

- A Study in Acts -

Chapter Seventeen – Second Journey of Paul Continued

ACTS 17:22-34:

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**. Upon arrival in Athens, and while he is waiting for Silas and Timothy, he begins to speak in the city's synagogue and marketplace (Paul is uniquely moved by the city being given over to idolatry); his preaching soon gains him an audience with the cities philosophers and that is where we pick up in this lesson.

Please use the map provided.

Before we begin, we should remind ourselves that this is not the first recorded sermon of Paul to Idolaters; please record for your notes – **Acts 14:15-18**. This sermon that we are about to look into is an expansive version of the word he shared in Lystra on the first journey.

Text #1:

Introduction and Compliment –

Acts 17:22-23 “Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; ²³ for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription”
TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:"

The Apostle Paul compliments these philosophers in order to gain their attention and use an object they are familiar with to begin the series of instruction. It should be additionally understood at this point that just because they were religious does not equate with an acceptable presentation of worship. This then becomes a good place to make a note concerning the words of Jesus to the woman by the well in Samaria (as this sermon sets many precedence's concerning worship of God in spirit and truth), note:

John 4:23-24 “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.””

Text #2:

Evidence of God –

Acts 17:24-28 ““God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. ²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. ²⁶ And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, ²⁷ so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that 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 have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’”

The foolishness of idolatry is something that has been demonstrated through the prophets of God for centuries prior to this – see **Isaiah 44:9-17**; as an example. Paul additionally sets forth that everything in this world was created for us; so why would He accept what we can fashion out of what was created for us, in order to offer worship to Him? Instead, we learn the universal singular item that the Creator is seeking; His offspring!!! Acceptable worship can only come from within each of us, and is never found in anything created by us!

The fact that God does not dwell in temples made with hands, and that He is only sought acceptably through His offspring (mankind), demonstrates that His ways are higher than our own (**Isaiah 55:8-9**); and that what we may see as foolish by the standards of this world, He chooses purposefully, that no flesh should glory (**1 Corinthians 1:21-29**).

Times and Boundaries: Many have explained this over the passage of time to state that we are affixed to this world (oxygen, warmth, food, water, etc.); which has always seemed to me an overstatement of the obvious. We have however, the similar language used by Moses to describe God’s work in the rising and falling of nations (especially the provision of the boundaries for Israel) – see: **Deuteronomy 32:8-9**. In the context of Paul’s lesson, it would seem that he is likewise showing that the rising and falling of nations is God’s sole area of control, that regardless of the ruling powers, all men should seek the Lord and His ultimate power; because in Him we are, in every aspect!

God’s manifest control in this way is supported by the whole of God’s revelation: **Genesis 11:9; Exodus 14:4; 2 Samuel 17:14; 2 Kings 19:28; Job 12:19; Proverbs 16:9; 21:1; Isaiah 40:23; Jeremiah 18:7; Daniel 4:25; Revelation 17:17.**

Text #3:

Conclusion –

Acts 17:29-31 “Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising. ³⁰ Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹ because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.””

Therefore: Paul has presented evidence from nature, used common sense concerning the futility of their desire to create gods, and used their own wisdom to demonstrate that they should have known better.

He now re-enforces that fact that we cannot think of service to God in any way except in His nature, spiritual! Never physical! The simplicity of coming to God is never about grand edifices, anything given to the masses for their entertainment; naught but the trained heart of man, will God accept!

Times of Ignorance: Ignorance was never an excuse not to seek God, nor is it one now. God is speaking about a simple recognition that before the One He sent to judge the world had come, when men stopped looking for God, He simply allowed them to stay ignorant (as in not sending prophets to them) – **Romans 1:18-23.**

But Now: A change has occurred! No longer will God allow ignorance; thus, He has commanded that the message about God's great work in Christ is now to be spoken to the entire humanity of man and the universal need of every man to repent (leave their own desires and come to God!).

Listen to Paul's words, as he explains his commission:

Acts 26:17-18 **"I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, ¹⁸ to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."**

Assurance: Evidence is now presented, testimony that only the power of the Creator could wield in demonstrating control over death; the resurrection of the Christ of God. This is now for the Gentiles, as well as it was for the Jews, God's vindication of Jesus as the Christ.

Romans 1:4 ***"and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."***

Text #4:

Acts 17:32-34 ***"And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." ³³ So Paul departed from among them. ³⁴ However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them."***

The Gospel would see limited success here; yet it would still find the hearts of some. This should not surprise us with the level indifference and conviction explained by Luke in **Verse 21**. It should speak of two very important things to us; first, Paul's words concerning ignorance being overlooked now, is absolutely true on their part, thus they have determined their judgment in disbelief. Second, is that even in what would be otherwise considered hostile territory to the truth of the Gospel, honest hearts can be found is courage and trust is demonstrated.

Next: "Paul in Corinth!"