

# Acts 17:1-34

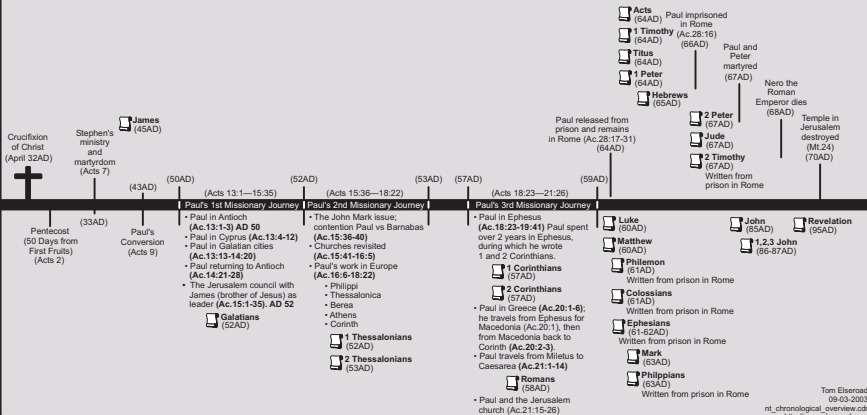
## Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey, Part 3

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# New Testament Chronological Overview





## Strengthened in the faith

*4 Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. 5 So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.*

- 16:1-5 – Timothy joins Paul and Silas (and Luke<sup>1</sup>)
- 16:6-10 – The Macedonian call
- 16:11-15 – Conversion of Lydia at Philippi
- 16:16-24 – Paul and Silas sent to prison for healing the spirit-possessed girl
- 16:25-34 – Philippian jailer is converted
- 16:35-40 – Paul and Silas released after Paul declares his Roman citizenship

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<sup>1</sup>The text continuously uses second person plural

## As was his custom

*1 Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.*

- Paul's custom was to go to the Jews in the Synagogue
  - Reasoned with them from the Scriptures (the OT writings)
  - Explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead
    - Literally opening and placing before them...
    - "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."
    - Note how he dealt with them with care and patience
- Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas
  - Along with some Greeks and leading woman
- Text says they were in the synagogue for three Sabbath's, but they probably stayed in Thessalonica longer<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:9 & 4:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:5 & 3:7-10; Phil. 4:15-16

## Turned the world upside down

*5 But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.*

- *But the Jews*<sup>3</sup>
  - They were jealous, but of what?
    - See also Acts 7:9 and 13:45,50; 14:2,19
  - Formed a mob and started a riot
  - Went to the house of Jason looking for Paul & Co.
- *When they did not find them*
  - Was this intervention by God?
  - Accused Paul and Silas of rebelling against Rome
- *And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others*
  - A “guarantee” that Paul & Co. would not cause any more trouble

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<sup>3</sup> Jewish leaders?

## You'd better run for your life

*10 The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.*

- *The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea*
  - Was this done out of a trust in the Lord?
  - They (almost) immediately<sup>4</sup> went back into the synagogue
    - Seems they are clear as to what they are to be doing
  - The Jews in Berea were *more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica*
    - They eagerly received the word and examined the scriptures
- *But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out*
  - They seem to have a thing against Paul and Silas
  - They went to Berea to stir the pot
- *Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea*
  - Paul is escorted to Athens; Silas and Timothy stay behind

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<sup>4</sup>So it would seem

## The city was full of idols

*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.*

- *Now while Paul was waiting for [Silas and Timothy] at Athens*
  - Paul was greatly affected by seeing the ungodliness of the city
    - *Spirit was being provoked* = stirred or roused to anger or indignation
    - Is this anger, or sorrow (a la Jeremiah)?
  - He continued to reason (or present intelligent arguments) with the *Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles*
    - Additionally, he spoke to anyone who would listen
- *And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him*
  - He caught the attention of the professional thinkers of the day
  - They wanted to know what he was talking about



# Dueling philosophies

## Epicurianism

- “Epicureanism were disciples of Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) who believed that pleasure was the greatest good and the most worthy pursuit of man. They meant pleasure in the sense of tranquility and freedom from pain, disquieting passions, and fears, especially the fear of death. Epicurus taught that the gods took no interest in human affairs. His followers also believed that everything happened by chance and that death was the end of all. This philosophy is still popular today. One of its modern poets was A. C. Swinburne.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Constable

## Dueling philosophies (cont.)

### Stoicism

- Stoics followed the teachings of Zeno the Cypriot (340-265 B.C.). The name 'stoic' comes from 'stoa', a particular portico (Gr. stoa) where he taught when he lived in Athens. His followers placed great importance on living in harmony with nature. They stressed individual self-sufficiency and rationalism, and they had a reputation for being quite arrogant. Stoics were pantheists who believe that God is in everything, and everything is God. They were also fatalistic. Their teaching is also common today. A modern poet who set forth this philosophy of life, W. E. Henley, wrote, 'I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul,' in his poem Invictus. Stoics were also idealists."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Constable

## To the unknown god

*22 So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said,  
“Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in  
all respects.*

### Paul's sermon

- General observations about his methodology
  - Speaks to them in their own cultural terms<sup>7</sup>
  - He builds off things they would know
  - He quotes their own poets
    - The Cretan poet Epimenides<sup>8</sup> (ca. 600 B.C.): *For in Him we live and move and exist*
    - The Cilician poet Aratus (c. 315-240 B.C.): *We are his offspring*
- vs.22-23 – States several obvious facts
  - They are highly religious
  - They have an altar to the “unknown god”

<sup>7</sup>see 1 Corinthians 9:22

<sup>8</sup>also quoted in Titus 1:12


## He is Lord of heaven and earth,

*24 The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;*

### Paul's sermon (cont.)

- vs.24-27 – Declares God to them, contrasting him with their conceptions of deity
  - Points out several facts about God<sup>9</sup>
    - He is the creator of all things
    - Creator-creature distinction (i.e. he does not dwell in temples) – immanence as well as transcendence
    - He is in control of all things – not fate or destiny
    - He is sovereign – even over the Roman state
    - He desires that all men desire him (and he is *not far from each one of us*)

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<sup>9</sup>all of which contradict the Greco-Roman ideals about deities 

## Being then the children of God

*29 Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.*

### Paul's sermon (cont.)

- vs.28-29 – Declares their personal connection with God
  - Their existence is based in him
  - They are his children
  - They have a deep connection to him, unlike to a god made of gold or silver
- vs.30-31 – Proclaims the call to repent
  - Notes the patience of God
  - Explains what they are to do, which is repent
  - Speaks of the forth-coming judgment
  - Finds this on the power of the resurrection

## Some believed

*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.”*

- The response:
  - Some people sneered
  - Some people wanted to hear more
  - Some people (Dionysius and Damaris) believed
- What are some take-aways?
  - We are not always going to get a “good” response to our teaching
  - In order to speak to “others”, we need to understand them
  - We also need to understand the truths of scripture
  - We can't always measure the outcome by the immediate response