

- A Study in Acts -

**Chapter Seventeen – Second Journey of Paul Continued**

**ACTS 17:16-21:**

From Philippi, Paul will travel to **Thessalonica** and preached to the Jews and devout Greeks in the synagogue with good success. The unbelieving Jews would stir up a mob and attempt to bring Paul and his traveling companions out to the people. This would be unsuccessful; however, it forced the brethren to send Paul and Silas away by night to **Berea**. Paul would enter the synagogue and bring the Gospel of Jesus as the Christ to these Jews with a much different universal result. They searched, proved, and readily accepted Paul's evidence and teaching; however, Jews from Thessalonica came to Berea and stirred up trouble there. The brethren sent Paul away by ship to **Athens**, and that is where we will pick up in this lesson.

Please use the map provided.

**Text #1:**

**Acts 17:16-21** “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. <sup>17</sup> Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the *Gentile* worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. <sup>18</sup> Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, “What does this babblers want to say?”

Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,” because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.

<sup>19</sup> And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new doctrine *is* of which you speak? <sup>20</sup> For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.” <sup>21</sup> For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.”

**Waited for Them:** We started out here in Athens with Luke mentioning Paul waiting. We must remember back to the last lesson and Paul's instructions for Silas and Timothy to come to him in Athens. Paul's need to leave Berea swiftly caused them to be left behind. Timothy, we will find out, would be with the brethren in Thessalonica (**1 Thessalonians 3:1-3**), and Silas in Berea.

**Given Over to Idols:** Many cities Paul has and will enter in his work to bring the Gospel of Jesus as the Christ would likewise be given over to idolatry. Athens, as we discussed in our last lesson, was still the seat of Greek art, science, and philosophy and was the most important University City in the ancient world, which also included the vast worship of their many gods.

**Synagogue and Marketplace:** Luke records the existence of a synagogue of the Jews, even in this climate of idolatry in Athens. Paul, as was his custom, begins his work here, but

additionally, works in the marketplace daily with all there. It is here that he will gain the attention of certain philosophers.

**Epicurean Philosophers:** Epicureanism is a system of philosophy based upon the teachings of Epicurus. Epicurus was a Greek philosopher that began his work over three hundred years prior to this encounter by Paul. He was the ultimate materialist, which set him against all superstition or Divine intervention, even to the point of attack against even the mention.

He taught his followers to find a state of “*Ataraxia*” (the Greek word for tranquility), which was much more than just eat, drink, and be merry. He taught that pleasure was of course the greatest good; but additionally, the best way to achieve this true state of tranquility was to seek knowledge of all the wisdom of the working of this world and the limits of one’s desires!

**Stoic Philosophers:** About the same time that the Epicurean philosophy was born; additionally; the stoic philosophy was born by the Greek thinker ‘Zeno of Citium’. It should be noted before we even describe this philosophy that Stoics and Epicureans were antagonists of one another’s philosophies, and much of what would develop in the three hundred years from their birth, to when Paul came across them, would come because of the conflicts between the philosophies. The Stoics viewed all moral corruptions as vicious to the stoic calm they sought to achieve. They sought to achieve a ‘*Prohairesis*’ (the Greek word for ‘moral character’ or ‘moral choice’); it represents the choice involved in rigid self-denial rather than the easier giving in to desires, in order to find true happiness.

The encounter in the marketplace of the philosophers was met with skepticism as some of them called him a “**Babbler**”; which is from a bird, also known as a “seed picker”, which was known to pick up seeds and spread them.

Others stated that he was a “**Proclaimer of Foreign gods**”. This is from the Greek rendering, better translated as “foreign demons”. The Greeks believed superstitiously that great men died and became demons in honor of their achievements. These thought that Paul’s preaching concerning Jesus and the resurrection was speaking of just such a case.

In any case, they were interested in knowing more about what Paul had to say about this doctrine he was teaching in the marketplace. This will make much more sense when we learn about the purpose of the Areopagus!

**Areopagus:** The Areopagus was both a place and an order that met there. So, first, let us take a look at the place.

The location of the Areopagus was on what was at that time referred to as Mar’s Hill, or the “Rock of Ares”. At one time the meeting place on this Hill, was for the Greeks, the place of their High Court; however, when Rome became the prevailing power, they Hill became the place for the council of the Areopagus to congregate.

Here is a modern-day picture of the Areopagus looking down from the Acropolis.



This next picture is a view from below the steps leading up to the summit.







The council that met at this location originally was an ancient council of elders, which usually combined judicial and legislative functions. At the time of Paul's visit to Athens, the council now acts only as a collective magnet for teaching and information from around the world (much more academic than legal). This helps us understand the desire to have Paul speak before them.

**Next: "Addressing the Areopagus!"**