



Book of Acts

Chapter 17

*Theme: The second missionary journey of Paul continued
(Paul in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens)*

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McGee Introduction: In this chapter we continue with Paul on his second missionary journey. In chapter 16 we were with him when he crossed over into Europe, a memorable, significant, revolutionary crossing. It brought the gospel to the ancestors of many of us, who were by no means a superior people. Actually, God chooses the weak things of this world just to let the world know that it is all because of His sovereign grace and not because of merit. We thank Him for sending the gospel over into Europe.

We went with Paul first to Philippi where he received some rough treatment. Yet, a little church came into existence in that town. When we study the Epistle to that church, we will find that it was closer to the apostle Paul than any other church or any other group of believers.

Now he continues on his journey. I hope you will follow this on the map. You will notice that he goes to Thessalonica and Berea, still traveling westward into Macedonia, then south to Athens. Thessalonica will be his next significant stop for missionary activity.¹

Acts 17:1

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

Timothy and Luke left behind in Philippi. Paul and Silas used famous Roman road: Via Egnatia, which crossed Macedonia, connecting the Adriatic Sea with the Black Sea. (Greek extension of the Via Appia).

Amphipolis = 33 miles southwest of Philippi, North coast of Aegean; A city of Macedonia built on an island in the middle of the river Strymon where it empties into the Aegean Sea. About 33 miles southwest of Philippi

Apollonia = 30 miles Southwest Amphipolis; and 30 miles west of Thessalonica.

Thessalonica = 37 miles west Apollonia, northwest extremity of Aegean.

Thessalonica = strategic center: capital city of Macedonia (200,000?).

Built by Cassander and named for his wife. It is now called Saloniki, an important city of Greece. There were many Jews here and a synagogue.

Thessalonica was one of the wealthiest and most influential cities in Macedonia. This is the first city Paul visited where his teachings attracted a large group of socially prominent citizens. The church he planted grew quickly, but in A.D. 50-51, Paul was forced out of the city by a mob (Acts 17:5-6, 10). Paul later sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the Christians were doing. Soon afterward, Paul wrote two letters to the

¹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:586). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Thessalonian believers (1 and 2 Thessalonians), encouraging them to remain faithful and to refuse to listen to false teachers who tried to refute their beliefs.

Barnes: Where was a synagogue. Greek, Where was THE SYNAGOGUE of the Jews. It has been remarked by Grotius and Kuinel, that the article used here is emphatic, and denotes that there was probably no synagogue at Amphipolis and Apollonia. This was the reason why they passed through those places without making any delay.²

McGee: As we have noted before, Paul used the synagogue as a springboard to get into a city or a community. This would lead him to the devout Jews of the city, and some of those Jews would believe. Never did all of them believe, but some of them did. In fact, most of them would reject him and this would push him right out to the Gentiles. Then some of the Gentiles believed. This is how a church would come into existence, a local church composed of Jews and Gentiles.

Amphipolis was also called “Nine Ways,” which name suggests its importance both strategically and commercially. Most cities are built on the pattern of a square, but this was like a roundhouse and the wall around it was round. It was an important station on the Via Egnatia, a Roman road which was the prominent thoroughfare through that area. It was five hundred miles from the Hellespont to Dyrrhachium on the Adriatic by this road. This would be the highway which the Roman army would use. This was the route the traders would travel. And now here come some missionaries on this road going to Thessalonica. Apollonia was another town on this same Egnatian Road.

Thessalonica was thirty-eight miles west of Apollonia on the Egnatian Road. It was inland but it was a seaport because three rivers flowed into the sea from there. It was a prominent city of that day, another Roman colony. Cassander rebuilt it in about 315 B.C. and it is thought that he named it after Thessalonica, the stepsister of Alexander the Great. There are some warm springs there and the earlier name of the town was Therma or Therme. Cassander was one of the generals of Alexander the Great, and he took over the rule of that area after the death of Alexander. At the time of Paul, however, the city was a Roman colony.³

ESV: 1–9 Paul Witnesses in Thessalonica. From Philippi Paul traveled the 94 miles (151 km) to Thessalonica, capital of Macedonia (see Introduction to 1 Thessalonians: Purpose, Occasion, and Background). In 1 Thess. 2:2, Paul recounts that they “had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.” He also mentions in Phil. 4:16 that the Philippian church helped him with his material needs during this time.⁴

Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Thessalonica were all cities on the main east-west Roman highway called the “Egnatian Way.” These cities were separated from each other by about a day's journey by foot.

² Barnes' Notes on the New Testament

³ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:586). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ <http://www.esvstudybible.org/search?q=Acts+17>

Acts 17:2

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

[reasoned] *dialegomai*, G1256, *dee-al-eg'-om-ah-ee*; middle from Greek 1223 (dia) and Greek 3004 (lego); to *say thoroughly*, i.e. *discuss* (in argument or exhortation) :- dispute, preach (unto), reason (with), speak. Forceful teaching (1 Thess 1:8).

As his manner was—He constantly offered salvation first to the Jews; and for this purpose attended their Sabbath-days' meetings at their synagogues.

Barnes: His manner was. His custom was to attend on the worship of the synagogue, and to preach the gospel to his countrymen first, Acts 9:20, 13:5,14.

LAN: A synagogue, a group of Jews who gathered for teaching and prayer, could be established wherever there were ten Jewish males. Paul's regular practice was to preach in synagogues as long as the Jews allowed it. Often those who weren't Jews would come to these services and hear Paul's preaching. For a description of a synagogue service, see Acts 13:14-15.⁵

JNTC: Being an observant Jew (13:9), it was his usual practice to attend synagogue, not an occasional event when it suited him.

Gave them *drashot*, literally, "lectured to them." A *drash* or *drashah* is, literally, a "searching"; the word denotes a sermon, exegesis, exposition or homiletical interpretation of a text. The word "*midrash*" is related. The normal form for a *drash* in the midrashic period (100 B.C.E. to 500 C.E.) was: (1) introduction, consisting of a biblical verse with illustrations and parables, leading up to (2) the particular text to be explained, now expanded by stories, allegories and associations with other texts, and (3) conclusion, consisting of exhortations and words of comfort and ending with the *Kaddish* prayer (see Mt 6:9–13N). That Sha'ul frequently used Talmudic and *midrashic* thought patterns is illustrated by Ro 10:5–13; 1C 9:9–14; 2C 3:3–18; Ga 3:16, 4:22–31.⁶

reasoned with them from the Scriptures: There was a great deal of evidence in Scripture that Paul could use in his argument. For example, Ps. 22, written over one thousand years earlier by David, describes the crucifixion of the Messiah. Paul could quote Isa. 53 and Zech. 12 to demonstrate that the suffering, death, and resurrection of the coming Messiah was predicted by the prophets. The Old Testament abounds with evidence of the Messiah's character and life that clearly matches that of Jesus (see Luke 24:25–27).⁷

⁵ Life Application Bible Notes

⁶ Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 17:2). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

⁷ The Nelson Study Bible

Acts 17:3

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.

Expositional approach: texts, relationships... Gospel defined in 1 Cor 15:1-4. Here we have again the four fundamental facts of the gospel of salvation (1 Cor. 15:1-8). Paul collected the facts of what the Messiah was to do and to suffer and then proved that they were fulfilled to the letter in Jesus Christ.

Used Old Testament (Ps 16; 22; Isa; Hosea, etc.) Emmaus road example.

[alleging] Greek: *paratithemi* (GSN-3908), setting before them (Acts 17:3; Acts 14:23; Acts 16:34; Acts 20:32; Matthew 13:24; Mark 8:6-7; 1 Cor. 10:27).

Opening and alleging—Proving by citations. His method seems to have been this:

- 1st. He collected the scriptures that spoke of the Messiah.
- 2d. He applied these to Jesus Christ, showing that in him all these scriptures were fulfilled, and that he was the Savior of whom they were in expectation. He showed also that the Christ, or Messiah, must needs suffer—that this was predicted, and was an essential mark of the true Messiah. By proving this point, he corrected their false notion of a triumphant Messiah, and thus removed the scandal of the cross.⁸

Barnes: **That Christ must needs have suffered.** That there was a fitness and necessity in his dying, as Jesus of Nazareth had done. The sense of this will be better seen by retaining the word Messiah. "That there was a fitness or necessity that the *Messiah* expected by the Jews, and predicted in their Scriptures, should suffer." This point the Jews were unwilling to admit; but it was essential to his argument in proving that Jesus was the Messiah, to show that it was foretold that he should die for the sins of men. On the necessity of this, Luke 4:26.

Have suffered. That he should die.

When Paul spoke in the synagogues, he wisely began by talking about Old Testament writings, which were the only writings at the time, and explaining how the Messiah fulfilled them, moving from the known to the unknown. This is a good strategy for us. When we witness for Christ, we should begin where people are, affirming the truth they do know, and then we can present Christ, the One who is truth.

McGee: Paul followed his usual custom of first preaching in the synagogue. He was there only three sabbaths, which means that he could not have been there longer than a month. In that limited period of time he did his missionary work. Believers came to Christ, a local church was organized, and Paul taught them. In that brief time he taught them all the great doctrines of Scripture, including the doctrine of the Rapture of the

⁸ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament

church—we know this from his First Epistle to the Thessalonians which was the first Epistle that Paul wrote. Paul had quite a ministry there in one month’s time!

Now note his message. He was “opening and alleging”—that is, from the Old Testament Scriptures—“that Christ must needs have suffered.” He preached the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, showing that this was necessary, as set forth in the Old Testament. Friend, you will not find a message given in the Book of Acts either by Peter or by Paul in which the Resurrection is not the heart of the message.

Today we find so often that the Resurrection just doesn’t seem to be the heart of the message. What we talk about today is the cross—even in fundamental circles. But, my friend, we have a living Christ today. Someone has put it this way: “There is a Man in the glory but the church has lost sight of Him.” The Lord Jesus Christ is yonder at God’s right hand at this very moment. That is very important. It is one thing to talk about the historical death of Christ nineteen hundred years ago and His resurrection on the third day, but the question is: How are you related to it? That was Paul’s great theme in the Galatian epistle. Is it meaningful to you that Christ died and that He rose again? Are you related today to that living Christ? How has this been meshed and geared into your life?

Today we have conservatism in the church and we have liberalism in the church and, very candidly, neither group seems to be getting through to *Him*. Why not? Well, because every Sunday should be an Easter—on the first day of the week He came back from the dead! It is important to mention the resurrection of Christ because we are talking about the Man in the glory.

Unfortunately, that just doesn’t seem to be the emphasis. Pastors don’t emphasize it because seminaries don’t emphasize it. Take down any theology book and study it—Strong’s, Shedd’s, Thornwall’s, Hodge’s, and you will find that all of them have a long section on the death of Christ. That’s very important; thank God they have a long section on that. But they have a short section, just a few pages on the Resurrection. I think they missed the boat there. I think they should have put in a long section about the resurrection of Christ. That was the basis of New Testament preaching. I’m emphasizing this because it is very important. Paul was in Thessalonica only three Sabbath days, and the resurrection of Christ was his message.

Notice their reception of Him.⁹

Opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, &c.—His preaching, it seems, was chiefly expository, and designed to establish from the Old Testament Scriptures (1) that the predicted Messiah was to be a suffering and dying, and therefore a rising, Messiah; (2) that this Messiah was none other than Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁰

JNTC: Explaining and quoting passages to prove, literally, “opening up and setting before them.” One hears opposition to “proof-texting,” a term that means explaining and quoting Scripture passages in order to prove something, just like Sha’ul. The main argument against proof-texting is that it can be misused: passages can be quoted out of

⁹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:586). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁰Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ac 17:3). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

context or invested with a meaning the author never intended. These are indeed abuses; “nevertheless, God’s firm foundation stands” (2 Ti 2:19): when passages are quoted with regard to context, with terms properly translated and explained, and with account taken of the culture and background of the author and his intended readers, the method is perfectly proper. It was used by the rabbis throughout Jewish history, and it is reasonable to suppose that Sha’ul’s methods of using Scripture were well within Jewish tradition.

The fact that the *Tanakh* is cited some 695 times in the New Testament shows that its writers were convinced that although God had done something unique and radically new in Yeshua, the meaning of what he had done could be adequately expressed only in relation to the *Tanakh*. This conviction set the first believers to reading the *Tanakh* with new eyes, which led to understanding how it relates to New Covenant truth. For some purposes it was sufficient to refer generally to “the Scriptures” or “the *Tanakh*” (e.g., 1C 15:3–4); but frequently major events in the life of Yeshua were related to individual texts. However, one seldom finds in the New Testament the kind of far-fetched allegory common in later rabbinic and Christian interpretation; and there is rarely the kind of sustained verse-by-verse commentary on a *Tanakh* passage that can be found already at Qumran and later in both Jewish and Christian traditions (but MJ 3:7–4:11 has this character). In conclusion, what is seen in the New Testament is individual verses used with restraint to express the writers’ underlying confidence that Yeshua the Messiah’s coming is central to fulfilling God’s purposes for Israel and the world.

The Messiah had to suffer and rise again from the dead. Sha’ul had to show this from the *Tanakh*, e.g., from Isaiah 52:13–53:12 and Psalm 16:8–11 (see 1C 15:3–4&N), because the Jewish people were expecting that the first and most important act of the Messiah would be political liberation (1:6–7&N).

This Yeshua ... is the Messiah (See Mt 1:1&N). The first task was to re-order Jewish expectations. The second, here, is to show that these new expectations are fulfilled in Yeshua.¹¹

Spurgeon: The apostle's custom was to reason from the Scriptures, and surely there is no weapon so powerful as that which is taken from the armory of inspiration.

necessary for the Christ to suffer. The Jews resisted the idea that the Messiah had to suffer, even though this is found in the OT (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; Zech. 12:10; 13:7).

Acts 17:4

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.

[believed] Greek: *peitho* (GSN-3982), be convinced, not by persuasive words (1 Cor. 2:4), but by what Scripture teaches (1 Thes. 1:7; 1 Thes. 2:13).

¹¹Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 17:3). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

[consorted with Paul and Silas] Cast their lot with the apostles. Literally, had their lot with Paul and Silas; that is, they united themselves to them, and became their disciples. The word is commonly applied to those who are partakers of an inheritance.

[chief women] Women of the best families (Acts 13:50).

BBC: Macedonian women had earlier gained a reputation for their influence, which they probably still exercised in this period. As patrons within church or synagogue, upper-class women could also enjoy higher status than was available to them in society at large due to their gender. Social conditions thus made it easier for well-to-do women than for men to convert.¹²

Clarke: The devout Greeks—That is, Gentiles who were proselytes to the Jewish religion, so far as to renounce idolatry, and live a moral life, but probably had not received circumcision.

McGee: Some of them believed. That always happens when you give out the Word of God. Some of them believe. Also some of them won't believe. The minority believe; the majority will not.

When Dr. Luke says “of the chief women not a few,” he is using his usual understatement and means that a large number of prominent women came to the Lord. How wonderful!¹³

of the chief women—female proselytes of distinction. From the First Epistle to the Thessalonians it appears that the converts were nearly all Gentiles; not only such as had before been proselytes, who would be gained in the synagogue, but such as up to that time had been idolaters (1Th 1:9, 10). During his stay, while Paul supported himself by his own labor (1Th 2:9; 2Th 3:7–9), he received supplies once and again from the Philippians, of which he makes honorable acknowledgment (Php 4:15, 16).¹⁴

Some of the Jews were persuaded and threw in their lot with Sha'ul and Sila. The normal consequence of trusting Yeshua is to remain in fellowship with those who led you to faith. Sha'ul and Sila, unlike many of today's evangelists, never left new believers to flounder for themselves; and we are not told of new believers who went off by themselves, eschewing the company of other members of the Body.

“**God-fearers.**” See 10:2.¹⁵

¹² Bible Background Commentary

¹³ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:587). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁴ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ac 17:4). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

¹⁵ Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 17:4). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Acts 17:5

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.

Jason may have been kinsman (Rom 16:21).

[**moved with envy**] Moved with jealousy.

[**baser sort**] Idlers, rowdies (Acts 19:38).

[**the house of Jason**] The house where the apostles stayed.

LAN: The Jewish leaders didn't refute the theology of Paul and Silas, but they were jealous of the popularity of these itinerant preachers. Their motives for causing the riot were rooted in personal jealousy, not doctrinal purity.

McGee: Unfortunately, we also have some "lewd fellows of the baser sort" in our churches today.

gathered a company—rather, "having raised a mob."

Acts 17:6

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;

[**rulers**] - (Greek) *politarch*, used nowhere else; found on inscription on marble arch in Thessalonica, including seven names of founders.

"Turned right side up"? Testimony of their enemies (Cf. Judas, Caiphas, et al.)

Barnes: **These that have turned the world upside down.** That have excited commotion and disturbance in other places. The charge has been often brought against the gospel, that it has been the occasion of confusion and disorder.

All the persecution that follows Paul is caused by the Jews. (Note Luke's emphasis.)

BBC: Jason was a common Greek name but was also common among Hellenized Jews, as inscriptions and business documents alike testify. He is probably a Jewish host with whom Paul and Silas stay while working there. *Delatores*, or accusers, were necessary to open a case under Roman law.

LAN: We don't know much about Jason except that he evidently was the local host and sponsor of Paul and Silas; thus he took the heat for all the problems. Jason is just one of many "unsung heroes" who faithfully played their part to help spread the gospel. Because of Jason's courage, Paul and Silas were able to minister more effectively. You may not receive much attention (in fact you may receive only grief) for your service for Christ. But God wants to use you. Lives will be changed because of your courage and faithfulness.

LAN: What a reputation these early Christians had! The power of the gospel revolutionized lives, broke down all social barriers, threw open prison doors, caused people to care deeply for one another, and stirred them to worship God. Our world needs to be turned upside down, to be transformed. The gospel is not in the business of merely improving programs and encouraging good conduct, but of dynamically transforming lives. Take courage and ask God how you can help spread his Good News all over *your* world.

McGee: Now don't put that down as an oratorical gesture or hyperbole. When they said that these men were turning the world upside down, that is exactly what they meant. When Christianity penetrated that old Roman Empire it was a revolution. It had a tremendous effect.

Today we don't see much revolution except in the wrong direction. It's too bad we can't have a great revolution of turning back to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the Word of God. Our country is a country filled with hypocrisy. We pretend that we are a Christian nation. We pretend that our leaders are Christian, that all the politicians are Christians, that everyone is a Christian. Friend, we are one of the most pagan nations this world has ever known. Christianity today is mostly a pretense. We need to recognize that we need to get back to the Word of God and to the living Christ. How important that is!

men who have turned the world upside down. These hostile opponents spoke better than they knew, for the spread of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire was the beginning of a movement that would change the course of history forever.

Acts 17:7

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

Under the emperors, it was declared high treason to violate the majesty of the state.

[contrary to the decrees of Caesar] Sedition is generally charged by persecutors of religion.

Barnes: **These all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar.** The charge against them was that of sedition and rebellion against the Roman emperor. Grotius on this verse remarks, that the Roman people, and after them the emperors, would not permit the name of king to be mentioned in any of the vanquished provinces, except by their permission.

[decrees of Caesar] See Acts 16:4.

[king, one Jesus] The same attempt to raise the charge of high treason, as in John 18:36-37; John 19:12. The apostles no doubt spoke of the kingdom of heaven and of Christ the coming king, but never did they say that He was in competition with any king before the prophecies are fulfilled and the Messiah comes to earth.

These all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar—Persecutors always strive to affect the lives of the objects of their hatred, by accusing them of sedition, or plots against the state.

The Jewish leaders had difficulty manufacturing an accusation that would be heard by the city government. The Romans did not care about theological disagreements between the Jews and these preachers. Treason, however, was a serious offense in the Roman empire. Although Paul and Silas were not advocating rebellion against Roman law, their loyalty to another king sounded suspicious.

JNTC: They assert that there is another king, Yeshua. Compare 16:20–23&NN, also the accusations made against Yeshua at his own trial (Yn 18:33–38, 19:12) and his responses. He is King. He will rule the world. However, at present his rulership is not in this world (Yn 18:36), so that Sha’ul taught believers to obey temporal laws (Ro 13:1–7) and Kefa wrote, “Honor the king” (1 Ke 2:17). In the light of the emissaries’ own teaching, the accusation against Sha’ul and his companions is false.¹⁶

Spurgeon: Earnest Christians have often been attacked with this handy weapon--they are innovators, and, of course, are the enemies of "our glorious constitution," causing infinite disturbance by their new-fangled ways. Verily, church history repeats itself.

Acts 17:8

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

Barnes: And they troubled the people. They excited the people to commotion and alarm. The rulers feared the tumult that was excited, and the people feared the Romans, when they heard the charge that there were rebels against the government in their city. It does not appear, that there was a disposition in the rulers or the people to persecute the apostles; but they were excited and alarmed by the representations of the Jews, and by the mob that they had collected.

¹⁶Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 17:7). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Acts 17:9

And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.

[**security**] Greek: *hikanos* (GSN-2425), substantial bail.
Security: to keep peace; leave town?

Barnes: **And when they had taken security of Jason.** This is an expression taken from courts, and means that Jason and the other gave satisfaction to the magistrates for the good conduct of Paul and Silas, and became responsible for it. Whether it was by depositing a sum of money, and by thus giving bail, is not quite clear. The sense is, that they did it in accordance with the Roman usages, and gave sufficient security for the good conduct of Paul and Silas. Heuman supposes that the pledge given was, that they should leave the city. Michaelis thinks that they gave a pledge that they would no more harbour them; but that if they returned again to them, they would deliver them to the magistrates.

Paul desired, expected soon to return (1 Thess 2:17, 18).
Timothy, left at Philippi, sent to them (1 Thess 3:5-7).

BBC: As their host (Acts 17:6), Jason is held responsible for their actions and required to post bond for them, as if they were members of his household. A fine was a lenient penalty as far as Roman courts went, and a bond to curtail troublemakers would not have been unusual. But given the charge (Acts 17:7), had Paul himself been caught, he might not have been so fortunate. The politarchs' decision would stand till they left office (cf. 1 Thes. 2:18).

The **money as security** was given as a guarantee that there would be no more disturbance of the peace as a result of Paul's preaching. As a practical matter, this probably meant that Paul would have to leave Thessalonica, since his Jewish opponents would continue to stir up trouble. This may have been "Satan's hindrance" (1 Thess. 2:18), which Paul said prevented his return to Thessalonica.

Acts 17:10

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming *thither* went into the synagogue of the Jews.

[**Berea**] About 45 miles from Thessalonica.
Small out-of-the-way town, off the beaten path, in foothills of Olympic Mountains, (Paul not a healthy man; a fugitive that needed continuing assistance...) This was another city of Macedonia, on the same gulf with Thessalonica; and not far from Pella, the birth place of Alexander the Great.

You would think that all this would dampen the enthusiasm of Paul, that it would slow him down. It didn't slow him one bit and he is still going. He goes to Berea, which is a town down closer to the coast.

Acts 17:11

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.

Thessalonica were persuaded (by argument); Bereans believed—spiritually apprehended; searched (like stalking game), John 5:39.

Without Scriptures, we are lost in a sea of relativism...

Never follow a single man: Cephas, Apollos, Paul...or even your pastor, or teacher.

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...

(Sopater became ardent helper..Acts 20:4)

[noble] Greek: *eugenes* (GSN-2104), well born. Here; Luke 19:12; 1 Cor. 1:26. Hence more courteous and of a better disposition, better education, and more polished.

Three Acts of Nobility:

1. Receive the Word of God with all readiness and open-mindedness.
2. Search the Scriptures daily to know the truth.
3. Believe what is plainly written in the Scriptures (Acts 17:12).

Barnes: These were more noble. This literally means more noble by birth; descended from more illustrious ancestors. But here the word is used to denote a quality of mind and heart; they were more generous, liberal, and noble in their feelings; more disposed to inquire candidly into the truth of the doctrines advanced by Paul and Silas. It is always proof of a noble, liberal, and ingenuous disposition, to be willing to examine into the truth of any doctrine presented. The writer refers here particularly to the Jews.

Barnes: They received the word, etc. They listened attentively and respectfully to the gospel. They did not reject and spurn it, as unworthy of examination. This is the first particular in which they were more noble than those in Thessalonica.

Barnes: Daily. Not only on the Sabbath, and in the synagogue; but they made it a daily employment. It is evident from this, that they had the Scriptures; and this is one proof that Jewish families would, if possible, obtain the oracles of God.

LAN: How do you evaluate sermons and teachings? The people in Berea opened the Scriptures for themselves and searched for truths to verify or disprove the message they heard. Always compare what you hear with what the Bible says. A preacher or teacher who gives God's true message will never contradict or explain away anything that is found in God's Word.

McGee: These people were reasonable. They searched the Scriptures, and there came into existence a church in Berea. We don't hear much about that church. It is interesting that the strongest churches arose where the persecution was the greatest. One of the troubles today is that the church is not being persecuted. In fact, the church is just taken for granted. The average Christian is just a person to be taken for granted. It wasn't that way in the first century.

JNTC: Berea As soon as they arrived, they went to the synagogue. Now the people here were of nobler character than the ones in Thessalonica; they eagerly welcomed the message, checking the *Tanakh* every day to see if the things Sha'ul was saying were true. Many of them came to trust. Today such openmindedness is similarly welcomed by Messianic Jews and is praiseworthy. We are confident that when the Good News is given this sort of a fair hearing, and the hearers rely on the facts, including **the *Tanakh***, to verify the message, the response today will often be like that in Berea, where many Jewish people came to trust in Yeshua—a clear success for Sha'ul's Jewish evangelism.¹⁷

Note they went to the Old Testament to see if what Paul was teaching was true. They did not have the New Testament. Paul couldn't tell them to go read his latest book to see if these things were true.

Noble translates the Greek *eugenēs*, which originally meant “of noble birth” or “well born.” The word was also applied to people who exhibited noble behavior, in that they were open-minded, fair, and thoughtful. Thus Luke saw the Bereans as “more noble” in their receiving Paul's message with all eagerness, and then in looking to the written words of the OT as their final authority, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. By commending this activity, Luke encourages this searching of the Scriptures as a pattern for all believers and also gives support to the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture, the idea that the Bible can be understood rightly, not only by scholars but also by ordinary people who read it eagerly and diligently, with conscious dependence on God for help.

Acts 17:12

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

Many, including prominent women.

Clarke: Therefore many of them believed—From the manner in which they heard, received, and examined the word preached to them, it was not likely they could be deceived. And, as it was the truth that was proclaimed to them, it is no wonder that they apprehended, believed, and embraced it.

¹⁷Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 17:10). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Barnes: Therefore. As the result of their examination. They found that the doctrines of Paul and Silas accorded with the Old Testament. This result will commonly follow when people search the Scriptures. Much is gained when men can be induced to examine the Bible. We may commonly take it for granted that such an examination will result in their conviction of the truth. The most prominent and invariable cause of infidelity is found in the fact that men will not investigate the Scriptures. Many infidels have confessed that they had never carefully read the New Testament. Thomas Paine confessed that he wrote the first part of the "Age of Reason" without having a Bible at hand; and without its being possible to procure one where he then was, (in Paris.) "I had," says he, "neither Bible nor Testament to refer to, though I was writing against both; nor could I procure any."-*Age of Reason*, p. 65, Edin. 1831. Also p. 33. None have ever read the Scriptures with candour, and with the true spirit of prayer, who have not been convinced of the truth of Christianity, and been brought to submit their souls to its influence and its consolations. The great thing which Christians desire their fellow-men to do, is candidly to search the Bible; and when this is done, they confidently expect that they will be truly converted to God.

Acts 17:13

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.

Upper classes of these European Greek and Romanized towns were probably better educated than those in Asia Minor.

Spurgeon: Earnest saints have earnest enemies; pleased with their success at Thessalonica, the Jews used the same tactics at Berea; yet they only gave wings to the feet of the missionaries and kept the light moving on.

Acts 17:14

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

[immediately the brethren sent away Paul] They obeyed the command of Matthew 10:23.

Barnes: Sent away Paul. In order to secure his safety. A similar thing had been done in Thessalonica, Acts 17:10. The tumult was great; and there was no doubt, such was the hostility of the Jews, that the life of Paul would be endangered, and they therefore resolved to secure his safety.

Barnes: As it were. Rather, "even to the sea," for that is its signification. It does not imply that there was any feint or sleight in the case, as if they intended to deceive their pursuers. They took him to the sea coast, not far from Berea, and from that place he probably went by sea to Athens.

immediately sent Paul off. Apparently most of the opposition was directed against Paul, who was the main spokesman, so the believers sent him away, while allowing Silas and Timothy to remain among them. The phrase **to the sea** indicates that they took Paul as far as the coast, but the text does not specify whether Paul then traveled to Athens by ship or by land, along the coastal road (a distance of 222 miles or 357 km).

Acts 17:15

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.

Silas and Timothy left behind to establish a church.

Athens

At the time of Paul's visit to Athens, Corinth was the commercial and political center under the Roman Caesars. (Athens belonged to province of Achaia, whose capital was Corinth.)

Athens still the university center, heir to the great philosophers — the city of Pericles and Demosthenes; of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Sophocles and Euripides — men who established patterns of thought that have affected human learning for centuries.

400 years after the golden age of Greece, but still a center for art, beauty, culture, and knowledge. Still the most sacred shrine of the fair humanities of paganism...

Paul left alone (Luke left in Thessalonica; Silas and Timothy left in Berea...)

Sent for Silas and Timothy (heading for Corinth). When Timothy arrives, he is immediately sent back to Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:1-2).¹⁸

[Athens] The chief city of Greece famed for its learning (Acts 17:15-34; 1 Thes. 3:1).¹⁹

Athens, with its magnificent buildings and many gods, was a center for Greek culture, philosophy, and education. Philosophers and educated men were always ready to hear something new, so they invited Paul to speak to them at the meeting of the Areopagus (Acts 17:18-19).

McGee: Paul goes to Athens. He will wait for Silas and Timotheus there. He probably had said to them, "You go back to check on the believers in Thessalonica and see how the church is progressing there, and check on the believers in Berea; then join me in Athens."

Silas and Timotheus to come to him with all speed—He probably wished their company and aid in addressing himself to so new and great a sphere as Athens. Accordingly it is added that he "waited for them" there, as if unwilling to do anything till they came. That they did come, there is no good reason to doubt (as some excellent critics do). For though Paul himself says to the Thessalonians that he "thought it good to be left at Athens alone" (1Th 3:1), he immediately adds that he "sent Timotheus to establish and

¹⁸ Chuck Missler, Notes on Acts, khouse.org

¹⁹ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

comfort them” (Ac 17:2); meaning, surely, that he despatched him from Athens back to Thessalonica. He had indeed sent for him to Athens; but, probably, when it appeared that little fruit was to be reaped there, while Thessalonica was in too interesting a state to be left uncherished, he seems to have thought it better to send him back again. (The other explanations which have been suggested seem less satisfactory). Timotheus rejoined the apostle at Corinth (Ac 18:5).²⁰

a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible. Luke does not at this point give many details about the travels of Silas and Timothy, but Paul gives more information in 1 Thessalonians 3, and Luke gives more details at Acts 18:1, 5. These passages reveal the following sequence: (1) Paul traveled to Athens, leaving Silas and Timothy in Berea (17:14–15). (2) Paul summoned Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens (v. 15). (3) Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Athens (v. 16; 1 Thess. 3:1–2). (4) Paul became concerned for the churches he had just founded in Macedonia (in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea), so he sent Timothy to Thessalonica to find out how that church was doing amid its persecution and opposition (1 Thess. 3:1–2). At the same time he must have sent Silas somewhere else in Macedonia (Acts 18:5), being willing to be left at Athens “alone” (1 Thess. 3:1). It is likely that Silas went at least to Philippi but possibly also to Berea. (5) Paul “left Athens and went to Corinth” (Acts 18:1). (6) Silas and Timothy joined Paul again in Corinth, bringing good news from the churches of Macedonia (18:5; 1 Thess. 3:6). (7) From Corinth, Paul wrote his two letters to the church at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; both of these letters come from “Paul, Silvanus [= Silas], and Timothy”).²¹

Acts 17:16

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

[**stirred**] Greek: *paroxunomai* (GSN-3947), here; 1 Cor. 13:5.

[**wholly given to idolatry**] No city in the world had more idols than here.

wholly given to idolatry—“covered with idols”; meaning the city, not the inhabitants. Petronius, a contemporary writer at Nero’s court, says satirically that it was easier to find a god at Athens than a man. This “stirred the spirit” of the apostle. “The first impression which the masterpieces of man’s taste for art left on the mind of St. Paul was a revolting one, since all this majesty and beauty had placed itself between man and his Creator, and bound him the faster to his gods, who were not God. Upon the first contact, therefore, which the Spirit of Christ came into with the sublimest creations of human art, the

²⁰Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ac 17:15). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

²¹ <http://www.esvstudybible.org/search?q=Acts+17>

judgment of the Holy Ghost—through which they have all to pass—is set up as “the strait gate,” and this must remain the correct standard for ever” [BAUMGARTEN].²²

Acts 17:17

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.

Clarke: Disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews—Proving that Jesus was the Messiah: and with the devout persons, probably heathens, proselyted to the Jewish religion. And in the market: I suppose the market here means some such place as our exchange, where people of business usually met, and where the philosophers conversed and reasoned. The agora was probably like the Roman forum, and like places of public resort in all countries, where people of leisure assembled to converse, hear the news, etc.

Barnes: And in the market. In the forum. It was not only the place where provisions were sold, but was also a place of great public concourse. In this place the philosophers were not unfrequently found engaged in public discussion.

he reasoned. Witnessing for Christ was a matter of patient persuasion. Although Paul saw a few people come to faith here in Athens (v. 34), he had no helpers with him, there is no record of any miracles being done, and there is no record of a church being established. Devout persons means God-fearing Gentiles (see note on 8:26–27).

Acts 17:18

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

Sight-seeing: temples of the Acropolis, crowned by the Parthenon; temples, theaters, marketplace (the Agora) 30,000 “gods.”

There probably is no temple, altar, or idol of Athens that is not reproduced in our cities today:

Athene, the mother of the mental

Demeter, mother of the earth,

Zeus, the god of force

Rumor, the base goddess had her Scriptures issued every morning until the very life of man is made restless by her lying..

Shame, Philanthropy, et al..

We are still idolaters... Ex 20:3-6; Isa 44:9-20; Jer 10:3-5; 1 Cor 1:21.

²²Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ac 17:16). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

[philosophers] Only use of the Greek: *philosophos* (GSN-5386).

[Epicureans] Followers of Epicurus, 342-279 B.C., who did not believe in any gods except in name. They denied that they exercised any government over the world or its inhabitants. They held that the chief good consisted in gratification of the appetites and that pleasure was the only end in life.

[Stoicks] Followers of Zeno, 270 B.C., who believed in gods, but that all human affairs were governed by fate, and that no good came from various deities. They held that no supreme good was virtue, and that man should be free from passion and moved by neither joy nor grief, pleasure nor pain. They were the Fatalists and Pantheists of that day. Both these sects denied the resurrection of the body; the former denied immortality of the soul (Acts 17:18).

[What will this babbler say? ... May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?] This is questions 50-51 in the Book of Acts. The next question is in Acts 19:2.

[babblers] Greek: *spermologos* (GSN-4691), seed-picker, chatterer. The name of a small bird that lives by picking up seeds on the road. It was applied to men who gathered scraps of information from others.

[setter forth] A proclaimer, as in Acts 17:3,13,23.

[strange gods] Greek: *xenos* (GSN-3581) daimonion (GSN-1140), foreign demons. Daimonion is translated "devils" 52 times and "gods" only here. See Demons or Unclean Spirits. Preaching strange gods was forbidden both in Rome and in Athens. One charge against Socrates was that of introducing strange divinities. Heathen theology taught that the theoi (GSN-2316) were gods of nature, and the daimon (GSN-1142) were deified men. Paul had taught that Jesus was a man, crucified, risen and exalted at the right hand of God. This was the same to them as the deification of heroes who had been honored for their special services to mankind. Hence, the use of the term daimonion in connection with Jesus. To them He was not a god of nature, but a daimon or a deified man. The heathen Greeks also were used to personifying abstract ideas, as victory, pity, etc., and they may have thought that Jesus and the resurrection were two new divinities Paul was introducing. At least, they thought they had just grounds for bringing him before the council of the Athenians.

[Jesus, and the resurrection] Paul had so emphasized Jesus and the resurrection that the heathen Greeks remembered that much of his message.

LAN: The Epicureans and Stoics were the dominant philosophers in Greek culture. The Epicureans believed that seeking happiness or pleasure was the primary goal of life. By contrast, the Stoics placed thinking above feeling and tried to live in harmony with nature and reason, suppressing their desire for pleasure. Thus they were very disciplined.

this babbler: Some of the philosophers in Athens mocked Paul, calling him a “seed picker” or gutter sparrow, a small bird that snatches up scraps of food. Paul was being accused of grabbing at bits of knowledge without fully digesting or thinking through what he taught. Because Paul did not speak eloquently (1 Cor. 2:1), some philosophers in Athens arrogantly ridiculed him, arguing that he was not sophisticated enough to be taken seriously. Others thought that Paul was advocating foreign gods named Jesus and Resurrection, incorrectly understood to be a male and female deity.²³

Acts 17:19

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

[**Areopagus**] The hill of Mars where the great council of the Athenians was held (Acts 17:22). It was the most sacred and reputable court in the Gentile world. The legend is that Mars was tried there by a court of 12 gods for the murder of Halirrhothius, son of Neptune, but was acquitted. The justice administered in this court was held to be so strict and impartial that both the accused and the accusers were satisfied with the decision. Judges held court at night so they could not be distracted from the great business by the sight of the accused to pity or despise. The pleaders were strictly forbidden the use of any means whatever to excite either pity or aversion, or to affect the passions, everything being confined to simple relation, or statement of facts. The two persons involved, placed with bleeding members of an animal (slain on the occasion) between them, were obliged to take oath with a warning that if they did not tell the truth they and their families would be liable to such a horrible death. The gods of the infernal world whose temple was next to the court were called to witness the oaths. When the case was fully heard, the judges gave their decision by throwing flint pebbles on one of two boards or tables; one for condemnation and the other for acquittal of the person in question.

Barnes: May we know. We would know. This seems to have been a respectful inquiry; and it does not appear that Paul was brought there for the sake of *trial*. There are no accusations; no witnesses; none of the forms of trial. They seem to have resorted thither because it was the place where the subject of religion was usually discussed, and because it was a place of confluence of the citizens and judges and wise men of Athens, and of foreigners. The design seems to have been not to try him, but fairly to canvass the claims of his doctrines. See Acts 17:21. It was just an instance of the inquisitive spirit of the people of Athens, willing to hear before they condemned, and to examine before they approved.

LAN: For a time the Council or Court (here called the Areopagus) met on a low hill in Athens near the Acropolis. As Paul stood there and spoke about the one true God, his audience could look down on the city and see the many idols representing gods that Paul knew were worthless.

²³ The Nelson Study Bible

McGee: The Areopagus is a very peculiar formation of rock on top of which the Parthenon and the buildings connected with it stand. Frankly, it is a very lovely setting, beautiful buildings and beautiful statues, but a city wholly given over to idolatry. It is up from the market place of the city and Paul is brought there to speak. Probably every preacher who visits there reads Paul's sermon from the top of Mars' Hill. When I was there another preacher began to read it, and since I didn't like the way he was reading it, I went way over to the other side of the rock. I sat with my Bible and read it silently. It was a thrilling experience.

Now these Greek philosophers say to him, "May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest is?" They want to know more about it. They are completely in the dark. They are worse off than the Galatians or the people in Philippi and Thessalonica. Why? Because they think they know something. The very hardest people in the world to reach with the Word of God and the gospel are church members because they think they don't need it. They think the gospel is for the man on skid row and for some of their friends. Some church members can be mean and sinful and yet not recognize they really need a Savior, not only to save them from sin, but also to make their lives count for God.

Acts 17:20

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

Clarke: Thou bringest—strange things to our ears—The doctrine of the apostles was different from any they had ever heard: it was wholly spiritual and divine; thus it was strange: it was contrary to their customs and manners; and thus it was strange also. As it spoke much of the exaltation and glory of Jesus Christ, they supposed him to be a setter forth of strange gods: and, therefore, on the authority of the laws, which forbade the introduction of any new deities, or modes of worship, he was called before the Areopagus.

Acts 17:21

(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.)

The whole atmosphere in Athens was very much like a university atmosphere, the public pastime was to exchange ideas and traffic in new thoughts.

[new thing] The newest thing, the latest idea.

Barnes: And strangers which were there. Athens was greatly distinguished for the celebrity of its schools of philosophy. It was at that time at the head of the literary world. Its arts and its learning were celebrated in all lands. It is known, therefore, that it was the favourite resort of men of other nations, who came there to become acquainted with its institutions, and to listen to its sages.

McGee: In this same way America is going to seed today. Have you ever listened to the talk shows? They are boring to tears. Everyone is trying to come up with something new. Each one is trying to say something novel. They try so hard to say something smart, something sophisticated; yet it is the same old story. Athens tried the same thing.

There must have been quite a bunch of loafers back in Athens. They didn't work—they didn't do anything. They just talked, propounding new theories and new ideas. The human family seems to reach that place of sophistication. They think they know something when they don't. They don't know the most important fact in the whole universe.

There are those who say that Paul failed on Mars' Hill, that he fell flat on his face at Athens. I totally disagree with that. I believe this was one of the greatest messages that Paul ever preached.

Acts 17:22

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.

[**superstitious**] - mistranslated in English, "very religious" would better fit Paul's intent.

Paul begins where the people are... did not denounce them, did not attack their idolatry; you are "extremely devout," "very god-fearing." An altar to the Unknown god: how this voices the agony of humanity!

[**the midst of Mars' hill**] In the midst of the judges in court.

[**too superstitious**] Literally, greatly addicted to religion.

BBC: It was customary to begin a speech by complimenting the hearers in the opening *exordium*, designed to secure their favor. This practice seems to have been forbidden at the Areopagus, but this would not prevent Paul from starting on a respectful note. "Religious" meant that they were religiously observant, not that he agreed with their religion (KJV "superstitious" does not convey the right idea). His hearers may not have been extremely religious, though Stoics accepted the existence of the gods. Philosophers in Roman times dealt mainly with ethics, whereas pagan religion involved ritual rather than ethics.

LAN: Paul was well prepared to speak to this group. He came from Tarsus, an educational center, and had the training and knowledge to present his beliefs clearly and persuasively. Paul was a rabbi, taught by the finest scholar of his day, Gamaliel, and he had spent much of his life thinking and reasoning through the Scriptures.

It is not enough to teach or preach with conviction. Like Paul, we must be prepared. The more we know about the Bible, what it means, and how to apply it to our lives, the more convincing our words will be. This does not mean that we should avoid presenting the gospel until we feel adequately prepared. We should work with what we know, but

always want to know more in order to reach more people and answer their questions and arguments more effectively.

Paul's address is a good example of how to communicate the gospel. Paul did not begin by reciting Jewish history, as he usually did, for this would have been meaningless to his Greek audience. He began by building a case for the one true God, using examples they understood (Acts 17:22-23). Then he established common ground by emphasizing what they agreed on about God (Acts 17:24-29). Finally he moved his message to the person of Christ, centering on the resurrection (Acts 17:30-31). When you witness to others, you can use Paul's approach: use examples, establish common ground, and then move people toward a decision about Jesus Christ.

McGee: He begins his message quite formally, "Ye men of Athens." Then he says, "I perceive ... ye are too superstitious." The word *superstitious* is wholly inadequate to say what Paul really means. He is saying that he perceives they are in all things too religious. The Athenians were very religious. Athens was filled with idols. There was no end to the pantheon of gods which the Athenians and the Greeks had. There were gods small and gods great; they had a god for practically everything. That is what Paul is saying. They were too religious.

I sometimes hear people ask, "Why should we send missionaries to foreign countries? Those people have their religion." I suppose that when Paul went down to Athens, somebody said, "Why are you going down there? They have religion." I am sure Paul would have answered, "That's their problem; they have too much religion." A preacher friend of mine said many years ago, "When I came to Christ, I lost my religion." There are a great many folk in our churches today who need to lose their religion so they can find Christ. That is the great problem. Some folk say, "People are too bad to be saved." The real problem is that people are too good to be saved. They think they are religious and worthy and good. My friend, we are to take the gospel to all because all men are lost without Christ, which is the reason Paul went to Athens. The Athenians needed to hear the message of the gospel.

Notice that in Athens Paul did not go to a synagogue. He had no springboard in Athens. He begins his masterly address to "Ye men of Athens." After he makes the observation that they are too religious, he continues:

Acts 17:23

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.

"Ignorantly" = "not knowing him..."

[**devotions**] Greek: *sebasma* (GSN-4574), objects of worship. Only here and in 2 Thes. 2:4.

[declare I unto you] Since it was a capital offense to preach a new deity in Athens, Paul simply used this inscription as a text then declared that the UNKNOWN GOD they did not know was the one he was representing and making known to them. He was not bringing a new deity, but making known the one they already acknowledged.

Eighteen Doctrines of God:

1. Creator of all things (Acts 17:24).
2. Lord of heaven and earth (Acts 17:24).
3. Dwells not in man-made temples.
4. Is not worshiped by man's hands.
5. Universal providence (Acts 17:25)
6. Made all people of one kind (Acts 17:26).
7. He planned habitations (Acts 17:26).
8. He planned the ages (Acts 17:26; Acts 15:18).
9. A God-provided salvation (Acts 17:27)
10. Omnipresence (Acts 17:27)
11. God, the source of all life (Acts 17:28)
12. He is a living Being (Acts 17:29).
13. Revelation of God (Acts 17:30)
14. Repentance commanded (Acts 17:30)
15. Great judgment day appointed (Acts 17:31; Rev. 20:1-15; Matthew 12:36; Romans 2:16)
16. The whole world to be judged in righteousness (Acts 17:31; Rev. 20:11-15)
17. Jesus Christ to judge (Acts 17:31; John 5)
18. Resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees justice to all (Acts 17:31; 1 Cor. 15)

LAN: The Athenians had built an idol to the unknown god for fear of missing blessings or receiving punishment. Paul's opening statement to the men of Athens was about their unknown god. Paul was not endorsing this god, but using the inscription as a point of entry for his witness to the one true God.

LAN: Paul explained the one true God to these educated men of Athens; although these men were, in general, very religious, they did not know God. Today we have a "Christian" society, but to most people, God is still unknown. We need to proclaim who he is and make it clear what he did for all mankind through his Son Jesus Christ. We cannot assume that even religious people around us truly know Jesus or understand the importance of faith in him.

McGee: "I ... beheld your devotions." He saw their objects of worship. He noted their altars and their idols and their temples. In fact, that very beautiful temple called the Parthenon was a temple built to Athena, the virgin goddess of the Athenians. There were idols all around. Paul said, "I observed all of this, and amidst the idols I found an altar inscribed to the unknown god."

Now an altar to the unknown god could mean that the Athenians were broad-minded. They didn't want to leave anyone out. If someone had come to Athens and said, "How is it you don't have an altar to my god?" they would have answered, "Well, this altar is

really to your god.” That way any stranger could come to worship at the altar to the unknown god, believing it was built for his god.

Or it could mean that they recognized there is a God whom they did not know. Many pagan folk recognize that behind their idolatry is a living and true God. They know nothing about Him, and they do not know how to approach Him. They have traditions that back in the dim and distant past their ancestors did worship Him. This could have been the case with the Athenians.

Paul uses this as the springboard for his message. He says he wants to talk to them about this unknown God. He says he wants to tell them about the God whom they don’t know. Perhaps that is not as diplomatic as his first approach. After all, the Athenians thought they knew everything. This crowd of philosophers met in Athens and talked back and forth, as philosophers do on college campuses today. And now Paul begins to talk to them about the God they do not know. Who is He? Well, first of all, He is the God of creation.

Acts 17:24

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;

Creation testimony—Rom 1 [The idea of creation is nowhere to be found in classical literature and ancient philosophy...]

[No one is ever going to believe in the resurrection if he does not believe in creation.]

[made the world and all things therein] Paul shows here that idol gods shut up in temples could not be the Unknown God, for they were less than the places in which they were contained. This was an attack against all of Greek idolatry.

[dwelleth not in temples made with hands] Paul quotes Stephen, the man whom he first heard preach (Acts 7:48).

McGee: God had made very clear all the way through the Old Testament—even when He gave to Israel the pattern for the tabernacle and the temple—that He did not dwell in one geographical spot. Solomon acknowledged this in his prayer at the dedication of the temple: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?” (1 Kings 8:27). These men in the Old Testament recognized that God the Creator, the living God, could not live in a building that had been made by man. Man lives in a universe that God has made. Why does man get the idea that he can build a building for God to live in?

Acts 17:25

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

God does not live in temples made with hands. Paul probably pointed to the Parthenon, home of Athene, the goddess for whom the city was named.

Giver, without needs Himself. Neither buildings for worship nor priest to minister with human hands.

[worshipped] Greek: *therapeuo* (GSN-2323), wait upon, minister, heal. True worship is such and will do all this (John 4:24; Isaiah 40:31; Acts 1:4).

[as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things] This was an attack against the images and all service and supply to them. The Unknown God had need of nothing, for He was alive, giving life, breath, and other things to all creatures.

McGee: Here is a masterly stroke by Paul. He tells them, "God doesn't need anything from you. You built an altar to Him; you bring offerings to feed Him"—they wanted this unknown God to know that they were thinking of Him. Now Paul says, "God doesn't need anything from you! God is on the giving end. He gives you life. He gives you your breath. He has given you the sun, the moon, and the stars. He has given you all things." These Athenians worshiped the sun. They said that Apollo came dragging his chariot across the sky every day. Paul says that the sun is something that God has made, and it is a gift for you. The Creator is the living God. He is the One who has given you everything. By the way, He gives you salvation also. He not only gives you physical things but also gives you spiritual gifts.

Paul speaks of the God who made the world and everything in it, including mankind. He identifies this one true God as superior to all the lesser, competing deities that might be worshiped in Athens, with all their foibles and weaknesses. When Paul says that "God . . . does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands" (cf. 7:48), it is easy to imagine him gesturing toward the magnificent temple, the Parthenon, that stood just above him and his hearers on the acropolis. Paul was claiming that the true God of heaven and earth does not live in temples like the Parthenon and is not served by the sacrifices which the Athenians regularly brought to their temples.

Acts 17:26

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;

One race, one source, one species. God draws men; does not seek to evade them! Search: Heb 11:6; Jer 29:13,14.

[hath determined] : opposes both. Stoical fate and Epicurean chance, ascribing to periods and localities his sovereign will and prearrangements (Dan 2:21).

Separation in Scripture

This verse says God made "all nations of men" from "one blood"; it also speaks of "the bounds of their habitation." In spite of a common ancestry, from Adam first and later Noah, it was God's will for man to scatter over the earth, to "be fruitful, and multiply" (Genesis 1:28; Genesis 8:17; Genesis 9:1). Man's failure to obey caused God to confuse his language (Genesis 11:1-9) and to physically separate the nations by dividing the earth into continents (Genesis 10:25). Both physically and spiritually, separation has been a consistent theme for God's people.

McGee: So much has been made of this "one blood" business that I think we need to dissipate any wrong notions here. A better translation is, "He made from one every nation of mankind." God has made one humanity. This verse is not talking about brotherhood. The only brotherhood which Scripture knows is the brotherhood of those who are in Christ Jesus. Perhaps I should amend that by saying there is a brotherhood of sin. We all are sinners. Paul's statement that God "hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" is fascinating.

Not only is He the God who created the universe and who created human beings, but it is interesting to note that He also put them in certain geographical locations.

My doctor is a cancer specialist and he has told me to stay out of the sun here in California because I am a blonde. There seems to be even a medical reason why God put the darker races where the sun shines and put the light-skinned races up north where there is not so much sun. So some of us who are blonde and light-skinned need to be very careful about too much exposure to the sun. God is the One who has determined the geographical locations for His creatures. I guess some of my ancestors should have stayed where they belonged. Maybe I'm kind of out of place here in California, but I'm glad to be here and I try to be careful about protecting myself from too much sunshine. Now that is just a little sideline as an illustration.

God has put nations in certain places. It is interesting that the thing that has produced the wars of the past is that nations don't want to stay where they belong; they want someone else's territory. That has been the ultimate cause for every war that has ever been fought.

One man refers to Adam, in whom all people find their ancestral unity, an idea that would appeal to the Stoics' strong sense of human brotherhood. Paul thus affirms the historicity of Adam and the descent of the entire human race from him. This also rules out any kind of racism, since the various ethnic groups come from one man. Having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place indicates God's sovereignty over the histories of nations.

Acts 17:27

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:

“Feel”:²⁴ only New Testament occurrence.
God is searchable (Jer 29:13-14; Heb 11:6).

[That they should seek the Lord] This is the chief end of all God's dealings with people (1 Peter 2:24; 2 Peter 3:9; John 3:15-20; Rev. 22:17).

[feel] Greek: *pselaphao* (GSN-5584), grope for. Only in Acts 17:27; Luke 24:39; Hebrews 12:18; 1 John 1:1. All who grope for God will find Him, because He is close to all (Romans 10:9-10; 1 John 1:9).

McGee: This phrase “feel after him” has the idea of groping after Him. Man is not really searching for the living and true God, but he is searching for a god. He is willing to put up an idol and worship it. Man is not necessarily looking for the living and true God, but he is on a search.

Feel their way toward him implies a kind of groping around in darkness, without really knowing how to find God, though they hoped that they would. The verbs translated “feel their way” and “find” are in the optative mood in Greek, suggesting possibilities considered uncertain of realization. Not far from each one of us implies God's omnipresence and also implies that God hears people's prayers and knows their hearts (including these philosophers in Athens). God's providence leads people to seek God, in the hope that they might . . . find (i.e., worship) him, but all people fall short of seeking God wholeheartedly and successfully, as Rom. 1:18–3:20 teaches. Paul is being inviting here. There is a God to find, and he is not hard to find, having revealed himself to us through the story Paul prepares to tell.²⁴

Acts 17:28

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.

“live...move...have our being” - Epimenides, 606 B.C. (also quoted in Tit 1:12).

“We are his offspring”:²⁴ Astronomical poem of Aratus, a Greek countryman of Paul's, and his predecessor by 300 years; Religious hymn of Cleathes of Troas, a contemporary of Aratus, a most celebrated Stoic who taught at Athens; Paul also quotes Menander..1 Cor 15:33.

[in him we live, and move, and have our being] He is the source of life (Hebrews 1:3).

²⁴ <http://www.esvstudybible.org/search?q=Acts+17>

[poets have said, For we are also his offspring] This was quoted from Aratus, a poet of Cilicia, Paul's own country.

God is known in his creation, and he is close to every one of us. But he is not trapped in his creation—he is transcendent. God is the Creator, not the creation. This means that God is sovereign and in control, while at the same time he is close and personal. Let the Creator of the universe rule your life.

McGee: He does not call them sons of God but the offspring of God. He is referring to creation and the relationship to God through creation. By the way, this is not pantheism that he is stating here. He is not saying that everything is God. He says that in God we live and move and have our being but that God is beyond this created universe.

Paul quotes to them from their own poets. One of the poets he quoted was Arastus who lived about 270 B.C.. He was a Stoic from Cilicia. He began a poem with an invocation to Zeus in which he said that “we too are his offspring.” Cleanthes was another poet who lived about 300 B.C.. He also wrote a hymn to Zeus and speaks of the fact that “we are his offspring.” Paul means, of course, that we are God’s creatures.

Paul demonstrated his broad interest and wide knowledge. He quoted the Greek poet Aratus of Soli, Cilicia (270 B.C.), in the words “for we are also His offspring,” realizing that the words were familiar to his sophisticated audience and would be associated with Zeus (Jupiter), the major god of the Greeks. Thus, Paul laid a foundation from which he built his presentation of YAHWEH, the God of Israel. Compare his reference to a Cretan poet or prophet in Titus 1:12, where once again he reveals that he was familiar with the world and culture of his hearers.²⁵

Acts 17:29

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.

Man is God’s offspring.

Image of God:

Passion for life

Revolt against death, boredom, frustration...

Seize hold of life, dominion, desire to succeed, reach out and try something new, accomplish new objectives, conquer new territory...

Create, invent, produce, fashion, shape, make...

...man’s greatest dignity.

[offspring] Greek: *genos* (GSN-1085), offspring (Acts 17:28-29; Rev. 22:16); generation (1 Peter 2:9); stock (Acts 13:26; Phil. 3:5); kindred (Acts 4:6; Acts 7:13,19); countrymen (2 Cor. 11:26); nation (Mark 7:26; Galatians 1:14); kind (Matthew 13:47; Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29; 1 Cor. 12:10; 1 Cor. 14:10); diversity (1

²⁵ Believer’s Study Bible

Cor. 12:28); birth (Acts 4:36; Acts 18:2,24). All descended from Adam who was created by God to reproduce his kind (Genesis 1:26-28). In this sense only are we the offspring of God.

[Godhead] Greek: *Theios* (GSN-2306), Divine One (2 Peter 1:3-4). If we are God's offspring, He cannot be like the idols of Athens.

[graven] Greek: *charagma* (GSN-5480), graven here, but eight times of the mark of the beast (Rev. 13:16-17; Rev. 14:9-11; Rev. 15:2; Rev. 16:2; Rev. 19:20; Rev. 20:4).

In other words, he says we ought not to be idolaters. He has shown God to be the Creator. Now he will present Him as the Redeemer.

God is not like gold or silver or stone, of which idols are made. God made us (we are God's offspring), and we are much more complex and wonderful than these lifeless material substances. Therefore God himself must also be much more wonderful than these things. With this observation Paul returns to the critique of idolatry with which he began and sets up the basis for the need to repent.

Acts 17:30

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

“Times of ignorance”: man’s responsibility.

“Call men everywhere”: universal character of Christianity. Aimed at everyone.

Duty = “repent.”

Man retreats to intellectual excuses for refusing moral demands... Ps 14:1, 53:1.

[but now commandeth all men every where to repent] God tolerated idolatry which disgraced the world, but now He is giving a complete revelation demanding that it stop and that men repent (Luke 13:3).

BBC: Here Paul breaks with his audience’s views; although philosophers spoke of conversion to philosophy through a change of thinking, Paul here clearly communicates the Jewish doctrine of repentance toward God.

McGee: There was a time when God shut His eyes to paganism. Now light has come into the world. God asks men everywhere to turn to Him. Light creates responsibility. Now God is commanding all men everywhere to repent.

He has presented God as the Creator in His past work. He shows God as the Redeemer in His present work. Now he shows God as the Judge in His future work.

JNTC: To those who approach life intellectually Sha'ul offers knowledge in lieu of **ignorance** (v. 23). He does not use the Scriptures at all, since these would carry no weight with these highly educated pagans (contrast vv. 2–3&NN, 10–12&N). Instead, he quotes from Greek poets in v. 28 (first Epimenides, then Aratus or Cleanthes); elsewhere he quotes Menander (1C 15:33) and Epimenides of Crete (Ti 1:12). He presents God as Creator, Giver of all, and Ruler of nations and history (vv. 24–26), and as One who seeks our love (vv. 27–28), which consists not in idol-worship (vv. 24–25, 29) but in turning from sins (v. 30), because a day is coming when everyone will be judged by God through the resurrected Yeshua (v. 31). His resurrection gives public proof that the Gospel is true and therefore objectively demands belief (see 26:8).²⁶

Acts 17:31

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.

Three key points:

- 1) **Inescapable day:** God has fixed as the time when He will judge the world.
Every life evaluated.
- 2) **Unchallengeable judge.**
- 3) **Irrefutable fact:** resurrection

[appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained] The 9th New Testament prophecy in Acts (Acts 17:31, unfulfilled). Next, Acts 20:29. At the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:7-15; Matthew 12:36; John 5:22; Romans 2:16).

[he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead] The resurrection of Christ guarantees the resurrection and judgment of all men (1 Cor. 15:1-23). He is "ordained" as judge (note, □ Acts 13:48). To Epicurians and Stoics the resurrection and judgment were a madman's dream. Only those whose hearts were open believed.

He hath appointed a day—He has fixed the time in which he will judge the world, though he has not revealed this time to man.

Paul did not leave his message unfinished. He confronted his listeners with Jesus' resurrection and its meaning to all people—either blessing or punishment. The Greeks had no concept of judgment. Most of them preferred worshiping many gods instead of just one, and the concept of resurrection was unbelievable and offensive to them. Paul did not hold back the truth, however, no matter what they might think of it. Paul often changed his approach to fit his audience, but he never changed his basic message.

²⁶Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 17:22). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

He will judge the world means that God will hold all people accountable, even these philosophers in Athens. raising him from the dead. Jesus is not just a religious teacher. The resurrection of Jesus is at the center of God's plan for history and is the basis for hope in the future resurrection of the body (1 Cor. 15:42–57; Rev. 21:4). It is also a central evidence to persuade people to believe in Christ (Acts 2:24, 32). Most importantly, the resurrection placed Jesus at God's right hand, showing his authority to be the judge and the giver of salvation that Paul is describing (2:30–36)

Acts 17:32

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

Mocking is always the defense of pride (University city more resistant to the Gospel) 1 Cor 1:23, 24.

Barnes: Some mocked. Some of the philosophers derided him. It was believed by none of the Greeks; it seemed incredible; and they regarded it as so absurd as not to admit of an argument. It has not been uncommon for even professed philosophers to mock at the doctrines of religion, and to meet the arguments of Christianity with a Sneer. The Epicureans particularly would be likely to deride this, as they denied altogether any future state. It is not improbable that this derision by the Epicureans produced such a disturbance as to break off Paul's discourse, as that of Stephen had been by the clamour of the Jews, Acts 7:54.

Paul had not finished his discourse before the crowd broke up.

Paul's reference to **the resurrection of the dead** ignited a reaction among the Athenians. The Greeks repudiated the idea of a bodily resurrection. Though they embraced the concept of the soul living forever, they were repulsed by the idea of a bodily resurrection because they considered the body to be evil, something to be discarded. This idea, known as dualism, was derived from the teachings of the Greek philosophers Socrates and Plato. It held that everything physical is evil and everything spiritual is good, and that it makes no difference what one does with one's body so long as the spirit is good. Tragically, the Athenians' adherence to this philosophy blinded them to the truth of the gospel.²⁷

Acts 17:33

So Paul departed from among them.

Paul had no patience with intellectual flippancy and moral dishonesty.

[departed from among them] He had not broken their law so was free to go on his way.

²⁷ The Nelson Study Bible

So Paul departed. Seeing there was little hope of saving them. it was not his custom to labour long in a barren field, or to preach where there was no prospect of success.

Acts 17:34

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

Dionysus, the Areopagite (tradition, other non-Biblical sources: placed over the flock at Athens).

1st Century: Publius, Quadratus, Aristides, Athenagoras, and other bishops, martyrs.

4th Century: 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.]

[Areopagite] A member of the great court of Athens. In order to be one of these men he had to be governor of the city and of the highest reputation among the people.

Paul's speech received a mixed reaction: some sneered, some kept searching for more information, and a few believed. Don't hesitate to tell others about Christ because you fear that some will not believe you. Don't expect a unanimously positive response to your witnessing. Even if only a few believe, it's worth the effort.

a woman named Damaris—not certainly one of the apostle's audience on the Areopagus, but won to the faith either before or after. Nothing else is known of her. Of any further labors of the apostle at Athens, and how long he stayed, we are not informed. Certainly he was not driven away. But "it is a serious and instructive fact that the mercantile populations of Thessalonica and Corinth received the message of God with greater readiness than the highly educated and polished Athenians. Two letters to the Thessalonians, and two to the Corinthians, remain to attest the flourishing state of those churches. But we possess no letter written by Paul to the Athenians; and we do not read that he was ever in Athens again" [HOWSON].²⁸

Although it is said occasionally that Paul was unsuccessful in Athens, this verse proves the contrary: the persons named became the core of that city's Messianic community.

As a result of Paul's address to the Areopagus, Luke notes that some men believed (Gk. *andres*, "men" referring to male human beings, as would have been the case for members of the Areopagus; see v. 22). In addition to these men who initially believed, some others

²⁸Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ac 17:34). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

also (Gk. *kai*, “and, also”) believed, including Dionysius . . . and a woman named Damaris, as well as others with them (i.e., with Dionysius and Damaris).

Spurgeon: Not many wise men after the flesh are called, but a few are, and if only one be saved the preacher is well rewarded for his pains. Paul spake not in vain in Athens, a church was formed and flourished even in that ungenial soil.

Tertullian exclaims, “I adore the fulness of the Scriptures.” No man who merely skims the book of God can profit thereby; we must dig and mine until we obtain the hid treasure. The door of the word only opens to the key of diligence. The Scriptures claim searching. They are the writings of God, bearing the divine stamp and imprimatur— who shall dare to treat them with levity? He who despises them despises the God who wrote them. God forbid that any of us should leave our Bibles to become swift witnesses against us in the great day of account. The word of God will repay searching. God does not bid us sift a mountain of chaff with here and there a grain of wheat in it, but the Bible is winnowed corn—we have but to open the granary door and find it. Scripture grows upon the student. It is full of surprises. Under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to the searching eye it glows with splendour of revelation, like a vast temple paved with wrought gold, and roofed with rubies, emeralds, and all manner of gems. No merchandise like the merchandise of Scripture truth. Lastly, the Scriptures reveal Jesus: “They are they which testify of me.” No more powerful motive can be urged upon Bible readers than this: he who finds Jesus finds life, heaven, all things. Happy he who, searching his Bible, discovers his Saviour. (Spurgeon, Morning and Evening, June 9)