SMITH FOR CHRIST PUBLISHING · BEREAN DASHBOARD STUDY

Acts 17

Noble Bereans and an Unknown God — O·I·A, integrated with the Deep Dive

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION · 2026-11-10 · NASB 1995

"Seeking God diligently — examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." — Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

Paul opens the Scriptures in Thessalonica and Berea and names the living God in Athens, and everywhere the message lands on Jesus raised from the dead. The Bereans show me how to hear it: eager to receive the word, and careful to check it in the Book every day.

00 The Text

ACTS 17 (NASB95), MARKED

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED — God — His character & actions · Command / instruction · Key repeated word · Sin / warning · Promise / blessing · Time / place / contrast

1 Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and
Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a
synagogue of the Jews.

2 And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and
for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the
Scriptures,

3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to
suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This
Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

4 And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and
Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing
Greeks and a number of the leading women.

5 But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along
some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob
and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of
Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.

6 When they did not find them, they began dragging
Jason and some brethren before the city authorities,
shouting, "These men who have upset the world have
come here also;

7 and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary
to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another
king, Jesus."

8 They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who
heard these things.

9 And when they had received a pledge from Jason and
the others, they released them.

10 The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by
night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the
synagogue of the Jews.

11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in
Thessalonica, for they received the word with great
eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see
whether these things were so.

12 Therefore many of them believed, along with a
number of prominent Greek women and men.

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.

14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as
far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there.

15 Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.

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.

17 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.

18 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.

19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?

20 "For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean."

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

22 So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.

23 "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

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

25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;

26 and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,

27 that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

28 for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'

29 "Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.

30 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,

31 because He has 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."

32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this."

33 So Paul went out of their midst.

34 But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Marked in the text

- **v2** "reasoned with them from the Scriptures" — Command / instruction
- **v3** "the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead" — God — His character & actions
- **v3** "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ" — God — His character & actions
- **v5** "becoming jealous" — Sin / warning
- **v6** "These men who have upset the world have come here also" — Time / place / contrast
- **v7** "there is another king, Jesus" — God — His character & actions
- **v11** "more noble-minded" — Promise / blessing
- **v11** "more noble" — Promise / blessing
- **v11** "they received the word with great eagerness" — Command / instruction
- **v11** "examining the Scriptures daily" — Command / instruction
- **v12** "Therefore many of them believed" — Promise / blessing
- **v16** "his spirit was being provoked within him" — Sin / warning

- **v16** "the city full of idols" — Sin / warning
- **v18** "he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection" — God — His character & actions
- **v21** "telling or hearing something new" — Time / place / contrast
- **v23** "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD" — Time / place / contrast
- **v24** "The God who made the world and all things in it" — God — His character & actions
- **v25** "He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things" — God — His character & actions
- **v26** "He made from one man every nation of mankind" — God — His character & actions
- **v27** "He is not far from each one of us" — Promise / blessing
- **v28** "in Him we live and move and exist" — God — His character & actions
- **v30** "all people everywhere should repent" — Command / instruction
- **v31** "He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness" — Time / place / contrast
- **v31** "by raising Him from the dead" — God — His character & actions
- **v32** "some began to sneer" — Sin / warning
- **v34** "some men joined him and believed" — Promise / blessing
- **v2** "Scriptures" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v2** "scriptures" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v18** "resurrection" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v23** "ignorance" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)

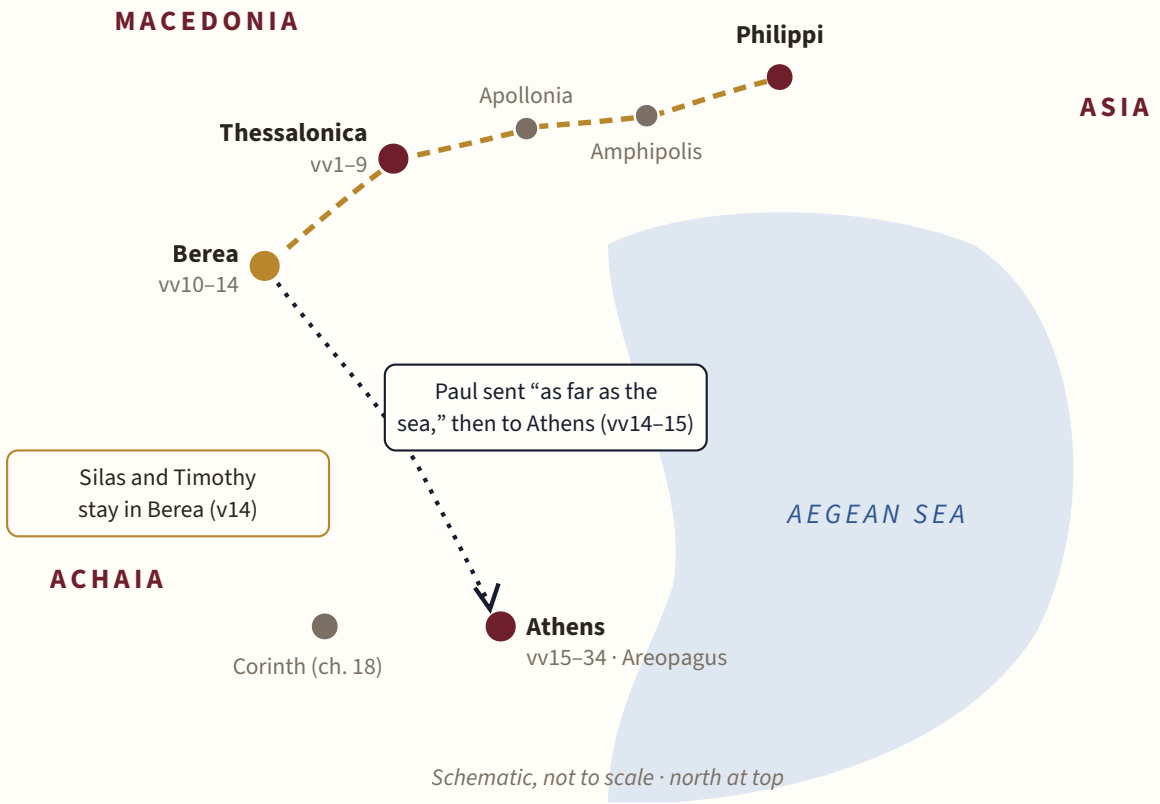
01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · ACTS 17:2

"And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,"

FIGURE · MACEDONIA TO ACHAIA



Follow the gold road west from Philippi to Thessalonica and Berea, then the dark line by sea to Athens, where Paul waits for Silas and Timothy.

Setting. Paul, Silas and Timothy leave Philippi (ch. 16) and travel west through Amphipolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica (v1). After three Sabbaths in the synagogue and a riot, the brethren send Paul and Silas by night to Berea (vv1–10). When Jews from Thessalonica follow, Paul is escorted to Athens while Silas and Timothy stay (vv13–15). In Athens he reasons in the synagogue and the market place, and is brought to the Areopagus (vv16–21), where he preaches (vv22–31). Some sneer, some delay, some believe (vv32–34).

Structure:

- vv1–9 — **Thessalonica:** Paul's custom — the synagogue, three Sabbaths, reasoning from the Scriptures (v2); the Christ had to suffer and rise; "This Jesus … is the Christ" (v3); some persuaded, many God-fearing Greeks and

leading women (v4); the jealous mob attacks Jason's house (v5); "These men who have upset the world" — "another king, Jesus" (vv6–7); a pledge, and release (vv8–9).

- vv10–15 — **Berea:** sent by night; the synagogue (v10); "more noble-minded … examining the Scriptures daily" (v11); many believed, Jews and prominent Greeks (v12); agitators from Thessalonica (v13); Paul sent to the sea and on to Athens; Silas and Timothy remain (vv14–15).
- vv16–21 — **Athens:** his spirit provoked by a city full of idols (v16); reasoning in synagogue and market place every day (v17); Epicurean and Stoic philosophers — "idle babbler," "strange deities" (v18); the Areopagus — "May we know what this new teaching is?" (vv19–20); the Athenians' love of something new (v21).
- vv22–31 — **the sermon:** "very religious" — an altar "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD" (vv22–23); the God who made the world, Lord of heaven and earth, needs nothing, gives all (vv24–25); one man, every nation, appointed times and boundaries (v26); that they would seek God — He is not far (v27); in Him we live and move and exist — His children (v28); no idols of gold, silver or stone (v29); repent (v30); a fixed day, a Man appointed, proof by resurrection (v31).
- vv32–34 — **responses:** some sneer, others "We shall hear you again" (v32); Paul leaves (v33); some join him and believe — Dionysius the Areopagite, Damaris, and others (v34).

Repeated words, with counts:

- "man / men / Man" ×9 — vv5, 6, 12, 26, 29, 30, 31 (×2), 34.
- "all" ×9 — vv7, 21, 22, 24, 25 (×2), 26, 30, 31.
- "God" ×5 — vv13, 24, 27, 29, 30 (plus "God-fearing" vv4, 17, and "UNKNOWN GOD" v23).
- "proclaiming / proclaimed / proclaimer / proclaim" ×5 — vv3, 13, 18, 19, 23.
- "Jews" ×5 — vv1, 5, 10, 13, 17.
- "resurrection / rise / raising" ×4 — vv3, 18, 31, 32.
- "city" ×4 — vv5, 6, 8, 16; "Athens / Athenians" ×4 — vv15, 16, 21, 22.
- "Silas" ×4 — vv4, 10, 14, 15; "brethren" ×3 — vv6, 10, 14.
- "Jesus" ×3 — vv3, 7, 18; "world" ×3 — vv6, 24, 31; "Thessalonica" ×3 — vv1, 11, 13.
- "Scriptures" ×2 — vv2, 11; "reasoned / reasoning" ×2 — vv2, 17; "daily / every day" ×2 — vv11, 17.
- "ignorance" ×2 — vv23, 30; "worship" ×2 — v23 (×2); "new" ×2 — vv19, 21; "strange" ×2 — vv18, 20; "children" ×2 — vv28, 29; "believed" ×2 — vv12, 34.

Contrasts: Thessalonica's jealous mob ⟷ Berea's eager examiners (vv5, 11). Caesar's decrees ⟷ "another king, Jesus" (v7). The city full of idols ⟷ the God who made the world (vv16, 24). Temples made with hands ⟷ the Lord of heaven and earth (v24). Served by human hands ⟷ He gives to all (v25). Groping in the dark ⟷ He is not far (v27). Gold, silver, stone ⟷ the Divine Nature (v29). Times of ignorance ⟷ now (v30). Sneer ⟷ hear again ⟷ believe (vv32–34).

Shape of the chapter: three cities and three receptions, each shorter or longer as the hearers allow: a riot (1–9), a Bible study (10–15), and a sermon to philosophers (16–34). The method changes — Scripture to Jews, creation to Greeks — but every scene reaches the same center: the Christ who suffered and rose (vv3, 18, 31).

Chapter theme (my words): The gospel is reasonable, public and unsettling. It can be checked against the Scriptures, it confronts every idol, and it tells all people everywhere to repent because God has fixed a day and raised the Judge from the dead.

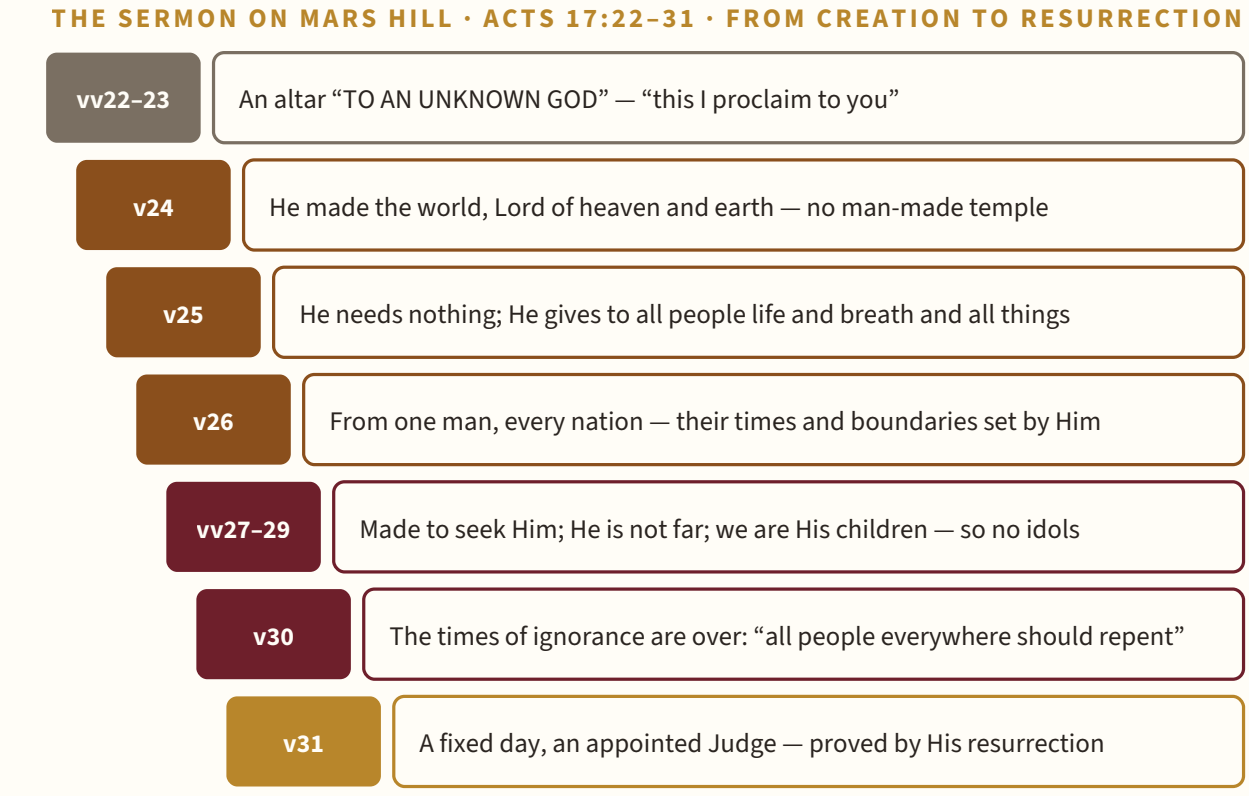
02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · ACTS 17:31

"because ◷ He has 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."

FIGURE · THE SERMON ON MARS HILL



Paul's Areopagus sermon steps down from the Creator to the coming Judge; notice that it ends, like his synagogue preaching, at the resurrection.

What did Paul prove from the Scriptures? That "the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead" (v3), and that Jesus is that Christ. The stumbling block for the synagogue was a suffering Messiah. Henry: "He must needs have suffered for us, because he could not otherwise purchase redemption for us." Jesus had taught the same thing from Moses and the prophets (Luke 24:26–27, 46).

Why did the charge "upset the world" matter? It was meant as sedition — "they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus" (v7). Guzik calls it "an unintended compliment." Henry: "Their

enemies set the city in an uproar, and then laid the blame upon them;" yet "Christ's kingdom was not of this world." The church did not riot; it was rioted against.

What made the Bereans "more noble-minded"? Not birth (*eugenēs* first meant "well-born") but how they treated the word: eagerly received, daily examined (v11). Guzik: "They would not accept Paul's teaching without checking for themselves, so they could know if these things were so." "When Paul preached, they had open hearts; but also clear heads." Henry: "Searching the scriptures must be our daily work." Notice the Bible they checked was the Old Testament, and it confirmed the gospel.

Why was Paul provoked in Athens? Because God's glory was being given to idols (v16; Rom 1:23). Guzik: "he was only depressed by the magnitude of the idolatry he saw all around." Henry: "the greatest pretenders to reason were the greatest slaves to idols." And Paul did something with the grief — he reasoned in the synagogue and the market place every day. Sproul: "The cradle of the church was the marketplace."

Did Paul compromise on Mars Hill? No. He began with creation because his hearers had no Bible, and he quoted their poets as a bridge, not an authority (Guzik). But every line of the sermon is biblical — Creator (Isa 42:5), needs nothing, one man, appointed times — and it ends with repentance, judgment and the resurrection. Guzik rejects the theory that Paul was disappointed in Athens and changed his message in Corinth.

What does "He is not far from each one of us" mean? God is present to every person as Creator and Sustainer — "in Him we live and move and exist" (v28). Spurgeon: "The living God is not far from any one of us," and "When the sinner seeks God and God seeks the sinner they will soon meet." But nearness is also solemn: He sees "the secret intents of our hearts."

What did God "overlook"? Not sin itself, but the full judgment due to the times of ignorance (v30; Acts 14:16). Stott (cited by Guzik): God "now declares such ignorance to be culpable." Sproul's sermon summary asks: "Will we be able to plead ignorance about God's identity when we come to His appointed day of judgment?" I believe that day is fixed on God's calendar and that the risen Jesus is the Judge (John 5:22).

Why did the resurrection divide the hill? Guzik: "The Greeks were fond of the idea of the immortality of the soul, but not of the idea of the resurrection of the body." Some sneered, some delayed, and some believed (vv32–34). Henry: some "adhered to him, and believed."

Word study (Greek):

- **reasoned — *dialegomai* (G1256):** dialogue, discussion; 17:2, 17; 18:4, 19.
- **giving evidence — *paratithēmi* (G3908):** to set beside, lay out the proof (v3).
- **upset — *anastatoō* (G387):** to stir up, overturn; 17:6; 21:38; Gal 5:12.
- **more noble-minded — *eugenēs* (G2104):** well-born, noble; Luke 19:12; 1 Cor 1:26.
- **eagerness — *prothymia* (G4288):** readiness of mind (v11).
- **examining — *anakrinō* (G350):** to sift, to examine as a judge; Luke 23:14; 1 Cor 2:15.
- **provoked — *paroxynō* (G3947):** stirred, sharpened; 17:16; 1 Cor 13:5.
- **full of idols — *kateidōlos* (G2712):** only here.
- **idle babbler — *spermologos* (G4691):** "seed-picker"; only here.
- **very religious — *deisidaimōn* (G1174):** fearing the gods; only here.
- **unknown — *agnōstos* (G57):** only here.
- **grope — *psēlaphaō* (G5584):** to feel for; Luke 24:39; 1 John 1:1.

- **repent — *metanoeō* (G3340):** change of mind and direction (v30).
- **fixed / appointed — *horizō* (G3724):** set a boundary; vv26, 31.
- **resurrection — *anastasis* (G386):** vv18, 32.

Key insights to carry (from the Deep Dive):

1. **Paul reasoned; he did not just announce** — *dialegomai* (vv2, 17).
2. **A suffering Messiah was the sticking point** (v3; Luke 24:26).
3. **Upside down is right side up** — "another king, Jesus" (vv6–7).
4. **Noble is a word about the Book, not the bloodline** (v11).
5. **Open hearts, clear heads** (Guzik).
6. **Searching the Scriptures is daily work** (Henry).
7. **Provoked, not impressed** — Athens' idols (v16).
8. **The church belongs in the marketplace** (Sproul).
9. **God needs nothing and gives everything** (v25).
10. **He is not far — and He has fixed a day** (vv27, 31).

Cross-references: Gen 2:7; Eccl 12:14; Isa 40:18; 42:5; 45:22; 66:1; Luke 24:26–27, 39, 46; John 5:22, 39; Acts 14:15–17; 16:9, 37–40; 18:4; Rom 1:20–23; 1 Cor 1:26; 2:15; 13:5; Gal 5:12; 1 Thess 1:9; 3:6; 5:21; 2 Tim 3:16–17; 1 John 1:1.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · ACTS 17:30

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,"

FIGURE · TWO SYNAGOGUES, TWO RESPONSES

TWO SYNAGOGUES, TWO RESPONSES · ACTS 17:1–13

	THESSALONICA (vv1–9)	BEREA (vv10–13)
What Paul did	reasoned from the Scriptures, three Sabbaths (v2)	the same: into the synagogue of the Jews (v10)
How the word was met	some persuaded (v4); others "becoming jealous" (v5)	"received the word with great eagerness" (v11)
What they did next	formed a mob, dragged Jason to the rulers (vv5–6)	"examining the Scriptures daily" (v11)
The outcome	a pledge taken; Paul sent away by night (vv9–10)	"many of them believed" (v12)

Open hearts and clear heads: eager to receive, careful to check — and "therefore" many believed (vv11–12).

Read across each row: Paul did the same thing in both towns; the difference was how the hearers met the word and what they did with their Bibles.

Example to follow — the Bereans. They did two things I need to do together: they "received the word with great eagerness," and they kept "examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so" (v11). This is the verse our Berean Dashboard is named for. When I hear a teacher — even a good one, even me — I want the men I serve to open the Book and check. This week I will read the chapter every day and write down one thing I checked for myself.

Sin to confess — clear head, closed heart (or the reverse). Guzik says, "Many people have clear heads but closed hearts." Some days I study to win an argument, not to obey. Other days I swallow whatever sounds spiritual without checking it. I confess both, and ask God for the Berean balance: open heart, clear head.

Truth to face — the idols of my town. Paul was provoked by a city full of idols (v16). Mine are not marble; they are money, approval, comfort, the screen, the bottle. Some of the men I sit with have bowed to the worst of them. God

"does not dwell in temples made with hands" and "is not served by human hands" (vv24–25) — He gives me life and breath and everything. I don't have to feed an idol to get what only God gives.

Command to obey — repent. "God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent" (v30). Not some people; all people, everywhere — the professor on the hill and the man in the cell. I will name one thing I need to turn from this week, and turn.

Promise to trust — He is not far. "He is not far from each one of us" (v27). For the man who feels he is groping in the dark, this is good news: God is near enough to find. Spurgeon: "If I seek God, and he is not far from me, I shall surely find him." And He has proved His word by raising Jesus from the dead (v31).

Questions for the table (from the Deep Dive):

1. Paul reasoned "from the Scriptures" that the Christ had to suffer and rise. If someone asked me to show them Jesus from the Old Testament, where would I start? (17:2–3; Luke 24:26–27) *Beginning with Moses and with all the prophets (Luke 24:27).*
2. The mob said the gospel had "upset the world." What has Jesus turned upside down in my life — and what still needs turning? (17:6–7) *Jesus turns the thinking and the power structures of this world around (Guzik).*
3. The Bereans had open hearts and clear heads. Which am I weaker in — eagerness to receive the word, or care to examine it? (17:11–12; 1 Thess 5:21) *Many people have clear heads but closed hearts (Guzik).*
4. When I hear a sermon, a podcast or a friend's advice about God, how do I check it against the Scriptures? What does my daily habit actually look like? (17:11; 2 Tim 3:16–17) *Searching the scriptures must be our daily work (Henry).*
5. Paul's spirit was provoked by a city full of idols. What are the idols of my town — and do they still bother me? (17:16, 29) *The greatest pretenders to reason were the greatest slaves to idols (Henry).*
6. God "is not far from each one of us," and He "has fixed a day." How do both truths — nearness and judgment — change how I talk to a lost friend? (17:27, 30–31) *When the sinner seeks God and God seeks the sinner they will soon meet (Spurgeon).*

Worship. The God who made the world and all things in it, Lord of heaven and earth, needs nothing from me and gives me life and breath and all things. He made every nation from one man, set our times and our boundaries, and is not far from any of us. He has fixed a day, appointed a Man, and proved it by raising Jesus from the dead.

Prayer. Lord God, You are not an unknown God to me anymore — You have made Yourself known in Jesus. Give me a Berean heart: eager for Your word and careful to search it every day. Break my heart over the idols around me and in me, and make me willing to speak about Jesus and the resurrection in the market place. I repent today of what I have been holding onto. Thank You that You are not far. Amen.

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