

Acts 17:16-21

1. Observation and exposition
2. The take-away for us?

Observation and exposition

1. Read the passage [SLIDES]
 - a. Why read the passage?
 - i. **1 Timothy 4:13**, for one reason!
 - ii. “During his training for ministry, [Bishop Taylor Smith] was sent to assist in a mission at an Islington church. ‘He said that he was so nervous that before the service he spent an hour in prayer seeking God’s aid in the duties he would be called upon to perform. When he got to the church he found that all that he was required to do was to read the lessons! On the following Wednesday, however, the vicar wrote to him to the effect that during the reading of the second lesson (it happened to be Romans 8) his church-warden (a man who had been a church-warden for years) was converted.’” Derek Prime & Alistair Begg, 210
2. Observation and exposition
 - a. The time and setting [SLIDES]
 - b. A side note on Paul’s missionary journeys:
 - i. The distance traveled in Paul’s first missionary journey was roughly 1,500 miles, the area they covered is roughly the size of South Dakota, and the time they were gone was between 1 ½ and 2 years.
 - ii. The distance traveled in Paul’s second missionary journey was roughly 3,000 miles, over a period of about three years.
 - c. Athens
 - i. “Athens is one of the oldest named cities in the world, having been continuously inhabited for at least 5000 years. Situated in southern Europe, Athens became the leading city of Ancient Greece in the first millennium BC, and its cultural achievements during the 5th century BC laid the foundations of Western civilization.” (History of Athens, Wikipedia)
 - ii. “Many of Classical civilization’s intellectual and artistic ideas originated there, and the city is generally considered to be the birthplace of Western

civilization.” (<https://www.britannica.com/place/Athens>)

- iii. Widely referred to as the cradle of Western civilization and the birthplace of democracy. [SLIDE]
 - iv. By the fifth century B.C. it was the premier Greek city-state, but it was defeated numerous times after that (Sparta in the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.), Macedonia (338 B.C.), and Rome (146 B.C.)), but each time it was not destroyed. Rather, out of respect for its many achievements in sculpture, architecture, literature, etc., it was essentially left alone.
 - v. Capital (present-day) and largest city of modern Greece.
 - 1. Approximately 3.8 million people in the metro area
 - 2. Population estimates in ancient times (according to one scholar)
 - a. 431 BC - peaked at 40,000
 - b. 150 BC - perhaps 10,000
 - c. In Paul’s day, perhaps 5-10,000 voting citizens (plus their families, non-citizens, and slaves) (Witherington, 513)
 - vi. Native city of Socrates and Plato, and the adopted home of Aristotle, Epicurus, and Zeno (founder of Stoicism).
 - 1. “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Socrates
 - vii. Attic Greek was the dialect of Athens, and the predecessor of Koine (common) Greek, which the New Testament was written in.
 - 1. Socrates (470-399 B.C.), Plato (428-348 B.C.), Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.)
 - viii. The first modern Olympic games were held in Athens in 1896, and the summer Olympics were held there in 2004.
- d. Paul in a city full of idols (16)
- i. It wasn’t the beauty nor the brilliance of Athens that struck Paul, but the overwhelming idolatry of the city.
 - ii. It was a city dedicated to false worship (idolatry). Bruce, 329
 - iii. Shouldn’t Paul have been more tolerant?
 - 1. Would he have had a “Coexist” sticker on his suitcase? [SLIDES]
 - iv. Paul was “provoked”
 - 1. In the LXX, this term is used of God and his extreme anger at idolatry.
 - a. **Deuteronomy 9:18**

b. Psalm 106:28-31

i. **Numbers 25:1-18**

ii. **Malachi 2:5-7**

iii. Jonathan Edwards memorial plaque [SLIDES]

c. 2 Chronicles 28:22-25

2. Paul did not resort to violence (as Phinehas did in Numbers 25), as that is not God's intention in our present age, but to words (reasoning).

a. Piper on the window of grace that we are presently living in (the New Testament era).

v. Can we relate to this? Is our culture full of idols or idolatry? If so, what is our typical reaction?

e. What did he do? He reasoned with everyone! (17)

i. In the synagogue with the Jews and devout persons (Greeks)

ii. In the marketplace (agora) with anyone who happened to be there
1. Shoppers, vendors, etc.

iii. With the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers

iv. People will sometimes equate the NT synagogue with today's church, but I'm not so sure that that's a fair comparison.

v. In our culture, let's say in Spearfish, what or where would we find something similar to the Agora (marketplace)?

f. One example: going toe to toe with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (18)

i. Epicureans

1. Considered the gods to be so remote as to take no interest in, and have no influence on, human affairs. The world was due to chance, a random concourse of atoms, and there would be no survival of death, and no judgment. So human beings should pursue pleasure, especially the serene enjoyment of a life detached from pain, passion, and fear. (Stott, 280) [SLIDE]

ii. Stoics (philosophers of the porch (stoa))

1. Acknowledged the supreme god but in a pantheistic way, confusing him with the 'world soul'. The world was determined by fate, and human beings must pursue their duty, resigning themselves to live in harmony with nature and reason, however painful this might be, and develop their own self-sufficiency. (Stott, 280-281) [SLIDE]

iii. Babblers

1. σπερμολόγος - babbler, scavenger, idea-picker
 2. “Metaphorically, it was applied to people who obtained scraps of information from others and retailed them as their own. So they were accusing Paul of being an ignorant plagiarist and a religious charlatan.” Peterson, 490
- iv. Foreign divinities
1. Confusion of two Greek words?
 - a. Ἰησοῦς (masculine)
 - b. ἀνάστασις (feminine)
 2. The resurrection (ἀνάστασις) would have been a foreign (unknown) concept to the Greeks - see **17:32**
- v. This was one of the charges brought against Socrates 450 years earlier.
1. Luke seems to be (?) drawing some parallels between Paul and Socrates.
- g. Paul goes to the Areopagus (**19-20**)
- i. Areopagus (Mars Hill)
 1. Ἄρειος (Ares - Greek god of war) πάγος (rocky hill)
 - ii. The hill, or the group of men?
 1. See **17:22** - “standing in the midst of the Areopagus”
 - iii. I wonder if the original Areopagus didn’t meet at or beside the physical Areopagus, rather than on top of it.
- h. Luke’s estimation of Athenians (**21**)
- i. Ironically, this is what they were accusing Paul of being and doing!
 - i. If there’s time, read Paul’s speech in **17:22-34** as prep for next week.

The take-away for us

Resources

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, F. F. Bruce, 1990
2. *The Book of the Acts*, F. F. Bruce, 1988
3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, David G. Peterson
4. *The Message of Acts*, John Stott
5. *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ben Witherington III

6. *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, F. F. Bruce
7. <https://www.princeton.edu/~pswpc/pdfs/morris/120509.pdf>
8. <https://romeonrome.com/2018/10/athens-in-the-roman-empire/>
9. *On Being a Pastor*, Derek Prime & Alistair Begg
10. *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography*, Iain H. Murray
11. *The Minor Prophets, Vol. 3, Malachi*, Douglas Stuart