Sunday School Lesson 12 – November 23, 2025, Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens- Acts 17:1-4,10-12,22-25, 28

BIBLE BASIS: Acts 17:1-4,10-12,22-25, 28

BIBLE TRUTH: Paul preached the Gospel with strong conviction in spite of opposition.

MEMORY VERSE: "For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To The Unknown God. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." (Acts 17:23)

LESSON AIM: KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1. Truth Meets Resistance (Thessalonica)
 - Some believe, but others stir up opposition. Sharing truth may provoke resistance—but faithfulness matters more than popularity.
- 2. Noble Curiosity (Berea)
 - Spiritual maturity involves testing teachings against God's Word. Curiosity + discernment = growth.
- 3. m Cultural Bridge-Building (Athens)
 - Effective witness begins with understanding others. We can build bridges without compromising truth.
- 4. God Is Near
 - True conversion is a work of God—and it leads to action. God is accessible. He invites all people to seek Him and find Him.
- 5. A Call to Repentance
 - The gospel isn't just interesting-it's urgent. Knowing God leads to changed lives.

Background

1. **1** Timothy Joins the Team

- Paul meets Timothy in Lystra and invites him to join the mission.
- Timothy is circumcised to avoid offending Jewish audiences, showing Paul's strategic sensitivity. (Acts 16:1-5)

2. **Solution** Divine Redirection

- The Holy Spirit prevents Paul from preaching in Asia.
- Paul receives a *vision of a man from Macedonia* asking for help—this leads them to Europe for the first time. (Acts 16:6-7)

3. **Ministry in Philippi**

- Philippi is a Roman colony in Macedonia.
- Paul and his team meet *Lydia*, a wealthy merchant of purple cloth. She becomes the first convert in Europe and hosts the missionaries. (Acts 16:8-1)

4. Deliverance and Conflict

- Paul casts out a spirit from a slave girl who was being exploited for fortunetelling.
- Her owners, angry at losing profit, stir up trouble. Paul and Silas are beaten and imprisoned. (Acts 16:-24

5. 🕎 Earthquake and Salvation

- While in jail, Paul and Silas sing hymns.
- A miraculous earthquake opens the prison doors.
- The *jailer*, fearing the prisoners escaped, is about to take his life—but Paul stops him.
- The jailer and his household believe and are baptized. (Acts 16:25-34)

6. Roman Citizenship Revealed

 Paul reveals his Roman citizenship, which shocks the officials who had beaten him. • They are released and respectfully escorted out of the city. (Acts 15:35-40)

The Lesson:

I. INITIAL RECEPTION (ACTS 17:1-4)

- ¹Now after Paul and Silas had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.
- ² And Paul entered the synagogue, as was his ^[a]custom, and for three Sabbaths he engaged in discussion *and* friendly debate with them from the Scriptures,
- ³ explaining and pointing out [scriptural evidence] that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead, and *saying*, "This Jesus, whom I am proclaiming to you, is the Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed)."
- ⁴ And some of them were persuaded *to believe* and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and many of the leading women.

What's Happening Here (Acts 17:1-4)

1. Arrival in Thessalonica

- Paul and Silas travel through Amphipolis and Apollonia, two cities in Macedonia, on their way to Thessalonica, a major urban center with a Jewish synagogue.
- This journey follows their release from prison in Philippi (Acts 16), continuing their second missionary journey.

2. Paul's Customary Approach

- Paul enters the synagogue, **as was his custom**, meaning he regularly began ministry by engaging Jewish communities through Scripture.
- For **three Sabbaths**, he teaches and debates, using the Hebrew Scriptures to explain that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead.
- 3 Sabbaths = 3 Sunday's equaling 3 weeks

🚹 3. Proclaiming Jesus as Messiah

- Paul presents **scriptural evidence** that Jesus fulfills the Messianic prophecies.
- He boldly declares: "This Jesus... is the Christ," connecting the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to the long-awaited hope of Israel.

🔭 4. Mixed Response

- Some Jews are persuaded and believe.
- A **large number of God-fearing Greeks** (Gentiles who respected Jewish teachings) and **many prominent women** also join the movement.
- This shows the gospel's inclusive reach—crossing ethnic, gender, and social boundaries.

Reflection Question:

- 1. Why do you think Paul started in the synagogue?
- 2. What does it mean to "reason from the Scriptures?"
- 3. What scriptures might Paul have used to explain Jesus' suffering and resurrection?
- 4. Why do you think different people responded in different ways?

II. Inspiring Research (VS 10-12)

¹⁰The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived, they entered the Jewish synagogue.

¹¹Now these people were more noble *and* open-minded than those in Thessalonica, so they received the message [of salvation through faith in the Christ] with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

¹²As a result many of them became believers, together with a number of prominent Greek women and men.

Let's Fill in the Gaps (vs. 5-9)

2 1. Jealousy Turns Violent

• Some **unbelieving Jews** become jealous of Paul and Silas's influence—especially among Gentiles and prominent women.

• They recruit **thugs from the marketplace** (likely idle troublemakers) to form a mob and stir up chaos.

2. Attack on Jason's House

- Jason, a local believer who hosted Paul and Silas, becomes a target.
- The mob searches for Paul and Silas but can't find them, so they drag Jason and other believers before the authorities.

3. Accusation: "Turning the World Upside Down"

- The mob accuses Paul and Silas of disrupting the status quo and defying Caesar by proclaiming Jesus as King.
- This is both a spiritual and political charge—claiming allegiance to Jesus challenges Roman authority.

🐞 4. Bail and Release

- Jason and the others are forced to pay security (bail) to be released.
- This shows how early Christians often paid a personal price for their hospitality and faith.

What's Happening here (Acts 17:10-12)

1. Secret Escape to Berea

- After intense opposition in Thessalonica, the believers send Paul and Silas away by night to protect them.
- This shows the urgency and danger surrounding their mission—but also the support of the early church.

2. Ministry Begins in the Synagogue

- True to their pattern, Paul and Silas begin by engaging the Jewish synagogue in Berea.
- They continue teaching about Jesus as the Messiah, using Scripture as their foundation.

3. Berean Response: Noble and Open-Minded

- The Bereans are described as **more noble** than the Thessalonians—not because of status, but because of their attitude.
- They receive the message with eagerness and examine the Scriptures daily to verify what Paul says.
- This posture reflects humility, curiosity, and discernment.

4. Fruitful Belief

- Many Bereans believe, including prominent Greek women and men—again showing the gospel's reach across cultural and social lines.
- Their belief is rooted not in emotion or pressure, but in **Scriptural confirmation**

Reflection Questions

- 1. Why do you think truth sometimes makes people angry?
- 2. How can jealousy distort our view of others?
- 3. What does it mean to stand with someone who's being targeted for their faith?
- 4. Why would the gospel feel threatening by some people?
- 5. When is it wise to stay and speak, and when is it wise to leave?

III. Provoking Reflection (vs. 22-25, 28)

²²So Paul, standing in the center of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I observe [with every turn I make throughout the city] that you are very religious *and* devout in all respects.

²³ Now as I was going along and carefully looking at your objects of worship, I came to an altar with this inscription: 'TO AN ^[a]UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you already worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

²⁴The God who created the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

²⁵ nor is He ^[a]served by human hands, as though He needed anything, because it is He who gives to all [people] life and breath and all things.

Let's Fill in the Gaps (vs. 13-15)

😟 1. Opposition Spreads from Thessalonica

- "The Jews of Thessalonica... came there too, agitating and disturbing the crowds."
- The same group that opposed Paul in Thessalonica now travels to Berea to disrupt his ministry there.
- This shows how deeply threatened they were by the spread of the gospel—even willing to travel and stir up unrest.

1 2. Urgent Protection

- "The brothers immediately sent Paul away..."
- The believers in Berea act quickly to protect Paul, sending him toward the sea—likely en route to **Athens**.
- This reflects the early church's solidarity and strategic care for its leaders.

2 3. Silas and Timothy Stay Behind

- · "Silas and Timothy remained there..."
- Paul's companions stay in Berea to continue the work and support the new believers.
- This shows teamwork and trust—

1 4. Paul Arrives in Athens

- "Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens..."
- Paul arrives in **Athens**, a city full of idols and philosophical debate.
- He sends word for Silas and Timothy to join him soon, preparing for the next phase of ministry.

III. Provoking Reflection: What's happening here vs. 22-25,28

1. Paul Stands in the Areopagus

- The Areopagus (Mars Hill) was a prestigious place where philosophers gathered to discuss ideas.
- Paul is invited to speak after being noticed for preaching about Jesus and the resurrection.

2. Observing Their Devotion

- "I observe... you are very religious..."
- Paul begins by affirming the Athenians' spiritual interest.
- He's respectful, not confrontational—building a bridge rather than burning one.

3. The Altar to an "Unknown God"

- "What you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you..."
- Paul uses their altar as a launch point to introduce the God they don't yet know.
- This is a brilliant example of **contextual evangelism**—starting where people are.

4. God as Creator and Sustainer

- "The God who made the world... gives life and breath..."
- Paul contrasts the living God with idols made by human hands.
- · He emphasizes that God is self-sufficient, not dependent on temples or rituals

5. One Humanity, One Purpose

- "From one man He made every nation..."
- Paul affirms human unity and divine sovereignty.
- God has placed people in specific times and places so they might seek Him.

6. God Is Near

- "He is not far from each one of us..."
- Paul shifts from philosophical to deeply personal.
- God is accessible, not distant or unknowable.

7. Quoting Their Poets

- "For we also are His children..."
- Paul quotes Greek poets to connect with his audience.
- He shows that truth can be found even in unexpected places—and points it back to God.

Reflection Questions:

- 1. What did Paul notice about the people of Athens?
- 2. Why do you think he started his message by talking about their altar to an "unknown god"?
- 3. How does Paul describe God in this passage?
- 4. What are some things he says God doesn't need from us?
- 5. What does Paul say about where God lives and how close He is to us?
- 6. How is that different from what the Athenians believed