The Acts of the Apostles

Week 28 — Acts 17:1–15

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Introduction — The Apostolic Gospel: Revival, Reformation, and Regional Transformation

As we begin Acts 17, Paul continues his second missionary journey into Macedonia, where the gospel is advancing through influential cities and establishing Christian communities throughout the region.

We will divide Acts 17 into two sessions to examine the historical context, cultural dynamics, and spiritual significance of Paul's ministry.

Acts 17 reveals the transforming power of the apostolic gospel as it confronts established religious systems, challenges cultural assumptions, and establishes communities of believers committed to Jesus Christ.

God's Strategy for Regional Transformation

Throughout Paul's missionary journeys, we observe several important principles:

- **Strategic Mission:** The gospel advances through influential centers of population, commerce, and government.
- **Apostolic Proclamation:** The message of Jesus Christ, His death, resurrection, and Kingdom produces spiritual transformation.
- **Revival and Reformation:** The gospel changes individual lives and challenges the structures and assumptions of society.
- **Spiritual Warfare:** The advancement of the Kingdom encounters religious opposition, persecution, and resistance.
- **Church Multiplication:** Apostolic ministry establishes communities that continue proclaiming the gospel long after the missionaries depart.

The events of Acts 17 challenge the contemporary Church to recover confidence in the transforming power of the gospel.

The same Holy Spirit who empowered the Early Church continues to equip believers to bring the presence, truth, and love of Jesus Christ into every sphere of society.

Acts 17:1 — Paul Arrives in Thessalonica

The Journey Through Macedonia

Paul and his companions travel through Amphipolis and Apollonia before arriving in Thessalonica.

Luke does not record ministry activity in the two preceding cities.

The narrative emphasizes Thessalonica, a strategically important center of government, commerce, and population.

Thessalonica — A Regional Center of Influence

Thessalonica was founded around 315 BC by Cassander of Macedon.

By Paul's arrival, approximately AD 49–50, it was an important Roman city and the capital of the province of Macedonia.

Several characteristics made Thessalonica strategically significant:

- An important population center in Macedonia.
- A center of regional government and commerce.
- Located along the Via Egnatia, a major Roman road.
- Connected to trade routes extending throughout the Roman world.
- Home to an established Jewish community with a synagogue.

God's Strategy for Maximum Impact

Paul's ministry demonstrates the importance of reaching influential population centers.

The establishment of a Christian community in Thessalonica created opportunities for the gospel to spread throughout Macedonia and beyond.

The Jewish Synagogue

Paul begins his ministry in the synagogue, following his established missionary pattern.

His background as a Pharisee trained under Gamaliel equipped him to engage Jewish audiences through the Hebrew Scriptures.

Cross-references: Acts 22:3; Romans 1:16.

Talking Point: Apostolic ministry recognizes the strategic importance of reaching communities and centers of influence that can multiply the gospel throughout entire regions.

Acts 17:2 — Paul Reasons from the Scriptures

Paul's Apostolic Method

Paul enters the synagogue and reasons with the Jewish community for three consecutive Sabbaths.

Greek: **DIALEGOMAI** — To discuss, reason, converse, or engage in dialogue.

Paul does not simply make religious declarations.

He engages his listeners through Scripture, explanation, and theological reasoning.

The Messianic Expectation

The Jewish people were awaiting the promised Messiah.

Paul uses the Hebrew Scriptures to demonstrate that Jesus fulfills God's covenant promises.

His teaching likely drew upon several important prophetic passages:

- **Isaiah 53:** The suffering servant who bears the sins of many.
- **Psalm 16:10:** God's Holy One would not experience corruption.
- **Jeremiah 31:31–34:** God's promise of a New Covenant.
- **Ezekiel 36:26–27:** A new heart and the indwelling Spirit.
- **Joel 2:28–32:** The outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The Word and the Power of God

Paul's ministry consistently emphasizes the proclamation of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Cross-reference: 1 Corinthians 2:1–5.

Although Luke does not describe specific miracles in Thessalonica in this passage, Paul's broader ministry demonstrates the relationship between biblical proclamation and supernatural power.

Talking Point: The apostolic gospel must be grounded in Scripture, centered upon Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Revival and reformation require both theological truth and spiritual power.

Acts 17:3 — Jesus Is the Messiah

Explaining and Demonstrating the Gospel

Paul explains that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead.

He then declares that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

Greek: **DIANOIGŌ** — To open, explain, or make something understandable.

Greek: **PARATITHĒMI** — To present, set before, or demonstrate through evidence.

Paul opens the Scriptures and presents the biblical case for Jesus Christ.

The Central Message of the Apostolic Gospel

Paul's proclamation emphasizes three foundational truths:

1. **Jesus is the promised Messiah.** He fulfills God's covenant promises to Israel.
2. **Jesus suffered and died.** His sacrificial death accomplishes God's redemptive purposes.
3. **Jesus rose from the dead.** His resurrection confirms His identity and victory over sin and death.

Revival Through the Gospel

The gospel confronts the religious assumptions of the community and calls people into a New Covenant relationship with God.

The notes emphasize the extraordinary transformation that occurred during Paul's relatively brief initial ministry in Thessalonica.

Acts records three Sabbaths of synagogue ministry, although Paul's total time in the city may have extended beyond those three weeks.

An Enduring Apostolic Legacy

Paul later writes two letters to the Thessalonian believers.

These epistles demonstrate his continuing commitment to their spiritual formation, perseverance, holiness, and understanding of Christ's return.

Talking Point: The transforming power of the apostolic gospel is not measured only by the length of a ministry assignment. A faithful proclamation of Jesus Christ can establish communities whose influence continues for generations.

Acts 17:4 — Revival Reaches Every Sphere of Society

A Diverse Community Responds

Luke identifies several groups who respond to Paul's message:

- Some Jewish believers.
- A large number of God-fearing Greeks.

- Several prominent women.

The gospel crosses religious, cultural, economic, and social boundaries.

The Power of the Gospel to Transform Lives

The notes emphasize that the gospel breaks spiritual bondage and opens hearts to the truth of Jesus Christ.

Cross-reference: 2 Corinthians 10:3–5.

Spiritual warfare includes confronting false beliefs and bringing human thoughts into obedience to Christ.

Prominent Women and Kingdom Influence

Luke specifically recognizes the response of prominent women.

Their inclusion reveals that women of influence were important participants in the expansion of the Early Church.

The Philippian Church Supports the Mission

Paul later acknowledges that the Philippian believers provided financial support during his ministry in Thessalonica.

Cross-reference: Philippians 4:15–16.

This demonstrates the importance of partnership between established churches and frontline apostolic ministry.

Although Lydia's personal involvement in organizing the gifts is not specified, her earlier hospitality illustrates the kind of marketplace partnership that supported the mission.

Talking Point: Revival reaches across every sphere of society. Healthy apostolic ministry brings together believers, marketplace leaders, and local churches to advance the gospel through prayer, proclamation, generosity, and partnership.

Acts 17:5 — Religious Opposition Produces a Riot

Jealousy Fuels Opposition

Some Jewish opponents become jealous of Paul's ministry and organize a hostile crowd.

They gather troublemakers from the marketplace and create a public disturbance.

Spiritual Warfare Through Religious Opposition

The notes identify jealousy, deception, and religious hostility as recurring expressions of spiritual opposition to the gospel.

Paul repeatedly experienced persecution from both Jewish and Gentile opponents.

Cross-references: 2 Corinthians 11:24–27; 2 Corinthians 12:7–10.

Paul's description of his thorn in the flesh has been interpreted in different ways; persecution is one interpretation, although the text does not explicitly identify the thorn.

Jason's House Is Attacked

The crowd rushes to Jason's home, seeking Paul and Silas.

Jason appears to have provided hospitality and support to the missionaries.

His home likely served as an important gathering place for the emerging Christian community.

The Marketplace as a Center of Public Influence

The marketplace, or *agora*, was central to economic and civic life in Greco-Roman cities.

It was a place where commerce, social interaction, and public activity intersected.

The opposition to Paul's ministry now moves into the public sphere.

Talking Point: The advancement of the gospel may provoke opposition from those threatened by spiritual and cultural transformation. Christian leaders must respond with courage, discernment, and faithfulness rather than fear.

Acts 17:6 — Turning the World Upside Down

Jason Is Brought Before the Authorities

Unable to find Paul and Silas, the crowd drags Jason and other believers before the city officials.

Their accusers declare that the missionaries have been turning the world upside down.

Understanding the Greek Language

Greek: **ANASTATOŌ** — To disturb, unsettle, stir up, or throw into disorder.

The accusation suggests that Paul's ministry was producing significant social disruption.

The Reputation of the Apostolic Gospel

Paul and his companions had developed a reputation for bringing a message that challenged established religious and cultural assumptions.

The notes emphasize that the apostolic gospel transforms more than individual religious beliefs.

It introduces a new understanding of God, humanity, authority, and community.

Revival and Reformation

The gospel produces transformation as people embrace the lordship of Jesus Christ.

That transformation can influence families, economic relationships, cultural practices, and institutions.

Talking Point: The apostolic gospel is not simply a message of private spirituality. The lordship of Jesus Christ transforms the way people live, lead, relate to one another, and participate in society.

Acts 17:7 — Proclaiming Another King: Jesus

The Political Accusation

The opponents accuse Jason of receiving Paul and his companions.

They claim that the missionaries are acting against Caesar's decrees by proclaiming another king named Jesus.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

This accusation reveals the political implications of proclaiming Jesus as Lord.

The apostles preached that Jesus Christ was the risen Messiah and King.

Cross-references: Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:9–11; Revelation 11:15.

The Kingdom of God and Earthly Authority

The Kingdom of God represents a higher and eternal authority.

However, the gospel does not call Christians to pursue rebellion against civil government.

Rather, believers are called to demonstrate allegiance to Jesus Christ while living as faithful witnesses within society.

Transforming Cultural Systems

The notes emphasize that the message of Jesus challenges unjust power structures and introduces the values of God's Kingdom.

The love, righteousness, justice, and truth of Jesus Christ have implications for every sphere of human life.

Talking Point: The apostolic gospel proclaims Jesus Christ as King. His Kingdom transforms individuals and challenges every system that contradicts His righteousness, justice, and love.

Acts 17:8 — The City Is Thrown into Turmoil

Fear of Political Instability

The accusations disturb the crowd and the city officials.

Roman authorities were deeply concerned about public disorder and political rebellion.

An accusation of promoting another king could create serious political consequences.

The Gospel Confronts Fear

The opposition attempts to portray the Christian movement as a threat to Roman stability.

Yet the apostolic message is centered upon reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ.

Cross-reference: 2 Corinthians 5:18–20.

Spiritual and Political Pressure

The emerging Christian community experiences pressure from both religious opponents and civil authorities.

Talking Point: When the gospel enters influential cultural environments, believers must remain faithful to Jesus Christ while demonstrating wisdom, integrity, and peace in their public witness.

Acts 17:9 — Jason Posts Security

The Authorities Require a Financial Guarantee

The city officials require Jason and the other believers to provide security before releasing them.

This likely involved a financial pledge intended to discourage further disturbances.

The Cost of Supporting Apostolic Ministry

Jason's hospitality and partnership with Paul now carry personal and financial consequences.

His willingness to support the missionaries demonstrates courage and commitment.

Kingdom Partnership Requires Sacrifice

The advancement of the gospel often depends upon believers who provide hospitality, resources, protection, and encouragement.

Talking Point: Apostolic ministry advances through courageous partnerships. Those who support the mission may share in its challenges, sacrifices, and spiritual rewards.

Acts 17:10 — Paul and Silas Travel to Berea

A Strategic Departure

The believers send Paul and Silas away during the night to protect them from further persecution.

They travel to Berea, another Macedonian city.

Berea — A New Mission Field

Berea was an ancient city in Macedonia, located in a fertile agricultural region.

The surrounding area was known for productive farmland and regional commerce.

Paul's Established Missionary Pattern

Upon arriving, Paul and Silas enter the Jewish synagogue.

Paul continues his practice of beginning with those who already possess a foundation in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Perseverance in Apostolic Ministry

Persecution does not stop the mission.

Paul and Silas continue proclaiming Jesus Christ in another community.

Talking Point: Opposition may require a change in location or strategy, but it does not cancel God's calling. Apostolic perseverance combines courage with practical wisdom.

Acts 17:11 — The Bereans Examine the Scriptures

A Noble Response to the Gospel

Luke describes the Bereans as more noble-minded than the Thessalonian opponents.

They receive Paul's message eagerly and examine the Scriptures daily to determine whether his teaching is true.

Understanding Noble Character

Greek: **EUGENĒS** — Noble, well-born, or possessing noble character.

In this context, Luke emphasizes their openness, fairness, and willingness to investigate the truth.

Faith and Critical Examination

The Bereans demonstrate two important spiritual qualities:

1. **Eagerness to receive truth.** They are open to hearing the message of Jesus Christ.
2. **Commitment to biblical examination.** They test Paul's claims against the Scriptures.

A Model for Christian Discipleship

Their example demonstrates that genuine faith does not require abandoning thoughtful examination.

The Holy Spirit works through both revelation and the faithful study of God's Word.

Cross-references: 2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

Talking Point: Spiritual maturity requires both openness to the Holy Spirit and commitment to biblical truth. Healthy believers receive teaching with humility while carefully examining it through Scripture.

Acts 17:12 — The Gospel Reaches Influential People

Many Believe

Luke records that many Bereans believe the gospel.

Among them are prominent Greek women and men.

The Gospel Crosses Social Boundaries

As in Thessalonica, the gospel reaches people from different cultural and social backgrounds.

The emerging Church includes both Jewish and Gentile believers.

Women and Marketplace Influence

Luke again highlights prominent women among those responding to the gospel.

This reflects the significant role women played in the development of early Christian communities.

Establishing Regional Centers of Influence

The notes emphasize the strategic development of Christian communities throughout Macedonia.

Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea form an expanding network of believers positioned to influence surrounding regions.

Talking Point: God calls people from every sphere of society into His Kingdom. The transformation of influential individuals creates opportunities for the gospel to reach families, communities, and entire regions.

Acts 17:13 — Opposition Follows Paul to Berea

The Thessalonian Opponents Arrive

When the opponents in Thessalonica learn that Paul is preaching in Berea, they travel there and stir up the crowds.

Their opposition extends beyond their own city.

Spiritual Warfare and Religious Deception

The notes emphasize the destructive nature of religious deception.

False understandings of God's nature and character can prevent people from receiving His grace and experiencing their identity in Jesus Christ.

The Gospel Reveals the Father

The message of Jesus Christ reveals God's redemptive purposes and His desire to reconcile humanity to Himself.

Cross-references: John 14:9; Colossians 1:15–20; 2 Corinthians 5:19.

The Importance of Theological Clarity

Christian leaders must faithfully communicate the character of God as revealed through Jesus Christ.

Distorted theological assumptions can produce fear, legalism, and spiritual bondage.

Talking Point: The apostolic gospel reveals the true nature and character of God through Jesus Christ. Spiritual reformation begins when people encounter the Father's love and discover their identity in Him.

Acts 17:14 — Paul Departs for the Coast

Protecting the Apostolic Mission

The believers immediately send Paul toward the coast.

Silas and Timothy remain in Berea.

Developing and Strengthening the Church

The decision allows the mission to continue while maintaining leadership support for the emerging Christian community.

Apostolic Teamwork

Paul does not attempt to accomplish every ministry assignment independently.

He works through trusted leaders who share responsibility for strengthening believers.

Leadership Multiplication

Silas and Timothy demonstrate the importance of developing capable ministry partners.

Apostolic leadership involves recognizing, equipping, and releasing others into meaningful responsibility.

Talking Point: Healthy apostolic ministry multiplies leaders rather than creating dependence upon one individual. Sustainable church growth requires teamwork, delegation, and intentional discipleship.

Acts 17:15 — Paul Arrives in Athens

A New Missionary Assignment

Those escorting Paul bring him to Athens.

Paul sends instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

Athens — A Center of Philosophy and Culture

Athens was one of the most influential intellectual and cultural centers of the ancient Mediterranean world.

The city was associated with Greek philosophy, education, religion, and public debate.

Paul's arrival prepares the way for a significant encounter between the gospel and the philosophical traditions of the Greco-Roman world.

Apostolic Leadership and Strategic Planning

Paul remains connected to his missionary team even while traveling separately.

His instructions reveal the importance of communication, leadership coordination, and ongoing ministry partnership.

The Mission Continues

Paul's departure from Macedonia does not represent the end of his commitment to the churches established there.

His later correspondence with the Thessalonians and Philippians demonstrates his continued concern for their spiritual maturity.

Talking Point: Apostolic ministry is not simply about making converts. It is about establishing enduring communities of faith through leadership development, discipleship, and continued spiritual care.

Major Themes of Acts 17:1–15

- **The apostolic gospel produces revival and reformation.** The message of Jesus Christ transforms individuals and challenges established cultural assumptions.
- **God strategically advances His Kingdom.** Influential population centers become important locations for gospel multiplication.
- **The Scriptures reveal Jesus Christ.** Paul's preaching demonstrates that Jesus fulfills the promises of the Hebrew Scriptures.
- **The Holy Spirit empowers gospel proclamation.** Apostolic ministry depends upon both biblical truth and spiritual power.
- **The Kingdom of God challenges earthly systems.** Proclaiming Jesus as King introduces a higher allegiance and a new way of life.
- **Spiritual warfare accompanies Kingdom advancement.** Religious opposition, jealousy, and persecution seek to hinder the mission.
- **The gospel reaches every sphere of society.** Jews, Gentiles, prominent women, and marketplace leaders respond to Jesus Christ.
- **Apostolic partnership sustains the mission.** Financial generosity, hospitality, and local leadership support church planting.
- **Biblical examination strengthens spiritual maturity.** The Bereans model eagerness to learn combined with careful study of Scripture.
- **Persecution does not stop the gospel.** Paul and his companions demonstrate perseverance and flexibility.
- **Leadership multiplication establishes lasting churches.** Silas and Timothy help strengthen the communities formed through Paul's ministry.

- **The revelation of God's character produces transformation.** The gospel reconciles people to the Father and establishes their identity in Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. The Apostolic Gospel and Cultural Transformation

Paul's ministry in Thessalonica produced such a significant response that his opponents accused him of turning the world upside down. What distinguishes the apostolic gospel from a message focused only on personal salvation? How can Christians today proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom in ways that transform families, communities, workplaces, and cultural institutions while demonstrating the love and character of Jesus Christ?

2. Spiritual Discernment and the Berean Example

The Bereans eagerly received Paul's teaching while examining the Scriptures daily to determine whether his message was true. How can we develop this same combination of spiritual openness and biblical discernment? What practices can help us distinguish between genuine revelation, sound biblical teaching, personal assumptions, and religious traditions that may distort our understanding of God?

3. Apostolic Leadership, Perseverance, and Multiplication

Paul, Silas, and Timothy continued their mission despite persecution, public accusations, and repeated disruptions. They also developed partnerships with local believers and influential people who helped establish enduring churches. What can we learn from their example about perseverance, leadership development, and strategic Kingdom influence? How can our churches intentionally equip believers to carry the gospel into every sphere of society?