

Acts Chapter 17

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[0 : 00] Well, we welcome you to our, what is it, January 16 class, and we are glad for your presence. We continue with the Acts of the Apostles.

We had debated some time ago about whether we were going to discontinue this with the end of this particular segment, but I just feel it would be doing a disservice to the themes that we've been following from the time we began with Acts, so we are going to continue right on through. However, it will go a lot more rapidly because from here on through the balance of the Acts of the Apostles, there is a lot more narrative, that is, just story form, recounting of what actually happened, not the kind of content that really requires an examination like a doctrinal passage would. So we will be moving more rapidly. And as we look at Acts chapter 17, because we've had a little bit of a break from it, I want to just begin reading some of these verses, and we will reserve comment for when we get to the new material.

Notice, if you will, 17.1, either in your Bible or in a sheet that you have, and be reminded that the Apostle Paul and his companion Silas are engaged in their second missionary journey.

[1 : 22] This one has taken them all the way into Europe, and we will not recount the landing at Philippi and the incidents that happened there, because that is beyond us in chapter 16.

So we read, And this simply means he debated with them from the Scriptures, and bearing in mind, the only Scriptures they had was the Old Testament.

And that's what he was using, and that's what those in the audience were using. And what Paul would do would be to begin in Genesis and point out where Christ was located in the Old Testament.

And you go to Isaiah 53, which, by the way, is an incredible passage of Scripture. Isaiah 53 gives a very vivid description of the crucifixion of someone.

And when the Jews would read that in Isaiah 53, they couldn't figure out, Who is this person? Who is this talking about? And yet, bear in mind that that passage was written approximately six to seven hundred years before Christ was born in Bethlehem.

[2 : 58] Yet, he fulfilled the details of it perfectly. And that would be just one of the passages that he would show them. And he would say, Here, Isaiah 53, in our own Hebrew Scriptures, read this.

Do you know who that is in Isaiah 53 that Isaiah is talking about? No! Who is it? We've always wondered. It was Jesus, the Messiah. Israel crucified him. There is a detailed description given there.

Wounded for our transgressions. Bruised for our iniquities. We did esteem him stricken. Smitten of God undeflected. All of that is a detailed account of the crucifixion. And they would scratch their head and look at that.

Remember on the Emmaus Road in Luke chapter 24, when Christ appeared to these downtrodden disciples and they didn't know it was him? And finally, he revealed himself to them because they thought he was dead.

They didn't have any idea of the resurrection. They didn't know they were talking to their Lord. And after he revealed himself to them, the text says that Christ opened the Scriptures, and he revealed himself unto them in the Scriptures.

[4 : 09] And those verses just popped out. And Isaiah 53, of course, would have been one of them. And after Christ leaves them and goes his way, one of the disciples turned to the other and said, Did not our hearts burn within us when he opened unto us the Scriptures by the way?

These are the same Scriptures that Paul is opening to those Jews in these synagogues. And there are eyebrows raising and jaws dropping all over the place. And it becomes very controversial.

Could this be true? What this man is saying about our Messiah? He already has come. And we as a nation rejected him and crucified him.

And he was raised from the dead. Now he's gone back. Can this be? And some believed. And some didn't believe. And some were trying to make up their mind. They didn't know which way to go.

But it was a hot potato issue. Everybody was talking about it. So we continue on with that. In verse 2, With three Sabbaths, he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ, the Messiah, must needs have suffered.

[5 : 22] He had to do this. Why? Why did Israel's Messiah, Deliverer, Rescuer, why did he have to suffer? He had to suffer because that was the only way he could pay for the sins of the world.

And he did that in his own body. This is part of the mystery of Christ. And you know something? 2,000 years after the fact, multitudes of people living right here in this country don't have a clue. Don't have a clue. That is amazing. Fellas, I want you to consider this. This is the world's greatest news, most significant event that has ever taken place in the history of the universe since creation. And it is so little known and appreciated. Part of that is due to the spiritual blindness that Paul speaks about in 2 Corinthians 4. That the God of this world has blinded the minds of those who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, which is the image of God, should shine unto them.

There is a spiritual blindness plus the fact that man, as part of that spiritual blindness, man reasons and thinks and applies logic with a fallen intellect.

[6 : 44] And all of these are hindrances to really receiving the gospel. So this is what he's up against. He is justifying the need for Christ to suffer and rise again from the dead.

And he says, And that this Jesus, this same one that I preach unto you, is Messiah. Now understand that Messiah or Christ is a title.

It's not Jesus' last name. He is not Mr. Christ. Like John Smith, Jesus Christ. No, no. He is Jesus the Christ.

Jesus the Messiah. Jesus the Savior. So, thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. So he is Jesus the Christ.

And Christ is a title in the same way that president or king or judge is a title. Bear that in mind. And Jesus, of course, in his humanity, coupled with his deity, filled that role.

[7 : 44] And some of them believed. Verse 4. But only some. I don't think any evangelist has ever preached the message of the gospel anywhere and had 100% takers.

There are always doubters. Probably always will be. There are always deniers. There are always some in these synagogues who listen to Paul, preach this, and make the connection with Jesus Christ in the Old Testament.

And some of them sat there like this. Don't believe it. Don't buy it. It's not true. Can't be. Who is this guy anyway?

He's nuts. Where does he get this stuff? This is the most bizarre thing I've ever heard. Who let this guy in here anyway? Who gave him the platform? This is crazy. There were some of those.

There always are in just about every crowd. So, some believed. And some believed not. And some believed and consorted with Paul and Silas.

[8 : 43] That simply means they came up to them and said, this is incredible. Never heard anything like this in our life. This is so wonderful. God sent this one and we crucified him.

But in doing so, he paid for the sins of the whole world. Hey, fellas, listen. Is there something we can do for you? Is there some way we can help you? What do you need?

That's the meaning of consorted with them. They threw their lot in with Paul and Silas and said, hey, we want to take care of you. We want to meet your needs while you're here. What can we do?

How can we help? They were very, very helpful. And you know, that's characteristic of new believers because when you latch on to this truth that Jesus Christ died in your place where you deserve to die, one of your first responses is going to be an overwhelming sense of gratitude.

You want to do what you can, little as it might be, in response to the message that you've received. That's only natural. A changed heart wants to reach out and help.

[9 : 52] And they consorted with Paul and Silas and of the devout Greeks. And these, by the way, these Greeks, don't be misled by this. These Greeks are not Gentiles.

That's an important point to note. They are not Gentiles. They are Jews. Why then are they called Greeks? They are Jews who spoke Greek and had adopted Greek culture, Greek mores, Greek thinking, Greek way of living.

But they were Jews. That's why they were in the synagogue. That's why they were in the synagogue. And they are devout.

The text says they are devout. That simply means, devout simply means you are serious about your faith. A lot of Christians aren't. They just don't have a level of commitment.

They are not devout. They are not serious about their faith. It's just, eh, you know, take it or leave it. Go to church Sunday if it doesn't rain or if I've got something better to do. They're just not serious about their faith.

[11:00] But these people were. They are a great multitude. And of the chief women, not a few. You've got to understand something about women's place in the first century.

And that is about the only women who had any influence were women who were married to men who had influence. Because women, for the most part, were really second-class citizens.

They had no right to vote. Their testimony in a court of law would not be acceptable any more than a slave's would. They were definitely second-class citizens.

And, in fact, it wasn't until Jesus Christ came on the scene and his treatment of women elevated femininity in a way that had never occurred up until that time.

And the Apostle Paul continued that theme. And it is amazing to me. I always recount this with a great deal of humor. Because the Apostle Paul has been a favorite punching bag of the women's lived movement, the feminists.

[12:06] They hate Paul with a passion. And they are convinced that Paul was a woman-hater. Because Paul forbade women to teach in the assemblies or to exercise spiritual authority over men.

And as far as the women's lived are concerned, them fighting words. And they see Paul as relegating women to a position of inferiority.

He did not do that at all. But he did recognize that God established a pattern of authority in that he created man first. Man has the primogenitor.

And man is the head of the marriage relationship, not the woman. But, Paul's bombshell that I referred to as, when Paul said in Ephesians 5, that you men, you husbands, are to love your wives in the same way that Jesus Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.

That was absolutely unheard of. There would be men who would read that and say, why, this is the craziest thing I've ever read. What is he saying here?

[13:12] What he's saying is this. That men are to love their wives sacrificially. That means her interests and her needs come before yours.

Christ loved the church in such a way that he was willing to die for the church. And, fellas, if you are not willing to die in the place of your wife, you don't deserve her.

You are supposed to live sacrificially for her. And you young men who yet have a wife to look forward to, if you are not willing to give your life for your wife, you don't have a right to ask her to marry you.

Because that's part of the deal. That's what I refer to as Paul's bombshell. Does that sound like a woman hater? Not hardly. So, let's continue on.

But the Jews, which believed not. Ah, here's that element. The Jews, which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort.

[14:20] What a description. We would call these guys ne'er-do-wells, troublemakers, bums, cast off on the street. Guys, we would call these lewd fellows of the baser sort the kind of a person who would do anything for a buck and ask no questions.

There have always been low-life individuals like that who would do anything, lie or whatever is needed, perjure themselves or whatever is needed for a dollar.

And they took these fellows and what they're going to do is use them as agitators. It's the kind of thing where you would, where today, today, somebody who might regard himself as a community organizer could go around in the neighborhood and pay people, give them five bucks to show up and create a demonstration and give them the signs to hold.

And that's the kind of people we're talking about here. Joe? I don't mean to go back on you, and I'm getting out of the line here, but how can you say these Greeks were Jews? The other translations seem to indicate that they weren't, that they were like Gentiles.

How do you know that they were Jews? Well, there may have been some of those. I don't get that before you can get that out of that interpretation.

[15:46] Yeah, well, I can provide you with a better answer next week. Okay. Let's go on. I can provide you with, this is a very legitimate question though, because there were times when they were Gentiles.

And we know Cornelius. Cornelius was a God-fearer. He was a Roman, but we wouldn't call him a Greek. But nonetheless, they're Greeks. And let me just throw this in. Back in Acts chapter 6, when the issue of the apostles waiting on tables, that doesn't mean they were waiters like in a restaurant. But it means that they were devoting themselves to the material, physical needs of the widows. There was no welfare department or anything like that. And they took it upon themselves to do that. But the Grecians, and there it's translated Grecians, I think, in Acts 6. The Grecians, that is the Greek-speaking Jews, women, widows, were being neglected.

And they saw the error of that, and they began addressing that. I don't want to go all the way back to Acts 6, but you can look it up later. And there are two different classes. And the idea was that, you see, even among the Jews, there was discrimination.

[17:04] And the Jews who were full-fledged Jews with a Jewish background, Jewish culture, Jewish everything, occupied the acme, the epitome in Judaism.

Then there were those Jews who were Greek-speaking, and they had been influenced by Greek culture, Greek architecture, Greek thinking, Greek philosophy.

They were still Jews. And they were still believers in the law of Moses, etc. But they were not considered really top-line, full-fledged Jews like the others were.

They were kind of like a lower class of Jew. They were the Greek-speaking, the ones who had been infiltrated and influenced by Greek thought rather than Jewish thought.

And the Jews kind of looked down their nose at those as being less than full-fledged Jews. Yes, Dana? It seems to me an answer to that is Paul was in the synagogue, and people wouldn't have been in the synagogue unless they were Jews.

[18:11] Yeah, that's true. I think they could be God-fearers and in the synagogue because they were God-fearers. And Cornelius was one of those. It doesn't say he was in the synagogue there, but it does say that he gave alms to the people, and you did that in the synagogue, you know.

So there are different levels. And there were people who were just interested in Judaism. Maybe they weren't a God-fearer. Maybe they weren't convinced at all. But they would go in and listen to the teaching, etc., and expose themselves to it a little bit.

Dana? The Greeks have always been associated with scholarly, intellectual. What would apply to this group? I mean, they were probably very learned people, weren't they? Most of them were.

Most of them were. And you've got to keep in mind, we tend to think of these people as being a bunch of ignoramuses, but most of them could speak more than one language. Some of them could speak two and three languages.

So they weren't a bunch of dummies. And later we're going to see in this very next chapter, in fact, it's in this chapter, when Paul gets to Athens. Athens is the very core of Greek philosophy, learning, education, intellect, all the rest.

[19:19] This is where Socrates and Plato and Aristotle, where these heavy thinkers came from. And these are the people that Paul is going to do mental battle with when he arrives.

And we're on our way. We're almost there. So the Jews, which believed not, lewd with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar.

They used these people as agitators. And they assaulted the house of Jason, that is his family, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found out, and the reason they did this, of course, was because Jason would have been among those who consorted with Paul and Silas.

In other words, they were giving aid and comfort to Paul and Silas, whom most of these Jews, who did not believe, considered to be the enemy. They were housing them, quartering them.

Jason was giving them all the assistance that he could. So now they're going to take it out on Jason. And, fellas, I want you to understand what's going on here, because this is really important.

These Jews, who rejected Paul's message as being simply untrue, how do they regard Paul's message?

[20 : 32] Not only as untrue, but they see him as, they see him like Saul of Tarsus saw the believing Jews before he was converted. These saw Paul and Silas as a cancer growing on Judaism.

Do you hear what this guy is saying? He's not teaching the law of Moses at all. He's teaching this harebrained idea that the Messiah of Israel came, and that Israel was ignorant and didn't even recognize him, and crucified him, and God raised him from the dead, and all the rest of this baloney.

Can you believe this guy? Why, somebody ought to shut him up. That's exactly what this is all about. And, fellas, they are coming from a position of conviction.

These are not people who are not well motivated. They really believe they're right. And they see themselves as doing a service to God to shut these people up, and put them out of commission, because they're ever charging him with teaching against the law of Moses.

And they never considered that the law of Moses was ever intended to be temporary. That, too, would have been an offense to them, because they regarded the law of Moses as eternal and ongoing as the God who gave it.

[21 : 57] They could not conceive of the idea that the time would come when God was going to set that covenant aside and bring in a whole new covenant, and that Christ would be the one, Messiah would be the one to initiate that new covenant.

Jeremiah 31.31. And Paul himself admits years after his conversion how embarrassed he was, how shamed he was, how sorry he was that he tried to stamp out those believers who accepted Jesus, those fellow Jews of his who accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

And you know the story, how he imprisoned them and hauled them off and beat them and persecuted them and everything. And he says, when he writes to Timothy, he said, you know what, I did that ignorantly and in unbelief.

I can't believe I was so stupid that I couldn't see it. I really believed I was right and they were wrong. And it was my duty to stamp them out.

And I even went to the chief priest and said, hey, a lot of these guys got away. And they left the country. And they went clear up to Syria. Let me go after them.

[23 : 14] Give me a letter of introduction. I'll go up there and get those dirty so-and-sos and bring them back here and hold them in trial and we'll fix them. And I did it ignorantly and in unbelief.

It's amazing the number of things people do with good intentions. Sometimes they turn out to be the most tragic because good intentions is no guarantee for truth.

So let's continue on. Verse 6. And when they found them not, that is, looking for Paul and Silas.

And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city.

When they couldn't find Paul and Silas, they found those who were giving aid and comfort to them.

And they said, these that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.

These guys are nothing but troublemakers. They are spewing out the most awful stuff you ever heard. And we're told that Jason has received them.

[24 : 19] And these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. Now, they can't say to the Romans, these guys are teaching against the law of Moses.

Because the Romans would say, and the Romans are the ones here in authority, the Romans would say, so what? We don't care about that. But they didn't do that. They said, he's teaching against the decrees of Caesar.

Caesar. Oh, oh, that's a whole new ballgame. Caesar. That's the civil government. That's the government of the people who are in charge. And if Rome knew how to do anything, it was put down rebellion, riots, dissension, mobs.

And that's what they're suggesting needs to be done here. And they say that there is another king, one Jesus. Well, whom did these people regard as king?

Caesar. Caesar. Remember, Christ was involved in that little set too when they brought a coin to him and said, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Give me a coin.

[25 : 27] Whose image is on this coin? Whose picture is that? Caesar's. Okay. Well, if Caesar's picture is on it, this must belong to Caesar. So, give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. Give to God what belongs to God.

These people were bringing politics into it. Not just religion. The Jews. The Romans didn't care anything about religion because they accepted all religions. All religions were valid.

These were some of the original, what shall I say, the original religious pluralists. And they would just take Jesus and add him as another deity to the long list of deities they already had. But the true Christians, of course, would not stand for that at all because they saw him as being the only one. And we are told that they troubled the people and the rulers of the city when they heard these things.

They brought the politics into it. And when they had taken security of Jason and the other, they let them go. All that means is they accepted from them some kind of collateral that would guarantee their presence when they wanted to bring formal charges against them.

[26 : 35] This is nothing more than Jason posting a bond of some kind. And then they let them go. So we'll take up there in our next session together with verse 10 of Acts 17.

And I think we might be in that new sheet by then, are we? Yeah. Yeah, we'll be in a new sheet by then. Any question or comment before we... Roger? When you say deep down, those religious Jews that opposed Paul really didn't care for Caesar, they just used as...

Oh, yeah. They hated Caesar with a passion. And wherever there were Jews, they had no regard for Caesar or Caesar's government at all. And especially was that true in Israel.

We're here in Europe, you see. But Rome ruled the whole Mediterranean at this time. And the Jews, the biggest reason that the Jews hated the Romans and everything about them was because the Romans were polytheistic.

They worshipped many gods and they imposed their government upon the Jew, God's chosen people. And of course, there was natural enmity and hatred there.

[27 : 43] Richard and then Roger. Well, as you described the narrative of the... This whole scene of the world, I put myself back then.

And I said to myself, well, how would I have reacted if I were there? Yeah. I think I would have done the very same thing. I would have opposed them. Yeah. And one of the things, the reason people cannot accept Christians is the only way to preach, you know.

And everybody, you know, somebody's been to the church today and started preaching something. No, there's a difference. And my upbringing, I wouldn't...

Absolutely. It would be a natural reaction. So, I say that, you know, we've got to do a little bit.

This is a crutch, but we have to start. The police don't go through. But it really bothers me somehow to make this whole thing come together.

[28 : 47] Because I tend to think, I would have done this like that. Yeah. Yeah. That's right.

We need to remember, fellas, as humbling as the thought may be, is that essentially, we are not really much different. Essentially, we would buy into a lot of the same things.

And each generation kind of proves that. You would... We would probably all be embarrassed to know what we would really be capable of out of stupidity or ignorance, you know.

And it's always been that way. Because that's just human nature. That's the way it is. Roger, you had a comment? Question? Is there anything else you know about this Jason guy?

Well, the information about Jason is pretty scanty. Other than the fact that he was an aider and an abetter of Paul and Silas and wanted to help them. And they, of course, branded him.

[29 : 47] You know, they put their sights on him because he was, as far as they were concerned, he was aiding and abetting the enemy. Okay, guys, thanks again for being here.