

Acts 17 - 2nd Missionary Journey: Thessalonica; Berea; Athens; Paul on Mar's Hill

III. Outreach to the remote parts of the earth (Acts 13:1—28:31)

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- (G) Athens (17:16-34)
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 - (ii) Paul's sermon (17:21-31)
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Review: Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Paul and Barnabas agree to revisit the Galatian churches, but they disagree about taking John Mark who had left them on the earlier mission. After an argument, Barnabas takes Mark to Cyprus. Paul takes Silas to Galatia. At Lystra Paul asks Timothy to join them (16:1-3). They revisit the towns, telling the believers the decisions of the Jerusalem Council about Gentile converts (16:4-5).

Paul tries to go to Bithynia, but is blocked by the Holy Spirit (16:6-7). At night, Paul has a vision: a Macedonian urges him to come help. At this point Luke joins them: they sail for Macedonia (16:8-10). Paul delivers a slave girl from an evil spirit. Her owners protest; the crowd attacks; they are flogged, imprisoned; freed by an earthquake. Jailer is converted (16:11-40). They travel to Thessalonica (17:1).

Acts 17

- (E) Thessalonica (17:1-9)

The Second Missionary Journey (15:36–18:22)

1 Now when they had traveled through **Amphipolis** and **Apollonia**, they came to **Thessalonica**, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

1 Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

1 Paul and Silas traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.

1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:

- Timothy and Luke stayed behind in Philippi (we know this because the pronouns change from "we" to "they"). Timothy later rejoins Paul and Silas in Berea (v14).

- Paul and Silas walked the famous Roman Road (*Via Egnatia*) which crossed Macedonia, connecting the Adriatic Sea with the Black Sea (a Greek extension of the *Via Appia*).

- "...Amphipolis" - 33 miles southwest of Philippi, North coast of Aegean

- "...Apollonia" - 30 miles Southwest Amphipolis

- "...Thessalonica" - a strategic center and capital city of Macedonia; 37 miles west Apollonia, at the northwest extremity of the Aegean Sea.

2 And according to Paul's custom, he visited them, and for **three Sabbaths reasoned** with them from **the Scriptures**,

2 And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

2 As usual, Paul entered there and on three Sabbaths discussed the Scriptures with them.

2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,

- "...three Sabbaths" - this is how long he ministered in the synagogue, not how long he stayed in Thessalonica. He likely stayed in Thessalonica for 6-12 months. We decipher this because:

- The Philippian church sent money to Paul on at least two occasions while he was in Thessalonica (Cf. Phil 4:15-16), implying a longer stay than just three weeks.
- We know that Paul support himself through manual labor (Cf. 1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:7-10). This indicates that Paul resided in Thessalonica for considerable time before the financial gifts from Philippi arrived.
- Most of the converts in Thessalonica were not Jews from the synagogue, but rather Gentiles steeped in idolatry (Cf. 1 Thess 1:9).
- When Paul wrote the epistles of 1&2 Thessalonians, shortly after his visit there, from Corinth, it certainly seems that these new believers in Thessalonica already understood a good amount of theology (see chart below). So based on a study of 1&2 Thessalonians, it appears that Paul had already laid down a fairly substantial doctrinal foundation. This couldn't have taken place in just a few weeks or even a couple months.

- "...reasoned" *dielexato*, Paul explained his method of evangelizing in Thessalonica as a logical, reasoned approach, giving evidence, proving (*paratithemenos*), and proclaiming

(katangelo).

— These terms imply that Paul dealt carefully with his hearers' questions and doubts. He showed that the facts of gospel history confirmed what the Scriptures predicted.

- "...the Scriptures" - the OT; the only NT book Paul had written at this time was Galatians. It's possible that the gospel of Matthew was also written around this time, and likely that the epistle of James had also been written.

— Because Paul here is in a Jewish synagogue, he is obviously using the OT

Presumed Knowledge in Thessalonica	
Trinity	1 Thess 1:1, 5-6
Holy Spirit	1 Thess 1:5-6; 4:8; 5:19
Second Advent	1 Thess 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:14-17; 5:23
Day of the Lord	1 Thess 5:1-3
Eschatology	2 Thess 2:5
Assurance	1 Thess 1:5
Conversion	1 Thess 1:9
Election	1 Thess 1:4
Resurrection	1 Thess 4:14-18
Sanctification	1 Thess 4:3; 5:23
Christian behavior	1 Thess 2:12; 4:1

Adapted from Scofield Study Bible, 1640

3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

3 He explained and showed them that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead: "This very Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Messiah."

3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

- Paul uses Hebrew Bible (the OT) to demonstrate to "explain and give evidence" that Jesus Christ is their promised Messiah
- The NT claims that the information found in the OT points to Jesus as the Messiah (Cf. John 5:39,46; Luke 24:27,44; 1 Cor 15:3-4)
- Paul used the OT to prove that Jesus was the Messiah



Josephus

Antiquities 18.3.3

“About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Christ. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.”

OT Prophecies About Christ

Prophecy	Scripture	Years in Advance
Manner of Birth	Isaiah 7:14	700 years
Place of Birth	Micah 5:2	700 years
Nationality	Numbers 24:17	1400 years
Tribe	Genesis 49:10	1800 years
Time of and Response to His Messiahship	Dan 9:25-26	600 years
Crucified Between Thieves	Isaiah 53:9	700 years
Pierced	Isaiah 53:5	700 years
No Broken Bones	Psalms 22:17	1000 years
Gamble for His Clothing	Psalms 22:18	1000 years
Buried in Rich Man's Tomb	Isaiah 53:9	700 years

4 And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the **God-fearing Greeks** and a significant number of the **leading women**.

4 And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.

4 Some of them were persuaded and began to be associated with Paul and Silas, especially a large crowd of devout Greeks and the wives of many prominent men.

4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

- "...God-fearing Greeks" - proselytes; Gentiles who converted to Judaism because they believed in Yahweh and wanted to walk with Him

- "...leading women" - could have been upper-class society, or may have been wives of the city's leading men. In either case, the gospel had an impact on the leadership level of

society in Thessalonica.

5 But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the marketplace, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and they attacked the house of **Jason** and were seeking to bring them out to the people.

5 But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.

5 But the Jewish leaders became jealous, and they took some contemptible characters who used to hang out in the public square, formed a mob, and started a riot in the city. They attacked Jason's home and searched it for Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the people.

5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

- Whenever you make any kind of progress in ministry or evangelism, the empire will always strike back against you. If you're getting pushback for ministry or evangelism, it's a good sign that you're over the target.

- The unbelieving Jews became jealous of Paul's success in ministry, so they rounded up some local riff-raff who were not part of the church and formed a mob to create chaos and division in the city.

— Paul was again treated harshly, as he was earlier in Galatia (Cf. 13:45,50; 14:2,19), because they were again "jealous" of the popularity and effectiveness of his message. All the persecution that follows Paul is caused by the Jews (note Luke's emphasis).

- "...Jason" - evidently Paul's host in Thessalonica, as Lydia had been in Philippi. He, along with Aristarchus (Col 4:10) and Secundus (20:4), appear to be among these new believers.

6 When they did not find them, they *began* dragging **Jason and some brothers** before **the city authorities**, shouting, "These men **who have upset** the **world** have come here also;

6 When they did not find them, they *began* dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also;

6 When they didn't find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials and shouted, "These fellows who have turned the world upside down have come here, too,

6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;

- "...Jason and some brothers" - it appears that this was the beginning of the church in Thessalonica
- "...the city authorities" - politarches, a title used only in Macedonia to describe city officials; only usage in Scripture
 - Since this term was unknown elsewhere, critics of Luke (and biblical inerrancy) once dismissed the use of this word as a mark of ignorance, but here have now been 16 epigraphical examples in modern Salonica (one in the British Museum) on a stone that once formed part of an archway.
- "...who have upset" - *anastatoō*, to stir up, excite; to turn upside down. It is not common for the church to turn the world upside down. More often, the world turns the church upside down (Cf. Laodicea).
 - When Christianity goes into action and is lived out as intended, it causes a revolution in both the life of the individual and in the life of society.
- "...world" - *oikoumenē*, depending upon the context in which it is used, it can mean the known (inhabited) world (Cf. Luke 2:1; Acts 11:28) or the entire world (Cf. Luke 4:5; Acts 17:31; Rev 12:9). The context of this passage favors the known/inhabited world, not the entire world.

7 and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the **decrees of Caesar**, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

7 and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

7 and Jason has welcomed them as his guests. All of them oppose the emperor's decrees by saying that there is another king—Jesus!"

7 Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.

- "...decrees of Caesar" - Roman law forbade proselytizing Roman citizens

— The Jewish antagonists charged the missionaries with revolutionary teaching...that "another king—Jesus" would rule and reign (Cf. 1 Thess 3:13; 5:1-11; 2 Thess 1:5-10; 2:14).

8 They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things.

8 They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things.

8 The crowd and the city officials were upset when they heard this,

8 And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.

- The mob was even more disturbed now, and the city authorities needed to do something because of the charge of insurrection against Paul, Silas, and Timothy. If they didn't do anything, they could be charged with insurrection.

- 9 And when they had **received a pledge** from Jason and the others, they released them.
- 9 And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.
- 9 but after they had gotten a bond from Jason and the others, they let them go.
- 9 And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.
- The city authorities couldn't get their hands on Paul, Silas, or Timothy because they were not at Jason's house when the mob arrived. So they took Jason instead.
 - "...received a pledge" - since the city officials could not find Paul and Silas to bring them to trial, they made Jason and his friends pay a bond to guarantee that Paul would not cause further trouble and leave town
 - If trouble continued and Paul remained in town, Jason would lose his money
 - Paul desired to stay, but he did leave town and later wrote that Satan hindered his return (1 Thess 2:17-18).
 - Timothy, whom Paul left at Philippi, was sent to them (1 Thess 3:5-7), and the Christians in Thessalonica carried on, for which Paul was thankful (1 Thess 1:7-10; 2:14-16).

Once Paul and team left Thessalonica, the unbelieving Jews turned on and began persecuting the new converts. Paul addressed this in 1 Thess 3:1-5.

(F) Berea (17:10-15)

- 10** The **brothers** immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.
- 10** The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.
- 10** That night the brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue.
- 10** And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.
- "...brothers" - the converts to Christianity that Paul bore in Thessalonica (Cf. v4)
 - For the second time, Paul fled a city under cover of "night" (Cf. 9:25; Matt 10:23); he and Silas left the *Via Egnatia*, at Thessalonica, and took the eastern coastal road toward Athens.
 - They headed for Berea (modern Verria), a small out-of-the-way town in the foothills of the Olympic Mountains, about 45 miles west-southwest of Thessalonica.
 - Again, as was his custom, Paul went into the Jewish synagogue first before beginning to minister to the Gentiles (Cf. Rom 1:16)

11 Now **these people** were **more noble-minded** than those in Thessalonica, for they **received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see**

whether these things were so.

11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

11 These people were more receptive than those in Thessalonica. They were very willing to receive the message, and every day they carefully examined the Scriptures to see if those things were so.

11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

- This verse is a perfect description of biblical discernment...

- "...these people" - the Jews in the Berean synagogue, as compared to the Jews in Thessalonica

- "...more noble-minded" - *eugenēs*, "well-born"; they were "a cut above" the Jews in Thessalonica. They "stood out" above the Thessalonian Jews because they did something that the Thessalonian Jews did not.

- "...received the word" - listen to understand, not necessarily agree. It means to receive what is being taught from the Scriptures with humility (Cf. James 1:21).

— Unlike other locations, the Bereans did not react out of jealousy (Cf. v5), but listened carefully to what Paul preached and compared it to the teachings of their Hebrew Scriptures. They received Paul's message of the Gospel with humble sincerity instead of prejudice and hostility.

- "...with great eagerness" - they were teachable; they didn't approach what was being taught with preconceived ideas, but rather were open-minded to what was being taught.

— It's just as important to receive the Word with openness of mind as it is to search the Scriptures. A two-fold plan for Bible study.

— The ultimate barrier to truth is the presumption that you already have it.

- "...examining" - *anakrinō*, to sift up and down; to make careful and exact research as in a legal process. We're constantly told to discern what we're being taught against the foundational truth of Scripture (Cf. Deut 13:1-5; Is 8:20; 1 Cor 2:15; 14:29; Gal 1:6-9; 1 Thess 5:21; Heb 5:14; 1 John 4:1; Rev 2:2).

— The open-mindedness and humility with which they listened to the teaching of the Scriptures was then run through a grid of truth. They "examined" or researched the Scriptures to determine whether or not what they heard was confirmed by God's Word.

— Specifically, they did a thorough search and examination of the OT to confirm that what Paul was teaching them concerning Jesus being predicted in the OT as the Messiah were true.

— Comparison of what Paul taught them to the OT Scriptures was how they determined the veracity/truthfulness of what Paul taught them. They had an open mind, then they had an

open Bible to discern if what they were taught corresponded with Scripture.

— If Paul had contradicted what God said in the OT, the Bereans would've disregarded his teachings. In fact, Luke commends the Bereans for doing this, stating that they were more noble than the Thessalonians.

- "...the Scriptures" - *graphē*, the OT, Hebrew Bible

— Without Scripture, we are lost in a sea of relativism...We do not read of any other city wherein he was given so fair a hearing, wherein people were so honest in seeking to know whether the Word was really in accordance with the Scripture or not.

- "...to see" - spiritual sight; you cannot develop spiritual sight without Scripture (Cf. Ps 119)

12 Therefore, many of them believed, along with a significant number of prominent Greek women and men.

12 Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.

12 Many of them believed, including a large number of prominent Greek women and men.

12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, **not a few**.

- After these Jewish Bereans humbly listened to Paul's teaching and corroborated it with the OT Scriptures, they placed their faith in Christ

- "...not a few" [KJV] - the KJV translation uses a figure of speech called a *litotes*, which is an understatement or negative statement to express an affirmation. It is the opposite of hyperbole.

— If someone were to say, 'He is not a bad preacher,' they mean that he is a very good preacher. The understatement is made for emphasis. Luke often used litotes for emphasis (Cf. 12:18; 19:24; 21:39; 27:20).

— Many Gentiles also believed (including Sopater, 20:4), along with a number of prominent women (Cf. v4)

13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds.

13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds.

13 But when the Jewish leaders in Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul also in Berea, they went there to upset and incite the crowds.

13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

- After hearing of Paul's presence and preaching in Berea, the Thessalonian Jews followed him there, and used the same tactics they had used in Thessalonica (agitating the crowds) to force Paul to leave.

— There was no hostility in Berea until hostile Thessalonian Jews arrived seeking vengeance after failing to capture Paul and Silas in their own city

— They charged the missionaries with stirring up trouble (v6), but it was them who were disturbing the peace

14 Then immediately **the brothers** sent Paul out to go **as far as the sea**; and Silas and Timothy remained there.

14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there.

14 Then the brothers immediately sent Paul away to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed there.

14 And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

- "...the brothers" - Paul's converts in Berea (Cf. v12)

- "...as far as the sea" - the Berean believers sent Paul away by sea for his safety

— Silas and Timothy stayed behind in Berea to continue to evangelize, minister, and disciple the young church there, just as Luke had remained behind in Philippi to disciple the new church there (Cf. 16:40).

15 Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.

15 Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.

15 The men who escorted Paul took him all the way to Athens and, after receiving instructions to have Silas and Timothy join him as soon as possible, they left.

15 And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

- The gospel expansion now moves into the pagan darkness that enveloped the province of Achaia (southern Greece). Athens is about 200 miles west-southwest of Berea.

— New believers from Berea accompanied Paul to Athens, then returned home. Paul told them to send Silas & Timothy to him in Athens upon their return.

— Paul is likely weary at this point...fanatical opponents had forced him out of three consecutive cities just as the gospel was taking hold. The new believers he left behind

obviously weighed heavy on this heart

(G) Athens (17:16-34)

(a) Paul reasoning in the synagogue (17:16-17)

16 Now while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he observed that the city was full of idols.

16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.

16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was deeply disturbed to see the city full of idols.

16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

- The fact that Athens was filled with idolatry means that it was a Gentile city. The Babylonian exile cleansed Israel of idolatry, so after that time up through today, Israel no longer had a problem with idolatry that they had so badly prior to the Babylonian captivity.

At the time of Paul's visit to Athens, Corinth was the commercial and political center under the Roman Caesars. Athens belonged to the province of Achaia, whose capital was Corinth. Athens was still the university center, heir to the great philosophers—men who established patterns of thought that have affected human learning for centuries. This was 400 years after the golden age of Greece, but it was still a center for art, beauty, culture, and knowledge.

Upon his arrival in Athens, Paul was alone. Luke left in Thessalonica; Silas and Timothy remained in Berea. He sent for Silas and Timothy (heading for Corinth). When Timothy arrived in Athens, he is immediately sent back to Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:1-2).

17 So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing *Gentiles*, and in the **marketplace** every day with those who happened to be present.

17 So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing *Gentiles*, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.

17 So he began holding discussions in the synagogue with the Jews and other worshipers, as well as every day in the public square with anyone who happened to be there.

17 Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

- "...marketplace" - *agora*, the Agora in Athens is where Paul preached the gospel among the common people. This was Paul's form of "street preaching". In the Greek Empire, public discourse and debate was encouraged and many cities had designated places set aside for this purpose.

— The *agora* was the center of civic life in Athens, where philosophers gathered to discuss and debate their views. Paul's preaching in the market brought him to the attention of the Areopagus, a council of Athenian officials named for the place they met (the Romans called it Mars Hill).

— These officials were intrigued by Paul's preaching of the gospel and a few of them later became believers.

(b) Paul's speech on Mars Hill (17:18-34)

(i) Paul brought to Mars Hill (17:18-20)

18 And some of the **Epicurean** and **Stoic** philosophers as well were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What could this **scavenger of tidbits** want to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of **strange deities**,"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

18 And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

18 Some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also debated with him. Some asked, "What is this blabbermouth trying to say?" while others said, "He seems to be preaching about foreign gods." This was because Paul was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

18 Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

- "...Epicurean" - a group that followed the teachings of Epicurus, a Greek philosopher who lived from 341-270 BC. It began with the search for pure truth by reason, however since this search was considered to be hopeless, they believed the chief end of man was to find happiness. They thought that pleasure, not knowledge, should be the goal in life.

— They believed that pleasure was the greatest good and the most worthy pursuit of man. They defined pleasure in the sense of tranquility and freedom from pain, disquieting passions, and fears, especially the fear of death.

— Epicurus taught that the gods took no interest in human affairs. Thus organized religion was bad, and the gods would not punish evildoers in the afterlife.

— They believed that the gods lived in eternal calm but away from the lives of man and that, unlike gods, man has no afterlife to fear or hope for. Because there is no afterlife, they believed that man should make the best of his life here.

— Epicureans were not theological atheists, but they were practical atheists. Eventually this belief system devolved into a life of sensualism. Lucretius and Horace were the most famous Epicurean poets.

- "...Stoic" - they were followers of Zeno (334-262 BC) and Chrysippus (279-206 BC). The term comes from *stoa*, a particular portico where he taught when he lived in Athens. They believed that wisdom was found in being free from intense emotionalism, therefore man had to submit to natural law and learn to live comfortably with nature.

— His followers placed great importance on living in harmony with nature. They stressed individual self-sufficiency and rationalism, and they had a reputation for being quite arrogant.

— Stoics were pantheists, who believed that God is in everything, and everything is God. They were also fatalistic. This teaching is also common today.

— They believed that the highest expression of this life was reason. To be virtuous was to live in harmony with reason, and this was the only good. Not to be virtuous was the only evil. All other things, such as death, pleasure, or pain, were indifferent.

- "...scavenger of tidbits" - *spermologos*, better translated "idle babbler"; it means that they believed that Paul took learning from here and there and passed it off as his own. It refers to someone who picked up words from others as a bird picks up seeds.

— The term implies that Paul had put together a philosophy of life simply by picking up various ideas from various sources. They viewed him as a person who had nothing to say from his own knowledge.

- "...strange deities" - *xenos daimonion*, they believed Paul was preaching under the power of demons. The reason they believed this is because Paul was preaching Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

— They believed gnostic dualism, the idea that the natural world was bad and the spiritual world was good. If Jesus was God in a physical body, that would be bad in their eyes since the physical world was bad. To be good, Jesus would have had to come spiritually, not physically. John later argues against gnostic dualism in 1 John 4:2-3.

— This is where amillennialism came from...how could you have a physical kingdom on earth, and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, when the physical world is bad?

19 And they took him and brought him to the **Areopagus**, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?"

19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?"

19 Then they took him, brought him before the Areopagus, and asked, "May we know what this new teaching of yours is?"

19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?

- "...Areopagus" - aka, Mars Hill; it is located just off the Acropolis in Athens. It was a free speech platform, a place for itinerant lectures. This term was used in two different ways by

the Greeks in Luke's day:

1. To the Hill of Ares (i.e. Mars Hill), on which the Council of the Areopagus conducted its business in ancient times.
2. It also referred to the group of about 30 citizens, known as the Council of Areopagus, who met in the Royal Portico of the Agora.

20 For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean."

20 For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean."

20 It sounds rather strange to our ears, and we would like to know what it means."

20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

- The Council of the Areopagus had authority over religion, morals, and education in Athens. Its members wanted to know what Paul was advocating.

— The enemies of Socrates poisoned him for teaching strange ideas in Athens, so Paul was in some danger

(ii) Paul's sermon (17:21-31)

21 (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or **hearing something new**.)

21 (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)

21 Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there used to spend their time doing nothing else other than listening to the latest ideas or repeating them.

21 (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

- A description of what the Athenians did every day at the Areopagus...they would listen to itinerant lectures from people who were saying things or making arguments that they hadn't heard before.

- "...hearing something new" - there's a lot of pressure in the church today, or at church-related conferences, to come up with or teaching "something new". Paul predicts this in 2 Tim 4:3-4, where people will not "endure sound doctrine" but instead will "want their ears tickled" so they will accumulate teachers who will confirm their doctrinal presuppositions.

— This is what was going on in Athens at this time. The desire for knowledge and to hear something new was intense in Athens, and the platform for this was Mars Hill.

22 So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I see that you are **very religious** in all respects.

22 So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.

22 So Paul stood up in front of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in every way.

22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

- There was no synagogue in Athens, so Paul completely changes his evangelistic philosophy in Athens because he is dealing with pagan, idolatrous Gentiles.

— Rather than preaching from the Scriptures (special revelation), Paul uses general revelation.

— Many times when unbelievers hear general revelation, they suppress it (Cf. Rom 1:18-20). Once you do that for long enough, God stops sending you revelation because if you can't accept or don't believe general revelation, you won't believe special revelation (the gospel).

— But if a person accepts general revelation and desires truth, God will bend over backwards to get special revelation to that person (Cf. Philip; Cornelius)

— General revelation cannot save anyone. Believing that there is a God, or even that He created the universe, is not the condition for salvation. Special revelation, on the other hand, is the specific information a person needs to be saved (the gospel).

— On his first missionary journey, while Paul was in Lystra, he outlined how he would approach evangelism to pagan Gentiles through general revelation (Cf. 14:15-17). He used the attributes of God (living, Creator, patient, Revealer, good), rather than the OT, to evangelize them.

— "...very religious" - while they knew nothing of Almighty God or the name Jesus Christ, they had a religious bent to them. They were pious and superstitious. He provides his reason for his belief in v23.

GENERAL VS. SPECIAL REVELATION		
	GENERAL	SPECIAL
EXAMPLES	Nature, conscience (Rom 1-2)	Incarnation, Scripture, miracles
AVAILABILITY	All	Some
ACCOMPLISHMENT	Accountability (Rom 1)	Salvation (Acts 4:12; 2 Tim 3:15)
FORM	Non-written / non-verbal	Written
QUALITY	Natural	Supernatural, miraculous

23 For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore, what you worship in **ignorance**, this I proclaim to you.

23 For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

23 For as I was walking around and looking closely at the objects you worship, I even found an altar with this written on it: 'To an unknown god.' So I am telling you about the unknown object you worship.

23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

- Paul tells them that they are worshipping some kind of god, but they do not know who that god is. Then, Paul goes on to describe this unknown god as the Almighty God.

— Paul made this unknown God known to them. They were obviously somewhat interested in this unknown God, otherwise they wouldn't have set up this altar for Him.

- "...ignorance" - different than stupidity; ignorance is you are unaware of the necessary information; stupidity is you have the necessary information, but you choose to not heed it.

— The problem the Athenians had was ignorance...they were unaware of this "unknown God" that they worshipped. Paul is going to describe Him to them in the following verses...

24 The God who made the world and everything that is in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made by hands;

24 The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

24 The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth. He doesn't live in shrines made by human hands,

24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

- Paul first covers the doctrine of Creation. By talking about this, Paul is aiming his argument at the misguided beliefs of the Stoics. This demonstrates that Paul was very tuned in to what his audience believed philosophically, then he tailored his arguments to counter those beliefs.

— The first phrase of this verse is Stoic language, because his argument was aimed toward the Stoic belief system. He challenged certain Greek ideas, such as that the *demiurge* created the universe. The fact that the Creator brought all things into being proved that matter did not exist eternally, as the Stoics believed.

— Paul also declared that one God made everything, which contradicted the idea of a pantheon with a god for this and a god for that.

— Then Paul said that this God is not only the Creator of the universe, but also "Lord of heaven and earth." God is the Owner and absolute Possessor of both heaven and earth, not just parts of them.

— Lastly, the God Paul describes does not dwell in temples made by hands, such as the Parthenon in Athens (Cf. 7:48).

25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things;

25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things;

25 and he isn't served by people as if he needed anything. He himself gives everyone life, breath, and everything else.

25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

- Next, Paul explains that this God is sufficient in and of Himself, meaning that God did not create man because He was lonely or needed someone else.

— He is the God that both created and sustains life (Cf. Dan 5:23d)

26 and He made **from one man** every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, **having determined their** appointed times and **the boundaries of their habitation**,

26 and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,

26 From one man he made every nation of humanity to live all over the earth, fixing the seasons of the year and the national boundaries within which they live,

26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

- "...from one *man*" - every human being owes their original origin to Adam; every person alive came from Adam & Eve. The origin of both our being/creation and original sin both originate in Adam (Cf. Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:21-22).

— This demonstrates that biblically, there is no such thing as "race." There is one "race": the human race, because every single person originated from the same couple (Adam & Eve).

— The Athenians prided themselves on being racially superior, but Paul told them that they, like all other people, descended from one source. This fact excludes the possibility of superiority of any race and completely undermines the notion of racism.

- "...having determined" - God also determines the "times" of nations—their seasons, when they rise and fall, and their boundaries

— God is sovereign over the political and military affairs of nations; this contradicted Greek thought that they determined their own destiny

— This opposes both Stoical fate and Epicurean chance, ascribing to periods and localities His sovereign will and prearrangements (Cf. Dan 2:21)

- "...the boundaries of their habitation" - sounds like God created national boundaries or borders, as well as the nations themselves (Cf. Gen 10:32; Deut 32:8).

- The *sine qua non* (without which you have not) of nationhood:

- Common currency
- Common language
- Common culture
- Enforceable national borders

27 **that they would seek God**, if perhaps they might **feel around** for Him and find *Him*, though He is not far from each one of us;

27 that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

27 so that they might look for God, somehow reach for him, and find him. Of course, he is never far from any one of us.

27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

- "that they would seek God" - the purpose for God creating "the boundaries of their habitation" (v26). God's purpose for revealing Himself was for people to follow the light of general revelation and thus be open to special revelation.

— Notice that Paul says that people have the ability to seek God. But doesn't this contradict Rom 3:11, which says, "There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God"? Calvinism uses Rom 3:11 to argue in favor of their doctrine of Irresistible Grace, where God regenerates a person and gives them the gift of faith so that they can believe. Without this, according to Calvinism, no one would believe.

— So how do we reconcile this seeming contradiction? Paul told the Athenians that God created borders and nations so that people would seek God, but later he wrote to the Romans that no one seeks God.

— We reconcile it by understanding the context of Rom 3:11: if God left us to our own devices, it is true that no one would seek God. However, thankfully God is active in salvation and doesn't just leave man to his own devices. God gives the following graces to the unsaved:

- Conviction ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11)
- God's Word, which is the power unto salvation (Rom 1:16)
- Gospel
- Creation (general revelation, Rom 1:18-20)
- Conscience (Rom 2:14-15)

— When Paul says in Rom 3:11 that "no one seeks for God" he is speaking of people without the graces that God gives to the unsaved (above).

28 for **in Him we live and move and exist**, as even some of your own poets have said, '**For we also are His descendants.**'

28 for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'

28 For we live, move, and exist because of him, as some of your own poets have said: '... Since we are his children, too.'

28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

- "...in Him we live and move and exist" - Paul further refutes Stoic pantheism because he knows his audience and he knows their belief system. He knows what parts of theology as revealed in general revelation go against their pagan belief system.

— In contrast to Stoic pantheism, the God Paul is describing is immanent (nearby). Paul then provided an ascending scale that reaches a climax in God:

- We live, therefore we have life
- We move, therefore there is movement

- We have our being, therefore there is existence

- "...even some of your own poets have said" - Paul reminded his audience that some of their own poets have said the same things. Among them, Aratus of Soli (315-240 BC), and the already-mentioned Cretan poet Epimenides (Paul also quoted Epimenides in Titus 1:12), who had this to say to the god Zeus:

They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one— The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies! But thou art not dead: though livest and abidest forever, For in thee we live and move and have our being

- "...For we also are His descendants" - another poet, Cleanthes, was the son of Phanius of Assos and head of the Stoic School in Athens from 263-232 BC. In his hymn to Zeus, he wrote these same words quoted by Paul here.

— It's impressive that Paul is giving his audience on Mars Hill truths about God that his audience could recognize from general revelation, and even some of their own poets. It's impressive that he knew enough about Hebrew Bible (the OT) and these ancient Greek philosophers and poets to weave together an argument, along with general revelation, that spoke to his audience.

— Paul is obviously not recognizing that everything these pagan philosophers and poets said was true, but he knew enough to call out certain things that even paganism recognized was true.

29 Therefore, since we are the descendants of God, we ought not to think that the Divine *Nature* is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by human skill and thought.

29 Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.

29 So if we are God's children, we shouldn't think that the divine being is like gold, silver, or stone, or is an image carved by humans using their own imagination and skill.

29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

- In light of Paul's description of the "unknown God" (v24-28), Paul now tells them what they need to do now that they understand who He is

— The first thing they should do is reject idolatry. They should reject God as they understand Him and embrace God as He really is.

30 So having overlooked the **times of ignorance**, God is now proclaiming to mankind that all people everywhere are to **repent**,

30 Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent,

30 Though God has overlooked those times of ignorance, he now commands everyone everywhere to repent,

30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

- "...times of ignorance" - this means that the days of idolatry are over, you now know the truth. Paul is saying to his audience that the days of worshipping these images and this temple to this unknown God are over...you are now responsible for what you know.

— It means that they now have the truth. Truth has been communicated to them as Paul used general revelation as a springboard to the truth of who God is. And now that they know the truth, God will no longer put up with idolatry, worshipping God not as He is but as people want Him to be, because people now know the truth.

— Paul said close to the same thing in Lystra (Cf. 14:16). They were previously in darkness, but now they know the truth and are now responsible to accept it. As far as pagans in the OT are concerned, God put up with their unbelief until His Son came onto the scene. Since that time, the time that God put up with paganism and unbelief have past. He is no longer overlooking the idolatry of the past because Truth in the form of Jesus has now been revealed.

— The construction of Paul's evangelism in Lystra closely mirrors his preaching on Mars Hill. In 14:15d-17, Paul describes the attributes of God from general revelation (similar to v24-28 here).

- "...repent" - *metanoēō*, *meta* = change; *noēō* = notion, idea; so "to repent" means to change your mind. Paul called on his audience to change their mind about their present understanding of God (v29) to who God really is (v24-28).

— They have been worshipping all of these idols, but now they knew who God is. As a result of that change of mind, Paul wanted them to put their trust in that God for their salvation.

— Paul here uses *metanoēō* (repent) as a synonym for *pisteuō* (believe). Any time the Bible uses the word *metanoēō* to unsaved people to be made right with God, a synonym for that is to believe (Cf. 20:21; 26:20; Rom 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25; 2 Peter 3:9).

— Repentance cannot be added to believing as a condition of salvation because over 160 passages of Scripture condition salvation upon believing only (Cf. John 3:16; Acts 16:31).

Unfortunately what is taught or stated in many churches today is that a person must "repent of their sins" and "believe." If you believe without repenting, they say, you are not "truly saved."

— Then, unfortunately, they mis-define repentance as penance. In the Rheems English Translation (the Roman Catholic English translation) they translate *metanoēō* as penance. Teaching that repentance in the form of penance is necessary for salvation is a false

gospel. Penance (sorrow for sin) is a work we do, not something Christ did, therefore believing this is to believe a gospel of works.

— The church puts many things under the banner of penance: sorrow for sin, showing contrition, walk an aisle, sign a card, pray a prayer, stand up in front of man, confess your faith, and pick up your cross and follow Jesus. All of this goes under the category of penance, which they say you have to do, plus believe. But if that's the gospel, then the gospel is based on what I do, not what He did. How is salvation a gift if I have to do all these things?

— Paul earlier, in his epistle to the Galatians, said that no man is justified by works of the law (Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16; 3:11). God is not interested in accepting us based on anything that we could do.

— How do we know that this interpretation of "repent" is correct? Look at v34: "But some men joined him and *believed*...". But didn't Paul tell them they must "repent"? This demonstrates that "repent" and "believe", in the context of evangelism (speaking to unsaved people), are synonyms (different words, same meaning).

— This same construction, unbelievers commanded to "repent" and later saying that many "believed" also happened in Acts 2:38 ("repent") and 2:44 ("all those who had believed").

— There is not a single verse in the Bible that says that to be made right with God, I need to "repent of my sins." Repentance in the Bible is not a turning *away* from something (my sin), it's a change of mind *toward* something (Jesus Christ).

[Rom 3:25]

31 because He has set a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all people by raising Him from the dead."

31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

31 because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world with justice through a man whom he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

- "because" - the reason they should repent

- "...He has set" - *histēmi*, established, fixed; this day is non-negotiable. Judgment is like a train rolling down the tracks...there's nothing you can do to stop it. The only thing you can do is be on the right side of it.

- "...He will judge" - refers to the Great White Throne judgment (Cf. Rev 20:11-15)
- "...world" - *oikoumenē*, depending on the context in which it is used, it could refer to either the "known (inhabited) world" or the "whole world" (Cf. notes on v6). The context of this verse, in contrast with v6, favors the whole world.
- "...in righteousness" - it will be a perfect judgment
- "...a Man whom He has appointed" - Jesus Christ (Cf. John 5:22)
- "...furnished proof to all people by raising Him from the dead" - how do we know this judgment is coming one day? The proof is that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. Just as the resurrection of Christ is an objective, verifiable, historical reality, so is the coming judgment of the world.

(iii) Mixed response (17:32-34)

32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, **some began to scoff**, but others said, "**We shall hear from you again concerning this.**"

32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this."

32 When they heard about a resurrection of the dead, some began joking about it, while others said, "We will hear you again about this."

32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.

- "...some *began* to scoff" - they scoffed because gnostic belief was prevalent in Athens at the time, and the gnostics taught that the physical world was bad, but the spiritual world was good.

— With the foundation of gnosticism, the belief that God became a Man would've been offensive to them because they believed the physical world was bad, so why on earth would God enter the physical world as a Man?

— The gospel is not known through the great philosophers and wise thinkers of this world because the gospel is "foolishness" (Cf. 1 Cor 1:21). They are scoffing at Paul because the gospel he is preaching is so ridiculous, so foolish, that they thought it was beneath their intellect.

— Ancient Corinth is only about 54 miles west of Athens, and they were also steeped in gnosticism. This is why Paul had to write an entire chapter about resurrection (1 Cor 15).

- "...We shall hear from you again concerning this" - some in Paul's audience didn't reject his message outright, but simply procrastinated in making a decision. This could've been because they didn't want to make a decision (repent) that day, or possibly because they were interested in what Paul was saying, considering it, and wanted to hear from him again on the topic.

33 So Paul went out from among them.

33 So Paul went out of their midst.

33 And so Paul left the meeting.

33 So Paul departed from among them.

- Paul's departure is different than other times he left...we get the idea here that Paul left voluntarily, his audience did not rise up and throw him out of the city. We also get the idea that a church was not yet born in Athens.

— There is evidence that a church was later started in Athens, but just not at this exact time.

34 But some men joined him and **believed**, among whom also were **Dionysius the Areopagite** and **a woman named Damaris**, and **others** with them.

34 But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

34 Some men joined him and became believers. With them were Dionysius, who was a member of the Areopagus, a woman named Damaris, and some others along with them.

34 Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

- "...believed" - *pisteuō*, Paul told his audience to "repent" (v30), but here it says they "believed." This is because repent and believe are synonyms when used in an evangelical/unsaved context.

- "...Dionysius the Areopagite" - the fact that Dionysius was described as an Areopagite means that he was a member of the Council of Areopagus. He was convinced by Paul's teaching and became a believer in Christ. Dionysius was one of the guys who brought Paul to Mars Hill to speak (Cf. v19).

— According to Eusebius (4th century historian), Dionysius became the bishop of the church in Athens and died as a martyr.

- "...a woman named Damaris" - Luke specifically points out that Damaris, a woman, also got saved. This follows his overall purpose in writing to Theophilus that the gospel is for everyone (Cf. 16:14).

- "...others" - Paul later wrote that the household of Stephanas was the firstfruits of Achaia (1 Cor 16:15), so he and his household may have been included in this group

— In the next century, the Church at Athens gave us Publius, Quadratus, Aristides, Athenagoras, and other bishops, martyrs. In the 4th Century, it gave us Basil and Gregory.

The church that Paul founded in Greece was the lineal predecessor of the Greek Orthodox Church, which has now become sunken in apathy, liturgy, ritual, and dead orthodoxy, and is now persecuting the fresh, alive evangelical church in those areas.

