



March 16, 2016
Acts 17:1-34
Pastor Gary Hamrick

Exegetical Study

1. **Acts 17:1-9** - *“When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,’ he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: ‘These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.’ When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.”*

- a. The Journey and the Ministry

- i. Paul *“reasoned with them from the Scriptures.”*

1. The Greek word for reasoned is *dialogomai*,¹ which means to speak thoroughly or to converse.
 2. Paul was able to dialogue to the Jews in the synagogue using the Scriptures, which was very different from the way he dialogued with Gentiles in Athens, who were unfamiliar with the Scriptures.

¹ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G1256&t=NIV>

ii. Opponents of Christianity were always after Paul, and in this situation, they also made things hard for Jason and *“some other brothers.”*

1. Pastor Gary said, “Historians believe that in the first two centuries alone, six million Christians were killed because they refused to acknowledge Caesar as king. They [would only] acknowledge Jesus as king. ... Persecution is still happening around the world. ... Fox News just had a report two weeks ago that 2015 was the worst year for Christians being persecuted since statistics have been kept. About 7,000 Christians were killed in 2015 for their faith alone. The worst nation offender [was] North Korea. ... [The other nine countries] are all Muslim countries... Persecution still exists, but it’s because we are isolated that we don’t really see all of the [troubles and difficulties other Christians face].”

a. The Top 10 Nations are: North Korea, Iraq, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Iran, and Libya.

2. **Acts 17:10-15** - *“As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.”*

a. The Journey and the Ministry

i. Paul traveled to Berea, which was about 50 miles northwest of Thessalonica

ii. The Bereans

1. Pastor Gary said, “You should never accept at face value anything I say, or any pastor, or televangelist, or any author of any book [has to say]. You should examine the Scriptures to see if what anybody is saying to you is actually true. You have a brain, and you have the ability to read the Bible, [and you have the ability] to examine the Scriptures carefully to make sure that you are not being deceived or duped by people just because they have a title or a television program. ... [Paul] commended the Bereans... because they didn’t take what Paul said at face

value. They searched the Scriptures **every day** to see if what Paul said was true. ... Study the Bible for yourself! ... If you think that just by coming [to church on Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings just to hear the information is enough, it's not!] ... [All of us need to read the Bible, study the Bible, examine the Scriptures so we can tell what is true and what is false.] It is so easy to hear heresy just one degree off, and it bothers me. ... I'll sometimes watch televangelists, not because I'm particularly impressed by most of them, but just because I want to hear [what they are saying]... because sometimes if it's horrible enough, I might need to weave in something in one of my teachings to undo some of the damage that some of these folks are doing. It's tragic! People are just making stuff up [and] saying things that aren't true." (Emphasis added)

3. **Acts 17:16-34** - *"While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, 'What is this babbler trying to say?' Others remarked, 'He seems to be advocating foreign gods.' They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, 'May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.' (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: 'Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. 'The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone - an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he*

commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.’ When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject.’ At that, Paul left the Council. A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris and a number of others.”

a. The Journey and the Ministry

i. Athens

1. Athens was the capital city of Greece.
2. The population at this time was about four million people, which made it the largest city.
3. Athens is one of the oldest cities in the world, having a history of about thirty-four hundred years.
4. At this time there were more than three thousand pagan statues and temples in Athens.
5. Athens was the center of intellectual thought and ideas, and counted among the intelligentsia were Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle.

a. Plato established the first institution of higher learning in world history.

ii. The Parthenon, a temple dedicated to the worship of Athena, the goddess of protection, is located on the top of the Acropolis,

1. The Greeks, like the Romans, were polytheistic.

a. There were twelve chief gods and goddesses the Greeks worshiped, plus more than three hundred mysterious and mythological creatures which were also worshiped.

iii. The Areopagus was located on a smaller hill on the southwest side of the Acropolis.

1. The Areopagus was the hill of Aries, the Greek god of war.

2. Some Bible translations use the term Mars Hill because Mars is the Roman name for Aries.

iv. Epicurus (341 - 270 B.C.) taught that tempered pleasure, not wild pleasure, was the only intrinsic good.

1. Tranquility, friendship, and knowledge were the simple pleasures he promoted.

2. Food and sexual expression fell outside of the teachings of Epicurean philosophy.

v. Stoic philosophy centered on the goal of being free from suffering through logic and reason.

vi. Paul’s Message

1. Paul spoke to the men of Athens in a completely different way

- from the message he brought to the Jews in synagogues.
2. The altar TO AN UNKNOWN GOD was Paul's entry point to sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - a. Pastor Gary said, "[The Greeks] didn't want to leave out any god and therefore incur the wrath of any god, [even] though they had [more than] three hundred, so they [built an altar to an unknown god to cover their bases, so to speak]."
 3. Paul presented God in eight different ways.
 - a. Creator
 - i. [Acts 17:24](#) - *"The God who made the world and everything in it..."*
 - b. Life-giver
 - i. [Acts 17:25](#) - *"... he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else."*
 - c. Sovereign
 - i. [Acts 17:26](#) - *"... he determined the times set for them..."*
 - d. Personable
 - i. [Acts 17:27](#) - *"... so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him..."*
 - e. Father
 - i. [Acts 17:29](#) - *"... since we are God's offspring..."*
 - f. Divine
 - i. [Acts 17:29](#) - *"... the divine being..."*
 - g. Judge
 - i. [Acts 17:31a](#) - *"... he will judge the world with justice..."*
 - h. Miracle-worker
 - i. [Acts 17:31b](#) - *"He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."*
 4. Pastor Gary said, "There are some Bible scholars and Bible commentators who are critical of Paul [concerning his message]. ... [Their issue is that Paul did not mention Jesus by name and preaching the cross of Christ. They point to [1 Corinthians 2:1-4](#)² as the basis for their concerns.] ... [They point to] when Paul moved on to Corinth, he felt like he [had been] a failure in Athens. ... [They point to the reason that Paul's ministry in Athens wasn't fruitful is because] he didn't preach Christ crucified, [and that

² [1 Corinthians 2:1-4](#) - *"When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power..."*

when he got to Corinth, he changed his message...]. ... We shouldn't think that we can string words together, and it's through our cleverness that people will get saved. I think that those who say that Paul's ministry was not very fruitful, and thus he was a failure in Athens, are mischaracterizing the ministry of Paul [at] the Areopagus. The reason that I say this is because people [did get saved, so] who are we to say how many should get saved? Who are we to evaluate a man's ministry because a few got saved or hundreds got saved? The fact of the matter is [people in Athens believed]. I think what [Paul] did in Athens is an important lesson for us, in this sense, when you look at how [Paul] shared the truth, [the gospel], it teaches me four things in how we communicate with [people]."

- a. Sharing the gospel with others includes these four things:
 - i. **Listen** to the person's story, find out what their worldview is, and understand their perspective.
 - ii. **Look** for a relevant entry point.
 - iii. **Lead** the person to God and give them an understanding of repentance.
 - iv. **Leave** the results to God.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the 1984 New International Version (NIV)