

## Acts 17:1-15: Examine the Scriptures

Intro: Have you ever heard the name Berea? My aunt lived in Berea, Ohio. There are towns, colleges, Baptist churches, and Bible studies named Berea or Berean all over the USA. Why is Berea such a popular name, especially among Christians?

P & S passed by 2 towns to go to Thessalonica. Why? Because it had a synagogue. Paul followed his mission strategy. Find the most receptive people.

### P & S in Thessalonica: 17:1-9

*And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ."*

Paul reasoned from the Scriptures that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the Messiah, and that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and rise from the dead.

I'm sure that Paul reasoned from Old Testament prophecies Isaiah 53 and Psalms 16, 22, 110, and many others that Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.

Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 describe the pain of crucifixion.

Gospel writers referred to 22:18 (Matthew 27:35): "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they rolled dice (cast lots)."

Jesus quoted Psalm 22 (Matthew 27:46): "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Peter used Psalm 16:8-11 (Acts 2:25-28) to prove the resurrection of Christ and Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:34-35) to prove the ascension of Christ to God's right hand.

I'm sure Paul used the same Scriptures Peter used.

What Paul had to explain was WHY the Messiah had to suffer and die.

Paul probably referred to the sacrificial system described in the Law of Moses and practiced in the Jerusalem temple. Christ died as a propitiation (a sacrifice that satisfies), an atonement for human sin.

Paul probably reasoned from Abraham's sacrifice of Issac saved by a ram (Genesis 22).

Paul probably reasoned from the Exodus Passover to explain the Messiah's propitiatory sacrifice - the blood of a lamb on the doorposts to save the firstborn Hebrews from death.

Paul probably reasoned from the serpent in the wilderness to demonstrate the Messiah's sacrifice for sin. Jesus had a conversation with Nicodemus, John 3:14: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

If you don't know the Scriptures I'm referring to then you need to examine the Scriptures!

After Paul reasoned from the Scriptures some Jews believed and "a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading or prominent women."

Then the unbelieving Jews became jealous. They paid some thugs to start a riot, just like the anarchists (Marxist BLM-ANTIFA) are being paid to riot and destroy American cities. The Jews said to the city officials, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." The phrase "turned the world upside down" is not an unintended compliment; it means an attempt to overthrow Caesar. This is the same accusation the Jews made against Jesus (John 19:12-16). The Pharisees convinced Pilate to crucify Christ because he claimed to be a king and the phony religious leaders said, "We have no king but Caesar!" This was pure hypocrisy because the Jews had no love for Caesar, a man who declared himself to be a god.

Who is Jason? The believers met in Jason's house, just like Lydia's house. They only had house churches back in the first century. If Jason allowed the new believers to meet in his house, then the city officials would have condemned his house and taken it.

Why were the Jews who rejected the Gospel jealous? If another man or woman seduced your spouse to cheat on you, commit adultery, then would you be jealous? The spouse who is cheated on would be jealous and maybe even violent and commit a "crime of passion." Or what if the church next door took our members - would we be jealous? That's the way these unbelieving Jews looked at Paul.

1. The God-fearing Gentiles were leaving their synagogue to follow another Jewish leader - Paul. The "devout Greeks" left the synagogue and took their money with

them. It's a loss of money and prestige especially if the prominent women and men in the city left the synagogue.

2. The power of God in "signs and wonders" was being manifested through P & S, and not through them. This confirmed the truth of their Gospel.
3. Paul didn't require circumcision for Gentiles to be saved, as the rabbis had been advocating for years.
4. Paul called Jesus "the Christ" or the Messiah and proved it from the Scriptures and the rabbis didn't know the real Jewish Messiah had arrived.
5. Visit website "One for Israel." Jesus is still the elephant in the synagogue, but many Jews are coming to faith in Jesus Messiah.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1. The Philippian church of Luke, Lydia, and the jailer supported their mission work in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:15-16): *Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.*

#### P & S in Berea: 17:10-15

*Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.*

Who believed: "Greek women of high standing as well as men." These were more noble-minded, of noble birth, of high social status (GR *eugenas*). The GR word probably describes both character and social status. These were wealthy respected women with social status.

Noble-minded means they preferred reason over emotion. Today we might say "open-minded" or "fair-minded."

GR word for *examine* means to make careful and exact research as in legal processes. The primary reason for the Bereans examination of Scripture was Jesus Christ the Messiah for Jews and Gentiles. Paul had them examine all the OT scriptures that foretold what would happen to the Messiah and compared those scriptures to the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Paul's emphasis was on the resurrection as final proof.

God had already prepared people to receive the Gospel in every town or city P & S went to. The Jewish synagogues had prepared the way. God sent the Jewish people to Greek cities as witnesses to the one true God. But the Jews maintained segregation from the Gentiles. The Jewish synagogues were there in Greco-Roman cities as light but they didn't really carry their light into the darkness. The light attracted people, like a night light attracts moths and bugs. God-fearing Gentiles were drawn to the synagogue to learn about the God of the Jews. Since Jews were usually wealthy businesspeople in Greek cities, they did business with people of higher social status. It seems from Dr. Luke's descriptions that the Gospel was attractive to the God-fearing Gentiles of higher social status, especially women. (The Philippian jailer is an exception. But the church needs blue-collar workers also.)

- Lydia, a God-fearing wealthy businesswoman.
- Thessalonica: *And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.* Prominent God-fearing women and men believed.
- Berea: *Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.* Prominent God-fearing women believed.
- Two women from Philippi "labored" with Paul in the Gospel: Philippians 4: <sup>2</sup> *I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.* <sup>3</sup> *Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

A missionary of many years observed: "From the first century until now, no matter where we go in the world, the backbone of Christian churches is women."

Two main reasons why Greeks/Gentiles were attracted to Jewish synagogues: 1) NOT attracted to the polytheism of the Greco-Roman culture but to know the one true God the Jews had worshiped for thousands of years; 2) attracted to the morality of the Jews.

If we combine these two then it is really one reason, "ETHICAL MONOTHEISM." The morality of the Jews was attractive. The Jews had the 10 Commandments, the most significant part of the Law of Moses, an absolute moral code given by God. This would've been much more attractive than Caesar as the law. Law for Romans and

Greeks was whatever Caesar said it was. The Jews had an unchanging source of law higher than human government.

Add to the two reasons above the attractiveness of Christian morality. Christians have a source of law higher than human government. (The churches in CA are obeying the higher laws of God.) People who don't know Christ follow his law of love, the Golden Rule: Do to others what you would have them do to you (Matthew 7:12). Women would especially find Christian morality regarding husband and wife extremely attractive. Consider what Paul wrote in his epistles about the husband-wife relationship.

Application: How do we examine the Scriptures?

- Receive the Scriptures as the inerrant and infallible word of God.
- Ask the Holy Spirit for enlightenment (Psalm 119:18). He is the divine author who breathed on (superintended) the human writer.
- Know the basic rules of interpretation (the science of hermeneutics).
  - The primary rule of biblical hermeneutics is the analogy of faith. The Reformers defined this rule. It is the rule that Scripture interprets Scripture. No part of Scripture can be interpreted in such a way that it contradicts what is clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture. If a Scripture has two variant interpretations and one goes against the rest of Scripture while the other is in harmony with it, then the latter interpretation must be used. God doesn't contradict himself.
  - Here's one very important rule of interpretation: The meaning of a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph must be derived from the context. The media uses "sound bites" to distort what a person says and means. The context of a passage is absolutely critical to properly interpreting the Bible. Why? Because... Every word in the Bible is part of a verse. Every verse is part of a paragraph. Every paragraph is part of a book. Every book is part of the whole of Scripture. So, no verse of Scripture should be divorced from the verses around it.
- Read R. C. Sproul's book *Knowing Scripture*. He has 10 practical rules for biblical interpretation. (You cannot borrow my autographed copy. Get your own updated version.)

Rule 1: The Bible is to be read like any other book. This is the application of the principle of *sensus literalis* (i.e. literal sense); in other words, in the Bible a verb is a

verb and a noun is a noun. There are similes, metaphors, and analogies. There are various forms of literary genre.

Do not play “Bible roulette” or practice “luckydipping.” You desire a word from God so you close your eyes and pray and then randomly open the Bible and ‘dip’ your finger on a page. You open your eyes and read, “And Judas went out and hanged himself.” You wouldn’t do this with any other book. (Optional: Tell R. C.’s story page 64 of my original copy.)

Rule 2: Read the Bible existentially. We ought to get passionately and personally involved in what we read. But biblical history can be woefully understated and remarkably brief. Use empathy and try to “crawl into the skin” of the characters we read about. It’s OK to empathetically read between the lines. Such speculation adds nothing to the authoritative interpretation of what the text actually says, but it gives us a handle on our understanding and personal application of it.

As I am preaching ACTS you will occasionally hear me use this rule. After the mission plan of Paul & Silas was twice blocked by the Holy Spirit what were they thinking and feeling? How did they discern God’s will? When the angel shook the Philippian jail and everyone’s chains fell off why didn’t the other prisoners escape? What was the Philippian jailer thinking and feeling? You can empathetically “crawl into the skin” of biblical characters, ask questions, and imagine answers. I refer to this as “creative license” and it’s what the writers of *The Chosen* do with the disciples.

Rule 3: Historical narratives are to be interpreted by the didactic. You must be careful drawing too many inferences from narratives or building doctrine from narratives. Bible characters had virtues and vices. They made wise choices and dumb decisions. Paul and Barnabas argued and split up over John Mark. It would be irresponsible to infer that division (between believers or in a church) is good and God’s purpose. If there’s an important doctrine illustrated in the ACTS narrative then I will confirm it with the didactic; that is, a teaching in the epistles. We read about “power encounters” and “spiritual warfare” in ACTS and the didactic to confirm it would be Ephesians 6.

Application: When Dr. Luke wrote the Bereans were noble-minded and examined the Scriptures, he was addressing an attitude toward Scripture. What is your attitude toward the word of God? Skeptical? Complacent? Noble-minded? Do you receive it with eagerness? If you had the right attitude, then you would read and meditate on scripture every day.

Be like a noble-minded Berean and examine the Scriptures.