

**Acts 17****Lesson 16  
From Thessalonica to Athens****Outline****From Thessalonica to Athens****I. At Thessalonica** (vv. 1-9)

- A. *Preached Christ in the synagogue – many are converted* (vv. 1-4)
- B. *Unbelieving Jews persecuted and assaulted the house of Jason* (vv. 5-9)

**II. At Berea** (vv. 10-15)

- A. *Preached Christ in the synagogue and many were converted* (vv. 10-12)
- B. *Jews of Thessalonica came to Berea and stirred the people* (v. 13)
- C. *Paul sent away to Athens (Timothy and Silas went later)* (vv. 14-15)

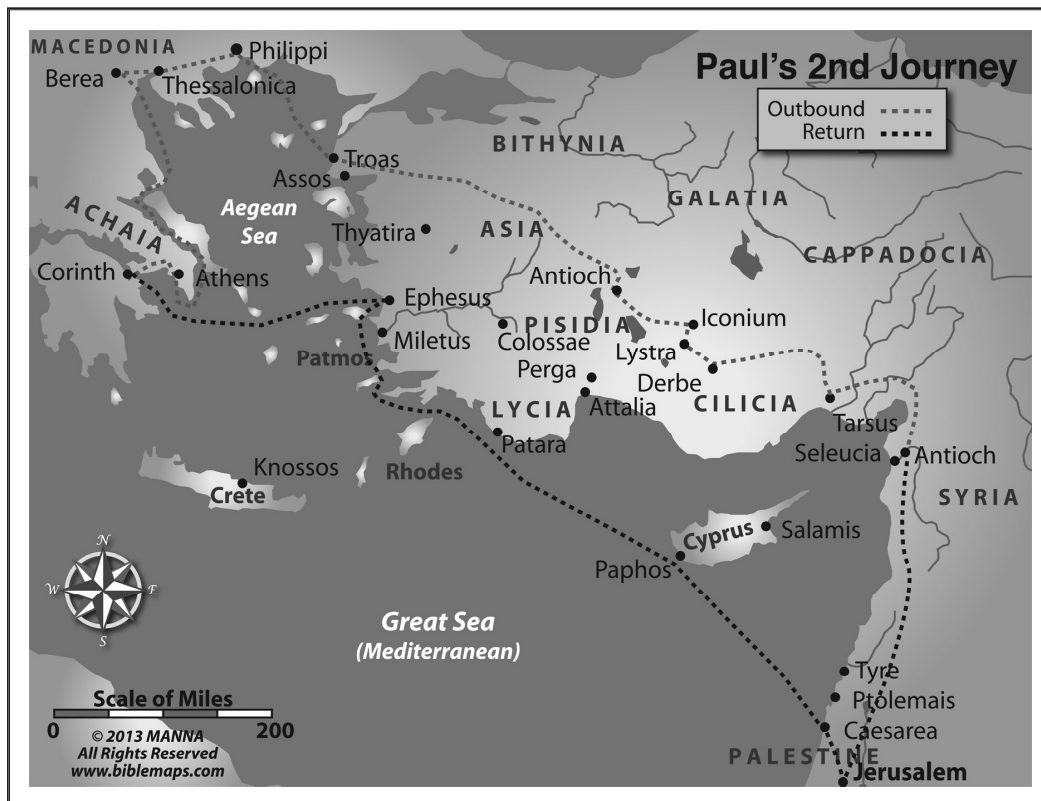
**III. At Athens** (vv. 16-34)

- A. *The situation in Athens* (vv. 16-21)
  - 1. City wholly given to idolatry (v. 16)
  - 2. Paul preached and disputed with them (vv. 17-18)
  - 3. Paul taken and questioned (vv. 19-21)
- B. *Paul's sermon on Mar's Hill* (vv. 22-31)
  - 1. The Athenians are ignorant of God (vv. 22-23)
  - 2. The Living God (vv. 24-29)
    - a. Made the world (vv. 24-25)
    - b. Made man (vv. 26-29)
  - 3. God demands repentance (vv. 30-31)
    - a. Because He will judge the world (v. 31)
    - b. In view of the assurance of the resurrection of Christ (v. 31)
- C. *Response to Paul's sermon* (vv. 32-34)
  - 1. Some mocked (vv. 32-33)
  - 2. Some believed (v. 34)

**Key Verse that Summarizes the Chapter****Acts 17:2**

*Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.*

The second missionary journey continues (Acts 16-18). This chapter takes Paul and Silas to Thessalonica, Berea, and then down to Athens. They leave Philippi, pass through Amphipolis and Apollonia and then come to Thessalonica.



### At Thessalonica (vv. 1-9)

*Preached Christ in the synagogue – many are converted (vv. 1-4).* Arriving at Thessalonica, Paul went to a synagogue of the Jews (v. 1).<sup>1</sup> He spent three Sabbath days reasoning from the Old Testament with them. He explained<sup>2</sup> and demonstrated (from the prophecies) that Christ should suffer and rise from the dead. He showed that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of the Old Testament prophecy (v. 3). Some of the Jews were persuaded along with a great multitude of devout Greeks. Some prominent women were converted as well. Here is another progress report.

*Unbelieving Jews persecuted and assaulted the house of Jason (vv. 5-9).* Some Jews who did not believe the message of Paul and Silas became envious over those who were converted

- 1 Note that Paul took the gospel to the people rather than expecting them to come to him. We often advertise our preaching efforts and expect the world to come to us. Perhaps we could reach more if we took the gospel to them (i.e. to their home).
- 2 Paul didn't just read from the Scriptures or just cite references, but developed his point and argumentation. This is what Ezra and the other teachers did (Neh. 8:7-8). When talking to prospects about the gospel, don't just give them a Bible reference, but reason with them and develop your point.

and decided to stir up a mob. They gathered men from the marketplace to create a mob and stir up the city (v. 5).<sup>3</sup> They attacked the house of Jason, the host of Paul and Silas. Not finding Paul there, the city rulers took Jason and some brethren, charging them with turning the world upside down and causing trouble in this city (v. 6).<sup>4</sup> They charged that claiming Jesus as king was trying to rival Caesar and threaten a revolt (v. 7). However, Jesus is king over a spiritual kingdom (John 18:36). The rulers took security (bond) from Jason and the brethren and then let them go.<sup>5</sup>

### **At Berea (vv. 10-15)**

*Preached Christ in the synagogue and many were converted* (vv. 10-12). The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away from Thessalonica to Berea because of the turmoil created there (v. 10). Paul again went into the synagogue of the Jews. These Jews who listened to him were open minded. They received the message with "great eagerness" (NASV). They "gladly listened to the message" (LBP). Their open mind was not gullible. They tested what they heard by the Scriptures to see if it was true (v. 11). They searched through the Scriptures on a daily basis. As a result many of the Jews believed as well as a number of Greeks and prominent women (v. 12). This progress report shows the gospel is being effective.

*Jews of Thessalonica came to Berea and stirred the people* (v. 13). Soon, Jews from Thessalonica came to Berea when they heard Paul was working there. They stirred up the city here as well.

*Paul sent away to Athens (Timothy and Silas went later)* (vv. 14-15). Immediately, Paul was sent away to Athens. Timothy and Silas stayed behind. However, Paul sent word to Timothy and Silas to come to him as quickly as possible.<sup>6</sup>

### **At Athens (vv. 16-34)**

*The situation in Athens* (vv. 16-21). As Paul waited on Timothy and Silas he took note of the fact that the whole city of Athens was given to idolatry (v. 16). He went to the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews and Gentiles and any whom he encountered in the marketplace

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3 "The forum, or market-place, was the place where the idle assembled, and where those were gathered together that wished to be employed, Matt 20:3. Many of these would be of abandoned character, the idle, the dissipated, and the worthless, and, therefore, just the materials for a mob. It does not appear that they felt any particular interest in the subject; but they were, like other mobs, easily excited, and urged on to any acts of violence" (Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft).

4 Those making the charge had deliberately stirred up the city. Often people charge others with the offense that they themselves are doing.

5 The purpose of the bond we are not told. It could be that it insured that Paul and Silas would leave the city (cf. v. 10 where they immediately left). Or, some have supposed that it assured the officials that they would not lead an effort to subvert the emperor (cf. v. 7).

6 "Though Luke does not tell us, Silas and Timothy must have come to Athens as Paul commanded, for Paul later sent Timothy from Athens to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:1-5). He evidently sent Silas, also, to some location in Macedonia, for Silas and Timothy later came to him from Macedonia while he was in Corinth (Acts 18:5)" (Johnny Stringer, *Truth Commentaries, Acts*, 354).

(v. 17). He disputed with the Epicurean<sup>7</sup> and Stoic<sup>8</sup> philosophers. Some asked, “What does the babbler want to say?” A babbler (literally “seed picker”) is one who picks up scraps of wisdom from others. They charged him with proclaiming foreign gods because he taught Jesus was raised from the dead (v. 18).

Paul was taken to the Areopagus<sup>9</sup> (Mar’s Hill) and questioned about this new doctrine he taught. The people of Athens relished in hearing new things, thus they wanted to know more about Paul’s teaching since it was strange to them (vv. 19-21).

*Paul’s Sermon on Mar’s Hill* (vv. 22-31). Paul’s sermon had three points:

1. **The Athenians are ignorant of God** (vv. 22-23). Paul began his sermon by pointing out that they are very religious as evidenced by all the objects of worship. He took note of an altar that had an inscription, “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” (perhaps to cover any gods that might have been overlooked). He used that as a launching point to tell them about the God of heaven, whom they did not know.
2. **The Living God** (vv. 24-29). God made the world and all things in it (v. 24). He is the ruler of heaven and earth (v. 24). He doesn’t dwell in a temple made by man (He is not contained within the walls of a temple like an idol). He doesn’t depend upon man for his existence (like an idol does), but man depends upon him (v. 25).

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7 Epicureans followed the teaching of the philosopher Epicurus (342-270 B.C.). “They denied that the world was created by God, and that the gods exercised any care or providence over human affairs, and also the immortality of the soul. ... One of the distinguishing doctrines of Epicurus was that pleasure was the summum bonum, or chief good, and that virtue was to be practiced only as it contributed to pleasure. By pleasure, however, Epicurus did not mean sensual and groveling appetites and degraded vices, but rational pleasure, properly regulated and governed. ... Confident in the belief that the world was not under the administration of a God of justice, they gave themselves up to the indulgence of every passion of the infidels of their time, and were the exact example of the frivolous and fashionable multitudes of all times, that live without God, and that seek pleasure as their chief good” (Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft).

8 Stoics followed the teaching of Zeno of Cyprus (360- 264 B.C.). “The doctrines of the sect were, that the universe was created by God; that all things were fixed by Fate; that even God was under the dominion of fatal necessity; that the Fates were to be submitted to; that the passions and affections were to be suppressed and restrained; that happiness consisted in the insensibility of the soul to pain; and that a man should gain an absolute mastery over all the passions and affections of his nature. They were stern in their views of virtue, and, like the Pharisees, prided themselves on their own righteousness. They supposed that matter was eternal, and that God was either the animating principle or soul of the world, or that all things were a part of God. They fluctuated much in their views of a future state; some of them holding that the soul would exist only until the destruction of the universe, and others that it would finally be absorbed into the divine essence and become a part of God” (Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft).

9 “It seems that Paul is brought to the hill where the celebrated court, the supreme court of Athens, often held its meetings. This hill was almost in the middle of the city, but little remains of its summit to help us determine what it looked like in Paul’s day” (Gareth L. Reese, *Acts*, 624).

God made man (vv. 26-29). All nations are made from one blood (all men came from Adam). He is the God of all nations. God has “determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings” (v. 26). This is a statement of God’s providence. He rules in the nations of men (Dan. 4:25). God created a world that He could control for His purpose (Rev. 4:11).<sup>10</sup> Some think this refers to God directly controlling how long a nation lasts and how much territory they control. Though God has all under his control, that doesn’t mean He directly causes all things to happen. There is a difference in what God causes and what He allows. “This passage may have reference to this divine control over the nations. Remember, however, that regardless of uncertainty as to Paul’s precise meaning, the point he is making is clear: *God is not the God of only one nation but has manifested an active interest in all nations.*”<sup>11</sup>

What God has done in creating the world and man (and controlling it as he does) is to cause man to seek the Lord (v. 27). Paul pictures the Pagan who considers creation as one groping (feeling) in the dark for God (cf. Rom 1:20).

Since we are the offspring of God, we are created by God and depend upon God (v. 27) and ought not to think of God as the Athenians did in terms of gold, silver, or stone (v. 28).

3. **God demands repentance** (vv. 30-31). Prior to the coming of Christ, God overlooked the ignorance of man (i.e. the ignorance of the Pagan world), but now commands all men (Jew and Gentiles) to repent. The reason given is that He will judge the world (Jews and Gentiles) by Christ, the judge (v. 31). Repentance is demanded in view of the assurance of the resurrection of Christ (v. 31).

*Response to Paul’s sermon* (vv. 32-34). There was mixed reaction to Paul’s sermon. When he mentioned the resurrection of Christ, some mocked (ridiculed the idea). Others said they would hear more from him later. (v. 32). So, Paul was dismissed and he left (v. 33). Some accepted what he preached and believed, among them was Dionysius who is identified as “the Areopagite” (one of the judges at Mars Hill cf. footnote 9). Another convert was a woman named Damaris. Others were converted as well. Here we have another progress report.

Paul had success in all three cities visited in this chapter.

## Questions

1. List the progress reports found in this chapter. \_\_\_\_\_  
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<sup>10</sup> “Nations rise and fall, but it is not blind chance or hard fate. Thus there is an interplay between God’s will and man’s activities, difficult as it is for us to see with our shortened vision” (A.T. Robertson, *Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft & Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament. Copyright (c) 1985 by Broadman Press).

<sup>11</sup> Johnny Stringer, *ibid*, 363

2. For class discussion: How could we do better (in light of Paul's practice) in taking the gospel to the people in contrast to expecting them to come to us? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. What use did Paul make of the Scriptures besides reading them at Thessalonica? \_\_\_\_\_  
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4. Why was the house of Jason attacked? \_\_\_\_\_  
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5. What charges were made against Paul at Thessalonica? \_\_\_\_\_  
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6. How were the people of Berea different from those in Thessalonica? \_\_\_\_\_  
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7. What was the point of calling Paul a "babbling"? \_\_\_\_\_  
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8. How would you summarize Paul's sermon at Athens? \_\_\_\_\_  
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9. What does "at the times of this ignorance God overlooked" mean? \_\_\_\_\_  
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10. What reasons are given for repentance? \_\_\_\_\_  
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