

Lesson 22- Acts 17:1-34

Paul Challenges the Greeks

What's up? What's new? The Greek culture was very interested in new ideas. Paul brought to them a new idea about the resurrection of the body.

To a Greek the body was like a prison, and the sooner one left it behind, the better. The physical body had no worth or value. Why raise a dead body and live in it again? They believed in immortality, but not the resurrection of the body.

When Paul arrived in Athens, his message remained unchanged. There is one true God, who sent His only Son Jesus to die for our sins. Because Jesus rose from the dead, our bodies too will rise from the dead one day. This was a new idea to the Greek philosophers, who brought Paul to the Areopagus for further discussion.

The Areopagus was where the city council met for business, but was also a place where citizens and visitors met to hear and discuss "new things." The Areopagus was named for Ares, the Greek god of war. It was also called "Mars Hill," after Mars, the Roman god of war. From here Paul would have been able to see another famous Greek landmark, the Parthenon, the temple of the goddess Diana.

I & II Thessalonians

Because Paul's ministry involved him moving from town to town, most of the ongoing contact he had with new believers was through letters. Two of those letters were written to the believers in Thessalonica while he ministered in Corinth. First Thessalonians 3:5 shows his deep affection and concern for them.

Paul begins I Thessalonians by encouraging the believers he was forced to leave behind. He thanks God for them and prays for them. Pleased to see they are showing Christ's love to others, Paul calls the church in I Thessalonians 3:12 to *increase* and *abound* in love for one another.

An important theme in I and II Thessalonians is Christ's Second Coming or "the day of the Lord." This phrase was often used by Old Testament prophets, referring to the day when God would punish evildoers and set His people free. How does I Thessalonians 4:13-18 comfort the believer? *They didn't need to grieve as though the dead were gone forever. Instead they could rejoice that believers would be with the Lord forever.*

Into the Word: Acts 17:1-34

THESSALONICA

1. Trace the route of Paul and Silas in Acts 17 on a map. In what city do the missionaries arrive? v.1
Thessalonica
2. Once again we find Paul in the midst of a Jewish community. His message for the people was that Jesus had suffered and had risen from the dead. Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Notice the reaction to Paul's message (vv.4-7):
 - Those who accepted the Gospel included *Gentiles* and *women*.
 - The Jews showed their displeasure with Paul and Silas by *gathering up some troublemakers and starting a riot*.

The Jews didn't find Paul and Silas, so they dragged some of the other believers before the authorities. They blamed Paul and Silas for upsetting the world and preaching against Rome by claiming Jesus was king instead of Caesar.

3. What possibly motivated the brethren to quickly send Paul and Silas away from Thessalonica by night to Berea? v.10
They likely knew the lives of Paul and Silas were at risk because there had been such a fast, violent reaction to his preaching. They may have feared for their own lives as well. Paul and Silas perhaps left Thessalonica in order to continue preaching the Gospel in another community too.

BEREA

4. Once in Berea, Paul and Silas went directly to the synagogue (vv.10-14).
 - Notice the reaction to Paul's message in Berea.

They received the Word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if what they were teaching was true. The Bereans were more “noble-minded.”

- Paul concluded his ministry in Berea because *the Thessalonican Jews came to Berea to drive him out of that town as well.*

ATHENS

5. Silas and Timothy remained at Berea, but Paul traveled to Athens (vv.16-21). When he entered the city, “his spirit was being provoked” by all the idols in the city (v.16).

- Aside from his usual visits to the local synagogue, where did Paul share the Gospel?
He was explaining Scripture in the marketplace with whoever was interested in talking to him.
- The educated people of Athens loved a good debate and new ideas. They were anxious to hear more from Paul. What was it about his message they were interested in hearing?
They were interested in hearing more about Jesus and the resurrection.

6. Paul observed the people of Athens were religious because of all the altars in the city, including one that was dedicated (v.23) “*To An Unknown God*”

When Paul spoke to the people at the Areopagus, he challenged their thinking. He knew he was speaking to a group of Gentiles who had limited knowledge of the Scriptures, so he started from square one (vv.22-31):

- v.24 *God made the world and everything in it*
- v.28 *In God we live and move and exist*

The idols of silver and gold and stone all around gave the idea that God was a created thing, but God is not “formed by the art and thought of man” (v.29). He has always existed. This was their “unknown God” (v.23).

Paul also explained that God wants everyone to seek Him and to repent. Paul concluded by explaining that God sent a Man, Jesus, whom He appointed to judge the world in righteousness (v.31). God had provided proof to all men by raising Jesus from the dead. He is not an unknown God. He is the risen Christ, the risen Jesus.

The people responded to Paul’s message (vv.32-34) in varied ways. Some sneered. Others were interested in hearing more, while some heard the message and believed.

New Idea: Resurrection

The thing about Paul’s preaching that intrigued the Athenians the most was the concept of the resurrection of the body.

Why is the resurrection of Christ so important? Read I Corinthians 15:13-19. If Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, what would that mean?

v.14 *Both preaching and faith are useless.*

v.15 *Those who preach the resurrection are lying about God and His work.*

v.17 *All people are still trapped in their sin.*

v.18 *Those believers who have died are lost, with no hope of eternal life.*

v.19 *Then our hope in Christ is for this life only, and we who believe are the most pitiful of all.*

Read John 11:25. What hope can a believer have from Jesus saying, “I am the resurrection and the life”?

Jesus is life—the person who believes in Him has eternal life even if he dies.

Memory Verse

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies."
John 11:25

Extra Memory Challenge

John 11:26

"And everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Discussion Questions

Each teacher should encourage, as much as time permits, discussion and inquiry on the part of students. Not every aspect of the following questions is addressed here, and students may have thoughts related to but not mentioned in this guide. The obligation of the teacher, then, is to understand as deeply as possible the Scriptures that are being discussed, in order to answer as well as possible any questions a student might have.

1. The believers in Berea (Acts 17:10-12) were praised for eagerly studying the Scriptures to see if Paul's words were true. The meaning of the Third Commandment is "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise His Word and the preaching of the same, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it." How eager are you to hear and study God's Word? How can we encourage each other to follow the Bereans' example?

There are many paths a discussion of this nature can take. Encourage students to come up with tangible ways to be an encouragement to each other, especially as regards being familiar with Scripture. Include Ephesians 4:14 in the discussion, talking about how knowing Scripture well can protect us from being "carried about by every wind of doctrine."

2. In Paul's day, there were Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (Acts 17:18). In their worldview, the Epicureans believed that the purpose of life is pleasure and that no one is in charge. The Stoics believed that what happens to them will just happen. What evidence do we see of these ideas in some people's worldviews today? How do the teachings of Scripture influence your worldview of life and death, of ethics and morality?

If we look, it is easy to find people today who believe that the purpose of life is pleasure, and that no one is in charge. A person with that mindset might have a hard time accepting that God has a right to judge them, or that as a believer they would be called to obey God with their whole hearts. It is equally easy to find people who believe, like the Stoics, that there is no way to control what happens in this world. People with that mindset might struggle with the concept of a personal relationship with Jesus, or struggle with the thought that what a person believes would have an impact on the afterlife.

Daily Devotions

Sunday: I Thessalonians 4:13-18
Monday: I Thessalonians 5:1-11
Tuesday: I Thessalonians 5:16-28
Wednesday: II Thessalonians 1:1-11
Thursday: II Thessalonians 2:1-12
Friday: II Thessalonians 2:13-3:5
Saturday: II Thessalonians 3:14-18

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH: THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE AFLC

* Fundamental Principle 10

According to Fundamental Principle 10, congregational cooperation and mutual help must be voluntary and free. Therefore, free congregations have no right to demand that other congregations shall submit to their opinion, will, judgment, or decision. Each congregation, which is subject to the Word and Spirit, is free to choose its sphere of ministry and work in the Lord's kingdom.

1. Think about the sphere of ministry in your congregation. What ministry opportunities is your congregation involved with? How could your congregation cooperate with other congregations in the work of the kingdom of God?

Answers will vary, may include support or work in a homeless shelter, a food pantry, a community church service, VBS in a park, support for a missionary with money or other resources, involvement in an agency that provides services to single mothers, Many congregations support our AFLC World and Home Missions endeavors, our Bible School, AFLBS and our Seminary, AFLTS

2. Why is it dangerous for one congregation to dominate over another?

According to Fundamental Principle 10, "each congregation subject to the Word and Spirit, is free to choose its sphere of ministry and work in the Lord's Kingdom." Each field is different and often needs tailored cultivating, planting, and harvesting. It is dangerous for one congregation to dominate another because there are different circumstances in each field. Each congregation should be free to minister as it is led by the Word and Spirit.