

ACTS CHAPTER 17

Paul at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9)

Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Thessalonica was about 100 miles from Philippi and it was the capital of the province of Macedonia and had a population of more than 200,000, including a colony of Jews (and a synagogue).



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 large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. But the Jews, becoming

jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a large disorderly crowd.

Why did the Jews become jealous? Because of the large number of people (including some Jews, many God-fearing Gentiles and many prominent women) who responded to Paul's ministry.

The large disorderly crowd set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, who had welcomed Paul, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.

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."

They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. And when they had received a 'security', or bail, from Jason and the others, they released them.

Paul at Berea (Acts 17:10-15)

The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea which is nowadays called Veria. It is located 50 miles from Thessalonica in another district of Macedonia.



Photo 24

Nightview of Veria, former Berea, with a population of 66,547 (as of 2011).

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*. Therefore many of them 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 as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds.



Photo 25

The city Veria by daylight

Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.

Paul at Athens (Acts 17:16-21)

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing 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. The Epicurean philosophers taught originally that the greatest good is happiness, but not just momentary pleasure. By Paul's time, however, this philosophy had degenerated into a more sensual system of thought. The Stoic philosophers taught that people should live in accord with nature, recognize their own self-sufficiency and independence, and suppress their desires. By Paul's time it had degenerated into a system of pride.

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; so we want to know what these things mean.”

The Areopagus or Areios Pagos is the ‘Rock of Ares’, north-west of the Acropolis, which in classical times functioned as the high Court of Appeal for criminal and civil cases. Ares was the Greek god of thunder and war (the Roman equivalent was Mars). Therefore later, the Romans referred to the rocky hill as ‘Mars Hill’ after Mars. By Paul’s time the Court or Council of the Areopagus considered themselves the custodians of teachings that introduced new religions and foreign gods.

(Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)

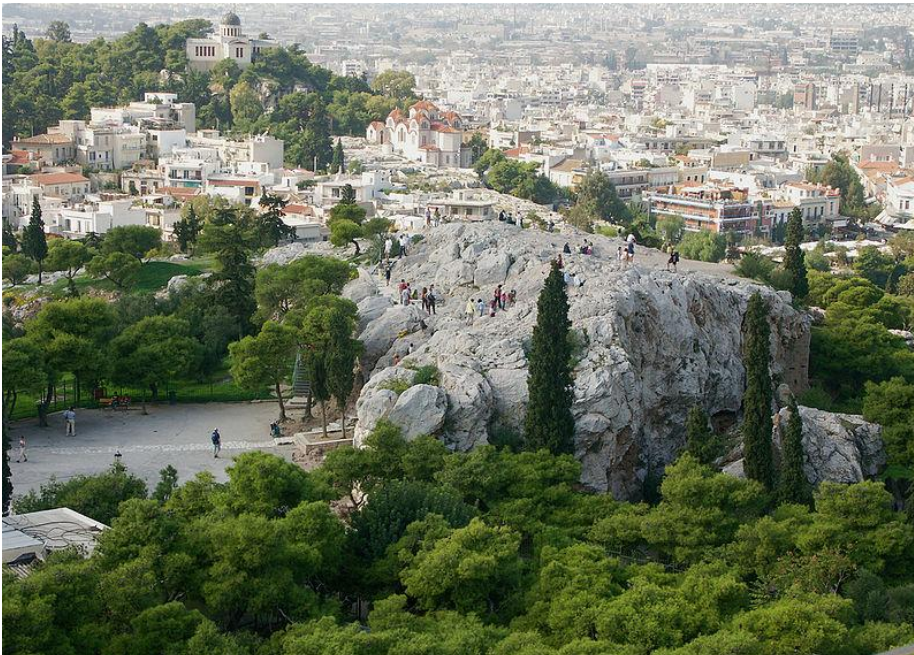


Photo 26

The Aeropagus as viewed from the Acropolis

Sermon on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-34)

So 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.’

Therefore what 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; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things; and He made from one *man* 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 would 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 children.’

What departure from the kingdom message and program do we see in this passage? Our Lord, in His proclamation of the kingdom never went any farther back in human history than David and Abraham. Once He did refer to Adam and Eve without mentioning their names (Matthew 19:4) but this without any reference to the kingdom. The Lord did this because the Gentiles had been cast away and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom was based on promises made to these two patriarchs.



Photo 27. Athens view from Areopagus hill



Photo 28

Engraved plaque containing Apostle Paul's Areopagus sermon.

“Being then the children 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 people 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.”

Why does Paul mention the word “repent” in his sermon? Since the word “repent” (in Greek metanoeo) means a thorough change of mind, it is evident that any unbeliever who becomes a believer repents in the process. Yet it is also evident that the emphasis in the message of John the Baptist, Christ and the twelve, was on repentance, while this was not the case with Paul. An examination both of the latter part of Acts and of his epistles will reveal that the emphasis in his message was upon grace, to be appropriated by faith.

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer, others said, “We shall hear you again concerning this.”

Immortality of the soul was accepted by the Greeks, but not resurrection of a dead body. That's why his address was interrupted. Satisfied with their own heathen beliefs they did not even care to hear him further.

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.

QUESTIONS OF ACTS CHAPTER 17

ALL ANSWERS CAN BE FOUND IN THE TEXT OF CHAPTER 17

1. What did Paul say to the colony of Jews in Thessalonica?

2. Why did the large disorderly crowd shout Paul when they *began* dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities?

3. How did the Jews of Berea received the word of God?

4. What happened to Paul's spirit while he was waiting for Silas and Timothy at Athens?

5. Where and with whom was he reasoning at Athens?

6. How did the men of Athens call Paul before they took him and brought him to the Areopagus?

7. How did they worship according to Paul?

8. Why is the God who made the world and all things in it not far from each one of us?

9. How did God proof to all men that Christ will judge the world in righteousness?

10. What was their reaction when they heard of the resurrection of the dead?

ACTS CHAPTER 17 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

Paul at Thessalonica

1Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. **2**And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, **3**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." **4**And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. **5**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 attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. **6**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; **7**and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." **8**They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. **9**And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.

Paul at Berea

10The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. **11**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. **12**Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men. **13**But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds. **14**Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. **15**Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.

Paul at Athens

16Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. **17**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. **18**And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. 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. **19**And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?" **20**"For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean." **21**(Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)

Sermon on Mars Hill

22So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. **23**"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.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. **24**"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; **25**nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things; **26**and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, **27**that they would seek God, if perhaps 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 exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' **29**"Being then the children 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.**30**"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, **31**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."

32Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." **33**So Paul went out of their midst. **34**But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE(r),

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