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Acts 16:25 - 17:34



Acts - Steve Gregg

In "Acts 16:25 - 17:34", Steve Gregg discusses the apostles' evangelization of Philippi, their imprisonment, and release after a supernatural event. Paul and Silas faced opposition to their message but found receptive audiences among fair-minded Jewish people in Berea and in Athens, where Paul connected with the crowd by quoting Greek poets and philosophers while preaching about the unknown God. Although some mocked him, others joined and believed in his teachings about Jesus' resurrection, the one God who made everything, and the importance of seeking and finding Him.

Transcript

Let's return to Acts 16, and we left off last time pretty much at verse 23, because Paul and his team, which was now Silas and Titus, excuse me, Silas and Timothy and Luke, these were now a team of four that had come to Philippi. It was the first broach of an apostolic team into Europe. Philippi was the first European city to be evangelized by the apostles.

Now, there were Christians in Rome at this time, and that's a European city, but no one knows how that got started. That probably started kind of spontaneously from converts who got saved at Pentecost in Jerusalem and went back to Rome and started sharing, but we don't have any apostolic connections with Rome at this early point. So, Philippi is the first European city, and they've come there, and they've made a few converts.

There's not many Jews in that city, so it's going to be largely a Gentile congregation. And Lydia was the first lady that's mentioned to be converted, and she offered her home as a meeting place and dwelling place for the apostles and the church. And one of the things, frankly, the main thing that we read about in Acts, about their stay in Philippi, we don't know how long they were there, except that it says they were there for, you know, a period of time.

One day, they encountered this demon-possessed girl who was a slave and who could tell fortunes, and her masters made money off of her fortune-telling. But Paul cast the demon out of her, and then she couldn't tell fortunes anymore. She didn't have these

powers anymore, so her masters were deprived of economic benefit from her, and this is what concerned them.

They didn't care that this girl had been delivered from demon possession. They cared that they could no longer make any money off of her. Once in a while, this is the thing that got Paul into trouble in his mission, is that there were people who had an economic interest in paganism, in this case, in this girl remaining demon-possessed.

In Ephesus, we'll find later on in chapter 19, there's a different issue, and that is that the silversmiths who made statues of the goddess Artemis were felt economically threatened because so many people were being converted through Paul that the worship of Artemis was declining, and the purchase of statues that they made was declining. So they, again, were feeling an economic pinch. From time to time, it's money that gets people angry at Paul because the gospel interferes with that money.

It'd be as if, you know, a person was doing evangelism down in the Red Light District, a bunch of prostitutes became Christians, and the pimps, you know, were no longer able to make money on them. They'd be angry at the evangelists, and that's how it was when this girl was saved. And so, without asking any questions about their identity or status, the authorities beat Silas and Paul and threw them in prison, and apparently, there wasn't even going to be a trial.

They were just trying to, you know, teach them a lesson. As it turns out, they intend to let them go the next day, but they just want to let them know, this is what we will do to you if you keep doing this kind of thing. That's kind of what the Sanhedrin did to the apostles in Acts chapter 4 and Acts chapter 5. They didn't really do anything long-term to them.

They just beat them and said, it'll be worse next time. Just stop preaching. And so, that's apparently what they intended here with Paul and Barabbas or Paul and Silas, because we don't really read of any trial set or anything like that.

It's just they're beaten and thrown in prison, and the next day, the authorities are going to come and offer to let them leave. But between their incarceration time and their release time, a significant thing happened. It says in verse 25, at midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Suddenly, there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awakening from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called out with a loud voice saying, do not do yourself any harm, for we are all here.

Then he came in for a light and ran in and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas, and

he brought them out and said, sirs, what must I do to be saved? Now, let's stop there for a moment. In the middle of the night, Paul and Barabbas are in pain, and they're in great discomfort. They're not trying to get any sleep, though.

They're singing and worshiping God, praising God, which is, of course, the reaction we often read of the apostles and martyrs. Even in later generations, the martyrs often were singing as the lions attacked them and as they were being burned at the stake and so forth. This is the grace of God given to his servants when they suffer.

It's amazing. We read about how people suffer for Christ in some countries, or sometimes in history, we say, man, I don't know if I could endure that. Well, neither could they, without the grace of God.

And you don't have to be without the grace of God any more than they had to be without it. The grace of God is what enables you to endure hardship graciously and victoriously, and we see that exhibited again and again in the apostles and in later martyr history. But here they are worshiping and praising God, rejoicing like the apostles in Acts, in the earlier chapters of Acts, did when they rejoiced after being beaten.

They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to be suffering shame for the name of Christ. Here they are rejoicing for the same thing, and this is heard by the prisoners. What's interesting is a great earthquake happens and the doors of the prison open and all the chains of all the prisoners fall off.

Now, I would understand if Paul and Silas were released by this supernatural intervention, but all the prisoners were released. Now, none of them left, which is interesting, and I think that we have to assume that Luke is implying that this the worshiping of God and the singing that the prisoners heard the apostles doing had an impact on them. That they were convicted to hear prisoners singing and worshiping God, and perhaps not converted, but very much impacted, so that they had a conscience about not escaping even when the chains fell off.

The fact that the chains fell off of the other prisoners may be implying, and although it's a literal fact that it happened, may be implying that there was, you know, a liberation of those who heard Paul and Silas singing, that spiritually speaking, that, you know, their spiritual chains were released just like their physical chains were. Hard to say. It's not known why the other prisoners had their chains fall off, except maybe that would be a way of demonstrating the change that had come about in their lives as a result of the influence of Paul and Silas in the prison.

We don't want to read too much into it because not much is said about this, but it's a remarkable thing. The jailer, of course, as a Roman jailer would, realized that if his prisoners were gone, he would be put to death. We saw this in chapter 12 where Peter was released supernaturally from prison, and the jailers were ordered to be put to death,

and this jailer knew that that would be his fate too, so he thought he'll save himself the shame of being condemned by the Romans, and he'll just kill himself right now.

He drew his sword because he thought the prisoners had escaped. He apparently woke up from his sleeping long enough to not know how long the doors had been open, and assuming that he's not seen anyone leaving right now, they must have left already, so he just assumes he's lost his prisoners and begins to do away with himself. Paul probably could not see the man at that point, and yet he knew the man was about to do something to himself and said, don't do yourself any harm, we're all still here.

Now, it is possible that Paul could see him. We don't know how the prison was situated. It's possible the man had come into the prison to see in the dark cells if anyone was there, but it was too dark for him to see them perhaps, and you know, Paul knew that he was about to take his sword.

We don't know how Paul knew. It doesn't matter how Paul knew. Paul assures the man that there's no need to take his life.

The prisoners have remained where they are. Now, the other prisoners apparently had their chains reattached, and the doors shut, and they remained in prison. Paul and Silas, however, were taken out of prison briefly.

They were put back in before dawn, and they were interviewed by the jailer, and his question is summarized in a single line, which may be merely Luke's summary. The man may have asked far more. He said, what must I do to be saved? And they said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.

Some people think that this is a promise that if you get saved, everyone in your household will be saved. This is a doctrine I hear taught in some churches called household salvation. You get saved, your whole house will be saved.

There's a promise of God right here. It's not a promise of God. Lydia and her whole household got saved.

Cornelius and his whole household got saved. This jailer and his whole household got saved. It was generally the case that if the head of the household became a Christian, his family would follow.

The wives in those days were not as independent of their husbands as they are in modern times, and nor were children. The father could determine, you know, the behavior and even the official beliefs of his family. So it was possible for a man to get saved, and his wife and children would just naturally follow suit.

That's why we find so often a whole household's getting saved. We do read in verse 32, then they spoke the word of God, spoke the word of the Lord to him, and to all who were

in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes.

Immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them, and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household. Now notice it says his whole household were baptized.

This verse, and others that are very much like it, are sometimes used to suggest that whole Christian households should be baptized, including infants. The idea of infant baptism arises from a verse like this, where a man got saved, so he baptized his whole house, his whole family. And just like the Jews would circumcise their infants to include them in the community of the Jews in the covenant, so it is argued that Christians did the same thing with their infants and baptized them.

But I would point out to you there's no mention of any infants here. There's no evidence that this man or any household that was baptized had any infants there, or that any of the people baptized had not first become believers. In fact, in this case, we're specifically told at the end of verse 34, he believed in God with all his household.

That means his household believed in God too. So the fact that the whole household was baptized seems to be based on the fact that the whole household became believers. And therefore this does not provide evidence of anyone being baptized prior to becoming a believer.

We don't have any case in the Bible where a person who is not yet a believer is baptized as an infant or otherwise. And therefore, even though many Christians do believe in infant baptism, it cannot be supported from this particular passage, although sometimes it is attempted. Now when it was day, the magistrate sent officers saying, let those men go.

Now apparently after he washed their wounds, fed them, and let them baptize him, he put them back in jail. Well, why not? They probably voluntarily went. They didn't want to get him into trouble.

He's their new child in the faith. They don't want him, you know, they could run off now that they're out of prison, but then he'd have to suffer for it. So they apparently, without any resistance, went back to prison, back to the jail, so that he would be, you know, exempt from penalties.

And the magistrate sent messengers saying, let those men go. And apparently this means let them go at their liberty, and they hopefully have learned their lesson. Hopefully they won't be making any more trouble because they don't want to spend another night in jail with another beating.

But it says, the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul saying, the magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart and go in peace. But Paul said to them,

they have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, meaning Roman citizens.

He's pleading his citizenship here, and he lets them know you have violated the law. Not the jailer, but the the lictors, the ones who had beaten him, the ones who are now asking him to leave. He could have avoided that beating by mentioning his Roman citizenship earlier, but he let them beat him so that he'd have something to hang over them.

And now he has it, and he plays his card. You beat me, both of us, and we are Roman citizens, and you did not condemn us. We were not condemned in court, so you have violated your own Roman law.

Now this could get the local authorities in big trouble because, you know, the emperor wanted his laws carried out to the letter. There needed to be sort of a predictable consistency to the way that justice was administered. And if news got out that Roman authorities had beaten Roman citizens against their legal privileges, this would raise concerns with all Roman citizens.

Oh, if they could do it, then maybe it does. And suddenly there'd be, you know, discontent with the whole legal system. And so these guys, when they learn, we'll read this, Paul says, they have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison.

And now do they put us out secretly? No, indeed, but let them themselves get us out. Now what he's saying is, you publicly humiliated us. You're going to have to publicly exonerate us.

We're not just going to sneak out quietly and everyone's going to wonder what happened to us. You're going to take us out publicly and exonerate us. Now is Paul just being arrogant and proud and power hungry? No, I think what Paul's doing is he realizes that the church is, by the arrest of Paul and Silas, excuse me, the arrest of Paul and Silas has rendered the church stigmatized in public opinion.

This is an illegal movement. Now, even if Paul and Silas would leave the church, the church would be left with that stigma hanging over it, that the leaders, the founders were treated as criminals. And therefore the church would have that disadvantage of that reputation.

So he said, well, you exonerate us first. He was willing to leave town, but not before his message was, you know, recast in the public eye. And so you're going to have to get us out publicly and exonerate us.

So the officers told these things to the magistrates and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, that is Roman citizens. Then they came and placed, excuse me, they came and pleaded with them and brought them out and asked them to depart from the city. So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia.

And when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed. Now, much more must have been done in Philippi besides this, but we don't have a record of it. This was the one instance that Luke wanted to record, namely, that the gospel had come under a seemingly legal attack, but it wasn't an attack on the gospel per se.

It was an attack because Paul personally had economically disadvantaged some people by casting a demon out. But nonetheless, he was the public face of Christianity in Philippi at that point. And for him to go to jail would leave, you know, the stigma that, well, like for example, when I'm talking about a certain doctrine, I won't go into it right now, but a doctrine that I think is a false doctrine.

I sometimes mention that one of the main teachers of that doctrine happens to be in prison right now for fraud, you know. Now, that doesn't prove his doctrine is wrong. That'd be what we call ad hominem argument if that's what I depended on.

But the truth is, he is. And it does kind of leave a stigma upon, oh, the chief advocate of that doctrine is in prison for fraud. Now, his doctrine could still be true, but that he's in prison stigmatizes it.

Now, the doctrine isn't true, and it can be proven untrue by other means. But the point is, those who believe it would probably prefer that you couldn't point those kinds of things out about its advocate. And so also the church would not wish to be following a message where its chief proponent in that town had been known as a criminal.

So by the time he and Silas left town, they weren't known as criminals. They were exonerated and proven innocent and declared, actually, the authorities were declared to have been in the wrong to persecute them. Now, chapter 17, when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

Well, there were synagogues of Jews in most towns. It's probably mentioned here only because in Philippi there wasn't before they'd been. So here there is one.

Now, Amphipolis would have been 33 miles journey from Philippi. So they went, they probably went one day to Amphipolis, spent the night there. And then they went another 27 miles to Apollonia, probably another day's journey.

And then it was another 35 miles to Thessalonica. So they got to Thessalonica from Philippi by three stages, each of them close to, you know, 30 miles. One was 33 miles, one was 27, one's 35 miles by these legs.

That's probably a day's journey, but that's a long way to go on foot in a day. Usually about 20 miles in a day is realistic on foot. So they were probably riding horses.

They were probably going a little faster than walking on this occasion to make these, to

cover these stages. And almost certainly these are individual days journeys. So it took them about three days to get from Philippi to Thessalonica.

Now Thessalonica is the capital city of Macedonia, just as Corinth is the capital city of Achaia. Macedonia being northern Greece, Achaia southern Greece. Thessalonica was the Roman capital of northern Greece, Macedonia.

It was also a Roman city. If you're a Roman colony, your citizens were exempt from Roman taxes, and they had certain other privileges too. They weren't necessarily Roman citizens in all respects, but the city had its own advantages legally.

Now there's a synagogue there, so they went into the synagogue. Paul, as his custom was, went into them and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, saying, this Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ. And some of them were persuaded, and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.

But the Jews who were not persuaded, became, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, which was apparently the host of the apostles in that town. Jason is not otherwise known to us, but it seems clear from what proceeds from this point, that it was he who was housing the apostles in town. So they attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people, but when they did not find them, apparently they weren't home, or they were hiding effectively in the house, when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, these who have turned the world upside down, have come here too, and Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there's another king, Jesus, and they troubled the crowd, and the rulers of that city, when they heard these things.

So when they had taken security from Jason, and the rest, they let them go. Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. Now Thessalonica, how long were they there? We read in verse 2, that they continued preaching in the synagogues for three sabbaths, so it would appear they were there about three weeks.

Now it may be that they were longer there, after they were no longer welcome in the synagogue, excuse me, on the sabbaths. They may have continued to minister to the Greeks, but we don't read of it. We do, for example, when Paul comes to Corinth in chapter 18, we read that when he is kicked out of the synagogue, he then begins to meet regularly for a year and a half with the converts elsewhere, but we don't read that here.

We don't read that when they kicked him out of the synagogue, he continued ministering

elsewhere, and so it may be that he was not much more than three weeks in this city. He was there long enough, we know, to at least receive a gift from the church in Philippi, which he had just left, so it's encouraging that he received a gift from Philippi, because he had not been there long, and he had been sort of seen as a troublemaker in town, but the church apparently was still loyal to him. Of course, he wrote Philippians much later than this, but in Philippians chapter 4 and verse 16, Paul tells the Philippians, for even in Thessalonica, you sent aid once and again for my necessities, so apparently twice financial gifts were sent to Paul while he was in Thessalonica from the Philippian church.

Now, you wouldn't think he'd need gifts for his support twice in three weeks time, unless they were not very large gifts or he had a lot of expenses, but it does suggest he might have been there longer than three weeks, although only three weeks were in the synagogue. After that, the Jews were too hostile. Now, the Jews stirred up a multitude against him.

They sought him at the place where he was being lodged. Apparently, he was not home when they came, so they grabbed his host Jason and others of the house and took them before the courts and said, this guy is harboring troublemakers, and not much was done except that the courts took security from Jason and let them go. Now, taking security from him must mean that they, you know, put them under some kind of a bond or something that, you know, no more trouble or this will cost you, sort of like when a person is on bail, you know, they've been arrested, they haven't gone to trial yet, they're released on bail, it means they put up bond, they put up some money on the guarantee that they'll show up for their trial.

If they don't show up, they lose the money. Probably that's what it means here. Jason had to put up some money guaranteeing there'd be no more trouble.

He'd get the money back if there's no trouble, but he'd probably lose it if there was. And Paul and his team, not wanting to give Jason any more trouble and knowing that the crowds were still volatile, decide to leave and go to Berea. Now, what's interesting in this one narrative about Thessalonica is that it says that the people accused Paul of teaching there's another king, Jesus, in verse 7. He says these are acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there's another king.

Now, Caesar, of course, had appointed rulers under him all over the Roman Empire, but Jesus was not one of them. Jesus was not one of the rulers that Caesar had appointed. Therefore, in claiming Jesus was the king, it was contrary to what Caesar had said.

Jesus was being declared to be a king independent of Caesar, in fact, higher than Caesar. Now, this was seen, of course, as a threat to Caesar's hegemony, to Caesar's authority. It was not really, because Jesus wasn't coming to displace Caesar.

Jesus, when he was asked by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, are you a king? Jesus

said, my kingdom is not of this world. I'm not here to set up a kingdom like a worldly kingdom that would be in competition with the Romans. It is in this world, but it's not of this world.

The king, of course, is in heaven, and he reigns over the hearts of people. It's a spiritual enterprise, not a political one, and because of that, you could have King Jesus as your supreme ruler and still be a loyal citizen to Caesar, as Paul exhorts in Romans 13 that Christians should do, that they should recognize the government authorities as even ordained by God, but not necessarily as, certainly not on the level of Jesus. Jesus is the king of the kings and the lord of the lords, and Christians are bound to be loyal to him first, but insofar as it is possible to be loyal to Jesus and still keep the laws of the land, Christians are always exhorted to do that, and as it turns out, most of the time they can't.

It was only at times when Caesar began to usurp the prerogatives of Christ himself that the Christians came into conflict with the Roman authorities. Remember, Jesus had said, render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's, so Jesus acknowledged that Caesar had some rights, and you should give him what is his by right, but you should not fail to give God what is his by right, and if Caesar seeks to claim for himself things that only God has the right to, then you must not give to Caesar what is not Caesar's, but give to God what is his, and therefore when there is a conflict between Caesar and God, God wins for the Christian. Jesus is the higher authority, but according to Romans 13 and even 1 Peter chapter 2, the rulers of the world are appointed by God to keep peace and to maintain justice, and if they keep doing that, then we should approve, and we should submit, and we should give them no trouble, and so they recognize, interestingly, that Paul's gospel was a gospel of there being a king, one Jesus.

The emphasis of New Testament gospel preaching was not necessarily just that you can be saved and go to heaven when you die, but that you can be saved into a kingdom under a king. There's a king named Jesus, and you are being called upon to be submissive to him, that he is the ruler. You're being brought into a society governed by a king, a monarchy of Jesus, a spiritual one, but still it's a spiritual kingdom, and therefore it has impact on your life every day, not just after you die, not just when you die and go to heaven, but in this life you live as a subject to a real king who has real authority and claims on your life and whose rules and laws and will is your obligation to fulfill in your life.

So they left Thessalonica. By the way, of course, Paul later wrote two letters to the Thessalonians, but not right away. He didn't write those letters until he got to Corinth, which he will do in chapter 18, but here, verse 10, then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews again.

Now, this is 45 miles south by southwest of Thessalonica. They traveled 45 miles, probably took a couple days, but they left Thessalonica by night so that their enemies would not see them going and not know where they're going because the enemies of Paul in one town tended to follow him from town to town and make trouble there, as they would do, as we shall see, but they did their best to keep their leaving and coming more or less secret. So they traveled 45 miles to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.

These were more fair-minded than those of Thessalonica in that they received the word of God with all readiness and searched the scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Hence, we have passed into evangelical jargon the word Bereans. Being a Berean means you're one who searches the scriptures.

Now, Berean really refers to a person who lives in a town called Berea, and as usual, when Paul came to Berea, he came to the synagogue first. That's where he always did go if there was one available, and he found in this case the people in the synagogue differently-minded than in Thessalonica. He was able to preach three weeks in Thessalonica in the synagogue, but he got terrible opposition there.

They just resisted his message and were told they were jealous. It was out of their envy that they resisted him, but here the people were more fair-minded. The King James is more noble.

They were more noble. They were more fair-minded, more commendable than the Jews he had spoken to in Thessalonica who wouldn't listen and didn't want to hear. These people wanted to listen.

They listened eagerly, but they were not quick to accept. They wanted, first of all, to see if the scriptures supported what Paul was saying, so they searched the scriptures daily to see if these things were so, and it says, therefore, many of them believed. So, as a result of studying the scriptures and checking Paul out on his scriptural support for his doctrines, they found him to be correct, and they believed, and so a church began in Berea, and it says, and also not a few of the Greeks, many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, verse 12, prominent women as well as men.

Now, many of these times it mentions the women, the prominent women. As I said, women often are more responsive to the gospel than men in terms of numbers. Now, men, when they're fully responsive to the gospel, can be pretty radically committed.

In fact, I've known a great number of Christian men who, although their wives are Christians, these men are sometimes ready to, you know, take radical steps, missionary activity, and, you know, different radical sacrifices they're willing to make for the gospel, which their wives are a little more reluctant to make in some cases. A lot of times the wife is the more spiritual, the more radical, but I think what I find in my experience is

there are more women who love the Lord than there are men, but the men who do are often pretty on fire, sometimes more so than their wives appear to be. But there's quite a few cases where the Bible speaks about women, notable women, becoming converted, and so we have to assume that there was a pretty large number of women in many of the churches, maybe more than men as there typically are now.

But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the Word of God was preached by Paul in Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowd. So here these opponents of Paul in Thessalonica who caused so much trouble, they make the 45-mile trip. Now to us, 45 miles isn't much, but that's a two-day journey on foot.

That's a 45-minute drive on a freeway for us, but that's like traveling two days journey on foot, walking all day long, two days. These guys are determined. They're not just content to have Paul out of their hair.

They don't want him in anyone's hair. They're very hostile, like he was. See, he followed people from town to town.

He went from town to town chasing Christians down to persecute them, and now he's getting a taste of his own medicine in a sense, because others who are zealous as he once was, Jews against Christianity, were now chasing him around the empire. So they came and they stirred up the crowds, and verse 14 says, then immediately the brethren sent Paul away to go to the sea, but both Silas and Timothy remained there. So you see what Paul's doing.

He's run out of Philippi, but he leaves Luke behind. He's run out of Berea, but he leaves Silas and Timothy behind. Why? These guys were not the targets for persecution that Paul was.

Paul was the lightning rod. He was the main preacher. The members of his team were kind of less visible and less targeted, so they could kind of stay safely in town and make sure the church gets established before they leave.

Now they would later rejoin Paul, but since he had to leave rather prematurely, he fortunately had team members he could leave behind to help nurture and establish the church for a little while anyway, though he had to be gone. So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens, and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed. Now Luke was still in Philippi, so it's they, not we, who are traveling here.

Paul is escorted down to the sea as if he's going to take ship, but he doesn't take ship. Apparently they're trying to cause those who are following him around to be misguided, to think he is leaving Greece. He's going to jump on a ship and go somewhere else, and they won't bother to follow him, but instead they conduct him over land to Athens, and

before those, it was apparently brethren from Berea who conducted Paul down to Athens to make sure he got there safely, and then he sent word back with those messengers back to Berea saying, you know, tell Timothy and Silas to join me as soon as they can.

I don't want to work here alone, and yet he was alone in Athens here, and we read of his ministry in Athens in the remainder of this chapter. Now Athens, of course, was the intellectual center of the empire. It was not politically that powerful, but it was, it had all the great philosophers associated with it, and it was still regarded, although it had much diminished in the time of Paul from what it had been in its glory days in the Grecian empire, it was still regarded as the intellectual center of the empire philosophically, and so it's also an idolatrous center, and there were hundreds if not thousands of idols in the city, and Paul sees that while he's there, and it causes him to be grieved, and eventually he manages to preach a sermon.

Now he doesn't start by preaching. He just starts by surveilling. He walks around in Athens looking around, and then he gets into conversations in the marketplace and starts arguing with people, and then eventually someone hears about him, and there's this group of philosophers that meet on Mars Hill or the Areopagus, and they just meet to talk about philosophical things, and when they hear that Paul is in town, and they catch a little bit of what he's saying, they say, this guy seems to be the purveyor of new gods.

Maybe we should have him come up and speak to our council on the Areopagus, so he gets a chance to speak there and gives a sermon that is recorded. That's what happens here in Athens. We read in verse 16.

Now while Paul waited for them, that is for Silas and Timothy at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw the city was given over to idols. Now idolatry was commonplace in all the cities Paul had been in the Gentile world, but this city was just rife with idols. Everywhere in the streets there were idols.

It's fully given over to idolatry, it says. Therefore, he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the Gentile worshippers in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be with there. So he preached to the Jews in the synagogue as usual, and he went out in the streets during the week apparently where people were doing business and reasoned with them.

Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him, and some said, what does this babbling man want to say? Others said he seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. Now some scholars feel that the word resurrection here in Greek being *anastasis* was taken by the Greeks to be a proper name, a feminine name, and that they heard Paul talking about Jesus and the *anastasis*, the resurrection, and that they mistakenly thought that Paul was talking about a god and goddess couple because the Greeks and the Romans had many gods who had female consorts, goddesses that were their wives or their consort, and they thought Paul

was talking about other gods when he talked about this Jesus and anastasis. Now, of course, anastasis means resurrection, but there is a possibility that the hearers took it as a proper name, and therefore they thought he's talking about gods, plural, that they had never heard of before.

They'd never heard of Jesus and anastasis. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus. Now, the word Areopagus just means the hill of Ares.

Now, Ares is the Greek god Mars, the god of war, but Ares is Greek, but Mars, I believe, is the Latin name for him, and Areopagus means the hill of war. And so this is where they would meet to have their, oh, their sessions, where they gathered to hear new things. It says, they brought him to the Areopagus saying, may we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak, for you are bringing some strange things to our ears, therefore we want to know what these things mean.

And Luke comments, for all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. They're always looking for novelty. By the way, people who are always looking for novelty are not going to be very stable, even when they become Christians, because they're going to look for something new.

There are Christians today who have that sort of tendency. They go for every fad that comes through. And as I've been, frankly, I've been in the charismatic movement for 50 years, and in the charismatic movement, you see this instability considerably.

There comes in the word of faith movement, and then there comes in the deliverance ministries movement, and there comes in the shepherding movement, and then there's the fourfold ministry movement, and the prophetic movement, and who knows what's next, the Toronto blessing. And it seems like in 50 years in the charismatic movement, I've seen so many fads come and go, because people just feel like, well, this is getting old. I want to do something new.

And some guy comes in, hey, I've got a new wrinkle here. It's leg lengthening. And so they've got this fad of leg lengthening comes and becomes a big splash for a while.

Then it passes too. And then, well, what's next? These are people, I think, who are bored. I think these are spiritually bored people.

And I don't think people who know Jesus are spiritually bored. I don't think Jesus is boring in the least. And I don't understand how it could be that Christians could just be always looking for some new thing to energize and revitalize their Christian experience.

If you have Jesus, and you really have Jesus, you don't get bored with Jesus. And it's just, it makes me think that a lot of people in the churches don't, have not really connected with Jesus, as seen by the fact they're always looking for some new thing. One of our

students here was telling us that her parents were very religious, but every time she saw them, they were in a different religion.

And that's sort of the typical thing. You want to hear a new thing. Oh, this religion is great.

Sounds really exciting. Oh, now I've got that one down. It's old now.

Let's see if there's something newer, more interesting. And that's the Athenians were. They didn't have anything to stabilize their thinking spiritually.

They're always looking for something that might be better than the previous thing, which is a sign that they don't have anything of very great importance at the moment, or else they'd stop looking. You stop looking for something once you found it. And so this is how the Athenians were.

Verse 22, then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious. For as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found in an altar with the inscription to the unknown God. Therefore, the one whom you worship without knowing him, I proclaim to you.

God, who made the world and everything in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is he worshiped with men's hands as though he needed anything, since he gives to all life, breath and all things. And he has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth. And he has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation.

So that they should seek the Lord in the hope that they might grope for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being. As also some of your own poets have said, for we are his offspring.

Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead.

Now, Paul probably intended his sermon to go longer, but mentioning the raising of the dead stirred up the crowd, because the Greeks don't believe in the resurrection of the dead. It's very important to them that the body is to be discarded at death and never re-inhabited. Being free from the physical body was what many of the philosophers, Plato for example, believed was the ultimate, you know, release from prison.

The body was like a prison, and once you die and your spirit is free, you're no longer in that prison. The idea that it would be somehow desirable that we would go back into the prison of a body in resurrection from the dead, physically resurrecting, would be an abomination to them. And it was.

And we read this more than once, but here we see it exhibited, because once he mentioned that God raised Jesus from the dead, it says, verse 32, and when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, we will hear you again on this matter. So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed among them Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Now, let me talk about Paul's sermon. Paul doesn't use any text of scripture here, because he's not speaking to Jews. When he preached among Jews, both he and Peter, we find they preach from the scriptures.

They talk about Israel's history, they talk about the Exodus, they talk about Moses and the law, they talk about David and the promises made to David, and the prophecies that were made with the Messiah. This is how both Peter and Paul preach to Jews. But when you're with pagans, there's none of that in their background.

They don't know scripture, and they don't quote any scripture for them. Instead, Paul actually quotes Greek philosophers, two of them. In verse 28, when he says, in him we live and move and have our being, that's actually a quotation from Epimenides, a Greek philosopher in Crete.

By the way, Paul quotes Epimenides on another occasion also, in Titus chapter 1, in verse 12, when he's speaking to Titus about the character of the Greek people, I'm sorry, the people of Crete, the Cretan people. And it's not a flattering description, so he actually quotes one of their own poets to support what he's saying. In Titus chapter 1, in verse 12, Paul says, one of them, meaning a Cretan, and this was Epimenides, the same one that he quotes who said, in him we live and move and have our being.

He says in Titus 1, 12, one of them, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. Now, Paul had said that as a Jew about Cretans, it sounded like a racist remark. So he says, I'll take it from a Cretan poet, Paul's his own people by this title.

So Paul was conversant in certain Greek writers. He was no doubt formally educated. Tarsus, his hometown, was a major university town.

It was an educational center in Cilicia, and Paul probably had a great education and probably had studied not only the law and the Pharisaic doctrines, but he had also studied, apparently, Greek philosophers and others. So he had probably a good classical

education. He could quote freely from Greek poets, even though they were pagans.

The other Greek poet he quotes is Aratus, and that's at the end of verse 28, where he says, for we are all his offspring. He says, one of your own poets has said, we are all his offspring. That's a quote from, I don't know if it's pronounced Aratus or Aratus, but this is a Greek poet also.

So instead of quoting scripture, Paul quotes Greek poets, because his audience doesn't know or have any respect for scripture, but presumably they know and have respect for their poets. And so he finds a point of connection between himself and his audience. He's coming from a very different cultural place.

He's a Jew, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee by background, and yet he's able to be versatile enough to connect with an audience from an entirely different culture. And the first connecting point he finds is that he saw in town a shrine that was dedicated to the unknown God. By the way, pillars and shrines of this sort have been found.

Not this one in particular, but some outside of Athens have been found where the pagans have put up shrines to what they call the unknown gods. There were so many gods in the Greek mind, and each one controlled something that had to do with people's well-being, that they wanted to placate them all, but they thought maybe we don't know all of them. You know, maybe there's gods we don't know about, and they, you know, they're being placated may be necessary too.

Who knows, they may have power to give us a lot of grief if we don't please them. So just to cover all the bases, we'll set up a shrine to the unknown god, and any unknown god that we don't know can count that to be his. Well, Paul says, I did come to tell you about this unknown god.

I saw that you have a shrine to the unknown god, so you are acknowledging that there is a god you don't know. He's actually a god I know, and I'm here to tell you about him. You've been ignorantly worshiping him.

Now that's an interesting statement, because Paul is saying that the pagans, in worshiping an unknown god, in whatever pagan way they did so, were actually worshiping the god that Paul believes in, only doing so ignorantly. He's not saying they were doing it acceptably. He's not saying that the fact that they were worshiping the unknown god is good enough, and that the real god that they're ignorantly worshiping accepts that.

He's just saying you are acknowledging a god that you don't know that you feel is worthy of worship, and I know that god, and I'm here to tell you you've been worshiping him ignorantly, and you need to stop doing so, because he later says, in these times of ignorance, verse 30, God overlooked this. He winked, it says the King James Version. In

times of ignorance, God winked.

Now you were ignorant. This was an unknown god to you until now. I have now proclaimed him to you, and God was willing to somewhat overlook your misbehavior when you didn't know better, but now you do.

And so he says, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent. So they're being called to repent for the first time, because this god they did not know has now been introduced to them. Their ignorance was taken into consideration by God, but they're no longer ignorant, and now their obligation is to clearly to repent.

Now when he begins to talk about God, he describes him in verse 24 as the god who made the world and everything in it. There are none of the Greek gods that have that in their resume. Different gods in the Greeks created different things and did different things, but one god, Paul says, has made it all, and that is obviously the god that Israel has worshiped all these years, though he doesn't mention Israel here.

Since he's the Lord of heaven and earth, he does not dwell in temples made with hands. Now Stephen had said this in his defense, and Saul had been in the audience in the Sanhedrin when Stephen gave his sermon. He said God did not dwell in temples made with hands, but of course he was talking about the Jewish temple, and this infuriated Paul when he was Saul attached to the Sanhedrin.

He was infuriated by Stephen saying that, but now he knows it's true, and now he's referring not to the Jewish temple, but to the pagan temples. There were lots of pagan temples. He says, well God, he's too big to live in a temple.

He doesn't live in houses made with hands, nor is he served by men's hands, and by that he means by the sacrifices that men's hands offer. God is not in need of food. You don't have to cook him meat and hand it over to him because he, you know, somehow he's being served by you.

He has no need for those things since he made everything. In fact, he's the source of everything. He gives to all life and breath, he says in verse 25.

Now in saying that God is the one who gives all life and breath, he's saying you have experienced benefits from this God, though you don't know who he is. Now in chapter 14, when Paul was talking to the people at Lystra, when they wanted to worship him and Barnabas as Zeus and Mercury, Zeus and Hermes, he told them, you know, this God that you don't know, he has not left himself without a witness. He has given you rain and the fruitful seasons and so forth.

He's saying you already have benefited from this God through the centuries without knowing who he is. All the crops you've raised, all the fruitful seasons, the rain, that has been from him. Now he's telling the Athenians something similar.

Your life, your breath, it's all been from him. You've had it all this time, but you never knew it was from him. That's verse 25 here.

He gives to all life, breath, and all things, and he's made from all people from one blood. He's made all nations, and he's determined where they would live. This has to do with, of course, the Tower of Babel and the dispersion of the people, and of course, everyone coming from Adam and Eve.

Why he brings this up is probably to indicate that everyone knew that different nations had different gods they worshipped. The Greeks, the Romans, the barbarians, the Canaanites, the Egyptians, they all worshipped different gods. But Paul's saying the one God made all these people.

All these different nations came from one bloodline made by God, therefore he's the one God for everyone. However many diverse gods these different nations have, they all should be worshipping the one God who is their source, who made them all from one bloodline that he created from the beginning. So all these other gods are bogus, and it doesn't matter if you're Greek, or Roman, or Jew, you were made by this one God, and owe him your worship.

That's what he's saying. He says that God separated the nations and gave them the boundaries of their habitation, verse 26 and 27, so that they should seek the Lord in the hope that they might grope for him and find him. The idea is they're in the dark, groping around, trying to find God.

But it says that God wanted them to do that. He wants them to grope around and maybe find him. He's suggesting that people can conceivably find God by seeking him, which of course again goes against the Calvinist idea that unless you're already born again you don't seek God.

You know, if you don't, if not born again, you don't want to seek God. You're totally depraved and you hate God. But Paul indicates there's people in the pagan world that are actually seeking after God.

They're in the dark, they're ignorant, but they're groping after him and hopefully will possibly, some of them might find him. Now he says this is why God divided them into separate nations, so that they could seek God. What's the connection there? Probably what Paul's thinking is if the whole world was under one ruler, one dictator, and he was a bad one, then he could prevent anyone from seeking God.

But because there are separate sovereign domains, a dictator in one area that forbids the worship of God doesn't have an impact on a separate sovereign nation where people could still seek after him. It's impossible when there's not a world government for all people to be brought under control and kept from seeking God. Only if there is one world

government that controls everybody, then possibly someone could prevent people from outwardly seeking God anyway.

But he goes on and says, you know, we shouldn't think he's made of gold or silver because after all we aren't and we're his offspring. And he says your own poets say we're his offspring and we are. All Christians know that God is the author of all life and therefore all people are his are God's children in a sense, not in the same sense Christians are.

All people are the offspring of God that in terms that God brought them into the world and therefore is in that sense the father of all people, but not all acknowledge him as father. The prodigal son was a sinner away from God, but he had a father that he wasn't in fellowship with. He was an alienated son until he came home.

That's how sinners are, Jesus is saying. Sinners who are apart from God, they're not, I mean, they are in a sense God's children, but they're alienated. They need to come back.

Now true, he said to certain people, you're your father the devil, but he was talking about those who wanted to kill him. This was people who were aligning themselves with the devil. And there's a different sense in which Christians are children of God because we deliberately align ourselves with God as opposed to the devil.

There are people who align themselves with the devil and are in that sense his children. Just like some of the children, some of the offspring of Cain were the fathers of those who worked with metals or who played musical instruments, who dwell in tents and keep herds. They aren't the literal fathers.

Those who do those things are following their example. They're in a sense are the sons of these people. It's a manner of speaking that the first person to do something is the father of that trade and the ones who do it are the sons of that trade.

And the devil is the first murderer. He was a murderer from the beginning, Jesus said, and you who want to murder me, you're his sons. Now those of us who follow God, we are his sons in a different sense.

But all people in a generic sense are God's sons, even though some are alienated from him, like the prodigal son. And therefore, Paul can approvingly quote this pagan who says we're all his offspring. He says, well, since that's true, we shouldn't think he's gold, silver, or stone because we're not.

And therefore, we have to see God differently than these idols that you have around you. And he says that when we were ignorant, God winked, but he's not going to wink anymore because you've now heard the gospel. And he's appointed a time he's going to judge everybody.

And he's going to judge him by this man, Jesus. And he's proven it by raising him from the dead. Now, unfortunately, that point, Paul overstepped his welcome, raising the subject of the resurrection of the dead.

They wouldn't hear him any further. And only a few people apparently responded favorably. Dionysius and very few other people.

And we don't know if church got started there at all. We don't know if he baptized anyone there at all. There were some willing to hear him again, but he didn't stay long enough to plant a church there.

And we don't ever read of a church in Athens in the Bible. So there must have been a few believers and Paul must have encouraged them to continue to believe, but they didn't really get anything started there. Interestingly, later on in first Corinthians chapter 16, Paul is going to refer to the household of Stephanas as the first fruits of Achaia.

Well, Athens was in Achaia and Stephanas was in Corinth, not Athens. And Paul hasn't gone to Corinth yet when he's in Athens. So the first fruits of the Achaia, Paul considers to be his first converts in Corinth, which means he must not have considered these people who heard him in Athens to be real converts or fully members of the Christian community.

So we come to the end of chapter 17. We take a break.