



ACTS: ENDS OF THE EARTH ACTS 17:1-15

STUDY GUIDE
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ACTS 17:1-15 ESV

1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 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." 4 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. 5 But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. 6 And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, 7 and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." 8 And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. 9 And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. 10 The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. 11 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. 12 Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. 13 But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. 14 Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. 15 Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

STRUCTURE

- I. Reasoning from the Scripture in Thessalonica (1-10a)
 - a. *Setting*: arrival at the synagogue (1)
 - b. *Ministry*: proclamation of prophecies about Christ from Scripture (2-3)
 - c. *Fruit*: some Jews but many Greeks and especially aristocratic women (4)
 - d. *Persecution*: mob violence and charges of treason (5-8)
 - e. *Resolution*: bail paid and escape made (9-10a)
- II. Examining the Scripture in Berea (10b-15)
 - a. *Setting*: arrival at the synagogue (10b)
 - b. *Ministry*: examination of prophecies about Christ from Scripture (11)
 - c. *Fruit*: many Jews and Greeks believed, including aristocratic women (12)
 - d. *Persecution*: mob violence stoked by Jews from Thessalonica (13)
 - e. *Resolution*: escape made to Athens (14-15)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

After being flogged and imprisoned in Philippi, Paul and his team press on undeterred. We should not assume that following Jesus comes with special perks. To proclaim Him is to identify with His life of sorrow and His death on the cross. Later, Paul will write to the Philippians expressing his deep desire to know Christ—both the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings. We see both of these in this story: Paul suffers as Jesus did, but he also rebounds with a supernatural resilience—like a buoy that refuses to sink, or like Christ who refuses to stay buried. The power of the resurrection is evident in how suffering does not overcome us.

Luke presents the ministry of Paul in Thessalonica and Berea as parallel stories, each shaped by how the people respond to Christ in the Scriptures. Both cities have Jewish populations that value the Word of God, yet one rejects the Christ of Scripture while the other embraces Him. It is not enough to simply honor God's Word; we must embrace the Christ of God's Word. I am reminded of our Lord's words to the religious elites of His day: "You diligently search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39-40). Scripture points to Jesus Christ—the man born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, who ministered throughout Israel, healing the sick, casting out demons, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, dying for sins, and rising from the grave. He is the One to whom the Law and the Prophets point. To embrace the Scriptures but reject the Christ of the Scriptures is to reject the Father and eternal life. We must embrace both the Christ of Scripture and of history in the person of Jesus. In Thessalonica, they did not.

But in Berea, they did. The Bereans were described as “more noble” or “fair-minded” than the Jews in Thessalonica. They demonstrated their reasonableness by diligently examining the Scriptures to see if Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ foretold. How we relate to Scripture reflects how we relate to God. To be “noble” is to search and scrutinize the Word of God, that we might find Christ—and know Him.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 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."

—The journey from Philippi to Thessalonica was 100 miles. Paul's team bypassed the smaller towns of “Amphipolis and Apollonia,” in keeping with their strategy of focusing on influential cities. Philippi had been a leading city of Macedonia, and Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia.

—Despite horrific persecution in Philippi, Paul and his team continue undeterred. Calvin remarks on Paul's “unconquerable mental courage and indefatigable endurance of the cross” (quoted by Stott).

—“where there was a synagogue of the Jews”: Paul's missionary strategy took them not only to big cities but also, first, to the Jews living there. As heirs of the promises, God gave Jews the “first right of refusal.” Unfortunately, most of them refused the gospel in Thessalonica. In Berea, it will be a different story. The contrast is instructive, as we will see.

—“three Sabbath days”: Paul's ministry to the Jews of Thessalonica lasted three weeks, but his letters to the Thessalonians could indicate that he was there for longer (cf. 1 Thess. 2:7-9; 3:7-9).

—“he reasoned with them from the Scriptures”:

- The “Scriptures” are mentioned in both Thessalonica and Berea, providing a pivotal point upon which we can evaluate the difference between the two cities.
- Paul “reasoned” from the Scriptures. Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words: “to converse, dispute, discuss, discourse with;” most frequently, “to reason or dispute with.” Paul was not merely appealing to emotion or felt needs. He appealed to logic from the Scriptures. Professions of faith must be rooted in an intellectual grasp—and embrace—of the facts.
- If we are to share our faith, we must be able to articulate the gospel from the Scripture. This includes the doctrines of sin, judgment, redemption, the incarnation, atonement, and resurrection.

—“explaining and proving”:

- These participles elaborate on how Paul reasoned from the Scriptures. He did so by explaining the meaning of the Scriptures and proving his doctrine about the Christ.
- Other translations: “explaining and demonstrating” (NKJV), “explaining and giving evidence” (NASB). Footnote in ESV: “Literally, ‘opening’ and ‘placing before.’”
- Paul reasoned from the Scripture by laying the evidence before them, clue by clue and prophecy by prophecy.

—“that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead”:

- “the Christ”: the Messiah, the King of Israel, the Son of David, the Anointed One
- “had to”: implies biblical necessity. Paul begins by showing principally what a coming Messiah would have to do (die and rise), and then he shows how Jesus did these things historically. Christianity is not just dogma or philosophy like other world religions. Our doctrine is rooted in history.
- We are reminded of Luke 24:25-27 when Jesus speaks with the disciples on the road to Emmaus: *“And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe **all that the prophets have spoken!** Was it not **necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?**’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”*
- In His subsequent resurrection appearance to the eleven disciples, we read, *“Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that **everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.**” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is **written**, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of*

sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (24:44-48).

- Augustine: "The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed; the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed."
- What Scriptures did Paul use to prove that Jesus had to die and rise again?
 - Throughout Acts, the apostles have pointed to Psalm 2: a passage about the nations attacking Christ but Christ being crowned as the resurrected King ("today I have begotten you") despite their futile efforts.
 - They have also pointed to Deuteronomy 18 about a prophet like Moses who would speak the very words of God and represent Him perfectly.
 - They have also pointed to Psalm 16 about a descendant of David whose body would not see corruption in the grave because of resurrection.
 - They have also pointed to Psalm 110 about a priest-king who sits at the right hand of God the Father and reigns over the earth from heaven.
 - They have also pointed to 2 Samuel 7, where God promised David that one of his descendants would rise up and reign forevermore.
 - They have also pointed to Isaiah 53, where the servant of Israel would make atonement for the people after suffering terribly and then rise above it.
 - They have also pointed to God's promise to Abraham that through his offspring, all the nations of the earth would be blessed.
 - They have also pointed to Psalm 118, where Jesus is the stone the builders have rejected, which has become the chief cornerstone.
 - There are many other passages besides these that point to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, as well. Psalm 22 is a big one. When we include typology, which we must, we have much more. For instance, Joseph was a type of Jesus: rejected by his own brothers, betrayed for silver, suffering unjustly, but rising to become king, forgiving his brothers, and bringing salvation to the world. We also see death/resurrection typology in Jonah.
 - Hosea 6:2 speaks of rising on the third day: "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him."
- Stott: "the identification of history with Scripture, Jesus with Christ, was essential to Paul's apologetic. It remains an indispensable part of Christian testimony in our day in which some theologians attempt to drive a wedge between the historical Jesus of the Gospels and a mystical Christ of Christian theology and experience."
- During the 18th-19th century, there began a "quest for the historical Jesus," where the history of the Gospels—particularly the miracles and resurrection—were set aside as legendary additions rather than historical facts. Theologians like Rudolf Bultmann argued for "the demythologization" of Jesus, whereby "the Jesus of faith" is distinct from "the Jesus of history," who in his view was just a man. He and others argued that the "mystical Jesus" was important to inspire faith, but we must not confuse legend with reality. This view 100% contradicts Scripture. It is heresy.
- "saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ'": having laid out the evidence from the Old Testament that the Christ must live, suffer, die, and rise again to reign from heaven at the right hand of God, Paul shows how the historical Jesus fulfilled these promises. When we read and teach the OT, we must never focus solely on the figures but also—especially—the One to whom they point: Jesus.

4 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. 5 But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.

—"some... a great many": some Jews joined; many Greeks joined. Jews received first right of refusal—and refused. The gates of salvation swung wide to the Gentiles, and they rushed in.

—"not a few of the leading women": the aristocratic Greek ladies embraced Jesus.

—"Jews were jealous": Jealousy is often the motivator for religious persecution:

- Matt. 27:18 – "For he knew that it was out of **envy** that they had delivered him up."
- Acts 5:17 – "But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with **jealousy**..."
- Acts 13:45 – "But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with **jealousy** and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him."

—Throughout Acts, there is a lot of stirring up crowds against Christians, usually from a small number of malcontents who spark the fire (Acts 5:17; 13:45; 17:5; 14:2; 14:19; 16:20-21; 17:6).

—"the house of Jason":

- Jason gets in trouble for harboring terrorists in his home. In all likelihood, he provided space for the first house church in the city.
- Jason is also mentioned in Romans 16:21: *"Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen."*
- Jason was a Greek name, but he might have been a Jew since many Hellenized Jews took on Greek names in that region and period.
- Verse 9 informs us that Jason was a man of means, able not only to provide housing but also a security deposit that facilitated the release of Paul and Silas.

6 And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, 7 and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." 8 And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. 9 And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

—"Jason and some of the brothers": These early converts—"brothers"—are introduced to persecution almost immediately after meeting Jesus. We should not suppose that following Jesus makes our life easier in any outward sense.

—"turned the world upside down": Paul's mission work had gained a reputation. Christianity spread like wildfire throughout the Roman Empire, subverting the old Roman gods and supplanting Caesar's claim as "Lord."

—"against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus": Paul did not just go about proclaiming that Jesus forgave your sins and took you to heaven. The summary of Christ's message, passed on to the apostolic witnesses, was "the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3)—that is, Jesus is the true ruler of the entire world. This summarized all apostolic preaching. That is why the last verse in Acts says of Paul, "He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (28:31).

—In America, we often reduce the gospel to a formula for personal salvation—receiving forgiveness of sins and going to heaven when we die. This is a true gospel, but it is insufficient. When Jesus walked the earth, He proclaimed, "the gospel of the kingdom," commanding people to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." God's reign has begun in Christ. This means that from a human standpoint, every king and president governs underneath Christ's universal rule, and He will depose every kingdom that opposes His own—either now or at His return (Ps. 2:10-12; Rev. 11:15-18). From a supernatural standpoint, Jesus has cast down Satan as the "ruler of this world" (John 12:30-31; Rev. 12:7-9) and commissioned His church to apply His victory through the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony until He returns (Rev. 12:11) and casts Satan into the lake of fire (Rev. 20). A robust gospel presentation does not invite people to receive Jesus into their heart but rather announces to them that King Jesus reigns, and He offers a peace deal through His blood if we repent before it is too late. If we repent and believe, He forgives us, welcomes us into His eternal kingdom, and we will rule with Him forever over the new world that He will one day make.

—These charges against Paul and his team were tantamount to high treason and worthy of death. Jesus was murdered for the same crime.

10 The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. 11 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.

—Even though the city had released them, Paul and Silas were not out of the woods. The crowd remained agitated. Therefore, fellow believers snuck them out in cloak of darkness.

—“Berea”: located about 50 miles from Thessalonica, or about 1-2 days of travel by foot.

—“Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica”:

- These two stories—the mission to Thessalonica (17:1-9) and Berea (17:10-15)—belong together as points of comparison.
- Jewish animosity toward the gospel was not uniform. Christians must never excuse antisemitism on the grounds that Jews rejected the gospel (or any grounds for that matter—racism is a grievous sin). Many Jews received the gospel, and one day, before Christ returns, the majority of Israel will be saved (Rom. 11).
- “noble”: “fair-minded” (NKJV); “noble character” (NIV, CSB); “noble-minded” (NASB); “open-minded” (NET)

—“received the word with all eagerness”:

- “eagerness”: translated “willingness” (2 Cor. 8:11-12; cf. 9:2) in the context of being a cheerful giver who is willing, eager, and ready to donate. Translated “readiness” (or “eagerness”) in 2 Cor. 8:19 to depict Paul's eager desire to serve.
- Whereas those in Thessalonica tolerated a mere three Sabbath days of instruction before jealousy and strife inflamed them, these Jews eagerly/willingly/cheerfully received the word—how?—see the continuation of the verse.

—“examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so”:

- Their eager reception of the word expressed itself in the thorough, daily, examination of the Scriptures. This contrasts with the three Sabbath teachings in Thessalonica that were briefly tolerated before inciting a riot.
- The Bereans did not gather to uncritically receive a “feel good” message from a motivational speaker who smattered in a few Bible verses. They gathered to examine the Scriptures and “see if these things were so.”
- “examining”:
 - This Greek word (*anakrino*) is used in Luke 23:14 to depict how Pilate examined Jesus judicially; in Acts 4:9, the same Greek word is translated “to be on trial”; in 24:8, it is rendered, “interrogating.”
 - This word carries strong connotations of thoroughness and scrutiny. Any time we encounter a teaching we've not heard, we should submit it to the same rigor as the Bereans. God did not hold them accountable for receiving Jesus without searching the Scriptures or applying their minds. Faith is not blind. It involves intellectual engagement and a scrutiny of the facts.
- In Thessalonica, Paul displayed his faithfulness in how he “reasoned with them from the Scriptures”. In Berea, the Jews displayed their noble character in “examining the Scriptures”. How we treat the Scripture speaks to our character. Every human has a relationship with the word of God. Some oppose it, others embrace it, and still others sit on the fence. Some treat it like a charismatic horoscope, flipping to random verses here and there, hoping to land on something inspiring. The best approach is to examine the Scriptures daily like the Bereans and to proclaim Christ from the Scriptures like Paul.

12 Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. 13 But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds.

—“Many of them therefore believed”: The “therefore” signifies that faith resulted from their diligent search of the Scriptures.

—“not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men”: Similar to the situation in Thessalonica (v. 4), the aristocratic class of women placed their faith in Jesus. Here, the men do the same. Luke often highlights the role of women as a matter of emphasis. He intends to show that this burgeoning Jesus movement was for all people, not just the men.

—“the word of God”: This is the central theme in Thessalonica and Berea.

—“Jews from Thessalonica... agitating and stirring up the crowds”: The opposition from Paul in Berea did not originate from the Bereans. We must always be careful of agitators. Human nature is like a powder keg, waiting for a spark. Proverbs 6:16-19 warns that those who sow strife are among the worst sinners of all, and this story proves why.

14 Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there.

15 Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

—In Thessalonica, the brothers “immediately” sent Paul away by night (v. 10); in Berea, the brothers “immediately” sent Paul away by sea (v. 14).

—“Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible”: Paul modeled doing everything as a team. The next scene in Athens proves to be one of the few exceptions, but it is only by necessity. God’s people should always aim to work in teams. Jesus is the only Person who didn’t “need” a team, yet He chose twelve to do ministry with Him, even breaking them up into teams of two to warm the peoples’ hearts up to their King.