TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN!

Acts 17 (text 17:6)

The events of Acts 17 are a continuation of Paul's second missionary trip.

As I read through the book of Acts it is interesting to note some of the accusations the world makes towards believers:

- **Acts 5:28**—“...behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine...” May this be said of Bible Baptist Church—“You have filled Port Orchard with your doctrine!” Have you filled your workplace... your school... your neighborhood with Christ’s doctrine?

- **Acts 16:17**—“...These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.” What a great thing to have this said of us—To be recognized as being a servant of God and showing people how to be saved!

- **Acts 17:6**—“...These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also...” Actually, sin turned the world upside down and now the preaching of the Gospel puts it right-side up! Any time a person gets saved, their world is turned upside down! Let’s turn someone’s world upside down with the transforming power of the Gospel!

- **Acts 18:13** — “This fellow [Paul] persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.” Of course, this was a misrepresentation of what Paul was doing. However, we would all do well to be accused of persuading men to worship God according to New Testament doctrine!

- **Acts 24:5**—“For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:” Three things said of Paul: (1) He was a pest—He wouldn’t quit. He was like a fly buzzing around your nose while you are trying to eat a jelly donut! That’s the way the world feels about a consistent soul winner—Always “bugging” people about Jesus! (2) He was a mover—Activator; motivator. Paul was “moving” people closer to Jesus (although the world called this “sedition”—They also accused Christ). (3) Paul was a “ringleader.” A ringleader is one who stands out front; a chief; a director. A leader of a ring of individuals engaged in some activity. In a circus, he is the one who runs the show and di-
rects the audience’s attention to the various acts performed in the ring. God give us more “ringleaders” like Paul!

Paul ministers in three cities in Acts 17. At each locality we see of an element of spiritual revolution:

I. AT THESSALONICA (17:1-10) – A CONSISTENT method of ministry.
   A. Paul’s PRACTICE (vs. 2, 3, 17; cf. 13:5, 14-16; 14:1; 18:4, 19; 19:8; 20:18).
      1. Paul reasoned OUT of the SCRIPTURES. Our reasoning must be from the Scriptures. Any counseling we do must be from the Scriptures. We are to get everything we preach OUT of the Word of God, not out of the world.
      2. Paul’s persistence—THREE WEEKS (v. 2).
   B. Paul’s PREACHING (v. 3). Preached Christ in the manner of a lawyer. Presenting the evidence.
      1. Jesus is the Messiah (v. 3 —“Christ”).
      2. Jesus died and rose again— He had to go to the cross before He could wear a crown—He had to redeem before He could reign.
      3. This includes the second advent of Christ (v. 7). We know from Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians, he was preaching Christ’s coming. Presenting Christ as a coming King goes contrary to every political scheme the Gentiles have ever known (Mt. 2:1-4).
   C. The PERSUADING (vs. 4).
      1. Some Jews... Many Gentiles (“...a great multitude...”)
      2. 1 Thessalonians 2:13
   D. The PERSECUTION (vs. 5-9).
      1. Envy—The unbelieving Jews were envious of the effect the Scriptures had on those who believed (v. 5 cf. 1 Thess. 2:13-16). They didn’t accept Christ, and they didn’t want anyone else to accept Him either.
      2. Paul was requested by the brethren to leave Thessalonica for his own welfare. Paul left physically, but he did return in the form to two epistles written soon thereafter.
3. Jesus said, “When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another” (Mt. 10:23). Paul and Silas went 60 miles southwest to Berea where new adventures awaited them.

II. AT BERE A (17:10-15)—A CONVICTION in the Scripture as the final authority.

A. Berean’s CHARACTER (vs. 11)—NOBLE
   1. Readily they RECEIVED the Scripture (v. 11a).
      • Willing and EAGER to hear! Enthusiastic, not bored.
      • Not like some, who enjoy the music ministry, but endure the preaching. Thank God for those who put an emphasis on the preaching and teaching of God’s Word. It is the centerpiece, not a sideline, of our worship services.
   2. Regularly they RESEARCHED the Scripture (v. 11b cf. 1 Thess. 5:21).
      • The Bereans didn’t blindly accept what Paul and Silas were saying. We must consult the Scripture for all matters of faith and practice.
      • No true Bible teacher fears scrutiny... He welcomes it!

B. Berean CONVERTS (v. 12—“many... not a few”)

C. Berean CONFLICT (vs. 13-14).

III. AT ATHENS (17:16-34)—A CONFRONTATION with the philosophy of the world.

   • Paul had sensitivity of spirit (17:16; 18:5, 25; 19:21). Stirred in spirit; pressed in the spirit; fervent in spirit; purposed in the spirit.

A. The AUDIENCE—"...philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics..." v. 18 cf. Col. 2:8). No Greek philosopher believed in a literal resurrection (cf. v. 32). The two main branches of philosophy.
   1. EPICUREAN—Key to life is indulgence / ENJOY life (eat, drink, and be merry). Hedonism; gratification of the appetite (cf. 1 Cor. 15:32).
      • Denied life after death.
   2. STOIC—Key to life is indifference / ENDURE life (tough upper-lip). Fatalism—all human affairs governed by fate; pantheistic; unemotional; unmoving; “tough it out... take it like a man.” Work for the universal good.
3. CHARACTERISTICS of the Athenian philosophers:
   a. Idolatrous (v. 16).
   b. Fickle—Like a bunch of gossiping old women; spent their time in hearing and telling some new thing (vs. 19-21). The world is always looking for something "new." There is even a new word for the word "new"—"NEO" as in neo-orthodoxy / neo-evangelical.
      • God has something "new" to offer. It is the new testament in Christ's blood; the new birth; and a coming new heaven and new earth!
   c. Superstitious (v. 22). All Greek philosophers believed—Men came from animals; men could bring peace to the earth through government / education; the universe was eternal and still evolving.
   d. Naive / agnostic (v. 23). "THE UNKNOWN [Gk, agnosta] GOD" is like the "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier." There is an admission that somewhere, some soldier got killed; but nobody knows his name, rank or serial number. The Athenians were saying, "Just in case we left out a god, we have this shine to him.
   e. Double-minded (v. 32)
   f. Skeptical (v. 18)

B. THE ADDRESS (vs. 22-31). Paul begins where the people are religiously (vs. 22-23), and takes them to where God wants them to be (vs. 30-31).
   1. God is THE LORD (vs. 24-26). He is Lord because He is the Creator.
      a. God is sovereign (v. 24 cf. 7:48). Paul corrects their concept of God. God is not pantheistic. He is separate from the universe. Since God created the universe, the universe cannot be eternal and cannot be God.
      b. God is spirit (v. 25). True worship is spiritual (John 4:24).
      c. God is self-sufficient (v. 25). He doesn’t need anything!
         ➢He starts life ("life") and sustains life ("breath")
      d. God is a segregationist (cf. Gen. 10:25; 11:1-9; Ex 23:31; Deut. 32:7-8; Job 14:5; Isa. 5:8; Rev. 21:21; 22:2). The only way men are the same is their blood (v. 26). All the modern versions omit the word "blood." Blood transfusions can be done between any eth-
nic group. Although all nations have the same blood, God has imposed "boundaries" regarding their habitation (Rivers; oceans; mountains; deserts; language).

2. God is ACCESSIBLE (vs. 27-30).
   
a. Why did God set bounds upon the nations? So they would seek after Lord (vs. 27-28).

   It is easier to arrive at the truth in a smaller group. The more people from different nations there are in a group, the more differences of opinion you have to contend with and the less truth is available.

   No Bible believer would be allowed to address the United Nations and say the only way to heaven is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ and until He returns, there will never be any peace on earth.

   The greater the advances in transportation, which break down boundaries, the less dissemination of Bible truth you will have. To the proportion of different people you have in one group, will be the proportion of compromise of the truth. The "price tag" for global unity is the elimination of absolute truth. Since Bible doctrine is divisive, the ecumenical movement says, "Put away your doctrinal creeds."

   Consider the fulfillment of Isaiah 5:8, "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!" Almost all condominiums (consolidated domain; joint dominion) have signs "NO SOLICITING" that restrict the propagation of the truth.

   God's judgment was upon those who removed "the bounds" that God set up (cf. Hos. 5:10; Dt. 19:14; 27:17).

b. Verse 28—Paul is speaking to unsaved philosophers. He did not mean that they were "in Him" spiritually, but geographically. God encompasses the universe, therefore everyone is "in Him" in that sense. Our breath is in God's hand (Dan. 5:23).

Since the Greek philosophers were pantheistic (God is everywhere and everything), Paul quotes one of their own poets—Aratus, a native of Seleucia. All men are the offspring of God in the
sense that all men are physically created by God. Paul did not mean all men were "born again." Paul was using something an unsaved heathen said to make a case for the Gospel (v. 29).

Man is the "offspring of God," therefore, idols are inferior to man since they are the devices of man. Since man came from God, anything made by man is less than God. Man degrades God and himself by worshipping something that is inferior to himself!

3. GOD IS THE JUDGE (vs. 30-31).

- Up until the resurrection of Christ, God tolerated idolatry among the Gentiles, whereas He judged the Jews for having idols. Sin is not imputed where there is no law (Rom. 4:15; 5:13). God did not approve of the Gentiles having idols, but "overlooked" it until the time when the Gospel was sent to them (cf. 14:16 cf. Rom. 3:25).

- Christ is the image of God, therefore, after His coming all graven images are condemned and must be repented of. Why? Answer (v. 31). Because a day of judgment is coming (Rev. 20:11-15) when God will judge even the Gentiles by Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 2:16).

  a. God is going to judge the world "in righteousness," not by relative standards (v. 31).

  b. The absolute standard of righteousness is Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 2:15-16). God has already chosen the standard. You cannot pick your own standard of righteousness (Buddha; Mary; etc.). We are going to be judged according to the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

  c. The proof that Jesus Christ is the standard is the fact of His resurrection. No other man has risen from the dead never to die again. Everything hinges on the resurrection, because the resurrection is what makes Jesus Christ unique.

C. The AFTEREFFECT (vs. 32-34):

1. **Derision;** rejected, ridicule — Message was **foolish** (v. 32)

Heathen ridicule the resurrection (v. 32). If Christ did not raise from the dead, any behavior is OK (1 Cor. 15:32). If Christ did not raise from the dead, He rotted in the grave. If He rotted in the grave, His
real father was Joseph. Since Joseph came from Adam, he was a sinner. Therefore, one sinner is just as good as another.

2. **Delay**; neglected, reluctant — Message was **fanciful** (v. 32)
3. **Decision**; accepted, receptive — Message was **factual** (v. 34).