Study of Acts – Discussion Notes Chapter 17

Introduction
Paul is well into his second missionary journey. He is accompanied by Timothy, Silas and Luke (the author of Acts). In chapter 17, we see pretty much the same pattern we have seen in the past. The group of missionaries arrive in a city and promptly go to the local synagogue. Paul reads scripture and expounds on it by explaining that Jesus Christ is the Messiah of which the Old Testament speaks.

Everywhere they go, some people receive the message of repentance and salvation through Christ. And, everywhere they go they encounter resistance instigated by Jews and joined in by worked up Gentiles. Together they present trumped up charges to the authorities and the missionaries are forced to flee the city. This is the continued pattern in various cities including Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica and Berea.

One can’t help but be reminded of our Lord’s words to Ananias when he called Paul as an apostle.

“Go! For this man is My chosen instrument to take My name to Gentiles, kings, and the Israelites. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for My name!” Acts 9:15-16 HCSB

Content
1. All those Berean churches (vs. 10-15).

Today, most every city has one or more churches named after Berea. In fact, there is a Berean Baptist Church in Elberta and one in Mobile. There is good reason for naming a church after Berea as we see in our text.

How does the scripture describe the people in Berea and what do you think that means?

Some translations describe the Berean people as “open-minded” and others as “of noble character.” The emphasis here is that they were of mental integrity. The original Greek word literally translates as “high born” but came to mean “good breading.” There is nothing wrong with having a proper upbringing. Showing a little class can go a long way in conveying integrity.

Illus: This week my son had some keys made at a local hardware store. When he told the young man he wanted 10 keys, the employee responded with a single word; the “F” word. Likewise, my daughter mentioned shared with me, her shock this week when a man who told her he was a retired Methodist preacher and later used “GD” in his conversation.

In the computer world, there is high-tech, low-tech and no-tech. I suppose in life, there is high-class, low-class and no-class. Such language reflects no class at all. Such language reflects a highly limited vocabulary in which one cannot find proper words to communicate their thoughts.

Fortunately for Paul, the people of Berea had some class and were not as barbaric in their thinking.

How would you describe the missionary’s effectiveness in Berea?

Luke tells us the Bereans were much more receptive to the gospel. He says they welcomed the message with eagerness. In addition, Luke tells us they examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were true.

It is important to note three things about their response.
1. They welcomed the message. This tells me they listened to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. They did not immediately rebuke the message. Their hearts were listening to God’s call.
2. They examined the scriptures to validate the truth and consistency of the teachings of Paul.
3. They did not react like the Jews by just saying this is not what we believe or our tradition.

**What do you make of the Jewish non-believers traveling to Berea to fight against Christianity?**

I suppose one can understand them fighting Paul’s teaching in their hometown. But to follow him in his travels dogging him and intentionally rebutting his teachings seems a bit extreme. One can only attach one word to their actions; Satan. Satan does not want the gospel to be told to non-believers. He will use anyone and anything to prevent lost souls from being saved.

Today it is no different. People who call themselves atheist are not satisfied just not believing. They actually work to stamp out the spread of the gospel. They are being used of Satan.

Illus: I read an article where in Starke, Florida, there is a monument at the Bradford County courthouse that displays the Ten Commandments. A group of atheist out of New Jersey insisted they be allowed to place their own monument at the courthouse. They did so successfully and they now have their own atheist monument displayed.

Now why would a group of atheist from New Jersey want to erect a monument in Florida pushing their non-belief? If they genuinely do not believe in God, why would they care that others believe in him? I do not believe in UFOs but have no desire to evangelize my disbelief. I could care less if others believe in UFOs.

Again, there is only one reason for such activity; Satan.

**2. The City of Athens (vs. 16-21)?**

**What is the first thing that struck Paul with great despair in the city of Athens?**

Paul was highly taken back by the enormous display of worship to idols. One gets the impression that everywhere he looked there were monuments and other evidence of idolatry and worship of Greek gods. A little research tells us Athens was a center of art and architecture. However, much of the art and great buildings were dedicated temples to the pagan gods.

Paul on the other hand was a Jew and thus believed strongly in monotheism (one God). He had a real distaste for graven images yet he found himself surrounded by them.

Illus: The discomfort I feel when in New Orleans and hear references to voodoo.

Notice this did not prevent Paul from preaching the gospel.

**Who were the two philosophical groups that argued with Paul in Athens?**

Epicurean – materialists, believed in gods but saw them as indifferent to humanity. They did not believe in any divine providence of any sort. They emphasized living a tranquil life free from worry.

Stoic – Believed in the gods and believed life could be influenced by them. Believed ultimate divine principal was found in nature, reasoning, human beings and in the cosmic order of life.

So as you can see, Paul was dealing with a difficult group of people. They were likely the kind of people eager to argue and debate the different beliefs but unlikely to be persuaded; eager to talk but not likely with a very open mind.
The word translated babbler or pseudo-intellectual comes from a Greek word that literally means “seed-picker” as in a bird pecking indiscriminately at seeds around the barnyard. It carries the meaning of someone who has a variety of ideas, apparently a response to Paul’s references to God, Jesus and the resurrection.

So they took Paul before the informal group of authorities known as Areopagus [ar-ee-op-uh-guh s].

3. The sermon in Athens (vs. 22-34).

The sermon at Athens is uniquely different from Paul’s other messages. The ultimate message of salvation is not different at all but the approach is quite different.

What does Paul open his message with to get their attention and open the door of their heart?

First Paul acknowledges them as “extremely religious in every respect.” He calls them religious even though later in his message he basically calls them ignorant. He is acknowledging their desire to know God but preparing them for the fact that they are completely missing God.

What unique thing does Paul bring up to build upon his opening?

Paul tells them he noticed the altar to the “unknown god”. Again, Paul is opening his message where they are in their spiritual walk. He is capitalizing on their desire for spiritual understanding.

Illus: One would not approach a non-Christian and ask them if they were a tither would they? If they do not go to church and do not profess Jesus Christ as Savior, they would not even understand a discussion on tithing. That would come much later in their spiritual walk.

By the same token, Paul is trying to start with where they are in their desire to know God though they are missing Him completely. Their altar to the unknown god was a reflection of their desire to cover the entire basis including any god they might have missed or not imagined.

Paul uses “the unknown god” as the opportunity to tell them who the one true God is that they are in fact missing.

What are some things Paul tells the Athenians about Jehovah God?

- He is the God who made the word and everything in it.
- He is Lord of heaven and earth.
- He does not live in shrines made by man.
- He is the giver of life and breath and all things.
- He made all men and women from one man (Adam).
- He controls the seasons and all of mankind.
- He desires for mankind to seek Him.
- He is not far from each of us.

Conclusion

Paul concludes with an invitation. He points out to them that the time of ignorance is over. Now is the time to make a decision to repent from sin and prepare oneself for the judgment of God. And that preparation comes only through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As usual, some believed and some rejected. This is a reminder to you, me and our church that our job is to proclaim. We must proclaim and leave the decisions up to God and the hearers.