

## Lesson 16

### Acts 17

#### RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

**Memory Verse:** "...for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." (Acts 17:11b)

In recording the groups' departure from Philippi and subsequent movements, the writer uses 'they' rather than 'we', indicating that Luke stays behind in Philippi. The others move on to Thessalonica, where over the next three Sabbaths their preaching in the synagogue brings good results (17:1-4).

As usual the missionaries' successes stir up the jealousy of the Jews. With the help of some hooligans, the Jews cause a riot and attack the house of Jason where Paul is staying. They seize Jason instead and take him to the city officials and accuse him of helping a group of Jewish rebels who are planning to set up their own king, Jesus, in rebellion against Caesar when no one can find Paul and his party. Subsequently, the officials hold Jason responsible to see that there is no further trouble and required a bond (money) from Jason to guarantee that Paul will leave the city and not return (17:5-9; see 1 Thessalonians 2:18).

At Berea the story of Jewish opposition is much the same as in Thessalonica (17:10-13). Paul is forced to depart, leaving Silas and Timothy behind while he goes on to Athens. From Athens he sends a message telling them to re-join him at once (17:14-15). After they meet him in Athens, Paul sends them back to Macedonia, Timothy going to Thessalonica and Silas probably to Philippi (see 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2; cf. Acts 18:5).

Athens was in the province of Achaia, the southern part of present-day Greece. It was the chief centre of learning in the Roman Empire, a place where philosophy, religion and politics were taught and discussed freely. Paul was invited him to give an account of his religion to the council of philosophers known as the Areopagus. Here Paul preaches, he as so often, links the name 'Jesus' with the word 'resurrection' (Greek: anastasis) that the philosophers thought he was introducing them to two gods, Jesus and Anastasis (17:16-21).

The Areopagus was divided largely between two schools of Greek philosophers, the Epicureans and the Stoics (17:18). The Epicureans believed that because nothing in the world is lasting or stable, people should not become too involved in the affairs of life. They should seek contentment through living calmly, and should try to avoid all pain, desire, unpleasant feelings and superstitious fears. This was how the gods lived, and for this reason they took little interest in human affairs.

The Stoics believed that everything is determined by a universal Mind or Reason. Therefore, people should accept whatever they meet in life without fear or complaint, and adjust their lives to fit what nature has determined for them. Self-discipline was essential; reason was always to have control over feelings.

This chapter describes Paul's ministry in three cities and how some of the people in those cities responded to the Word of God. These pictures are snapshots, not murals, for Dr. Luke did not give us many details. However, as we study the responses in those cities, we can certainly see our modern world and better understand what to expect as we seek to witness for Christ today.

**Scriptural Reading:** Acts 17:1-34

**Things to learn:** 1) Resisting the Word. 2) Receiving the Word. 3) Ridiculing the Word.

Read the introduction to this study and Acts 17

#### Questions:

Q1 What were the results of Paul's preaching within the synagogue and outside when they arrived at Thessalonica (vvs. 1 -9)?

Q2 What is it the Bereans do (Acts 17:10-15)? In what way are you similar and/or different to the Bereans?

Q3 How did the people in ancient Athens respond to the Gospel (vvs. 16-34)? Is there any difference today?