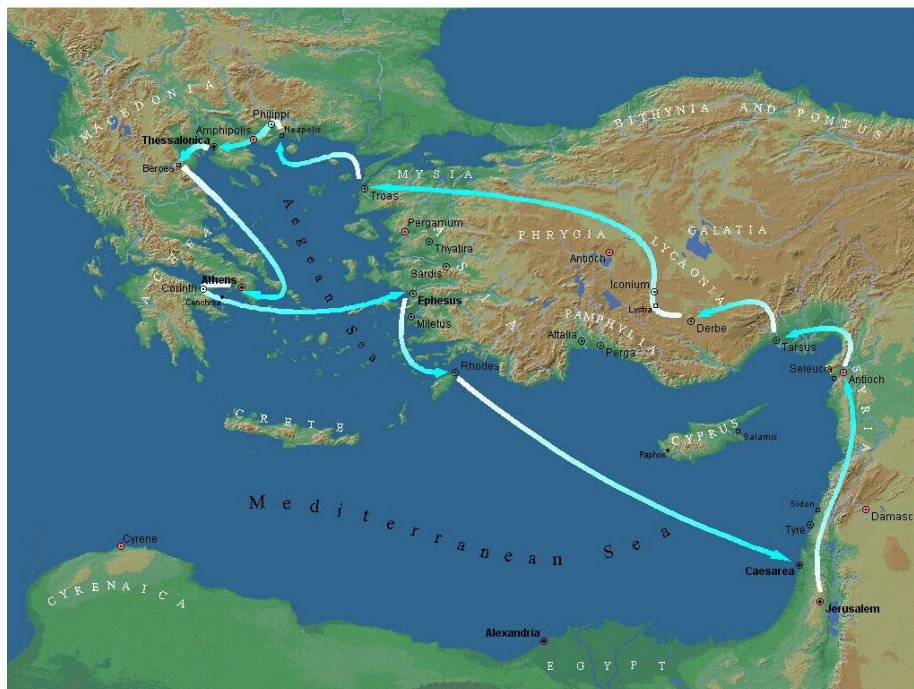


Acts 101  
Pagan Opposition  
Acts 17:13-21  
April 8, 2026  
Dr. Andy Woods

We find ourselves this evening in Acts 17:13. Jesus told the disciples in Acts 1:8:

*"...and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem [Acts 1-7], and in all Judea and Samaria [Acts 8-12], and even to the remotest part of the earth [Acts 13-28]" (Acts 1:8).*

We are in the midst of studying Paul's second missionary journey. He has gone on his first missionary journey, we have had the Jerusalem Council, and now he is on his second missionary journey. This is where he went:



Thus far in our study, after the split between him and Barnabas, he has gone to Syria and Cilicia, Macedonia, and Philippi. A couple of weeks ago we studied him in Thessalonica. Then last week we started to study his ministry in Berea. We have seen his journey to Berea, his ministry there in the synagogue. Acts 17:11 has a wonderful description of discernment by the Bereans. We spent some time on that. We saw the first Berean converts (Acts 17:12). Then, as typically happens, when things are going well, expect opposition.

Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36-18:22)

- I. Schism between Paul and Barnabas (15:36-41)
- II. Syria and Cilicia ministry (16:1-5)
- III. Macedonian call (16:6-10)
- IV. Philippian ministry (16:11-40)
- V. Thessalonica ministry (17:1-9)
- VI. Berean ministry (17:10-15)
  - A. Journey to Berea (10a)
  - B. Synagogue ministry (10b)
  - C. Berean Discernment (11)
  - D. First Berean Believers (12)
  - E. Opposition (13-15)

We pick it up with Acts 17:13 where Paul begins to experience opposition in Berea, really like he experiences opposition no matter where he goes. We see the source of the opposition (Acts 17:13):

*"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" (Acts 17:13).*

Here is Thessalonica and here is Berea. There are about 50 miles between the two. These Jews just drove Paul out of Thessalonica. That was not enough for them, I guess, because when he went 50 miles towards the southwest, and he started to bear fruit in Berea, the unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica were upset about that too. They traveled 50 miles. Keep in mind there are no airplanes, helicopters, or buses. It was hard to travel, but they travelled 50 miles to stir up trouble for Paul in the next city. That is how much they hated this guy. You know that someone hates you when they are going way out of their way to thwart you.

There is a lot of talk today about the synagogue of Satan (Revelation 2:9). To the church at Smyrna, and also to Philadelphia, Jesus says the same thing, that they were being persecuted by the synagogue of Satan. We have all of these podcasters today—or as some have called them, 'fraud-casters'—who hate the Jews. They want to take that expression 'synagogue of Satan' and apply it to all the Jews living, to the whole nation of Israel.

The truth of the matter is, the expression 'synagogue of Satan' has a context to it. It is not dealing with all Jews, it is dealing with unbelieving Jews that are given over to persecuting the Christians. That is what was going on in Smyrna. That is what was going on in Philadelphia. This is what Paul was facing here in Berea.

This group here that Paul is being persecuted by, I have no problems calling them the synagogue of Satan. I do have a problem calling all Jews the synagogue of Satan. Even though there are Jews that do that, the truth of the matter is, God has still made an unconditional covenant to the nation of Israel called the Abrahamic Covenant.

Who are the Jews here? They are the unbelieving Jews. They are the ones that have been pushed out of the olive tree through their own unbelief. In their place have come these wild branches that do not belong, who would be us Gentile believers. Paul says, as he is dealing with the unnatural branches and their attitude towards the natural branches—in other words, Christians and their attitude towards unbelieving Israel—Paul is pretty clear: Do not be arrogant towards those natural branches (Romans 11:18).

God is capable of reaching out and restoring them, which He will do. In the events of the Tribulation period and the Millennial Kingdom, all Israel will be saved. If God can do the greater agricultural miracle of bringing wild branches that do not belong into an olive tree—an apple branch into an olive tree, which is us—it is not really that hard for God to reach out and restore the branches that are supposed to be there in the first place.

We are living in this time period where Christendom is starting to look down on the nation of Israel like I have never seen before. We need to monitor our attitudes on that, because God has a future work in store for the nation of Israel, although they are currently in unbelief.

Romans 11:28 is a verse that almost never comes up in this whole discussion, nobody ever quotes it, but it fits perfectly:

*"From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice, they are beloved for the sake of the fathers" (Romans 11:28).*

What does that mean? God's choice. It means His elect nation to whom He gave the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 15), and is developed throughout Scripture.

What fathers? The patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom this covenant was given, the progenitors of the nation of Israel. Just because God is not finished with Israel, I am not going to swing to the other side and make it sound like they cannot cause problems for Christians. They clearly can, as you can see here. I can find a lot of Gentiles that cause problems for Christians also, but that does not mean that every Jew on planet earth is the synagogue of Satan. It does not mean that God does not have a future work in store for the nation of Israel, where He will fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant.

That is the source of the opposition Paul is facing here in Berea. Here come these unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica. They are working behind the scenes agitating the crowds, trying to turn the crowds against Paul, just like they did in Thessalonica. This is actually God's will, because it forces Paul to leave Berea and to see the gospel extended elsewhere.

*"Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there" (Acts 17:14).*

You notice the expression 'brethren' in Acts 17:14. Who are the brethren? The brethren are Paul's converts in Berea (Acts 17:12). Remember Acts 17:12 from last week:

*"Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men" (Acts 17:12).*

A body was developing; the church was coming into existence here in Berea, as it did in other places. They just decided to get Paul out of Dodge, so to speak, because these unbelieving Jews were following him around, causing trouble for him. He might have looked at his life and said, "I am outside the will of God," but actually he was in the will of God because it forced him to move geographically.

Every Geographical Location in Acts/Epistles



You also look at Acts 17:14 and it says that he had to leave by way of the sea. What sea are we talking about? We are talking about the Aegean Sea. He is in Berea. He lives by the sea. He is headed down here to Athens, so he probably took a ship from Berea to Athens. He leaves by way of the sea, which is the Aegean Sea, and makes his way down to Athens.

Then as you look at the last part of Acts 17:14, it says, 'Silas and Timothy remained there.' The missionary team is Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke. Luke has stayed behind in Philippi. We know that because Luke, our author, switches from 'we' to 'they' once you get outside of Acts 16. Then Paul, Silas, and Timothy leave Philippi and go to Thessalonica. Then from Thessalonica they go to Berea.

He goes by himself to Athens by way of the sea, and he leaves behind Silas and Timothy. Then you go to Acts 17:15, which is a description of Paul in Athens where he is going to have a huge ministry.

*"Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come as soon as possible, they left" (Acts 17:15).*

As Paul leaves, he leaves Silas and Timothy behind in Berea. He leaves a command: "I want Silas and Timothy to join me in Athens as soon as possible." So the escort returns to Berea with a command for Timothy and Silas to join Paul in Athens.

There is a lot of geography here, because Luke is trying to carefully document the birth, development, and growth of the church. So places of geography are very important to him in his writings. Luke is a doctor, a physician, so he has a mind for detail. If you have a physician that does not have a mind for detail, you might consider getting another physician. For a physician to be good, they have to be detail-oriented. That is why our book is as detail-oriented as it is.

We come now to Acts 17:16-34, the rest of the chapter, where we get a record of Paul's amazing ministry in Athens. This ministry has three parts. We have Paul's witness in Athens (Acts 17:16-21). Then Paul is going to give a tremendous speech called the Mars Hill address. I will have more to say about that when we get there.

- VII. Athens Ministry (17:16-34)
  - A. Paul's witness (16-21)
    - 1. Paul's provocation (16a)
    - 2. Athens' idolatry (16b)
    - 3. Athenian ministry (17)
    - 4. Philosophical opposition (18-21)
  - B. Paul's speech (22-31)
  - C. Athenians' response (32-34)

It is interesting that in this address he does not start with Hebrew Bible. He starts with Hebrew Bible when he is in the synagogue, because the Jews accept Hebrew Bible as authority. Now he is amongst Gentiles, so he does not start with Hebrew Bible. He does not start with Moses, the Prophets, the Law, or the Writings. He does not do anything like that. He appeals to the Bible that they have, which is general revelation.

God has revealed Himself in two (three) sources: Scripture, and creation and conscience. These are things that all people have, whether they know anything about the Bible or not. He adjusts his evangelistic methodology depending on who he is talking to. That is a good thing for us to remember as we evangelize. The message never changes, but we have different approaches based on who the immediate audience is.

He is going to give this speech on Mars Hill, and it is going to end with a record of God's future judgment, the great White Throne judgment. The judge will be Jesus, who God has testified of by raising Him from the dead.

Then the Athenians respond (Acts 17:32-34). How do they respond? Some mocked him, some believed in what he said, and some said, "We will hear you later." They postponed a decision, which is a decision. When you postpone a decision, you just made a decision. You decided that you do not want to decide right now. What you will discover is that those are the three responses to the gospel today. Some people will mock, some people will believe, some people will postpone a decision.

That is what Jesus taught in the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13), while the Kingdom is not here. The Kingdom is a time when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord (Isaiah 11:9). This is not that. Some, or many, are rejecting. The seed will be sown and it will fall on four batches of soil, depending on how the heart has been prepared in advance. You see that played out as Paul gives the gospel to a pagan audience. You get multiple responses. They are the same responses that people give today: some believe, some mock, some say, "We will hear you later."

What we are going to look at tonight is just Paul's initial witness in Athens (Acts 17:16-21). Paul gets into Athens and he is provoked. You see that there in Acts 17:16:

*"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" (Acts 17:16).*

That would be the inner being, or maybe it is the Holy Spirit, although it does not say that it is the Holy Spirit. Internally something was bothering him. Something inside of Paul was agitating him. That is what it means to be provoked. Of righteous Lot, whose life was not very righteous, though he was positionally righteous, Peter says:

*"...his righteous soul [was] tormented day after day by their lawless deeds" (2 Peter 2:8).*

This is speaking of Lot when he was in Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot, a child of God, was in Sodom and Gomorrah, and his soul was vexed because he was witnessing over and over again the total depravity of those living in Sodom and Gomorrah. Read Genesis 19 and you will see everything that they were doing by way of sin.

It is the same kind of reaction that Paul experiences when he comes into Athens. I hope we never reach a point in our Christian life where things do not unsettle us. If you can drive by an abortion clinic and have no internal response as to what they are doing in there, I would say we are not sympathetic or listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, because the voice of the Holy Spirit is into the bothering business. He bothers us about things that are not right.

If you can walk next to or across the street from or near a Muslim who has his wife 10 or 15 feet behind him in a full burqa in the hot Houston sun, and that does not bother you, then I would say that you are not listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit inside of us. If you can be around unsaved people and have no thought as to where they are going to

spend eternity, if you are never bothered by that, if something inside of you does not agitate you about that, then you are not being sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

I am not saying to respond to that in an aggressive, necessarily obnoxious way, but that is one of the ways that God works in us. He provokes us internally. That is what Paul is experiencing here during his wait in Athens.

What was provoking him? What exactly was bothering him? What was bugging him in Athens? It was idolatry. Look at the second part of Acts 17:16:

*"...his spirit was provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols" (Acts 17:16).*

Idols are things that people worship in the place of God. In this case, you are dealing with statues and little things, oftentimes they were items that were sold. Paul is going to run into a whole bunch of idol makers when he gets to Ephesus on his third missionary journey.

A Jewish person, a devout Jewish person, does not like idols. When God took the nation of Israel to Mount Sinai and gave them the Law, the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, the first two of those commandments were: (1) "You shall have no other gods before Me;" and (2) "You shall not make for yourself an idol or any likeness of what is in heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or in the water, or on or under the earth" (Exodus 20:3-4).

Obviously, a Jewish person that has these commandments about no idols, no other gods before Me, would be bothered by the fact that the City of Athens was filled with idols. We know that Paul's audience is Gentile here. Israel had idolatry in the pre-Exilic time period. They were worshiping all these little statues and all these kinds of things, and God sent them 350 miles into the east into a place called Babylon (modern-day Iraq) for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10).

When they came out and went back into the land of Israel, as you read about in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah—they were returnees at that point—one of the things that they quit doing was idolatry. The Babylonian captivity ridded Israel of idolatry. The only idolatry they would ever commit from that point on would be things in their hearts perhaps, but they were not worshiping these statues anymore.

It is in that time period that Pharisaism rose to the surface. We look at Pharisaism as a bad thing, and it became a bad thing, but it started off as a good thing. The Pharisees rose up in this time period leading up to the time of Christ. The New Testament does not tell you this background, it just tells you that there were Pharisees. It does not explain to you where they came from, but I am giving you the explanation.

There were basically people that said, "Do you know what? Idols sent us into the captivity. We are never going to have idols again." So they started to promulgate rules about how they would never have idolatry again. The rules started off well-intentioned, but as sometimes happens, the tail starts to wag the dog and the rules became more important than the biblical text.

They also observed that the reason they went into captivity was because they did not honor the Sabbath. There were two Sabbaths. There was a Sabbath every week that they were to honor, and then there was a Sabbath every seven years that they were to honor. They were to take a Sabbath year and let the land have its rest. They did not do that. There were 70 Sabbaths that they trampled over, so God said, "You would not let the land have its rest for 70 years, so I will kick you out of the land for 70 years. Then the land will have its rest."

When they came back into the land, Pharisaism arose and they had all of these regulations about what you could do or what you could not do on the Sabbath. It starts off well-intentioned: "We are not going to go back into captivity. No idols, no Sabbath breaking." But by the time of Christ it got crazy to where the tail started to wag the dog.

Jesus and His disciples are eating on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees get very upset about that. Jesus says, "I am the Lord of the Sabbath. I know what the original intent of the Sabbath is. It was to be a blessing to man. It was to allow man to have his rest on the Sabbath. Here I am blessing man on the Sabbath. I am even healing a guy on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8; Luke 6:5).

They were mad about that and He called them hypocrites. "You pull your ox out of the ditch on the Sabbath, but I am healing a man on the Sabbath and you are mad at me about it? Don't you understand that I am the Lord of the Sabbath? The Sabbath was meant as a blessing to man." What started off being good with phariseeism, as typically happens with legalism, the actual intent starts to get buried under layer after layer after layer of pharisaical interpretation.

They had something called the Mishnah, which was a multi-layered set of regulations. I had to read some of that when I was in seminary. It is absolutely exhausting; it is like reading the tax code. Then they had something called the Talmud; and they had two Talmuds. One is now called the Palestinian Talmud, developed in the land of Israel. There is another one developed in Babylon a little later, about 500 years later, called the Babylonian Talmud. It is just a bunch of rules.

By the time of Christ, what was most important to people was their rules and not God's Word. You can jot down Mark 7:13, where Jesus says, "You have made null the word of God through your traditions." That was His whole conflict with the Pharisees. It was not Jesus versus Moses; it was Jesus versus the pharisaical interpretation of Moses.

One of the things that they got rid of was idols. This is how we know that Paul is going to be ministering to a Gentile audience, because a Jewish city would not be filled with idols the way Athens was. That is why Paul, when he gets the opportunity to give his speech and he evangelizes these people, he does not start with Hebrew Bible, he starts with general revelation.

We have in Acts 17:17 an initial ministry of Paul in Athens. Notice Acts 17:17, which says:

*"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" (Acts 17:17).*

His primary ministry is going to be with the Gentiles, but as Paul always does with every city, he goes to the synagogue first. He tries to show them from Hebrew Bible that Jesus is the Messiah. Why does he do that? Because of what he is going to state in Romans 1:16:

*"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).*

He always goes to the Jews first. The Jews are in the synagogue. They are the elect nation. He gives them the first opportunity to trust in the Messiah. Typically, they reject him. Then Paul bears fruit amongst the Gentiles. The Jews get jealous of that and drive him out of town to the next city. This happens over and over again in the Book of Acts. That is what he did in Thessalonica also:

*"Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ'" (Acts 17:1-3).*

He did the same thing in Berea:

*"The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews" (Acts 17:10).*

This is what he does everywhere he goes. Then he has a ministry amongst the proselytes, the group that is called the 'God-fearing Gentiles.' These are Gentiles that wanted to walk with God. In this time period, if you wanted to walk with the God of

Yahweh and learn of Yahweh, then you had to convert to Judaism. They were Gentile converts to Judaism.

The most famous proselyte in the whole Bible, I think, is Ruth from Moab, which is modern-day Jordan. She said to her Jewish mother-in-law, Naomi:

*"...Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God" (Ruth 1:16).*

That is who these God-fearing Greeks are; they are what you call proselytes.

Then he goes into the market place. This is where commerce was handled. The word for 'market place' here in Greek is '*agora*' (ἀγορά). He is one of these kinds of guys that likes to get out to where the masses are. He is evangelizing there in Athens, and just like what happens every time a little bit of fruit is born, here comes the opposition.

In Berea, the opposition was the synagogue of Satan from Thessalonica, as I will call them. Here, as Paul is out doing his ministry, he gets opposition from the philosophers of the day. He is amongst Gentiles. Gentiles have a lot of philosophers, so here they come (Acts 17:18-21). We see his opponents and their mockery of him (Acts 17:18).

#### VIII. Athens Ministry (17:16-34)

##### A. Paul's witness (16-21)

1. Paul's provocation (16a)
2. Athens' idolatry (16b)
3. Athenian ministry (17)
  - a) Synagogue (17a)
  - b) Proselytes (17b)
  - c) Market place (17c)
4. Philosophical opposition (18-21)
  - a) Opponents (18a-b)
    - (1) Epicureans (18a)
    - (2) Stoics (18b)
  - b) Mockery (18c-d)
    - (1) Babblers (18c)
    - (2) Resurrection (18d)
  - c) Before the Areopagus (19-21)
    - (1) Transfer (19a)
    - (2) Need to explain strange teachings (19b-21)

Then they take him to a place called the Areopagus, Mars Hill, where there were a lot of itinerant speakers. It is like what universities used to have, a free speech platform. I do not know if they still have those anymore. I notice that the place for free speech has shrunk a lot in the universities today. They give you a little five-by-five place where you can express yourself. Everywhere else is a safe space where you do not want to offend anybody.

Back in the day, they would have a free speech platform, where you could go up and voice whatever it was you wanted to talk about. It was really big in the Vietnam War time period, where there were a lot of different opinions, strong opinions about the Vietnam War, the draft, and all of that. I remember hearing about that even though I was a little young to appreciate it, but I remember hearing about the free speech platform at our nearby university, Long Beach State University.

That is kind of what the Areopagus was. It was a place where guest speakers could come and have a hearing. It did not mean that everybody out there agreed with what you were saying, but at least you had a chance to be heard.

Now, here come the opponents. First of all, there are two groups. There is a group called the Epicureans, and then there is a group called the Stoics. Whenever God works, Satan opposes. Here it is Gentile opposition. Notice these Epicureans:

"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" (Acts 17:18).

His first philosophical opponents were the Epicureans. Who were they? Here is Arnold Fruchtenbaum description of the Epicureans:

"The first group followed the teachings of Epicurus, a Greek philosopher who lived between the years of 341-270 BC. Epicureanism began with the search for pure truth by reason. However, since this search was considered to be hopeless, the chief end of man was to try to find happiness."<sup>1</sup>

"Our goal is to find truth, which no one can find, and since we cannot find truth, let us just be happy." This is their mindset. It is like in a philosophy class. I have been in philosophy classes where the whole class is about searching for something which we are never able to find. If we found it, the class would be over.

They got this discouraged with the pursuit of knowledge, so they started to pursue happiness and pleasure.

"Pleasure, not knowledge, should be the goal of life. Epicureans believed that the gods live in eternal calm but away from the lives of man and that, unlike the gods, man has no afterlife either to fear or to hope for."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 366.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

When you understand that, you understand why Paul ends his address at Mars Hill the way he does, speaking about how this life ends in judgment. He is rebutting, refuting the Epicurean philosophy.

"Because there is no afterlife for either the good or the bad, they believed that man should make the best of his life here. While Epicureans were not theological atheists, they were practical atheists."<sup>3</sup>

They believed in God, but they thought that He was not really around. It is kind of like a deist.

"Eventually, this philosophical movement degenerated into a life of sensualism."

"Just eat, drink, and be merry, because we cannot find the truth. If there is a god out there, he does not intervene and there is no afterlife."

"Eventually, this philosophical movement degenerated into a life of sensualism. Among the more famous Epicurean poets were Lucretius and Horace."<sup>4</sup>

These are the people that Paul is now interacting with.

The second group of people mentioned is the Stoics:

*"And some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him" (Acts 17:18).*

Who are the Stoics?

"The second type of Greek philosophers Paul encountered were the Stoics. They were the followers of Zeno (ca. 334-262 BC) and Chrysippus (ca. 279-206 BC). Zeno taught in the Stoa Poikile ('Painted Porch'). Therefore, his philosophy became known as 'Stoicism.' According to the Stoics, wisdom lay in being free from intense emotionalism. Therefore, man had to submit to natural law and to live comfortably with nature. The highest expression of life was reason. To be virtuous was to live in harmony with reason, and that was the only good. Not to be virtuous was the only evil. All other things, such as death or pleasure or pain, were indifferent. Theologically, Stoics were pantheists."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 366-67.

They worshiped creation rather than the Creator.

"In their view, the purpose of the gods was in directing history, and man had only to align himself with the gods in this purpose. They viewed the gods as the 'world soul.' The Stoic ideal was to be absolutely brave in the face of pain and death because pain and death were not evils."<sup>6</sup>

That is where we get the expression, "So-and-so has a very stoic expression." There is not a lot of emotion.

"There was a stern self-repression on the basis of human self-sufficiency. The goal was absolute contentment because pleasure was not good."<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, the Epicureans are going the opposite direction.

"Absolute justice was not to be influenced by pleasures or favor. Stoics stressed the rational over the emotional in man. They stressed individual self-sufficiency, including the right to commit suicide. The ideal was a stern and unending endurance. This philosophy was especially attractive to the Roman mind. Seneca was one of the famous Roman Stoics, as were Epictetus, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius."<sup>8</sup>

The better you understand these philosophers, the better you understand why Paul is going to surface the different ideas he is going to surface when he deals with general revelation on Mars Hill.

How did they treat Paul? They made fun of him. How did they make fun of him? They called him two things. The first thing they called him was a babbler. If someone really does not want to hear what you are saying, they might say something to you like, "What are you babbling about?" That is kind of what Paul was facing here.

*"Some were saying, 'What would this idle babbler wish to say?'" (Acts 17:18).*

To be honest with you, I did not know what a babbler was until I started to look at this in the original Greek.

"The Epicureans and the Stoics mocked Paul, calling him a babbler (v. 18b). The Greek word for 'babbling' is spermologos. Aristotle and Aristophanes used the term of crows or daws picking up grain in the fields. Plutarch used it of small carnivorous birds. Hence, the term means 'a seed

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

picker,' 'scavenger,' or 'scrapmonger.' Paul was seen as one who took to learning here and there and passed it on his own."<sup>9</sup>

He passed it out as if it was his own. You grab a little knowledge from this philosopher, you grab a little knowledge from that philosopher, you mix it all together, and you toss it out there and say that it is your own philosophy. That is what is meant by a babblers, which is an English translation of the Greek word '*spermologos*' (σπερμολόγος).

"Paul was seen as one who took learning here and there and passed it off as his own. He was considered a loquacious person with nothing to say."<sup>10</sup>

Do you know what loquacious means? They talk a lot.

This is how paganism looked at the man who wrote two thirds of the New Testament epistles and said, "He talks a lot, but he does not say much." It is amazing how unregenerate man cannot see a clear work of God in Paul's life. He was a master theologian, but the pagans looked at him as being loquacious but having nothing to say.

"—and so they mocked, 'Let us see what this little seed picker is going to say.' This would have been an Epicurean question."<sup>11</sup>

Arnold thinks this was something that the Epicureans were asking.

Next, they made fun of him because of his doctrine of resurrection.

*"And some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, 'What would this idle babblers wish to say?' Others, 'He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,'—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18).*

If you look up 'strange deities' in the Greek text, it is the word for 'demons,' '*daimonion*' (δαίμόνιον). They are basically saying, "This man is preaching under the power of evil spirits." It is like what you would call a witch doctor or someone like that.

The thing that stumbled them is this whole concept of resurrection. "What a ridiculous idea that someone can come back from the dead." They thought resurrection was a strange idea because of Gnostic dualism. The Gnostics at this time period taught that the physical world is bad and the spiritual world is good. If the physical world is bad, then Jesus never came in a body; it just looked like He had a body.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

This is why John tells us in 1 John 4:2-3 that anyone who denies that Jesus has come in a body is of the antichrist. It is a refutation of the Gnostics, those teaching Gnostic dualism. Gnostic dualism tampered with the doctrine of the incarnation. It taught that Jesus did not have a body, but it just seemed like He did; and if He had a body, then He never was the Christ. They taught that the spirit of Christ came upon Him when He was baptized and left Him just before He was crucified.

These are all the outworkings of Gnostic dualism. This is where the doctrine of Amillennialism came from. Amillennialism is the idea that there is no future earthly kingdom. How could you have a future earthly kingdom of banqueting and feasting when the physical world is bad? Of course, in their philosophy, this idea of Jesus dying and coming out of the grave in a physical body that we studied last Sunday, that idea would not make any sense either.

They are listening to Paul, and when he gets to the subject of the resurrection, they start mocking him. That is why, when he will give his speech on Mars Hill, virtually the same thing happens.

*"because He fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).*

That is how Paul concludes his remarks on Mars Hill. Look at the reaction:

*"Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer" (Acts 17:32).*

Why are they sneering? Because of Gnostic dualism. You have to keep in mind that Athens was a very short distance from Corinth. The resurrection chapter is in your Bible, in 1 Corinthians 15, because this mindset that the physical world is bad started to seep into Corinth. Paul has to write them a whole chapter on the consequences and the repercussions of throwing overboard the doctrine of resurrection.

That is why Paul will say in 1 Corinthians 15:14:

*"and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, your faith also is in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14).*

Why is Paul going for a whole chapter, for 58 verses—57 verses about doctrine and 1 verse about application—on the importance of the resurrection? Why do that to Corinth? Because of where Corinth was located near Athens, which was a hotbed of this kind of philosophy of Gnostic dualism, of Epicureanism, and of Stoicism. All of those systems are hostile to the physical resurrection of Christ, which is the centerpiece of Christianity.

When you understand where Corinth was located relatively near Athens, you understand why 1 Corinthians 15 is there in your Bible, and what it is doing there? It is not just Paul saying, "I have some random thoughts to share with you today." He was always dealing with real world problems, one of which was the Corinthians being influenced by Athens on the precipice of throwing overboard the doctrine of resurrection.

Athens started to negatively influence the church at Corinth. That is what it means to become worldly. You start to adopt the value system of the world—Corinth adopting the value system of Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Gnostic dualism.

They make fun of him as a seed scavenger, and they make fun of him because of the doctrine of resurrection. Now is Paul's chance to be heard. This is where they take him to the Areopagus, Mars Hill, and they transfer him there. I am not sure how they transferred him there. Do they do it by force? Do they just walk him over? It really does not say, but they brought him there.

*"And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus" (Acts 17:19).*

What is the Areopagus? It literally refers to the Mount of Aries or Mars Hill. It is the free speech platform. It is the place for itinerant lectures. It is not a pulpit. From a pulpit you are speaking with authority, but this is more of a classroom lectern where you are being given a hearing. After the hearing comes the cross-examination.

Behind a pulpit, like in a church, you expect most people to agree with what is being preached, but a free speech platform is different. There could be people that agree, or there could be the people that disagree, but at least you have the right to give your say. That is where they take him.

The reason they take him there is because they have never heard anything like what they are hearing from him. It is a strange doctrine. You see this in the second part of Acts 17:19-21:

*"...saying, 'May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean'" (Acts 17:19-20).*

Then Acts 17:21 gives a description of what these people did all day at Mars Hill at the Areopagus:

*"(Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new)" (Acts 17:21).*

"If it is new, we are interested in it." Not to get too off far afield, but there are a lot of prophecy conferences like that today, where the whole goal is to give people something new. The pressure is to give people something new, not necessarily something Biblical. If you can make it Biblical, great, but it has to be new.

So they talk about Bigfoot; they talk about Martians; or they talk about the flat earth that people believe in. They do a lot of stuff with the Nephilim in Genesis 6 (which I do take the angel view of), but they make this case that Nephilim never got wiped out in the Flood. They say that some were sneaked onto the ark and that Nimrod in the Tower of Babel was Nephilim. If you can really develop this stuff, you can get a hearing, let me tell you.

I was at one church in New York, and they were doing these prophecy conferences and moving this direction and having these speakers come in and talk about the Nephilim and all of these subjects. The place was packed to the rafters. Finally, the leaders of the church said, "We are not really honoring God with this." They went back to the Bible and the attendance shrank by about 75%. I know that because I was one of the Bible speakers, they brought me in to speak from the Bible, and the Nephilim crowd was not really interested in that.

People have this fascination with something new or novel. I remember the big thing in the 90s was the Bible codes, the Equidistant Letter Sequence. You would start off with the second letter of the second word of every second sentence in every second paragraph, and you would string those letters together and they would form a hidden message. Then if you did it backwards, you got more of a hidden message. There were all these books being written at the time, "The Bible Code" and all of these kinds of things. I remember thinking to myself, "I have enough problems understanding the Bible, reading it correctly, let alone, picking every second word and letter."

By the way, there are textual variants in the Bible, so not all the Bible translations agree with each other. What do you do with your message then when you have variants? That was one of the questions we never really got an answer about.

People love this kind of stuff. They would give money to these ministries. These kinds of people were all over Christian radio, Christian TV, and wrote best-selling books. Then, like a fad, it disappeared and people moved on to the next fad.

I am sorry to say that there is a push in Christendom to appeal to this mentality. We do not do that at our prophecy conferences. We look at a prophecy conference like a Bible study and you are studying the prophetic sections of the Word of God. Those are the types of speakers that we bring in. If we brought in Nephilim stuff, UFO, life on Mars, and all that, we would probably get a much bigger audience, but at the end of the day, do you want a big audience or do you want to be pleasing to the Lord?

Unfortunately, this mentality of people wanting to hear something new is going to accelerate in the church in the last days. At the end of his life, talking to Timothy in a pastoral letter about what will happen in the church in the last days, Paul says:

*"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).*

You have some patience to put up with correct teaching, but people in the end times will not want that. They will not want sound doctrine. Doctrine just means teaching. 'Sound' is the Greek word where we get the word 'hygiene,' *'hygiainō'* (ὕγιαίνω). It means what is good for you, what is healthy. But people will not want that in the last days.

This is the Greek word *'mythos'* (μῦθος), things that are just made up—Equidistant Letter Sequence, Bible codes, Nephilim on the Ark, Bigfoot, and all these kinds of topics. People will want that and they will gravitate towards teachers who tell them those things because it has a way of tickling their ears. They will turn away from people that want to give them hygiene, healthy teaching and doctrine.

That is why Paul got this hearing in front of these pagans at Athens on Mars Hill. Now he gives a speech (Acts 17:22-31). For next time, could you read that speech and then read the responses (Acts 17:32-34)? We will take a look at those next time.