

# A Practical Study of ACTS:

## Take It To Them!

### “Putting the GO Back in the Gospel”

#### Study Number Thirteen – Acts 17:1-34

Psalm 107:2 says: “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy.”

Jesus’ last words were:

#### Acts 1:8

You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses...

Peter caught ahold of that and he said:

#### 1 Peter 3:15

Set apart Christ as Lord in your hearts and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason, the hope that’s in you, with meekness and fear.

Question: How many people are going to be in heaven because of us? And who are we going to meet when we get there? Who is going to say thanks for sharing Christ?

A lot of believers are going to miss a great deal. Some of the maximum joy that's going to take place in eternity is people who are going to be able to come up and say, "Hey thanks. I appreciate the fact that you lived your life and you shared the Gospel with me and I became a Christian."

The beauty of this particular study in the book of Acts is that we see men with initiative going out to where people are and they're sharing Christ with them.

Now we left our heroes in Macedonia, Philippi of Macedonia. Having just been released from prison, they went to the house of Lydia.

### Acts 16:40

And they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

Now let's start at Acts 17:1:

**v. 1 Now when they traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.**

"Now when they traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews."

The amazing thing about Luke is that we read something like this and we think, well these fellas just went out for a little stroll, went down the street and they hit another town.

This is a 100 mile trip. First of all, they went 33 miles to Amphipolis and then 30 miles on further to Apollonia, and then 37 more miles to Thessalonica. So it's just a brief little jaunt down the road. They didn't have any trouble getting their miles in on a daily basis.

It probably took them at least three hard days to get there. And when they got there it says "there was a synagogue of the Jews."

Now why does Luke emphasize the fact that there's a synagogue there? There are two reasons:

1. There wasn't one in Philippi—in our last study we read that they had to go down by the river to a women's prayer meeting to get the ministry started because there was no synagogue. So this town is different. There is one here.
2. The other reason that he mentions the synagogue is that it is the staging place for all the operations of evangelism.

They always went to the synagogue first, got in an argument with the Jews and got them all stirred up. And as a result of getting attention, they then could move out to the Gentiles and have a great opportunity of fruitful ministry in a city.

So there is a synagogue here and sure enough that's where they're going to go.

Tim Hansel when he writes his book, *You Gotta Keep Danc'n*, talks about the fact that the greatest grief he has in life and the thing that brings the deepest sadness to him. He states it this way:

(You Gotta Keep Danc'n by Tim Hansel)

... is to watch people continually miss the miracle of being alive. I see people constantly who wander through each day, almost forcing themselves, it seems *not* to experience life. Like flies crawling across the roof of the Sistine Chapel, we're unable to see the beauty and grandeur at our feet. But do we all have to experience tragedy before we can see life's majesty? I certainly hope not.  
(source unknown)

Now these men do not miss very much of life. Every time we see them they're enjoying it to the fullest. And everywhere they go they're taking it to them.

Look at verse 2.

**v. 2 And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths he was reasoning with them from the Scriptures,**

“And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths he was reasoning with them from the Scriptures,”

See the phrase “he went to them”? There’s the THEME of the book: You’ve got to take it to them!

They “went” and they began to “reason with them from the Scriptures.”

The Scripture is the BASIS.

Isaiah the prophet said in:

Jeremiah 23:29

“Is not my word like a fire?” declares the Lord, “and like a hammer which shatters the rock in pieces.”

Paul when he writes to the Hebrews says:

Hebrews 4:12

The word of God is alive and it’s powerful, and it’s sharper than any two-edged sword...

And so he comes to them and “reasons with them from the Scriptures.”

Now verse 3 tells us how he reasoned “with them from the

Scriptures.”

**v. 3 explaining and pointing out that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise again from the dead, and that this man is the Christ, this Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you.**

“explaining and pointing out that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise again from the dead, and that this man is the Christ, this Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you.”

Question:

How did they “reason from the Scriptures?”

What kind of approach did they have when they went into the synagogue and they talked to these fellas since they don’t have the Bible like we do?

They had certain parts of the Scriptures. They had the prophets, the Law, the Psalms and so on.

We can almost see Paul hitting the Thessalonian synagogue and saying, “Fellas, let me read you a portion of Scripture from Isaiah the prophet.”

And of course they all say, “Isaiah boy, it’s great!”

“Surely he hath born our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem him, stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. He

was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities; and the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.” (ref. Isaiah 53:3-5)

Who is he referring to, this servant of Jehovah who’s going to suffer?

And then he’d say, “Now listen, I want to talk to you one more minute about something from David.”

And they said, “Oh David, great!”

“You know Isaiah and David, let’s turn over to Psalm 22.”

### Psalm 22:1ff

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

...all my bones are out of joint.

...they stare at me...

...they pierce my hands and my feet.

...and here they are casting lots for my clothing.

Who is David speaking of?

And then he would turn to Psalm 16 and he’d say, “Who is David speaking of?”

### Psalm 16:10

Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol,

nor suffer thy Holy One to see corruption.

And then after he finished that, he would turn to the prophets to prove that Christ in fact had come and fulfilled over 300 prophecies by His death on Calvary by itself.

He was born in Bethlehem, according to what Micah said. (ref. Micah 5:2)

He was born of a virgin, according to what Isaiah said. (ref. Isaiah 7:14)

And he would take all of these incredible passages and these Jews would just be sitting there just saying, “Hmmm, I can’t believe this! This all happened in our lifetime and we didn’t even know it!”

And so he would come with an overpowering message explaining and pointing out that Christ had come, and he’s bringing an exciting message to them that they’re going to have to enter into relationship with Him by faith.

Now there are **THREE FRUIT VERSES** in the text:

1. There’s fruit in verse 4—from Thessalonica.
2. There’s fruit in verse 12—from Berea.
3. There’s fruit in verse 34—from Athens.



The fruit verses are great because it basically tells us the results of their ministry.

**v. 4 And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, [along with] a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and not a few of the leading women.**

“And some of them were persuaded and they joined Paul and Silas, [along with] a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and not a few of the leading women.”

Now they had good results. There are some folks in Thessalonica from the synagogue that became Christians. But there’s a whole lot of the Greek folks—men and women—who became Christians as a result of this ministry.

In fact the church is founded here and the first letters that Paul writes—1 and 2 Thessalonians—are written to this particular assembly.

Well naturally here we go again. This is the same song about the tenth verse, isn’t it?

**v. 5 But the Jews became jealous and took along some wicked men from the marketplace and having formed a mob, they were setting the city in an uproar; and having rushed at the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.**

“But the Jews became jealous and they took along some

wicked men from the marketplace and having formed a mob, they were setting the city in an uproar; and having rushed at the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.”

Now why “the house of Jason?”

In our last study Lydia said, “Y’all come and stay at our house.” Lydia’s house in Philippi became the staging operation for the ministry there and the church.

Jason probably said the same thing when they hit Thessalonica. He said, “Hey I like what I’m hearing, I’ve responded to it. I’d like you to use my home as a place.”

Open HEART—Open HOME.

And so Jason’s house was a staging operation and the city police found that out. They decided we’re going to put a stop to this and so they come to Jason’s house hoping to get Paul and Silas while they’re there. It happened that they happened to be away—sovereignly.

**v. 6 And when they did not find them, they were dragging Jason and some brethren before the city officials, shouting, “These men who upset the world have come here also;**

“And when they did not find them, they were dragging Jason and some brethren before the city officials, shouting, ‘These

men who upset the world have come here also;”

Now notice that the Greek translation of this verse is a little bit different than what the King James version says.

King James, when it’s translated, says: “These men come here who have turned the world upside down.”

And the reason we have used the word “upset” is because it better communicates what happened.

The world was turned upside down when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden. And yes, these men come to turn the world upside down. But when you turn something upside down that’s already upside down you turn it right-side-up. Right?

And so we’re really upsetting it. We’re turning it back the way it’s supposed to be. And they have it right. They are “upsetting the world.” They’re putting people back in their right orbit. They’re getting them on their feet again so they can learn to walk before God and bring pleasure and joy to Him.

“These men who upset the world have come here also;”

**v. 7 whom Jason has welcomed, and they all are doing things contrary to Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, Jesus.”**

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contrary to Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, Jesus.”

Now has that been a problem? Remember when they shoved Paul and Silas into the marketplace back at Philippi, they accused him of teaching things that were illegal for Romans to listen to and to follow? And now they’re pulling this deal in Thessalonica where they’re talking about another king instead of Caesar—“king Jesus.”

This has always been the case ever since the birth of Christ.

Remember in Matthew 2 when the wise men came to the city? They said: “Where is He who is born King of the Jews?” And they could just see green envy and jealousy all over Herod’s face. He seeks to inquire to find that He’s born in Bethlehem and so he tells them, “Go and seek for the young child. When you have found Him, bring me word so that I may come and worship Him also.” But it was only to destroy Him as the angel speaks to the wise men. After they make their visit to the young child, they leave by another way. (ref. Matthew 2:1-13)

And the same jealousy, the same hatred, the same feeling of threat over what they’re preaching is now again mentioned here in the city of Thessalonica.

**v. 8 And they stirred up the crowd and the city officials who were hearing these things.**

“And they stirred up the crowd and the city officials who were hearing these things.”

**v. 9 And when they received a bond from Jason and the others, they released them.**

“And when they received a bond from Jason and the others, they released them.”

Now it isn't any different today is it? When someone gets arrested, if they can put up their bond they can be released for a time.

And so they put up the bond—the other believers did—and they were released.

**v. 10 And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; who, when they arrived, went into the synagogue of the Jews.**

“And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; who, when they arrived, went into the synagogue of the Jews.”

Can you believe that? They took another trip. They're going 60 miles further southwest to Berea.

What's so phenomenal about these men? Nothing ever hassles them. They only have one purpose in life.

We have only one PURPOSE and that's to BEAR FRUIT. We're here as instruments for God to use. It's our responsibility to be faithful channels to proclaim the truth and let God bear the fruit.

And what happens to the channel doesn't make any difference. That's all God's business. Leave it in His hands.

This makes a whole bunch of verses really come alive when we realize they leave Thessalonica, they go down 60 miles, and what do they do? They're looking up the services at the synagogue. And they're going to go right over there and they're going to start the same thing over again. They're just faithful to proclaim, it's God who will produce!

Nothing can stop them! That makes 2 Corinthians 4 come alive—always going through it but never going under.

They may be knocked down but they're not knocked out.

It's almost like when they get to Berea they can start playing the theme from Rocky. "Here we go again! We're going to do it one more time! We're going to fight another round! We're going to do something here that's really great."

It made another verse come alive in Philippians.

Philippians 3:12

Forgetting those things which are behind, we press toward

those things which are in front.

It's almost like he's saying, "I forget yesterday. You know today's the first day of the rest of my life. I'm going to live it to the fullest. Yesterday's already gone and past. I can't do anything about it. I'm forgetting that. I'm pressing toward the things which are in front. You know I'm going to keep on running."

And so the neat thing about it all is, something would have really happened to them if they hadn't been faithful in Berea.

God knows just how much we can take. He'll give us an experience like Thessalonica where we're running uphill into the wind and it just seems like we aren't doing anything and we're spinning our wheels and nothing good is happening. And then He gives us a Berea in between.

"You know, y'all have had a rough time in Philippi and Thessalonica, let Me lay something on you to really encourage you boys so you can lick your wounds and just enjoy having somebody appreciate you for once. Okay?"

And they'd have missed Berea! Now look at that! Isn't that great? Look at verse 11! That's a neat one!

**v. 11 Now, these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, who received the word with all willingness, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so.**

“Now, these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, who received the word with all readiness, willingness, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so.”

### Jeremiah 15:16

Thy words were found and I did eat them; and thy word was a joy and the rejoicing of my heart.

What does Paul say? He says, “Can you believe it! These guys are excited!”

It’s nice to find somebody who’s excited about the Word once in a while, isn’t it? They get eager about jumping off their seats and getting excited about what the Word has to say and they want to study it!

And it’s different from what they had in Thessalonica, wasn’t it? They would have missed all that if they hadn’t been faithful to just keep on keeping on.

Here’s a place where he knows he’s needed and he’s having a ministry.

### Psalms 119:140

Thy word is very pure,  
therefore thy servant loves it.



## Psalm 119:162

I rejoice at Thy word,  
as one who finds great spoil.

Here are some prayers of some Haitian Christians written by the Turnbull's who were missionaries. And a couple of them were so special.

(God Is No Stranger by Wally & Eleanor Turnbull)

Lord,  
Help us to sow good seed,  
Since we will be the ones  
Eating from the harvest.  
(source unknown)

(God Is No Stranger by Wally & Eleanor Turnbull)

Father,  
A cold wind seems to have chilled us.  
Wrap us in the blanket of Your Word  
And warm us up a bit!  
(source unknown)

(God Is No Stranger by Wally & Eleanor Turnbull)

God is in the business of using broken things. He takes broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to give rain, broken grain

to give bread, broken bread to give strength. It is the broken alabaster box that gives forth perfume...It is Peter, weeping bitterly, who returns to greater power than ever. (Vance Havner)  
(source unknown)

The apostle Paul has been broken in Thessalonica but not forsaken. Here he comes into Berea. He says:

### 2 Corinthians 4:7

We have this treasure in cracked pots, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God, and not of ourselves.

Here they come preaching. Here comes another fruit verse. Look at it—verse 12.

**v. 12 Many of them therefore believed, and not a few of the prominent Greek women and men.**

“Many of them therefore believed, and not a few of the prominent Greek women and men.”

Okay, now compare verse 4 with verse 12. What did verse 4 say?

Verse 4 said, “some of them were persuaded.” What happened when they got to Berea?

“Many of them therefore believed,”

If the enemy would have gotten the victory and the persecution and the pain and the peril and the plagiarism that had been taking place in their lives had stopped them, they would have missed all this.

But the apostle says we keep “running with patience,” we keep “pressing on.” (ref. Hebrews 12:1, Philippians 3:14)

God is at work and we just keep on letting Him work.

Ever been around people that look like a frontispiece to the book of Laminations or they’ve been baptized in vinegar or something and they’ve got a minus for a brain? They’re just totally negative. If they didn’t think of it, they’re against it.

And then the minute we mention something, they have 76 reasons why that won’t work. “Hmmm. We tried that in our church and only three showed up.”

They can pour cold water on anything we want to try! They are totally negative.

It’s hard to find a spirit-filled believer who’s really being fruitful for the glory of God, spending much time being negative. Instead of looking at the mountains they’re looking at the great God who is ready to do something.

And it doesn’t make any difference where we drop these men. Drop them in a favorable environment and there’ll be many

who do! Dump them in an environment where it's totally cold and indifferent, there'll be a few. But God is faithful to them. And it all depends upon the mindset.

The thing that gets us thinking about this is a well-known story that Tim Hansel has in his book *You've Gotta Keep on Danc'n*. This is the key to these men. They looked at every day as something beautiful. Here's a very familiar story.

(You Gotta Keep Danc'n by Tim Hansel)

There were once two men, both seriously ill, in the same small room of a great hospital. Quite a small room, just large enough for the pair of them—two beds, two bedside lockers, a door opening on the hall, and one window looking out on the world.

One of the men, as part of his treatment, was allowed to sit up in bed for an hour in the afternoon (something to do [I guess] with[the] draining the fluid from his lungs), and his bed was next to the window.

But the other man had to spend all his time flat on his back—and both of them had to be kept quiet and still. Which was the reason they were in the small room by themselves, and they were grateful for peace and privacy—none of the bustle and clatter and prying eyes of the general ward for them.

Of course, one of the disadvantages of their condition was that they weren't allowed to do much; no reading, no radio, certainly no television—they just had to keep quiet and still, just the two of them.

Well, they used to talk for hours and hours—about their wives, their children, their homes, their jobs, their hobbies, their childhood, what they did during the war, where they'd been on vacations—all that sort of thing. Every afternoon, when the man [who had his] bed next to the window was propped up for his hour, he would pass the time by describing what he could see outside. And the other man began to live for those [very] hours.

The window apparently overlooked a park, with a lake, where there were ducks and swans, children throwing them bread and sailing model boats, and young lovers walking hand in hand beneath the trees, and there were flowers and stretches of grass, games of softball, people taking their ease in the sunshine, and right at the back, behind the fringe of trees, a fine view of the city skyline.

The man on his back would listen to all of this, enjoying every minute—how a child nearly fell into the lake, how beautiful the girls were in their summer dresses, then an exciting ball game, or a boy playing with his puppy. It got to the place that he could almost see what was happening outside.

Then one fine afternoon, when there was some sort of parade, the thought struck him: Why should the man next to the window have all the pleasure of seeing what was going on? Why shouldn't he get the chance?

He felt ashamed, and tried not to think like that, but the more he tried, the worse he wanted a change. He'd do anything!

In a few days, he had turned sour. *He* should be by the window. And he brooded, and couldn't sleep, and grew even

more seriously ill—which none of the doctors understood.

One night as he stared at the ceiling, the other man suddenly woke up, coughing and choking, the fluid congesting in his lungs, his hands groping for the button that would bring the night nurse running. But the man watched without moving.

The coughing racked the darkness—on and on—choked off—then stopped—the sound of breathing stopped—and the man continued to stare at the ceiling.

In the morning the day nurse came in with water for their baths and found the other man dead. They took away his body, quietly, no fuss.

As soon as it seemed decent, the man asked if he could be moved to the bed next to the window. And they moved him, tucked him in, and made him quite comfortable, and left him alone to be quiet and still.

The minute they'd gone, he propped himself up on one elbow, painfully and laboriously, and looked out the window.

It faced a blank wall.

G. W. Target

(source unknown)

People go through life enriching it with all the potential and seeing so much, and there are some who see a blank wall.

Someone said:

“Two men looked out from behind prison bars. One saw the mud and the other saw the stars.”

(source unknown)

In essence that's what's being said here. If we're living in the mud of living and that's all we can see, we're not going to get very far. But if we're like these men with an unbreakable spirit, we see a fantastic ministry every time we turn around. And God is bearing fruit to the glory of God through us.

**v. 13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there likewise, agitating and stirring up the crowds.**

“But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there likewise, agitating and stirring up the crowds.”

Here we go. These men are so intense. They travel 60 miles southwest of Berea to stir them up again, just like Thessalonica.

**v. 14 And then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to be proceeding as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy were remaining there.**

“And then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to be proceeding as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy were remaining there.”

Why? These fellas are saying, “We’re hungry. Can we keep Silas and Timothy here? We’ll just send Paul.”

And so they send Paul 50 miles to the Aegean Sea. Now he has a 200 mile sailing trip down to the city of Athens, still further south geographically. So that's where we're going.

Now as he comes to the sea, he's also been accompanied with some of the fellas from Berea.

**v. 15 Now those who were bringing Paul brought him as far as Athens; and having received a command for Silas and Timothy to the effect that they should come to him as soon as possible, they departed.**

“Now those who were bringing Paul brought him as far as Athens; and having received a command for Silas and Timothy to the effect that they should come to him as soon as possible, they departed.”

**v. 16 Now, while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols.**

“Now, while Paul was waiting for them in Athens,”

He decided to get a little R&R and not do anything. Is that what it says? Put him anywhere, he'll uncover a ministry.

Athens is the cultural center of the world! Corinth is the commercial center—the seaport town. They're twin cities of culture and commerce. This is the place for all the



philosophers, the poets, the sculptures, the artists. What a city!

“while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols.”

Listen, if we want to make a choleric mad, leave him by himself in the midst of a foreign environment and he'll get terribly upset by what he sees. A choleric always has a short fuse—a temper. And Paul's inner spirit is “provoked within him” by what he sees all about him.

So what does he do? Two things—Look at him.

**v. 17 So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing [Gentiles], and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.**

“So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews”

Here he goes talking about the suffering, the resurrection and the prophets in the synagogue. But that wasn't enough. That was just Saturday action. What do they do the other six days of the week? Well they hit the Agora, they grab everybody in the marketplace.

“and the God-fearing [Gentiles], and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.”

He was just out there talking to everybody, enjoying himself—both the synagogue and the market place—uncovering a ministry wherever he finds himself.

**v. 18 And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were disputing with him, and some were saying: “What would this picker up of seeds wish to say?” but others were saying: “He is seeming to be a proclaimer of strange deities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.**

“And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were disputing with him, and some were saying: ‘What would this picker up of seeds wish to say?’ but others were saying: ‘He is seeming to be a proclaimer of strange deities’—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.”

“Epicureans” and “Stoics”—who are they?

The “Epicureans” are those whose god is pleasure. Really there are gods but they’re not interested in what’s going on here. They live today, grab for all the gusto they can get because we only go around once in life. Life ends it all. They were pleasure-lovers. Enjoy it to the full—eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.

Then there are “Stoics.” They are the “God is everywhere and His purpose is being fulfilled in the good and the bad.” So

their statement was “grin and bear it.” Just keep a stiff upper lip and keep going.

And so they had these two extremes in the philosophical schools represented here and there were a lot of them around. And they “were disputing with him.”

And they use a derogatory term when they speak of him: “What is this little seed sparrow doing coming into Athens? He wants to pick up some seed of truth from us so that he can sustain himself!”

Never once thinking that this little seed sparrow might have some seeds of truth that they’d never dealt with before and that they needed to consider. Intellectual arrogance brings us to the point of: “So what else is new? You can’t teach me nothing that I ain’t already heard.”

And so these fellas are coming at him that way.

Now he’s no mean man intellectually either because he’s sat at the feet of Gamaliel. He has been a great student of the Law and the prophets, and all of the disciplines. And it’s obvious he has done his homework by what he’s getting ready to say to them.

But another guy says, “He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities’—because he’s preaching Jesus and the resurrection.”

Now having done that and argued with them in the market

place and in the synagogue, he is now going to hit them head on.

**v. 19 And having taken him, they brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we come to know what this new teaching is, which is being spoken by you?”**

“And having taken him, they brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we come to know what this new teaching is, which is being spoken by you?’”

Now don’t get the Areopagus mixed up with the Acropolis!

The one place in Athens that’s the archeological wonderland is the Acropolis. And in pictures of Athens, it’s the center of the city. Parthenon is on the highest point in the city. It is amazing what they have kept intact and what is there. And it’s beautifully multi-colored lighted every night and you can see it from any place in the city of Athens—the Acropolis.

Now what does “Areopagus” mean? Areopagus means “the hill of Ares.” Ares was the god of war. So the Areopagus is the hill of the god of war.

Now read it in the King James and it’s called Mars Hill. Well the Roman god of war was Mars. And so if we were a Roman coming into a Greek town, we would call that Mars Hill because he was our god of war. But if we were a Greek and a local citizen, it would be the Areopagus—the Greek god of war.

So they brought him to this place and they had said:

“May we come to know what this new teaching is, which is being spoken by you?”

He’s gotten their attention. He’s ready now to move in and give a message that only is about five or six minutes long, and every word ought to be cast in gold.

And they say to him:

**v. 20 For you are bringing some surprising things to our ears; we are wanting to know therefore what the intent of these things is.”**

“You are bringing some surprising things to our ears; we are wanting to know therefore what the intent of these things is.”

And then the parenthesis is verse 21.

**v. 21 (Now all Athenians and the strangers visiting there were devoting their leisure time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)**

“(Now all Athenians and the strangers visiting there were devoting their leisure time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)”

The “Areopagus” was the preverbal gossip fence. It’s the place

where they get the latest information and anything that's new.

Paul is scared. This is a tough assignment. And he's never had one of these before.

It is different standing in the synagogue with peers than standing on the Areopagus with some philosophers that they really don't know too much about.

How is the Spirit of God going to anoint our words to convince these men of what they need to hear?

**v. 22 Then Paul having stood in the midst of the Areopagus was saying: “Men of Athens, I am observing that you are very religious people in all respects.**

“Then Paul having stood in the midst of the Areopagus”—having already prayed, I'm sure a great deal—“was saying: ‘Men of Athens, I am observing that you are very religious people in all respects.’”

They're saying, “Yay man, we're proud of our religion! We have all the bases covered, we have it all together. The loose ends are all tied up. We have a god for every eventuality!”

We can just hear old Paul underneath his breath saying, “Here a god, there a god, everywhere a god, god.”

This is the city of Athens! The religious city. Why did he spend his time preaching to religious people?

One man said it so well:

“When I came to Christ I lost my religion.”  
(source unknown)

That’s it. Sometimes we have to come to that place where we recognize that it has to take place.

We spend time with religious people and we can never assume that they have a relationship with the Lord Jesus.

So here he is. “Y’all are very religious! Yes sir.”

Scott Peck in *People of the Lie* says this about evil:

(People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil by M. Scott Peck)

Since the primary motive of the evil is disguise, one of the places evil people are most likely to be found is within the church. What better way to conceal one’s evil from oneself, as well as from others, than to be a deacon or some other highly visible form of Christian within our culture? In India I would suppose that the evil would demonstrate a similar tendency to be “good” Hindus or “good” Moslems. I do not mean to imply that the evil are anything other than a small minority among the religious or that the religious motives of most people are

in any way spurious.

I mean only that evil people tend to gravitate toward piety for the disguise and concealment it can offer them.  
(source unknown)

And here we have a host of them. He's preaching to "religious people" without a relationship.

**v. 23 For when I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar upon which was written, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' What therefore you are worshipping without knowing it, this I am proclaiming to you.**

"For when I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar upon which was written, "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." What therefore you are worshipping without knowing it, this I am proclaiming to you."

Isn't that great? Know a great bridge! He compliments them on being very religious and then he says: "As I was walking through your city and did a study of all of your gods, I came to an altar to an unknown God. And that's the one I want to talk to you about. He's the one I want to share with you right now."

**v. 24 The God who made the world and all things in it, this God being Lord of heaven and earth, is not dwelling in temples made with hands;**



“The God who made the world and all things in it, this God being Lord of heaven and earth, is not dwelling in temples made with hands;”

And he turns around and looks at the Acropolis! And what an amazing message!

He says, “The God I’m getting ready to talk to you about doesn’t live up there on the hill. He’s so big we ain’t got a place that we can put Him in. And He says He doesn’t dwell in temples made with hands.”

That’s exactly what Stephen said when he preached his message to the Sanhedrin. And that came across to them because they were worshippers in the temple in the city of Jerusalem.

And he said in Acts 7:

### Acts 7:48-50

The Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; and the prophet says: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is the footstool of My feet; what kind of house will you build for Me?” says the Lord; “or what place is there for My repose? Was it not my hand which made all these things?”

And so Paul says the same thing to them.

Notice he says, “You have many gods. I’m coming to the

unknown God and I want to tell you about Him.”

**v. 25 neither is He being served by human hands, as though He is needing anything, since He Himself is giving to all life and breath and all things;**

“neither is He being served by human hands, as though He is needing anything, since He Himself is giving to all life and breath and all things;”

“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:4)

**v. 26 and He made from one every nation of mankind to be living upon all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation,**

“and He made from one every nation of mankind to be living upon all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation,”

That word “appointed” occurs **THREE TIMES** in this sermon and it’s very critical.

First he says to them, “This God of the universe has done something. He has made an appointment of your days and of your habitation. He determines your days and the direction of your life.”

James 4:13-16

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” Yet you do not know what your life shall be like tomorrow. You are just as a vapor which appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.” But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

These guys are so arrogant. They think they have life by the tail on a downhill pull and they know all the answers. And he’s saying to them, “this God has ‘determined your appointed times, and the boundaries of [your] habitation,’—where you live and your life is in His hands.”

**v. 27 in order that they should be seeking God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;**

“in order that they should be seeking God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;”

**Jeremiah 29:13**

You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all of your heart.

**Isaiah 55:6**

Seek ye the Lord while He may be found. Call ye upon Him while He is near.

**v. 28** for in Him we are living and moving and being, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His offspring.’

“for in Him we are living and moving and being, as even some of your own poets have said,”—he quotes from one of theirs—  
“‘For we also are His offspring.’”

**v. 29** Therefore being the offspring of God, we ought not to be thinking that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something fashioned by the skill and thought of man.

“Therefore being the offspring of God, we ought not to be thinking that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something fashioned by the skill and thought of man.”

And he says, “Fellas, look at the landscape! God is not in the gold and the silver and the stone, fashioned by the hands of men! This unknown God exceeds all of that!”

**v. 30** Now, therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should be repenting,

“Now, therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance,”

Now please notice that it does not say SIN. God always has to deal with sin. He overlooks ignorance.

“God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should be repenting,”

“The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

Why? Here comes the end of his sermon—verse 31.

**v. 31 because He appointed a day in which He is about to be judging the inhabited earth in righteousness through a man whom He appointed, having furnished proof to all men when He raised Him from the dead.”**

“because He appointed a day”

He appointed the direction and the domain of our lives but he’s also “appointed a day.”

“in which He is about to be judging the inhabited earth in righteousness”

This God has a day set when He’s coming as the Judge and He’s also appointed the Judge. He is a person—that’s the third thing.

“through a man whom He appointed, having furnished proof to all men when He raised Him from the dead.”

End of the sermon.

Isn't that great? What a powerful message!

**v. 32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some were sneering but others said, “We shall hear you also again concerning this.”**

“Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some were sneering but others said, ‘We shall hear you also again concerning this.’”

When we faithfully proclaim we're going to get sneers, but we're also going to get those who respond.

Some of them said, “You know we really respect you for what you said. We want to come back and we want to hear from you again on this matter.”

Now some of these guys are sneering, speaking about the resurrection, but there are some fellas that say, “Hey, I want to hear some more!”

**v. 33 So Paul went out of their midst.**

“So Paul went out of their midst.”

But look at verse 34—now here comes our fruit verse—the last one.

**v. 34 But some men having joined themselves to him, believed, among whom also was Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.**

“But some men having joined themselves to him, believed, among whom also was Dionysius the Areopagite”—he was evidently in charge of the Areopagus—“and a woman named Damaris and others with them.”

We never hear of a church in Athens but there obviously was some fruit from his labor. And while Timothy and Silas and the rest of them are up north, he’s down in Athens doing what he always does—bearing fruit and uncovering another ministry.

We can’t help but think of the words of Helen Steiner Rice when she wrote a little poem called:

### Fulfillment

Apple blossoms bursting wide  
now beautify the tree  
And make a Springtime picture  
that is beautiful to see...  
Oh, fragrant lovely blossoms,  
you’ll make a bright bouquet

If I but break your branches  
    from the apple tree today...  
But if I break your branches  
    and make your beauty mine,  
You'll bear no fruit in season  
    when severed from the vine...  
And when we cut ourselves away  
    from guidance that's divine,  
Our lives will be as fruitless  
    as the branch without the vine...  
For as the flowering branches  
    depend upon the tree  
To nourish and fulfill them  
    till they reach futurity,  
We too must be dependent  
    on our Father up above,  
For we are but the branches  
    and He's the Tree of love.  
(source unknown)

May God speak to us to cause us to recognize that we have a responsibility to bear fruit. And when we're trying to find all kinds of excuses, let's do what Colson told a very good friend:

The beginning of solving problems is to understand that our communities are our responsibility—simply telling off the local politician doesn't let us off the hook.

So, I told that Delaware representative, the next time he receives an angry call he might suggest his constituent take a good look in the mirror. For if we really want to know who's



causing the breakdown in our society, we will find more answers in the looking glass than in the state capitol.  
(source unknown)

We'll find a lot more of the reason more people aren't coming to Christ when we look in the mirror than we do when we point our fingers at somebody else.

God is at work today and He's ready to find any channel He can to proclaim His truth and bear fruit for the glory of God.

Here these men demonstrate on three occasions—Thessalonica, Berea and in Athens—God is interested in bearing fruit and He does beautifully.

Now there are a number of lessons. Let's go over them as we prepare to wrap it up.

Lesson #1: Our responsibility to take the initiative.

Lay hold of it. As a result, draw up a prayer list of people that you're going to get involved with.

As a believer, our responsibility is to take the initiative. We've got to take it to them.

Lesson #2: Paul's witness is three-fold:

1. the Scriptures,

2. the Christ, and
3. the resurrection

And if we can build our witness around those three things, it'll make us effective.

The Scriptures, the Christ, and the Resurrection—that's what he uses as the foundation for his witness to people that don't know Him.

Lesson #3: God does not promise exemption from persecution.

It's going to be tough! Just recognize that's part of the curriculum and accept it! And realize God's going to use it.

Lesson #4: Will you, like the Bereans, receive the Word with all readiness of mind?

Lesson #5: Is God bearing fruit through your life?

John 15:16: "You have not chosen me but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit."

Is He? If not, why not? If we are not having fruit borne through our life, there's one of two reasons and neither one of them are very happy thoughts.

The first is we're not a Christian. We're playing games. We're just acting out a part. The life of Christ does not flow through

us so no one else is coming to know Him.

The second is just about as bad. We're out of fellowship. We've quenched and grieved the Holy Spirit. We've turned off the life that flows through to produce the fruit. And we quench the Spirit by saying no to Him! "Uh-uh, can't do that! No, I'll only go this far, no further." And we've not made Him Lord.

Or there's sin and disobedience and as a result, the Spirit is grieved and fruit cannot be borne.

Lesson #6: Do you know the unknown God?

If so, when did it happen? Are we sure that we walk with Him? Is He our Savior?

Lesson #7: Jesus is coming and He's going to be the judge.

Ron Dunn wrote a great little book called *The Faith Crisis* and in it he says he following:

(The Faith Crisis by Ronald Dunn)

Someone says, "Do you mean to tell me that if I simply believe I have the victory, I *have* the victory?"

"That's right."

"I don't believe it."

"You don't have the victory either, do you?"

The phrase "win the victory" betrays an inadequate understanding of the Cross work of our Lord. By His death

Jesus won every victory for us. The tense of the verb *overcome* indicates that it has already been done and remains done. Just think of it—every temptation you will face today was overcome by Jesus 2,000 years ago! You have only to step into the victory already secured. That’s living in the luxury of Calvary. And we enter that victory the same way we entered salvation—by grace through faith. Grace obtains the victory; faith maintains the victory.  
(source unknown)

Then he uses a great illustration from Gideon:

(The Faith Crisis by Ronald Dunn)

Gideon probably jumped six feet off the ground when the angel spoke without warning. The angel may have been stretching it a bit by calling Gideon a “valiant warrior.”

Do you remember what Gideon said in response to the angel’s greeting? “Oh my Lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about...? But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian” (*Judges 6:13*).

If the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? Gideon’s theology was simple, not to say appealing: If God is with us, then nothing bad can happen and we will experience a miracle a day as proof of His presence.

Unfortunately, Gideon’s miracle-a-day theology is still with us, stronger than ever. It is preached, mostly on TV by the Joy-boys, [they say] that if we are filled with the Spirit

and trust the Lord, we will always be healthy and wealthy, that we will have “all honey, no bees; no work, all ease.”  
(source unknown)

That is not true! We’re going to see the apostle as a faithful instrument being built more and more Christlike with the circumstances he goes through. But just remember, God always drops a Berea between a Thessalonica and an Athens just to encourage us for His glory as we’re sensitive to His Spirit.

Father, thank You for the Bereas in our lives. The times when You know that we’ve been tested to the limits and we need to just have a pat on the back. We need some encouragement, we need to see some fruit borne. Thank You for how precious You are to know those times in our lives when the red lights come on and we need that help and that encouragement. For some of those who might be suffering some difficult circumstances, we pray they’d sense Your healing hand upon them for good. That You’re molding them as a potter molds a vessel, for honor and glory and for usefulness, and above all to bear fruit through them. Please our Father, use the ministry to edify, to evangelize and to build up Your church by causing Your children to be more effective as they are doers of the word and not just hearers only. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

# A Practical Study of ACTS:

## Take It To Them!

### “Putting the GO Back in the Gospel”

#### STUDY NUMBER THIRTEEN – ACTS 17:1-34

#### NOTES

v. 1 Now when they traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

v. 2 And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths he was reasoning with them from the Scriptures,

v. 3 explaining and pointing out that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise again from the dead, and that this man is the Christ, this Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you.

v. 4 And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, [along with] a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and not a few of the leading women.

v. 5 But the Jews became jealous and took along some wicked men from the marketplace and having formed a mob, they were setting the city in an uproar; and having rushed at the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.

v. 6 And when they did not find them, they were dragging Jason and some brethren before the city officials, shouting, “These men who upset the world have come here also;

v. 7 whom Jason has welcomed, and they all are doing things contrary to Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, Jesus.”

v. 8 And they stirred up the crowd and the city officials who were hearing these things.

v. 9 And when they received a bond from Jason and the others, they released them.

v. 10 And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; who, when they arrived, went into the synagogue of the Jews.

## NOTES

v. 11 Now, these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, who received the word with all willingness, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so.

v. 12 Many of them therefore believed, and not a few of the prominent Greek women and men.

v. 13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there likewise, agitating and stirring up the crowds.

v. 14 And then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to be proceeding as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy were remaining there.

v. 15 Now those who were bringing Paul brought him as far as Athens; and having received a command for Silas and Timothy to the effect that they should come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

v. 16 Now, while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols.

v. 17 So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing [Gentiles], and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.

v. 18 And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were disputing with him, and some were saying: “What would this picker up of seeds wish to say?” but others were saying: “He is seeming to be a proclaimer of strange deities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

v. 19 And having taken him, they brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we come to know what this new teaching is, which is being spoken by you?”

v. 20 For you are bringing some surprising things to our ears; we are wanting to know therefore what the intent of these things is.”

v. 21 (Now all Athenians and the strangers visiting there were devoting their leisure time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)

v. 22 Then Paul having stood in the midst of the Areopagus was saying: “Men of Athens, I am observing that you are very religious people in all respects.

v. 23 For when I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar upon which was written, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’ What therefore you are worshipping without knowing it, this I am proclaiming to you.

## NOTES

v. 24 The God who made the world and all things in it, this God being Lord of heaven and earth, is not dwelling in temples made with hands;

v. 25 neither is He being served by human hands, as though He is needing anything, since He Himself is giving to all life and breath and all things;

v. 26 and He made from one every nation of mankind to be living upon all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation,

v. 27 in order that they should be seeking God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

v. 28 for in Him we are living and moving and being, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.'

v. 29 Therefore being the offspring of God, we ought not to be thinking that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something fashioned by the skill and thought of man.

v. 30 Now, therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should be repenting,

v. 31 because He appointed a day in which He is about to be judging the inhabited earth in righteousness through a man whom He appointed, having furnished proof to all men when He raised Him from the dead."

v. 32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some were sneering but others said, "We shall hear you also again concerning this."

v. 33 So Paul went out of their midst.

v. 34 But some men having joined themselves to him, believed, among whom also was Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.



**QUESTIONS:**

1. Read Acts 17:1-34 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

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2. What is the response to Paul and Silas’s ministry in Thessalonica in verses 4 & 5?

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3. What is the response from those in Berea, according to verse 11?

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4. What provoked Paul when he arrived at Athens, according to verse 16?

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5. How does Paul build a bridge to the men of Athens in verses 22 & 23?

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6. How does Paul describe a relationship to God, according to verse 28?

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7. What is God telling us to do, according to verse 30?

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8. Whom has God chosen to be judging the inhabited earth, according to verse 31?

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9. What verse in the study has meant the most to you?

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10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

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**LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:**

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

**LESSON #1:** It is our responsibility to take the initiative.  
You gotta take it to them!

**LESSON #2:** Paul's witness is three-fold: 1) the Scriptures; 2) the Christ; and 3) the resurrection.

**LESSON #3:** God does not promise exemption from persecution.

**LESSON #4:** Will you, like the Bereans, receive the Word with all willingness of mind, examining the Scriptures?

**LESSON #5:** Is God bearing fruit through your life? (John 15:16)

**LESSON #6:** Do you know the unknown God?

**LESSON #7:** Jesus is coming, and He will be a judge.

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