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AMONG THE PHILOSOPHERS

ACTS 17



Luke has shown us how the gospel matches up against two major opponents: the zealous Jews in synagogues around Turkey and now in northern Greece, and the economic and political forces of the Roman Empire. But there is an entire world of thought which we haven't yet had on stage. Ancient philosophy governed how thousands of ordinary people saw the world, what they thought of as reasonable and unreasonable, what they thought about the gods, what they thought human life was for and how best to live it. Millions who had never studied philosophy were nevertheless deeply influenced by the major currents of thought that were debated in the schools, just as plenty of people today who have never studied philosophy are massively influenced by the popular ideas of today.

THESSALONICA V. BEREÆ (17:1-21)

1. Read Acts 17:1-21. Paul follows his usual practice of going to the Jewish synagogue, where he explains the Scriptures. But this time there is a new note added. Luke says Paul was interpreting and explaining that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and rise from the dead. In verses 4-6, what are the mixed results of Paul's preaching?
2. How do the people in Berea (17:10-15) differ from the people in Thessalonica (17:1-9)? What suspicions or accusations do people have or make about Christians today?
3. Read verses 16-21. What do you make of the Athenian philosopher's invitation to Paul to come and speak at their "church", the Areopagus? Was it a friendly invite or something else?

PREACHING TO PHILOSOPHERS (17:22-34)

An idol is a God substitute. Any person or thing that occupies the place God should occupy is an idol. Covetousness is idolatry. Ideologies can be idolatries. So can fame, wealth and power, sex, food, alcohol and drugs. People can be idols—parents, spouses, children and friends. The possibilities extend further to work, recreation, television and possessions. Even church, religion and Christian service can be idolized. Paul was deeply pained by the idolatrous city of Athens. It was a city of aesthetic magnificence and cultural sophistication and the world center of pagan philosophy and religion. In Acts 17, Paul gives us a great example of how to communicate Jesus to a culture like this one.

4. In his sermon (17:22-28), what differences does Paul draw between idols and the true God?

5. Epicureans believed there simply was not enough evidence available to us to be able to tell whether the gods exist or not, and if they do, what do they want from us? What parts of Paul's address would they have agreed or disagreed with?

6. In verses 30-31, how has God verified that Jesus is the coming judge of all mankind?

7. Do you know someone who wonders if there is a God? How could you use the example of Paul's message at the Areopagus to help that person consider Jesus?

8. In verses 32-34, what aspect of Paul's message seems the deciding factor for his listeners? What can we learn from this for our own personal evangelism of family, friends, or neighbors?