

# The Book of Acts

## Lesson 23: Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens -- Acts 17:1-34

Paul moves through three very different cities, and in each one the gospel meets a different response. In Thessalonica he goes to the synagogue and reasons from the Scriptures for three Sabbaths, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, and that this Jesus is the Christ. Some are persuaded, but jealous opponents stir up a mob and drag Paul's hosts before the authorities, shouting that these men who have turned the world upside down have come here too. The gospel is still turning worlds upside down.

In Berea, Paul finds a more noble-minded people. They receive the word with eagerness, but they do not believe it blindly; they examine the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so. Here is the perfect picture of healthy faith: an eager heart and an open Bible, testing every claim against the word of God. Many of them believe, and Luke holds them up as a model for every generation.

Then Paul comes to Athens, the intellectual capital of the world, and his spirit is provoked within him as he sees the city full of idols. He reasons in the synagogue and debates in the marketplace until the philosophers bring him to the Areopagus to explain this new teaching. Paul meets them brilliantly. He notes their altar to an unknown god and declares, what you worship as unknown, I proclaim to you. He preaches the one true God, the Creator who does not live in temples made by hands, who needs nothing, who gives life and breath to all, in whom we live and move and have our being.

And then Paul drives to the point. The God who made us will no longer overlook our ignorant idolatry; He now commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed, and He has given proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead. At the mention of resurrection some mock, some want to hear more, and some believe. From a synagogue in Thessalonica to the philosophers of Athens, the message is the same: the crucified and risen Christ, before whom all the world must repent.

**Group Discussion:** The Bereans were called more noble because they received the word eagerly yet examined the Scriptures daily to see whether it was true (v. 11). What does this teach about how we should receive teaching, and why is it important to test everything against Scripture rather than believing blindly?

**Personal Reflection:** Paul's opponents accused the Christians of turning the world upside down (v. 6). Has the gospel turned your world upside down, reordering your priorities, values, and loyalties? In what area is it still calling you to be turned?

*Read Acts 17:1-34*

## Study Questions

1. The Bereans were commended as more noble because they received the word with eagerness yet examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so (v. 11). What does this teach about the authority of Scripture and about how we should test the teaching we receive?
2. The Bereans searched the Scriptures themselves rather than simply accepting what they were told (v. 11). Do you examine the teaching you receive against God's word, or tend to accept things uncritically? How could you become more like the Bereans in your own study of Scripture?
3. In Thessalonica Paul reasoned from the Scriptures, proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead (vv. 2-3). Why was it necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise, and how does this show the gospel is grounded in the Scriptures?
4. Paul's opponents complained that the Christians had turned the world upside down (v. 6). Has the gospel turned your world upside down, reordering your priorities, values, and loyalties? In what area is it still calling you to be turned?
5. In Athens Paul proclaimed the true God, the Creator who does not live in temples, needs nothing, gives life to all, and in whom we live and move and have our being (vv. 24-28). What does Paul teach about the nature of the true God, and how does this expose the emptiness of idols?
6. The Athenians filled their city with idols, substitutes for the living God (vv. 16, 23). What are the idols in your own life, the things you treat as ultimate, look to for security, or serve in God's place? How is God calling you to tear them down?
7. Paul engaged the Athenian thinkers thoughtfully, starting with their altar and their poets, yet he did not compromise the gospel of the resurrection and judgment (vv. 22-31). What can we learn from how Paul engaged a skeptical, idol-filled culture with the truth?
8. Paul spoke the truth of the gospel to skeptics and idolaters with both wisdom and boldness (vv. 22-31). How do you engage the unbelievers and the skeptical culture around you? Where do you need more wisdom, more boldness, or both?
9. Paul declared that God now commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day to judge the world by the man He appointed, and He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead (vv. 30-31). What does this teach about the universal call to repent, the coming judgment, and the role of the resurrection?
10. Looking back over this whole chapter, the noble Bereans, the upside-down gospel, the true God against idols, and the call to repent before the coming judgment, name one specific way the Lord is calling you to respond, in searching the Scriptures, tearing down an idol, witnessing wisely, or living ready, and what is one step you will take this week.

**Now or Later**

**Reflect on these passages:** Isaiah 55:6-11, seeking the Lord while He may be found and the power of His word; Romans 1:18-25, the truth about God in creation and the folly of idolatry; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, turning from idols to serve the living God and await His Son; Acts 24:25, Paul reasoning about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come; John 5:22-29, the Father giving all judgment to the Son and the resurrection to come