



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

"RIDING THROUGH"

THE BOOK OF ACTS - LESSON 17

After encouraging the brethren at Lydia's house (Acts 16:40), the missionary team left Philippi and headed Southwest to Thessalonica. (It is possible that Timothy remained in Philippi at this time, since there is no reference to him until Acts 17:15.) The team traveled down the Egnatian Way, which was the great Roman Road that stretched from the Adriatic Sea to the Middle East. The main street in Thessalonica was, and still is, part of this road.

The team made two stops before reaching Thessalonica. The distance between Amphipolis and Apollonia and Thessalonica was approximately 30 miles each, which may suggest a three-day journey on horseback.

Thessalonica is our modern day Saloniki. This famous city was founded in 315 B.C. by the Macedonian king Cassander. He named the city after his wife Thessalonica, who was the sister of the Greek military conqueror, Alexander the Great. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia, and because of its natural harbor, it was an important trade center. It was a "free city," which meant it could have its own citizens' assembly and make its own coins. Although it was controlled by the Romans, it was predominately a Greek city and had no Roman garrisons within the city walls.

Paul developed a deep affection for the believers in Thessalonica. If you read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, you can see Paul's tender heart for them.

First Day

1. Read Acts 17:1-34. What impressed you the most about this chapter? What new facts did you learn? Are there any reoccurring phrases or themes?

2. Reread Acts 17:1-9. Title this section. What do you think is the key verse?

3. What is the first thing Paul does when he reaches the city?

The rulers of the synagogue customarily would invite any visiting or traveling rabbi to speak to the assembly. Paul was probably invited to address this Jewish crowd.

4. In Thessalonica, how often did Paul preach on the Sabbath?

We don't know exactly how long Paul stayed in Thessalonica. We know he ministered in the synagogue for three weeks, but he probably stayed longer, ministering outside of the synagogue. Paul might have worked during the week as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3, 1 Thessalonians 2:9, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-10). We do know that he stayed long enough to receive financial aid twice from the Philippian church (Philippians 4:15-16).

5. What three words from verses 2 and 3 tell us what Paul did with the Jews?

The Greek word for "**reason**" gives us our English word for "**dialog**." This suggests a give-and-take conversation where the Jews presented their arguments, and Paul refuted them by presenting his own. He was allowing them to discuss what he was sharing, and talk out the problems.

Next, Paul "**explained**." This means "**to expand or force open**" in the Greek. Paul was expanding the understanding of the listeners.

Paul then "**demonstrated**" or "**proved**" his argument for the Gospel. This word means to "**put alongside of**." Paul was able to take Old Testament texts and put them alongside each other, explaining how they went together. For example, maybe he took Isaiah 53 and compared it with a text from Micah, then put it alongside some verses in the Psalms. By doing so, he was proving how they all spoke about the same person, Jesus Christ. It was hard for the Jews to understand how the prophecies that spoke about the Messiah, who had to suffer and die, was also the same Messiah who would eventually set up the Kingdom of God.

6. According to Acts 17:4, did many people believe Paul? Who?

7. What did the unbelieving Jews do? Why?

8. What were Paul and Silas being accused of? (vs 6-7)

Paul never said that Jesus had come to be Caesar's rival. Jesus Himself said in John 18:36 "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but now My kingdom is not from here." The accusations of these Jews were similar to the ones used at the trial of Jesus (Luke 23:2).

9. When the mob was unable to find Paul, whom did they drag before the city officials?

Paul and Silas must have been staying in the home of Jason. Jason may have been a relative of some sort (Romans 16:21) or possibly Paul's temporary employer. He also may simply have been one of the believers that responded to Paul's message in Thessalonica.

10. What did the officials require from Jason? (vs 9)

This may have been either a fine or some type of legal contract that guaranteed Paul and Silas would not return to their city.

11. How were the Christians "**turning the world upside down**"? Why were they making such an impact?

12. As a Christian, are you "**turning your world upside down**"? Are you making a difference for the Gospel? How, or why not?

This ends our lesson for today. It is possible that this is the incident that Paul is referring to in 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18 as a work of satan to hinder him. Later

Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica to teach and encourage them (1 Thessalonians 3:1-3). Timothy came back to Paul and reported the news of their great faith (1 Thessalonians 3:6-7). There was much fruit from this mission to Thessalonica.

Memory Verse of the Week: "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." Acts 17:11

Second Day

Review your memory verse.

Yesterday Paul and Silas were asked to leave another city. This time it was the believers who sent them away for their own safety, and the safety of the Christians who remained in Thessalonica. They stole away during the night and headed to Berea, which was 60 miles west of Thessalonica.

1. Read Acts 17:10-15. Title this section.
2. How are the Bereans described in verse 11?
3. What does it mean to be fair-minded?

The Bereans' commitment to the Scriptures is a challenge to each of us. They were not only seeking the truth, but with an open, teachable heart. This would be a pastor's dream -- a congregation of people who loved and studied God's Word so diligently! (Does that describe you?)

These next questions are very personal. Spend some quiet time with the Lord, and then answer these questions honestly. Meditate on the things that God shows you as you search your heart.

4. When you listen to someone teach God's Word, do you automatically believe it, or do you search the Scriptures yourself to see if "these things are so"?

5. Do you listen to others with a critical heart or a teachable heart? Are you ready and willing to learn and be challenged? Or do you like to remain unchallenged and comfortable?
6. Do you know why you believe what you believe? Can you prove such doctrines as the Trinity, eternal security, or the second coming of Christ? Can you explain what salvation is to someone?
7. How often and how diligently do you study the Scriptures? How many times a week?
8. Do you know the difference between devotions and study time? When you study, do you simply look up verses, or do you analyze the truth of the texts?
9. Read Joshua 1:8. What must we do to be spiritually prosperous?
10. What does Solomon say in Ecclesiastes 12:13 is the whole duty of man?
11. Read Psalm 119:18. Is this your prayer before you open the Word each day?

**I pray that these questions challenged you to continue, or begin,
studying the Word.**

12. According to Acts 17:12, what was the result of searching the Scriptures?
13. Why do you think they only sent Paul away? Where did he go?

When Silas and Timothy got word that Paul arrived in Athens safely, off they went!

If you don't really know how to study your Bible, let me offer you three simple steps to help you learn to get the most from any text you study. (If you need additional help, or maybe some suggestions on Bible helps, please see your group leader)

Step 1- Observation (See it!)

First you want to observe the text. You want to ask yourself, "**What does the text say?**" Write down any facts you find. Then read as a detective, asking yourself the questions Who? What? Where? When? Why? Make note of any questions you have, things you don't understand, etc. Your goal is to "see" what it says.

Step 2- Interpretation (Know it!)

Your goal is to now find out "**What the text means.**" Look up any words you don't understand, and find the answers to the questions you have. Use Bible helps, such as your Concordance, Bible Dictionary, Vines Expository Dictionary, or Commentaries. You can cross-reference, do word studies, etc. Try to understand all you can.

Step 3-Application (Do it!)

This is the goal of your Bible study: to learn how the Word applies to you. Now you ask the question, "**What does this mean to me?**" Ask the Holy Spirit to take each lesson you see in the text and show you how to use that lesson, spiritual truth, or doctrine in your life.

If you are diligent in your study of God's precious Word, you will be in awe of how many "**Reasons to Rejoice**" you will find. Trust me! (Well, don't trust me -- dig in and see for yourself!)

Third Day

Review your memory verse. How does it encourage you?

Timothy and Silas were left behind in Berea, then summoned to join Paul in Athens. According to 1 Thessalonians 3:1-6, it seems that Silas and Timothy did join Paul at Athens and from there Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica, and Silas perhaps to Berea or Philippi. Paul then proceeded to travel to Corinth alone, where Timothy and Silas later joined him (Acts 18:1-5). It is thought that from Corinth, Paul wrote 1st and 2nd Thessalonians.

While Paul waited for his friends in Athens, he did a little sightseeing.

1. Read Acts 17:16-34. Reread verses 16-21.
2. What was Paul's reaction to the city of Athens? Did he like it?
3. What did Paul think of idols? Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-6 and 10:14-23.

Athens was the intellectual capital of the ancient world. It was the center of art, literature, culture, architecture, and politics during the "golden age" of the Greeks (5th century B.C.). There were many philosophers that lived in Athens. It was a city where many came to debate and discuss different philosophies of life.

This city is known today as the birthplace of western civilization and culture. There were many statues and massive buildings that were all devoted to pagan worship.

4. According to Acts 17:17, where did Paul go to preach?
5. What two groups of people did Paul encounter?
6. Look up the meaning of each of these words in your dictionary and write the meaning. You may also use a Bible Dictionary to help.

A. Epicurean:

B. Stoic:

7. What did they call Paul in verse 18?

The philosophers were not impressed with Paul and his theology. They saw him as a "babbler" or a "seed picker." This term is an Athenian slang word that comes from the Greek word "spermologos." This term was used literally of birds, and figuratively of one who lived by picking up scraps, or as here of a vagrant philosopher who belonged to no organized system. (Kent, Jerusalem to Rome)

The Greeks saw Jesus and the Anastasia (Greek word for resurrection) as simply two more gods that Paul wanted to add to their list of deities.

8. The Greeks thought they were wise in all their philosophies. What is the truth of the matter? Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25.

They took Paul to Areopagus, otherwise known as "Mars Hill." This was behind the marketplace and was the ancient meeting place of the Council of Areopagus, which was the supreme judicial and legislative body in Athens. (The Areopagus was the same court which had tried and condemned Socrates centuries before.)

It was the custom for a traveling, or itinerant lecturer to be brought before the council, to see if their lecture or philosophy was worth allowing Athens to hear it.

9. In Acts 17:21, did the people of Athens spend much time debating and comparing philosophies?

People today spend much time getting their ears tickled by new winds of doctrine (2 Timothy 4:3-4). They waste precious time dwelling on things that have no eternal value or truth. How solid we need to be in God's Word so we don't get deceived and drawn away.

They brought Paul to Areopagus to hear what he had to say. Tomorrow we will look at Paul's sermon on Mars Hill. I want to leave you with one last question ...

10. Paul hated what he saw in Athens. His heart was grieved over the sin he was witness to. How bad do you hate sin? When you see people who have given themselves over to the world and its ways, are you provoked? How do you respond? Do you look the other way, thinking it's their business, or do you ask God for opportunities to share the truth, and show them the way to eternal life?

Think about it ...

Fourth Day

What's your memory verse?

In today's lesson, Paul uses wisdom as he addresses the group at Areopagus. Paul uses a much different approach than when he speaks to a Jewish audience.

1. Read Acts 17:22-34.

Paul begins by acknowledging the fact that they were very "religious." While walking through the streets of Athens, he noticed that there were many gods! William Barclay said, **"It is said that there were more gods in the city of Athens than in all the rest of Greece put together, and that in Athens, it was much easier to meet a god than a man."**

2. Why do you think the Athenians had an altar to the "Unknown God"?

3. Why did Paul begin by making reference to it? What was his strategy?

4. From Acts 17:24-28, what facts do you find about God?

5. Why is it essential to understand that God cannot be contained in a manmade temple? (Refer back to Acts 7:47-50.) Where does He live?

Charles Swindoll, in his commentary on the book of Acts, says that Paul pulls back the veil of Heaven and reveals four key facts about God in Acts 17:24-28:

1. **Being the Creator, God cannot be contained (vs 24).** This told the Athenian's that their shrines and temples would not do.
2. **Being the Originator, God has no needs (vs 25).** They could not give Him anything He didn't have, or tell Him anything He didn't know; He is self-sufficient.
3. **Being intelligent, God has a definite plan (vs 26-27).** He is in control, but unlike the Epicureans' or Stoics' gods, He is accessible and approachable. God ordained history and geography, and He created mankind from "one man" so that all nations are made of the same blood.

4. **Being the Sustainer, God is not dependent (vs 28a).** Rather, we are dependent on Him, and His grace, mercy, and love.

6. At times we forget who our God is, and the awesomeness of His character. How does reminding ourselves that God is self-sufficient and intelligent give you hope in any situation you're in right now? How does knowing that He is not dependent on anyone or anything encourage you?

In verse 27, Paul reminds the Athenians that God is knowable and attainable. They believed that their gods were the opposite; unattainable and unknowable. They believed that their gods didn't care much about them.

7. Why is it so important to understand that God is knowable? Is He knowable to all? Read Romans 1:20.

8. Remember back when you didn't "know God." What did you think the first time you were told that you could know God personally and that He wanted to have an actual, loving relationship with you? Did you believe it?

In verse 28, Paul quotes from some of their own poets. He first quotes from Epimenides, "**For in Him we live and move and have our being,**" and then from Aratus and Cleanthes, "**For we are also His offspring.**"

9. What was Paul saying? Read Genesis 1:26.

Even though this sermon is much different in style than his others, Paul still includes the essentials of the Gospel.

10. Read Acts 17:29-31. Give the verse that supports the following doctrines:

- a. The condemnation of sin:
 - b. The need for repentance:
 - c. God's certainty of judgment:
 - d. Salvation in the Resurrected Jesus Christ:
11. The Athenians did not believe in a bodily resurrection. What was their reaction to this message? (vs 32) How was their reaction different than those in Thessalonica?
12. According to verse 34, who believed?

Dionysius was thought to be a member of the Areopagus council. Nothing is known about Damaris. Some speculate that she may have either been the wife of Dionysius, or a temple courtesan (prostitute).

This is the last we hear of Athens in the Book of Acts. We are unsure if there was even a church established there. People argue whether or not Paul's mission in Athens was a failure. I personally believe that we are never failures when we are in God's will, no matter what the outcome. We can rejoice in His sovereignty!

Fifth Day

Write out your memory verse.

Let's take a few moments to review what we learned from Acts 17.

1. Review each day of the lesson. What specifically spoke to your heart each day?
 - a. Day 1
 - b. Day 2
 - c. Day 3

d. Day 4

2. What did you learn about God this week?

3. What did you learn about yourself from this chapter?

4. What changes in your life do you need to make as a result?

5. Acts 17:28 says, "In Him we live and move and have our being."
What does that mean to you?

This concludes our study of chapter 17. I pray that God gave you many **"Reasons to Rejoice"** this week! I rejoice that the God who created the Heavens and the earth wants to have a relationship with me. **Now that's incredible!**