

***“Paul’s Second Letter to Timothy —
The Great Transition, The Glorious Sweep of God’s Abundant Grace — Part 13
The Second Missionary Journey: Paul in Athens, Pagan Capitol of the Gentiles”***

Review:

***Last time our theme was simply “The Ministry in Thessalonica and Berea
— A Time of Remembrances!”***

Paul was in the city of Thessalonica only a little more than three weeks. But he taught them enough for a lifetime as we wrote about that visit in his first letter to these beloved ones. There he reminded them of many things including:

- ***Their Election by God and How They Were Living in the Light of It***

Chapter 1 of 1 Thessalonians sets the Stage for the rest of the letter which in each following chapter builds on the themes mentioned there. The apostle had ministered the word of the Lord to these dear believers only a short time but his teaching was enough, he reminds them of there in chapter 1. There were four main focal points:

Truth’s Reception

1 Thess. 1:3-5

3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;

4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

Truth’s Response —

1 Thess. 1:6-7

6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:

7 So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

Truth's Repetition —

1 Thess. 1:8-9

8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

Truth's Reward —

10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

- ***The whole point of Paul's opening words here in this letter is that the Lord was at work and is still at work in the lives of these believers — and that they now need to REMEMBER all that! And he exhorts them here to remember that in the context of his teaching while he was with them for those short weeks during his Second Missionary Journey.***
- ***These were all repeated amplifying the truths that had changed the lives forever of these believers. Chapter 2 speaks of that power and its effect in these words:***

1 Thess. 2:13-14

13 For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

14 For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:

- ***The apostle's main teaching here is the power and faithfulness of God as personally displayed in these believers. But this display of the faithfulness of God (which they are asked to remember) started with their hope in Christ Jesus and developed into an enduring hope as he writes in several verses. Without that his exhortation in chapter 4 (and all here leads to that as that is at the heart of his motivation for writing this letter, due to the false teachers and their hope-dashing dispensational heresy) loses its power.***
- ***How Their Hope Should Give Victory Over Life's Greatest Trials***

1 Thess. 4:1-2 [Again, he had taught them all of this on his visit. But they had begun to forget and needed to be reminded ...]

1 Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

2 For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

1 Thess. 4:13, 16-18

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

...

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

- *Their futures were all bound together with Christ's. They were his inheritance (see Eph. 1) even as he was theirs. So the actual timing of one's home-going has no effect of the reception of the promised blessing. Whether physically alive or physically dead and in the grave, the promises are true for all, he writes so powerfully here!*

- ***How Under Grace They Were Not Appointed to Wrath as Were Others***

1 Thess. 5:9–11 [Again, reminding them of what he had already taught them!]

9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. [... *and even more considering the mutual ministry and mutual edification that will occur as they keep these truths close as these two pre-Tribulational verses state so very clearly (as we have seen before).*]

- *So we see that the true and authentic hope of the Thessalonian believers was based on the preaching of Paul when he was in Thessalonica. They did know “perfectly” that the Rapture would precede the coming Tribulation and should not have deviated from*

that precious truth following false teachers.

He is asking them to “Remember”! For Remembrances Can Make All the Difference.

Our Outline Today: “The Second Missionary Journey: Paul in Athens, Pagan Capitol of the Gentiles”

- ***Paul’s Deliverance to Athens — Facilitated by the Bereans***
- ***Paul’s Witness in the Synagogue — The Daily Dialogue Bears Little Fruit***
- ***Paul’s Introduction to the Athenian Court — Welcomed by Philosophers***
- ***Paul’s Initial Preaching before the Areopagus — Challenging Each Heart***

I. Paul’s Deliverance to Athens — Facilitated by the Bereans:

[READ] Acts 17:13-15

13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

14 And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

15 And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

- ***The challenge by unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica continued now in Berea. The brethren delivered Paul however when it was discovered sending him “as it were” to the sea, however in fact he was taken to Athens, one of the chief cities of the world for over 500 years at this point.***
- ***Note that the ruling Jews from Thessalonica were still not believing though many Jews had believed, both in Thessalonica and in Berea. Many Gentiles had believed as well. So it was necessary to preach to them first but now it was a time of Israel’s falling, and not any longer a time of Israel’s rising, as we have seen illustrated many times already here in our studies. So the Berea believers took Paul by the hand to Athens: “... to the Jew first” now also in Athens:***

II. Paul’s Witness in the Synagogue — The Daily Dialogue Bears Little Fruit:

[READ] Acts 17:16-17

16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

17 Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

- ***Paul waited for his associates, but his spirit stirred within him due to the gross idolatries demonstrated everywhere around him. What must have been the effect of this idolatry on his spirit and what was the effect of not having Silas and Timothy and his other associates still not with him here in the world capital of pagan idolatries.***
- ***Athens was the center of idolatry in this part of the world, the Parthenon and Mar's Hill being prime examples. The hill top where the Parthenon or Temple of Athena is found has five temples still standing. But we can only wonder what it was like in Paul's day when it would have been splendor upon splendor. Built in the 5th century B.C., its center piece was the statue of the Greek goddess Athena after which the city of Athena (or Athens) was named. This statue we are told by historians was nearly 50 feet high and made of wood, bronze and ivory with a gold covering.***
- ***But although Athena and the other Greek gods and goddesses (in all numbering in the hundreds) were the center of attraction here, there was a competing and compelling challenge to their old-time religion here as well, and that was their focus on philosophy and philosophers as we see in our next verses here in chapter 17:***

III. Paul's Introduction to the Athenian Court — Welcomed by Philosophers:

[READ] Acts 17:18-21

18 Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection [with the definite article here].

19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? [a formal review]

20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

21 (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

- ***They called Paul a babbler or literally, a “seed-picker” like a crow, picking up whatever was left over and the discarding it and going on to other things of interest... That was highly derogatory. But not all thought the same way. Many here represented the highest wisdom***

available in ancient times and here were gathered the true elites of the western world. And the philosophers were a significant part of their ruling class there in Athens.

- *Paul was promoting what seemed entirely new and different to them, new gods and goddesses in fact named Jesus and Anastasia even. By the way, Anastasia is the name probably still historically the most popular name in Europe. In Russia, for example, until 2008 it was the most popular girl's name being supplanted in that year with Sophia. The name means "resurrection", by the way. So Paul preached Jesus and the resurrection and they misunderstood him to be talking about two new gods to be added to the very long list of acceptable Greek and Roman gods and goddesses (which list numbers in the hundreds).*

They bring him to the Areopagus or the Hill of Ares (or Mars, the god of war and agriculture), a special place of pagan worship over the centuries since Athens was founded 500 or more years before. But now it was primarily the center for the Athenian government and here for their "supreme" court. This would be formal review indeed for Paul and a decision on these new gods would soon be forthcoming. By the way, Socrates was condemned in this very place 450 years before for promoting false gods and such like!

- *Now, what about these philosophers? Epicureans believed that the chief end of man should be his own pleasure [honorably, of course] while Stoics were focused on reason and purpose and not on immediate gratification. Just the opposite of the Epicureans. Where were the Aristotelians and the Platonists those days, I wonder?*
- *A key word here in our translation is "strange" and "stranger". For "all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing." So the teachings of Paul were "interesting" to them, at the least.*

IV. Paul's Initial Preaching before the Areopagus – Challenging Each Heart:

[READ] Acts 17:22-23

22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

23 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.

- ***With much boldness indeed was how Paul began, challenging the hearts ... and he gets right to the heart of the issue, spiritually speaking, and transitions to his main message after a quick introduction addressing what he saw around him there in Athens. There was gross idolatry everywhere and with the temple of Athena most visible to all. This was Mar's Hill or the Areopagus, so called, a primary site for hundreds of years of idolatrous worship of demonic spirits. I do not think we can easily understand what it was like for Paul to be there that day when such splendor of a demonic sort was so overwhelming.***
- ***But Paul's words were simple and yet bold, really quite "matter of fact":***
 - ***"I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious [or, 'rather religious'] ": This was not in itself perhaps a condemnation, but rather an opening statement to what he really wanted to say which would soon follow as the following verses indicate.***
 - ***"I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD ...": Paul considered this to be rather striking as he will now explain ... For this to be found here in the center of both learning and pagan religion amazed him. But it provided an opening for speaking into the very hearts of these sinners.***
 - ***"... Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you":***
- ***Paul is bold and direct, isn't he? This would be like going into St. Peter's in Rome with the Pope and bishops assembled and telling them that although they were sure that they worshipped God through faith in Jesus Christ, in fact they did not and were ignorant as to who Jesus really was. Furthermore, that unless they believed correctly according to his preaching they could not be saved. Bold indeed!***
- ***But would his message be well received? Well, next time, Lord willing, we shall see how his preaching developed on that critical day for the Athenians.***