

# ACTS

## Chapter 17

### *Paul and Silas in Thessalonica*

**Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” 4 And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. 5 But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. 6 And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, 7 and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” 8 And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. 9 And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.**

**17:1-15** The visit to Thessalonica is a stop on Paul’s second missionary journey. His partner this time is Silas, after a parting of ways with Barnabas over the matter of John Mark (Acts 15:36–41). This second journey, even more than the first, looks toward the Gentiles; its initial purpose is to fortify the new churches of Asia Minor, Paul’s first plants, with the Jerusalem Council’s encouraging word to Gentile converts (15:12–21). Since Paul’s vision in Troas (16:8–10), the mission has moved even further from Jewish roots into Europe. (It was likely there in Troas that Luke joined the expedition.) Philippi, with its famous incidents (16:11–40), was a Roman colony in Macedonia. After Thessalonica will come the very pagan Athens and Mars Hill (17:16–34). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

**17:1** *Amphipolis ... Thessalonica.* The Egnatian Way crossed the whole of present-day northern Greece east-west and included Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia and Thessalonica on its route. At several locations, such as Kavalla (Neapolis), Philippi and Apollonia, the road is still visible today. If a person traveled about 30 miles a day, each city could be reached after one day’s journey. (CSB)

*Thessalonica.* About 100 miles from Philippi. It was the capital of the province of Macedonia and had a population of more than 200,000, including a colony of Jews (and a synagogue). All these contributed to Paul’s decision to preach there. See Introduction to 1 Thessalonians: The City and the Church. (CSB)

Thessalonica, the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia and a major city (Salonika) of that country yet today, lay on an important east-west road crossing the province. It was also the major seaport of Macedonia and a naval base. Though fiercely persecuted (1 Thess 2:14; 2 Thess 1:4–8), the church Paul founded on this visit became an example far and wide (1 Thess 1:6–8). Paul follows his usual custom of going first to the Jewish synagogue. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

The Thessalonian Christians would become a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia, and even beyond (1 Thess. 1:7). (PBC)

*synagogue*. Unlike Philippi, Thessalonica had a Jewish community and synagogue. (TLSB)

**17:2-3** dielevxato . . . dianoivgwn . . . paratiqevmeno", "discussed . . . opening up . . . placing before." Paul's manner of dialectic or debate was to expound, explain, lay out proofs of Jesus' messiahship. tw'n grafw'n, "the Scriptures." Paul's source was the biblical texts. While other speeches in Acts detail *which* Old Testament proofs are cited, in this pericope (including also v 11) the emphasis is simply on the fact that the Scriptures were authoritative. The Bible is the source and norm of true teaching. e[dei, "had to." It was the same divine necessity that Jesus identified for his mission (dei', Mt 16:21). The cross *is* Christ's mission, and the resurrection drives the apostles' mission. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

**17:2** *three Sabbath days*. These two weeks represent the time spent in the synagogue reasoning with the Jews, not Paul's total time in Thessalonica. An analysis of the Thessalonian letters reveals that Paul had taught them much more doctrine than would have been possible in two or three weeks. (CSB)

Paul's method in the synagogue was to take passages from the OT and compare them with the facts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The idea of a suffering Messiah was a stumbling block to the Jews, and so it was important to show that he must suffer. (PBC)

The verb here has the sense of a philosophical discussion on the basis of the texts of the Torah. Such activities of study and discussion were a common feature of the synagogue in its realization as Beth ha Midrash (house of study). (Sacra)

*reasoned ... from the Scriptures*. Paul began where people were. If they had the OT Scriptures and accepted them, Paul utilized them; contrast his approach in vv 22–31. (TLSB)

**17:3** Following a pattern set by Jesus, Paul uses the OT to demonstrate God's work of salvation, which depends on Jesus as the promised Messiah (Lk 24:26–27, 44–45; cf Is 52:13–53:12). (TLSB)

**17:4** Paul regularly has some success at the synagogues among Jews and God-fearing Gentiles there. (TLSB)

*leading women*. Perhaps the wives of the leading men of the city, but women who deserve notice and position in their own right (see also v. 12). (CSB)

Culturally, women more easily converted from one religion to another, as commonly happened through marriage. Inheritance and other issues placed more restrictions on men; e.g., circumcision hindered male converts to Judaism. (TLSB)

**17:5** *were jealous*. Because of the large number of people (including some Jews, many God-fearing Gentiles and many prominent women) who responded to Paul's ministry (cf. 13:45). (CSB)

*wicked men of the rabble* – People who hang about in the public square. Could rightly be translated as "low life's." They were the sort of folk who as day-laborers were often at loose-ends and therefore ready for mischief. (Sacra)

*house of Jason.* Paul had probably been staying there. (CSB)

Perhaps hosted Paul and Silas in his home during their time in Thessalonica, as Lydia had in Philippi (16:15). (TLSB)

Possibly the same man mentioned as a *suggenei*", "kinsman," of Paul in Rom 16:21, though this is uncertain. His "crime" is hosting Paul here in Thessalonica. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

**17:6** *city authorities.* The Greek term *politarch* (lit. "city ruler"), used here and in v. 8, is found nowhere else in Greek literature, but it was discovered in 1835 in a Greek inscription on an arch that had spanned the Egnatian Way on the west side of Thessalonica. (The arch was destroyed in 1867, but the block with the inscription was rescued and is now in the British Museum in London.) The term has since been found in 16 other inscriptions in surrounding towns of Macedonia, and elsewhere. (CSB)

*turned the world upside down.* Lit, "shaking or stirring up the inhabited (i.e., Roman) world" in a negative, seditious manner. In a more profound sense, Christianity does invert the ways of this world (e.g., Lk 1:51–53; 6:20–26; 9:46–48; 18:14). (TLSB)

**17:7–8** *another king, Jesus.* An issue in Jesus' trial (Lk 23:2–3; Jn 18:37; cf Lk 1:32–33); the lordship of Christ may have been part of Paul's message. Asserting a rival king to Caesar was a serious charge and greatly disturbed the city. (TLSB)

**17:7** *pavnte*", "all." All of the believers are held accountable, considered guilty, by the Jewish accusers. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

*acting against decrees of Caesar.* Blasphemy was the gravest accusation for a Jew, but treason—to support a rival king above Caesar—was the worst accusation for a Roman. (CSB)

**17:9** *money as security.* Jason was forced to guarantee a peaceful, quiet community, or he would face the confiscation of his properties and perhaps even death. (CSB)

Jason was required to place his money and property on the line to guarantee that there would be no further disruptive events. (TLSB)

The church in Jason's house flourished, however and this is the core congregation that had the honor of receiving the first two documents ever written in what would later be called the NT, namely 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Jason himself would later join Paul in Corinth (Romans 16:21). Here was another man marked by the Gospel, and appropriately so, since Greek Jews generally chose the name Jason in Greek for their Semitic names Joshua or Jesus. (LL)

**17:1–9** At Thessalonica, Paul and Silas continue the pattern of preaching at the synagogue, gaining converts, and experiencing harsh opposition. The offense and foolishness of the cross (1Co 1:23) may well provoke a harsh response from the world. Yet Jesus, the Messiah, suffered, died, and rose, and "turned the world upside down." Sinners are forgiven, the humble and poor are raised up, and the proud and rich are brought low. The first will be last, and the last, first. • Heavenly Father, may the Good News of Jesus Christ, the King of kings, continue to turn this world upside down. Amen. (TLSB)

*Paul and Silas in Berea*

**10 The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. 11 Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. 12 Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. 13 But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. 14 Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. 15 Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.**

**17:10** *brothers*. Christians in Thessalonica. (TLSB)

*Paul and Silas*. It has been suggested that Timothy was left at Philippi and rejoined Paul and Silas at Berea (compare v. 10 with v. 14). (CSB)

*Berea*. Modern Verria, located 50 miles from Thessalonica in another district of Macedonia. (CSB)

Present-day Verria, still in Macedonia, about 50 miles west of Thessalonica. The reception that follows has made Berea a name beloved to Christian history, one of the few Bible cities sometimes chosen as a namesake by congregations. Interestingly, Cicero tells of a Roman magistrate, Piso, who a century earlier had traced the same route as would Paul, also fleeing from Thessalonica and finding haven for a time in Berea—until he, like Paul, was followed (v 13). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

**17:11** *more noble...examining the Scriptures daily* – Here the emphasis is entirely on behavior, demonstrated by their “complete eagerness.” (Sacra)

In contrast to the Thessalonian Jews, the dominant group in the Berean synagogue is open to listening to Paul’s message. They use the OT Scriptures to discern its validity. Luther: “We must go back to the Old Testament and learn to prove the New Testament from the Old. There we shall see the promise concerning Christ, as Christ Himself declares in John 5:39: ‘You search the Scriptures ... and it is they that bear witness to Me.’ Likewise (v. 46): ‘If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me’ ” (AE 30:18–19). (TLSB)

eujgenevsteroi, “more noble-minded.” Can also refer to noble birth (Lk 19:12; 1 Cor 1:26), but here the comparison to the Thessalonians is certainly that they were noble in giving Paul’s message a fair hearing and testing it against ta;” grafav”, again, “the Scriptures.” pavsh" proqumiva": The Bereans received the Word with “all eagerness.” kaq? hJmevran ajnakrivnonte", “every day examining.” They pored over the Scriptures daily. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

No passage in the NT better demonstrates how important it was for earliest Christian preaching that Jesus’ person and work be proclaimed as the fulfillment of OT prophecy. For that reason, the first creed of the church was simply “Jesus Christ,” which means: “Jesus is the Messiah,” the one whom the Scriptures (i.e., the OT) point. (LL)

**17:12** *Greek women of high standing.* Socially prominent women seem to have been commonly present in Jewish synagogues and among those who accepted Christianity (cf vv 4, 34; 16:14). (TLSB)

**17:13** *agitating and stirring up the crowds* – In the eastern Mediterranean there was always an idle but reliable rabble in each town for such purposes – dry kindling just waiting to be set aflame. One good, decent riot was better than days of boredom! (LL)

**17:14** Hostility of Thessalonian Jews must have been directed most vehemently against Paul, who is sent off, while Silas and Timothy continue the work in Berea. (TLSB)

*the sea.* One might conclude that Paul went by boat to Athens. But the road to Athens is also a coast road, and Paul may have walked the distance after having been escorted to the coast (some 20 miles). In any event, Christian companions stayed with him until reaching Athens. (CSB)

*Silas and Timothy remained*– Now another congregation had been founded in Macedonia, and it too would prosper. Doubtless the Sopater of Berea who accompanied Paul for part of third mission journey was one of the apostle’s converts at the time (20:4). (LL)

**17:15** *conducted Paul.* Others go along with Paul to ensure his safety. (TLSB)

*Athens.* Five centuries before Paul, Athens had been at the height of its glory in art, philosophy and literature. She had retained her reputation in philosophy through the years and still maintained a leading university in Paul’s day. (CSB)

*command.* Paul instructs his escort to tell Silas and Timothy to join him soon (cf 1Th 2:17–3:6). (TLSB)

**17:10–15** Persecution follows the Gospel, even when the Bereans eagerly receive it. God’s people should follow the noble example of the Bereans, who studied the Scriptures daily in order to receive further truths and to examine what they were being taught. Because the OT Scriptures also testify to Jesus Christ (Jn 5:39), searching them brings God’s blessings of salvation (Is 55:10–11). • Heavenly Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. May it be “a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119:105). Amen. (TLSB)

*Paul in Athens*

**16** Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. **17** So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. **18** Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. **19** And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? **20** For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” **21** Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

**17:16** “Now while Paul was waiting (*ekdechomenou*) for them”—in Athens, for Timothy and Silas to join him from Berea. As he waits, his righteous spirit is provoked (*parōxuneto*), stirred up, upset, by a city of idols that have enslaved the people. The passive nature of the verb suggests

the Spirit of God working to move Paul to speak. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

Athens had many idol statues and temples. The most prominent was Athena, patron goddess of the city, whose temple was the Parthenon. This wanton idolatry irritated and angered Paul. (TLSB)

**17:17** *synagogue*. As was Paul's custom, he would first go to the synagogue. With these Jews and *sebomenois*, the devotees, the reverent people, he had a common reference in Scripture. Paul then spoke in the marketplace, where the common people gathered for shopping and, as today, paused to discuss happenings in their city and beyond. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

*marketplace*. Paul also reasoned and debated with those in the commercial hub of the city (Gk *agora*), which archaeologists have excavated. (TLSB)

**17:18** *Epicurean ... philosophers*. Originally they taught that the supreme good is happiness—but not mere momentary pleasure or temporary gratification. By Paul's time, however, this philosophy had degenerated into a more sensual system of thought. (CSB)

The philosophical fame of Athens is evident. Epicureanism emphasized seeking a pleasurable life, though not merely in a sensual way. Stoicism stressed the rational order of nature and urged people to accept their fate within it. These two Gk philosophies were the most popular of the day. (TLSB)

“Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.” The Epicurean goal of life was pleasure and happiness through moderation and friendships. For Epicureans, God becoming man and suffering and dying would be ridiculous. To the Stoic, the universe is god. Nature keeps what is good and discards what is harmful. The Stoics would regard anything supernatural such as dying and returning once again into human form illogical and contrary to nature. Both speak of Paul in derogatory terms, calling him a babbler, a *spermologos*, a pseudo-intellectual, teaching foreign (*xenōn*) lower deities (*daimoniōn*). Perhaps Paul also proclaimed the mystery of the Holy Trinity. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

(341-270 B.C.) taught that the gods are not interested in the affairs of men and that there is no afterlife in which we will be called to account. By the first century A.D. this philosophy had degenerated to hedonism, the love of pleasure: “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” (PBC)

*Stoic philosophers*. They taught that people should live in accord with nature, recognize their own self-sufficiency and independence, and suppress their desires. At its best, Stoicism had some admirable qualities, but, like Epicureanism, by Paul's time it had degenerated into a system of pride. (CSB)

*babblor*. The Greek word meant “seed picker,” a bird picking up seeds here and there. Then it came to refer to the loafer in the marketplace who picked up whatever scraps of learning he could find and paraded them without digesting them himself. (CSB)

This uncomplimentary term suggested that Paul was like a bird picking up seeds of knowledge here and there, but not really knowing much. (PBC)

*foreign divinities.* At least some may have thought Paul was preaching a divine Jesus and a goddess, Anastasia (Gk for “resurrection”). (TLSB)

*preaching Jesus and the resurrection.* This was the heart of Paul’s message, emphasized in Ac (cf 1Co 15:3–4). (TLSB)

**17:19-21** Paul’s teaching was certainly novel to these pagan philosophers. They wanted to know (*thelei*) the meaning or implications of this new teaching. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

**17:19** *Areopagus.* † Means “hill of Ares.” Ares was the Greek god of thunder and war (the Roman equivalent was Mars). The Areopagus was located just west of the acropolis and south of the Agora and had once been the site of the meeting of the Court or Council of the Areopagus. Earlier the Council governed a Greek city-state, but by NT times the Areopagus retained authority only in the areas of religion and morals and met in the Royal Portico at the northwest corner of the Agora. They considered themselves the custodians of teachings that introduced new religions and foreign gods. Since the Greek text does not contain the term “a meeting of ” either here or in v. 22, Paul may not have appeared before the court of the Areopagus, but on the “hill of Ares,” which would accommodate a larger audience. (CSB)

Lit, “hill of Ares.” Ares was a Gk god of war linked with Mars by the Romans; therefore, the location is also called Mars Hill. Early in the history of Athens, citizens met here to govern the city, so “Areopagus” also came to describe the city council. Paul seems to be in the place called the Areopagus, near the Acropolis, rather than at a formal meeting of citizens. He would be in view of the massive Parthenon, dedicated to Athena. (TLSB)

*new teaching.* Since there was at least one synagogue in Athens (v 17), the Athenians likely knew of the OT. But the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection was new to them. (TLSB)

**17:20** Their openness is reminiscent of the Bereans (vv 11–12), as well as those at Pisidian Antioch (13:42). (TLSB)

**17:21** *hearing something new* – These Athenian philosophers, however, were not so set in their ways that they would ignore new teachings. In fact, Luke points out that in the cosmopolitan climate of Athens in that day, new ideas were a big item. So Paul had a ready-made audience in Athens. (LL)

This parenthetical comment heightens the philosophical reputation and character of the city of Athens, from the time of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle on. (TLSB)

**17:16–21** At Athens, Paul engages the dominant religious and philosophical teachings of the day. The Gospel message is foolishness to people of this world. Yet, God desires to engage all people with His Word and, by the Spirit’s power, to open their hearts and minds to the good news of Jesus and His resurrection. • Father, the Gospel of Jesus is the power by which we are saved (1Co 1:18–25). Guide Your people to engage the world with this message. Amen. (TLSB)

*Paul Addresses the Areopagus*

**22 So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. 24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. 26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, 27 that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, 28 for “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ 29 Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. 30 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” 32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” 33 So Paul went out from their midst. 34 But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.**

**17:22-31** Paul was presenting Christianity to the leading philosophers of the leading Hellenistic city, a strategic event for the spread of the Gospel among the Gentiles. Paul had been driven from Berea to Athens by persecution, and was waiting for Timothy and Silas to rejoin him, so he was there more by accident than by his own missionary plan (vv 10–16). Yet, characteristically, he made the most of the opportunity. “Athens, although she had long since lost her political eminence of an earlier day, continued to represent the highest level of culture attained in classical antiquity. The sculpture, literature and oratory of Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. have, indeed, never been surpassed. In philosophy, too, she occupied the leading place, being the native city of Socrates and Plato, and the adopted home of Aristotle, Epicurus and Zeno” (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954] 348). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

**17:22-23** Paul begins to reveal this God, who has been previously unknown to these Athenians. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

**17:22** *the Areopagus* - The Areopagus is a 370-foot-high hill in Athens, between the Acropolis and the Pnyx. The name is classical Greek for “hill of Ares.” In Greek mythology, Ares (or Mars in Latin) was the god of war, bloodshed, strife, and pestilence, the son of Zeus (the head of the pantheon) and Hera. A temple for Ares probably was located on the hill. The hill was the ancient meeting place of a court, whose varied functions used to include trials for murder and other capital crimes. This court’s “traditional power was curtailed with the growth of Athenian democracy in the fifth century B.C., but it retained authority in matters of religion and morals, and in Roman times it enjoyed enhanced power and commanded great respect” (Bruce, p. 352). The court or council used the name for itself even when it met at alternate locations, as it may have in our text. Paul is not on trial in any legal sense; the Areopagus meeting was for the purpose of discussing philosophy and religion, something the Athenians loved to do (cf. v 21). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)



*religious*. Or “superstitious.” The Greek for this word could be used to congratulate a person or to criticize him, depending on whether the person using it included himself in the circle of individuals he was describing. The Athenians would not know which meaning to take until Paul continued. In this context it is clear that Paul wanted to be complimentary in order to gain a hearing. (CSB)

Gk term could have a positive (“religious”) or negative (“superstitious”) meaning. Here Paul most likely speaks positively in order to get a fair hearing. (TLSB)

The term *deisidaimonesteros*, ‘very religious,’ literally, “fearing the divinity,” is a comparative used as a superlative. It can be derisive, as in “superstitious,” or complimentary, as in “religious.” The adjective is used only here in the NT; the noun only in Acts 25:19. The context indicates that Paul meant it in the positive sense. He is putting the best possible construction on what he sees, and establishing rapport with his hearers. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2) (CSB)

**17:23** *TO AN UNKNOWN GOD*. The Greeks were fearful of offending any god by failing to give him attention; so they felt they could cover any omissions by the label “unknown god.” Other Greek writers confirm that such altars could be seen in Athens—a striking point of contact for Paul. (CSB)

The Greeks had many gods; this altar was built to ensure no significant deity was missed. Its existence is confirmed by other sources. (TLSB)

“To an unknown god,” the altar being a way to “cover all the bases.” Other writers of that era speak of such altars, though there is no secular evidence of such an inscription in the singular. Ignorance of the true God is not unique to Athenians. Paul says to the Galatians, “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods” (4:8; cf. Rom 2:14–16; Jn 4:22). Paul speaks to their admitted spiritual condition, employing an opening illustration of their own making. He then tells them he has knowledge of that God for which they are searching. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

It is impossible for those who have the Spirit of God not to know who they are worshiping. The men of Athens struggled and built an altar with the inscription, “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD” (Acts 17:23). But those who have the Spirit of Truth proclaim and confess not just any belief in any god, but belief in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 2)

**17:24** *The God who made the world*. Thus a personal Creator, in contrast with the views of pantheistic Stoicism. (CSB)

Dominating the landscape of Athens was the Parthenon whose ruins still stand. It is the temple dedicated to the patron goddess of the city, the virgin Pallas Athene. Paul said, “The creator of the universe does not need anything that human beings might make for him, any dwelling that they might build for him. (PBC)

“The God who made the world and everything in it” stands in stark contrast to the multiplicity of stone and metal idols, as well to the Greek “higher philosophy” of an unspecified “prime mover” or divine *nous*, “mind.” Paul starts with the First Article of the Creed. To Gentiles, who lack the written testimony of Scripture, something of God should still be evident from his creation (Rom

1:20). When Jonah (1:9) spoke to the pagan (Phoenician?) sailors, he described the true God in the same terms. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

*does not live in temples.* Pagans generally built temples for their gods to “live” in, as evidenced by the statues contained therein. The God of creation transcends earth and any structure on it. (TLSB)

The God Paul preaches “does not live in temples built by hands.” This is in harmony with Solomon’s own comment “The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!” (1 Ki 8:27). Yet Paul goes on to allude to God’s incarnation in “the man he has appointed” (v 31). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

**17:25** God is not to be served in a Law fashion, as if he needs something from us and is then obligated to repay us for our worship. Rather, worship stems from the Gospel—from what he has given us. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

God is not dependent upon His creation or anything human beings do. Instead, God is the giver of life to all, as well as the giver of all that we have. (TLSB)

**17:26-27** The description of God’s determination of the course of world history and the movement of peoples brings to mind Genesis 10, the “Table of Nations,” and Amos 9:7. The man who had his Damascus road experience could see that the world’s events are not random, but purposeful: “God did this so that men would seek him.” God’s concern extends to all peoples, not just Israel. Nor is there room for the Greek belief in their own innate superiority over “barbarians,” i.e., all others, or for modern ethnic or racial prejudice. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

**17:26** *he made from one man he made every nation.* All people are of one family (whether Athenians or Romans, Greeks or barbarians, Jews or Gentiles). (CSB)

All people are descended from Adam. (TLSB)

“And he made from one man every nation of mankind.” Paul in speaking this truth will later in v 31 confess that by a man whom God has appointed, he will come to judge the world in righteousness. By one man, we are condemned; by one man, we are saved. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

*determined allotted periods.* He planned the exact times when nations should emerge and decline. (CSB)

*boundaries of their dwelling place.* He also planned the specific area to be occupied by each nation. He is God, the Designer (things were not left to Chance, as the Epicureans thought). (CSB)

God is involved in the lives of all peoples and nations on earth, even setting in order the times and places of their existence. Cf Gn 10–11; see note, Jb 38:4. (TLSB)

**17:27** *they should seek God* – God demonstrated his power and intelligence in creation and in the history of nations so that people would realize that an intelligent and powerful being is in charge

of the universe. In God's intention this should make them see him, reach for him and find him. (PBC)

The goodness and power of God revealed in creation should lead people to seek Him (cf Rm 1:19–21). (TLSB)

“That they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.” “Seek” (*zēteîn*) has the connotation of seeking God through reason. To “feel” (*psēlaphēseian*) is to touch or perhaps in this case grope to God and, eureka, find him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

*feel their way.* Apart from God's direct revelation, it is like groping for God in the darkness. (TLSB)

*not far.* Chemnitz: “Paul says that God can almost be contacted through these evidences. ... Nine proofs are listed [by Melancthon]: (1) the very order of nature itself, (2) the nature of the human mind, (3) the difference between the honorable and the shameful, (4) the truthfulness of natural knowledge, (5) the terrors of conscience, (6) the structure of human society, (7) the orderly process of cause and effect, (8) the signs of future events, (9) the ultimate purpose of things.... These proofs of the natural knowledge of God can be quite favorably compared with the arguments of Paul by which in his preaching to the gentiles he marshals his argument concerning the natural knowledge of God” (*LTh* 1:52). Cf Ac 14:15. (TLSB)

**17:28** *some of your own poets.* There are two quotations here: (1) “In him we live and move and have our being,” from the Cretan poet Epimenides (c. 600 B.C.) in his *Cretica*, and (2) “We are his offspring,” from the Cilician poet Aratus (c. 315–240) in his *Phaenomena*, as well as from Cleanthes (331–233) in his *Hymn to Zeus*. Paul quotes Greek poets elsewhere as well. (CSB)

The Stoic philosopher agreed with the idea that God is not far from each one of us. In fact, most philosophers of Paul's time were pantheists. They confused the creator with his creation by teaching that everything is god. Paul used their mistaken beliefs as a starting point from which to go on and preach the gospel of the true God. (PBC)

His quotations from the Greek writers Epimenides and Aratus demonstrate that Paul was at home in Greek literature. (LL)

To substantiate these claims, Paul quotes from two Greek poets who give evidence of natural knowledge of God “For in him we live and move and have our being” from Epimenides, a Cretan poet, and “We are his offspring,” from Aratus, a Cilician poet. Paul's citations reveal not only the breadth of his learning, but also his mastery of communicating the Gospel across cultures by appealing to what they already know and accept. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

Paul quotes Epimenides of Crete, a seer highly regarded by the Athenians as a reformer of their civil affairs, and from the poet Aratus, a highly regarded stoic poet, to further the point that his dialogue is reasonable. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

*In Him we live.* Paul here refers to pagan poets who, through their natural knowledge of God (Rm 1:20–21), correctly assessed and asserted this truth about the Creator God. C 600 BC, Epimenides concluded that one god is the creator and sustainer of all life. “In order that God's creation and work in mankind may be distinguished from the devil's work, we say that it is God's creation that a person has body and soul. Also, it is God's work that a person can think, speak, do,

and work anything” (FC SD I 42). SB) Chemnitz: “[God] watches over and sustains the order which He has established in nature” (*LTh* 1:167). (TLSB)

*For we are indeed His offspring.* Both Aratus and Cleanthus made this statement c 300 BC. It agrees with Paul’s assertion in v 26 (cf Ps 8; Jn 10:34–35). (TLSB)

*offspring.* Gk *genos*, similar in meaning to Eng “generation.” Luther: “Natural life is a part of eternal life and its beginning, but it ends through death because it does not acknowledge nor honor him from whom it comes. Sin cuts it off, so that it must die eternally. On the other hand, those who believe in him, and acknowledge him from whom they have their being never die. Their natural life will be stretched out into life eternal, so that they never taste death” (AE 52:55). (TLSB)

**17:29** *God’s offspring.* God created Adam; as Adam’s offspring, we are similarly God’s creation and offspring; see note, v 26. Note that elsewhere Paul and other apostles distinguish the children of God (believers) from the world (unbelievers). (TLSB)

Paul next asserts that since man is God’s *genos*, offspring, it is unreasonable for him to be like gold, silver, or stone idols that are derived from the imagination of man. But this is exactly the problem. Natural man makes up gods from his imagination, not from divine inspiration. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

*art and imagination of man.* We cannot make God in our image or find Him in the gods of other religions. Original sin drives all people to idolatry. (TLSB)

Regarding the folly of idols, Paul speaks from the vantage point of OT sections such as Is 40:18–31, which begins with the searching question, “To whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you compare him?” The answer, of course, is that God is incomparable. See also Rom 1:22–23, and the hymn “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise” (*LW* 451). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

**17:30-31** “Judging the world in righteousness.” Jesus is the righteous one, and through his death he has declared all who trust in this word righteous. This is made certain through his resurrection from the dead (cf Rom 3:21–26). Jesus’ resurrection is the proof that what he says and claims is true, since death is common to all mankind and no one else has returned from it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

**17:30** *overlooked such ignorance.* God had not judged them for worshiping false gods in their ignorance (see v. 31). (CSB)

Cf Rm 2:12–16. With the coming of Christ, God’s revealed Word is sent out into the world. Now it has come to Athens through Paul. Chemnitz: “God by His determination has decided how long He wills to wait for repentance and where He is going to crush wickedness” (*LTh* 1:211). Cf Rm 2:4; 9:22; 1Pt 3:20. (TLSB)

Regarding “overlooked,” the words of 2 Pet 3:9 come to mind: “He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” The forbearance of God (Rom 3:23–26) is never promoted by man’s sinful “ignorance,” but always and only by God’s undeserved kindness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

God did not immediately punish idolatry in the past. Ignorance was not innocence, but he chose not to destroy the idolaters at once. Now he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, and he calls on people everywhere to turn from idols to him. (PBC)

*all people.* “No one is an exception who is a human being. This repentance teaches us to discern sin: We are completely lost; there is nothing good in us from head to foot; and we must become absolutely new and different people” (SA III III 34–35). (TLSB)

*repent.* The proper response to God’s message is repentance (Lk 3:3; 10:13; 13:3, 5), but it must be His gift and work through His Word (cf Ac 2:38; 5:31; 10:44). (TLSB)

*metanoein*, infinitive of *metanoēō*, “to repent,” “to change one’s mind,” “conversion.” Here, the Greek word for repentance is not simply a call to sorrow over sin or to make restitution for one’s action. This is a call to total conversion. It is a complete turnaround of the heart and mind. This is possible, of course, only through the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word. It should be noted, thus, that Paul’s calling to repentance is really an announcement of God’s gift. Repentance is a gift, courtesy of the Holy Spirit. Paul’s message to the world of repentance and a day in which Jesus will judge in righteousness is really a message of joy, not misery. Where there is Law in Paul’s message, it is motivated by the Gospel. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 2)

**17:31** *judge the world in righteousness by a man.* Jesus will come again in glory to judge; He will do so in accordance with the righteousness required by God and freely granted through faith. (TLSB)

*the man whom he has appointed.* Jesus, the Son of Man (see Da 7:13; cf. Mt 25:31–46; Ac 10:42). (CSB)

“Appointed” is from *horizō*, used eight times used in the NT, six by Luke. Other significant occurrences include Lk 22:22, Acts 2:23, Acts 10:42, Acts 17:26. The word re-enforces that God has a plan of salvation, that the risen Jesus is Lord, and that God will fulfill his plan for his people. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

The Jews tended to stumble over the cross because they expected from God miraculous signs of power. Here the “foolishness” of the resurrection, dominant in the book of Acts and in Paul’s sermons and epistles, is the stumbling block to the Greeks, who sought wisdom. The result is illustrated in v 32: “When they heard about the resurrection from the dead, some of them sneered.” But this did not deter Paul from proclaiming “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24). While Paul tailored his preaching to his audience to make it as effective as possible, he never sacrificed the content of the Gospel, no matter how unfavorably it was received. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

*assurance - pistis*, “an assurance,” from *pisteuō*, “faith,” “belief.” This is a no-brainer for inclusion in the sermon. Assurance and comfort in our salvation come from faith in our crucified and resurrected Lord. Think of resurrection faith. For instance, think of the difference of Thomas’s heart before he saw the resurrected Christ and then after! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 2)

*raising Him from the dead.* Paul identifies the resurrection as the event that publicly declared Jesus to be God's Son (cf Rm 1:4) and, therefore, the one entrusted to judge (cf Jn 5:22; Mt 28:18). (TLSB)

**17:32** *resurrection of the dead.* Immortality of the soul was accepted by the Greeks, but not resurrection of a dead body. (CSB)

When he spoke of the resurrection of Christ, they stopped listening. They did not persecute Paul, for they were tolerant of virtually everyone and everything. Tolerance, however, easily becomes indifference. (PBC)

*mocked.* Derisive reaction to the bodily resurrection, an unthinkable event for Platonic philosophers, who emphasized the spirit and ideas over the body and physical reality (cf 1Co 15:12, 35). (TLSB)

**17:34** *some men joined him and believed* – Even if Paul may have thought his mission to Athens less than successful statistically, Mar's Hill and the Acropolis stand today at the intersection of two streets in modern Athens named "Avenue of Dionysius the Areopagite," and "St. Paul's Street." (CSB)

*Dionysius.* Later tradition states, though it cannot be proved, that he became bishop of Athens. (CSB)

First named convert in Athens; tradition says he became a church leader there. (TLSB)

*Damaris.*† Some have suggested that she must have been a foreign, educated woman to have been present at a public gathering on the Areopagus. She surely was not a member of the court. It is also possible that she was a God-fearing Gentile who had heard Paul at the synagogue (v. 17). (CSB)

Another leading female convert (cf 16:14; 18:2).

**17:22–34** Paul reaches out to Athenians who do not know the Scriptures. He uses teachings from their philosophy and literature to point them to the God of creation, who sent His Son, Jesus. All people need to repent before Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead. The Creator desires that all people seek after Him. In love, He has come to us with the message of Jesus Christ, who has saved us by His resurrection. • Heavenly Father, move all people to seek You through repentance and to come to the true knowledge that You have already reached out to them in Christ. Amen. (TLSB)