Acts Chapter 17: Paul & Silas in Greece

In Acts Chapter 17, Paul moves on from Philippi to the capital city of Macedonia, Thessalonica, this city was named after the half sister of Alexander the Great, the wife of Cassader, in 315 BC. Cassander was one of the rulers of Alexander's Kingdom after his death. Rome later took the former Greek kingdoms after the, Greco-Roman wars from the 3rd to 2nd BC. From Thessalonica, Paul will go to Berea and then finally to Athens in this Chapter. In each city Paul presents the Gospel to different groups of people in different ways; but his message is the same, "Jesus the Mesiah died for your sins".

In Acts 16, Paul in Troas has a vision of seeing a man calling him to Macedonia (Acts 16:9), saying "Come over to Macedonia and help us", Philippi was the first city, now he is making way to the capital of the Roman Province. Here we can learn from Paul, he is delivering God's message of salvation to Jews and Pagan Greeks alike. Through out his journey, God opens the hearts of both Jews and Greeks, Paul job is to present the message, its up to God to open their hearts to hear the message.

Paul and Silas in Thessalonica

Acts 17:1-34
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.

Vs.1-3

Thessalonica: Was the capital of Macedonia, leaving Philippi, Paul, Silas and Timothy took the Egnatian Way[1]. The cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia were each about 30 miles apart, about a days journey. From Philippi to Thessalonica via the Egnatian way was about 103 miles. The city had a population of between 65,000 to 100,000 based on recent excavations, some have place a population as high as 200,000, but this could be an exaggeration. The Jewish population was also significant, and might of numbered more then 10,000 during this period.

After arriving in the city, Paul spent the next 3 weeks, **three Sabbaths**, reasoning from the scriptures with Jews in the synagogue. Here we see how Paul crafts his message for the audience, the Jews were familiar with the prophets and promise of the Messiah, Paul uses his time, help the Jews to see Jesus as the fulfillment of those promises. Paul spent probably 4-6 months, discipling the new group of believers, before he is chased out of the city.

Explaining and proving: Paul is setting the template of evangelism. He speaks to his Jewish audience, on their terms. What is he doing? He helps them understand just who the Messiah is, and the aspects of the Messiah they are not familiar with. He is showing them, how the life of Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises of the prophets. These are portions every Christian should be familiar with.

Isaiah 53	Psalm 22	Daniel 9:24-26	Isaiah 50	Zechariah	Deuteronomy 18
Isaiah 53:5 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.	**Psalms 22:16** 16 For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of evil-doers have enclosed me; they pierced my hands and my feet.	**Daniel 9:26** 26 And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.	**Isaiah 50:6** 6 I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.	**Zechariah 11:13** 13 Then the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD, to the potter.	**Deuteronomy 18:18-19** 18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

Paul himself was a Pharisee, learning under Gemayel, one of the chief teachers of Jewish law in history.

[1] The **Egnatian Way** (known in Latin as the *Via Egnatia*) was a critical ancient Roman highway constructed in the 2nd century BC. It served as the primary eastern extension of the famous **Via Appia** (Appian Way). While the Via Appia ran south from Rome to the heel of Italy's boot (Brindisi), travelers and military legions would then cross the Adriatic Sea by boat to pick up the Via Egnatia and continue all the way to the eastern edges of the empire.

But, in spite of all that, Paul could not understand, nor did he see the *suffering Messiah* of the Jewish prophets. Namely that of Isaiah 53. Psalm 22. Daniel 9, and Isaiah 50. He did not know that the Messiah was first to come and suffer and die for the sins of the world. And then, at his second coming, to judge the world. Only later, after, Paul chose to persecute Christians, did Jesus reveal himself to Paul. And Paul finally understood God's plan for the Messiah, the Christ. How the Messiah should first suffer and die for the sins of the world, and then return a second time to judge the world.

This is what Paul presents for the next three weeks. In the synagogues of Thessalonica, God opens the hearts of some, both Jews and Gentiles to hear and accept this message. This becomes the church in Thessalonica, which later Paul addresses. *First Thessalonians*[2] and *2nd Thessalonians.* The new believers had questions on the first and second coming of Jesus, which Paul addresses in both letters.

Verses 4-9

Some believed: Not everyone is going to accept the message of the Gospel, that is the case here and the same in our day. Our job is to present the message of the Good News, it's the Holy Spirit's job to open the hearts of the listener. A **great multitude**, means a sizable number accepted along with **not a few** chief women, so this became yeast of the initial church.

The Jews which believed not: As in other cities, Jews rejected the Good News of Jesus the "Suffering Messiah" and turned against Paul. Progress was being made, as more people accepted Jesus, but the Jews basically hired a mob, **lewd fellows of a baser sort**, and made a tumult against Paul. Paul, it seems knowing what was happening had already left, since the group was trying to seize him. They came to the **house of Jason**, looking for Paul, not find him, they pulled out Jason and brought him before the magistrates. This might have been the future house church, where the believers met.

The charge against Jason and the others was: a political charge against Caesar, making it seem Paul was a political revolutionary. They were playing off the anti-Jewish sentiment in Rome, it was during this time, AD 49, the Jews were expelled from Rome, during the time of Claudius[3]. Claiming Paul and the early church opposed the decrees of Caesar, they were hoping to get the city on their side against Paul and the believers. Later in Acts 18, we meet Aquila and Priscilla, Jews expelled from Rome, who were believers.

Since Paul had already left the city, probably with the promise to not return, Jason had to secure his and the other freedom with a pledge of security, before they were let go.

Paul and Silas in Berea

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.

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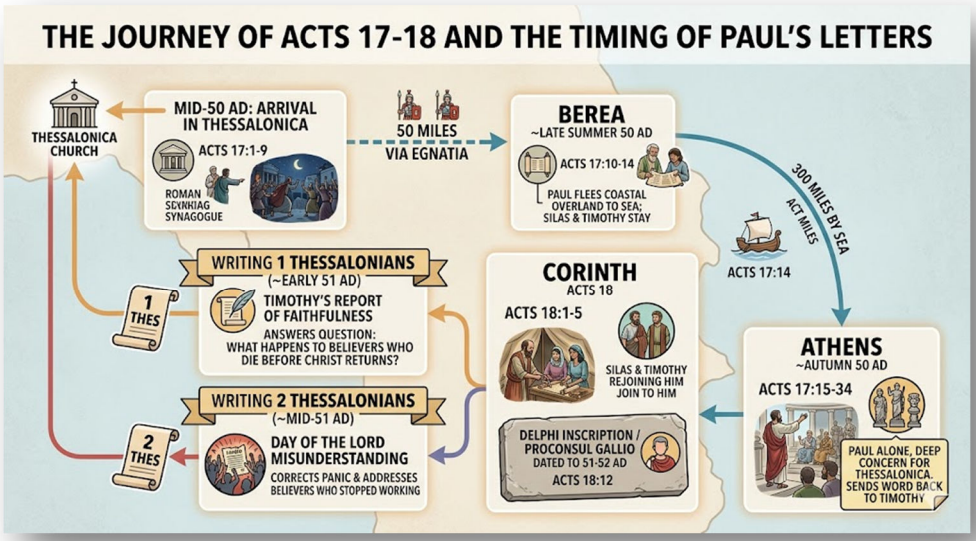
[2] Most New Testament scholars agree that **1 Thessalonians** and **2 Thessalonians** were written very early in the timeline of the early Church, specifically around **50–51 AD**.
This makes 1 Thessalonians one of the very earliest books written in the entire New Testament—likely predating all four Gospels. Paul wrote both letters from the city of **Corinth** during his second missionary journey, just months after his sudden departure from Thessalonica described in Acts 17.

[3] **The "Chrestus" Riots:** The Roman historian Suetonius wrote that Claudius expelled the Jews because they *"constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus."* ***What this actually means:*** *Most modern historians agree that "Chrestus" was a common Roman misspelling of Christus (Christ). What Claudius was actually witnessing was the explosive arrival of early Christianity in Rome.*

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.



The brothers: These are the saints, the Church birthed by Paul's evangelism, now after they are established, they are sending Paul out. Paul will address them again in his First and Second Epistle.
Berea: Was a smaller landlocked city as opposed to Thessalonica, with an estimated population of 15 to 20,000 in Paul's day, compared with a 100,000 of Thessalonica.
Jewish Synagogue: Paul's kept the same routine, first he would present the Messianic prophecy and events in the life of Jesus, how they were fulfilled.
Examining the scriptures daily: The difference between the Jews of Berea and Thessalonians is the sincerity of approach to Paul's message. They actually compared what Paul said, to what the scriptures said. When Paul said the Messiah was to suffer for sins, they actually read Isaiah 53 and other scriptures, Jesus did in fact fulfill them, **Many…believed.**
Jews from Thessalonica: When word spread, because there was travel and family between cities, the ones who ran Paul out of town, used the same methods in Berea. They caused a commotion, claiming Paul was violating Caeser edicts and inciting rebellion. They **sent Paul off** and let Timothy and Silas finish establishing the believers in the faith.
Athens: From Berea, it was 315 miles, by land alone it would have taken 2-3 weeks, so he probably took the boat 300 miles to Piraeus (the port of Athens) and that would have taken 3-5 days depending on wind conditions.

In the 1st century AD, Athens was a much smaller, quiet provincial town. Historians estimate its permanent urban population was only about **10,000 to 20,000 people**.
While its population was small, its cultural footprint remained massive. Rome had conquered Greece militarily, but Athens had conquered Rome culturally. It functioned primarily as a **university town and a tourist destination** for the Roman elite, celebrated for its philosophy, architecture, and prestigious history.
Command for Silas and Timothy: Paul was God's general on the spiritual front lines, he was spearheading the charge into the front lines of demonic controlled territory. Paul need his staff to help in the work, it during this period, from Athens to Corinth, that Paul writes 1st and 2nd Thessalonians.

Paul in Athens

16 Now **while Paul was waiting** for them at Athens, **his spirit was provoked** within him as he saw that the city was full **of idols**.
17 So **he reasoned in the synagogue** with the Jews and the devout persons, and **in the marketplace** every day with those who **happened** to be there.
18 Some of **the Epicurean** and **Stoic philosophers** also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbler wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the

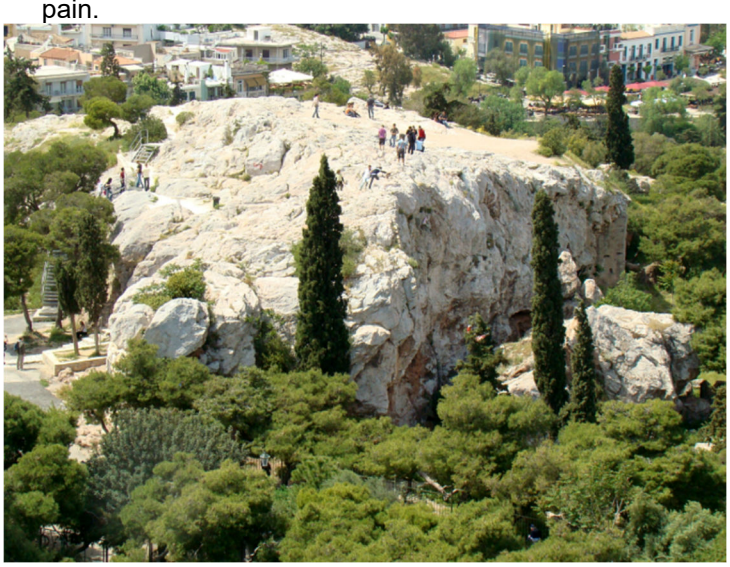
resurrection.
19 And they took him and brought him to **the Areopagus**, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?
20 For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.”
21 Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

Paul was waiting: Requesting for Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens, he was waiting. Looking around the city, his inner **spirit** was **provoked** by the idolatry of the people. There is no mention of Paul being enthralled by the beautiful artwork, but by the idolatry, he could not just sit idle. Paul knew the source behind the **idols** was demonic, he tells this to the church at Corinth;

1 Corinthians 10:19-21
19 What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?
20 No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

Paul was engaged in spiritual warfare against Demons as he brought the Gospel forward in Athens,

He reasoned in the synagogue: The first place Paul goes is the synagogue, since the Jews were familiar with scripture, he went to present the “Suffering” Messiah. Hoping to reach Jews who open to God’s word. But Paul also went to the **marketplace**, the Agora, this is where the public interacted with each other, its here where Paul allows God to bring the people who need to hear the message. Those **who happened** to be there.
Epicurean and Stoic Philosophers: Athens at this time, was much like a university city for the Romans, it was not great city of its past, but many Romans toured it and philosophers lived there who love to engage in discussion on all the issues. These were two main schools of thought in the first century, each trying to figure out, “what is the purpose of life?”.
The Epicureans: Taught that the chief end of man was the avoidance of pain. Epicureans were materialists-they did not deny the existence of God, but they believed He did not become involved with the affairs of men. When a person died, they believed his body and soul disintegrated.
The Stoics: Taught self-mastery—that the goal in life was to reach a place of indifference to pleasure or pain.



This babbler: The philosophers looked down on Paul’s teaching, the literally called him a “seed picker” someone who picks up scraps of philosophy. **Others** who heard Paul, were also in the marketplace, since people were gathering to buy and sell wares, just like today’s marketplace. Jesus and the resurrection was a foreign concept, this was the first time they heard this. Today, many people still have not heard nor do they understand Jesus and the resurrection, its our job to bring the Gospel forward.
Areopagus: Literally the “hill of Aries”, god of war, also known as Mars Hill, Mars being the Roman equivalent of Aries. This was basically a philosophical court in the days of Paul, where they would examine the teachings of individual to see if they were acceptable for the public. Since, Paul was bringing new ideas, ideas which were new and foreign, they wanted to hear first hand what he was teaching. Athens was very much a learning center, even for Romans, who were received Greek philosophy in their upbringing. So Romans came and toured this city in Paul’s day. Students from Rome would come to Athens and learn about the purpose of life.

Paul Addresses the Areopagus

22 So Paul, **standing in the midst** of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are **very religious.**
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.
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,
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.
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,
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,
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.'
29 Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.
30 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,
31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."
32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this."
33 So Paul went out from their midst.
34 But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

The story behind the altar **"To an Unknown God"** (*Agnostos Theos*) is one of the most fascinating intersections of secular history and biblical narrative. It stretches back roughly 600 years before Paul ever set foot in Athens. Baptist Messenger

The Historical Background: The Plague of Athens

According to ancient historians like Diogenes Laertius, around the 6th century BC, a devastating plague swept through Athens. The citizens panicked and offered sacrifices to every single deity in their massive pantheon, but the death toll kept rising. None of their known gods were answering. Wascana Fellowship - Wor... + 1

Desperate, the city elders sent a ship to Crete to fetch a famous poet and spiritual sage named **Epimenides.** Patheos

Upon arriving, Epimenides reasoned that if all the known gods had been appeased to no avail, the plague must be the work of a god so great, powerful, or elusive that the Athenians didn't even know his name. To fix this, Epimenides devised a test: BibleHistory.Net

- **The Test:** He brought a flock of healthy, hungry sheep to the top of the **Areopagus** (Mars Hill) and let them loose. Naturally, hungry sheep keep walking to graze. Epimenides instructed the elders to follow them. Reddit + 1
- **The Altars:** Wherever a sheep chose to lie down, it was seen as a sign that *this* specific spot was sacred to the unnamed deity. At each location, the Athenians sacrificed the sheep and built an anonymous altar with no name inscribed upon it—an altar **"To an Unknown God."** Reddit + 1

The plague stopped within days. The altars were left standing throughout Attica for centuries as a memorial to this mysterious deliverance, a fact later verified by other ancient writers like Pausanias and Philostratus. Wascana Fellowship - Wor... + 1

Paul, **standing in the midst** now sets the template of evangelism, he speaks to each audience on their terms, without sacrificing the Truth. His goal is to present Jesus as the Messiah, but he looks for bridges of thought, to help his listeners understand the Good News of the Gospel. In **Areopagus** speech, he first connects the religious nature of Athens, saying "**you are very religious**". When Paul was touring Athens, he saw the altar to the "**unknown god**", Paul connects the unknown god, to the God of the Bible.

Paul throughout his speech, is making connections and drawing parallels of thinking and life, to help his audience understand the God of the Bible. He want them to understand His plan of redemption through Jesus. This is God's textbook illustration on how to advance the Gospel.

The God who made the world: Where did life and matter come from? What is the source of our being? This was a question the Greek thinkers were constantly addressing, so Paul used their very questions to introduce the God of the Bible; He is the one who made the world. Paul is giving God an identity, God is the cause of the universe.

Does not live in Temple: Many felt their god's lived in these temples, Paul is contrasting the God of the

Bible, from the Greek gods, Paul is not trying to placate them, but he wants them to know the truth.

Give to all mankind life and breath: We all breath and are existing, another connection, the God of the Bible, the God Paul is presenting is the source of our breath and being. He is not dependent on us, but we are on him.

From one man every nation: Where did we come from? Are we evolved? What is our source? Paul again answers that question, from one man; Adam all humanity came into existence. The nations of the earth are all descendants of that one man.

He is not far from each one of us: Humanity, such as the Stoics and the Epicureans seek God, feeling their way, seeking Him, but not knowing him. He is a God, who wants a relationship with His creation.

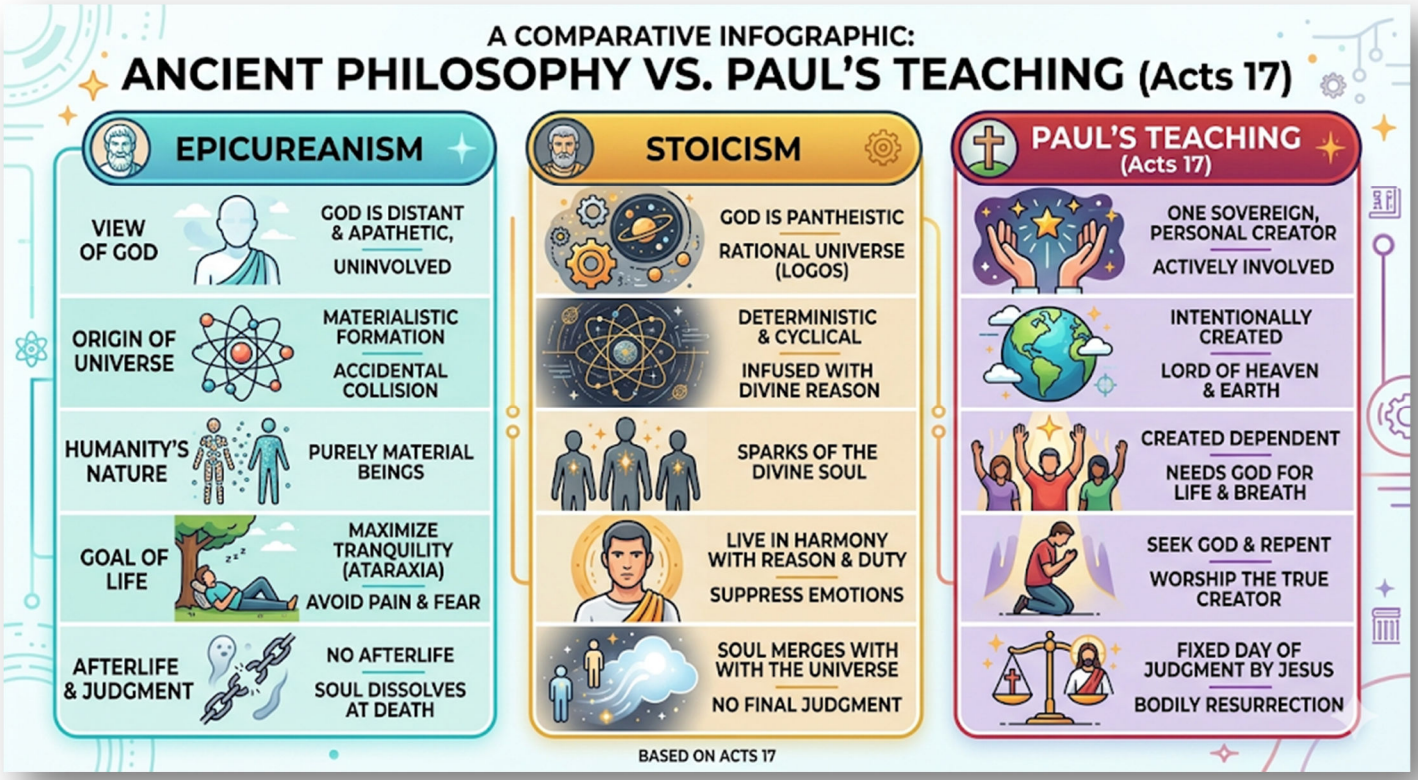
Your own poets: Now Paul, using their own Poets words shows how they have a parallel thought process; quoting from Epimenides of Crete says your thinkers have said the same, "In him we live and move and have our being" and Aratus of Cilicia wrote "For we indeed his offspring". Paul is demonstrating that his presentation is not off base, but he is correcting them to the right path of the God of the scripture as opposed to Greek theology.

Times of ignorance: Paul is moving his audience forward to the Gospel, in the past, days of pagan idolatry, such as the worship of Zeus and other false religions. Now God is going to judge and people need to Repent (*metanoeō*), meaning to *think differently* or *afterwards*, that is, *reconsider* (morally to *feel compunction*): - repent.

Fixed a day: What is the "End Game" what is it all about, again this is question his Greek audience discussed, Paul now tells them the end game; **God will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed**. The person is Jesus of Nazareth, his resurrection proved his identity.

Some mocked - Some of the philosophers derided him. The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead was believed by none of the Greeks; it seemed incredible; and they regarded it as so absurd as not to admit of an argument, It has nor been uncommon for even professed philosophers to mock at the doctrines of religion, and to meet the arguments of Christianity with a sneer. The Epicureans particularly would be likely to deride this, as they denied altogether any future state. It is not improbable that this derision by the Epicureans produced such a disturbance as to break off Paul's discourse, as that of Stephen had been by the clamor of the Jews, Act_7:54.

And others said - Probably some of the Stoics. The doctrine of a future state was not denied by them; and the fact, affirmed by Paul, that one had been raised up from the dead, would appear more plausible to them, and it might be a matter worth inquiry to ascertain whether the alleged fact did not furnish a new argument for their views. They therefore proposed to examine this further at some future time. That the inquiry was prosecuted any further does not appear probable, for:
(1) No church was organized at Athens.
(2) There is no account of any future interview with Paul.
(3) He departed almost immediately from them, Act_18:1. People who defer inquiry on the subject of religion seldom find the favorable period arrive. Those who propose to examine its doctrines at a future time often do it to avoid the inconvenience of becoming Christians now, and as a plausible and easy way of rejecting the gospel altogether, without appearing to be rude, or to give offence.


A COMPARATIVE INFOGRAPHIC:
ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY VS. PAUL'S TEACHING (Acts 17)
EPICUREANISM
VIEW OF GOD
GOD IS DISTANT & APATHETIC,
UNINVOLVED
ORIGIN OF UNIVERSE
MATERIALISTIC FORMATION
ACCIDENTAL COLLISION
HUMANITY'S NATURE
PURELY MATERIAL BEINGS
GOAL OF LIFE
MAXIMIZE TRANQUILITY (ATARAXIA)
AVOID PAIN & FEAR
AFTERLIFE & JUDGMENT
NO AFTERLIFE
SOUL DISSOLVES AT DEATH
STOICISM
GOD IS PANTHEISTIC
RATIONAL UNIVERSE (LOGOS)
DETERMINISTIC & CYCLICAL
INFUSED WITH DIVINE REASON
SPARKS OF THE DIVINE SOUL
LIVE IN HARMONY WITH REASON & DUTY
SUPPRESS EMOTIONS
SOUL MERGES WITH WITH THE UNIVERSE
NO FINAL JUDGMENT
PAUL'S TEACHING (Acts 17)
ONE SOVEREIGN, PERSONAL CREATOR
ACTIVELY INVOLVED
INTENTIONALLY CREATED
LORD OF HEAVEN & EARTH
CREATED DEPENDENT
NEEDS GOD FOR LIFE & BREATH
SEEK GOD & REPENT
WORSHIP THE TRUE CREATOR
FIXED DAY OF JUDGMENT BY JESUS
BODILY RESURRECTION
BASED ON ACTS 17