

## Acts of the Apostles – Paul and the Spread of the Church

### *New Testament Survey – Lesson 17 (Part 5)*

Recently one of our daughters had a week-long experience at a debate camp that she did *not* want to go to. She was missing a family vacation so she could work round the clock among a bunch of folks most of whom she did not know. Many were rather rough around the edges, and the experience was long and hard on her.

One of my suggestions to help her get through the week was to find some faith songs that particularly spoke to her. I assured her that songs of trust in God and songs of praise and worship are tools of the Lord to minister to us in the midst of some of the worst experiences of life. (Aren't many of the Psalms such songs?)

I have found those songs of my youth, have stuck with me for decades. They may not have a current melody. They may seem almost a bit simple in their lyrics, but they still minister deep in my soul. Over the decades, they have become ingrained as testimonies of God's faithfulness in the midst of difficult times.

I was in the middle of a particularly long week when I received an email from my dear friend and brother-in-law Kevin Roberts. He sent a few others and me a marvelous quote from C. S. Lewis:

Hardships often prepare ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny.

The quote hit the spot. It reminded me of an old OLD Amy Grant song, that, when I was a young man, was on my list of songs for encouragement: *Faith Walking People*. The lyrics were those of a teenager, as opposed to the eloquence of Lewis, an Oxford Don, but they spoke to me then, and have ever since.

Well it seems with you, there is something new every time I turn around.  
Oh I never really know quite what to expect, but it won't keep me down.  
'Cause I know you bring, each and everything, just to teach me how to live.  
And the secret of it all is trusting in you and the wisdom you give.  
Say good-bye to the feelings, 'cause the feelings go away.  
Say good-bye to the people, 'cause the people never stay.  
Say good-bye to the future, if it blinds you to today.  
Say good-bye to the reasoning that's standing in the way.  
We've got to break away to be faith-walking people.

That's a song that has come to my mind and heart many times in life. I was never too fond of the lyric about saying good-bye to the reasoning, because I believe in a reasonable faith, but I suspect Amy was not writing on that philosophical level!

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Her comment was all too often, the world paints one picture, and we need to see the picture of faith.

Songs have ministered to God’s people for centuries. Paul and Silas sang hymns from prison in Philippi, and I am certain that was not a one-time occurrence. In times of difficulties, songs can speak to heart and mind. God ministers in the midst of our praise and worship, because they draw us before God, “before the sanctuary” in Old Testament-speak. As the Psalmist said,

Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name... strength and beauty are in his sanctuary (Ps. 96:1-6).

We continue our study of Paul’s second missionary trip, after his release from prison in Philippi. We see Paul going through even more difficulties, but he never complains. Though we do not know the lyrics, he approaches everything with a song in his heart before a faithful God who works through hardships to bring forth Paul’s extraordinary destiny.

The events we study in this lesson likely occurred from mid-49 to early 50BC.<sup>1</sup>

## **THE TRIP CONTINUES**

After the great success in Philippi, the conversion of Lydia and her household, the jailer and his household as well as others we do not have stories for, Paul and Silas left for other parts of Europe. Luke seems to remain behind in Philippi for we see his language return to the third person. Luke writes, “When *they* had seen the brothers, *they* encouraged them and departed” (Acts 16:40). Luke then writes of the continued mission, “Now when *they* had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, *they* came to Thessalonica...” (Acts 17:1). So at this point, Paul’s mission team included Silas and Timothy. Luke apparently stayed behind at Philippi.

Thessalonica was a major city in Macedonia. The ancient geographer Strabo (c.64 BC – c.25AD), writing a couple of decades before Paul’s journey, noted it was the most populous city in Macedonia,<sup>2</sup> later calling it, “the metropolis of what is now

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<sup>1</sup> A good discussion of this dating is found in Shulam, Joseph, *The Jewish Roots of Acts 16-28*, (Netivyan 2012), at 941.

<sup>2</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, Bk 7 at 7.4. Demographers set the population between 65,000 and 100,000. Shulam, at 926.

Macedonia.”<sup>3</sup> In Thessalonica, about 75 miles from Philippi (scholars reckon that a five day walk)<sup>4</sup>, Paul started by going to the synagogue, “as was his custom” (Acts 17:2). For three weeks in a row, Paul went. Each time, Paul worked from the Old Testament explaining and showing why the Messiah (“Christ” in Greek) had to suffer, die, and rise from the dead. Paul told the Jews of Jesus, proclaiming him as the Messiah. Paul never sought to appeal simply to emotion. Paul presented well-reasoned arguments for his faith. Some of the Jews “were persuaded” as were a great many Greeks.

Paul was supported in his work there by gifts that came from the church in Philippi. Paul later wrote to the Philippians mentioning their “partnership in the gospel *from the first day*” (Phil. 1:5). Paul later spoke of their specific kindness at this time saying, “even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again” (Phil. 4:16). Paul did not rely on the support of the Philippians alone. Paul, Silas, and Timothy also worked “night and day” so as not to burden the new believers (I Thes. 2:9).

As we have seen in other places, the success of God’s work among the Greeks incited jealousy among disbelieving Jews who worked up the crowd. Thinking Paul was in the house of one named Jason, a mob descended upon the house. When Paul was not found there, the mob grabbed Jason and some other converts and took them before the city authorities. Arguing that the Christians were traitors who had a king (named Jesus) in the place of Caesar, the mob convinced the authorities to arrest the believers. After posting bond, Jason and the others were released.

The term Luke uses for the security Jason posted (*labontes to hikanon* – λαμβόντες τὸ ἱκανόν) indicates that money was paid, and also that Jason gave assurance that Paul and Silas would leave the city.<sup>5</sup> Evidently, Timothy was exempt from this requirement, which would explain why Timothy soon came back to the city, to encourage and minister to the church in Paul’s absence (1 Thes. 3:2).

After posting this security, the church sent Paul and Silas away from Thessalonica by night. Aside from common sense that dictates beginning a journey at night was

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, at 7.21.

<sup>4</sup> Darrell Bock, Acts, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Baker Academic 2007) at 550)

<sup>5</sup> Bruce, F. F., *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, (Eerdmans 1990), at 372; Witherington, Ben, *The Acts of the Apostles, A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Eerdmans 1998) at 509. See also Paul’s reference to being “torn away,” in spite of his desire to stay in 1 Thes. 2:14-18, and the comment in Bock, at 553.

unsafe and extra difficult in a age before modern electricity and lighting, there another indication this was a hasty decision. Jewish rabbis spoke quite disparagingly of beginning a journey at night. It was not only dangerous (unbecoming to a sage or wise rabbi) but it also gave the appearance of immoral intentions, which was even more unbecoming to a rabbi! The Jewish Talmud noted,

We have learnt in accord with Rabbi Shila: If one starts out on a journey before *keri'ath ha-geber* ["the cock crowing"], his blood comes upon his own head! Rabbi Josiah says: [He should wait] until he has crowed twice.<sup>6</sup>

Paul referenced back to this ill-commenced journey in his letter back to the Thessalonian believers saying,

But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us (1 Thes. 2:17-18).

The missionaries were taken to Berea, about 45-50 miles west-southwest of Thessalonica.<sup>7</sup>

F. F. Bruce made a well-reasoned argument that Paul likely planned on staying on the road he was on (the *Via Egnatia*), which continued west to the Adriatic where ships sailed to Rome. In Romans 1:13 ("I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented)") and 15:22 ("This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you"), Paul told the Romans he had wanted to come to them.<sup>8</sup>

Berea was not a small town, although it was not as large as Thessalonica. Pauline scholar Rainer Riesner believes that Paul was planning only a temporary stay there, planning to return to Thessalonica once things calmed down.<sup>9</sup> Riesner believes that is part of Paul's meaning in his 2 Thessalonians 2:18 statement, "we wanted to come to you...but Satan hindered us."

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<sup>6</sup> *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*, (Soncino Press 1974), Yoma 21a.

<sup>7</sup> Bock at 555.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce, at 373.

<sup>9</sup> Riesner, Rainer, *Paul's Early Period – Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology*, (Eerdmans 1998), at 360.



One must wonder if Paul was frustrated to be taken off of the main road, south to the town of Berea. Maybe Paul was humming Amy Grant's song along the way, "Well, it seems with you, there is something new every time I turn around! I never know what to expect, but it won't keep me down!" The interesting add is that had Paul been able to see the future, he would have discerned that just about the time he was due to get to Rome, the Emperor Claudius was expelling Jews from Rome because of internal disputing over Jesus! This might be alluded to by Luke in Acts 18:2 when he added the fact that in Corinth,

a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife **Priscilla**, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome (Acts 18:2).

So instead of Rome, Paul went to Berea, and from there to Athens and Corinth, cities Paul would have missed otherwise.

Have you ever heard of a church named after Berea? There are many! The reason why is the account of the Bereans in Acts 17. Luke says that the Jews in Berea "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" (Acts 17:11). Jews and Greeks (especially Greek women of high standing) put their faith in Christ.

When the Thessalonian Jews heard of Paul's Berean presence, they came into Berea and tried working up those crowds also. Consider how intensely Paul was despised by some of his enemies. The distance from Thessalonica to Berea was about 40 miles, roughly a three day walk. How many people would spend six days of our lives (round trip time) just to express our anger and animosity against someone or something? It certainly implies a passion about Paul and the Christian faith. Undoubtedly, Paul found solace from a source beyond physical comfort as he left Silas and Timothy in Berea and was ushered on a boat to Athens by some Berean brothers. After arriving in Athens, Paul sent the brothers back with instructions for Timothy and Silas to come as soon as possible.

Upon arrival, Paul was alone in Athens. It would be marvelous to know what was going through Paul's head! Athens was not just another town. It was one of the oldest cities of Paul's day. For nearly one thousand years, Athens had given the world culture and education. Athens was the birthplace of philosophy, theater, and democracy. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., while the rest of the world was ruled by kings and tyrants, Athens was at least ruled by an elected council (albeit elected by the rich and nobles from among their own ranks). They ruled from the Areopagus ("Mars Hill"). By 508 B.C. all citizens were given a voice in government. Democracy was born!

In the 400's, the famous Parthenon was built on the Acropolis in Athens. That same century, Socrates (c.471-399 B.C.) brought his voice to Athens teaching and questioning others as the gadfly of the city. Socrates had a number of students who took philosophy further. Plato (c.424-c.348 B.C.) and Xenophon (c.431-355 B.C.) were two of his more noteworthy followers. Plato laid foundations of the West that still undergird much of western culture and thought. Plato's impact was strong both personally and through his student Aristotle (384-322 B.C.).

Aristotle wrote on physics, metaphysics, poetry, music, theater, logic, rhetoric, politics, government, ethics, theology, biology, and zoology – all from Athens, moving there when he was 18. Aristotle was tutor to Alexander the Great, one of history's greatest military geniuses. To this day, Athens is referred to as the cradle of European civilization.

Athens was also a pagan city, its name coming from the goddess Athena, who also had a temple in her honor on the Acropolis. There were many temples set up in Athens, both on the Acropolis and in the agora (marketplace).

Paul must have had a myriad of thoughts, as he was alone in this historical mecca of philosophy and culture. We know Paul was well versed in writers of Athens because he is able to quote them as needed in his conversations.

Athens was a brand new experience for Paul. First, it is the first recorded missionary account of him alone. We know he spent time in Cilicia and Syria after his conversion, but we have no accounting of what happened in those years.

In the other cities, Paul and his companions started in synagogues or places of Jewish prayer, speaking to the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks. Paul would use Scriptures to teach Jesus as Messiah and Lord. Paul had just finished reasoning from the Scriptures with Jews and Greeks in Berea. But now that Paul was in Athens, he did something different. Luke explained that Paul reasoned in the synagogues, but he also tells us that Paul went daily to the agora (marketplace) to reason with the pagans there. This was not a place where Paul could reason from the Scriptures that Jesus was the awaited and promised Messiah. The pagans in the market would not have had any regard for Jewish Scriptures. So Paul had to use another approach in the agora.

The agora was a long area of shops, food stalls, schools, and councils. It was the center of the town's life and the ruins can be found at the foot of the Acropolis. In the agora, Paul came across the leading philosophers of the day. These were "Epicureans" and "Stoics." In a manner reminiscent of Socrates, Paul went about the market place and began to engage the Epicureans and Stoics in discussion. To best understand Luke's details, we need to know a bit about each of these philosophical schools.

### *Epicureans*

Paul's speech was to "an educated and rather philosophical pagan [audience] without contacts with the synagogue."<sup>10</sup> The Epicureans derived their name from the Athenian philosopher Epicurus (341-270 B.C.). Philosophers call Epicureans "materialists." By that term, philosophers are referring to the general Epicurean belief that matter (material) was necessary for existence. There was no real belief by the Epicureans in non-matter (or "incorporeal") entities.<sup>11</sup> To the Epicureans, even the soul was formed of matter.

Not surprisingly, Epicureans believed that one could only accept truth that came from reasoning based solidly on what was evident. Since they perceived reason to be an inherent part of the material soul of man, it was deemed reliable if used

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<sup>10</sup> Witherington at 511.

<sup>11</sup> The exception to this was the Epicurean acceptance of "void" as a concept that existed, although not in a material form. For a good overview and selected source readings in Epicurean philosophy, see Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy – Introductory Readings* (Hackett Publishing Co. 2d Ed., 1997).

properly. They believed that man's happiness or misery was based on the exercise of reason.<sup>12</sup>

In the area of ethics, reason again played a prominent role. A precise understanding of the nature of man was the key to "a true conception of the good life for man."<sup>13</sup> Epicureans believed that pleasure or happiness was the highest goal of life. This gave birth to the modern usage of "epicurean" as a word expressing "pleasure-seeking, hedonistic...pampered, luxurious."<sup>14</sup> But Epicureans were not so hedonistic themselves! Epicurus wrote that reasoning through the consequences helps one understand:

When we say, then, that pleasure is the end and aim, we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal or the pleasures of sensuality, as we are understood to do by some through ignorance, prejudice, or willful misrepresentation. By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul. It is not an unbroken succession of drinking-bouts and of revelry, not sexual love, not the enjoyment of the fish and other delicacies of a luxurious table, which produces a pleasant life; it is sober reasoning, searching out the grounds of every choice and avoidance, and banishing those beliefs through which the greatest tumults take possession of the soul.<sup>15</sup>

Epicurus taught that one should live simply without a great deal of expectation and one could then more readily enjoy whatever life threw at you.

Epicurus did believe in the existence of gods, but "not as the multitude believe."<sup>16</sup> Common sense taught of gods and their true nature, which Epicurus believed to be good. He also believed the gods were interested in their own good pleasure. The gods were not, however, interested or involved in humans. Epicurus also believed that death ended one's existence. He taught that there was no afterlife with reward or punishment from the gods.

### *Stoics*

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* at xviii.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus American Edition (Oxford 1996) at 484. It also is used in more than one grocery store chains!

<sup>15</sup> Letter to Menoeceus contained in Diogenes Laertius's Lives of Eminent Philosophers at 10.131. Loeb Classical Library edition translated by R. D. Hicks.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* at 10.123.



The Stoics were also materialists like the Epicureans. In the matters set forth earlier under “Epicureans,” the Stoics held very similar views.<sup>17</sup> Diogenes Laertius (who most scholars place in the third century<sup>18</sup>) wrote on the lives of key Stoic philosophers.

The father of the Stoic movement was the Greek Zeno (334-262 B.C.). Once Zeno moved to Athens, he paced on a covered walkway/colonnade at the northwest side of the agora, where he taught his philosophy. The Greek word for this colonnade was *Stoa Poikile* (στοά ποικιλή); hence the name for his followers, “Stoics.”

Zeno himself was “sour” and frowned a great deal. He was famous for his “one liners” that were supposed to make people think. For example, it was Zeno who said, “The reason why we have two ears and only one mouth is that we may listen the more and talk the less.”<sup>19</sup>

Stoics tried to avoid being emotional. Passion and emotion were considered “an irrational and unnatural movement in the soul.”<sup>20</sup> The emotions were divided into four groups: grief, fear, desire and pleasure. Stoics would have loved Star Trek’s Mr. Spock.

Stoics taught that God was “a living being, immortal, rational, perfect or intelligent in happiness, admitting nothing evil [into him], taking providential care of the world and all that therein is.” Their view was basically pantheistic as they saw God as the “world-soul.”<sup>21</sup>

### *Paul*

Paul was discussing his faith with various philosophers of the Epicurean and Stoic schools. Paul provoked enough interest for some others to ask what he was talking about. While some responded with derogatory name-calling, others responded more substantively.<sup>22</sup> They noted that Paul was “speaking of foreign

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<sup>17</sup> Philosophy students will find certain distinctions that do not matter in our discussions here. For example, the Stoics believed in four kinds of “incorporeal” entities: void (like the Epicureans), place, time and “things said.” See Inwood at xvi.

<sup>18</sup> Diogenes Laertius, Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 1 at xvi.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* Vol 2, VII.23.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* at VII.110

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* at VII.146; Bruce, at 377.

<sup>22</sup> The ESV translates the name calling as “babblers” (“What does this babler wish to say?” Acts 17:18). The Greek is *spermologos* (σπερμολόγος), and it literally means a “seed-picker.” When

divinities” (Acts 17:18). This perception of “foreign divinities” came about because Paul was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

The Athenians took Paul to the Areopagus counsel for a hearing. Luke noted that the Athenians spent an inordinate amount of time “in nothing except telling or hearing something new” (Acts 17:21). Paul certainly had something new!

The council asked Paul to explain the “strange things” in his new teaching. That was all the open door Paul needed! Luke noted,

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus,<sup>23</sup> said...

Before we examine Paul’s speech, we should examine his stance! Paul assumed the orator’s position.<sup>24</sup> Accomplished orators would strike a standing pose, typically holding out a hand as they gave their presentation. This is in contrast to Paul’s Jewish training. In the synagogue, they would stand to read Scripture, but sit to teach (Luke 4:16-21). Paul was a Jew to Jews, but became a Greek to the Greeks, and a philosopher to the philosophers, so that he might win some to Christ. (“I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” 1 Cor. 9:22).

Paul began his explanation noting the devotion of the Greeks. Standing on the Areopagus commands great views of Athens. One view is down to the agora, where one would find idols galore. A second view is up towards the Acropolis with its temples to Athena and others. A huge temple to Zeus was also easily visible nearby. In the face of these temples, Paul began,

Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found an altar also with this inscription, “To the unknown god.” What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you (Acts 17:22-23).

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used in this manner it conveyed an “imagery of persons whose communication lacks sophistication and seems to pick up scraps of information here and there” as a “scrapmonger” or, “scavenger.” “Σπερμολόγος,” Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (U. of Chi. 1979), 2d Ed.

<sup>23</sup> Many consider Paul to be standing on the hill called the Areopagus. Other scholars point out that the ruling council of Athens was called by the name of the Areopagus because they originally met there. By the time of Paul, these scholars point out, the Areopagus council likely met in the *agora* (marketplace). See Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles, A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Eerdmans 1998) at 515.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* at 517.

Paul began with a point of familiarity and contact. Paul used the altar to an unknown god to position himself into that area where the Athenians had already admitted there were likely aspects of divinity beyond their own knowledge.

Paul then dove straight into the character and nature of God in a way that would not have caused alarm to the philosophers around him.<sup>25</sup> Paul explained the divine power and nature of God.

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything (Acts 17:24).

This statement itself was not foreign to the Stoics. The Stoics believed that, “God is one and the same with Reason, Fate, and Zeus; he is also called by many other names. In the beginning he was by himself; he transformed the whole of substance... He created first of all the four elements, fire, water, air, earth.”<sup>26</sup> Greek philosophers frequently taught that the gods did not live in man-made temples.<sup>27</sup>

Paul made a very logical statement that more and more philosophers were coming to realize made sense (even apart from Paul’s argument). Namely, in spite of all the beautiful temples, anyone who created the world and everything in it did not really need man’s help. The rational approach Paul used in this argument was precisely what the Epicureans and Stoics believed was the proper way to consider such issues.

Paul then began to sharpen his focus on the relation between God and mankind. Indeed, a creator God is one thing, but what interaction with humanity is involved? Paul explained,

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<sup>25</sup> Paul made points of contact in this speech, relating to the Greek philosophers in language and approach that would all seem familiar to them. That is not to say that Paul had abandoned scripture. While Paul never quoted scripture (which would have no impact on these philosophers) Paul’s speech was firmly rooted in Isaiah 42. In Isaiah 42 we read of God “who created the heavens ... gives breath to the people on it.” This same passage speaks of God making his people (which would include Paul) “a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind.” God also speaks in Isaiah 42 of his historic patience, “For a long time I have held my peace” which was coming to an end.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* at VII.136-137.

<sup>27</sup> Euripides, *Fragments*, 968.

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 (Acts 17:25).

Paul then took it further, establishing the purpose for the Creator God's work,

That they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him (Acts 17:27).

At this point Paul has finally taken a sharp deviation from the Greek philosophers. Both Epicureans and Stoics alike taught that the chief goal of life was achieving happiness by moderating expectations. Paul proclaims the purpose of life is fulfilling the Creator's design to know God. For Paul, it was simple logic. If God made man in his image, then surely man has the responsibility, over and against all other things, to divine God's true nature.

To support his argument, Paul made an appeal to Greek poets. As Paul did so, he shifted from third person ("their dwelling place... they should seek... they might feel") to first person plural ("us/we"). Paul urged the Athenians to accept that,

He is actually not far from each one of us, for, "In him we live and move and have our being;" as even some of your own poets have said, "For indeed we are his offspring" (Acts 17:28).

Paul was quoting from two different poets. We believe the first quote comes from Epimenides.<sup>28</sup> The second quote is from a poem by Aratus named "Phaenomena." (Aratus was from Cilicia, Paul's birthplace). The Aratus poem is a description of the stars and heavenly bodies, and it even included a bit of weather! The poem begins with a tribute to Zeus, "From Zeus let us begin; him do we mortals never leave unnamed; full of Zeus are all the streets and all the market-places of men; full is the sea and the havens thereof; always we have need of Zeus. For we also are his offspring..."<sup>29</sup> Of course Paul left out Zeus as the beginning of humanity. Paul had already told the Athenians that a God they had never been able to name was the source of creation.

Paul drew the natural conclusion from these Greek thinkers asserting that if we are God's offspring then we need to quit thinking of God as some image formed by man's imagination and represented by gold, silver or stone. Paul said that while God may have overlooked such ignorance before, God now was commanding

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<sup>28</sup> This original poem did not survive antiquity, so scholars cannot state for certain where it is from.

<sup>29</sup> Aratus, *Phaenomena*, Loeb Classical Library, translation by G. R. Mair, lines 1-5.

repentance. Paul explained that God has fixed a day for judging the world in righteousness by an appointed man (Jesus). God has given assurance on this judgment by raising Jesus from the dead.

Paul's proclamation on this matter brought snickering and mocking from some. Others expressed a desire to hear more. Even though many scholars equate this Athenian excursion as a "failure," it is certainly not fair to say so. Luke informed us that Paul went out from the Areopagus, but not alone!

Some men joined him and believed, among whom were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others" (Acts 17:34).

Church history records that Dionysius became the first bishop of Athens, later being martyred under the reign of Domitian (who reigned from 81-96).<sup>30</sup>

Next week, we read Paul's further Greek journey into Corinth!

## CONCLUSION

I am sure that I have changed a lot in the over thirty years have passed since first I first absorbed Amy's song about walking by faith. I am sure time has changed Amy as well. But the message of the song is as old as man, and one can hear echoes of it in Amy's most recent song of a few months ago, *If I Could See*. In the newer song, she makes the point, if we saw things from an eternal nature, then we would "never that doubt God is near," we would "watch the world," seeing God's hand and love in the events of life. And contemplating the end of life, knowing God's love and the markings on Jesus' hands and feet, we would "know that death is just a swinging door." There is something freeing about walking by faith!

## POINTS FOR HOME

1. From Thessalonica: "a mob ... dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities" (Acts 17:5-6).

Jason was arrested because of Paul and Paul's ministry. Life turns that way sometimes for Christians. We are sometimes found bearing challenges and problems because of the deeds of others. Jason never fled from the Lord, nor did he attack his persecutors. Jason walked the path before him with

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<sup>30</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, at 3.4.11, 4.23.3.

the strength and confidence of God's provision. May we always remember the words of Jesus, "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt. 5:44-45).

2. From Berea: *"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"* (Acts 17:11).

Amen! May we all strive to be like the Bereans!

3. From Athens: *"he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead"* (Acts 17:31).

Paul was right, as he put into Greek thought the point Jesus made so clearly, we were made to know and relate to God. Jesus said, "this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3). To know God in the biblical sense is to have an intimate relationship. That gives meaning to any philosophy, to know and relate to God. It is possible, in spite of our sin, by the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, God incarnate, who died and was resurrected into an eternity we can share with God. Paul's mission was to bring that message. Let us continue to pray for our missionaries taking out that message.