

NOON BIBLE STUDY: ACTS 17 (PART 1)

ACTS 17:1-4 - THESSALONICA



THESSALONICA IS 94 MILES FROM PHILIPPI. THESSALONICA WAS THE PROUD CAPITAL OF THE ROMAN PROVINCE OF MACEDONIA AND HAD A POPULATION OF OVER 100,000. ITS NATURAL HARBOR AND PLACEMENT ON THE BUSY EAST-WEST EGNATIAN WAY AS WELL AS KEY NORTH-SOUTH TRADE ROUTES MEANT THAT IT WAS A FLOURISHING CENTER OF TRADE AND PHILOSOPHY. IT WAS A FREE CITY AND WAS GOVERNED BY LOCAL OFFICIALS CALLED "POLITARCHS" (CF. ACTS 17:6, 8). RELIGIOUSLY, THE CITY WAS COMMITTED TO THE GRECO-ROMAN PANTHEON AND THE IMPERIAL CULT; EGYPTIAN CULTS WERE ALSO PROMINENT. THERE WAS A SIZABLE POPULATION OF JEWS IN THESSALONICA. (ESV STUDY BIBLE, INTRO TO 1 THESSALONIANS)

V. 1-3 - IN SYNAGOGUE, PAUL'S CUSTOM

V. 3 - "CHRIST" NOT JESUS' LAST NAME BUT FROM GREEK WORD FOR "MESSIAH" WHICH MEANS ANOINTED ONE. KING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

V. 3 - "CHRIST HAD TO SUFFER" - JEWS RESISTED THE IDEA THAT THE MESSIAH HAD TO SUFFER, THUS WHY IT WAS CENTRAL TO PAUL'S TEACHING.

V. 4 - "GOD FEARING GREEKS" - GENTILES WITH INTEREST AND DEVOTION TO JUDAISM (CP. CORNELIUS)

ACTS 17:5-9 - TROUBLE IN THESSALONICA

V. 5 - JEWS, WICKED MEN FORM A MOB & ATTACK JASON'S HOUSE.

V. 7 - OPPONENT'S VIEW OF PAUL & SILAS' PREACHING. "ANOTHER KING (THAN CAESAR), JESUS."

- OUR MESSAGE HAS LARGELY TURNED FROM ETERNAL, GLOBAL AND POLITICAL MESSAGE TO "PERSONAL" MESSAGE. WE NO LONGER HAVE THE VIEW OF THE WORLD BEING TAKEN OVER BY JESUS (REV. 11:15, ETC) AND THE SAINTS TO RULE AND RESTORE. WE INSTEAD HEAR "PERSONAL SALVATION" MESSAGE AND GOAL OF "GOING TO HEAVEN" WHEN YOU DIE. BUT THAT IS NOT THE MESSAGE JESUS AND APOSTLES SPOKE. THERE IS PERSONAL SALVATION AND BENEFITS AND ETERNAL LIFE → BUT THOSE ARE PARTS OF A BIGGER STORY, NOT THE STORY THEMSELVES.

ACTS 17:10-15 — BEREА. 50 MILES SOUTH OF THESSALONICA (SEE MAP)

V. 11 - MODEL FOR ALL CHRISTIANS

V. 15 SILAS AND TIMOTHY STAY, PAUL ON THE ATHENS

PAUL WILL MOVE ON TO PREACH IN OTHER PLACES (BEREA, ATHENS, CORINTH) AND LEAVE TIMOTHY AND SILAS TO MINISTER TO NEW BELIEVERS IN THESSALONICA (THEY WILL JOIN HIM LATER, ACTS 17:15, 18:5). MOST SCHOLARS TODAY DATE 1 THESSALONIANS TO AD 49—51, EARLY IN PAUL'S 18-MONTH STAY IN CORINTH DURING HIS SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY (ACTS 18:1—18).

1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-3:8 - DETAILS OF PAUL'S WAITING, TIMOTHY'S MINISTRY BACK TO THESSALONICA

ACTS 17:16-22 - PAUL IN ATHENS (TRAVEL EITHER BY LAND OR SEA. BY FOOT, 222 MILES FROM BEREА, SEE MAP)

- **ATHENS** WAS FILLED WITH EXAMPLES OF ARTISTIC BEAUTY, PARTICULARLY ITS STATUES OF THE GREEK GODS AND THE ARCHITECTURAL MAGNIFICENCE OF ITS TEMPLES. PAUL, HOWEVER, WAS DEEPLY TROUBLED BY THE IDOLATRY THAT THE ART REPRESENTED, SEEING THE ENTIRE CITY DEVOTED TO FALSE GODS REPRESENTED BY IDOLS. LARGE PORTIONS OF CENTRAL ATHENS HAVE BEEN EXCAVATED. PAUL WOULD PROBABLY HAVE BEEN SPEAKING IN THE ROMAN FORUM (USED AS A

MARKETPLACE) AND IN THE GREEK AGORA (LARGELY FILLED WITH CIVIC STRUCTURES). THESE WERE SURROUNDED BY GREAT STOAS (COVERED WALKWAY), ONE OF WHICH (THE STOA OF ATTALOS) HAS BEEN RECONSTRUCTED FOR MODERN VIEWERS. IN PAUL'S DAY ATHENS BOASTED A STADIUM, A LARGE THEATER, AND AN ODEION (LARGE BUILDING BUILT FOR MUSIC) KNOWN AS THE AGRIPEION. SOME OF ATHENS'S MOST PROMINENT FEATURES WERE ITS NUMEROUS PAGAN TEMPLES. THE GREAT TEMPLE TO ATHENA (THE PARTHENON), THE ERECHTHEION (DEDICATED TO MULTIPLE DEITIES), AND THE TEMPLE TO THE GODDESS ROMA AND THE EMPEROR AUGUSTUS STOOD ATOP THE ACROPOLIS OVERLOOKING THE CITY. MANY OTHER PAGAN SACRED SITES HAVE ALSO BEEN FOUND, CONFIRMING PETRONIUS'S SATIRICAL ASSERTION THAT IT WAS EASIER TO FIND A GOD THAN A MAN IN ATHENS. MULTIPLE INSCRIPTIONS ALSO INDICATE A JEWISH PRESENCE IN ATHENS, AND HEROD THE GREAT WAS HONORED BY THE ATHENIANS FOR HIS GENEROSITY TO THE CITY. (ESV STUDY BIBLE)

- **THE AREOPAGUS** IS THE "HILL OF ARES" (ARES BEING THE GREEK GOD OF WAR). THE COURT OF THE AREOPAGUS WAS A LONG-ESTABLISHED BODY WITH EXTENSIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS LIFE OF ATHENS. IN PAUL'S DAY, IT EXERCISED JURISDICTION ESPECIALLY IN MATTERS OF RELIGION AND MORALITY. (ESV STUDY BIBLE)

V. 18, 21 — WHY PAUL WAS INVITED TO SPEAK

- **EPICUREANISM** - A PHILOSOPHY ADVANCED BY EPICURUS THAT CONSIDERED HAPPINESS, OR THE AVOIDANCE OF PAIN AND EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE, TO BE THE HIGHEST GOOD AND THAT ADVOCATED THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURES THAT CAN BE ENJOYED IN MODERATION.
- **STOICISM** - AN ANCIENT GREEK SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY FOUNDED AT ATHENS BY ZENO OF CITIUM. THE SCHOOL TAUGHT THAT VIRTUE, THE HIGHEST GOOD, IS BASED ON KNOWLEDGE, AND THAT THE WISE LIVE IN HARMONY WITH THE DIVINE REASON (ALSO IDENTIFIED WITH FATE AND PROVIDENCE) THAT GOVERNS NATURE, AND ARE INDIFFERENT TO THE CHANGING EMOTIONS OF FORTUNE AND TO PLEASURE AND PAIN.

V. 18 - "PROCLAIMING JESUS & RESURRECTION" WOULD HAVE BEEN AN ODD CONCEPT FOR THE LEADING THINKERS OF GREECE/ATHENS. GREEK THOUGHT WAS ROOTED IN "DUALISM", SOMETHING PLATO & ARISTOTLE WOULD DEVELOP. "MATTER" (CREATION, BODY, ETC) IS BAD, "SPIRIT" (LIFE, "SOUL", ETC) IS GOOD. WHEREAS, THE RESURRECTION (FOUNDATIONAL BELIEF OF CHRISTIAN FAITH)

ACTS 17:22-31 - PAUL'S MESSAGE TO AREOPAGUS

- GLEANINGS FROM PAUL'S MESSAGE AND METHOD: RESPECTFUL (V. 22). CLEAR. QUOTES GREEK POETS (V. 28), TURN TOWARDS REPENTANCE WITH REASON WHY (V. 29-31)

V. 30-31 - CP. JESUS' MESSAGE OF "REPENT FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND"

IN PAUL'S DISCOURSE AT AREOPAGUS, HE NEVER ONCE QUOTES SCRIPTURE. DOING SO WOULD HAVE BEEN IRRELEVANT AND COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE BECAUSE OF HIS AUDIENCE. HOWEVER, ALL THAT HE SAYS COULD BE BACKED UP WITH SCRIPTURE IF NEED BE. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT EXAMPLE FOR US. OUR CULTURE IS BECOMING MORE LIKE THE AREOPAGUS THAN THE JEWISH SYNAGOGUE. WE NEED TO KNOW THE MESSAGE AND BE ABLE TO SPEAK IT IN LANGUAGE OF COMMON PEOPLE.

ACTS 17:32-34 - RESPONSE

V. 32 - SNEERING AT RESURRECTION BECAUSE THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN FOREIGN, EVEN FOOLISH CONCEPT, TO GREEK THINKER.

RESPONSE TO GOSPEL: 1 - REJECTION (V. 32) 2 - CONSIDERATION/FOLLOW UP (V. 32) 3 - ACCEPTANCE & BELIEF (V. 34)

1ST PART OF ACTS - PAUL ABLE TO "REASON FROM SCRIPTURES"

2ND PART OF ACTS - PAUL SPEAKING WITHOUT SCRIPTURES.

BOTH ARE NEEDED BY PEOPLE OF GOD.

TO CONSIDER

1 - WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOUR PERSONAL BELIEFS ARE BASED ON WHAT YOU HAVE READ AND LEARNED IN THE BIBLE (LIKE THE BEREANS) OR IS PRIMARILY BASED ON WHAT YOU HAVE READ ELSEWHERE OR LEARNED IN CHURCH?

2 - CAN YOU ARTICULATE THE GOSPEL BOTH IN "PLAIN SPEAKING" TO PEOPLE WITHOUT BIBLE KNOWLEDGE AND ALSO BY USING THE SCRIPTURES FOR THOSE WHO MIGHT BE FAMILIAR WITH THE BIBLE? IF NOT, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO GET BETTER?

3 - WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF ACTS 17:30-31 ON YOUR LIFE? WHAT ABOUT THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU?