

WHEN WORLDVIEWS COLLIDE

Acts 17:1-34

Well one of the reasons that I'm enjoying the book of Acts, and I trust you are as well, is because this is our history. We're connected to everything going on in Acts through a long, godly legacy of faithful Christian witnesses who've passed on the faith, and we are learning a lot about being good witnesses for Jesus who do the same. Jesus said to His disciples they would be His witnesses to the world so that the world would come to know Him (Acts 1:8).

One of the things that missionaries do who go to a foreign field, is they learn to contextualize the gospel. They try to make the gospel make sense to that particular culture. Prime example is in the book *Peace Child*, where as the missionaries are teaching through the story of Jesus, a jungle tribe rejoices over Judas's betrayal of Jesus because betrayal a virtue to them. The missionaries had to find something else in their culture that would clearly communicate the gospel in a way they would understand. In our rapidly changing, unchurched culture, we're finding a larger and larger gap between our Christian worldview and those who seek to reach. And I think we have to learn to think more like missionaries on a foreign field who can contextualize the gospel to meet the needs of the people where they're at in a way they'll understand. So that's our focus as we walk with Paul who witnesses in 3 cities today. And I have to give credit to the late Warren Wiersbe for my outline. His outlines was so simple and so good I couldn't not use it.

I. **THESSALONICA: RESISTING THE WORD.¹ (VV. 1-9)**

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 [agora], 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 [politarchs], 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.

So **Paul, Silas and Timothy** leave **Philippi** (Luke presumably stay there), and travel down the Via Egnatia, a prominent Roman road to **Thessalonica** (called Saloniki today), the second most influential city in Greece. They do pass by a couple of significant places, **Amphipolis** and

Apollonia, but it seems it was Paul's **pattern** to reach larger cultural centers who would then reach their surrounding region. And that's exactly what happens. Of the Thessalonians, Paul will say that because of their reception of the gospel amidst persecution, they became a model to all churches, their testimony having gone out into all regions of Macedonia and Achaia—all of Greece as we know it today (1 Thess. 1:6-8)—including these two towns. In Amphipolis they've uncovered 5 ancient churches. Remember that. Paul plants a few seeds in the cultural centers that grow and reach their area. He's doing this all over the Roman Empire.

Another **pattern** of Paul was to reach out to the **synagogues** first. Luke calls it Paul's **custom**. In Romans, Paul tells us the gospel is to the Jew first and then to the Greek because everything about it is Jewish—the Scriptures, the Messiah, the promises. He loves his Jewish brethren and wanted to reach them and as a rabbi he'd be welcomed to speak in the synagogues, but not if he preached to Gentiles first.² But there's another reason he goes to the Jew first. They have the same Biblical worldview. There's not so much gap between Paul and them. He is sharing the good news with the Jews who are expecting a Messiah and so Paul is reasoning with them from the Old Testament Scriptures, like Isaiah 53, explaining Jesus had to suffer and die for sins and be raised to life again. It's much easier than trying to explain a Jewish Messiah to a Gentile people who don't have that same hope. Today, it's a lot easier to explain the gospel to someone who understands the Bible is God's Word or at least has a certain respect for the Bible than someone who doesn't.

Winsome witnesses reason from the Scriptures.

Ideally, I think we want to help people understand the gospel *from Scripture*. We want to reason and explain truth and gospel from Scripture because **God's Word is powerful**. Hebrew 4:12 says, *"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."* God has said His Word won't return void (Is. 55:10-11).

And in the case at Thessalonica, some were **persuaded** and **joined** Paul and Silas, but some became resistant and hostile. Some Jews become jealous and along with some **wicked men**, form a **mob**, setting the city in an uproar, and then try to pin it on the Christians as some sort of **revolution**. It reminds me of Emperor Nero who set the city of Rome on fire and then blamed the Christians in 64 AD. But that's what they mean by having *"upset the world"*. This is a serious charge and something Luke is showing us on replay in Acts how the gospel keeps colliding with social, political and economic concerns because let's face it, the gospel changes how we relate to everything, including Caesar. A lot of Christians would end up losing their life for not burning incense to Caesar as a god anymore.

A lot of times, we think of faith as only a private, spiritual, personal matter. But Luke is showing us how if we really understand the gospel our worldview changes and it collides with all matters in life. It changes priorities and loyalties. It transforms our lives, our relationships, our ways of doing business, our social structures, our ways of relating to Caesar.³ There is a quote I've saved

since March by scholar Joel Green in his commentary on Luke: “*Salvation is neither ethereal [only spiritual] nor merely future, but embraces life in the present, restoring the integrity of human life, revitalizing human communities, setting the cosmos in order, and commissioning the community of God’s people to put God’s grace in to practice among themselves and toward ever-widening circles of others. The Third Evangelist [Luke] knows nothing of such dichotomies as those sometimes drawn between social and spiritual or individual and communal. Salvation embraces the totality of embodied life, including its social, economic, and political concerns.*” In other words, Jesus changes everything – including a hurting world that needs Christians who apply Scripture to every aspect of their lives.

Unable to lay hands on the missionaries, they drag **some of the believers** and **Jason** who opened his home to them, before the city authorities and demand what was basically a good behavior **bond** to let them go and Paul moves on but will continue correspondence through snail mail. Now let’s contrast this synagogue community with Berea’s synagogue community. This is where we get our name for our church!

II. **BEREA: RECEIVING THE WORD. (VV. 10-15)**

*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.*

So they travel to **Berea** (Beroea) about 45 miles southwest of Thessalonica inland. If you were to look for it on a map today it would be under the title **Veria** with a V. And if you were to visit today, you’d see a colorful mosaic at the exact location they think Paul preached, depicting Paul’s preaching to the Bereans who both have Scriptures open in hand. But of all the Jewish responses, the Bereans’ response was ideal. They were described as **noble-minded** because when Paul came and shared the gospel, they didn’t accept his words blindly, nor did they refuse to listen because of their own presuppositions about the Messiah. They said, “*Show us from Scripture. Let’s see what God’s Word has to say about it.*” And they gave themselves to **careful, daily study of the Scriptures** to see if what Paul was saying was true. They cross-examined his words with Scripture. And you know, that’s your job when it comes to what I say up here. You should cross-examine my words with God’s Word. But can I say How do you know if what I’m saying is true if you aren’t in the Bible yourself? And are you willing to bank your eternity on my words rather than getting into God’s Word for yourself? I say that because God wants all of us to be people of His Word, who open His Word and study it together.

That's how the *Berean Fellowship of Churches* started. Our fellowship (we are not a denomination) of like-minded churches started in 1932 in North Platte, Nebraska with 13 people who were tired of going to church and not having the Bible opened and preached. So they just started to meet and pray with open Bibles, calling themselves the "*Church of the Open Bible*". In 1935 changed the name to The Berean Church. Now there's 57 Berean churches throughout the United States from California to Kentucky and more in India.

Winsome witnesses invest in honest seekers.

The witnessing principle I want to take from this is that if you come across a seeker who has an open and honest interest in learning *what God's Word has to say* about truth and salvation, you need to take advantage of that, especially today. Meet with them. Make it a priority. Like Paul, just help them understand God's Word and will. Eventually, the Jews from Thessalonica come to persecute Paul in Berea so goes alone to Athens.

III. ATHENS: RIDICULING THE WORD. (VV. 16-34)

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.)

I've got to be honest and say that I've been a little antsy to get to Athens. It's just such a high point in the book of Acts and one we can learn a lot from. When I think of Athens, I think of university city. This is the intellectual capital of the Greco-Roman world, the cradle of democracy and philosophy. Home to Socrates, Aristotle, Plato. Granted, the glory of Athens was fading by the time Paul reached it because they had been conquered by Rome and the population was dwindling to somewhere around 30,000,⁴ but it was still very influential. The art, literature, and oratory of Athens from the 4th and 5th centuries BC still remained unsurpassed.⁵ We can't imagine a more sophisticated setting for the gospel to be preached. In Athens, people would sit around and spend their time preoccupied with the latest philosophical fads.

If we were to visit Athens today, we would be blown away by all the magnificent art and architecture, but unlike us, Paul wasn't sight-seeing—he was soul-searching. And his **spirit**, on the inside, he was **vexed** by the **overwhelming idolatry** this city was drowning in. The word for **provoked** (v. 16) is where we get our word paroxysm. It's a surge of emotional anger or frustration. He's upset and greatly irritated on the inside by idols EVERYWHERE. It's how you

and I'd feel if we went to India today. When I was in South America, there were little manmade shrines to Mary—in the ditches and on the sidewalks and in the cathedrals. It was difficult to see people so devoted to her as if she was their mediator between God and man. That's nothing compared to Athens. Today people are still gawking at the temples and the idols in the museums there. Of ancient Athens, one Roman official serving under Nero said, *"Truly our neighborhood is so well stocked with deities at hand you will easier meet with a god than a man."*⁶

And just like Socrates did, Paul sits in the agora—the hub of the city and marketplace for everything, including ideas—to discuss the gospel with anyone present. There he runs into these two main schools of thought in that time, the Epicureans and the Stoics. The **Epicureans** were followers of **Epicurus** (341-270 BC), who could be described as **agnostic secularists**.⁷ Basically, they were indifferent to all gods, believing that if they existed, they were far too removed from being involved in the affairs of man. They emphasized the material and sought a balanced life, free from pain and suffering. They were particularly disinterested in the idea of a god one day judging them. Diogenes summed it up well with, *"Nothing to fear in God; Nothing to feel in death; Good [pleasure] can be attained; evil [pain] can be endured."*

More popular than Epicureans were the **Stoics**, followers of **Zeno** (340-265 BC). Their name came from the building called the **Stoa** where he would teach. These are basically the New-Agers, the pantheists, who believed all matter was god and humans in particular came from a single origin and had a special, divine spark. They were more fatalistic, believe we should just accept our lot of suffering and pain, refusing to show any emotion. Being the more popular philosophy, Paul speaks to their worldview most in his sermon. When they hear Paul speak, they ridicule him as a babbler – in the Greek, literally a **"seed picker"**. They compare him to a bird who with an inconsistent, incoherent worldview who might pick and choose from this philosophy and that philosophy – much like some people you find on YouTube today. Our goal as Christians should be to have a consistently biblical worldview.

Anyway, these philosophers want to know more about what Paul has to say and so they invite him to speak before the **Areopagus**,⁸ Athens' 30-member governing body. Luke's account is very reminiscent of Socrates who was sentenced to death by this group for introducing strange deities and refusing to recognize the gods recognized by the state. It seems Luke is depicting Paul in the same light⁹ and it help us appreciate Paul's bravery here. Paul and the gospel are confronting the elite religious, cultural, and legal institutions of Athens, showing it's a message worthy of attention by society's most prestigious institutions.¹⁰

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.

I could do a sermon series on Paul's witness in Athens, but I want just to help you see what he did here as a good and winsome witness.

1. He turns his righteous anger into compassion. (vv. 16-17)

Remember, Paul's like you and me. He's looking around at the pagan culture of Athens like we are with our country and he is stirred up with all sorts of righteous anger on the inside. He's jealous for God and for lost souls. And yet, he doesn't let that impede his witness, but channels it into compassion for this people.

2. He respectfully gains an audience. (v. 22)

He doesn't start out with, "You pagans!" He says, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects." It's a respectful and gentle greeting. He's gaining an audience.

3. He finds a cultural springboard. (v. 23)

Greeks were often terrified of offending the gods so they had insurance, an **altar to an unknown god**, you know in case they missed one. This becomes Paul's springboard and defense. Remember Socrates was killed for introducing foreign gods to them but since they've already concluded they might not know every god out there they have no real reason to indict him. He's got his defense and their attention now. He's speaking to their language.

4. He contextualizes the gospel. (vv. 24-29)

Remember he's presenting Jewish, monotheistic concepts into a Gentile polytheistic culture. They could probably care less about what his Bible says. So in verses 24-29, Paul bridges the gap between his biblical worldview and theirs by quoting their gods, their philosophers, and their poets, and in particular confronting the Stoic worldview. Everything he says is very biblical but he's not quoting the Bible. He **contextualizing** the gospel for the Athenian, making it understandable and relatable. One commentator said, "He seems to go out of his way to find common ground with philosophers and poets."

Paul somewhat affirms their thinking that men have a single point of origin in Adam and as creations of God, but he also corrects them. He quotes two poets, one of them **Aratus** of Cilicia, a philosopher-poet from the 3rd century BC who said of Zeus that we are his **offspring**. Paul obviously isn't supporting the Zeus aspect but saying in a sense, all humans are God's offspring since He created us. We came from him and are dependent on Him, not Him dependent on us. You see, Greeks started with man and made God in *their* image, but Paul is reversing that and saying we're made in *God's* image and are therefore accountable to Him. To make gods in our image out of stone is illogical. In contrast to the **Epicurean's** god who is not involved at all in our lives, Paul says He is sovereign over our lives and even where we live. In contrast to the **Stoic's** fatalism and impersonal pantheistic god, Paul says God wants us to seek Him. He is not far from any of us and when we find Him, that divine nature can be restored through the Holy Spirit who is given to everyone who believes. Remember that when you go to speak with your New-Ager friends who are seeking the divine within.

But do you see the difference between this approach to the Gentiles and his approach with the Jews in the synagogue? He is relating to this crowd **respectfully** and **contextually**, but also **confronting and correcting** at the same time showing that Christianity is superior even to the Stoics and that it answers all of their deepest questions and desires, while also showing them the compromises they are making despite their commitment to intellectualism. They are the real "seed pickers" living in ignorance. I think this sermon sort of becomes a model for us presenting the gospel to our unchurched culture, especially with individuals who could care less about what the Bible says. We need to seek points of contact with such desires they have and inconsistencies as already exist in their worldview.¹¹ We should have some awareness of our culture's beliefs and desires, or an individual we seek to reach and speak to it. Paul wins souls this way, even a member of the Areopagus.

5. He calls for a decision. (vv. 30-31)

He gets to the point. God calls for all men everywhere to repent and return to God who created them and made their restoration to Him possible through Christ. Failure to respond appropriately to God in view of the witness of **creation** and the **resurrection** of the Son of God would prove to be disastrous in the coming day of judgement. Luke and Acts emphasize personal, individual, responses to the gospel. We must accept the good news of Christ to be saved.

In summary, I want us to note how everywhere Paul goes, he plants seeds and a few of them will take root and bear more seeds, which bear more seeds. He is not a "seed picker" but a "seed planter." In this way, not only Athens, not only Thessalonica, not only Berea, but the whole Roman Empire would be filled with Christianity. In a few centuries, Christianity will become the dominant worldview and religion. Many of these temples like the ancient temple to Athena next to the Stoa, or the temple of Haphaestos in the agora, would eventually be converted into churches. In fact, the reason for the perseveration



of this great building in the agora is because it continued to be used as a church and was not quarried for other newer buildings.¹²

Our culture is rapidly changing. America is a boiling pot of cultures and ideas. The one-size fits all gospel approach might not be the best in every situation. I think this passage challenges us to think more like missionaries who seek to contextualize¹³ the gospel, make it relatable and desirable to the problems we are facing in their faulty worldviews. And be encouraged by the small Christian beginnings which eventually turned the world upside down.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2007), 375-76.

² An ancient synagogue plaque was found at Thessalonica with writing in Greek and Samaritan Hebrew. Also, in the 1800's an inscription was found that confirmed that 1st century leaders here were in fact called politarchs, as the original Greek suggests.

Dave Stotts, *Drive Thru History: Acts to Revelation*, Episode 8 – The Second Journey Continues: Philippi and Thessalonica.

³ “Accepting the lordship of Christ would mean new priorities and loyalties for those who became disciples. It would lead to the transformation of personal relationships, business and personal ethics, social structures and ambitions, new attitudes towards other religions, and changed ways of relating to Caesar and his representatives.”

David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 482.

⁴ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 722. McRay (“Athens,” 139) lowers the number to 25,000.

⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 329.

⁶ Dave Stotts, *Drive Thru History: Acts to Revelation*, Episode 9 – A Road Trip to Athens.

⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 561.

⁸ “The Areopagus (the “hill of Ares,” Ἀρειον πάγος, Areion pagon) refers, depending upon the context and the time period of the source, to either the location on the hill and/or an Athenian assembly that engaged in governmental or judicial tasks. The Areopagus was located on a hill northwest of the Acropolis and south of the Agora (Herodotus, Histories 8.52); this may have been the same location where Paul preached his message every day (Acts 17:17). Thus, references to the “Areopagus” may refer to either the hill, the council, or both. By the time of Luke’s writing of Acts, many scholars suppose that the Areopagus no longer met on the hill but rather met more frequently in the Stoa Basileios near the Agora (Demosthenes, Against Aristogeiton 1 22–23). Yet there are good reasons for supposing that the Areopagus council continued to meet on the hill.”

Joshua W. Jipp, “Paul at the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:15–34),” in *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation*, ed. Barry J. Beitzel, Jessica Parks, and Doug Mangum, Lexham Geographic Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 345.

⁹ “Luke speaks of the Athenians as accusing Paul of “introducing” (εἰσφέρεις, eisphereis, 17:20) foreign deities, and this resonates with memories of Socrates, as this verb was used to depict the charge against Socrates (Xenophon, Apology 10–11; Justin, First Apology 5.4, Second Apology 10.5).” Jipp: 348.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Bock, 573.

¹² David DeSilva, Ph.D., *Athens: “In Every Way a Religious People”* video, 2015, Faithlife/Logos Bible Software. <https://media.faithlife.com/logos-media/401417-13842045-->

¹³ What is Contextualization?

<http://www.gotquestions.org/contextualization.html>

Generally, to contextualize an idea, statement or event is to place it within its larger setting in which it acquires its true and complete meaning. Contextualization aids comprehension. For example, an arithmetic problem may not seem very practical until it is seen within a story problem; the real-life situation contextualizes the math problem and makes it more understandable. In Christian evangelism, to contextualize is to tailor the presentation of the gospel to the wider sociological context in order to achieve greater understanding and, therefore, greater acceptance of the message.

Various churches and missionary efforts through the years have used varying levels of contextualization. At one end of the spectrum is no contextualization at all. On the foreign field, this means that the gospel is presented in Western terms that may not be understood by the indigenous peoples. Truth is presented with no regard for the background, experience or thinking of the hearers. In America, we sometimes see churches that refuse to adapt music or programs to the surrounding culture. Gospel truth remains, but it is set in a rigid framework that allows little room for creativity.

At the other end of the contextualization spectrum is too much adaptation. A message is presented in terms that are easily understood by the audience, but truth is compromised. We see this in places where Christian customs have been added to pagan belief systems, resulting in a confused syncretic of doctrine, and in churches that try to incorporate modern philosophy into their theology, whether or not it's biblical. The result is a watering down of the truth.

The necessary balance falls somewhere between those two extremes. The gospel must be presented in terms that are easily understood, but truth must also remain distinct from untruth. This occurs in churches that understand the culture in which they function and adapt their methods to the preferences of that culture. Gospel truth remains, presented in a culturally relevant manner, and no attempt is made to “sanitize” the cross to avoid offense (1 Corinthians 1:23).

Contextualization is most often discussed in terms of missionary work. Some very early missionaries made no attempt to contextualize, but rather required their converts to become “Westernized,” or at least required a drastic break from their native culture. This tended to build walls rather than build relationships. Later, missionaries of the 19th and early 20th centuries, such as William Carey, Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael and others, leaned more toward immersing themselves in the culture and partnering with natives in reaching the lost. They contextualized the message to the culture without diluting the truth. This led to the modern missionary movement.

In his book *Peace Child*, Don Richardson tells of his effort to bring the gospel to the Sawis, a tribe of headhunters in Papua New Guinea. He faced tremendous obstacles in a culture that honored deceit and betrayal—when they first heard the gospel, the natives saw Judas Iscariot as the hero of the story. In order to bridge the gap between the Sawi worldview and God's message of love, Richardson had to contextualize the message. Through much prayer, hard work and persistence, Richardson was able to find the “key” to unlock the Sawi culture and present the gospel of Jesus in a way the Sawi could truly understand. The result was that a jungle church was established and some of the Sawi began evangelizing neighboring tribes.

In the Bible, Daniel and his three friends were fully immersed in the Babylonian culture without giving in to influences that might draw them away from their God (Daniel 1-2). Their willingness to accommodate earned them an audience with the Babylonian king, and their refusal to compromise truth

eventually led to the king's acknowledgement of God (Daniel 4). When Paul spoke to the Athenians, he not only emulated the Athenian style of argument and oratory, but he also used their own writers to bolster his points (Acts 17:22-34). In other words, Paul understood Greek culture and contextualized the gospel in order to gain a hearing.

There are clear biblical examples of contextualization in the New Testament. Jesus preached to Samaritans and Gentiles without requiring them to conform to Jewish practices. Peter's dramatic vision of Acts 10 showed him that he needed to modify his approach to the Gentile culture; this he did, and a Roman centurion came to faith in Christ as a result. Paul's statement that he would be "all things to all men" (1 Corinthians 9:22) indicates his willingness to contextualize the truth for his hearers, whoever they may be. And, finally, in Revelation we see that the Lord Jesus has redeemed people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Revelation 5:9; 14:6). The gospel is truly cross-cultural and must be presented in a way that each culture can apprehend.

The Christmas song "Some Children See Him" describes the baby Jesus from the point of view of various children of the world: to different children, Jesus is "lily white," "bronzed and brown," "almond-eyed," or "dark as they." The children understand Jesus in terms of their own background and culture. That is contextualization.