

# Acts 17

## Acts 17.1-9

**V1 – Why didn't they stop at Amphipolis and Apollonia?** They were Roman military outposts, and Paul was to take the gospel first to the Jews and then to the Greeks (*Romans 1.16*)

-In mission work, we sometimes have to make tough decisions concerning where to put our efforts and our limited resources

-We never can live long enough or have the funds or personnel to go everywhere we would like to go with the gospel

**V2 – Jewish services in the First Century were like the Quakers in the U.S.: anyone can speak (see *Acts 13.15* at Antioch of Pisidia)**

-**What Scriptures were being used?** The Old Testament

**V3 – Why was Paul "giving evidence"?** Because the gospel of Christ is always based on a logical presentation of the evidence (not just, "Believe this because I am telling you to believe it")

-**What term is used concerning presenting the evidence of our faith?** Apologetics

**V4 – "God-fearing Greeks" and "proselytes at the gate" – Paul's best converts: listeners who had a good knowledge of the Old Testament, but didn't have many Jewish prejudices**

-**Are there many Jewish converts to the Lord's church today?** No, not many

**V5 – Why did the Jews fail to believe?** Jealousy

-**Why were they jealous?** Of their power

-Remember that Paul also said in *1 Cor. 1.23* that the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews

-**Why was it a stumbling block?** Because they could just not believe that their "king" would allow himself to die in such a shameful manner

-**Jason?** Housed Paul and Silas (mentioned in *Rom. 16.21*)

-Possibly a kinsman of Paul

**V6 – Can this be said of us today (that we have upset the world)?**

-**Is the charge familiar?** Yes – Jesus in *Luke 23.2*

**V7 – Was Jesus a king?** Yes, but not politically, just spiritually

**V8 – The Jews continued to stir things up**

**V9 – Jason had to post bond for Paul**

-Probably Paul had to promise not to come back until the present magistrate was dead

-**Did Paul establish a congregation there?** Yes – very strong – See *1 Thess. 2.14*

## Acts 17.10-15

Background:

-**Can anyone comment on the meaning of these words:**

(Note to the teacher: You might want to assign people a week in advance to make a report on these

terms and places)

- Parthenon – temple dedicated to Athena, the goddess of wisdom
- The world's only full-size replica of the Parthenon can be seen in Centennial Park in downtown Nashville, Tennessee – Nashville is known as the "Athens of the South" because of the 14 colleges and universities there
- Athens, Greece – capital of Greece
- Stoics – believed in depriving oneself of all pleasures of life
- Epicureans – believed in indulging in all the pleasures of life
- Mars (Ares) – god of war
- Athena (Roman name: Minerva) – goddess of wisdom
- Corinth, Greece – located south of Athens; two seaports
- Poseidon (Neptune) – god of the sea
- What had just happened in the life of Paul?** He had been forced to leave Thessalonica

**V 10** – **What group of people did Paul begin with?** The Jews (as was always his practice)

**V 11** – **Lessons from this verse?**

1. Don't believe every preacher – check the scriptures
  - Examples: Lydia, Cornelius – sincerity is great, but not enough for salvation
2. The only way to stop false teachers is to know the Scriptures

**V 12** – **Natural result of study?** Belief

- There is a terrible lack of Bible knowledge today

**V 13** – The Jews pursued Paul to Berea

- Who does this remind you of?** Paul (Saul before his conversion) – *Acts 8.3, 9.2*

**V 14-15** – **What happened next?** The brethren sent Paul on to Athens (for his own safety)

## **Acts 17.16-21**

- Athens, Greece (named after Athena – goddess of wisdom)
- The city is considered to be the birthplace of democracy (from the Greek "city-states" which developed about 500 BC)
- It was a great center of learning and the home of Socrates and Plato and was the adopted home of Aristotle
- Athens had a series of hills around it, and there were temples on each hill
- On the acropolis was the Parthenon (for the worship of Athena)
- On "Mars' Hill" there was a temple to the worship of Mars or Ares (the god of war)

**What bad habit did the people of Athens have?** They were always looking for some new thought or

- some new religion or belief – they were too interested in the latest fad and the latest news
- In about 340 BC, Demosthenes warned Athens to stop spending so much time just listening
- He said that Philip of Macedon (the father of Alexander the Great) was gaining too much power
- In 338 BC, Athens was conquered by Philip of Macedon
- Later it was conquered by the Romans, the Goths, the Turks, and in 1833 it became independent again
- It remained a cultural center through all those centuries

**V 16 – Why did Paul object to idols?** He was raised as a Jew – In the Ten Commandments both #1 (no other gods) and #2 (no graven images) condemned idolatry

**V 17 – "God-fearing Gentiles"** – proselytes (converts to Judaism from the Gentile world – they were not natural-born Jews)

**V 18 – Stoics – 300 BC – pantheistic = the cosmos was god** (like the Transcendentalism of Ralph Waldo Emerson in the U.S. in the early 1800's)

-This is the belief that flesh and reality mean nothing – it deteriorated into depressing beliefs [Ernest Hemingway committed suicide as the final result of Transcendentalism, or existentialism, as it was known in the early 1900's]

-Epicureans – the answer to life was pleasure (the Playboy philosophy today)

-the Romans (Epicureans) would eat a huge meal and then tickle their throat with a feather and vomit and then eat another meal

-Both of these philosophies were very primitive ways to try to understand life, but they can both be seen in our society today

Classical saying: Epicurean philosophy produces degenerates; Stoic philosophy produces suicides

**V 18 – "Idle babbling"** – a term of great mocking and derision

-Literally: a "seed picker" – a type of sparrow

-It is always fun to try to belittle one's opponent with such terms, but it does not work in the long run

**V 19** –The Athenians were frequently criticized for not thinking too deeply

## **Acts 17.22-31**

-This section is an example of an incredibly great characteristic of the writing in the Bible: Saying something great in the fewest number of words

-A British general in the Boer War in South Africa was under fire in a fierce battle with the enemy

-He sent a telegram to the headquarters and said, "Pardon me, but I do not have time to be brief"

-A classic statement and so true – it takes great skill to make a great statement in a few number of words, and that is what we see in this paragraph (and throughout the Bible – example: *Genesis 1*)

-Think about the 272 words of the Gettysburg Address, which lasted just a little over 2 minutes, yet it is probably the greatest speech in American history

**-When Paul spoke at Antioch of Pisidia (on the First Missionary Journey) in Acts 13, how did he arrange his speech?** Around references from the Old Testament

-This speech is different – it is for pagans (See *1 Cor. 9.19-23* – all things to all people)

**V 22** – "Religious" – superstitious (ambiguous – not a compliment, but did not condemn them outright)

**V 23 – Just how "religious" were they?** They made altars to all the gods that they knew about, but they had a statue to the "unknown god," just in case they had left out any god

-Paul said that he was "passing through" – **Who was he waiting for?** Silas and Timothy (v 15)

-The word for "unknown" is where we get our word "agnostic"

**V 24** – Strong words! See *Isaiah 42.5* and *Isaiah 66.1*

**-Where did Jesus say this thing?** *John 4.19-24* – to the woman at the well

- God is not in a mountain or in Jerusalem, but he is God in spirit and truth
- What does this say to us about a church building?** It is not "sanctified" or special (we can eat in the building, for example)
- The most beautiful church building or temple in the world means nothing to God

**V 25** – Different from Greeks' view of gods? Yes – temples are worthless

**V 26** – That is a hard lesson to learn

- The Nazis thought that the Jews and the blacks were worthless
- And the Athenians thought they arose from dust and were more noble than other groups and races
- "Appointed times" = seasons

**V 27** – "Group" – Even people who haven't been taught the truth can find some knowledge of God

- Where else did Paul speak of this concept?** *Romans 1.20-23*
- Not far from each one of us** – not in buildings

**V 28** – A quote from two Greek poets [Aratus and Cleanthes]

- In other words, even enlightened pagans realized that man came from God

**V 29** – Do people today still worship images? Yes – statues of Mary, Buddha, etc.

**V 30** – A reference to *Romans 2.14* – Mankind gets a fresh start

**V 31** – Jesus – not just a good man, but was raised from the dead

- Paul is reasoning things out with the Athenians
- Does anyone know when Christ will return?** Read **2 Peter 3.10** – like a thief

## **Acts 17.32-34**

- According to the god Apollo, "A man dies and the earth drinks up his blood, and there is no resurrection"
- What did the philosophers begin to do?** Sneer!
- They were men with bitterness in their hearts – they had no hope

**V 32** – Two responses to Paul's message?

**V 33** – What did Paul do? Left their presence, because they had cut off his speech

**V 34** – Some converts

- Do we have any record of a congregation ever being established at Athens?** No
- What miracle did God carry out at this time?

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