

Turning the World Right-side Up: Study 14, Acts 17

Acts Studies for Teens by Mike Apodaca, MA



Begin with prayer for wisdom from God and for the presence of the Spirit.

Note: In a Bible Study, as much as possible ask the questions and let the students answer. Where they

cannot, you supply the answer and keep everything flowing.

Introduction: How will people react to the Kingdom of Christ?

Acts 17: Three Responses to the Kingdom

Section 1: Acts 17:1-9 Some Who Know Truth Reject Jesus

Now when they had passed through Amphip'olis and Apollo'nia, they came to Thessaloni'ca, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ²And Paul went in, as was his custom, and for three weeks he argued with them from the scriptures, ³explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." ⁴And some of them were persuaded, and joined Paul and Silas; as did

a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. ⁵But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked fellows of the rabble, they gathered a crowd, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the people. ⁶And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brethren before the city authorities, crying, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, ⁷and Jason has received them; and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." ⁸And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard this. ⁹And when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

Whenever Paul entered a new place, it was his custom to share the good news with those who already had the most truth. The Jews should have been most ready to see that Jesus was the Messiah promised by God in the Old Testament.

Paul argues from the Scriptures, the Old Testament, showing that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead.

He may have shared the following Scriptures:

Psalm 22

Isaiah 53

Zechariah 12:10

Psalm 16:8-11

Paul most likely discussed the pictures in the Old Testament—the Passover, the Sacrificial System, the Feasts, etc. In Leviticus 14:2-7, Moses writes: **2** "These are the regulations for the diseased person at the time of his ceremonial cleansing, when he is brought to the priest: **3** The priest is to go outside the camp and examine him. If the person has been healed of his infectious skin disease, **4** the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the one to be cleansed. **5** Then the priest shall order that one of the birds be killed over fresh water in a clay pot. **6** He is then to take the live bird and dip it, together with the cedar wood, the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. **7** Seven times he shall sprinkle the one to be cleansed of the infectious disease and pronounce him clean. Then he is to release the live bird in the open fields."

As far as we know, this symbol of death and resurrection was only used once—when Jesus healed the man of leprosy and told him to take the offering to the temple (Matthew 8).

It is very important that we understand the whole story of the Old Testament as being about Christ. Creation was God making people

in His image that He could be in relationship with. But sin entered through disobedience. The rest of the Old Testament is God showing Israel that they could not reach Him in their own strength and that He was sending a savior.

The Jews had been looking for the Christ. There were over 300 prophecies speaking of the coming Christ in the Old Testament. The possibility of this happening in the life of one man by chance is absolutely astronomical.¹ And yet, they were all fulfilled in Jesus. "Any man who rejects Christ as the Son of God is rejecting a fact proved perhaps more absolutely than any other fact in the world."²

Paul is referred to by the Jews as the one who has turned the world upside down. The world was actually turned upside down at the fall. Christians are the ones that turn the world right-side up. The Jews use the same argument against Paul that was used against Jesus—that he was a competing king to Caesar. This resulted in dragging Paul's friend Jason in for questioning.

Section 2: Acts 17:10-15 Some Who Know Truth Study and Believe

¹⁰The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Beroe'a; and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹Now these

¹ For a thorough discussion, see *Science Speaks*, by Peter W. Stone, pgs. 101-112.

² *Science Speaks*, pg. 112.

Jews were more noble than those in Thessaloni'ca, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so. ¹²Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. ¹³But when the Jews of Thessaloni'ca learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea'a also, they came there too, stirring up and inciting the crowds. ¹⁴Then the brethren immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. ¹⁵Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

The Jews from Berea are known for being more honorable because they studied the Scriptures and did not rely on Paul's words or persuasion. If what he said was true, they should be able to see for themselves in the Word. This attitude of searching things out brought them to a studied examination of the Word which led them to a solid faith Christ.

Of course, persecution was not far away. As happened when Jews from Iconium came down to Lystra, the Jews came from Thessalonica to Berea to stir up trouble for Paul. He got away and,

when he arrived at Athens, sent back his helpers to get Silas and Timothy.

Section 3: Acts 17:16-34 Those who are Ignorant have a Mixed Response

¹⁶Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there. ¹⁸Some also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers met him. And some said, "What would this babbler say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he preached Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹And they took hold of him and brought him to the Are-op'agus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you present? ²⁰For you bring some strange things to our ears; we wish to know therefore what these things mean." ²¹Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

²²So Paul, standing in the middle of the Are-op'agus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in

every way you are very religious. ²³For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. ²⁶And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, ²⁸for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'
²⁹Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he

will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead."

³²Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, "We will hear you again about this." ³³So Paul went out from among them. ³⁴But some men joined him and believed, among them Dionys'ius the Areop'agite and a woman named Dam'aris and others with them.

Why is Paul's soul stirred up within him over the idolatry? It is not only because idolatry is offensive to his God. This is true, but the thing that drives Paul crazy is that these Athenians were blindly following the purpose for which they were created—to connect with God. What they were seeking was right and good. They were just going about it in the wrong way.

Paul does not insult their failed attempts to reach the One True God. Instead, he takes them from where they are, at the level of truth they currently know. Notice, he does not use the Old Testament here in Athens. This is not their frame of reference. He would have to explain the Old Testament before he could explain how Jesus fulfills it. The people in front of him would not care. Instead, Paul meets them where they live, pointing to two realities: 1) They live in nature. Our God is the One Who has made nature, who is not able to be fit into any box inside of nature. 2) The Greeks,

with all their hundreds of Gods, still know that they have not covered everything. There is more. Paul is here to fill this gap inside of them that can only be filled by a relationship with the true and living God.

Paul explains that the Greeks are God's offspring. This is another way of saying that they are made in the image of God and are meant to be His sons.

What have we learned?

We share the gospel in ways that they can hear it. If they have a relationship with truth, with the Bible, we start there. If they don't, we start with what they know. We bring people from where they are to the foot of the throne of God. We lead the way and never get so far ahead of them that they cannot follow.

We always must remember that we are not pushing a religion or a church. We are not promoting an idea. We are uniting people with their God with Whom they have become estranged through sin. We have seen how beautiful it is when a person is reunited with their real parents after years of separation. This is like that. We don't have to worry about the message itself, we simply need to speak it in a way that it can be heard.

What the Text Says

Section 1 Acts 17:1-5

In Thessalonica Paul shares the gospel with the Jews first. He specifically begins with the Old Testament Scriptures, the truth that they are familiar with and connects the dots between this and Jesus who is the fulfillment of all the promises of God. As often happens, the gospel is met with anger and adversity. People who are set in their ways, who have religion (their own way to God based on their performance) get upset when we declare that God has made salvation available to all freely through Jesus' death and resurrection.

Section 1 Acts 17:6-15

The Bereans are more noble because they search out the things that Paul tells them to make sure they are true. When they see that it is true, they not only come to faith, but they do so with a solid foundation. The antagonistic Jews from Thessalonica follow Paul and try to cause trouble for him in Berea.

Section 1 Acts 17:16-34

This chapter ends with Paul trying to share the good news with those who do not have any experience with God's word. These interpret his message through their beliefs, which makes it very hard to talk to them. Paul begins with the things they know (nature, their desire to know an unknown God, etc.). In the end some believe. Paul asks his helpers to send Silas and Timothy back to him.

Connecting to the Scripture

God wants us to be in fellowship with Him and to invite others into this relationship.

We do this by beginning where they are and providing the ladders they need to ascend to faith. If they are familiar with truth—if they have gone to church or have a Jewish background—we can use this to show them how Jesus is the fulfillment of all their aspirations.

When our oikos does not have a church background, we can begin where they are in their lives. We can point out nature and how it reveals God and His power. We can start with their jobs or their thoughts on issues, or with their family or relationships. The main point is to start where they will understand.

Paul shows us how to do share the gospel. He is our role model. He is able to share the story of God's chasing after man explained in the Scriptures. God loves us and wants to be with us for all eternity. He wants to begin this relationship now. God has intervened in history, revealing Himself and leading man back into fellowship with Him. Paul knows the story from before creation to Jesus ruling over all. We need to study the Bible and understanding it. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." 2 Timothy 2:15.

A. W. Tozer wrote, "A right understanding of the Bible opens to us the only path into the presence of God."³

³ *Experiencing the Presence of God*, by A. W. Tozer, pg. 44

Questions to Ask During the Study

Section 1 Read Acts 17:1-5

1. Why is it Paul's habit to start with the Jews when sharing the gospel? Why do you think he goes to them first?
2. What does this tell us about who we should seek to share the gospel with first?

Section 1 Read Acts 17:6-15

1. What was more noble about the Bereans? Why is studying so very important?
2. What was the measure of all truth for the Bereans? How can we make the Bible the measure of all truth for us? How would this look in your relationship with friends and family? How would it look in your classes at school?

Section 1 Read Acts 17:16-34

1. Have you ever tried to explain something to someone who did not have any common base of understanding? Explain how that went.
2. How does Paul's sermon to the people of Athens compare to his arguments in Romans 1:18-25?
3. How do you explain to someone who does not know the Bible that all men and women need Jesus for salvation and to be in a right relationship with God?
4. How were you saved? What was it that brought you to faith and salvation?