

THESSALONICA, BEREIA, AND ATHENS

Summer 2022, Acts 17

August 7, 2022

“These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here”

Acts 17:7

A tale of three cities

When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ² As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,” he said. ⁴ Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

Acts 17:1-5

¹⁰ As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ¹² Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

Acts 17:16-40

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there

³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” ³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴ A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

Acts 17:16-34

1. In these Greek cities, Paul starts in the synagogues, but the emphasis is on the Gentiles
2. In Greece, opposition to the gospel is both civil and religious
3. In three different cities, there are three different gospel presentations – and believers everywhere!

The gospel in three different situations

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Acts 17:2

1. This is a summary of Paul’s first gospel message in Psidian Antioch (Acts 13:16-41)
2. For those familiar with Scripture, Paul shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of every promise in the Old Testament

¹¹ Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ¹² Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

Acts 17:11

1. When Paul encounters “noble character”, he allows Scripture to speak for itself
2. A seeker encountering the truth of the gospel of his or her own is a most powerful apologetic!

²⁹ “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s design and skill. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”

Acts 17:29-31

1. When the gospel of the cross and resurrection is rejected, Paul starts farther back in redemptive history
2. The Creator God is redemptive history challenged most assumptions of Greek/Roman philosophy
3. Only after Paul explains redemptive history does he introduce Jesus, the fulfillment of history

Gospel ideas for Anacortes from Thessalonica, Berea and Athens

Thessalonica: The simple gospel doesn't answer all the important questions

⁹ Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰ And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

¹¹ Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, ¹² so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

¹³ Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. ¹⁴ We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words.

1 Thessalonians 3

Berea: Reading Scripture is always a good thing

⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever

¹⁰ They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.

¹¹ By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Psalm 19

Athens: Our secular and post-modern culture requires even more worldview evangelism

²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out 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 some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

²⁹ "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

Acts 17

Resources for further studies in Acts

The Bible Project team has great stuff on Acts at <https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg>

Spurgeon's very good sermon on Acts 17 is at <https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0193.htm>

Tim Keller has said much on the topic of mission. See "5 Practices" at <https://brave.is/5-practices-of-a-missional-church-tim-keller/> and <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/gospel-culture-and-mission-an-interview-with-tim-keller/>

D. A. Carson has a wonderful essay from Acts 17 on "Worldview Evangelism" at <https://www.monergism.com/athens-revisited-exegetical-study-acts-17-da-carson>

J. C. Ryle has a wonderful "The City" essay at <https://www.biblebb.com/files/ryle/city.htm>

Deffinbaugh has an audio only message on Acts 17 at <https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts>

For those who want to dig deeper into the worldview clash at Mars Hill, I recommend Andrew Klavan's challenging "Speaking Truth into Modern Culture" at <https://youtu.be/Cckiti7as44>

John Stott's *The Spirit, The Church and the World: The Message of Acts* (IVP, 1990) and F. F. Bruce's work: *New Testament History* (Doubleday, 1980) and *The Book of the Acts* (Eerdmans, 1984). For this passage, I also like Kistemaker's commentary (Baker Book House, 1990).

Harry Boer, *That My House May Be Filled* (Eerdmans, 1957)