anywhere else. The evangelistic results at the Areopagus seem small,

yet among those believing were a man named Dionysius (who must have been a member of the "court" of the Areopagus)

and a woman named Damaris.

Dionysus, the Areopagite

There is DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE [die oh NISS e us air e OP uh ghyte]

As already said, the Areopagus was composed of perhaps not more than thirty people; so that Dionysius must have been one of the intellectual aristocracy of Athens.

Nothing else is known about him except by tradition.

One tradition says he was martyred in Athens during the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian.

(tradition, other non-Biblical sources: placed over the flock at Athens).

1st Century: Publius, Quadratus, Aristides, Athenagoras, and other bishops, martyrs.

4th Century: Basil and Gregory.

The church that Paul founded in Greece was the lineal predecessor of the Greek Orthodox Church, which has now become sunken in apathy, liturgy, ritual, and dead orthodoxy, and is now persecuting the fresh, alive evangelical church in those areas.

There was DAMARIS [DAM uh riss] (meaning unknown)

The fact that she was singled out along with Dionysius the Areopagite, one of the court judges, may indicate she was a woman of distinction.

Others think that because the position of women in Athens was very restricted, it is unlikely that any respectable woman would have been in the market square at all.

Philosophy is good at asking questions but of not much value in providing answers.

**John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (KJV)**

**OUR OWN IDEAS AND SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS COUNTS FOR NOTHING IN GOD'S COURT**

**Isa 64:6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. (KJV)**

**DOES CHRISTIANITY EXCLUDE OTHER BELIEF SYSTEMS?**

In the end there are only two belief systems:

