

Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy... 'The Traveling Fellowship of the Word'... they've just left Thessalonica where the same story played out once again: Paul went into the Synagogue and reasoned with the Jews and Gentiles for 3 Sabbaths. Some Jews believed, many Gentiles believed as well as several 'chief women,' *'not a few.'* Once more, the unbelieving Jews, moved with envy, stirred up the populace until our missionary team had to travel on the next city... this time, finally, to Berea!

Acts 17:10: *'And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.'*

Paul goes directly to the Synagogue of the Jews, more *noble Jews* who readily received God's Word because, rather than relying on the foolish traditions of the Pharisees and Rabbis, they chose, instead, to search the Scriptures daily: God's Word: Moses' five books, all the Prophets, Psalms, etc. so that their minds and hearts were ready to recognize the Truth of the Lord Jesus Christ as the God's Redeemer, promised throughout, beginning in the Garden. They heard and listened to all God's Word through Paul, they recognized the Truth as he spoke it but still, they thoroughly searched the Written Word to confirm all that God said through Paul.

We have chosen to emulate these noble Bereans of Old: we search the Scriptures daily and know with all certainty that when the Lord Jesus Christ shall appear in the clouds to call us home, we will know Him and *'we will be like Him for we shall see Him as He is!'* 1 John 3:2. And, if the Antichrist should be allowed to appear before that time, masquerading as *'the christ,'* we would also recognize him for the imposter he will be.

Many who claim to be Christians will not see, recognize or be taken up by the Lord Jesus Christ for they do not, in reality, know Him as Savior, never having truly placed their faith and trust in Him and His finished Saving Work through His Life, Death and Resurrection and they will, in fact, be deceived into believing the Antichrist to be *'the christ for the new age.'*

Verse 12: *'Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.'*

'Therefore many of them believed... therefore what? Firstly, many of them believed because God had chosen them from the foundation of the world; all these who believed, did so because they had been, by God, ordained/appointed unto Eternal Life. When they were in Antioch in Pisidia, Paul brought to the Gentiles the wonderful news that they were not to be under the terrible yoke of the Law: *'And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: **and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed!***' Acts 13:48

The Truth of God's Election of His Chosen, unto Eternal Life, based only upon His Good Pleasure, completely apart from any worth or goodness on their part, whatsoever, is one of the most hated Truths of God's Word; throughout time, from Adam until the Final Judgment, every 'saved' person is so only because God willed it so: *'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast.'* Eph 2:8

In fact, God makes the definite point in telling us just who it was He chose to elect from Eternity past: He chose no one for their beauty, strength, wisdom or noble standing among men: *'Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. ²⁶ For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: ²⁷ But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; ²⁸ And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: ²⁹ That no flesh should glory in his presence.'* 1Cor 1:25

This foundational Doctrine is despised by many Christians and nonbelievers alike. Man recoils at the idea that he could not have had some part, even a small part, in his own acceptance by God, that God must have recognized some worth, some spark of goodness in him to cause God to want him. Or, it's hated because it's

so unfair that God should choose some and not others... that He would save one and allow another to go to Hell but the Truth is: **God is not fair!** God has never been fair and He will never be fair... and praise God that He is not fair! If God were fair and equitable, we would all spend eternity in the Lake of Fire! Period!

Many Bereans believed because they responded to God's call by faithfully searching the Scriptures in order to know and understand the Truth of His promised Deliverer, His promised Messiah...

Verse 13: *'But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.'*

If there are differing degrees of punishment in the Lake of Fire, forever... well, let's just say... I wouldn't want to be one of this particular bunch, when they stand before the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of the Age and try to explain why they took it upon themselves to have, as their life's mission, to do all in their power to follow from city to city seeking to destroy God's Work in new believers. No one deserves to go to Heaven; we all deserve to be cast into the Lake of Fire but I would think that God has a special reward for those who actually take it upon themselves to fight against the Work and Word of God and against the opportunity of others coming to Saving Faith.

But... as Joseph, 1500 years earlier, said: *'But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.'* Genesis 50:20

Paul is forced to leave and, so, the Gospel is taken to yet another city where another Church will be born and hundreds or thousands more will come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ thanks to these evil hearted Jews who are, unwittingly, important tools in God's Hand.

Verse 14: *'And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.'*

Paul is safely taken away to the next city while Silas and Timothy stay on in Berea for a short time...

Verse 15: *'And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.'*

Christians from Berea decided to act as Paul's bodyguards in order to conduct him safely to Athens. Paul probably resisted, saying, I'm fine, God protects me but these guys, probably brick layer, stonecutter types with big muscles and strong hands... they insisted... so they all take him to Athens. Now, if you'll remember the map we had a few weeks ago, Berea is in the northern part of Greece with Athens in the south, about 250 miles. If they were walking, at about 3mi/hr, it would take 80 hours or, a very full week of walking.

It would take them a week to walk from Berea to Athens; then, it would take another week for the 'commandment' from Paul, to reach Timothy and Silas, telling them to come to Athens and then another week for them to reach Athens to join Paul. So Paul is in Athens, alone, for at least 2 weeks and he is not just wasting time sightseeing; Paul is always looking for his next opportunity to preach the Gospel: whenever, wherever and to whomever!

Verse 16: *'Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry'*

When Paul sees the city *'wholly given to idolatry,'* he is seeing the many imposing temples and statues to various Greek gods and goddesses and remember, these 'gods' are not simply made up out of some ancient imagination; I believe these are the physical representations of fallen angels who have appeared to men and women in the past. The mythology surrounding many of them are of their origins as the offspring of the 'heavenly' gods of Olympus when they mated with human women which is exactly what we find in the days before the Great Flood: *'And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, ² That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose... ⁴ There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.'* Gen 6:1

Greek and Roman 'mythology' corresponds perfectly to the supposed 'Golden Age of Man' before the Flood when fallen angels and their hybrid offspring ruled over many people.

This is what Paul sees as he walks the streets of Athens: a city wholly given to the worship of these false gods.

Verse 17: *'Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.'*

Of course, the Jews meeting in the synagogue are not given to idolatry but they are deceived into thinking that their acceptance with God is based on circumcision and the Law so he disputes and convinces regarding the Lord Jesus Christ and the New Covenant. The 'devout' persons in the market may be completely different; 'devout' means devoted; these pagans are devoted to their various false gods; in that, they are devout and we shall see that Paul seeks to convince them, as well.

Every day Paul is seeking to find God's Elect and lead them to Salvation. I should be so faithful but I'm not!

Verse 18: *'Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.'*

Very broadly: the Epicureans sought pleasure, sequestered in a garden and gathered with other likeminded fellows while seeking to eliminate pain. Stoics believed in temperance, reason and justice but out in the marketplace. Both were philosophical schools teaching differing methods of dealing with life and the soul. It would have been into these thought and action processes which Paul would have then inserted the Gospel as the only way to true joy, peace, happiness and Eternal Life.

As Paul preached Jesus Christ as the Only Son of the Only True God Who was sacrificed for the sins of many and raised back to Life again, this would have been, to some of these Greeks, the words of a babbler presenting a very strange *Good and Holy God* as opposed to their own Greek concept of 'the gods' whose lives and actions mirrored evil, sinful and capricious humans in every way: God Almighty, Good, Holy and Righteous was surely, to them, a strange God.

Verse 19: *'And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? ²⁰ For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)'*

Areopagus is not a person; the *Areopagus* in Athens is the highest stone hill of the city, having multiple stone seats where upon the council of leading citizens met daily to adjudicate disputes and to exchange ideas, always ready and anxious to hear 'new things.' *Areopagus* is both the place and the 'council' who met there. As Paul's preaching began to be noticed, he was invited to speak there and to share his new and novel ideas. *Areopagus* is the conjunction of two Greek words meaning the stone, or the hill of *Ares* who was the Greek god of war. Since this had been ruled by the Romans for many years, it was called Mars Hill, Mars being the Roman version of the god of war.

Paul used their concept of 'the gods' and their own idol statues to introduce the Truth of the One True God, the coming Day of Judgment and the only Way to escape that Judgment:

Verse 21: *' Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. ²³ For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. ²⁴ God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; ²⁵ Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; ²⁶ And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; ²⁷ That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: ²⁸ For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. ²⁹ Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like*

unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. ³⁰ And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: ³¹ Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.'

Verse 32: '*And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. ³³ So Paul departed from among them.*'

Like today and always, some claim to search for wisdom and truth but when they hear the True Wisdom and Truth, they mock and turn away while others genuinely want to hear and to hear even more. Why is that? It is always in relation to the Work of God in men's hearts and minds; some He softens, prepares and opens while others He hardens and allows the hardness of their own sinful, unbelieving hearts to turn them away from True Wisdom and Truth but God's Word is always True: '*For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: ¹¹ So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*' Isa 55:10 This ties in perfectly with what Paul just said: God is Good; He cares for His Creation and then, Paul presents the Gospel, believing that it will never return void but will always accomplish God's intended Purpose and here, in Athens, His Word produces fruit:

Verse 34: '*Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.*'

Just as when Paul preaches to synagogues and even the Sanhedrin, 'leading citizens' are always among those whose hearts God had been preparing. A number of those gathered in the Areopagus that day believed Paul's Words, joining themselves to him, including Damaris and Dionysius, one of the judges of the Areopagus council of who later became the first bishop of Athens; we are seeing the Church of Athens being born this day. I would guess that there was a '*Paul's Letter to the Athenians*' which was eventually lost but was never intended, by God, to be among His Preserved Word for the Church. Remember: the gathering and joining together of the various letters and longer Books of the Bible, from the writings of Moses through Jesus Christ's Revelation to John, was never the work of mere men and 'scholars;' it was always, and only, the special Work of God in giving, compiling and preserving His Word - His personal Revelation of Himself to Man detailing His Grace, Mercy, Love and Salvation.

And that's it; that's all we have of Paul's time in Athens. Luke's rehearsal of all the Acts of the Apostles is a whirlwind tour through the first 30 to 35 years of the True Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, condensed into only about 50 pages and, actually, Paul's time in Athens received more attention than most: about 19 verses.

Now Paul is in Corinth and God will, eventually, preserve Paul's two Letters to the Church in Corinth. From Athens to Corinth, Paul and company had to travel about 50 miles: 2 days walking.

Acts 18:1: '*After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; ² And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.'*

Rome had fought 3 wars with the kingdom of Pontus, around the Black Sea, northern modern Turkey in the 1st Century B.C. It may be that some of Aquila's ancestors had been taken to Rome as slaves which may have been his reason for traveling all the way to Rome, the center of 'modern civilization' but he was then expelled, with all the Jews, from Rome.

Now Aquila with his wife, Priscilla, are in Corinth and become joined with Paul; he will work with them in tentmaking; Paul, also a tentmaker, was always willing to work to support himself without begging for money from churches comprised of new believers.

Aquila and Priscilla will, doubtless, help to birth the new Church at Corinth.