

Conversions In Acts

The Athenian's Conversion

(Ac 17:22-34)

INTRODUCTION

1. Good Morning,
 - a. Greeting...
2. Series of lessons covering the different "Conversions In Acts."
 - a. Last week we looked at "The Jailer & His Household's Conversion."
 - i. **Ac 16:33** "And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family."¹
 - b. This week we are going to examine Paul's trip to Athens and "The Athenian's Conversion."
 - i. **Ac 17:34** "But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them."
3. As we talked over the last two weeks...
 - a. Paul and Silas are in what is commonly called Paul's second missionary journey.
 - b. Paul having just been in Philippi now goes and finds himself in Thessalonica.
 - i. This is where we found ourselves reflecting upon in our Sunday night lessons from I Thessalonians.
 - c. Paul after being run out of Thessalonica goes to Bera.
 - i. These new converts were more noble than those of Thessalonica because of their making sure Paul was teaching truth before believing, obeying, and then becoming Christians.
 - d. Paul was then run out by the Jews from Thessalonica in Bera to Athens.
 - i. This is where we find our lesson today.
4. With this all in mind let us consider our lesson today from our four question perspective once again.
 - a. What led to the conversions?
 - b. What was said to the non-Christians?
 - c. What was the mentality of the new converts?
 - d. How can knowing this help us help others?

I. What Led To The Conversions?

- A. Paul having arrived in Athens finds himself waiting for Silas & Timothy (15-16)
 1. Paul is moved by the great architecture but not like tourist today are over there.
 - i. People today are in awe of the amazing artistic architecture of the day of Paul and find it wonderful.
 - ii. Paul on the other hand instead found it heart wrenching.

¹ All Scriptures are taken from the ESV unless otherwise noted. If other translations are used this is not necessarily an endorsement of the translation.

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- B. Paul went to the Synagogue of Athens and reasoned with those there (17-18)
1. These would be the Jews.
 - i. During the 400 years of silence Synagogues started being built everywhere.
 2. These would be the devout persons.
 - i. These were God-fearing Gentiles that would come to study at the Synagogues each Sabbath.
 3. These would be the Epicurean & Stoics.
 - i. The Epicureans were “one of the most popular systems of thought at this time...” (Barry, J. D., Grigoni, M. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Mangum, D., & Whitehead, M. M. (2012). Faithlife Study Bible. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.)
 - a. They believed the world & deities were made of atoms and as such there was no real connection between to two. They taught that physical life was all there is and as such they ought to experience the fullness of all physical pleasures because when one dies all life simply ends.
 - ii. The Stoics were a “popular system of thought during this time” as well. (Ibid)
 - a. They believed the world & deities were united and as such they ought not to give into the pleasures as this was (in their minds) not natural. As such they taught when one died they were united with their “impersonal divine beings” in the after life.
 - iii. Understanding this makes the two statements about Paul make since.
 - a. **Ac 17:18** “...And some said, “What does this babblers wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.”
- C. Paul finds himself at the Areopagus (19-21)
1. The Epicureans and Stoics take him to the Areopagus.
 - i. This was on a hill northwest of the Acropolis in Athens were it overlooked the marketplace.
 - ii. This was also known as “Mars Hill.”
 - a. “Mars being the Roman equivalent of the Greek god Ares.” (Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In Tyndale Bible dictionary. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.)
 - iii. At this time the Areopagus was used for many things.
 - a. It was used for trials which was its original usage.
 1. This is where Socrates faced those who accused him of deprecating the Greek gods.
 - b. It was used for other various things as well such as political, educational, philosophical, and religious matters.
 - iv. It should be noted that the Areopagus was also the name of the Athenian council that meet there.

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- D. Paul preaches before the Areopagus (22-31)
 - 1. Here we find Paul preaching before an all Gentile audience from what it appears.
- E. After Paul concludes his sermon we find...
 - 1. Some that mocked him.
 - i. This most likely was the Epicureans.
 - 2. Some wanted to hear more from Paul.
 - i. This most likely was the Stoics.
 - 3. Some became Christians.
 - i. We are told only that some men (one named Dionysus) and some women (one named Damaris) became children of God.
- F. Thus...
 - 1. What led to the conversions...was there anything that got the conversions going...yes it was Paul reasoning from Scripture to the Gentiles.

II. What Was Said To The Non-Christians?

- A. In our text we find what was reasoned/preached to the Areopagus
 - 1. Paul could not go about preaching as he usually did.
 - i. Normally Paul was reasoning Scripture with Jews from the Law of Moses to prove Jesus was the Christ.
 - ii. These men & women would have little knowledge of the Law of Moses though and as such Paul had to use other means.
- B. Paul reasoned...
 - 1. First that the Athenians were very religious.
 - i. Because of all the temples there in Athens Paul knew they were religiously minded.
 - 2. Second that they understood they didn't know everything religiously.
 - i. Paul points to the unknown god and uses this to teach them about the God they had not known who is actually the only true God.
 - 3. Third that this God whom they previous did not know is the creator of the world and everything in it.
 - i. Paul appeals to both Epicurean and Stoic mentalities here.
 - 4. Fourth that God having create man, created him so as to seek God out.
 - i. Paul not only pointed to the reason for their existence but that they could actually find God and know truth therefore.
 - 5. Fifth that He (Paul) was not unaware of their culture and philosophers.
 - i. Paul quotes from two Greek works to make his point concerning God.
 - a. Epimenides of Crete
 - b. Phainomena (written by Aratus)
 - 6. Sixth that the God of heaven could not be anything made up by man hands.
 - i. This is simple logic, if God created man and therefore man is the created, man cannot invent God or gods.
 - 7. Seventh that God is a loving God willing to allow everyone repent.
 - i. Paul points out that repentance is giving but time is of the essence because God has appointed a time that He will judge the world.

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8. Eighth that the judgment of the world will come based on the righteousness of one man who was raised from the dead.
 - i. The raising of this one man forever more was the assurance that the judgment of all mankind will come.
- C. Thus...
 1. What was said to the non-Christians...was there any specific doctrine mentioned...yes they were taught the nature of God through God's creation and judgment and the need to be obedient to this one true God.

III. What Was The Mentality Of The New Converts?

- A. This is the only time in our series of lessons where we are not given some sort of response to their conversion
 1. Whatever the reason for such it is suffice to say their response would have been on par with the others we have studied.
- B. With that in mind let us reflect on the other response we have seen
 1. We have seen the converts devote themselves to the apostles teaching.
 2. We have seen the converts devote themselves to fellowship with one another.
 3. We have seen the converts devote themselves to bold prayers.
 4. We have seen the converts devote themselves to hospitality.
 5. We have seen the converts devote themselves to rejoicing.
 6. We have seen the converts devote themselves to worshiping the one true God.
- C. Thus...
 1. What was the mentality of the new converts...was there anything surprising after their conversion in their attitude or actions...no doubt as we just saw most if not all of these would have been their response we are just not made privy this time to such information.

IV. How Can Knowing This Help Us Help Others?

- A. Knowing these things helps us help others by understanding that everyone needs to hear the gospel
 1. This sounds like a "common sense" statement however we mentally do not always consider this as true.
 - i. How many atheist have you tried to have a Bible study with?
 - a. I heard an elder one time say "you can't study with anyone that does at least believe the Bible is inspired by God."
 - b. This statement suggests that atheist are not to be studied with.
 1. Unfortunately there are far too many people that take this approach.
 2. We must never forget that the gospel is for all.
 - B. Knowing these things helps us help others by understanding that you cannot teach everyone the same way
 1. Like we mentioned in an earlier lesson that we must assess the persons biblical knowledge and go from there.
 - i. If the person is very well versed in understanding God, Jesus, sin...we start teaching where they are not well versed.

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2. Sometimes the person we are studying with (talking to) does not even know the Bible and it being the Word of God.
 - i. If the person is not versed concerning the Bible we must start not with Scripture but why the Bible is the only true Word from God.
3. Though we start outside of Scripture we must never lose focus on the purpose of the study which is to teach the gospel.
 - i. We know we are not given all that Paul talked about because we know that some became Christians and only repentance and belief are mentioned.
 - ii. From all of our other studies we have found a continuous pattern established.
 - a. First the expectation of listening and learning hence the preaching/reasoning.
 1. **Ro 10:17** “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”
 2. We have seen this throughout the lessons.
 - a. **Ac 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 16, & now 17**
 - b. Second the expectation of responding to what has been studied. The natural open-hearted response is faith in Jesus.
 1. This is believing Jesus is the Christ.
 - a. **Jn 8:24** “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.”
 2. This is also obeying Jesus
 - a. **Jn 14:15** “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”
 - b. **Mt 7:21** “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”
 3. We have seen this throughout the lessons.
 - a. **Ac 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 16, & now 17**
 - c. Third the expectation of repentance. The natural response to one that knows Jesus is Lord and is willing to obey Him is to stop going away from Him by turning 180 degrees and going toward the Christ.
 1. **Lk 24:47** “and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”
 2. We have seen repentance proclaimed often.
 - a. **Ac 2, 3, 10, 16, & now 17**

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- d. Fourth the expectation is for one to confess. When one puts their faith in Jesus and repents the natural response will be to confess with the mouth that Jesus is Lord.
 1. **Mt 10:32** “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.” (NKJV)
 - i. **Ro 10:9-10** “because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”
 2. We have seen this only once in our studies thus far.
 - i. **Ac 8**
 3. We know through other passages that it is required such as **Mt 10:32** or **Ro 10:9-10**.
- e. Fifth the expectation is for one to be baptized/immersed for the forgiveness of sins. When one puts their faith in Jesus, turns their life, in repentance, toward Christ, confesses Jesus as Lord the natural response as we have seen is to immediately be baptized.
 1. **Mt 28:19** “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...”
 2. We have come to find this true through our series of lessons thus far.
 - i. **Ac 2, 8, 9, 10, 16**
 3. Though it is not mentioned in our lesson today we know they were baptized/immersed for the remission of sins in order to obey the gospel
 - i. **I Co 15:1-4** “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you...3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures”
 - ii. **Ro 6:3-5** “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

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C. Thus...

1. What we find is what we have continuously found and know to be truth we must go out and preach the gospel to every creature.

CONCLUSION

1. Brethren let us preach the truth without waver and stand lovingly bold for the Word of God and what it says concerning God's Plan of Salvation.
 - a. Let us never be arrogant but rather let our hearts ache for those that need to hear the truth.
2. Question: Have you been so bold as to seek to teach those you know the Word of God?
 - a. If so continue therein and grow thereby.
 - b. If not why not?
3. Invitation
 - a. For those that are Christians but are not living for Christ repent by confessing your sins to God that He may forgive you and dedicate your life/time back to Him.
 - i. **I Jn 1:7, 9** "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin...9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
 - b. For those that are not Christians or for those that think they are Christians and want to know for sure notice what is required to become a child of God or Christian according to God and God only.
 - i. Hear/Study **Rom 10:17; II Tim 2:15**
 - ii. Have Faith In Jesus **Jn 3:16; 8:24**
 - iii. Repent/Turn To God **Ac 17:30; Lk 24:47**
 - iv. Confess Jesus As Lord **Mt 10:32; Rom 10:9**
 - v. Immersed For The Forgiveness of Sins **Ac 2:38; 22:16; I Pt 3:21**
 - vi. Live A Faithful Life **I Jn 1:7; Eph 5:8**