

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 17 — The Gospel in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 17 shows the gospel entering three very different environments:

Thessalonica.

Berea.

Athens.

In Thessalonica, Paul reasons from the Scriptures and proves that Jesus is the Christ.

Some believe.

Others become jealous.

A mob forms.

Jason and other believers are dragged before the city authorities.

In Berea, the response is different.

The Bereans receive the message eagerly, but they do not accept Paul's words blindly.

They:

“Examined the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was true.”

This becomes one of the greatest biblical models for Christian discernment.

Faithful Christians should:

Listen eagerly.

Study carefully.

Test teaching biblically.

Believe what Scripture confirms.

Then Paul arrives in Athens.

Athens was famous for:

Philosophy.

Education.

Religion.

Art.

Intellectual discussion.

Yet Paul is not impressed by the city's sophistication.

He is:

“Deeply troubled to see the city full of idols.”

He begins reasoning in the synagogue and marketplace.

Eventually he is brought before the Areopagus.

There Paul delivers one of the most important missionary sermons in the New Testament.

He begins where his hearers are.

He notices an altar:

“To the Unknown God.”

Then he declares:

“The God you worship without knowing is the One I proclaim to you.”

Paul teaches them that God is:

The Creator.

The Lord of heaven and earth.

Independent of human temples.

The giver of life and breath.

The ruler over nations.

Near to humanity.

Unlike idols made of gold, silver, or stone.

Then Paul moves from creation to repentance.

He says:

“God now commands all people everywhere to repent.”

Why?

Because God has appointed a day of judgment.

And He has appointed a Judge.

God has given proof concerning that Judge by:

Raising Jesus from the dead.

Then the reactions divide.

Some mock.

Some want to hear more.

Some believe.

Acts 17 therefore teaches:

The gospel must be explained from Scripture.

Every teacher should be tested by Scripture.

Intellectual sophistication does not remove spiritual blindness.

God is Creator and Lord over every nation.

Idolatry distorts the truth about God.

All people everywhere are commanded to repent.

Jesus Christ will judge the world.

And:

His resurrection is God's great public confirmation that He is the appointed Lord and Judge.

The central truth of Acts 17 is:

The gospel proclaims Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen Messiah to every culture, and all people are called to examine God's truth, turn from idols, repent, and believe in the risen Lord whom God has appointed to judge the world in righteousness.

I. PAUL ARRIVES IN THESSALONICA

Acts 17:1

“Paul and Silas traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.”

Paul continues his missionary journey.

Thessalonica becomes an important center of gospel ministry.

Cross References

Acts 16:8

Paul had previously traveled through Troas before receiving the Macedonian call.

1 Thessalonians 1:1

Paul later wrote to the church in Thessalonica together with Silas and Timothy.

1 Thessalonians 2:2

Paul reminded the Thessalonians that although he had suffered in Philippi, God gave him courage to preach the gospel in Thessalonica.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful ministry continues even after painful experiences.

Paul had been beaten and imprisoned in Philippi.

Yet he keeps preaching.

II. PAUL REASONS FROM THE SCRIPTURES

Acts 17:2

“As was his custom, Paul went in and for three Sabbaths explained the Scriptures to them.”

Notice Paul’s method.

He does not merely share feelings.

He:

Explains.

Reasons.

Uses Scripture.

Cross References

Luke 4:16

Jesus regularly entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and read and taught from Scripture.

Acts 13:14

Paul had previously entered the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch and preached from the biblical record.

Acts 18:4

Paul later continued reasoning in synagogues, seeking to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Biblical preaching should explain Scripture rather than merely display the preacher's opinions.

III. JESUS IS THE CHRIST

Acts 17:3

“He showed them that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am telling you about is the Christ,’ he said.”

Paul's message is unmistakably centered on Jesus.

The Messiah Had to Suffer

The cross was not an accident.

The Messiah Had to Rise

The resurrection was necessary.

Jesus Is the Christ

Paul identifies Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Cross References

Luke 24:46

Jesus explained that Scripture foretold the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead.

Isaiah 53:5

The Servant was wounded for our rebellion and crushed because of our sins, and through His suffering peace and healing come.

1 Corinthians 15:3

Paul taught that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

Spiritual Principle

Christian preaching must proclaim both the cross and the resurrection.

IV. SOME BELIEVE

Acts 17:4

“Some of the Jews were persuaded, along with a large number of devout Greeks and many prominent women.”

The gospel reaches across social lines.

Jews

Greeks

Prominent Women

Cross References

Acts 13:43

Many Jews and devout converts had previously followed Paul and Barnabas after hearing the gospel.

Acts 17:12

In Berea many would also believe, including prominent Greek women and men.

Romans 11:5

Paul taught that even among Israel there remained a remnant chosen by grace.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel does not belong to one social group; it calls people from every background.

V. JEALOUSY PRODUCES A MOB

Acts 17:5

“But some Jews became jealous. They gathered some wicked men from the marketplace, formed a mob, and started a riot in the city. They attacked Jason’s house, looking for Paul and Silas.”

Again:

Jealousy.

Not biblical reasoning.

Not careful investigation.

Jealousy.

Cross References

Acts 13:45

Opponents in Pisidian Antioch became jealous when they saw crowds listening to Paul.

Acts 14:19

Hostile opponents later persuaded a crowd in Lystra to stone Paul.

1 Thessalonians 2:14

Paul later reminded the Thessalonian believers that they had suffered persecution from their own countrymen.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Religious jealousy can become more dangerous than open unbelief because it disguises pride as spiritual concern.

VI. “THESE MEN HAVE TURNED THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN”

Acts 17:6

“When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting, ‘These men who have turned the world upside down have come here too.’”

The accusation is intended negatively.

But spiritually:

It contains an unintended compliment.

The gospel was changing lives everywhere.

Cross References

Acts 16:20

Paul and Silas had previously been accused of disturbing the city of Philippi.

Acts 24:5

Paul was later accused of being a troublemaker who stirred up unrest.

1 Thessalonians 1:8

The message of the Lord had sounded out from the Thessalonian believers into surrounding regions.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Gospel Turns an Upside-Down World Right-Side Up.”

Sin has distorted human life.

The gospel calls people back to:

God.

Truth.

Holiness.

Hope.

VII. “ANOTHER KING — JESUS”

Acts 17:7

“Jason has welcomed them. They are all acting against Caesar’s decrees, saying there is another king, Jesus.”

Again the gospel is distorted into a political charge.

But one statement is profoundly true:

There is another King.

Jesus.

Cross References

Luke 23:2

Jesus’ opponents accused Him before Pilate of claiming royal authority.

John 19:12

Political pressure was used against Pilate by suggesting that releasing Jesus would oppose Caesar.

John 19:15

Jesus' opponents cried that they had no king but Caesar.

Important Truth

Christianity does not teach political rebellion as its central message.

But it does declare:

Jesus is Lord.

Therefore every human authority is secondary and accountable to Him.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus does not compete with earthly rulers as one politician among many; He reigns above every earthly authority.

VIII. THE CITY IS TROUBLED

Acts 17:8

"This troubled the crowd and the city officials."

The accusation creates fear.

Cross References

Acts 16:20

Similar accusations had caused disturbance in Philippi.

Acts 19:23

The gospel later produced major public controversy in Ephesus.

Luke 23:5

Jesus' opponents accused Him of stirring up the people.

Spiritual Principle

Fear can be manipulated by people who distort the message of Christ.

IX. JASON POSTS BOND

Acts 17:9

“They made Jason and the others post bond and then let them go.”

Jason suffers consequences for receiving gospel workers.

Cross References

Romans 16:21

Jason later appears among those associated with Paul’s ministry.

Acts 16:39

Authorities in Philippi had previously released Paul and Silas after becoming alarmed.

3 John 1:1

Early Christian ministry often depended upon believers who received and supported traveling gospel workers.

Spiritual Principle

Hospitality toward gospel ministry can sometimes become costly.

X. PAUL AND SILAS ARE SENT TO BEREA

Acts 17:10

“The believers immediately sent Paul and Silas to Berea by night. When they arrived, they went to the synagogue.”

Persecution changes the location.

Not the mission.

Cross References

Acts 9:25

Saul had once escaped Damascus by night when his life was threatened.

2 Corinthians 11:33

Paul later remembered being lowered in a basket through an opening in a city wall to escape danger.

Acts 17:14

Paul would soon again be sent away when opposition followed him to Berea.

Spiritual Principle

Leaving danger can be wisdom rather than cowardice when the mission continues elsewhere.

XI. THE NOBLE BEREANS

Acts 17:11

“The Bereans were more noble than those in Thessalonica. They received the message eagerly and examined the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was true.”

This is one of the most important verses for Bible study.

The Bereans demonstrate two qualities:

Eagerness

They wanted to hear.

Examination

They tested what they heard.

Cross References

John 5:39

Jesus told people to search the Scriptures because they testify concerning Him.

Isaiah 34:16

God’s people are called to search and examine what the Lord has spoken.

1 Thessalonians 5:21

Believers should test everything and hold firmly to what is good.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Never Reject Biblical Teaching Without Hearing It, and Never Accept Teaching Without Testing It.”

The Bereans were neither:

Cynical.

Nor gullible.

They were:

Teachable.

Biblical.

Discerning.

XII. MANY BELIEVE IN BEREIA

Acts 17:12

“As a result, many believed, including prominent Greek women and men.”

Careful examination led to faith.

Cross References

Acts 17:4

People from several social groups had also believed in Thessalonica.

Acts 13:50

Prominent women had previously appeared in the narrative during opposition to Paul’s ministry.

Acts 8:12

Men and women in Samaria believed the gospel and were baptized.

Spiritual Principle

Honest examination of Scripture can lead a sincere seeker toward confidence in Christ.

XIII. OPPOSITION FOLLOWS PAUL

Acts 17:13

“But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching in Berea, they came there and stirred up trouble.”

The opposition travels.

Cross References

Acts 14:19

Opponents had previously followed Paul from other cities to stir up violence.

Acts 17:5

The Thessalonian opposition had already organized a mob.

2 Corinthians 11:26

Paul later described constant dangers from various enemies throughout his ministry.

Spiritual Principle

Persistent opposition does not mean God’s mission is failing; sometimes it reveals how seriously the enemy treats the message.

XIV. PAUL IS SENT TO THE COAST

Acts 17:14

“The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, while Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea.”

The team temporarily separates.

Cross References

Acts 17:15

Paul’s escorts took him onward to Athens.

Acts 18:5

Silas and Timothy later rejoined Paul.

1 Thessalonians 3:2

Timothy was used to strengthen and encourage believers during this period.

Spiritual Principle

Mission teams sometimes adjust roles and locations according to changing circumstances.

XV. PAUL ARRIVES IN ATHENS

Acts 17:15

“Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him soon.”

Paul enters one of the intellectual centers of the ancient world.

Cross References

Acts 18:5

Silas and Timothy later joined Paul again.

1 Thessalonians 3:1

Paul later referred to being left alone in Athens for a time.

Acts 17:16

While waiting, Paul became deeply troubled by the city’s idolatry.

Spiritual Principle

God can place the gospel in the center of a culture’s intellectual conversation.

XVI. ATHENS IS FULL OF IDOLS

Acts 17:16

“While Paul was waiting in Athens, he was deeply troubled to see the city full of idols.”

Paul sees:

Architecture.

Culture.

Art.

Religion.

Philosophy.

But spiritually:

He sees idolatry.

Cross References

Romans 1:23

Humanity exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling created things.

Exodus 20:3

God commanded His people to have no other gods before Him.

1 Corinthians 8:4

Paul taught that idols have no true divine existence and that there is one God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Spiritual discernment sees beyond cultural beauty to the beliefs shaping a culture.

XVII. PAUL REASONS EVERY DAY

Acts 17:17

“He reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and devout Greeks, and in the marketplace every day with those who were there.”

Paul does not retreat from culture.

He enters conversation.

Synagogue

Religious audience.

Marketplace

General public.

Every Day

Persistent witness.

Cross References

Acts 17:2

Paul’s normal practice was to reason from Scripture.

Acts 18:4

He later continued reasoning with Jews and Greeks.

Acts 19:9

Paul later reasoned daily with people in Ephesus.

Spiritual Principle

Christian witness should be willing to enter both religious spaces and public spaces.

XVIII. EPICUREANS AND STOICS DEBATE PAUL

Acts 17:18

“Some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some asked, ‘What is this babblers trying to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be preaching about foreign gods,’ because Paul preached about Jesus and the resurrection.”

Two philosophical traditions engage Paul.

Epicureans

Generally emphasized material reality, tranquility, and minimizing fear and pain.

Stoics

Emphasized reason, self-discipline, and living according to perceived natural order.

Paul presents something neither system anticipated:

Jesus and the resurrection.

Cross References

Acts 17:32

The resurrection would soon become the point at which some Athenians mocked Paul.

1 Corinthians 1:23

Paul said the crucified Christ was offensive to some and foolishness to others.

1 Corinthians 2:14

The natural mind does not automatically welcome the things revealed by God’s Spirit.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel must not be reshaped merely to fit the assumptions of the surrounding philosophy.

XIX. PAUL IS BROUGHT TO THE AREOPAGUS

Acts 17:19

“They took him to the Areopagus and asked, ‘May we know what this new teaching is?’”

An opportunity opens.

Cross References

Mark 1:27

People repeatedly wondered about the authority and newness of Jesus’ teaching.

Acts 25:19

Paul’s preaching about Jesus later continued to provoke questions among political authorities.

Acts 17:22

Paul would now address the Areopagus directly.

Spiritual Principle

Curiosity can become an open door for gospel explanation.

XX. “WE WANT TO KNOW WHAT THEY MEAN”

Acts 17:20

“You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.”

The Athenians do not yet understand.

But they are listening.

Cross References

Acts 10:28

Peter had also entered unfamiliar cultural territory when preaching to Gentiles.

1 Peter 4:4

Unbelievers are often surprised by beliefs and behavior different from their own worldview.

Acts 17:19

The philosophers had asked Paul to explain his teaching.

Spiritual Principle

When people do not understand Christian truth, explanation is often better than assumption.

XXI. ATHENS LOVES NEW IDEAS

Acts 17:21

“All the Athenians and foreigners there spent their time doing nothing but talking about or listening to the latest ideas.”

Luke describes a culture fascinated with novelty.

Cross References

2 Timothy 3:7

Some people are always learning yet never arriving at a knowledge of the truth.

Ecclesiastes 1:8

Human curiosity can remain restless and unsatisfied despite endless seeing and hearing.

1 Timothy 6:20

Paul warned Timothy against empty and falsely called knowledge.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A fascination with new ideas is not the same as a hunger for truth.

XXII. PAUL BEGINS WITH THEIR RELIGIOUSNESS

Acts 17:22

“Paul stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in every way.’”

Paul observes before he confronts.

Cross References

Acts 14:15

Paul had previously addressed a pagan audience by calling them away from idols toward the living God.

Romans 1:19

Paul taught that God has given humanity a genuine witness concerning Himself.

Acts 17:16

Paul had already been deeply troubled by Athens’ idolatry.

Spiritual Principle

Wise evangelism understands the audience without compromising the truth.

XXIII. THE UNKNOWN GOD

Acts 17:23

“For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: ‘To the Unknown God.’ The God you worship without knowing is the one I proclaim to you.”

Paul uses something familiar as a bridge.

Cross References

John 4:22

Jesus told the Samaritan woman that people can worship without fully knowing the One they claim to worship.

Romans 1:21

Humanity knew enough about God to be responsible but exchanged truth for distorted worship.

Acts 14:15

Paul had previously called pagans to turn from worthless idols to the living God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A good evangelistic bridge begins with what people know but must lead them to the truth they do not know.

XXIV. GOD IS CREATOR AND LORD

Acts 17:24

“The God who made the world and everything in it is Lord of heaven and earth. He does not live in temples made by human hands.”

Paul begins with creation.

God Made Everything

Therefore:

God is not part of creation.

God Is Lord

He rules over creation.

God Is Not Confined

No temple contains Him.

Cross References

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Isaiah 42:5

The Lord created the heavens, spread out the earth, and gives breath and life to its people.

1 Kings 8:27

Solomon acknowledged that even the highest heavens cannot contain God.

Spiritual Principle

God is not one deity among many; He is the Creator and Lord of all.

XXV. GOD DOES NOT NEED US

Acts 17:25

“He is not served by human hands as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all people life, breath, and everything else.”

This reverses pagan religion.

Idols depend upon worshipers.

God does not.

We depend upon Him.

Cross References

Psalm 50:12

God says that if He were hungry, He would not need to tell humanity because the world and everything in it belong to Him.

Isaiah 42:5

God gives breath to people and life to those who walk upon the earth.

Genesis 2:7

God breathed life into humanity, and man became a living being.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

We do not sustain God; God sustains us.

XXVI. GOD MADE ALL NATIONS

Acts 17:26

“From one man He made all nations, and He determined their times and boundaries.”

Humanity shares common origin.

Cross References

Genesis 3:20

Eve is described as the mother of all living people.

Deuteronomy 32:8

Scripture speaks of God sovereignly ordering the nations and their boundaries.

Malachi 2:10

God's people are reminded that humanity ultimately has one Creator.

Spiritual Principle

Racial pride has no basis before the Creator because all humanity shares one origin and one dependence upon God.

XXVII. GOD WANTS PEOPLE TO SEEK HIM

Acts 17:27

“God did this so people would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from any of us.”

God is not distant in the sense of being inaccessible.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 4:29

Those who seek the Lord sincerely will find Him when they seek with all their heart.

Jeremiah 29:13

God promises to be found by those who genuinely seek Him.

Psalms 145:18

The Lord is near to all who call upon Him sincerely.

Spiritual Principle

God has surrounded humanity with evidence of His existence and goodness and calls people to seek Him.

XXVIII. “IN HIM WE LIVE”

Acts 17:28

“For in Him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are His offspring.’”

Paul quotes pagan poets selectively.

He does not endorse their entire worldview.

He uses a statement containing truth.

Cross References

Colossians 1:17

Christ is before all things, and all things are held together in Him.

Genesis 1:27

Humanity was created in the image of God.

Hebrews 1:3

The Son sustains all things by His powerful word.

Spiritual Principle

All human life depends moment by moment upon God’s sustaining power.

XXIX. GOD CANNOT BE REDUCED TO AN IDOL

Acts 17:29

“Therefore, since we are God’s offspring, we should not think of God as an image of gold, silver, or stone crafted by human skill.”

Paul exposes the irrationality of idolatry.

Cross References

Isaiah 40:18

Scripture asks what created image could possibly compare with God.

Isaiah 44:9

Idol makers produce things that cannot see, know, or save.

Romans 1:23

Humanity exchanged the glory of the immortal God for created images.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A god that human beings can manufacture is not the God who manufactured human beings.

XXX. GOD COMMANDS EVERYONE TO REPENT

Acts 17:30

“In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent.”

Paul’s sermon moves from explanation to command.

All People

No exception.

Everywhere

No geographical limitation.

Repent

Turn from false worship and sin toward God.

Cross References

Acts 14:16

Paul had previously said God allowed nations to go their own ways for a time.

Romans 3:25

God demonstrated His righteousness while showing patience toward sins committed previously.

2 Peter 3:9

God is patient, not wanting people to perish but calling them to repentance.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel does not merely invite intellectual curiosity; it demands a moral and spiritual response.

XXXI. A DAY OF JUDGMENT IS COMING

Acts 17:31

“For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. He has given proof to everyone by raising Him from the dead.”

Paul reaches the climax.

God Has Set a Day

History is moving toward judgment.

God Will Judge the World

Judgment is universal.

With Justice

God’s judgment will be perfectly righteous.

Through the Appointed Man

Jesus Christ.

The Resurrection Is Proof

God raised Jesus from the dead.

Cross References

Acts 10:42

Peter declared that Jesus is the One appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.

John 5:22

Jesus taught that the Father has entrusted judgment to the Son.

1 Corinthians 15:20

Christ has been raised from the dead as the firstfruits of those who have died.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Resurrection Is Not Only a Promise of Life; It Is Also God’s Warning That Judgment Is Coming.”

XXXII. SOME MOCK THE RESURRECTION

Acts 17:32

“When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, but others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject.’”

The resurrection creates division.

Cross References

Acts 17:18

The philosophers had already heard Paul preaching Jesus and resurrection.

1 Corinthians 1:23

The message of Christ crucified and risen appears foolish to those who reject God’s wisdom.

Acts 26:8

Paul later asked why anyone should consider it unbelievable that God raises the dead.

Spiritual Principle

People may reject the resurrection because it challenges their worldview, but ridicule does not disprove truth.

XXXIII. PAUL LEAVES THE MEETING

Acts 17:33

“At that, Paul left the meeting.”

Paul has delivered the message.

Cross References

Acts 18:1

Paul soon left Athens and traveled to Corinth.

Matthew 10:14

Jesus taught His disciples that there are times to move on after a message has been rejected.

Acts 13:51

Paul and Barnabas had previously moved onward after persistent rejection.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness sometimes means knowing when the message has been clearly delivered and leaving the response with God.

XXXIV. SOME BELIEVE

Acts 17:34

“Some people, however, joined him and believed. Among them were Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others.”

Not everyone mocked.

Some believed.

Cross References

Acts 17:12

Many in Berea had also believed after examining the Scriptures.

Romans 16:5

Paul frequently remembered individual believers by name as evidence of God’s work.

1 Corinthians 1:26

God often calls people from many different social and intellectual backgrounds.

Spiritual Principle

Even in environments resistant to the gospel, God can call individuals to faith.

XXXV. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 17

1. Preach Christ From the Scriptures

Principle:

Biblical evangelism explains why Jesus is the promised Christ who suffered and rose again.

2. Test Teaching by Scripture

Principle:

The Bereans listened eagerly and examined daily.

3. Jealousy Can Produce Religious Opposition

Principle:

Pride can make people resist what they should be celebrating.

4. God Is Creator, Not Creation

Principle:

He cannot be reduced to human-made images or temples.

5. All Humanity Is One Before God

Principle:

God made all nations from one human origin and rules over them all.

6. God Commands Everyone to Repent

Principle:

The gospel calls for response, not mere discussion.

7. Jesus Will Judge the World

Principle:

The resurrection confirms that history is moving toward accountability before Christ.

XXXVI. THE BEREAN MODEL OF BIBLE STUDY

Acts 17:11 gives us an extraordinary pattern.

They Received the Message Eagerly

They were teachable.

They Examined Scripture Daily

They were diligent.

They Tested Paul

They were discerning.

Notice:

Paul was an apostle.

Yet Luke praises them for checking his teaching against Scripture.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“No Preacher Is Above the Bible.”

Not:

Pastors.

Teachers.

Authors.

Denominations.

Traditions.

Popular speakers.

Every teaching must be tested by God's Word.

XXXVII. EAGERNESS AND DISCERNMENT BELONG TOGETHER

Some people are eager but undiscerning.

They believe anything spiritual.

Others are discerning but cynical.

They refuse to receive anything.

The Bereans show a better way.

Open Bible

Open Mind

Open Heart

Spiritual Principle

Biblical discernment is neither gullibility nor suspicion; it is humble testing under Scripture.

XXXVIII. WHAT PAUL PREACHED IN THESSALONICA

Paul's message had three central points.

The Messiah Had to Suffer

The cross.

The Messiah Had to Rise

The resurrection.

Jesus Is the Christ

Identification.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A sermon that never gets to Jesus has missed the center of apostolic preaching.

XXXIX. ANOTHER KING — JESUS

The enemies used this statement politically.

But spiritually it is foundational.

Jesus is:

King of kings.

Lord of lords.

Head of the church.

Judge of humanity.

Spiritual Principle

Every Christian confession that “Jesus is Lord” places every lesser loyalty under His authority.

XL. WHAT ATHENS TEACHES ABOUT IDOLATRY

Athens was highly educated.

Yet full of idols.

This teaches something important.

Education Does Not Automatically Produce Truth

Intelligence Does Not Automatically Produce Worship of God

Culture Does Not Automatically Produce Spiritual Light

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A society can become intellectually sophisticated while remaining spiritually confused.

XLI. PAUL WAS TROUBLED BY IDOLATRY

Paul does not look at Athens merely as:

An interesting tourist destination.

He sees people worshiping what cannot save them.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical compassion should be troubled when people give worship to anything other than the true God.

XLII. PAUL ENGAGES THE CULTURE

Paul does not merely condemn Athens from a distance.

He enters:

Synagogue.

Marketplace.

Areopagus.

He listens.

Observes.

Reasons.

Explains.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faithful cultural engagement means understanding people well enough to speak clearly without changing the gospel to please them.

XLIII. THE UNKNOWN GOD PRINCIPLE

Paul finds a point of contact.

Then he redirects it.

He does not say:

All your religions are equally valid.

He says:

You worship without knowing.

Now:

I proclaim the true God.

Spiritual Principle

A bridge is useful only if it actually leads people to biblical truth.

XLIV. GOD MADE THE WORLD

Paul's theology begins with creation.

If God created everything:

Then God owns everything.

God defines reality.

God defines morality.

God deserves worship.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

If Genesis 1:1 is true, then human beings do not have final authority to redefine the Creator.

XLV. GOD DOES NOT LIVE IN MAN-MADE TEMPLES

Paul does not mean God can never manifest His presence in a place.

He means:

No building contains Him.

Spiritual Principle

God is greater than every structure built for worship.

Church buildings may serve ministry.

But God is not confined to them.

XLVI. GOD NEEDS NOTHING

Acts 17:25 destroys the idea that God depends upon us.

He Gives Life

He Gives Breath

He Gives Everything

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Worship is not supplying something God lacks; worship is responding to the God from whom everything comes.

XLVII. ONE HUMAN FAMILY

Acts 17:26 has powerful implications.

All nations come from one human origin.

Therefore:

No race is a separate creation.

No ethnicity is spiritually superior.

All humanity stands under one Creator.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel confronts racial pride at the level of creation itself.

XLVIII. GOD DETERMINES TIMES AND BOUNDARIES

Paul teaches divine sovereignty over history and nations.

Spiritual Principle

Nations rise and fall within the sovereign permission and providence of God.

This does not mean every political act reflects God's moral approval.

It means history is never outside His ultimate rule.

XLIX. GOD IS NOT FAR AWAY

Paul says:

“He is not far from any of us.”

God is not absent.

Creation points toward Him.

Life depends upon Him.

Spiritual Principle

The sinner's problem is not that God left no witness; humanity repeatedly turns from the witness God provides.

L. IN HIM WE LIVE

Every breath is evidence of dependence.

We Live Because of God

We Move Because of God

We Exist Because of God

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Human independence is ultimately an illusion; every heartbeat depends upon the Creator.

LI. GOD CANNOT BE MADE

Paul's argument is simple.

If God made us:

Then we cannot make God.

Spiritual Principle

Idolatry reverses the Creator-creature relationship.

Human hands make an object.

Then human beings bow before what they made.

Paul says:

That makes no sense.

LII. GOD COMMANDS REPENTANCE

Paul does not finish his message by saying:

“Think about these interesting ideas.”

He says:

Repent.

Repentance Means:

Recognizing error.

Turning from idols.

Turning from sin.

Turning toward God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel confronts both the mind and the will.

LIII. “ALL PEOPLE EVERYWHERE”

Acts 17:30 is universal.

Not:

Some people.

Not:

Religious people.

Not:

Uneducated people.

But:

All people everywhere.

Spiritual Principle

No culture, nation, philosophy, or social class is exempt from God's command to repent.

LIV. THE APPOINTED DAY

God has:

“Set a day.”

History is not endless.

It has direction.

Creation

Redemption

Judgment

Kingdom

Crawford Bible Study Principle

History is not wandering aimlessly; it is moving toward an appointment with Jesus Christ.

LV. JESUS IS THE JUDGE

Paul's sermon in Athens is sometimes presented as though he only preached a generic Creator.

He did not.

He ends with:

Jesus.

Resurrection.

Judgment.

Spiritual Principle

Christian evangelism may begin with creation, but it must eventually reach Christ.

LVI. THE RESURRECTION IS PROOF

God gave assurance by:

Raising Jesus from the dead.

The resurrection validates:

Jesus' identity.

Jesus' victory.

Jesus' authority.

Jesus' future judgment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christianity rises or falls on the reality of the resurrection.

LVII. THREE RESPONSES TO THE GOSPEL

Athens shows three responses.

1. Some Mocked

Rejection.

2. Some Wanted to Hear More

Delay or continued interest.

3. Some Believed

Faith.

Spiritual Principle

The same gospel can produce ridicule, curiosity, or conversion.

Our responsibility:

Preach faithfully.

LVIII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What did Paul preach in Thessalonica?

Paul reasoned from the Scriptures that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead, and he declared that Jesus is the Christ.

Question 2

Why did opposition arise in Thessalonica?

Some became jealous of the response to Paul's preaching.

They gathered a mob, created a riot, and attacked Jason's house.

Question 3

What did Paul's opponents mean when they said the missionaries had turned the world upside down?

They meant Paul and his companions were producing major social and religious change.

Unintentionally, the accusation revealed how powerfully the gospel was spreading.

Question 4

Why are the Bereans called noble?

They eagerly received the message while carefully examining the Scriptures every day to determine whether Paul's teaching was true.

Question 5

What does Berea teach us about Bible teaching?

Every teaching should be tested against Scripture.

No pastor, teacher, denomination, author, or tradition is above the authority of God's Word.

Question 6

Why was Paul troubled in Athens?

He saw that the city was filled with idols.

Its cultural and philosophical sophistication had not led it to true worship of the Creator.

Question 7

How did Paul begin his message at the Areopagus?

He referred to their religious practices and specifically to an altar marked:

“To the Unknown God.”

He used this as a starting point to proclaim the true God.

Question 8

What did Paul teach about God?

God created the world.

He is Lord of heaven and earth.

He does not depend upon temples or human service.

He gives life and breath.

He made all nations.

He rules over history.

Question 9

What did Paul say about idols?

God cannot properly be represented as an image of gold, silver, or stone made by human skill.

The Creator cannot be reduced to something created.

Question 10

What does God command all people everywhere to do?

Repent.

People must turn from false worship and sin toward the true God.

Question 11

Why must people repent?

Because God has appointed a day when He will judge the world in righteousness through Jesus Christ.

Question 12

What proof did God give concerning Jesus?

God raised Jesus from the dead.

The resurrection confirms Christ's identity, authority, and future role as Judge.

LIX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 17 asks several important questions.

Do I Know How to Explain Christ From Scripture?

Paul did.

Do I Test Teaching by the Bible?

The Bereans did.

Am I Eager to Learn Without Becoming Gullible?

Berea models both.

Does Jealousy Affect My Response to Another Person's Ministry?

It did in Thessalonica.

Does Idolatry Trouble Me?

It troubled Paul.

Can I Speak to People Whose Worldview Is Different From Mine?

Paul did in Athens.

Do I Understand That God Is Creator?

Paul began there.

Am I Living as Though I Depend Upon God for Every Breath?

I do.

Have I Repented?

God commands everyone to repent.

Do I believe Jesus truly rose from the dead?

The resurrection is central.

Am I ready to stand before Christ as Judge?

Acts 17 says that day is appointed.

LX. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Open Your Bible Before You Open Your Trust”

The Bereans did not say:

Paul sounds educated.

Paul is famous.

Paul is an apostle.

Therefore:

Everything must be true.

They searched Scripture.

Principle

Your confidence in teaching should ultimately rest upon God’s Word, not the personality delivering it.

LXI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Confuse Intellectual Curiosity With Spiritual Conversion”

Athens loved ideas.

They discussed:

New teachings.

New philosophies.

New concepts.

But Paul did not merely add Christianity to their collection of ideas.

He commanded:

Repent.

Principle

A person can study Christianity endlessly without surrendering to Christ.

LXII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Creator Cannot Be Reduced to Something the Creature Made”

Gold.

Silver.

Stone.

Artwork.

Temples.

None can contain or define God.

Principle

The moment we create a god in our own image, we are no longer worshiping the God who created us in His image.

LXIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Resurrection Turns Philosophy Into Accountability”

Before the resurrection enters Paul’s sermon, the Athenians may treat the discussion as intellectual.

Then Paul says:

Judgment is coming.

Jesus is the Judge.

God raised Him from the dead.

Now the conversation becomes personal.

Principle

The gospel is not merely a theory to evaluate; it is truth before which every person must ultimately respond.

LXIV. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 17 takes the gospel into:

A synagogue.

A riot.

A Bible study.

A marketplace.

A philosophical council.

The setting changes.

The message remains centered upon:

Jesus Christ.

In Thessalonica:

Paul explains from Scripture that Jesus is the Christ.

In Berea:

People test Paul's message against Scripture.

In Athens:

Paul begins with creation and moves toward:

Repentance.

Judgment.

Resurrection.

Jesus.

This chapter gives the church an important missionary pattern.

Know Scripture.

Understand people.

Speak clearly.

Do not compromise truth.

Paul does not preach to the Athenians exactly as he preached in a synagogue.

His starting point changes.

But his destination does not.

He still reaches:

The true God.

Human accountability.

Repentance.

Jesus.

The resurrection.

Judgment.

Acts 17 also challenges every Christian to become more Berean.

Do not believe something merely because:

A preacher said it.

A denomination teaches it.

A book printed it.

A video claims it.

A tradition repeats it.

Ask:

What does Scripture say?

Receive truth eagerly.

Then examine it carefully.

Acts 17 also reminds us that education does not automatically cure idolatry.

Athens was intellectual.

Yet spiritually confused.

People can know:

Philosophy.

Science.

Art.

Politics.

History.

Culture.

And still not know the living God.

Paul therefore begins at the beginning:

God made everything.

God gives life.

God rules the nations.

God is near.

God cannot be reduced to idols.

Then Paul says:

Repent.

Why?

Because history has an appointed end.

There is:

A day.

There is:

A Judge.

There is:

A resurrection.

Jesus Christ will not remain merely an interesting religious figure for people to discuss.

Every person will ultimately answer to Him.

Some mocked Paul.

Some delayed.

Some believed.

The same responses remain today.

Our responsibility is not to manufacture belief.

It is to proclaim truth faithfully.

Therefore:

Explain Scripture.

Test teaching.

Reject jealousy.

Recognize idolatry.

Engage culture.

Proclaim the Creator.

Call for repentance.

Preach Jesus.

Declare the resurrection.

Warn of judgment.

And trust God to call people to faith.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Acts Chapter 17.

Thank You for the example of Paul.

Help us know Your Word well enough to explain Jesus clearly from the Scriptures.

Give us the heart of the Bereans.

Make us eager to hear truth.

Make us disciplined enough to examine Scripture daily.

Protect us from gullibility.

Protect us from cynicism.

Teach us to test everything by Your Word.

Keep jealousy out of our hearts.

When You use another servant powerfully, help us rejoice rather than compete.

Give us spiritual eyes like Paul had in Athens.

Help us see beyond outward culture to the spiritual condition of people.

Give us wisdom to understand those we are trying to reach.

Help us speak in ways they can understand without changing Your truth.

Thank You that You are the Creator.

You made heaven.

You made earth.

You made humanity.

You give us life.

You give us breath.

Every moment we exist depends upon You.

Forgive us for the idols we create.

Anything we love above You.

Anything we trust more than You.

Anything we allow to take Your rightful place.

Call us continually back to Yourself.

Thank You for Jesus Christ.

Thank You that He suffered.

Thank You that He died.

Thank You that He rose from the dead.

Thank You that His resurrection confirms His victory.

Help us remember that a day of judgment is coming.

Give us urgency.

Give us compassion.

Give us courage.

Help us call people to repentance with truth and love.

And when some mock:

Keep us faithful.

When some ask questions:

Give us patience.

When some believe:

Give You all the glory.

May our churches become Berean churches.

May our preaching become Christ-centered preaching.

May our lives point people toward the living God.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“The Bereans were more noble than those in Thessalonica. They received the message eagerly and examined the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was true.” — Acts 17:11

Central Truth

The gospel calls every person and culture to examine God's truth carefully, turn from idols, recognize the Creator, repent, and believe in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, whom God has appointed as the righteous Judge of the world.

Acts 17 in One Sentence

Paul proclaims Jesus as the suffering and risen Christ in Thessalonica, encounters noble Bereans who eagerly test his teaching by Scripture, and then confronts the idolatry and philosophy of Athens by declaring the Creator God, calling all people to repentance, and announcing that the risen Jesus will judge the world in righteousness.