

'Acts' - Extra Teaching Points #23

Acts 17:10-21 (NASB)

Acts 17:10-12 (NASB)

The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. ¹² Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.

Q: What does Luke mean when he says these Jews were “more noble-minded”?

- He is saying they were “open minded” and/or persuadable.
- The Greek word here is **eugenēs**, which originally meant well-born, of high rank, or honorable. Later it came to be used of people who possessed the character you would expect in someone of high social standing.

Q: Why did Luke consider them more “noble-minded”?

- They were eager to learn more about Jesus and His Kingdom; but they took responsibility to make sure what they were being taught checked out in the scriptures.

Acts 17:13-15 (NASB)

But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds. ¹⁴ Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. ¹⁵ Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.



Q: We know from Acts 19:21 that Paul wanted to go to Rome. The Egnatian Way was the high road to Rome, and the road Paul had followed from Philippi to Thessalonica to Berea. Why would the brethren put Paul on a boat to Athens instead of on the road to Rome?

- We aren't told why, but we could make a few guesses:
 - Perhaps the Jews who were pursuing Paul would have expected him to take that road; so going to Athens would possibly throw them off Paul's trail.
 - Perhaps the Holy Spirit wanted Paul to confront the underlying philosophies that formed that generation's worldview before he took on the government that was built on those philosophies?
- Whatever the reason, the fact is Athens was the intellectual and cultural capital of the world, and Paul was now taking the gospel into the most dangerous and hostile environment he had ever faced!

Acts 17:16 (NASB)

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

Q: Why was Paul's spirit provoked in Athens?

- Athens was the intellectual capital of the world at that time.
 - It was full of idols and ideas!
- Idol worship went hand-in-hand with sexual immorality, and pornographic artwork was everywhere and on everything in Athens.
 - The message was clear: Worship these gods, and your body, and everyone else's body, is a toy for people to use and abuse.

Acts 17:17-18 (NASB)

*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.** ¹⁸ **And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him.** Some were saying, "What would this **idle babbler** wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a **proclaimer of strange deities,**" — because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.*

Q: Paul went to the synagogue like he usually did, but he also went to the marketplace to preach. Why would he preach there?

- The marketplace in Athens was not only a market for commodities, it was also a market for ideas.
 - It was where he could meet and engage with the leading philosophers of the day.

Q: Who were the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, and what did they believe?

- Epicureans believed that the gods were a long way away from this world, and had little or no communication with people.
 - Their worldview was that people should live their lives to the fullest by finding pleasure in a quiet and sedate existence.

- They emphasized the goal of a happy and content life in the here and now, rejecting both superstitious fear of the gods and notions of an afterlife.
- Stoics believed that divinity could be found within the present world and within each person, though it was an impersonal force.
 - According to their worldview, to live a good life, one had to understand the rules of the natural order, since everything was rooted in nature.

Acts 17:19-21 (NASB)

***And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?" ²⁰ "For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean."** ²¹ (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)*

Q: Why did they take Paul to the Areopagus?

- It wasn't for a friendly discussion of philosophies!
 - The Areopagus was the highest court in the city... this was a showdown!
- When they called him an "**idle babbler**" in [vs. 18](#), it was a great insult!
 - They were accusing him of recklessly throwing around ideas.
- When they accused him of being a "**proclaimer of strange deities**", it was a serious charge!
 - This was the same charge used against Socrates, (the greatest and most famous philosopher of all time), for which he was found guilty and condemned to death.
- [Vs. 19](#) "**May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?"** was a veiled and sarcastic threat.
 - Their worldview rejected "new teachings" as obviously inferior to the "old teachings."
 - More than that, they feared secret societies based on new deities, and the trouble they could cause.
 - In effect, they were asking Paul, "Are you allowed to tell us these secret doctrines, or are they only for those you will collect into a dangerous little gang?"

Paul has been matched up against 2 major opponents up to this point: 1) "Zealous Jews", and 2) the economic and political forces of the Roman Empire.

- *Now, in Athens, he is going to go head to head with the prevailing philosophies and worldview of the ancient world!*
- *As he stands on the Areopagus to proclaim one true God, he is in the shadow of the Acropolis and the Parthenon!*

The Acropolis (background), and Areopagus (foreground) today.



The Acropolis (background), and Areopagus (foreground) in Paul's day.



Follow Up Assignment

Q: Would Luke describe you as "noble-minded"?

- Are you eager to hear new things about Jesus?
- Do you let the scriptures persuade you?

Q: What provokes your spirit?

- Does it cause you to preach the gospel in dangerous places?

Q: In Mark 16:15 Jesus said, "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.*" Paul went into the world of the Gentiles and met them where they were. Do you go into other people's worlds in order to preach the gospel to them, or do you try to get them to come into your world first?