International Bible Lessons Commentary
Acts 17:1-4, 10-12, 22-28
English Standard Version

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, November 22, 2015

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, November 22, 2015**, is from **Acts 17:1-4, 10-12, 22-28**. Please Note: Some churches will only study Acts 17:1-4, 10-12, 22-25, 28. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Lessons Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the *International Bible Lesson Forum*.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Acts 17:1-4, 10-12, 22-28

(Acts 17:1) Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

Paul and Silas took the Via Egnatia (the Egnatian Way or Roman Road that connected ports on the Adriatic Sea with Byzantium) to Thessalonica, the chief city in the province of Macedonia. Paul "passed through" Amphipolis and Apollonia, apparently without stopping to preach the gospel. As was his custom of going to the Jews first, Paul went directly to the synagogue.

(Acts 17:2) And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

Paul argued or reasoned from the Scriptures over a two-week period and on three Sabbath days. As a rabbi, Paul taught the prophecies from the Old Testament that foretold the coming of the Messiah, and then he explained how Jesus had fulfilled those prophecies. All believing Jews and Gentile God-fearers believed the Scriptures were the true word of God. However, the Sadducees only accepted the first five books of the Bible, the books of Moses. The Jews believed that any religious practice and teaching must be consistent with the revealed word of God, and Paul reasoned from the Scriptures and reassured them that the teachings of Jesus, and His life, death, and resurrection were according to the Scriptures.

(Acts 17:3) 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."

Jewish expectations did not include the suffering, death, and burial of the Messiah. Therefore, Paul had to use the Scriptures to explain why Jesus had to suffer and die so God could be both just and merciful in the forgiveness of sins. Paul had to explain that God approved the sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah when He raised Jesus from the dead. Because God raised Jesus from the dead, Jesus can baptize believers in the Holy Spirit, which He began to do on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus will also judge the world someday.

(Acts 17:4) 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.

As Paul interpreted the Scriptures, some believed him and accepted the fact that Jesus is the Messiah. Four keywords describe Paul's approach to those he spoke to in the synagogue: *explaining*, *reasoning*, *proving*, and *persuading* using the truth of the Scriptures and his best educated thinking to keep the focus on Jesus and who Jesus is and what Jesus did and why. We have no indication that Paul ever said to anyone, "Just believe," without explaining, reasoning, proving, and persuading with all his prayerful mind and might. Paul's efforts led to some Jews and God-fearing Gentiles believing in Jesus.

(Acts 17:10) The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue.

Since the Jews were not able to out-think or out-reason Paul or prove from the Scriptures that Paul was wrong, they started a persecution of the new Christians and Paul and Silas. They formed a mob from the rabble and caused a riot. To protect the new believers from further suffering, Paul and Silas left for Berea (or Beroea) and went first to the synagogue, as was their custom.

(Acts 17:11) 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.

Those with noble character will recognize and receive the truth more eagerly than others. Liars and unrepentant sinners will often feel condemned by the truth, and will not receive it gladly. Believers in God will also examine what seems to be true or what some claim to be true in order to find out whether or not what they are being taught is consistent with the Scriptures. The Scriptures are objective truth, the revealed word of God, by which all other moral, religious, and spiritual ideas are to be measured and judged as true or false. The Holy Spirit helps believers understand the Bible's right application and meaning.

(Acts 17:12) Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.

In Thessalonica "some" in the synagogue believed. In Berea, "many" in the synagogue believed. They were of more noble character in Berea than in Thessalonica, and as soon as the Jews in Thessalonica learned of Paul's success in leading people to faith in Jesus the Messiah, they went to Berea and agitated the crowds against Paul. Leaving Silas and Timothy to build up the new church in Berea, Paul left for Athens. In Acts, Luke has shown the effectiveness of Paul's teaching in the power of the Holy Spirit to reach men and women, and responsible business, political, and religious leaders with the truth.

(Acts 17:22) So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.

Athens was famous as the home of great philosophers; such as, Socrates and Plato, whose ideas influenced Jews and Christians for many generations. The Areopagus was the name of a council that discussed and evaluated the ideas that came into the city. About 450 years earlier Athenian city leaders judged that Socrates must go into exile from Athens because of his teaching, but instead he took his own life. Though the Areopagus did not have that type of power in Paul's day, new ideas still fascinated the Athenians and they wanted to hear more from Paul. Paul was not called before the Areopagus as a legal matter; they simply to hear him teach. The Greek word for "religious" could also be translated "superstitious," but Paul probably wanted to draw them into thinking about what he said rather than alienate them with his first words.

(Acts 17:23) For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

Places other than Athens have also had altars to unknown gods and goddesses rather than make an unknown god or goddess angry and then suffer from their wrath. From reading stories written by the Greeks, we know that Greek gods and goddesses were immoral and unpredictable in their behavior. Paul wrote to the Corinthians later: "The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons" (1 Corinthians 10:20). Paul would explain to them the God they did not know. He would begin by seemingly using philosophy, because the Athenians did not believe the Scriptures, but he actually stated without arguing truths from the Scriptures. Paul did not try to prove anything from philosophical argumentation, but proclaimed the truth of the Scriptures without quoting the Scriptures directly.

(Acts 17:24) The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,

Paul began his presentation by declaring that the God he was revealing to them was the One who made the world and everything in the world. Rather than being uninvolved or unmoved by the world, as Aristotle described God, the true God is Lord of heaven and earth and rules as Lord over all. God is so great in so many ways that God does not live in temples or shrines that humans build. The existence of this world points to the nature of the true God, so people who do not believe in God are without excuse (see Romans 1).

(Acts 17:25) nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

Our human hands serve God in a variety of ways; for example, believers care for widows and orphans and share the gospel of Jesus Christ as commanded by Him. But God does not need our service as though He lacked something that our hands and service could provide. God did not create the world and people because He needed the world, slaves to meet His needs, or because God needed someone to love. God is a giving God, and He himself personally gets involved and gives life and all that life needs for our benefit.

(Acts 17:26) And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

The Greeks believed they were special and all other races and/or nationalities were barbarians. In combating racism, Paul emphasized that all races descended from one man, and God made this possible. God remains involved in human history and God created all nations on the earth. God set their boundaries, and God determined how long these nations would survive. Without referring to the Scriptures, everything Paul spoke to them was according to the Scriptures and could be shown from the Scriptures when that time came. When teaching new believers, the believers Paul taught would not need to have his teaching corrected later by the Scriptures. Instead, they would recognize how everything Paul said was according to the Scriptures.

(Acts 17:27) that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,

Paul reasoned that one of God's objectives or purposes for what God has done and continues to do in creation and human history was God's intention that people seek the reason for all that is and happens. Then, in seeking the reason they would begin to seek God, reach out for God, and find God. The Bible affirms this through Jeremiah and others. God promised through Jeremiah, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). Again, what Paul declared was according to the Scriptures. Furthermore, God is everywhere present and not far from anyone. Unlike many of the Greek gods, God is not on a far off Mount Olympus. The true God is present everywhere and can be found anywhere people seek Him.

(Acts 17:28) for "'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, "'For we are indeed his offspring.'"

Paul revealed his own knowledge of Greek ideas and culture when he quoted two of their poets, which would increase the Athenians' respect for him personally and keep them listening to him. To show that some of their philosophers would have agreed with what he had said, Paul quoted Epimenides of Crete and Aratus of Cilicia. Since we are God's offspring, created in God's image, Paul would go on to reason that the world and each individual person in the world are accountable to God and to Jesus Christ as the just

Judge of the world. Paul declared that God proved this by raising Jesus from the dead. As a result Paul's teaching, some believed, even a member of the Areopagus, and some wanted to hear more from him.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. From today's lesson, what is one possible reason some people persecute Christians?

2. What possible good can come from Christians suffering persecution?

3. How does a person's character influence their response to the truth when they hear the truth?

4. Think of the Bereans, what is one benefit from knowing the Scriptures and having access to a Bible?

5. How did Paul's approach to unbelievers in the synagogues differ from his approach to unbelievers in the Areopagus?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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