

Acts 17:1-21 ~ Teacher's Lesson
Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey, Part B
Upsetting the World for Christ

Teacher's Note: Draw simple map on board of the Mediterranean world before class begins. Show modern Israel, Syria, Cyprus, Turkey and Greece.

Review: At the end of their 1st missionary journey to Cyprus and Galatia (Acts 13-14), Paul and Barnabas sailed back to their home base, Antioch, where they remained a long time, teaching, 14:24-28, 15:35. On Paul's 2nd missionary journey, he and Silas first traveled back to strengthen some of the churches established on the 1st journey, then sailed over to Greece.

Missions Geography:

1st Missionary Journey—Cyprus and south-central Turkey (Galatia)

2nd Missionary Journey—Northern Greece (Macedonia), establishing churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Corinth and preaching in southern Greece (Achaia) in Athens.

Thessalonica

What did jealousy motivate Jews in Thessalonica to do (17:1-9)? Jealously motivated them to form a mob and accuse the Christians of treason (proclaiming a rival king to Caesar), 17:7.

1. After the jail house rock, Paul and Silas left Philippi, traveled through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia, and stopped in Philippi. **Based on the information given in 17:1-2, why did the team not stop until they reached Thessalonica?** They did not stop to preach the Gospel until they reached Thessalonica, evidently because there was a synagogue there, but not in the other two cities.¹

2. **How did the church in Philippi help Paul do evangelism in Thessalonica?** See *Philippians 4:6*. Paul was able to devote more time to evangelism because he was being supported by the church in Philippi.

ESV **Philippians 4:16** Even in Thessalonica you (the church in Philippi) sent me help for my needs once and again.

Evangelism Insights:

a) We should give to support evangelists/missionaries.

ESV **1 Corinthians 9:14** . . . the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

¹ It is 94 miles from Philippi to Thessalonica (*ESV Study Bible*, 2120).

b) Paul and Silas by-passed two totally Gentile cities in order to get to a city with a synagogue. We are told in 17:3 that this was Paul's "custom". This was because a positive response is much more likely from a previously prepared people. The truth of divine election does not preclude the prior preparation of the elect before they hear the gospel. Thus, in our evangelism, we should prioritize witnessing to people who have some sort of background in the things of the Lord. Evangelism is much more difficult in a totally pagan area (such as in the jungles of South America).

According to 17:2, how long did this evangelism process take Paul? He spoke in the synagogue for three Sabbaths.

3. In 17:2-3, what verbs did Luke use to describe how Paul presented the gospel? The words Luke used were "reasoned" (17:2), "explaining" (17:3), and "proving" (17:3).

Evangelism Insight: Paul offered reasons for people to believe. He explained. He proved. It took time to do this: three Sabbaths. Presenting the Gospel is not simply laying out the bare facts of salvation. It also involves reasoning, explaining and proving. I'm not talking about arguing, but reasoning. You can win the argument but lose the soul. It also necessarily involves carefully listening and then humbly responding.

Based on 17:3, what was the essence of the Paul's message? He showed from the Scriptures how it was "necessary" for Christ to suffer, die, and rise from the dead and that Jesus is the Christ.

4. Why was it "necessary" for Christ to suffer and rise from the dead (17:3)? See *Psalm 22, Isaiah 53*. It was necessary because it was predicted in the Old Testament and for our sins to be forgiven.

ESV Isaiah 53:3-6 He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief . . . he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

5. What success was recorded in 17:4? See *1 Thessalonians 2:1-2*. Some of the Jews were persuaded, along with a great number of Greeks who had already been attracted in Judaism and many of the leading women.² Paul later wrote two letters to the church in Thessalonica.

ESV 1 Thessalonians 2:1-2 For . . . our coming to you was not in vain . . . though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi . . . we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

² Women often held prominent positions in Roman society (*ESV Study Bible*, 2120).

What synonym for “believed” did Luke use in 17:4? Luke recorded that they were “persuaded”. If you believe something, it means that you are “persuaded” that it is true. It is not blind acceptance.

Who did jealous Jews manipulate so as to cause a riot (17:5)? They formed a mob composed of “wicked men of the rabble”.

Insight: Don’t expect the enemy to fight fairly. They use lies, deception, and underhanded tactics. You must anticipate this demonic tactic lest you be unduly discouraged when it happens.

ESV **Matthew 10:34** Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

“The Jews”: “The Jews” (17:5) seems to refer to more than people who were descended from Abraham. Luke seems to use “the Jews” here to refer to organized opposition to Jesus from unbelieving Jewish leadership. It is becoming synonymous with unbelieving, hardened opposition to Jesus.

6. What good did Paul expect to sometimes come from Jewish jealousy? *See Romans 11:11-14.* Whereas jealousy over so many Gentiles coming to Christ caused these Jews to oppose the Gospel, Paul knew that other Jews would be motivated by jealousy to come to Christ:

ESV **Romans 11:11** . . . salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.

ESV **Romans 11:13-14** . . . Inasmuch . . . as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.

7. Who was Jason and why was he attacked (17:5-9)? Jason was obviously one of those in the synagogue who believed in Jesus and had become friendly with Paul. The Jews thought they would find Paul and Silas in his home.

What did “the Jews” accuse Paul and Silas of doing (17:6-7)? They accused them of causing trouble (when it was in reality the Jews who caused the rioting), of defying the decrees of Caesar, and of advocating another king as rival to Caesar (treason).

8. What difference is there between the Jews’ public accusations (17:6-7) and their private motives (17:5a)? As with so many things in life, there is the stated reason for something and then the real reason; the two may not be the same. They were privately motivated by jealousy, but they publically accused them of treason.

Example: The Democrats are opposed to requiring voters to show an identification card to prove who they are. The stated reason is they say it is discriminatory against the poor. The real reason is that they want illegal aliens to be able to vote early and often (using the names of deceased voters). **Joke:** My grandfather voted republican all his life right up until he died, then after that he voted democratic.

9. What did it mean for Paul and Silas that the city officials took security money from Jason (17:9)? See *1 Thessalonians 2:17-8*. This security money was like posting bond. The practical result was that Paul and Silas had to leave town, lest more rioting occur.

ESV 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18 But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you . . . but Satan hindered us.

Insight: God sovereignly allows Satan to hinder us from doing the things God Himself has called us to do! The Lord moves in mysterious ways.

10. Later writing back to the church in Thessalonica, what did Paul have to say about the Jews who hindered him from preaching the Gospel (1Th 2:14-16)? He said they liable to God's wrath for hindering Paul from speaking the Gospel to the Gentiles. He also said they were liable to God's wrath.

ESV 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 [You] became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins.

Berea

******11. How did “the Jews” from Thessalonica thwart Paul’s work in Berea (17:10-15)?** It is 50 miles from Thessalonica to Berea.³ When they learned that Paul had gone to Berea, they followed him there and once again agitated and stirred up the crowds, causing the brothers to send Paul off by boat.

Who had made the decision that it was time for Paul and Silas to leave Thessalonica (17:10)? The brothers of the church in Thessalonica made that decision, and Paul submitted to it. He was sent off under the cover of darkness.

Evangelism Insight: The New Testament way to deal with persecution is to leave if you can.

12. How were the Jews of Berea different from those in Thessalonica (17:10-12)? Luke recorded that they were nobler than the others because they received the word eagerly, and studied the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many of them believed, along with a number of Greek noblewomen.

Word Study: “Noble” (17:11) refers to people who are open minded, fair, and thoughtful.⁴

³ *ESV Study Bible*, 2121.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2121.

Evangelism Insight: The conversion of so many in Berea followed a daily examination of the Scriptures. In other words, there was a long gestation process. In an actual pregnancy, too short a gestation process leads to birth defects. The same could be argued spiritually: too short a process leads to spiritual birth defects.

Bible Study: Luke records how ordinary people studied the Scriptures and came to a right understanding of what it meant. This is consistent with the Protestant view that all believers should have access to the Bible and don't have to be a scholar or pastor to be able to correctly understand what it means.⁵

Who made the decision that it was time for Paul to leave Berea (17:14)? It was the local brothers, who subsequently sent Paul off to the coast. Once again, Paul submitted to the local church's decision.

13. How were Silas and Timothy able to remain behind (17:14)? They evidently had a lower profile and a quieter manner.

Where did Paul go after he left Berea (17:15)? He traveled 222 miles to Athens, where he sent word for Silas and Timothy to join him.

Athens

******What unusual invitation to preach did Paul receive in Athens (17:16-21)?** He was asked by the philosophers to speak to them at a meeting of the Areopagus.

14. What was it about Athens that particularly vexed Paul (17:16)? *See 1 Corinthians 10:20.* The city was full of idols. Athens was so known for idols that a writer named Petronius wrote that it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens.⁶

ESV 1 Corinthians 10:20 . . . what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God.

What success did Paul have in the synagogue (17:17)? Unlike in Berea, no conversions were recorded.

15. What word did Luke use to describe how Paul did evangelism in the Athenian marketplace (17:17-18)? It says that he "reasoned" in the marketplace. He did not preach "at" them, he reasoned with them. This led to the invitation to speak at the Areopagus, 17:18.

16. Based on 17:18-20, what range of reactions did the philosophers have to Paul? Their reactions ranged from seeing him as a babbler to a vague understanding that he was preaching about a strange foreign deity.

17. Based on 17:18, what did the philosophers understand Paul to proclaim about Jesus? They understood that Jesus was some sort of divine being who had risen from the dead.

⁵ Ibid., 2121

⁶ *ESV Study Bible*, 2121

18. What is the difference between an Epicurean and a Stoic philosopher (17:18)?

Epicurean: In today's usage, rich, sumptuous food is sometimes called an "Epicurean's delight" and is associated with luxurious indulgence. There actually was a man named Epicurus. Since they did not believe in life after death, materialism and pleasure was seen as the chief goal of life. However, they thought that contentment ultimately came through limiting one's desires (serene detachment).⁷

Stoic: Today we might say of someone, "He's very stoic". What we mean by this is that he can endure pain or hardship without showing any emotion. The name Stoic comes from a famous, large porch or colonnade in Athens where the founder of Stoicism taught (a porch was called a *stoa*). They sought happiness through limiting their desires so as to avoid disappointment. They saw God as an inherent universal reason they called the *logos*. They had a high standard of moral conduct.⁸ They believed in serving their fellow man, not out of love, but with disinterested virtue. They were not into idol worship.

19. These philosophers invited Paul to the Areopagus. What was the Areopagus (17:19)?

The Areopagus was both a place and a council. The place is a hill northwest of Athens. Literally translated, Areopagus means "hill of Ares" (the Greek god of war, corresponding to the Roman god Mars). In Paul's day, a council by the same name met up on the hill. It held great prestige in matters of morals and religion.⁹

According to 17:21, how did the men of Athens pass the time? They spent their time telling about new things or listening to reports of new things.

20. Did Luke mean 17:21 as a compliment or criticism?

So What?

21. What lessons in evangelism can be derived from Acts 17?

- 1) We should give money to missions
- 2) We should target the previously prepared
- 3) Effective evangelism involves explaining, proving, reasoning and conversing.
- 4) Expect Satanic opposition (such as that caused here by jealous Jews).
- 5) Remain undaunted by opposition (for instance, the team went to Thessalonica to Berea undaunted).
- 6) Deal with persecution by ceasing public ministry and by leaving the area.
- 7) Pray for open doors, such as Paul received at the Areopagus.

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.

⁷ *New Bible Dictionary*, 340

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1145

⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

- You can hear this lesson being taught at SermonAudio.Com/NTRF.

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