

# CONCERNING THE WAY

April 27, 2010

## LESSON 99: THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES



### Chapter 16

Continuing on with Paul's second missionary journey, he is now accompanied by Silas, as Barnabas has left on his own missionary trip with Mark. Paul is going through the same towns he visited on his first journey, encouraging and strengthening the churches he had started. Left to themselves, these churches may have wandered away from the faith and descended into apostasy. So Paul went back to teach Christian doctrine, which he would later write down in his letters.

**Acts 16:1-2 Paul also went to Derbe and Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a believing Jewish wife whose husband was a Greek. (2) Timothy was highly regarded by the brothers in Lystra and Iconium.**

You can look on the map at the end of the study for the locations of these towns in Lycaonia. Here we're introduced to Timothy, the son of a mixed marriage in more ways than one. His mother was Jewish and a believer, and his father was a Gentile unbeliever. Probably Timothy had been converted under Paul's ministry during his first visit to Lystra (1 Timothy 1:2). Some think he had been led to the Lord by his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). At any rate, he became Paul's protégé. He was 20-25 years of age here, and was mentioned fondly by Paul in many of his letters, even addressing two of them directly to him.

**Acts 16:3 Paul wanted this man to go with him, so he took him and had him circumcised because of the Jews who lived in that region, because everyone knew that Timothy's father was a Greek.**

Some call this a contradiction in Paul's thinking in Galatians 2:3-5 where he refused to let Titus be circumcised. The situations, though, were different. Titus was a Gentile believer, and in Galatians 2 the issue was the method of justification; here it was a question of not giving offense (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

Also, though Jewish believers were not under the Mosaic Law any more, circumcision was actually part of the Abrahamic covenant, which is still in force even today. Circumcision was the physical sign that set Jews apart as chosen by God. We as Gentiles benefit from the spiritual blessings of that covenant, but there are physical blessings, like those concerning the land of Israel, that still belong to Jews alone.

A big issue in the last chapter was whether or not Gentiles needed to be circumcised, and the Jerusalem council decided that it was not necessary for them. But if Timothy, whose mother was Jewish and father was gentile, wanted to be considered a Jew, he would need to be circumcised. It was certainly not required to be saved or to be able to join Paul in ministry. But Paul was sensitive to the cultural issues, and he didn't want Timothy's lack of circumcision to become an issue with the Jews. In those days, if your mother was Jewish, you were considered to be Jewish. But Timothy would not have been accepted as Jewish because he was not circumcised.

**Acts 16:4-5 As they went from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the**

**apostles and elders in Jerusalem for them to obey. (5) So the churches continued to be strengthened in the faith and to increase in numbers every day.**

The “decisions reached by the apostles” was the decree that was sent by the Jerusalem council in chapter 15, that Gentiles were not under the Law, did not need to be circumcised, and that they needed to keep away from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from anything strangled, and from sexual immorality.

The churches were increasing in numbers “every day”! There was an explosion of evangelism going on. The spirit of God was really moving!

**Acts 16:6-8** Because they had been prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the word in Asia, Paul and Timothy went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia. (7) They went as far as Mysia and tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them, (8) so they bypassed Mysia and went down to Troas.

What is going on here? Why would the Holy Spirit prevent Paul from preaching in Asia? We just don't know. Keep in mind that the Holy Spirit spoke to these apostles in a direct way. There are no apostles today on the level of Paul. When the Holy Spirit spoke to Paul, there was no doubt about what He was saying.

If you'll look at the map on the last page, you can see that from Antioch of Psidia this was new territory for Paul to preach the gospel. His decision to go from Troas westward meant that Europe would receive Christianity. Troas, ten miles from the ruins of the ancient city of Troy, was the main gateway harbor to Greece, the hinge linking Asia Minor with Europe. The spread of the gospel throughout Europe, of course, led to America being settled by Christians like the Puritans and the Pilgrims.

Eusebius, the fourth-century church historian, recorded traditions about the other 11 apostles (including Matthias, Acts 1:26). Some of these men probably spread the gospel to Asia, others to North Africa and possibly even to the Far East. Thomas may have reached India in the first century.

Notice in verse 7 it was the “Spirit of Jesus” that prevented them from going to Bithynia. The Holy Spirit is sent from both the Father and from Jesus. Romans 8:9 says this:

**Romans 8:9** You, however, are not under the control of the human nature but under the control of the Spirit, since God's Spirit lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of the Messiah, he does not belong to him.

This doctrine is what split the Catholic Church into east and west, the Roman Catholic from the Greek Orthodox church. The Roman Catholic church teaches what we protestants believe on this issue, that the Holy Spirit comes forth from both the Father and the Son, but the Greek Orthodox do not believe that the Spirit comes from the Son, but only the Father.

**Acts 16:9-10** During the night Paul had a vision. A man from Macedonia was standing there and pleading with him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" (10) As soon as he had seen the vision, we immediately looked for a way to go to Macedonia, because we were convinced that God had called us to tell the people there the good news.

Macedonia, as you can see on the map, was a part of Greece. It was the “elite” region of Greece, where Alexander the Great came from. Notice in verse ten for the first time the word “us” is used. We

must assume that this is where Luke, the author of the book, joined the party. We don't know how Luke met Paul, but he could have been present in a synagogue that Paul preached in at Troas, as a Gentile God-fearer or proselyte. So now the group of traveling missionaries includes Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke. From now on the narrative will be from the personal recollections of Luke, and you can notice how he loves to give you the travelogue details of the journey:

**Acts 16:11-13** **Sailing from Troas, we went straight to Samothrace, the next day to Neapolis, (12) and from there to Philippi, an important city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We were in this city for several days. (13) On the Sabbath day we went out the city gate and walked along the river, where we thought there was a place of prayer. We sat down and began talking to the women who had gathered there.**

Neapolis was a seaport town, and they would have traveled overland 10 miles on the Via Egnatia, the Egnatian Road to Philippi. Some say Luke grew up and attended medical school there. Philippi, originally named Crenides ("Fountains"), was taken by Philip of Macedon and renamed after him. In 168 B.C. Philippi became a Roman possession. After Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar, near Philippi in 42 B.C., the city was made into a Roman colony.

Apparently there were not enough Jews living in Philippi to have a synagogue (ten men would have been required to have one). Typically if there was no synagogue a place of prayer was established, usually near a river, either in the open air or in a building if one was available. So Paul found a place where the Jewish women gathered for prayer. I guess there were no men present at all.

**Acts 16:14-15** **A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a dealer in purple goods, was listening to us. She was a worshiper of God, and the Lord opened her heart to listen carefully to what was being said by Paul. (15) When she and her family were baptized, she urged us, "If you are convinced that I am a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she continued to insist that we do so.**

Thyatira was well known for purple dyes and cloth dyeing. Purple dye had to be gathered drop by drop from a certain shellfish called the murex. Because it was so expensive, purple dye was used on garments worn by royalty. The phrase "worshiper of God", or "God-fearer" tells us she was a Gentile. We assume she was unmarried since a husband isn't mentioned, but it does say that her family believed also and were baptized with her. The fact that she invited this group of men to stay at her home tells us she had a large home and must have been wealthy. God opened her heart – he was already working with her before Paul even got there. Here's the sovereignty of God at work. It was God that chose this woman, and she was Paul's first European convert to Christianity.

**Acts 16:16-18** **Once, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit of fortune-telling and who had brought her owners a great deal of money by predicting the future. (17) She would follow Paul and us and shout, "These men are servants of the Most High God and are proclaiming to you a way of salvation!" (18) She kept doing this for many days until Paul became annoyed, turned to her and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus the Messiah to come out of her!" And it came out that very moment.**

This woman was possessed by a demon that gave her some ability to divine the future. In the Greek it is literally "who had a spirit of Python." Python was the name of the serpent or dragon that guarded the oracle at Delphi. According to Greek mythology, it lived at the foot of Mount Parnassus and was killed

by Apollo. From this, the word came to designate a person who was thought to have a spirit of divination. Pagan generals, for example, might consult someone like this. Her expression "the Most High God" might have been understood as Zeus by the audience, but it was the same reference used by the demoniac in Luke 8:28.

Isn't it interesting that the demon in her is telling the truth! And it knows that the true God is the most high God and that these men are truly proclaiming the way of salvation. Demons know the truth! Paul apparently lets this screaming banshee continue on for quite a while (many days), maybe because she was speaking the truth, but he finally has enough of it. He finally casts the demon out, and it came out immediately.

**Acts 16:19-21** When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities in the public square. (20) They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are stirring up a lot of trouble in our city. They are Jews (21) and are advocating customs that we are not allowed to accept or practice as Romans."

This woman was obviously her owners' meal ticket, and all of a sudden that was over. Very upset to see their income vanish, they grab Paul and Silas and make a citizen's arrest. The men were saying this is not a custom or religion that is approved by the Roman Empire. They were obviously anti-Semitic, as they only took Paul and Silas and left Luke and Timothy alone.

**Acts 16:22-24** The crowd joined in the attack against them. Then the magistrates had Paul and Silas stripped of their clothes and ordered them beaten with rods. (23) After giving them a severe beating, they threw them in jail and ordered the jailer to keep them under tight security. (24) Having received these orders, he put them into the inner cell and fastened their feet in leg irons.

This turned into a mob scene, with the magistrates and the crowd of people all joining in. Not only did they throw them in the deepest darkest cell of the prison, but even put them in leg irons. They were very afraid that they might escape.

**Acts 16:25-26** Around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. (26) Suddenly, there was an earthquake so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken. All the doors immediately flew open, and everyone's chains were unfastened.

Paul and Silas' bodies were in pain, but their spirits were high, and they prayed and sang Hebrew chants of praise to God. We can assume that some of the other prisoners heard the gospel through the songs Paul and Silas were singing, and believed. If the words of the hymns didn't convince them, the earthquake that opened all the doors and broke their chains surely did! I wonder what magnitude earthquake this was, to have opened all the doors and broken the chains and stocks.

**Acts 16:27-28** When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he thought the prisoners had escaped. (28) But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Don't hurt yourself, because we are all here!"

The jailer knew that he was responsible for the prisoners, and that he would be killed if they escaped. So he figured he might as well do the job himself. What Paul says tells us that none of the prisoners escaped, that they were all still there, so they must have all been very affected by the hymns and the

earthquake.

**Acts 16:29-32** The jailer asked for torches and rushed inside. Trembling as he knelt in front of Paul and Silas, (30) he took them outside and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (31) They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you and your family will be saved." (32) Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and everyone in his home.

Seeing the powerful evidence of the presence of God, the jailer was terrified. He probably had heard the message Paul had been speaking, and knew why they were in prison. So he now saw that Paul's God was real and powerful.

This is the only place in the New Testament that anyone actually asks this question – what must I do to be saved? Notice that Paul told him that he only needed to believe, there was nothing else he needed to do to be saved. Paul would have filled him in on exactly what must be believed about Jesus later on at his house. Since belief involves trusting in Jesus Christ as King and Savior, it also includes submission and repentance. Of course, each of his family would have also had to believe for themselves.

**Acts 16:32-33** At that hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds. Then he and his entire family were baptized immediately. (34) He brought Paul and Silas upstairs into his house and set food before them. He was thrilled, as was his household, to believe in God.

He proved that his conversion was real by washing their wounds and feeding them a meal in his home, which a jailer would never do with prisoners. You can see here that everyone in his house actually believed.

**Acts 16:35-37** When day came, the magistrates sent guards, who commanded, "Release those men." (36) The jailer reported these words to Paul, and added, "The magistrates have sent word to release you. So come out now and go in peace." (37) But Paul told the guards, "The magistrates have had us beaten publicly without a trial and have thrown us into jail, even though we are Roman citizens. Now are they going to throw us out secretly? Certainly not! Have them come and escort us out."

The magistrates had already decided to release Paul and Silas, but God had already done it! Paul wasn't about to let this go so easily, because he was a Roman citizen and what they had done to them was against Roman law.

**Acts 16:38-40** The guards reported these words to the magistrates, and they became afraid when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. (39) So the magistrates came, apologized to them, and escorted them out. Then they asked them to leave the city. (40) Leaving the jail, Paul and Silas went to Lydia's house. They saw the brothers, encouraged them, and then left.

Born a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28), Paul had certain rights, including a public hearing. And no Roman citizen was supposed to be scourged, so Paul's rights had already been violated and the magistrates could have been in trouble with the Roman authorities. So they apologized to Paul and Silas and they agreed to leave the city. The we's go back to the "they's" in verse 40, so we know that Luke wasn't present for this, and he actually stayed in Philippi to lead the new church there. He rejoins the group when they come back through Philippi in Acts 20:5-6.



## Chapter 17

**Acts 17:1-2** Paul and Silas traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. (2) As usual, Paul entered there and on three Sabbaths discussed the Scriptures with them.

Amphipolis was the capital city of the southeastern district of Macedonia. It was a military post. From Philippi this was about 33 miles. Apollonia was a city in Macedonia about 27 miles west southwest of Amphipolis. Some have wondered why Paul didn't stop in these two important cities to preach the gospel, but we can speculate that, like Philippi, there must not have been much of a Jewish presence (and no synagogues) in those places, and wanted to get on to a city that did have a strong Jewish community and synagogue, Thessalonica.

Thessalonica (modern Salonica) was a city in Macedonia about 33 miles west of Apollonia. It was the capital of Macedonia. The road they traveled over was called the Via Egnatia. Because they did not resist when the Romans conquered Greece, the city of Thessalonica was allowed to be a "free city". In other words, Rome did not keep any Roman troops there and they were left pretty much to govern on their own. As usual, Paul goes straight to the synagogue.

**Acts 17:3-4** He explained and showed them that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. He said, "This very Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Messiah." (4) Some of them were persuaded and began to be associated with Paul and Silas, especially a large crowd of devout Greeks and the wives of many prominent men.

The Messiah HAD TO suffer and rise from the dead. That is why He came. This is what is hard for a Jew to accept, that their scriptures teach this important truth about their Messiah. Probably using passages like Isaiah 53 and Psalm 16, he proved it to some of them and they believed in Jesus, along with "a large crowd" of God-fearing Greeks that attended the synagogue. Also, wives of prominent men also attended the synagogue and believed in Paul's message. They probably went home and witnessed to their husbands, and some of them probably became believers also. The ones who "began to be associated with Paul" included Aristarchus (Acts 19:29, 20:4, 27:2, Colossians 4:10, Philemon 1:24), and Secundus (Acts 20:4).

**Acts 17:5** But the Jews became jealous, and they took some contemptible characters who used to hang out in the public square, formed a mob, and started a riot in the city. They attacked Jason's home and searched it for Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the people.

The Jews were jealous that so many were turning to Christ, and they even hired some local thugs to start a riot. They probably attacked Jason's home because it was where the new church was meeting, and where Paul and Silas were staying. We don't have any background on who Jason is, although Paul mentions him in Romans 16:20 as being his kinsman, so he may have been a relative.

**Acts 17:6-7** When they didn't find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials and shouted, "These fellows who have turned the world upside down have come here, too, (7) and Jason has welcomed them as his guests. All of them oppose the emperor's decrees by saying that there is another king — Jesus!"

Notice how some of these people knew what had happened elsewhere. The news about Paul and his

companions and their message was spreading. This was a serious charge. In A.D. 49 the Roman emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome due to riots that were started by a group of zealous Jews. They were advocating revolution against Rome and were opposing the installation of a new king. So this mob was charging Paul and Silas with doing the same thing. Rome would have to take action against any sedition, and Thessalonica would cease to be a free city.

**Acts 17:8-9** **The crowd and the city officials were upset when they heard this, (9) but after they had gotten a bond from Jason and the others they let them go.**

So Paul and Silas “made bail” and were let go. Jason had to promise the city officials that they would not cause any more trouble. Paul mentions this incident in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, and he says in 1 Thessalonians 2:14, 3:1-5, And 2 Thessalonians 1:6-7 that the persecution of the church there was only beginning.

**Acts 17:10-12** **That night the brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue. (11) These people were more receptive than those in Thessalonica. They were very willing to receive the message, and every day they carefully examined the Scriptures to see if those things were so. (12) Many of them believed, including a large number of prominent Greek women and men.**

Berea was a very old city in Macedonia on the river Astraeus about 45 miles west of Thessalonica. Paul went immediately to the synagogue and did what he always did – reasoning from the scriptures, explaining the Messianic prophecies, and persuading the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.

Verse 11 is a very profound verse. Out of all the places Paul visited, Luke only says this about the Bereans. They were receptive to the message Paul gave, they didn't just get offended and let their preconceived notions get in the way. They went to their Old Testament scriptures and checked out what Paul said. Where were these scriptures? Well, the synagogue would have had scrolls of the manuscripts. But, since many of these people were “prominent”, as it says in verse 12, some of them may have had their own copies. They carefully scrutinized these scriptures, and many of them believed.

**Acts 17:13-15** **But when the Jews in Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul also in Berea, they went there to upset and incite the crowds. (14) Then the brothers immediately sent Paul away to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed there. (15) The men who escorted Paul took him all the way to Athens and, after receiving instructions to have Silas and Timothy join him as soon as possible, they left.**

Again we see jealous Jews from one town following Paul to another town and try to cause trouble. Paul's friends got him out of there, because he seemed to be the one the Jews were after. He was the “lightning rod.” So Paul went on to Athens.

**Acts 17:16-17** **While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was deeply disturbed to see the city full of idols. (17) So he began holding discussions in the synagogue with the Jews and other worshipers, as well as every day in the public square with anyone who happened to be there.**

Athens has always been the preeminent city in Greece, and it is known as the cradle of democracy. The glory of Greece in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. was fading in Paul's day and even Athens, the proud center of Hellenism, was past its prime. But it was still an important cultural center with a

world-famous university. Many of its famous buildings were built during the days of its leader Pericles (461-429 B.C.). Athens was named for the goddess Athena, and her temple, the Parthenon, which contained a huge bronze statue of Athena, was perched on top of the Acropolis, the hill around which the city was built. Here's a painting of ancient Athens and a photo of the ruins today.





Just like most people who visited Athens, Paul took a tour when he first got there. He wandered the streets looking at all the marble temples, columns, sculptures, and statues. But he couldn't enjoy the beauty of the art, because the idolatry was so over the top. It was so in-your-face that even Petronius, the Roman satirist, said, "It was easier to find a god than a man in Athens."

Paul was angry at seeing all the idols. There is a time for righteous indignation. Anger is not itself a sin, but you have to be careful not to let it become sin. You just can't shut Paul up! He's preaching not only in the synagogue on the Sabbath to Jews and Greeks, but also in the "agora", the main marketplace. The "other worshippers" would have been Gentile "God-fearers", those Greeks who worshipped the God of the Old Testament and attended the synagogue. In this city he focused on two areas – going to the synagogue first, as he usually did, and also speaking to people in the marketplace, or public square, every day.

**Acts 17:18-20** Some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also debated with him. Some asked, "What is this blabbermouth trying to say?" while others said, "He seems to be preaching about foreign gods." This was because Paul was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. (19) Then they took him, brought him before the Areopagus, and asked, "May we know what this new teaching of yours is? (20) It sounds rather strange to our ears, and we would like to know what it means."

Like all other Greek and Roman philosophies of the day, Epicureanism and Stoicism were based on an evolutionary worldview. The Epicureans were basically atheists, like modern Darwinists, where the Stoics were pantheists, much like modern New Age evolutionists. Both believed in an infinitely old space/time/matter universe, and both rejected the concept of an omnipotent transcendent Creator. Both groups believed the many gods and goddesses were basically personifications of natural forces and systems.

An Epicurean was a follower of the philosophy of Epicurus, who founded a school in Athens about 300 B.C. They were moral people, and had a high sense of duty because of nature. They basically got their moral attitudes from nature (sound like environmentalists today?). The Epicureans saw the aim of life as pleasure, they were not really hedonists, because they thought of pleasure as the absence of pain. They tried to avoid trouble and annoyances (don't we all?). They saw organized religion as evil, especially the belief that the gods punished evildoers in an afterlife. So, as you can imagine, they could not accept Paul's teaching about the resurrection.

A Stoic was a follower of the philosophy founded by Zeno (342-270 B.C.), a Phoenician who came to Athens to teach that philosophy. The Stoics rejected the Epicurean ideal of pleasure, focusing on virtue instead. The Stoics believed in responsibility for their actions and thought risks were worth taking, but realized that actually attaining that virtue was difficult. They were pantheistic, which means they thought everything was part of God and God is part of everything, no separation between the creator and creation. They also believed in supernatural providence, but, like the Epicureans, they did not believe in a personal God but in a great Purpose or Force that directed history. Both of these groups would have been interested, but suspicious about teaching about some new foreign god. They brought Paul before the Areopagus, which was the advisory council of Athens which dealt with ethical, cultural, and religious matters.

**Acts 17:21-22** Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there used to spend their time do nothing else other than listening to the latest ideas or repeating them. (22) So Paul stood up in front of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I see that you are very

**religious in every way.**

This place, also called Mars Hill, a rocky hill in the shadow of the Acropolis, was the place where philosophers would stand up and speak about new ideas and new religious thought. So this was a great place for Paul to speak, because these men were interested in hearing new ideas. God brought Paul here for just this reason. The gospel of Jesus Christ was very foreign to these people, but the message that Paul spoke could quickly spread throughout Athens and throughout Greece.

Paul started by acknowledging they were “very religious”. These two words translate the Greek *deisidaimonesterous* from *deidō* (“to fear or revere”), *daimōn* (“deities, evil spirits”), and *stereos* (“firm, hard”). The idea is that the Athenians were firm and rigid in their reverencing of their deities. This was a carefully chosen word. Hearing it, the men of Athens would have thought of their deities or gods. But Paul subtly implied that their deities were evil spirits or demons, not gods. Behind idols are demons.

Watch what Paul says here. He doesn't give the same kind of sermon as he has in the synagogues. These people don't know who the true God is, so he has to start there, with teaching them about who created everything. He leaves out anything Jewish, which would have been unfamiliar and unaccepted. He has to be very basic here; it is a simple but profound message without a lot of detail. This is the kind of speech Peter and the other apostles would have had trouble with, but Paul's upbringing among Hellenistic Greeks in Tarsus has prepared him for how to speak to these folks.

**Acts 17:23-25 For as I was walking around and looking closely at the objects you worship, I even found an altar with this written on it: 'To an unknown god.' So I am telling you about the unknown object you worship. (24) The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth. He doesn't live in shrines made by human hands, (25) and he isn't served by people as if he needed anything. He himself gives everyone life, breath, and everything else.**

They had statues and shrines set up there to “an unknown god”, just to make sure they hadn't missed any and possible offend him or her! And people would leave food at the feet of the statue as offerings. Paul proceeded to tell them about this unknown god, that He was The God that made everything, it all belongs to Him, He doesn't live in man-made buildings, and He doesn't need anything from us, but He is the giver of all life. He wasn't an impersonal force, but the Lord and creator of the universe. What an incredible opening statement! This was all new to the pagans of that day – they didn't believe any of that. They thought that their gods lived in the temples they built, and they didn't believe that God made everything, but that He was in everything.

**Acts 17:26-27 From one man he made every nation of humanity to live all over the earth, fixing the seasons of the year and the national boundaries within which they live, (27) so that they might look for God, somehow reach for him, and find him. Of course, he is never far from any one of us.**

Paul continues to correct some of the Athenians view of the world, saying everyone came from one man, without quoting Genesis. And, speaking against the listeners deistic or pantheistic views, he states that God is in complete control of human history and He is active in it.

God places us where we live so we might look for God, reach for Him, and find Him. But He is never far from any one of us. So why doesn't everyone find Him? The obvious answer is sin. It controls the

minds and the hearts of people, and keeps most people from ever looking for God, much less finding Him. In fact, Paul in Romans 3:10-12 tells us that no one truly seeks after God. Is that a contradiction? No. Paul is saying here that God did all these things for us so that we might reach for God and find Him. People should be seeking God, but no one does unless the Holy Spirit draws them.

*“The concept of “race” has no basis in Scripture; all men are descended from Adam, through Noah, and thus all are members of only one race—the human race. The term “race,” as ordinarily used, is strictly an evolutionary concept, with “race” understood as a sub-species in the process of evolving into a new species. There is no observational scientific evidence for such evolutionary transformations, among either men or animals.” Henry Morris*

The only distinction between races in the Bible are that of the Jews and the Gentiles, or “the nations’. There’s only Jews and Gentiles. And the Jews are only singled out because they were chosen by God to teach the rest of humanity about God and serve as an example to us. And now, in Christ, there is no distinction between Jews or Gentiles in the eyes of God. Racism is a purely human idea.

**Acts 17:28-29** For we live, move, and exist because of him, as some of your own poets have said: 'For we are his children, too.' (29) So if we are God's children, we shouldn't think that the divine being is like gold, silver, or stone, or is an image carved by humans using their own imagination and skill.

The first phrase in verse 28 is a quote from the Greek poet Epimenides. The second phrase in that sentence, “For we are his children, too”, is a quote from the poet Aratus (310-245 B.C.). Paul is teaching a relationship with God and accountability to Him, foreign ideas to the Greeks.

All people—Athenians along with all others—are God’s children, not spiritually, not in the sense that they are all redeemed or in the sense that they all possess any element of deity, but in the sense that they are created by God and receive their very life and breath from Him. Then Paul states his conclusion, that since we are God’s children, why would you think that a manmade thing is God?

**Acts 17:30-31** Though God has overlooked those times of ignorance, he now commands everyone everywhere to repent, (31) because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world with justice through a man whom he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

The “times of ignorance” would be the time before Christ. This is like Acts 14:16, “In the past, He let all nations go their way” All through time the Gentiles were responsible for the general revelation given to them; now with the worldwide proclamation of the gospel, the Gentiles are also responsible to special revelation. That response is to obey God’s command to repent of their sins.

In verse 31 Paul introduces his first Christian idea – resurrection from the dead. The idea of resurrection contradicted Greek philosophy. The Greeks wanted to get rid of their bodies, not take them on again! A personal judgment was also repulsive to Greeks. So Paul’s gospel message hit the Athenians problem head on. He also gets across the idea of repentance, justice, and judgment. The “man whom he has appointed” is Jesus, of course, but he doesn’t mention Him by name.

**Acts 17:32-34** When they heard about a resurrection of the dead, some began joking about it, while others said, "We will hear you again about this." (33) And so Paul left the meeting. (34) Some men joined him and became believers. With them were



**Dionysius, who was a member of the Areopagus, a woman named Damaris, and some others along with them.**

Of course, since the idea of resurrection was nonsense to a Greek, some of them mocked Paul's message. But some were interested and wanted to hear more. Dionysius the Areopagite was one of the members of the upper echelons of the Athens Council, whose members all had once held some high office of state and were more than 60 years of age. Tradition (Eusebius) tells us that Dionysius was the first bishop of Athens and that he died the death of a martyr.

Some people were converted by Paul's preaching in Athens. But there is no record of a church being established there, which shows us how hard the hearts of the Athenians had become, and how entrenched these pagan philosophies were.

**Paul's First and Second Journeys**

