

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 17:15-22 | Session 45 | Stirring up Anger

Since coming to Macedonia, Paul has been beaten, thrown into prison, falsely accused of trying to subvert the Roman government, and hounded by the Judeans who are against his message that Jesus is the Messiah. Things were calmer in Berea and the people were responding to his message, but the Judeans found him there too and Paul had to be sent away to Athens where we find him in today's passage.

Verses 14,15—

Some of the believers in Berea **conducted Paul** (that is, made all of the arrangements) **to the sea** (we presume he got on a ship) and **brought him to Athens** where there was no Judean presence. Why **Silas and Timotheus** stayed behind in Berea we don't know. Perhaps as a diversion to make the Judeans think Paul was still there? But also, these two men could continue instructing and teaching the new church there. Once making land safely in **Athens** Paul gave the men who **brought him a commandment** to go back and tell **Silas and Timotheus** to come to him as quickly, **with all speed**, as possible. The men **departed**; Paul was now on his own.

Verse 16—

We don't know how many days Paul **waited** for Silas and Timothy. The journey by ship must have been at least 200 miles each way. As he waited, **his spirit was stirred in him**. Perhaps Paul has not seen such idolatry before but since **the city was wholly given to idolatry**, he could not remain silent.

Verse 17—

The word **Therefore** is somewhat puzzling. It makes it appear that because he was stirred by the idolatry that he **disputed in the synagogue**. It was always Paul's custom to go to the *Jews first*; Acts 9:20; 13:5,14; 14:1; 17:1,10. The word *disputed* is the same Greek word translated *reasoned* in 17:1. It seems to carry the idea of a discussion, or back and forth dialoging with each other about Jesus Christ (See 17:3). This same *disputing* carried on with the **devout persons**, who were probably Gentiles that had embraced (proselytes) Judaism. The **Therefore** could just indicate that Paul was so distraught by the idolatry the synagogue was more welcoming and that he was relieved to get there to preach Christ. But he also **disputed** with the people in the **market** (Greek: the *agora*). The **market** was the public square. We might equate it today with an outdoor mall where there are people shopping, music being played, discussions taking place, etc. The point here is Paul didn't waste time. Wherever he went he preached *the gospel to the appropriate audience* (See 1 Corinthians 1:17; 9:19-22).

Verse 18—

It was only a matter of time that in this philosophical city of Athens, Paul would encounter the philosophers and the varying schools of thought: **Epicureans** may have believed in the existence of a supreme being, but their worldview was not biblical, rather it was material. They were known primarily for valuing *pleasure*. But not necessarily material pleasure as we might think, e.g. drinking parties, sex, food, etc., but more of the *absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul*. In this sense, many today, at least in America lean toward the Epicurean mindset. There is a philosophy out there that we should not have any pain (hence, a myriad of pain meds, along with other self-medicating options to soothe the troubled soul). One way to overcome a life and spirit

without pain was to banish fear of superstition or death, and denial of the afterlife. Biblically speaking, while we don't want to experience bodily pain, and a troubled soul, we know this is all part of living in a sinful world that "groaneth and travaileth" (Romans 8:22). **Stoicks** (spelled Stoic today), were the larger of the two philosophies in Athens. They believed more in enduring pain and they were pantheists (God is in everything; or the universe is a manifestation of the gods). Stoics lived primarily without any passion. It seems Paul is going to address his upcoming speech or message more to the Stoics in the audience. These philosophers were interested in what **this babbler** had to say. The word **babbler** in Greek is *spermologos*, *spermo* = seed, and *logos* = words. In other words, *what will this seeder of words have to say? What is this guy spreading?* Having never heard of **Jesus, and the resurrection** before they looked on Paul as one who was a **setter forth of strange gods**. Nevertheless, they were curious.

Verse 19,20—

And they took him, and brought him, most likely they took hold of him and moved him into the **Areopagus** (The KJV transliterates the word). This word translates as *Mars Hill*. Mars Hill was also a place of judgment, but Paul is not being brought there to be judged, but to give his opinion on **certain strange things to our ears**. They wanted to know **what these things mean**.

Verse 21—

Spent their time on nothing else, but either to tell, or hear something new. There is a danger in not settling on a doctrine and sticking with it. Our society is notorious for always craving **something new**. The solution is to *weigh the evidence before you, and then settle somewhere*. There are many who hear the truth of the gospel, but always need to hear more before they will believe. There comes a time when we have to exercise faith based on the foundation we have. With that base of belief, and still questioning our assumptions, we strengthen and develop our doctrine.

Verse 22—

Ye are too superstitious. Some commentators and preachers take this as a positive, that Paul is trying to win over the crowd by commending them for being zealous in their religion. But the word **superstitious** in Greek is **δεισιδαίμων**, *deisidaimonesteros*. Paul might be saying, *I perceive you are very reverent, but to demons!* It could be (in verse 16) because his *spirit was stirred in him* he was provoked to anger. The word *stirred* is only used one other time in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 13:5, where it means *anger*. Anger, in and of itself, is not sinful when properly directed. Too often Christians lose their saltiness because they are too passive in the face of injustices or blatant sin. Paul gives his instruction on anger in Ephesians 4:26 where he says, *Be ye angry and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath*. This is nearly always misinterpreted. Paul says all of this in the imperative. The imperative is a command. Literally the verse reads, *Be angry and do it before the sun goes down!* Ephesians 4:27 gives the reason, that is, by not getting angry in the proper way, we *give place to the devil*. The context of the Ephesians passage is about lying, and stealing, and working, and corrupt language. Righteous anger is in order when called for. Paul, in Athens, was stirred with righteous anger. James, however, told the Jews in James 1:19 to be *slow to wrath*. We don't want to walk around angry about everything all the time. We need to express joy, giving praise to God and thanks to Him!