

Acts 17 Bible Study

1. What would you say an idol is? What makes an idol attractive? Are there any idols around us today?

Just canvas different ideas. In Acts 17:23 Paul refers to them as “objects of worship” – they take the place of a god, and we make sacrifices to them. Many things fit this description, eg career, family, sport, ‘stuff’, relationships etc.

2. [Optional] Read Acts 17:1-10a. How long was Paul in Thessalonica? Was his time there a failure? Read (quickly) 1 Thess 1:4-6, 9, 2:1-2, 13-14, 17, 3: 1-2, 6-7, bearing in mind 1 Thess was probably written weeks after the events in Acts. What can we learn from this?

The gospel is God’s means of saving as well as sustaining men and women, so although Paul and the others were forced to leave, God’s word remained and continued to work.

3. Read Acts 17:10-15. In what way were the Bereans different to the Thessalonians? What is the significance of this?

They were open to the message, ready to test if it was true or not. The Thessalonians (mostly) were not. Having an open heart and mind to the gospel, investigating it to see if it is true or not, will be rewarded!

4. Read Acts 17: 16-21. Why was Paul distressed at seeing idols – surely he had seen idols before?

The phrase “full of idols” means something like a “forest of idols” – Paul was distressed for God’s glory – that the Athenians could be so completely given over to the worship of created things and rob God of his due.

5. In v18 some philosophers speak to Paul. The NIV has “dispute”. This is too strong a word. Other translations have “converse”. Given this, and what Luke adds in v21, what does this say about the real openness of the Athenians to the gospel? Consider your answer to Q.3. Have you met people like this?

The Athenians were all talk! Happy to listen and swap ideas, but this is different to engaging with those ideas and being ready to change what you think if those ideas are ‘true’. They were likely to be very ‘hard ground’ for the gospel.

6. Read Acts 17:22-34. Look again at vv 22-23. Is there a model here for us in sharing our faith?

Paul took the time to look closely at what the Athenians believed and worshiped. He then was careful to start there, moving from where they were ‘at’ towards the gospel. He does not insult them or make a straight out attack on their idolatry – which much have been difficult considering how he himself was distressed by it.

7. Summarise Paul’s message in dot points. How many ideas here could you use with your friends?

Encourage written answers here.

8. How significant is it that God “is not served by human hands”? Do you find this confronting or encouraging?

*The fallen heart always wants to have something over God, so that we are either his equals or that he ‘owes’ us something. It is humbling, but also liberating, to know God does not **need** us or anything from us – yet chooses to love us and receive our worship / trust and obedience.*

9. What difference do vv 30-31 make to how we consider our unbelieving friends?

It’s easy to forget that they are under God’s command to repent – and we might be the ones to tell them! Repentance is what we are called to do, and we work hard to persuade our friends (cf 2 Cor 5:11, 20), but there is a place for saying that God also commands repentance. We can’t force someone to repent, they must choose, but it is not simply a matter of ‘preference’ with no consequences.

10. Is it possible that we have lost our grief over the idols of our city? How can we deepen our love for God and his glory and better stand out as those who worship the ‘unknown God’ of Perth? Think of practical suggestions. Commit these to God in prayer.