

Acts of the Apostles – 17

- I. The Inspired History
 - A. Paul at Thessalonica (1-9).
 - 1. Paul reasons in the synagogue (1-4).
 - 2. The Jews in Thessalonica oppose him (5-9).
 - B. Paul at Berea (10-15).
 - 1. Paul preaches in the synagogue (10-12).
 - 2. The Jews from Thessalonica oppose him (13-15).
 - C. Paul at Athens (16-34).
 - 1. Paul preaches in the synagogue and market (16-18).
 - 2. Paul preaches on Mars' Hill (19-31).
 - 3. He has mixed results (32-34).

- II. The Sense and Meaning
 - A. Paul reasons in the synagogue of the Thessalonians as typical of his methods (1-4).
 - 1. We again observe Paul's methods – he goes to the synagogue to find God fearers.
 - 2. Why didn't Paul just stand in a shopping center and let go with gospel power?
 - 3. Observe that gospel preaching is reasoning out of the Scriptures.
 - 4. He opened (made clear to the understanding) and alleged (pleaded a proposition).
 - 5. The prophecies of Jesus Christ were fulfilled, but hard for Jews to believe.
 - 6. Both Jews and Gentiles believed.

 - B. The Jews in Thessalonica oppose him by stirring up the people against him (5-9).
 - 1. Here is Jewish envy again working to oppose the apostle Paul (13:45).
 - 2. Here they take profane swine and assault the house where he stayed.
 - 3. They testify that Paul and company were turning the world upside down.
 - 4. They accused them of countering Caesar by preaching another King. Amen!
 - 5. Since they did not have the speakers, they took a bond of them and released them.

 - C. Paul preaches in the synagogue of the Bereans with good success among the people (10-12).
 - 1. Paul and Silas again go straight to the synagogue in this city to preach again.
 - 2. Here we have the definition of noble hearers – ready reception and daily searching.
 - 3. It is the duty of saints to read, know, and prove all things by Scripture (I Thess 5:21).
 - 4. Since Paul was preaching the truth to noble hearers, there were many converts.

 - D. The Jews from Thessalonica oppose him in Berea by stirring up the people there also (13-15).
 - 1. The envious Jews from Thessalonica could not let Paul preach in Berea either.
 - 2. They pretended they were taking Paul to sea, but they took him to Athens instead.
 - 3. At Athens, Paul sends a message to Silas and Timotheus to come quickly as possible.

- E. Paul preaches in the synagogue of the Athenians and in the market with hearers (16-18).
1. Paul had a spirit that was stirred, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.
 2. He begins again with the Jews in the synagogue, and also the devout Gentiles.
 3. And he found a place in the market to dispute daily with those who would hear.
 4. The philosophers of Athens heard of his new doctrine and desired a public forum.
 - a. Epicureans. A major philosophic sect of Greece and Rome founded by Epicurus (341-270 B.C.). The purpose of life is to enjoy pleasure, whether physical or intellectual. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. They had no place for a creator God, His providence, or judgment after death.
 - b. Stoicks. Another sect of Greece and Rome founded by Zeno of Cyprus (about 355-261 B.C.). They were pantheistic, with God the impersonal force in the universe along with matter. The purpose of life was to choose the moral good – virtue – over pleasure and feelings regardless. They were very temperate.
 - c. They ridiculed him as a babbler, so we should not be surprised at the charge.
 - d. They ridiculed him as teaching strange gods (plural) by perverting his words.
 - e. He preached Jesus Christ and the resurrection no matter where he spoke.
- F. The Athenians are intrigued by his doctrine and request him to speak at Mars' Hill (19-31).
1. Areopagus and Mars' Hill were the same place with two names (verse 19 cp verse 22).
 - a. More than just an elevated place near the temple of Mars in Athens, it was also the supreme court of the city.
 - b. Areopagus is the Latin for the Greek Hill of Mars, or Mars' Hill.
 - c. The Bible tells us enough about Greeks – they seek after wisdom (I Cor 1:22).
 - d. Because Athenians loved to hear new things in their pursuit of wisdom, they provided Paul a forum in which to address all the philosophers and “seekers.”
 - e. His audience was the most intellectual men of the most intellectual city going.
 2. Consider Paul's content and method when given an opportunity like this before men.
 - a. He accuses them of superstition. These were the most intellectual men of the day. Our modern versions have altered this to read “very religious.”
 - b. **Superstitious**. Unreasoning awe or fear of something unknown, mysterious, or imaginary, esp. in connexion with religion; religious belief or practice founded upon fear or ignorance. 2. An irrational religious system; a false, pagan, or idolatrous religion.
 3. He wisely uses their altar to the unknown God to introduce the true and living God.
 - a. No matter how cute or desirable, we do not presume ignorant elect here.
 - b. These men were pantheists (Stoicks) or deistic polytheists (Epicureans).
 - c. Among the many Greek gods, these fearful speculators were covering all bets.
 - d. There was a synagogue in Athens, and they were not worshipping God there.
 - e. Paul said, “I'll tell you about the true and living God you know nothing about.”
 - f. Neither sect believed in the obvious personal creator God (Rom 1:20-23).
 4. He launches into creation as distinguishing the true God from all other gods (24-25).
 - a. Creation is a basic fact of truth; only men with faith believe it (Heb 11:1-3).
 - b. The immensity, complexity, and sovereignty of creation rejects need for man.
 - c. He appeals to worshipping God in spirit and in truth as Jesus taught (Jn 4:24).
 - d. Observe the reference to God as the “Lord” of heaven and earth (Acts 2:36).

5. He moves to providence in the directing and governing of men in the world (26).
 - a. Regardless of skin color and such, the blood and nature of men are the same.
 - b. He has made these men and sustains them to populate the whole earth.
 - c. The economic cycles, military successes, famines, popular fads, and other “times” that affect nations are determined and appointed by this Lord of earth.
 - d. The Lord of heaven and earth has also established their national boundaries.
 6. His creation and sovereign government of the world is to reveal himself (14:15-17).
 - a. There is no excuse for men not to seek the Lord with their knowledge of Him.
 - b. God is not far off or disguised from man’s pursuit; He is near in every tongue.
 7. Paul quotes a minor Greek poet to show support for the personal providence of God.
 - a. He quotes from a poet Aratus, who phrased these words in a hymn to Jove.
 - b. The true God is neither pantheistic nor polytheistic, independent of man.
 - c. The true God creates, sustains, intervenes, and governs at a personal level.
 - d. If we are created like His offspring, then idol and altar worship is inadequate.
 8. God allowed this Gentile ignorance in the past, but now He commands all to repent.
 - a. For much of the history of the world, God dealt with the patriarchs or Israel.
 - b. But now the message of God was going forth into all the world (Rom 1:16-19).
 - c. Our Lord’s apostles were commanded to attack the gates of hell (Matt 16:18).
 9. Paul concludes with an “invitation” about the coming judgment of God.
 - a. God has appointed a day to judge all men by His Ordained Man, Christ Jesus.
 - b. God has kindly guaranteed the coming judgment by raising Him from the dead.
- G. His teaching in this Greek (wisdom seeking) place meets with mixed results (32-34).
1. It appears that Paul was not allowed to continue speaking by their interruption.
 2. The preaching of Christ divides men here as in other places (John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19).
 3. Several heard and believed, including Dionysius of the Areopagus and Daramis.