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By Dan Maines

Acts 17

Acts 17:1-3

Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul's custom, he visited them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

† Paul's strategy was always to begin with the synagogue, grounding his message in the Scriptures. He demonstrated that the Messiah's suffering and resurrection were foretold.

† Philo (On Rewards 95) also acknowledged Jewish hope in a coming deliverer, though expectations varied.

Acts 17:4-5

And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a significant number of the leading women. But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the marketplace, 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.

† The gospel divided responses. God-fearing Greeks and prominent women believed, but jealous Jews incited mob violence.

† Josephus (Antiquities 17.2.4) describes Jewish uprisings in cities, showing how quickly mobs could be stirred.

Acts 17:6-7

When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brothers 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."

† The accusation revealed the heart of the opposition: proclaiming Jesus as king challenged Caesar's authority. The gospel was both spiritual and political in its implications.

† Tacitus (Annals 15.44) noted Rome's intolerance for rival kings, making this accusation dangerous.

Acts 17:8-9

They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. And when they had received a pledge from Jason

and the others, they released them.

† Jason had to post bond for his release, reflecting Roman legal practices.

Acts 17:10-11

The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these people 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.

† The Bereans were commended for testing Paul's teaching against Scripture. True nobility lies in openness to God's word, not blind resistance.

Acts 17:12-13

Therefore, many of them believed, along with a significant 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.

† Once again, belief spread to both Jews and Gentiles. Opposition followed, proving that persecution often trails gospel success.

Acts 17:14-15

Then immediately the brothers 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 after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.

† Paul was removed for safety, yet the work continued with his companions. God's mission was not dependent on one man.

Acts 17:16-17

Now while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he observed that the city was full of idols. So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be present.

† Athens was a center of philosophy but also idolatry. Paul's provoked spirit drove him to reason in both synagogue and marketplace.

† Pausanias (Description of Greece 1.24.3) records Athens as filled with statues and altars, confirming Luke's description.

Acts 17:18

And some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers as well were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What could this scavenger of tidbits want to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

† The philosophers misunderstood Paul's message as introducing foreign gods, likely thinking "Jesus" and "resurrection" were two deities.

† Diogenes Laertius (Lives of Eminent Philosophers 10.139) outlines Epicurean and Stoic beliefs, showing why they found Paul strange.

Acts 17:19-21

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

† Paul was taken to the Areopagus, Athens' council for philosophy and religion. They were curious but skeptical.

Acts 17:22-23

So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I see 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."

† Paul began by building a bridge from their altar to the unknown god. He used their own religious context to proclaim the true God.

† Pausanias (Description of Greece 1.1.4) confirms the existence of altars to unknown gods in Athens.

Acts 17:24-25

"The God who made the world and everything that is in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made by human 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."

† Paul proclaimed the Creator God, distinct from idols and temples. His theology resonated with Scripture and directly opposed idolatry.

Acts 17:26-27

"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."

† Humanity's unity in Adam revealed God's providential rule. Nations rise and fall under His plan. The purpose of history is

that people seek God.

Acts 17:28

"For in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His descendants.'"

† Paul quoted Greek poets (Aratus and Cleanthes) to connect truth in their culture with revelation.

† Aratus, Phaenomena 5: "For we are also His offspring."

Acts 17:29-30

"Therefore, since we are God's descendants, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by human skill and thought. So having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now proclaiming to mankind that all people everywhere are to repent."

† Paul called them from idolatry to repentance. God's patience had ended, and the call to repentance was universal.

Acts 17:31

"Because He has set a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all people by raising Him from the dead."

† The resurrection was the decisive proof. Judgment was appointed through the risen Christ.

Acts 17:32-34

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

† The resurrection divided Athens. Some mocked, some delayed, and some believed. Among the converts was Dionysius the Areopagite, later remembered in early church writings as bishop of Athens.

How it applies to us today

† The gospel confronts both religious tradition and secular philosophy with the truth of Christ.

† God has revealed Himself through creation, history, and ultimately the resurrection.

† Believers must engage culture with wisdom, using even its own language to proclaim truth.

† Repentance and faith are required of all, because Christ has been appointed as Judge of the living and the dead.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

Source Index

† Philo, On Rewards 95 – Jewish hope in a deliverer

† Josephus, Antiquities 17.2.4 – Jewish uprisings in cities

† Tacitus, Annals 15.44 – Rome's intolerance of rival kings

† Pausanias, Description of Greece 1.24.3 – Athens full of idols

† Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers 10.139 – Stoic and Epicurean views

† Pausanias, Description of Greece 1.1.4 – Altars to unknown gods

† Aratus, Phaenomena 5 – "We are His offspring"

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