ACTS 17

Noble Bereans and an Unknown God

three cities, one Bible, and a God who is not far from each one of us

> *"Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."*
> ACTS 17:11

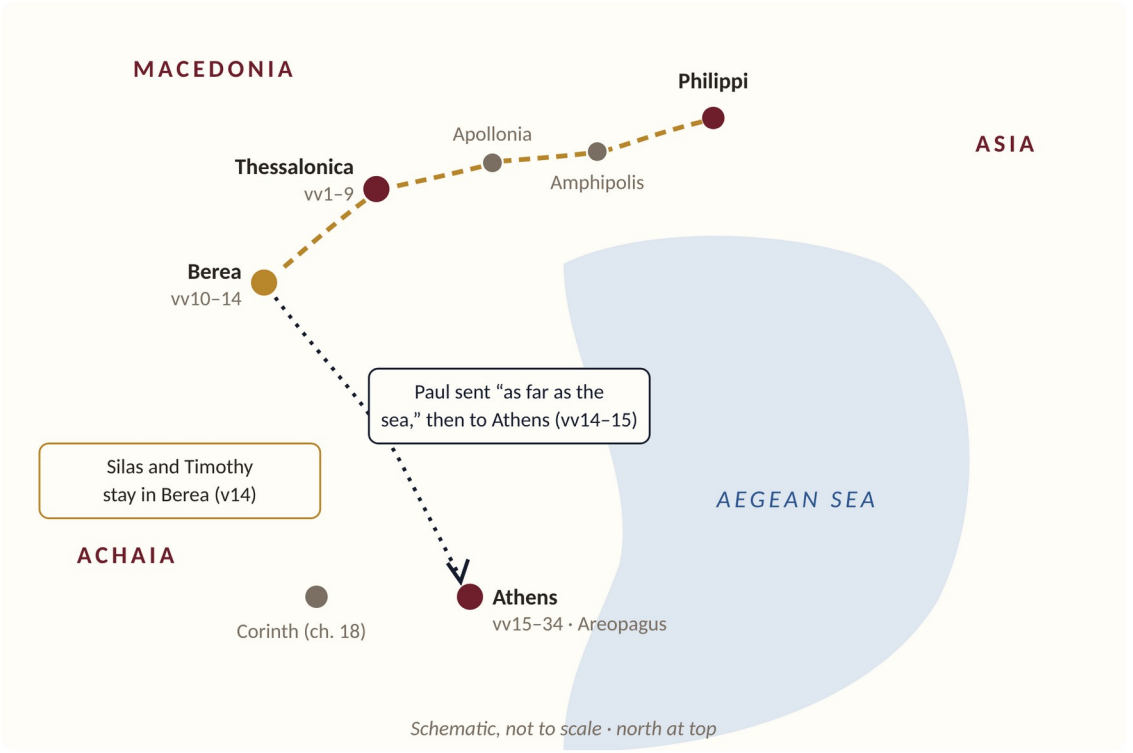
A SMITH FOR CHRIST STUDY · FOUR VOICES: GUZIK · SPROUL · SPURGEON · HENRY

Where Luke has brought us

1. Acts 16 ended in Philippi with Paul and Silas beaten, jailed, singing at midnight, and finally escorted out of the city by apologetic magistrates (16:37–40).

2. Chapter 17 is a tale of three cities and three kinds of hearers.

3. Watch how Paul's method changes and how his message does not.



Reasoning from the Scriptures

Three Sabbaths in Thessalonica, a suffering Christ, and a mob that says the world is upside down

ACTS 17:2

And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

DAVID GUZIK

"Reasoned" is our word dialogue; the charge was an unintended compliment.

R.C. SPROUL

Faithful preaching of the Word; Christians upset the world by their impact.

MATTHEW HENRY

Christ must needs suffer; reason serves Scripture, never competes.

διελέξατο

DIELEXATO · "REASONED"

From dialegomai, to discuss, argue, reason back and forth.

More Noble-Minded

Berea: eager hearts, open Bibles, and many who believed

ACTS 17:11

Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

DAVID GUZIK

Open hearts and clear heads; they checked for themselves.

R.C. SPROUL

Faithful preaching sends hearers to examine Scripture themselves.

MATTHEW HENRY

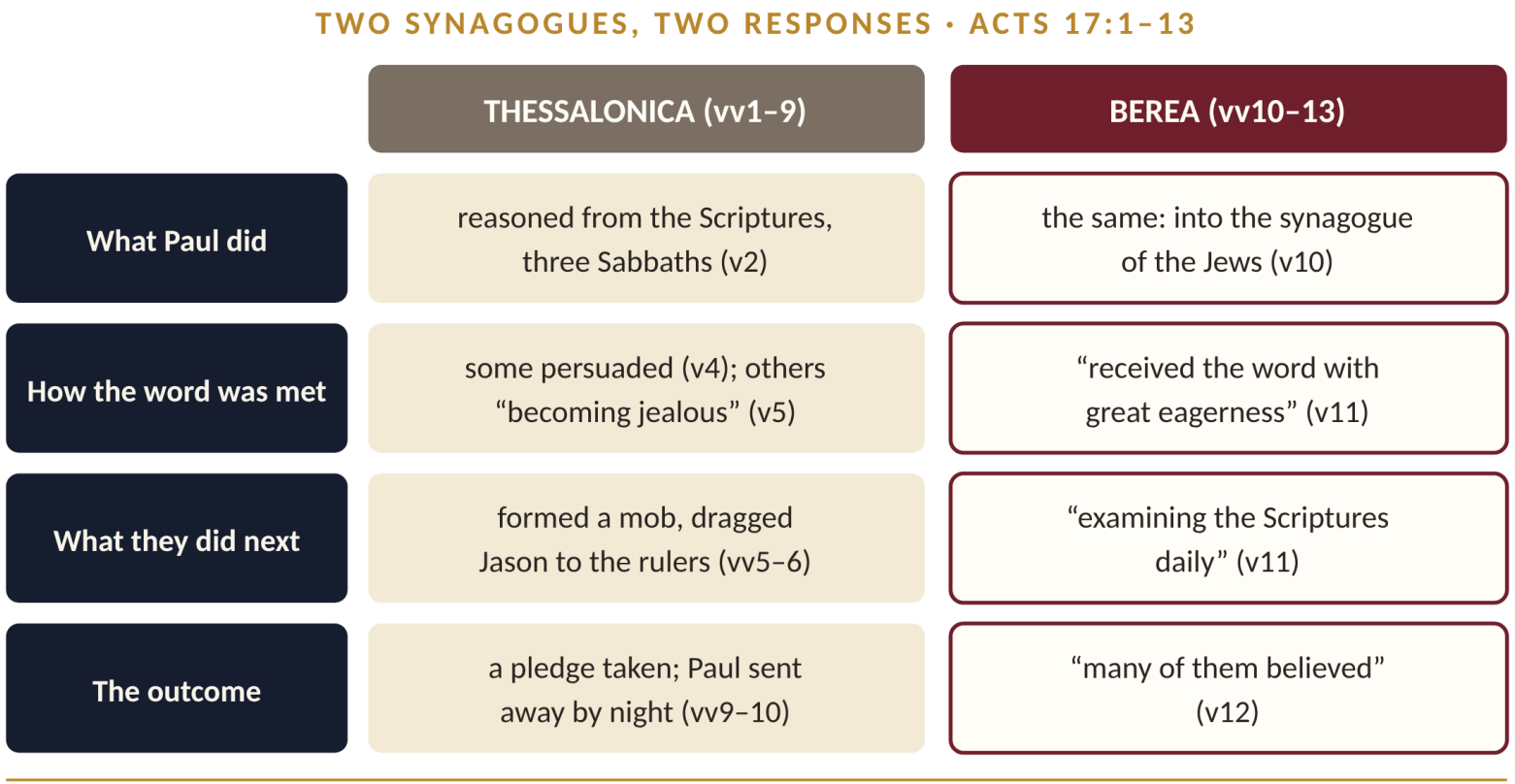
Willing, quick to understand; searching the Scriptures is daily work.

εὐγενέστεροι

EUGENESTEROI · “MORE NOBLE-MINDED”

The comparative of eugenēs, literally “well-born,” of noble birth.

Two synagogues, two responses



Open hearts and clear heads: eager to receive, careful to check — and "therefore" many believed (vv11–12).

Read across each row: Paul did the same thing in both towns; the difference was how the hearers met the word and what they did with their Bibles.

A City Full of Idols

Paul's provoked spirit, the marketplace, the philosophers, and the love of something new

ACTS 17:16

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.

DAVID GUZIK

Depressed by the idols; novelty, not depth, got Paul his hearing.

R.C. SPROUL

The cradle of the church was the marketplace — public, open, dangerous.

MATTHEW HENRY

The greatest pretenders to reason, the greatest slaves to idols.

παρωξύνετο

PARŌXYNETO · "WAS BEING PROVOKED"

From paroxynō, to sharpen, stir up, provoke (our word "paroxysm" comes from it).

The Unknown God Made Known

Creator, Giver, Ruler, near to all — and Judge of the world through a risen Man

ACTS 17:23

"For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

DAVID GUZIK

Creator distinct from creation; ignorance now culpable; resurrection the proof.

R.C. SPROUL

The unknown-god altar was playing it safe — it will not work on judgment day.

C.H. SPURGEON

Not far from any of us; seeker and Seeker soon meet.

MATTHEW HENRY

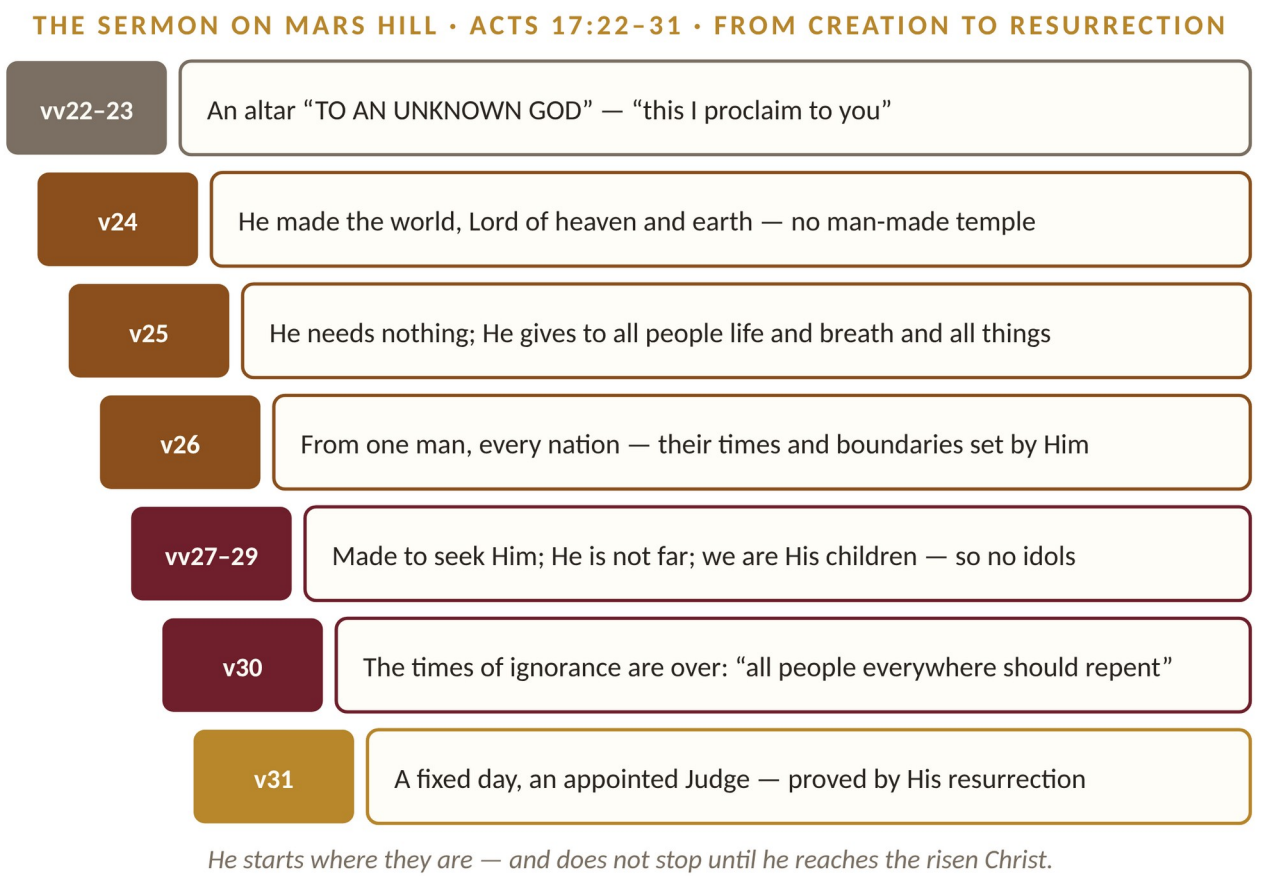
He needs nothing; live to Him in whom you live; now repent.

ἀγνώστῳ

AGNŌSTŌ · "UNKNOWN"

Agnōstos, "not known," found only here in the New Testament, on the altar inscription Paul read while "examining the objects of your worship" (sebasmata, G4574).

The sermon on Mars Hill



Paul’s Areopagus sermon steps down from the Creator to the coming Judge; notice that it ends, like his synagogue preaching, at the resurrection.

Some Sneered, Some Believed

The resurrection divides the hill — mockers, delayers, and a few who joined Paul

ACTS 17:32

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this."

DAVID GUZIK

Soul yes, body no — yet some did believe.

MATTHEW HENRY

Mockers, delayers, and a few who adhered to him.

ἀνάστασιν

ANASTASIN · "RESURRECTION"

Anastasis, a standing up again.

What to carry from this chapter

1

Paul reasoned; he did not just announce.

Guzik: “The Greek word translated ‘reasoned’ is the root for our English word dialogue.”

2

A suffering Messiah was the sticking point.

Paul had to show “that the Christ had to suffer and rise again” (v3) — the very thing Jesus explained on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:26).

3

Upside down is right side up.

The mob’s charge (v6) was, Guzik says, “an unintended compliment,” because “Jesus turns the thinking and the power structures of this world around.”

4

Noble is a word about the Book, not the bloodline.

Eugenēs meant well-born; Luke uses it for people who received the word eagerly and examined it daily (v11).

More to carry

5

Open hearts, clear heads.

Guzik: “When Paul preached, they had open hearts; but also clear heads.”

6

Searching the Scriptures is daily work.

Henry’s rule from verse 11.

7

Provoked, not impressed.

Athens’ temples did not dazzle Paul; its idols grieved him (v16).

8

The church belongs in the marketplace.

Sproul: “The cradle of the church was the marketplace.”

Talk it through

1. Paul reasoned “from the Scriptures” that the Christ had to suffer and rise. If someone asked me to show them Jesus from the Old Testament, where would I start?

2. The mob said the gospel had “upset the world.” What has Jesus turned upside down in my life — and what still needs turning?

3. The Bereans had open hearts and clear heads. Which am I weaker in — eagerness to receive the word, or care to examine it?

4. When I hear a sermon, a podcast or a friend’s advice about God, how do I check it against the Scriptures? What does my daily habit actually look like?

5. Paul’s spirit was provoked by a city full of idols. What are the idols of my town — and do they still bother me?

CLOSING

Acts 17 is three cities and one gospel. Paul opens the Scriptures to Jews, names the unknown God to philosophers, and in every place ends at the risen Christ. Be a Berean: receive the word eagerly, check it daily, and then repent and believe the One God raised from the dead.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

Full Deep Dive, O·I·A study and reflection journal: see the Acts study page.