

Paul in Berea and Athens

When we left Paul, he was just going out of Thessalonica and on his way to Berea. He left Thessalonica because it got a little hot there and he had to go out by night. There may be times in the 20th century when something like this applies. These things are written because they're examples to our walk. These examples in their walks are examples that we utilize in our walks. That doesn't mean when you want to decide whether or not to go out of town, you flip to Acts 17. It takes revelation. But that is a possibility.

Paul had to leave at night. There were other times he just stayed there and stood no matter how hot it got. There were other times he just walked out real cool-like and other times he had to go out at night. It depended on the revelation in that situation. He had to have that spiritual perception and awareness. Later, we're going to see something almost totally opposite from this because the situation was different. God's not a respecter of persons. He's a respecter of conditions. When the conditions change the revelation can change. When the conditions in a community are different, the revelation can be different. In Thessalonica he had to go out at night.

Acts 17:10:

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming *thither* went into the synagogue of the Jews.

“into the synagogue of the Jews” – not again. Yes, right back into the synagogue because that was what he was accustomed to doing because that was where he could begin to open up the Word. You and I wouldn't have, perhaps, so much success there. Paul did. You go where you know the Word will reach and bless people.

Berea is sort of south of Thessalonica. Not directly south, that's the sea. It's down the coast a little way. Berea was his next stop in Macedonia.

Acts 17:11:

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Did the people at Thessalonica receive the Word? They sure did; they believed it. They were ready to receive it but they did not have that readiness to the point that they really got in and searched the scriptures themselves.

“noble” – *eugenēs* – from which we get our name Eugene - *eu* always means “good” or “well.” *genos* from which we get *genēs* has to do with birth; being born. It is someone who is well-born or he has good genes. He's refined. That's why he's noble. The

nobility comes from his genetic makeup. He has the proper genes; good genes; well born.

Luke 19:12:

He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.

“nobleman” – wellborn; the proper genetic makeup; from the proper family tree. He was of noble birth.

I Corinthians 1:26:

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*:

“noble” – *eugenēs* – not many of nobility are called, relatively few.

Somehow this must relate to the 30 fold, 60 fold and 100 fold [in the parable of the sower]. Those who bring forth fruit 30 fold are working at their maximum capacity. They're putting out all they can but because of a certain genetic makeup, or for certain reasons they can't produce the 100 fold but their doing 100% of 30 fold. If you're born with no arms, no legs and no head, you couldn't produce as much as somebody born with all those things. On the other hand, somebody else, his capacity might be 60 fold and when he produces 100% he produces 60 fold. He's doing the absolute best. Somebody else does 100% when he produces 100 fold. But if somebody has, genetically, the capability of producing 100 fold but he's only producing 60 fold then he's not walking like he should. He's not producing like he should. The person who's doing 30 fold, who has the capability of doing 30 fold, is doing much better than the person who can do 100 fold but who's only doing 60.

The guys here at Berea were more noble in every capacity? No, not necessarily but in a certain area. In that they had enough sense to check the scriptures out. I don't mean it in the sense of; that the others didn't have sense. But they were noble in that they believed what Paul said just like the Thessalonians but then they'd go to the Word and they'd really study it out.

Most people today accept stuff by “blind faith” in a lot of groups. They don't go to the Word to check it out. That's one thing in the ministry we do. We study the Word. Go to the Word. See what the Word says. You can work it yourself. You can check these things out yourself. That's the word “noble.”

Acts 17:11:

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

They'd go to the Word and check it out every day. They had their noses in the book. What is it that sets people free; that gives you the guidelines? How do you know if something is true or false? Suppose you get in college in a philosophy class and somebody yaks. How are you going to know if he's right or wrong? Check him out with the Word. Suppose you don't know if he's right or wrong. What do you do? Check the scriptures whether these things are so. Sometimes that's real important when you get into some fields because it's so close. What they say sometimes sounds so right on but they might miss it a mile. Because when you're one iota on the wrong side, you miss it. Close doesn't count.

In Thessalonica they received the scriptures:

Acts 17:2-4:

And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, [he went to the scriptures and taught them]

Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

And some of them believed [they accepted], and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

But when he got to Berea, they not only believed what he taught, they had their noses in the book. They searched the scriptures daily.

I Thessalonians is addressed to the church but what name is on it? Thessalonians, that's one of the points at which the epistle was dropped. Every epistle, every letter, of the New Testament is what we call an encyclical. That simple means that they sent the letter to Thessalonica and then they would send it on to another place. They would send it to the next place. They would send it to the next place, so that every church, every place that there were believers, go to hear the Word. They weren't just written to one place and dropped there. There was an initial starting point where they first went like Thessalonica or Ephesus. That's why a lot of things in Thessalonians are specifically related to the believers that were at Thessalonica. Some of these things written in Thessalonians help to document when and where this epistle was written.

I Thessalonians 1:5:

For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

The Word came to them in word but also in power and in holy spirit and much assurance.

I Thessalonians 2:13:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye [at Thessalonica] received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

How did they receive the Word? They received it and believed it. They received it as the Word of God, not as the word of men. Did they at Berea? What made the difference? At Berea they searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so. That's the difference.

I Thessalonians 2:14:

For ye, brethren, became followers [imitators] of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they *have* of the Jews:

They became followers because they received the Word as the Word of God. They did at Berea but at Berea they also searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so.

Acts 17:12:

Therefore many of them [those at Berea in the synagogue] believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

Acts 13:50:

But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.

“honourable” – that's the same word. They were some of the elite, nobility or the high society. These honourable women and men were the leaders of the community. It says, “not a few.” Quite a few of them believed. There were not only street sweepers; there were senators; anybody and everybody. The Word is not closed. There were young people. There were adults, families, everybody. If somebody didn't want to believe, the others still believed and they stood fast on the Word.

Acts 17:13:

But [in contrast] when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

Remember the pattern in Acts 14? Same basic pattern; Paul comes in, preaches the Word, Jews or someone comes around, stirs up. So what do the apostles do? They just keep teaching that much more boldly. Then there's division because of the unbelieving faction. After that there's usually a persecution. If not a persecution, then a persecution

attempt. Then the apostles and believers have to make a decision as to what to do. Sometimes revelation is, “Go out at night.” Sometimes, “Stay put and teach the Word some more.” Sometimes, “Take the train out.” Sometimes, “Tell them you’re Romans.” They stirred up the people, same pattern; nothing new.

Acts 17:14-15:

And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

They conducted Paul down the seacoast to Athens. What about Silas and Timothy? They stayed in Berea or at least in Macedonia. We’ll see some time later that Timothy just didn’t stay right there. Silas perhaps did but Timothy backed up the road to Thessalonica. He went back to see how things were going there. Then later they come down and rejoin Paul. But right now they’re split up. Silas and Timothy are down in Macedonia. Paul’s down in Athens in Greece.

Paul said to the ones that conducted him to Athens, “Give a message to Silas and Tim. Tell them to come with all speed.” That means come as soon as possible. They went back up to Macedonia to deliver the message to Timothy and Silas.

How long does it take to sail down there? You just don’t do that in three hours. It took a little time for to go down there and for them to go back. In the mean time a lot of things can happen and a lot of things did happen.

Timothy and Silas now are up in Macedonia. Paul is down at Athens in Greece. Macedonia is one country and Greece is another one. Greece is also called Achaia. Achaia is usually the word that is in here. Paul’s down in Athens by himself. If you’re ever in a country all by yourself you think about home once in a while. I’m sure he had thoughts about the believers back at Antioch or in Macedonia.

There was a synagogue in Athens but the big thing in Athens was no Jews. It was the intellectuals, the philosophers. This was the intellectual and literary center; the center for all literary things in Greece. There was a Jewish synagogue here but for the most part it was Greek philosophers, intellectuals, and literary people. When Paul taught here there were not many who believed. “Not many mighty, not many noble are called.” There were a few here and we’re going to see who some of them were but not many because, generally speaking, they get on the intellectual and the philosophy and that’s it. It’s a real deflation of the ego to give up what you’ve worked out and accept God’s grace.

Acts 17:16:

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

The word “spirit” according to the Receiving The Holy Spirit Today book is either 4a which is the issue from man’s mind, or 5; the gift in manifestation. Either Paul’s mind was stirred because of what he saw which I’m sure it was because he saw philosophy all over the place. He saw idols all over the place; not much Word and not many believers. Or it could also have been the gift in manifestation where God was telling him, “Let’s clean up a little bit of this place or give them a chance to hear the Word anyway.”

“the city wholly given to idolatry” – he whole city was given to idolatry; worshiping of Pagan gods and goddesses. The name of the city, Athens, comes from Athena who was the goddess of war. Athena was Greek. Roman was Minerva. That’s where the city got its name. Sparta was where all the soldier groups were. They were the great military outfit. Why would Athens be named after the goddess of war? Where do wars start from? From all the intellectual stupidity; all the literary and mental geniuses. They didn’t start in Sparta. They just carried out all the dirty work.

Acts 17:17:

Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

“disputed” – he reasoned. This is the same word as “reasoned” in **Acts 17:2:**

And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,

He reasoned in the synagogue of the Jews. There was one there. What do you think he reasoned out of? The scriptures; the Word.

“devout” – that’s the same word as in **Acts 17:4:**

And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

There were a lot of intellectual philosophers and others out in the market place that he rubbed shoulders with at Athens. He’d be out there on the street corners witnessing, walking through the market place. He wasn’t there once a week on witnessing night. It says he was in the market daily.

Acts 17:18:

Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babblers say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

There were 4 major schools in Athens. One was the Garden. The Epicureans met in the Garden. Another school was called the Porch. The Stoicks met in the Porch. The Greek word *stoa* means “porch.” That’s where they got their name. The Epicureans got their name from their founder, Epicurus. The third school was the Academy. The Platonists met there. These are all philosophers. The Platonists studied at the Academy; the school of Plato. The fourth is the Lyceum. The Aristotelians met at the Lyceum.

The Word is concerned about two of these main groups, the Epicureans and the Stoicks. The Epicureans were followers of Epicurus who lived between 342 B.C. and 279 B.C. They believed that pleasure was the highest good. That was it; eat, drink and be merry, more or less. Pleasure is what they were after, not “free” pleasure necessarily but that which was most pleasurable was what you were to seek after.

The Stoicks, on the other hand, suppressed pleasure and felt that virtue was the most important. The Stoicks were disciples of Zeno who lived around 270 B.C. They were fatalists and Pantheists. The Epicureans, on the other hand, believed in absolutely no providence, that the world happened by chance which is just like a lot of the modern philosophy. These were two of the main groups. The others were followers of Plato and followers of Aristotle. Paul encountered these Epicureans in the market place. That’s where he was meeting with people; witnessing. These philosophers encountered him.

“babbler” – *spermologos* – *spermo* means seed. Literally it means a “seed picker.” It’s used a lot of times of birds. It’s used of men who gather scraps of information. That’s what they all were. They grabbed scraps of information from one philosopher and then from another; a little bit from Plato, a little bit from Aristotle, then Epicurus or the Stoicks.

Then they’d try to get all this stuff to flow together. That’s what they said Paul was.

“strange” – foreign. In other words, the God that Paul was talking about was not any of the Greek gods. It was some foreign god.

“gods” – is not *Theos*, it’s *daimonion*. They worshiped *daimonion*. That was one of the words they used for their gods. They said, “Why Paul seems to be a setter forth, in his teaching, some foreign devils. We worship devils, sure. Doesn’t everybody? Every land’s got devils they worship. Paul seems to be a setter forth of foreign devils. Let’s listen to what he has to say. Maybe we can add one to our collection.”

He preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection. They had never heard that before. That was strange.

Acts 17:19:

And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus [Mars Hill], saying,
May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?

Every major Greek city had an Acropolis. An Acropolis is the highest point in that city. On a little lower hill than where they worshiped was Mars Hill. Mars is the god of war. Athens was named after Athena, goddess of war. All their business activities took place down in the market place. Their religious, political and philosophical activities took place higher up on the hills. They found Paul witnessing down in the market place and they brought him up to Mars Hill. That's where all the free thinking philosophers, dogooders etc. got together to hear what Paul would have to say.

Acts 17:20-21:

For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

(For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

Everyday, that's all they did was come to hear or tell some new thing.

Acts 17:22:

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, *Ye* men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

“too superstitious” – *deisidaimōn* – *deisi* comes from a word that means fear and *daimōn* means devil. This is in the comparative degree which means you are “more fearing devils” which to them was a compliment. “You are more religious. You worship more than others. You're more religious than others.”

Acts 17:23:

For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

“devotions” – objects of worship. All the way from Athens down to the sea, on both sides of the road, they had it lined up with idols and they worshiped those gods and goddesses.

“TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” - With all the gods and goddesses they had, just in case they missed one, they had this one.

Here's another one of Paul's messages. Did he start in the Old Testament talking about Abraham and David? No, he's talking to philosophers now. He talked in terms of their interests. Now he goes into the Old Testament:

Acts 17:24:

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

He was teaching them the Word but he didn't say, "Well in Genesis it says..." It's still the Word isn't it?

Acts 17:25-26:

Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

"blood" – not in the text

"one" – perhaps referring to Adam

He's teaching them the Word. Maybe he didn't turn to the scroll.

"determined the times before appointed" – God has determined by His foreknowledge who's going to do what. That's God's providence; by His foreknowledge. It doesn't bypass our freedom of will. It's not fatalism like the Stoicks believed. It's not fate.

Acts 17:27:

That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

He was reaching close yet far from the Stoick philosophy because he was into God's Word.