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Acts 17

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Acts 17.

Topics.

- Paul reasons with Jews in the synagogue of Thessalonica.
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- Jews drive Paul and Silas out of Berea.
- Paul stands in the Areopagus in Athens and proclaims Christ.
- In God we live and move and have our being.
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- God is not an image formed by art and the imagination of man.
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- God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness.

The previous chapter: in the previous chapter Paul, Silas and Timothy visited the churches Paul had established then they sailed to Philippi (a leading city of Macedonia and a Roman colony) where Lydia and her household were baptised. The magistrates had Paul and Silas beaten and put in prison which resulted in them baptising the jailor and his family. The magistrates apologised to Paul and Silas when they heard they were Roman citizens. The chapter ended with Paul and Silas visiting Lydia and encouraging those who accepted the word of the Lord then leaving the city of Philippi.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

ACTS 17:1-4

Paul reasons with Jews in the Synagogue of Thessalonica.

- **Acts 17:1-4:** Now when they (Paul, Silas) (v4) had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ²And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." ⁴And some of them (Jews) were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.

NOTE: In the previous chapter Timothy was not mentioned when Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison in the city of Philippi (a leading city of Macedonia and a Roman colony) (Acts 16:12) nor is he mentioned in this chapter until verse fourteen. It is most likely Timothy is seldom mentioned because at this time Paul and Silas are the dominant characters. At the end of the previous chapter Paul and Silas left Philippi in Macedonia and have now arrived in Thessalonica, over three weeks Paul reasons with the Jews (especially on the Sabbath days) explaining the word of the Lord and proving Jesus is the Christ (no-doubt from Old Testament Scripture concerning the Lord).

Reasoned: means to say or discuss thoroughly by disputing or preaching in an argument or exhortation. Through reasoning Paul was able to persuade many Jews, devout Greeks and some leading woman of Thessalonica that Jesus was the Christ (v4).

NOTICE: the words, "It was necessary for Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead," Clearly shows that from the foundation of the world Christ's death and resurrection was in God's eternal plan for mankind's salvation from before time even began. God's foreknowledge is a stunning mystery to the human mind but majestically manifests the wisdom of God who has given mankind free will. By foreknowledge God is able to allow us to do as we please and come what may our free will is still mysteriously working within God's Sovereign will and bringing about His eternal plan that He set in motion before the beginning of time such is the wonder of God's foreknowledge. God in the book of Isaiah says:

- My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Reasoning religious matters: sadly reasoning is a skill that is lacking in many churches today since congregations are not only told what to believe, but also discouraged to even consider another point of view and often if they do try to question something they are verbally condemned or considered a rebel amongst the flock, but this is not how brothers and sisters of the early church fellowshiped, rather they got together and reasoned with each other over the Scriptures to find out what they teach. Remember their churches were made up of Jews who had been steeped in the customs of Moses, Greeks who had been devoted to their pagan gods and leading woman of cities who had authority and influence. Obviously, they had certain teachers, but their teachers taught expecting their listeners to study and question what they had heard and they commended them for doing so. They encouraged their listeners to take the responsibly upon themselves to see if what they were saying was so rather than simply switching off their mind and accepting what they were hearing was absolute truth (Acts 17:11).

ACTS 17:5-9

Jealous Jews Attack Jason's House.

- **Acts 17:5-9:** But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them (Paul and Silas) out to the crowd. ⁶And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, ⁷and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." ⁸And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. ⁹And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

This is a perfect example of spiritual blindness to the extreme, Jews who were God's chosen people are so full of jealousy and anger that they gathered wicked men to cause riots on the streets and to attack Jason's house because those who accepted Israel's Messiah the Christ were meeting there with Paul and Silas. The envious and jealous Jews take Jason and those meeting in his house before the authorities of Thessalonica. They tell them that Jason has taken into his home men (Paul and Silas) who have turned the world upside down by teaching that there is another King.

Rome and the Christian titles, Lord, Son of God and Saviour: these titles Lord, Son of God and Saviour were not pious terms in the first century, but titles of Caesar, when Christians were saying Jesus is Lord, Son of God and Saviour. Rome understood them to be taking the titles of Caesar and giving them to Jesus and so challenging the divine authority of the emperor. Thus, proclaiming that there was a King other than Caesar was a serious offense and the reason the people of Thessalonica and the city authorities were worried when they were told that this is what Paul and Silas were doing. To proclaim another king other than the king of Rome would certainly result in a battalion of Roman soldiers being sent to

stamp out such blasphemy against Caesar and result in whippings, prison and in many cases even death should it become known to the Roman officials. Since the accusations were against Paul and Silas the city authorities take some bond money from Jason and all those with him and allow them to go.

ACTS 17:10-14

Jason and the Brothers send Paul and Silas to Berea.

- **Acts 17:10-14:** The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. ¹²Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. ¹³But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. ¹⁴Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there.

NOTICE: Timothy is still with Paul and Silas in Thessalonica and Berea (14).

Jason and those with him realising the extreme danger for Paul and Silas if they stayed in Thessalonica immediately send them to Berea. As was the custom of Paul he goes to the Jewish synagogue and teaches Jesus, but to Paul's pleasant surprise there is an enormous difference between these Jews to those at Thessalonica, such a big difference that they are referred to as being noble meaning honourable, principled, admirable, praiseworthy and upright. The Jews at Berea were called noble because they received the word with all eagerness, meaning they were excited to hear what Paul and Silas said about the Lord Jesus Christ, but they did not simply believe it because two great men were proclaiming it, they still went to the Scriptures to examine that what Paul and Silas were saying was true, and for this they were commended by them.

NOTICE: even though Paul and Silas knew what they were teaching was the word of the Lord they did not impose or force it on their congregations, rather they encouraged their listeners to hold meetings to examine the Scriptures for themselves. They rested in the fact that the Holy Spirit will reveal the Good News of the Gospel to those who have a right and humble heart and truly desire above all things to know God, but would spiritually blind those whose heart is full of pride and selfish ambition to the beauty of God's grace found in the Lord Jesus Christ (perhaps God has designed His word to be this way). The author of Chronicles writes:

- The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him (2 Chron. 16:9).

NOTE: blameless in this context does not mean without sin, but refers to a heart that is humble and honest that is seeking God to know Him because he is God, contrasted to a heart that is prideful and hypocritical and seeking God for ones on gain.

Jews drive Paul and Silas out of Berea: the Jewish religious authorities had enormous authority and influence over the nation of Israel, they were the keepers of Moses customs and his Law to which all Jews respected, so it was very easy for the religious rulers to send their disciples into the crowds to turn them against anyone proclaiming what appeared to be a new teaching especially if it was proclaiming Jews and Gentiles together need not concern themselves with the customs of Moses since they can now be saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The chief priests and religious authorities feared losing their stronghold, control and power over the people of Israel so the same Jews that drove Paul and Silas out of Thessalonica now come and drive them out of Berea.

NOTICE: Silas and Timothy stay in Berea but Paul sails to Athens (v14-15).

ACTS 17:15-21

Paul arrives in Athens a City full of Idols.

- **Acts 17:15-21:** Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed. ¹⁶Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbler wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ²⁰For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." ²¹Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

Athens: the city of Athens was reputed to have founded by Athenai the goddess of wisdom. At the time of Paul, it was major cultural and educational center and the capital city of Greece 5 miles inland from the Aegean Sea. Paul visited Athens Paul on second and third journeys.

(Acts 17:15-16, 22) (Acts 18:1) (1 Thess. 3:1).

Epicurean; was a follower of Epicurus, a noted philosopher who lived (341-270 BC). His basic philosophy was that man has free will to plan and live a life of pleasure and his chief purpose is to achieve happiness. Since such teaching appealed to the common man and became widespread.

Stoicism: held that nature, is a hierarchical unity controlled by the universal Logos, being a kind of impersonal divine reason, all humans are participants in this universal Logos and are therefore also participants in deity. There is no real free will and therefore nothing lies within a persons' own power except imagination, desire, and emotion and so by cultivation of detachment from the world outside of them and mastery over their reactions to the world's impingement upon themselves they can achieve freedom, happiness, and self-sufficiency.

Whatever a person's position or handicap was, any person even a slave can be inwardly free, because all are partakers of a common rational nature so all humans everywhere are subject to the same law because there is a universal morality rooted in the universal Logos. Stoicism did not think in terms of obedience to a personal God, sin was simply and error of judgment, rectified by a change of opinion.

Paul is stunned by the multitudes of idols in Athens: Paul while waiting for Silas and Timothy to arrive wanders around the streets of Athens and is stunned at the enormous number of idols he sees throughout the city. The Athenians were so superstitious they believed in a multitude of gods, (a god for every purpose) and believed Paul was talking about gods belonging to other nations and not the gods of Athens because the message of Christ death and resurrection was so totally different to anything they had heard, but this worked to Paul's favour since the people unlike the jealous Jews who drove Paul out of cities loved listening to something new so they allow Paul to speak openly in public to the crowds that had gathered.

NOTE: though the Athenians belief was wrong their attitude was good, this is the attitude we should all have, it is not a sin to listen to something new and if we believe we have the truth there is nothing to fear. Listening to others share what they believe can have two positive effects, firstly if they do manage to persuade us that something, we believe is not correct

that is a good thing and secondly it opens opportunities for us to share Christ. There is a golden rule in human relationships which states, "The longer you allow someone to talk the longer they will allow you to talk," so never be quick to correct or dismiss what someone believes.

ACTS 17:22-34

Paul stands in the Areopagus in Athens and Proclaims Christ.

- **Acts 17:22-34:** So, Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus (Mars Hill in KJV) said:
"Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸for " 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, " 'For we are indeed his offspring.' ²⁹Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." ³²Now when they (the people in Athens) heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." ³³So Paul went out from their (the people in Athens) midst. ³⁴But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Areopagus: (Mars Hill in KJV) was the name of the Greek deity of war and the rock of Ares in Athens. Anyone who believes in a god will have strong emotions toward that god whether it is the true God or an illusionary god. Throughout history nations have gone to war because they believed in an illusionary god or had a false concept of the true God thus Paul in his wisdom does not begin his exhort by condemning the idols and gods of the Athenians since this would only result in them turning against him, but rather focus' on the an aspect of their false religious system whereby he can introduce Christ without degrading and condemning those he is speaking to. The fact the Athenians had an altar, "To the unknown god" (v23) and actually worship this god shows how extremely superstitious they were.

In God we Live and move and have our being: the words, "In God we Live and move and have our Being" (v28) is an enormous mystery to the human mind. Sometimes we can enter a cathedral or Church building that is so architecturally magnificent we feel God is there, yet Paul tells us God does not live in temples made by man and that all of us whether we believe in God or not live and move and have our being in God. This means that no matter whether a person is standing in the most beautiful religious building with its magnificent stained glass windows, church bells and cathedrals or whether a beggar is lying in the street both are in God because we are all living and moving in God and added to this wonder is Paul's statement:

- God is not far from anyone of us (v27).

This statement of Paul's shines a spotlight on the truth that no matter who we are, what we believe and what environment we are in God is not far from anyone of us because even our very existence is in God, nevertheless though all humanity dwells in God does not mean that all humanity is saved to eternal life.

God is not served by human Hands: the words, "God is not served by human Hands" (v25) refers to temples and idols, there is nothing man can build no matter how majestic beautiful or opulent that will add to God since He is fully self-sufficient in Himself rather it is God who gives to us. Even the Bible is given to benefit mankind by firstly revealing to us who God is and secondly to guide us toward the paths of peace and living in harmony with each other which is summed up in God's Royal Law:

- You shall love your neighbour as yourself (Matt 22:37-39).

This means do not deliberately do harm to other humans. No sane person deliberately does things to inflict pain on themselves, loving others as you love yourself is not about feeling some warm and fuzzy emotion towards others, it is about not hurting others as you would not hurt yourself. The thing God hates the most is when we do harm to another person, physically, financially, sexually, emotionally or spiritually and the thing God loves the most is when we do good to others. It is interesting to notice that the major crime that God points out in Noah's time and one of the main reasons for the flood was because of all the violence in the land. Leviticus chapter nineteen makes it clear that our neighbour is every other person, showing that the law requires justice to all people.

The six commandments regarding mankind should be applied to everyone and we must abide by them ourselves. To love in the biblical sense is not an emotional attitude, but the keeping of these laws in relation to our neighbour. This is the general law of justice, beyond that; our conduct is to be regulated by relationship. We must render honour and justice to all people wherever due, but we have a particular responsibility to care for our families and those who belong to Christ.

NOTICE: from one-man (Adam) God made every nation and determined boundaries and allotted periods of time. (v26) Though God never changes and the nature of man remains the same the way God deals in certain allotted periods of time does change, i.e. what God was doing during Moses generation was different to David's and Solomon's era and what God was doing through Jesus generation and the book of Acts is totally different to what God has done with any generation past or future. When Christ returns as King of kings and Lord of lords to establish God's Kingdom of righteousness, justice, joy and peace on earth what God will be doing that era will be totally different again thus God has appointed various periods for mankind and is working differently through each period.

Mankind should seek God: the words, "Mankind should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him" (v27) implies that God is not easily found. God has in a sense hidden Himself so that only those with a right heart attitude find Him, but this does not mean only those who have lived a relatively righteous life will find him since the religious leaders of Jesus generation were outwardly righteous but Christ rebuked them whereas a woman caught in adultery he forgave. God is looking for what is in the heart of a person he is not deceived by outward behaviour since that can be motivated by a child's wrong upbringing, wickedness or even hurt. Though God may not be easily found Jesus encourages everyone seeking God with the following words: -

- Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened because your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:9-13).

The Holy Spirit in this context refers to the gift of righteousness, salvation and eternal life.

Paul quotes the poets of Athens: Paul's words, "Even some of your own poets have said," (v28) shows us the following two things:

1. The enormous knowledge Paul had.

2. When sharing the Good News of the Gospel it can be beautifully supported by what the world believes since even though they may have no faith or believe in other gods as did the Athenians it does not mean that everything, they believe is wrong.

God is not an image formed by art and the imagination of man:

Paul tells the Athenians that "God is not an image formed by art and the imagination of man (v29) referring to their idols. When a person worships an idol their imagination is involved, the idol is simply what links their mind to the god of their imagination. Though there is no power in idols there is power in human imagination. This is because the human nervous system does not have mind of its own but simply responds to the mental movie played out on the screen of the imagination and affects the emotions and outward behaviour accordingly. If the idol they are worshipping is a symbol of a benevolent god they will naturally feel good emotions when worshipping that illusionary god, but if the idol is a symbol of a vengeful and wrathful god their emotions will react in fear and terror. Thus, our emotions cannot be used as evidence that the God we believe in is the God of the Bible nevertheless that does not mean emotions should be ignored. Providing a person's faith is based on the message of the cross, the words of Christ and the Gospel they should fully embrace the wonderful emotions the Good News of the Gospel produces in the heart of those who fully believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for righteousness and eternal salvation.

The times of ignorance God overlooked: the words, "God commands all people everywhere to repent" refers to Jews and Gentiles contrasted to just the Jews and the expression, "The times of ignorance God overlooked" refer to the era before Christ's death and resurrection. Prior to Christ appearing God was not concerned with the idols and gods Gentile nations were worshipping since the LORD'S primary focus and dealings was with Israel, but since Christ's resurrection, "God has visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name and has granted to them repentance that leads to life eternal" (Acts 11:18) (Acts 15:14) thus God's focus is now on Gentile nations and therefore He is not overlooking their ignorance or who or what they are worshipping.

God has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness:

the resurrection of Christ should assure everyone that God will judge the world and that the standard of righteousness that all mankind will be judged against is Christ (v31). Whoever denies Christ and falls short of living up to the sinless and righteous life of love, compassion, mercy, grace, kindness and forgiveness that Jesus lived is already judged because they have denied the One who has the power to give eternal life and not attained to the same perfect standard Jesus did. This is brilliant; God does not need to personally judge us since we bring judgment on ourselves every time we fall short of the sinless and righteous life Jesus lived. This is why the Gospel is called the Good News it proclaims that we are saved by faith and God's grace and that God imputes righteousness as a free gift to all who come to God through honest heartfelt repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

NOTE: if anyone thinks they attain to Jesus standard of love and righteousness they should read his famous Sermon on the Mount because if anyone does think this way, they are either horribly deceived or full of self-righteousness. If we could attain to Christ's perfect standard of righteousness by self-effort then he died for no purpose. For further information see:

- Matthew 5:20-48 in, Commentary New Testament (ON WEBSITE MENU).

How amazing is this? Though the people of Athens considered it wise, right and proper to worship a multitude of man-made wooden and gold idols and believe in many false gods, when they heard the truth concerning Christ's death and resurrection, they considered it foolishness so much so that they mocked Paul and Silas (v32). Paul leaves the crowd in peace with the few that did believe.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

Bible House of Grace