


# Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens

## Teaching Tips

November 22, 2015

## Bible Study Guide 12

### Words You Should Know

**A. Reasoned** ([Acts 17:2](#)) *dialegomai* (Gk.)—To converse, discourse with one, argue, discuss, mingle thought with thought. 

**B. Declare** (v. 23) *kataggello* (Gk.)—To announce, proclaim publicly, make known.

### Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Turning the World Upside Down. Some people accept verbal convictions while others reject them. How do Christians respond when those they hope will accept their messages reject them? Luke shows that Paul was undeterred and continued telling the Good News story and preaching with strong passion and conviction.

**A.** Read the Bible Background and Devotional Readings.

**B.** Complete Lesson 12 in the *Precepts For Living*® Personal Study Guide.

**C.** Reread the verses in a modern translation.

### O—Open the Lesson

**A.** Pray for your students and for lesson clarity.

**B.** Have a volunteer read the Aim For Change and In Focus story.

**C.** Discuss what it means to persevere in the midst of rejection.

### P—Present the Scriptures

**A.** Use information in the The People, Places, and Times and Background sections to provide context.

**B.** Ask volunteers to read the Focal Verses. Ask the students to share how the Background and The People, Places, and Times inform their understanding of the text.

**C.** Use the At-A-Glance outline and In Depth section to clarify the verses. Be sure to acknowledge any common themes that the students have noticed.

### E—Explore the Meaning

**A.** Review and discuss the Search the Scriptures and Discuss the Meaning questions.

**B.** Read the Lesson in Our Society section. Ask the students if they can think of other examples of how these concepts relate to modern-day situations.

## **N—Next Steps for Application**

**A.** Complete the Follow the Spirit and Remember Your Thoughts sections.

**B.** Summarize the lesson. Use the Make It Happen section to provide practical steps students can take for change.

**C.** Close with prayer.

## **Worship Guide**

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens

Song: “Throw Out the Lifeline”

Devotional Reading: [Psalm 47](#)



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## **Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens**

**Bible Background** • [Acts 17:1–32](#)



**Printed Text** • [Acts 17:1–4, 10–12, 22–25, 28](#) **Devotional Reading** • [PSALM 47](#)



### **Aim for Change**

By the end of the lesson, we will: **LEARN** that, although Paul and Silas’s message was accepted by some but not all, God received the glory; **REFLECT** on the effects of rejection in the lives of those who serve God; and **SEEK** out and use spiritual resources that support perseverance in the midst of rejection.



### **In Focus**



The company break room was filled with tension. Brandon had just been in a really intense debate with his coworker Jared. Jared was raised in an atheist family and could not understand why Brandon believed in God and the “silly stories” of the Bible. Brandon tried to calmly explain to Jared his belief in Christ and how everything made sense when looked at through the lens of Jesus. Jared wouldn’t hear it. In fact, Jared’s shouting managed to garner the attention of others who were passing by, and it soon became a company spectacle. Brandon knew he was not getting through and decided to agree to disagree. As he walked out of the break room, Sandi, one of the new interns, asked whether he could explain his faith in more detail. She had never heard the Christian faith presented in that way.



*The task of evangelism often comes with rejection. In order to persevere, we need to know God is working in ways that we often cannot see. Have you had a similar experience in persevering as a witness for Christ?*

### **Keep in Mind**

“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”

(Acts 17:23).



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## Focal Verses

KJV

**Acts 17:1** Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:



**2** And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,

**3** Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

**4** And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

**10** And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.

**11** These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

**12** Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

**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.

**24** God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

**25** Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

**28** For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

NLT

**Acts 17:1** Paul and Silas then traveled through the towns of Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.



**2** As was Paul's custom, he went to the synagogue service, and for three Sabbaths in a row he used the Scriptures to reason with the people.

**3** He explained the prophecies and proved that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead. He said, "This Jesus I'm telling you about is the Messiah."

**4** Some of the Jews who listened were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with many God-fearing Greek

men and quite a few prominent women

**10** That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. When they arrived there, they went to the Jewish synagogue.

**11** And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth.

**12** As a result, many Jews believed, as did many of the prominent Greek women and men.

**22** So Paul, standing before the council, addressed them as follows: "Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way,

**23** for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: 'To an Unknown God.' This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I'm telling you about.

**24** "He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn't live in man-made temples,

**25** and human hands can't serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need.

**28** For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

## The People, Places, and Times

**Thessalonica.** This was a city in the Roman province Macedonia, in northern Greece at the head of the Thermaic Gulf. It was named after Thessalonicea, the wife of a general under Alexander the Great. Thessalonica gained the status of a free city within the Roman empire, meaning it was self-governed and issued its own coinage. The city was very wealthy and relatively free from taxation. It also became wealthy from being Macedonia's main port and because of its location on the Via Egnatia, a road which ran through the provinces Illyricum, Macedonia, and Thrace. The people of Thessalonica adhered to a variety of religions, including the worship of traditional Greek deities and the Roman emperor. Jews formed a small minority in the city and became a community which Paul could access in order to preach the Gospel.

**Berea.** This is actually an alternative spelling of Beroea, a city 45 miles southwest of Thessalonica. The city was located 25 miles inland from the Aegean Sea on a fertile plain. It was one of the most populous cities in Macedonia around the time of Christ. Jews from Thessalonica traveled to Berea in order to oppose Paul's preaching of the Gospel. In spite of this, both Jews and Greeks readily received the message of Christ.

**Athens.** Paul preached the Gospel in this Greek city named after the goddess Athena. The Parthenon, a world-renowned temple dedicated to Athena, was built on top of the Acropolis in the city's center. Athens was known as a cultural center and the source of Hellenistic philosophy and literature. In the 5th and 6th century B.C., Athens was the home of philosophers, authors, poets, sculptors, and architects. During the time of Paul, it had lost its prominence after being conquered by Macedonians and the Roman empire.

## Background

Paul's second missionary journey took him and his companions Silas and Timothy into Greece. This is the first recorded time the Gospel reached Europe. His first stop was Philippi, a leading city of Macedonia and a Roman colony. There Paul preached to a riverside prayer meeting of women. Lydia, a wealthy woman who was a dealer of purple cloth, led the meeting. As Paul and Silas preached the Good News, the church in Philippi emerged from this all-woman prayer meeting.

Soon Paul and Silas encountered a local fortune teller who followed them through the marketplace. Knowing she was possessed by a demon, Paul commanded the evil spirit to leave her body. She was healed, but the men who gained money from her fortune-telling dragged Paul and Silas before the authorities. Consequently the two missionaries were thrown in jail. During the night while Paul and Silas were singing and praising God, an earthquake shook the jail. In the aftermath, the doors were opened and their bonds were unfastened. The jailer, thinking the prisoners had escaped, feared he would face punishment from the authorities. Instead Paul and Silas assured him they were still inside and preached to him the message of salvation. The jailer accepted. In a wise move, Paul claimed his Roman citizenship upon release in order to protect the church in Philippi from future harassment and persecution. Seeing that their church-planting job was done, Paul and Silas headed toward another significant city in Macedonia—Thessalonica.

## At-A-Glance

1. Initial Reception ([Acts 17:1–4](#))
2. Inspiring Research (vv. 10–12)
3. Provoking Reflection (vv. 22–25, 28)



## In Depth

### 1. Initial Reception ([Acts 17:1–4](#))



Paul and Silas arrived in Thessalonica to proclaim the Gospel. Their usual method was to start off proclaiming the Gospel in the synagogues, because Paul's fellow Jews would be a receptive audience to the message about their long-awaited Messiah. Paul's method included reasoning with them from the Scriptures in order to prove Jesus was the Christ. We can see from Paul's preaching in the synagogue that he used language and concepts familiar to his audience.

Some of the Jews of the synagogue, along with their Greek patrons, were persuaded by the claims that Jesus was the Messiah. It is interesting to note that many upper-class women were among the recent followers of Jesus. Due to their status in Thessalonica as free, wealthy women, they were more independent, making it easier for them to decide to follow Jesus without the opposition of their husbands. As a consequence, these upper-class, well-to-do women would be able to share their resources with the new fledgling church.

### 2. Inspiring Research (vv. 10–12)

Paul and Silas left Thessalonica in secret after certain jealous Jews gathered a crowd of wicked men in order to bring them before the authorities. On arriving in Berea, they did not deviate from their usual method but found a local synagogue. This audience was different: nobler, or more open-minded, than the people in Thessalonica. These Jews listened to the Gospel message with eagerness and searched the Scriptures to confirm whether it was true. Rabbis often praised those who listened attentively and searched the Scriptures. Greek philosophers also valued attentive, scrutinizing listeners.

The methods Paul and Silas used did not change, but they received different results in the two cities because they were preaching to different audiences. The Thessalonians by and large received their message, despite some opposition. The Bereans eagerly listened and kept a tolerant and open mind. The Gospel challenged those in the synagogue at Berea in a positive way to research whether what Paul said was true. The apostles' rejection in Thessalonica did not discourage them from preaching the same message in Berea, and it produced great results.

### 3. Provoking Reflection (vv. 22–25, 28)

The Thessalonian Jews travel forty-five miles southwest to Berea and manage to incite the crowds. This forced Paul

to escape by sea to Athens. While at Athens waiting for Silas and Timothy, Paul notices the city is full of idols. He goes about his usual custom of proclaiming the Gospel in the synagogues and marketplace. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, confused by the claims of the Gospel message, invites him to the Areopagus, or Mars Hill, a place where the philosophers and intellectuals gathered to hear the newest and most innovative ideas.

Paul opens his speech with a compliment to the religious sensibilities of the people of Athens. This leads to him pointing out the inscription he noticed on an altar: "To the unknown God." He next uses this inscription and connects it to their ignorance of the God of the Bible. He is the unknown God who Paul will now proclaim to them. Paul goes on to use popular quotes from poets and philosophers of the day in order to convince them of the resurrection of Christ and their need to repent and believe in Him.

## Search the Scriptures

1. What was Paul's usual method of proclaiming the Gospel ([Acts 17:2](#))?
2. How did the Bereans respond to the Gospel message (vv. 10–11)?



## Discuss the Meaning

1. How can we handle rejection when we are sharing our faith?
2. In what ways can we connect the Gospel to our modern popular culture?

## Lesson in Our Society

Many times Christians are shown in the media as closed-minded and uneducated. Although this portrayal is far from the truth, many have bought into it. This results in many assumptions about those who share their Christian faith and the credibility of the Gospel message. Often our faith is insulted, and we face rejection from those around us. It is disheartening to feel as if the whole world believes the beliefs you hold are outdated and silly. In this lesson, we are encouraged to persevere in spite of rejection, knowing that God is the One who brings people to Him. This is what Paul did in order to see much fruit from his labors in preaching the Gospel.

## Make It Happen

Paul used the culture of Athens to create a bridge for the Gospel. Have the class create a list of contemporary cultural issues and religions. Next discuss the different ways the Gospel can address each issue. Encourage the class to seek common ground when sharing their faith in order to effectively communicate and minimize rejection for the wrong reasons.

## Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do.

## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned.

## More Light on the Text

[Acts 17:1–4](#), [10–12](#), [22–25](#), [28](#)

**1** Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: **2** And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, **3** Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered,



**and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. 4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.**

The apostle Paul usually chose to preach the Gospel in large cities at key transportation hubs, so that the Good News could be spread beyond the places where he preached, a good example of strategizing for the most effective sharing of the Gospel. The Romans had built a road called the Egnatian Way, which stretched from the Adriatic Sea to the Hellespont. This very important road ran right through the city of Thessalonica, so once the message was planted, it could be carried west to the western shore of Greece or east to what is modern-day Turkey. Paul, Silas, and Timothy traveled from Philippi to Amphipolis to Apollonia to Thessalonica, a distance of about 100 miles, no easy stroll. No doubt Paul stopped overnight at both Amphipolis and Apollonia, but when morning came, he hurried on his way.

As always, if there was a synagogue in town, Paul began by preaching there, so that was the first place in Thessalonica that he went. He always had a heart to reach his own people first, even when his people rejected him and the Lord Jesus. Paul showed his listeners from Old Testament Scriptures that it was prophesied that the Messiah had to suffer and die, and then rise from the dead. The Greek word for alleging is *paratithemi* (**pa-ra-TEE-thay-me**) which literally means to place alongside; so we can see Paul setting prophecies alongside their fulfillment in Jesus.

Some of the Jews accepted this message, but there were a large number of Gentiles who had been attending the synagogue who turned to Jesus. Among the new believers were some from a variety of social positions, both men and women.

At first glance it looks like Paul was in Thessalonica for only three weeks, because our verses mention him preaching in the synagogue for only three Sabbaths, but when we look at [Philippians 4:15–16](#), we see that the Philippian church sent offerings to Paul in Thessalonica twice, which would imply that Paul was there for a longer period. We also read in [1 Thessalonians 2:9](#) and [2 Thessalonians 3:7–10](#) that he supported himself, probably by tent-making ([Acts 18:3](#)), as he was waiting for the gifts from Philippi. And then we read in [1 Thessalonians 1:9](#) that most of the converts were steeped in idolatry, so obviously many who turned to Christ were not from the synagogue. Then after three weeks of preaching in the synagogue, Paul began ministering in another part of the city. However, the leaders of the synagogue felt that Paul was stealing their converts, so they ran him out of town.

**10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. 12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.**

After the Jewish leaders of Thessalonica tried to have Paul executed, the believers in Thessalonica slipped Paul out of the city at night. Paul and Silas had a 45-mile hike to their next destination, the city of Berea. This was not such a prominent city, but at least the Jews here were not so prejudiced against the Gospel. The response of the Bereans in the synagogue was quite different from those in the Thessalonian synagogue. When Paul told them that the Messiah did not come the way they expected, they searched the Scriptures he was preaching from. The Greek word for searched is *anakrino* (**ah-na-KREE-no**), which is the word used for judicial investigations; in other words, they investigated, examined, and questioned critically. The Bereans were not content to accept at face value what Paul had to say, but daily checked his words with Old Testament Scripture. The question we can ask ourselves is, when we hear someone preach something we haven't heard before, what is our response? Are we like the Bereans—do we carefully check Scripture to see if this is the truth?

A number of prominent Greek women believed, as did devout Jews. This is probably underscored in both passages—in both Thessalonica and Berea, even wealthy men and women of other ethnicities received Jesus; anyone can


receive the Gospel, no matter what socioeconomic class, no matter whether male or female.

**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. 24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; 25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.**

The Thessalonian Jewish leaders who had chased Paul out of their city made the trip to Berea and did the same thing there, so the Berean believers escorted Paul out of their city and got him to Athens, presumably by boat, but Silas and Timothy stayed behind to continue teaching the new believers in Berea.

While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy to catch up with him in Athens, he was making use of every opportunity to share the Gospel. As was his custom, he used Old Jewish Scripture to convince Jews and Gentiles in the synagogue that Jesus is the Messiah God promised to send. He also hung out in the marketplace to discuss his faith with anyone who was interested. Athens was once the center of its own empire. Now that the Romans ruled, it had lost its political authority, but it was still known for its philosophers, including Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle from prior days. As a Jewish leader and an educated Roman citizen, Paul was a very educated and intelligent man. He was used to a teaching method that emphasized one-on-one debate, as well as the use of public debate.

The philosophers took note that Paul was talking in the agora, the marketplace, about ideas that were unfamiliar to them, and so they invited him to speak before the Areopagus (Gk. *Areios pagos*, **AH-ray-ose PAH-gose**), a gathering of philosophers, religious leaders, and learned men who came together regularly just to hear and exchange new thoughts on various matters. This was a forum that met to decide matters of morals or religion. Paul began his defense of the Gospel by telling his listeners they were extremely *deisidaimon* (Gk. **day-cee-DIE-mone**), a word which has been translated as either religious or superstitious. This is vague in Greek and could be taken as complimentary (religious) or derogatory (superstitious). In this case, Paul would be complimenting them as being very devout in order to get their attention. As a further bridge into their thinking, he mentions the many altars to the unknown god that were scattered throughout the city. The Athenians had many, many idols, but just in case they missed one, there were a number of altars dedicated to the unknown god. This concept was introduced by a poet, Epimenedes. During a time when Athens was suffering from a plague, he advised the rulers of Athens to sacrifice upon these altars and the plague was subsequently stopped. Because of this, Epimenedes was considered not only a poet but a prophet.

Paul said that he came to introduce them to the God they did not know—the God who created everything, the earth, the heavens, and everything on earth and in heaven. Not only is He the Creator, but also Ruler over everything. This God is too big to be contained in any earthly building. Even King Solomon, the builder of the first temple, acknowledged that God is too big to fit in any temple ([1 Kings 8:27](#)). And God is the one who sustains us; He does not need anything from us! In fact, our very life and breath are a gift from Him. Here, Paul states that what they have called the Unknown God out of ignorance is the true God. This is not an approval of their idolatry, but an affirmation of the partial truth that was revealed to them. This sets the stage for Paul to introduce them to the God who is the all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-present Creator of everything in existence. 

**28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.**

In this verse, Paul quotes two Greek poets, both pagans. This surprises many modern Christians, who then wonder why these quotes are in our Bible. From this we can learn some valuable lessons on how to communicate the Gospel to unbelievers. If we can connect to our audience by quoting from sources our listeners are familiar with and that we can agree with, we will get their attention. For instance, if we quote a phrase from a popular rap song that has a kernel of truth in it, teens and young adults may be more willing to listen to us, especially if that quote can lead us to



an explanation of the Gospel. In both of these quotes, Paul is showing something of the true nature of the one true God by affirming some truth found in Athenian culture.

Paul's first quote is that "in him we live, and move, and have our being." This quote is believed to be from Epiminedes in regards to Zeus, but Paul attributes it to Israel's God. The Stoic philosophers agreed with Paul on this point, as they believed in divine providence. In contrast, the Epicurean philosophers thought that the gods were too remote to be involved in the lives of human beings, but Paul is about to proclaim that God is as near as the air we breathe. It is only our sin that separates us from Him. Both we and the Greeks can look around at the things that God has made, including our own selves, and see that He is very near!

The second quote from the poet Aratus tells us that we are the offspring of God. The Stoic philosophers believed that there was a divine immanent principle in humanity, but Paul takes it a step further. For Paul, the phrase "we are his offspring" means that God created all humanity and we are ultimately responsible to Him. Later in the speech, Paul elaborates on this concept and concludes with a call to account for our actions and repent.

## Say It Correctly

Agora. **AH**-goh-rah.

Amphipolis. am-**PHI**-po-lis.

Apollonia. ah-pol-**LON**-ee-uh.

Areopagus. air-ee-**AH**-pa-gus.

Berea. ber-**EE**-uh.

Egnatian. eg-**NA**-shun.

Thessalonica. thes-sa-lo-**NEYE**-ka.

## Daily Bible Readings

### MONDAY

Creator God

([Deuteronomy 32:1–12](#))



### TUESDAY

Promises of God for All

([Genesis 9:8–17](#))



### WEDNESDAY

Blessing of God for All

([Genesis 12:1–4](#))



### THURSDAY

Majesty of God

([Psalm 8](#))



### FRIDAY

Goodness of God

([Psalm 33:13–22](#))



### SATURDAY

Reign of God  
([Psalm 47](#))



**SUNDAY**

Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens  
([Acts 17:1-4](#), [10-12](#), [22-25](#), [28](#))

