

BIB204 Early Church NT2

Unit 5 Study Resource

Commentary on Acts of the Apostles

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Acts XVII

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XVII: 1. Luke now drops the pronoun of the first person, in which he has spoken of the apostolic company since they left Troas, and resumes the third person, which shows that he remained in Philippi after the departure of Paul and Silas. He also speaks of the these two brethren as if they constituted the whole company, until they are about to leave Berea, when Timothy is again mentioned.³⁸⁹ This leads to the presumption that Timothy remained with Luke, to still further instruct and organize the infant congregation in Philippi. Leaving the cause thus guarded behind them, Paul and Silas seek another field of labor. (1) *“And having passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they went into Thessalonica, where was the synagogue of the Jews.”* The distance from Philippi to Amphipolis was thirty-three miles; from Amphipolis to Apollonia, thirty miles; and from Apollonia to Thessalonica, thirty-seven miles; making just one hundred miles to the next city which the apostles undertook to evangelize. The whole of this distance was over one of those celebrated military roads built by the Romans, and elegantly paved with flag-stones.³⁹⁰

At Philippi there was no synagogue, and the swift passage of Paul and Silas through Amphipolis and Apollonia indicates that there was none in either of those cities; hence the synagogue in Thessalonica was the only one in a large district of the country, for which reason it is styled *“the synagogue of the Jews.”* The existence of a synagogue in a Gentile city was always an indication of a considerable Jewish population. Thessalonica, on account of its commercial importance, was then, and continues to be, under its modern name Salonica, a great resort for Jews.³⁹¹ It was a knowledge of this fact, no doubt, which hastened Paul to this city, anticipating, through the synagogue, a more favorable introduction to the people than he had enjoyed at Philippi.

2, 3. (2) *“And according to Paul's custom, he went in to them, and for three Sabbath days disputed with from the Scriptures, (3) opening them, and setting forth that it was necessary that the Christ should suffer, and arise* 214 *from the dead, and that this Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.”* This was certainly a well-chosen course of argument. One of the chief objections which the Jews urged against Jesus during his life was his humble and unpretending position in society, which was inconsistent, in their estimation, with his claims to the Messiahship. And since his resurrection, the preaching of the Christ as crucified was, to the mass of the Jews, a scandal, because it appeared an impeachment of the prophets to proclaim the despised and crucified Jesus as the glorious Messiah whose coming they had predicted. But Paul begins his argument with the Thessalonian Jews, by showing that the writings of the prophets themselves made it necessary that the Messiah “should suffer and arise from the dead.” Having demonstrated this proposition, it was an easy task to show that “this Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” It was well known that he had suffered death, and Paul had abundant means of proving that he had risen again. This proof was not confined to his own testimony, as an eye-witness of his glory, though we may well suppose that he made use of this, as he did on subsequent occasions.³⁹² But he gave ocular demonstration of the living and divine power of Jesus, by working miracles in his name. This we learn from his first epistle to the Church in this city, in which he says: “Our gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance; as you know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.”³⁹³ The power of the Holy Spirit, working miracles before them, gave an assurance of the resurrection and glory of him in whose name they were wrought, which the “word only” of all the men on earth could not give. Without such attestation, the word of man in

reference to the affairs of heaven has no claim upon our confidence; but with it, it has a power which can not be resisted without resisting God.

This course of argument and proof occupied three successive Sabbaths. During the intervening weeks the two brethren carefully avoided every thing which might raise a suspicion that they were governed by selfish motives. They asked no man in the city for even their daily bread.³⁹⁴ They received some contributions to their necessities from the brethren in Philippi,³⁹⁵ but the amount was so scanty as to still leave them under the necessity of “laboring night and day.”³⁹⁶

4. The effect of arguments and demonstrations so conclusive, accompanied by a private life so irreproachable, was quite decisive. (4) *“Some of them believed, and adhered to Paul and Silas; of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.”* In this description the parties are distributed with great exactness. The expression “some of them” refers to the Jews, and indicates but a small number. Of the “devout Greeks,” who were such Gentiles as had learned to worship God according to Jewish example, there was a “great multitude,” and not a few of the “chief women,” who were also Gentiles. The great majority of the converts, therefore, were Gentiles; and Paul afterward addresses them as such, saying, “You turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God.”³⁹⁷

5–9. Such a movement among the devout Gentiles, whose presence at the synagogue worship was a 215 source of pride to the Jews, was exceedingly mortifying to those Jews who obstinately remained in unbelief. Their number and popular influence in Thessalonica enabled them to give serious trouble to Paul and Silas. (5) *“But the unbelieving Jews, being full of zeal, collected certain wicked men of the idle class, and raising a mob, set the city in an uproar. And rushing to the house of Jason, they sought to bring them out to the people. (6) But not finding them, they dragged Jason and certain brethren before the city rulers, crying out, These men, who have turned the world upside down, have come hither also; (7) whom Jason has received; and they are all acting contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, Jesus. (8) And they troubled the people and the city rulers, when they heard these things; (9) and having taken security of Jason and the others, they released them.”*

In the accusation preferred by the Jews there were two specifications, each one of which had some truth in it. Nearly everywhere that Paul and Silas had preached, there had been some public disturbance, which was in some way attributable to their preaching. But their accusers were at fault in throwing the censure on the wrong party. The fact that angry excitement follows the preaching of a certain man, or set of men, is no proof, either in that day or this, that the preaching is improper, either in matter or manner. When men are willing to receive the truth, and to reject all error, the preaching of the gospel can have none but peaceful and happy effects. But otherwise, it still brings “not peace, but a sword,”³⁹⁸ and is the “savor of death unto death.”³⁹⁹ The apostolic method was to fearlessly preach the truth, and leave the consequences with God and the people.

The other specification, that the brethren acted contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there was another king, Jesus, shows that Paul, while opposing the Jewish idea that the Messiah was to be an earthly prince had not failed to represent him as a king. He represented him, indeed, as the “King of kings, and Lord of lords.” But the accusation contained a willful perversion of his language; for these Jews knew very well, as their predecessors before the bar of Pilate knew, that Jesus claimed to be no rival of Cæsar. If he had, they would have been better pleased with him than they were.

One reason why the Gentiles and city rulers were so readily excited by this accusation was the fact that the Jews had then but recently been banished from Rome, as we learn from a statement below in reference to Priscilla and Aquila.⁴⁰⁰ The unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica, anxious to prove their own loyalty, adroitly directed public odium toward the *Christian* Jews, as the real disturbers of the public peace, and enemies of Cæsar.

10. Such was the state of feeling in the city that Paul and Silas saw no prospect of accomplishing good by further efforts, while the attempt would have been hazardous to the lives of brethren. (10) “*Then the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night, to Berea; who, when they arrived, went into the synagogue of the Jews.*” 216

This city lies about sixty miles south-west of Thessalonica. It contains, at the present day, a population of fifteen or twenty thousand, and was, doubtless, still more populous then.⁴⁰¹ Here again the apostles find a synagogue, and make it the starting point of their labors.

11. We have now, at last, the pleasure of seeing one Jewish community listen to the truth and examine it like rational beings. (11) “*Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, who received the word with all readiness of mind, searching the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.*” Their conduct can not be too highly commended, nor too closely imitated. The great sin of the Jews was a refusal to examine, candidly and patiently, the claims of the gospel. Having fallen into error by their traditions, they resisted, with passion and uproar, every effort that was made to give them additional light, or to expose their errors. Their folly has been constantly re-enacted by religious partisans of subsequent ages, so that the progress of truth, since the dark ages of papal superstition, has been hedged up, at every onward movement, by men who conceived that they were doing God service in keeping his truth from the people. If such men live and die in the neglect of any duty, their ignorance of it will be so far from excusing them that it will constitute one of their chief sins, and secure to them more certain and more severe condemnation. There is no greater insult to the majesty of heaven than to stop our ears when God speaks, or to close our eyes against the light which he causes to shine around us. The cause of Christ, as it stands professed in the world, will never cease to be disgraced by such exhibitions of sin and folly, until all who pretend to be disciples adopt the course pursued by these Jews of Berea; search the Scriptures, upon the presentation of every thing claiming to be God's truth, and “see whether these things are so.” Unless the word of God can mislead us, to follow *implicitly* where it leads can never be unacceptable to its Author.

12. If the claims of Jesus are false, an honest and thorough investigation of them is the best way to prove them so. If they are true, such an investigation will be certain to convince us and to bless us. With the Bereans, the logical result of a daily investigation is stated thus: (12) “*Therefore, many of them, and not a few of the honorable men and women who were Greeks, believed.*” It was not here, as in Thessalonica, that “*some of them*” and “*a great multitude of Greeks*” believed; but it was “*many of them,*” and “*not a few of the Greeks.*” That they believed, is distinctly attributed to the fact that they “*searched the Scriptures;*” showing again, that faith is produced by the word of God.

13, 14. There seemed to be no serious obstacle to the gospel in Berea, and the disciples may have begun to flatter themselves with the hope that the whole city would turn to the Lord, when an unexpected enemy sprung upon them from the rear. (13) “*But when the Jews of Thessalonica knew that the word of God was preached by Paul in Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.* (14) *Then the brethren immediately sent Paul away, to go as if to the sea; but Silas and Timothy remained there.*” There was always sufficient material for a mob, in a the 217
rude heathen population of a city as large as Berea, and there was always sufficient appearance of antagonism

between the gospel as preached by Paul, and the laws and customs of the heathen, to enable designing men to excite the masses against it. Hence, the easy success of these embittered enemies from Thessalonica, who, in addition to other considerations, could ask if Bereans would tolerate men who had been compelled to fly by night from Thessalonica.

The statement that the brethren sent Paul away to “go *as if* to the sea,” certainly implies some disguise of his real purpose. The only supposition answerable to the phraseology employed is, that he started in the direction of the sea, and then turned, so as to pursue the land route to Athens,⁴⁰² which was the next field of labor. Mr. Howson, who insists that he went by sea, does not display his usual ability in arguing the question.⁴⁰³ Paul once traveled from Corinth to Berea by land,⁴⁰⁴ and why not now from Berea through Athens to Corinth? The fact that it was the more tedious and less usual route, being two hundred and fifty miles overland, is a good reason why he should have chosen it the more certainly to elude pursuit.

Whether by land or by sea, the apostle now leave Macedonia, and starts out for another province of ancient Greece. He has planted Churches in three important cities of Macedonia. Of these, Thessalonica occupied the central position, with Philippi one hundred miles to the north-east, and Berea sixty miles to the south-west. Each of these becomes a radiating center, from which the light of truth might shine into the surrounding darkness. We have the testimony of Paul himself, that from at least one of them the light shone with great intensity. He writes to the Thessalonians: “From you has sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God is spread abroad, so that we have no need to say any thing.”⁴⁰⁵ There was no need of Paul's voice at any more than central points, when he could leave behind him congregations such as this. No doubt much of their zeal and fidelity were owing to the fostering care of such men as Silas and Timothy, and Luke, whom the apostle occasionally left behind him.

15–17. (15) *“Now they who conducted Paul led him to Athens; and having received a commandment to Silas and Timothy that they should come to him as quickly as possible, they departed. (16) And while he was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was roused within him, when he saw the city given to idolatry. (17) Therefore, he disputed in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the market-place daily with those who happened to be there.”*

In the ancient world there were two distinct species of civilization, both of which had reached their highest excellence in the days of the apostles. One was the result of human philosophy; the other, of a divine revelation. The chief center of the former was the city of Athens; of the latter, the city of Jerusalem. If we compare them, either as respects the moral character of the people brought respectively under their influence, or with reference to their preparation for a perfect religion, we shall find the advantage in favor of the latter. Fifteen hundred years 218 before, God had placed the Jews under the influence of revelation, and left the other nations of the earth to “walk in their own ways.” By a severe discipline, continued through many centuries, the former had been elevated above the idolatry in which they were sunk at the beginning, and which still prevailed over all other nations. They presented, therefore, a degree of purity in private morals which stands unrivaled in ancient history previous to the advent of Christ. On the other hand, the most elegant of the heathen nations were exhibiting, in their social life, a complete exhaustion of the catalogue of base and beastly things of which men and women could be guilty.⁴⁰⁶ In Athens, where flourished the most profound philosophy, the most glowing eloquence, the most fervid poetry, and the most refined

art which the world has ever seen, there was the most complete and studied abandonment of every vice which passion could prompt or imagination invent.

The contrast in reference to the preparation of the two peoples to receive the gospel of Christ is equally striking. In the center of Jewish civilization the gospel had now been preached, and many thousands had embraced it. It had spread rapidly through the surrounding country; and even in distant lands, wherever there was a Jewish synagogue, with a company of Gentiles, who, by Jewish influence, had been rescued from the degradation of their kindred, it had been gladly received by thousands of devout men and honorable women. But nowhere had its triumphs penetrated far into the benighted masses outside of Jewish influence. The struggle now about to take place in the city of Athens is to demonstrate still further, by contrast, how valuable “a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ” had been the law and the prophets.

Walking along the streets of a city whose fame had been familiar to him from childhood, and seeing, in the temples and statues on every hand, and the constant processions of people going to and from the places of worship, evidence that “the city was given to idolatry;” though a lonely stranger, who might have been awed into silence by the magnificence around him, Paul felt his soul aroused to make one mighty struggle for the triumph, even here, of the humble gospel which he preached. His first effort, as usual, was in the Jewish synagogue. But there seem to have been none among the Jews or devout Gentiles there to receive the truth. The pride of human philosophy, and the debasement of refined idolatry had overpowered the influence of the law and the prophets, so that he fails of his usual success. He does not, however, despair. Having access to no other formal assembly, he goes upon the streets, and places of public concourse, and discourse to “to those who happened to be there.”

18. By efforts so persistent he succeeded in attracting some attention from the idle throng, but it was of a character, at first, not very flattering. (18) “*The certain of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him, and some said, What will this babbler say? And others, He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign demons; because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.*” The persistency with which he sought the attention of every one 219 he met suggested the epithet “*babbling*,” and the prominence in his arguments of the name of Jesus and the resurrection suggested to the inattentive hearers that these were two foreign demons whom he was trying to make known to them.

The two classes of philosophers whom he encountered were the antipodes of each other, and the practical philosophy of each was antipodal to the doctrine of Paul. The Stoics taught that the true philosophy of life was a total indifference to both the sorrows and pleasures of the world; while the Epicureans sought relief from life's sorrows in the studied pursuit of its pleasures.⁴⁰⁷ In opposition to the former, Paul taught that we should weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice; and in opposition to the latter, that we should *deny* ourselves in reference to all ungodliness and worldly lusts.

19–21. Notwithstanding the contempt with which Paul was regarded by some of his hearers, he succeeded in arresting the serious attention of a few. (19) “*And they took him and led him to the Areopagus, saying, Can we know what this new doctrine is, of which you speak? (20) For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. We wish to know, therefore, what these things mean. (21) For all the Athenians, and the strangers dwelling there, spent their time in nothing else than telling or hearing something new.*” The Areopagus was a rocky eminence, ascended by a flight of stone steps cut in the solid rock, on the summit of which were seats in the open air, where the judges, called Areopagites, held court for the trial of criminals, and of grave religious questions. The informal character of the

proceedings on this occasion shows that it was not this court which had summoned Paul, but that those who were interested in hearing him selected this as a suitable place for the purpose. This is further evident from the note of explanation here appended by Luke, that the Athenians and strangers dwelling there, spent their time in nothing else than telling and hearing something new. It was more from curiosity, therefore, that they desired to hear him, than because they really expected to be benefited by what they would hear.

22–31. After persevering, but necessarily disconnected conversational efforts on the streets, Paul has now an audience assembled for the special purpose of hearing him, and may present his theme in a more formal manner. He has now an audience of Jews and proselytes, but an assembly of demon-worshippers. He can not, therefore, open the Scriptures, and begin by speaking of the long-expected Messiah. The Scriptures, and even the God who gave them, are to them, unknown. Before he can preach Jesus to them, as the Son of God, he must introduce to them a true conception of God himself. It was this consideration which made the following speech of Paul so different from all others recorded in Acts. We will first hear the whole discourse, and then examine the different parts in their connection with one another.

(22) *“Then Paul stood up in the midst of the Areopagus, and said: Men of Athens, I perceive that in every respect you are devout worshippers of the demons. (23) For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom, therefore, you worship without knowing him, him I announce to you. (24) The God who made the world, and all things which are in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands. (25) Neither is he served by the hands of men, as though he needed any thing, for it is he who gives to all men life and breath and all things, (26) and has made from one blood all nations of men, to dwell upon the whole face of the earth, having determined their prearranged periods, and the boundaries of their habitations, (27) that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him, although he is not far from each one of us. (28) For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also his offspring.’ (29) Being, then, the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Deity is similar to gold or silver, or stone graven by the art and device of man. (30) Now the times of this ignorance God has overlooked; but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, (31) because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, of which he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”*

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The excellence of an argumentative discourse is measured by the degree of adaptation to the exact mental condition of the audience, and the conclusiveness with which every position is established. It would be difficult to conceive how this discourse could be improved in either of these particulars.

The audience were worshippers of demons, or dead men deified. Nearly all their gods were supposed to have once lived on the earth. They regarded it, therefore, as an excellent trait of character to be scrupulous in all the observances of demon worship. Paul's first remark was not that they were “too superstitious,”⁴⁰⁸ nor that they were “very religious;”⁴⁰⁹ though both of these would have been true. But the term he employs, *deisedaimonestirous*, from *deido* to fear, and *daimon* a demon, means *demon-fearing*, or *given to the worship of demons*. This was the exact truth in the case, and the audience received the statement of it as a compliment. The second remark is introduced as a specification of the first: “For, as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.” After erecting altars to all the *known* gods, so that a Roman satirist,⁴¹⁰ said it was

easier to find a *god* in Athens than a *man*, they had extended their worship even to such as might be in existence without their knowledge. No specification could have been made to more strikingly exemplify their devotions to demon worship. The commentators have suggested many hypotheses by which to account, historically, for the erection of this altar, all of which are purely conjectural. It is sufficient to know, what the text itself reveals, that its erection resulted from an extreme desire to render due worship to all the gods, both known and unknown.

Having spoken in this conciliatory style, both of their worship in general, and of this altar in particular, Paul next excites their curiosity, by telling them that he came to make *known* to them that very God whom they had already worshiped without knowing him. They had, by this inscription, already confessed that there was, or might be a God to them unknown; hence they could not complain that he should attempt to introduce a new God to their acquaintance. They had also rendered homage to such a God while they knew him not; hence they could not consistently refuse to do so after he should be revealed to them. Thus far the course of the apostle's remarks was not only conciliatory, but calculated, and intended, to bind the audience in advance to the propositions and conclusions yet to be developed. 221

He next introduces the God to whom he refers as *the* God who made the world, and all things in it, and who is Lord of both heaven and earth. That there was such a God, he assumes; but the assumption was granted by a part of his audience, the Stoics, and the Epicureans found it difficult to account to themselves for the fact that the world *was* made, without admitting that there was a God who made it. He endeavors to give them a just conception of this God, by presenting several points of contrast between him and the gods with whom they were familiar. The first of these is, that, unlike them, "He does not dwell in temples made with hands." All around the spot where he stood were temples in which the gods made their abode, and to which the people were compelled to resort in order to communicate with them. But that the God who made heaven and earth does not dwell in temples made by human hands, he argued from the fact that he was "*Lord* of heaven and earth;" which implies that he could not be confined within limits so narrow. This was enough to establish his superiority to all other gods in power and majesty.

The next point of contrast presented has reference to the services rendered the gods. His hearers had been in the habit of presenting meat offerings and drink offerings in the temples, under the superstitious belief that they were devoured by the gods. But Paul tells them that the unknown God "is not served by the hands of men as though he needed any thing; for it is he who gives to all men life and breath, and all things, and has made from one blood all nations of men," and appointed beforehand their periods, and the boundaries of their habitations. These facts demonstrate his entire independence of human ministrations, and exhibit, in a most striking manner, the dependence of men upon him. They not only sustain the point of contrast presented by Paul, but they involve an assumption of the most special providence of God. By *special providence*, we mean providence in reference to individual persons and things. If God gives to *all* men life and breath and *all* things, he acts with reference to each individual man, to each individual breath that each man breathes, and to each particular thing going to make up *all* the things which he gives them. Again, if God appoints beforehand the "*periods*" of the nation (by which I understand all the great eras in their history,) and the "boundaries of their habitations," he certainly directs the movements of individual men; for the movements of nations depend upon the movements of the individual men of whom they are composed. Sometimes, indeed, the movements of one man, as of Christopher Columbus, determine the settlement of continents, and the destiny of mighty nations. In view of these facts, we must admit the most special and minute providence of God in all the affairs of earth. It would never, perhaps, have been doubted, but for the philosophical difficulty 222

of reconciling it with the free agency of men, and of discriminating between it and the working of miracles. This difficulty, however, affords no rational ground for such a doubt, for the *method* of God's agency in human affairs is above human comprehension. To doubt the reality of an assumed fact, the nature of which is confessedly above our comprehension, because we know not how to reconcile it with other known facts, is equivalent to confessing our ignorance at one moment, and denying it the next. It were wiser to conclude, that, if we could only comprehend that which is now incomprehensible, the difficulty would vanish. While the uneducated swain is ignorant of the law of gravitation, he could not understand how the world can turn over without spilling the water out of his well; but the moment he apprehends this law the difficulty disappears.

The incidental statement that God made from *one blood* all the nations of men, is an inspired assertion of the unity of the race, and accords with the Mosaic history. To deny it because we find some difficulty in reconciling it with the present diversity in the types of men, is another instance of the fallacy just exposed. It is to deny an assertion of the Scriptures, not because of something we know, but of something we do not know. We do not know, with certainty, what caused so great diversity among the races of men, and, because of this ignorance, we deny their common paternity. Such a denial could not be justified, unless we knew all the facts which have transpired in human history. But much the larger portion of human history is unwritten and unknown; and, at the same time, we are dependent, for all we do know of the first half of it, upon the word of God. The only rational course, therefore, which is left to us, is to receive its statements in their obvious import as the truth of history.

In arguing this last proposition, Paul interweaves with his proof a statement of God's purpose concerning the nations, "that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him." He here has reference to those nations who were without revelation; and means, I think, that one purpose of leaving them in that condition was to make a trial of their ability, without the aid of revelation, to seek and feel after the Lord so as to find him. It resulted in demonstrating what Paul afterward asserted, that "the world by wisdom knew not God," and that, therefore, "it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save those who believe."⁴¹¹

From this reference to the efforts of men to find God, a natural association of thought led the speaker to assert the omnipresence of God: "Although he is not far from each one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as also some of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring." The connection of thought in this passage is this: We are his offspring, as your own poets teach, and this is sufficient proof that he is still about us; for he certainly would not abandon the offspring whom he has begotten.

From the conclusion that we are the offspring of God, Paul advances to the third point of contrast between him and the gods around him: "Being then, the *offspring* of God, we ought not to think that the Deity is similar to gold, or silver, or stone, graven by the art and device of man." This was a strong appeal to the self-respect of his hearers. To acknowledge that they were the offspring of God, and at the same time admit that he was similar to a carved piece of metal, or marble, was to degrade themselves by degrading their origin.

The argument by which he revealed to them the God who had been unknown is now completed. He has exhibited the uselessness of all the splendid temples around him, by showing that the true God dwells not in them, and that he is the God who made the earth and the heavens and all conceivable things. He has proved the folly of all their acts or worship, by showing that the real God had no need to any thing, but that all men are dependent on him for life and breath and all things. He has exhibited the foreknowledge; the providence, general and special; the omnipresence, and the universal parentage of this God; and has made them feel disgusted at the idea of worshiping,

as their creator, any thing similar to metal or marble shaped by human hands. Thus their temples, their services, and their images are all degraded to their proper level, while the grandeur and glory and paternity of the true God are exalted before them.

The speaker next advances to unfold to his hearers their fearful responsibility to God now revealed to them. The times of ignorance, in which they had built these temples and carved these images, he tells them that God had *overlooked*; that is, to use his own language on another occasion, he had “suffered the nations to walk in their own ways.”⁴¹² “But now, he commands all men everywhere to repent; because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by a man whom he has appointed, of which he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” This was evidently not designed for the concluding paragraph of the speech, but was a brief statement of the appointment of Jesus as judge of the living and the dead, preparatory to introducing him fully to the audience. But here his discourse was interrupted, and brought abruptly to a close.

32, 33. (32) “*And when they heard of a resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, We will hear you again concerning this matter.* (33) *So Paul departed from among them.*” There are two strange features in the conduct of this audience. *First*, That they listened so patiently while Paul was demonstrating the folly of their idolatrous worship, which we would expect them to defend with zeal. *Second*, That they should interrupt him with mockery when he spoke of a resurrection from the dead, which we would have expected them to welcome as a most happy relief from the gloom which shrouded their thoughts of death. But the former is accounted for by the prevailing infidelity among philosophic minds in reference to the popular worship, rendering formal and heartless with them a service which was still performed by the masses with devoutness and sincerity. Their repugnance to the thought of a resurrection originated not in a preference for the gloomy future into which they were compelled to look, but in a fondness for that philosophy by which they had concluded that death was an eternal sleep. Their pride of opinion had crushed the better instincts of their nature, and led them to mock at the hope of a future life, 224 which has been the dearest of all hopes to the chief part of mankind. Thus the devotees of human philosophy, instead of being led by it to a knowledge of the truth, were deceived into the forfeiture of a blessed hope, which has been enjoyed by ruder nations, amid all their ignorance and superstition.

34. Although his discourse terminated amid the mockery of a portion of his audience, the apostle's effort was not altogether fruitless. (34) “*But certain men followed him and believed; among whom were Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.*” We find, however, no subsequent trace of a Church in Athens within the period of apostolic history, and these names are not elsewhere mentioned. We are constrained, therefore, to the conclusion, that the cold philosophy and polished heathenism of this city had too far corrupted its inhabitants to admit of their turning to Christ, until some providential changes should prepare the way.

³⁸⁹Acts xvii. 14.

³⁹⁰Life and Ep., vol. 1, pp. 317, 318.

³⁹¹Life and Ep., vol. 1, p. 325.

³⁹²Chapters xxii and xxvi.

³⁹³1 Thes. i. 5.

[394](#) 1 Thes. ii. 9.

[395](#) Phil. iv. 16.

[396](#) 1 Thes. ii. 9.

[397](#) 1 Thes. i. 9.

[398](#) Matt. x. 34.

[399](#) 2 Cor. ii. 16.

[400](#) Acts xviii. 2.

[401](#) Life and Ep., vol. 1, pp. 339–341.

[402](#) See Olshausen and others on the passage.

[403](#) Life and Ep., vol. 1, p. 342. Note.

[404](#) Acts xx. 3, 4.

[405](#) 1 Thes. i. 8.

[406](#) See Romans i. 22–32.

[407](#) For a more complete account of these two sects, see Life and Ep., vol. 1, pp. 366–370.

[408](#) Common version.

[409](#) Bloomfield and others.

[410](#) Petronius. Life and Ep., vol. 1, p. 363.

[411](#) 1 Cor. i. 21.

[412](#) Acts xiv. 16.

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