

The Naked Bible Podcast 2.0

Number 52

“Acts 16-17”

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With

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Acts 16-17

In Acts 16 Timothy joins Paul and Silas. In these two chapters there are several items of interest: the Spirit forbids and directs the team, they encounter a “python spirit,” they are supernaturally delivered from prison, and Paul uses some pagan literature to articulate some biblical theology – including some insight into the Deuteronomy 32 worldview.

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 52, Acts 16-17. I'm your layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you doing?

MSH: Good, good. Glad to be back again.

TS: Absolutely. We have two chapters this week.

MSH: Yeah, we do. I'm not going to read through the full chapters of both. We'll read most of what's there. But, again, I'm picking out a few things that are kind of interesting, at least to me anyway, and hopefully to listeners that pop up in these two chapters. So let's just jump in. We have Acts 16. We'll just start reading at the top.

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. ² He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. ³ Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

MSH: Now, again, if you think back to last time, the Acts 15 situation, where the Jerusalem Council had to meet and what burdens do we put on Gentile believers and whatnot, circumcision was not one of those. It was very clear in terms of the decision that Gentile converts don't have to become Jews to be saved. But Paul, nevertheless, because of really, I think, the places Timothy is associated with, Lystra and Iconium were so much trouble, he does circumcise Timothy. He had not undergone circumcision. The passage doesn't say anything about that this resulted in him being a believer or accepted by the disciples. It actually says both of those things prior to his circumcision. He was a disciple, verse 1 says. He's a believer, son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, well-spoken of by the brethren, the other believers of Lystra and Iconium. But Paul sort of I think to head off the argument or head off possibly a threat, even to Timothy, personal physical harm, goes ahead and circumcises him. So this is a pragmatic thing for Paul to do. It's not a theological thing that he's doing. Verse 4,

⁴ As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily. ⁶ And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately he sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

MSH: Of course, Luke is the writer here. He's part of the group, too. Now I want to stop here and just make a few observations. It's kind of interesting that here we have a situation where the Holy Spirit forbids Paul and his companions to preach the gospel in a certain place. Now, we don't really know what Asia means in the passage. What is actually meant by that term isn't clear. It has to do with ancient geography. Is it some province in Rome? Is it ancient Asia? Is it further east? It could be cities on the Aegean coast that this terminology was used of them in ancient geography. It doesn't really matter whatever the locale is. The Spirit prevents them from going there and preaching the gospel. It's contrary to a lot of the missions that you're going to see.

We've already seen or we're going to see in the book of Acts the Spirit initiates where Paul goes. We actually sort of get the answer to why he is forbidden from going to this one place in verses 9-10. It's because the Spirit wants him to go to a different place. He gets this Macedonian call where he gets this vision of a man in Macedonia urging them to come over to Macedonia and preach to them, and that's what they're going to do. Of course, that winds up to be the right thing to do. So here you have a situation. We're not really told how the Spirit forbade them, just that he did. There was part of a plan, and so Paul and his companions obey. Another thing I want to draw your attention to is, let me read verse 7 to you and see what kind of stands out as a little odd or perhaps a significant. Maybe it will ring a bell in your ear. We have in verse 7,

⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

MSH: Now, prior to that, the verse prior, we have, 'having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.' Here we're forbidden by the Spirit of Jesus. For anybody who's followed my work on the whole concept of the Godhead in Israelite religion, of course, within Judaism, the two powers in heaven teaching and on into the Divine Council stuff, perhaps the first draft of the book that'll be out imminently, used to be called *The Myth That Is True*. If any of you have read the older draft, you know that there's a discussion there about this language. And that is, just as when you get to be thinking about the two powers of heaven, again, it used to be Orthodox theology and Judaism to have two good powers in heaven, two Yahweh figures. In some Jewish texts, you even get the second one referred to as the lesser Yahweh or the second God, that kind of thing.

Now that becomes a heresy right around the beginning of the second century which, not coincidentally, coincides with the birth of the early church, the birth of biblical Christianity, but Jews at one-time had this idea. So back in the Old Testament, you would have a Yahweh figure that was human in form. The angel the Lord is the best example, in whom was the name. Again, that's another way of referring to God, ha'shem, in whom was the presence, that sort of thing. So as that second figure was but also wasn't God, that is sort of the backdrop for the way Jesus is presented in the New Testament. Jesus is but isn't God. He is God. He's really God. He's deity. He has all the attributes of God, all that sort of stuff, but he also isn't because he's not the Father. There's still this dissimilarity in this hierarchical relationship. This is how Christians talk when they talk about the Godhead.

It's the same sort of thing. But here, we have the Spirit brought into the discussion. So just as Jesus is but also isn't God, in that he's not the Father, the Spirit is but isn't Jesus. Did you

catch that? The Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus are used in parallel here. So is it the spirit of God or is it the spirit of Jesus? Well, the answer is yes, just like is it God or is it Jesus? The answer is yes. This is actually where you get Trinitarian theology coming from. You don't get Trinitarian theology from pronouns and prepositions and all this sort of stuff. That kind of thing helps, but for people who, you get some of these "teachers" in messianic movements or whatever, Hebrew roots movements or whatever they're calling themselves now. They want to deny Godhead theology, Godhead thinking. The trajectory they typically use or the same sort of well-worn paths about words like begotten and firstborn and all that kind of stuff, those things don't refer to a chronological beginning anyway.

But that's typically the tack they take. What I'm suggesting to you is that isn't really where Trinitarian thinking comes from. Trinitarian thinking comes from this notion of a Godhead that begins in the Old Testament. Two figures that they're both Yahweh but yet they're both different. They're dissimilar as well as being the same Yahweh of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament you get a few passages. You can look this up in my book, it's going to be out shortly or the old draft, where you get the Spirit drawn into this discussion, even in the Old Testament. Well here, because Jesus is the central figure, Jesus who is Yahweh in the flesh incarnate, here you have the Spirit spoken of as his Spirit, but it's also God's Spirit. So you have this third figure emerge more clearly but still identified as Jesus and as God because Jesus was identified as God. So you have three figures who are coequal in terms of God-ness but yet, they also have some sort of hierarchical relationship to them.

This is really where you get Trinitarian theology coming from, not, again, some of the things that you might of heard articulated in church and whatnot. In my experience, I grew up in a pretty serious church all the way from youth group to pulpit ministry. I never, to my memory, ever heard a sermon that discussed the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Christ language, in the New Testament, it occurs four or five places, and how that really is sort of a major consideration in Trinitarian thinking. It was just a gap in knowledge, just a gap in the way things were presented. So I'm hoping to draw your attention to it here and you can go to your Bible and look up some cross-references and find some other places, too, where it occurs. But this is an important part of Trinitarian discussion, Godhead discussion. right here in Acts 16. So let's just jump down to verse 11 where we have of Lydia enter the story. We read,

¹¹ So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. ¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God.

MSH: Now, again, this language takes us back to earlier language in the book of Acts about God fearers, people who were not Jews but had a very high view of the God of Israel and Judaism. So they, depending on the Jewish attitude toward them, they could participate in certain things and not other things. But, again, they just had a high view of Jewish monotheism and wanted to be part of that. And so they did what they could to be part of that. It just depended on the

community they were part of as to how much that they could really participate in. But here we have Lydia, a worshiper of God.

The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.
¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

MSH: So they give her the gospel. The Lord opens her heart to pay attention, to embrace what Paul is saying, obviously not to reject it or dismiss or downplay it. She gets baptized, her household, they go home, her household as well. We’re going to get another household baptism situation later in this chapter that actually gives us more details than this one. Lydia becomes a follower of Jesus. Verse 16 we start to get some trouble though in Philippi.

¹⁶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”

MSH: It's kind of ironic that you have of this woman who is really possessed by a spirit. She has more clear thinking than a lot of the Jewish authorities that are in these places. But that goes back to the Gospels too. She's really on a different plane of awareness when it comes to the spirit world than they are. This spirit within her understands immediately what's going on here. And it's interesting these men are the servants of the most high God. Draw your attention to the most high. Why is that term significant here? I'll give you a clue. They're in a Gentile city. They've been directed to go there by the Lord. Paul's the apostle to the Gentiles. His ministry is about reclaiming the nations. Why is the term 'most high' important? Because of Deuteronomy 32, Deuteronomy 32:8, 'When the most high divided up the nations, he divided them up according to the number of the sons of God. Israel is Yahweh's portion, Jacob is his inheritance.' It's this terminology, again, most high doesn't occur that often in the New Testament, and typically when it does, it referred this is Old Testament title for the God of Israel, most high. It's a statement of authority and superiority and if we take the Old Testament into consideration, uniqueness of Yahweh of Israel. He is no like no other and no other are like him. He is the most high. He's the one who disinherited the nations. He is the one who has authority over the gods of those nations. Deuteronomy 32 worldview theology packed into a title, most high. And the spirit uses this terminology of these guys who were coming into hostile turf that is under the dominion of other spirit beings. And says these guys are with the most high God. Again it is a clear declaration of really what just in one sentence what's actually going on, because they are there to displace, to disrupt this place, to reclaim this whole cosmic geographical mindset of the nations for the true God and for the kingdom, for this thing we call the church, circumcision neutral people of God. That's why they're there. And that statement just telegraphs it to readers who would've just been familiar that they would have seen that name and all these things would have clicked in their head.

¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” ¹⁸ And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

MSH: Of course, we know the rest of the story. The owners of the lady get mad because, hey, we just saw our income disappear because this person can't do what she was doing before because the spirit is gone. Of course, Paul and Silas end up getting thrown into prison. What I want to camp on a little bit here is this terminology. The ESV has, ‘they met a slave girl who has a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.’ Literally, the Greek text has a girl having a python spirit or a Python as spirit. The Greek is *pneuma python*. Now this sounds really weird because we associate the term python with a big snake. Python is a reference in the ancient world to a deity figure, to a specific divinity and specifically one that had oracular power.

That’s where you get this idea that Luke wrote about in Acts 16:16 about fortune-telling. Python was a divinity, a specific divine being who was sort of conceived of as a snake or a dragon and typically associated with *Delphi*, which was originally known as *Pythia*. That’s actually where the terminology has a more direct association there. But when you think of Delphi, what do you think of? The Delphic oracle, the Delphic oracle wasn’t the only oracle associated with Delphi or that region but you get this specific terminology, again, people who are reading this in Greek, reading their New Testament back in the ancient world, they would've known right away *pneuma pythona* is one of these entities, one of these divine beings in the spirit of divination. Now in Greek mythology, this spirit was defeated and slain by Apollo. It was well known. This wasn’t sort of a peripheral character.

This was sort of a significant entity. Priestesses of Delphi for instance were called *pythia*. They were sort of servants under Python, this Python spirit, spirit of divination, specifically the associated with women. Not surprisingly here we have a slave girl who's possessed, under the influence of the spirit of divination, the spirit of Python as Luke describes in Acts. Now some scholars think, there's actually a division of opinion here, some scholars think that what's going on here is ventriloquism because there are ancient texts that associate the term, the Python spirit, with ventriloquism. It's more than that here because Paul specifically addresses the spirit and Luke tells us that the girl had a spirit of divination, so it's not that she's just a ventriloquist. I'm just telling you that there is that association in a few ancient texts with this. But it's sort of a misnomer because ventriloquism more broadly was thought of in the ancient world as to be evidence of possession, some demonic possession or, again, spirit possession by a divine being whatnot.

But we get the contextual clues in Acts 16, especially when Paul addresses the spirit and says I command you in the name of Jesus Christ, come out of her, and it does, that we're not just dealing with a circus act here or someone who's a clever performer. This was real. So you get both sort of descriptions in antiquity, direct possession, and people sort of trying to fake it. The account here in Acts 16 makes pretty clear she wasn't faking it. She was under the authority of the power of the spirit. Of course, she's the one saying these guys are servants of the most high God. Again, very clear spiritual understanding in spiritual terms of what is going on here. So I think that's something that's very easily missed in the text unless you're reading it in an

interlinear and lookup that term, you basically never see it. Paul and Silas get thrown in jail after this account and then we get to the account of the Philippians jailer in verse 25.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

MSH: So, we get an account here. This is one of these so-called household conversion, household baptism situations. Typically the more detail you get, it's very clear that the people who wind up getting baptized have heard the gospel first and the implication is that they believe because earlier in the book of Acts, that's the order, repent and be baptized, so and so forth. People who are already believers who hadn't been baptized and they get baptized, whatnot. I'm spending a little time here on this because there are those who mistakenly assume that either baptism is sort of this 'without it, you can't be saved'. We have instances in the book of Acts where that's not the case very clearly. People are counted believers but maybe they've only had the baptism of John or they only had the baptism in one place. They were only baptized in name of Jesus.

Then you have to have this baptism happen and then the Spirit comes to connect them back to Acts chapter 2 so that everybody present knows that what's happening here is valid. What's happening here is part of what was initiated back at Pentecost. So it becomes sort of a litmus test in that way in the book of Acts that all these conversions, whether they're likely or not, Jews and proselytes, Hellenists, all these people initially the disciples would not have included in the people of God but not have thought what the Gospel's for because Messiah was Jewish. The Messiah, the son of David, all of these conversions, they're sort of validated by the act of baptism, and then specifically, the coming of the Spirit in certain contexts and whatnot. So a lot of these things are happening so that everybody's clear, both in terms of the real-time events and also people reading about the history of the early church, that it was the same God and the same message behind all of this because it was unusual. To us, in a way, it's not unusual to think about non-Jews embracing the Jewish Messiah, embracing the gospel. Back then it would've been, are you sure, can that really happen? Is that for real? Is that valid? Is it true? To us, we really don't think about that because most of us are Gentiles. Back then, not the case at all.

So you have these situations where these things all sort of go hand in hand for a very specific context, for a very specific reason, to validate the fact that this was all the same thing. This all goes back to the events at Pentecost, the reclaiming of Jews scattered through the nations for centuries, being brought back into the people of God, dare I say the finding of the lost tribes, the regathering of Israel. So typically, evangelicals associate these concepts only with the future millennium or only with some future prophetic scheme. I'm not saying that isn't part of it because people are still being gathered in the kingdom of God today. So I'm not saying this is not part of the picture. What I'm saying is I got news for you. The regathering of Israel began in the book of Acts. The regathering of Israel and the nations began in the book of Acts. It all started at Pentecost. So to put it all future for the sake of some scheme of biblical interpretation of prophecy is wrongheaded. It's misguided. It misses part of the picture or willfully ignores part of the picture.

Eschatology is about already but not yet. The kingdom is already here but not yet in its full form and if you don't get that point, your eschatology doesn't have a prayer of being anywhere close to being accurate. You must get that point. It's not an either or. It's not you have to be either an amillennialist or premillennialist. No you don't. It's not an either or choice. It's a both and. So deal with that and start rethinking your eschatology. It's already but not yet, that sort of thing. So we get these hints of it but you have to read passages like Acts 16, other passages in Acts, against the bigger picture, against the metanarrative. What was Pentecost about? Why even have it? Earlier we talked at length about this, about connecting it back to the new covenant, connecting it back to the spirit language of the Old Testament, that the spirit would come, which, even with that, was associated with washing. Lo and behold, why do we have baptism as part of the picture?

Well, there's an Old Testament precedent for that. All these things are framed and contextualized by the Old Testament theology, and if, God forbid, you're in a context where your church doesn't even hardly know what the Old Testament is, you're really going to miss out. You're not going to be able to frame correctly what you're hearing, what you are reading in the New Testament if you don't have sort of a working knowledge of the bigger picture, the bigger framework from the Old Testament. Because these things are not random, they're not accidental, they're not haphazard in the book of Acts, and quote frankly, anywhere else in the New Testament. They're not that. They're systematic. They're coherent and they're very decipherable within the framework that the Old Testament provides. But you have to get some of that under your belt to really begin to see some of these things and appreciate, to see patterns. I'm a big believer that patterns are more important than things like word studies. Patterning is really really really important because what you have in your Bible, none of it is there by accident, how it's arranged, how it's presented. It's deliberate, intelligent, and coherent. Let's move on to Acts 17. We have Paul and Silas, they're going to journey onto Thessalonica and the passage just starts out pretty normative. Paul and Silas show up, verse 2.

² And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." ⁴ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. ⁵ But the Jews were

jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.⁶ And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also,⁷ and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.”⁸ And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things.⁹ And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

MSH: The narrative keeps going and I want to get down to when Paul, let’s go to 16, verse 16. Paul gets to Athens. We’ll go back up to verse 14.

¹⁴ Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there.¹⁵ Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

¹⁶ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babblor wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—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 that you are presenting?”²⁰ For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.”²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,²⁸ for

“‘In him we live and move and have our being’;

as even some of your own poets have said,

“‘For we are indeed his offspring.’

²⁹ Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

MSH: That flips them out. But look at what Paul is saying here. It harkens back to this whole notion about he has made, the God, the unknown God, the God you don't really know, that's the one I'm here to tell you about. He made from one-man every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and boundaries of their dwelling place. Basically, having determined the regular periods of the history of nations, the times, the ebb and flow of their history, whether they're going to be empires, and that harkens back the language of Daniel about how God, it's God who sets up kings and who tears them down. It's God who's in control of the progression of the history of all these places and peoples is what Paul is saying. And then he adds, and he's also determined the boundaries of their dwelling places. Harkening back to the Deuteronomy 32 approach, the worldview there, he's familiar with because he knows his Old Testament.

But what's interesting here, this is sort of a geek moment for the people who are listening who have a little Greek, this statement that Paul makes, why should we care if God's in charge of the history of these nations and the boundaries of their dwelling places? Why should we care that God's really the one in control and by implication, catch this, not these other gods. The gods that you know aren't the ones in control. It's the one you don't know who's in control, this most high that we read about in Acts 16. That's the one that's in control. Why does that matter? Well, God did this so the these other nations should seek God, verse 27, 'and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.' Now the geek moment here is that what you have in verse 27, you have two verb forms for seeking, the seeking and groping, the finding their way toward God. They are in the optative mood for those of you have a little Greek. There aren't very many optatives in the New Testament. There are only 70 optatives in the entire New Testament. That's Dan Wallace's count.

If you remember your Greek a little bit, sorry for the rabbit trail but for those who have Greek, this is worth pointing out. You have indicative mood, which is the mood of reality, again, just the way things are, declarative statements, the subjunctive, which is the mood sort of expressing a wish or desire. And then you have the optative, the imperative, which is a command, but the operative mood is kind of rare in the New Testament, only 70 places in the tens and tens of thousands of words in the New Testament. In general, the optative conveys this idea. It's the mood the Greek writer would use when he wished to portray an action as not only potential, not only something wished for, like the subjunctive, but also possible. So by using an optative, Luke is telegraphing here, look, what God did, with disinheriting the nations, now, if

you hand them over to the other gods, the whole Deuteronomy 32 picture. He does this. The goal was never to totally get rid of them. Somehow, God leaves the door open so that they would seek the true God.

We know our Old Testament theology. We know this is part of the Abrahamic Covenant and through you all nations on the earth will be blessed. We know that Israel was supposed to be kingdom of priests. What are priests? They're mediators. We know that Israel was supposed to live in such a way that they would attract the nations. The nations' attention would be caught. What's going on over there? We know this worked with certain Gentiles in the Old Testament. What Luke is telling us here is that God left the door open and it was still possible for a non-Jew, someone who wasn't a physical descendent of Abraham, was still possible for them to seek God. They weren't cut off. In other words, God didn't do anything so that they couldn't find him so that it wasn't possible. Luke is saying it was. It was possible for them to be alerted to the God of Israel, what he was like, and to desire him and to seek and find them. It could have worked. It was possible. God wasn't shutting the door entirely as though they had no hope of being saved or, in hyper Calvinistic language that they were incapable of being saved as some sort of "non-elect".

And listeners will know that I have quite a different view of election in the Old Testament. Don't need to rabbit trail there. You can go up there and up on the blog and find that. But Luke's point here is that this is a possibility and he telegraph's that very clearly by using a very unusual mood in Greek, the optative mood, so it's a grammatical thing that just brings out a little aspect to it. Another thing I want to comment here in this regard, when Paul is making this argument, and Luke, again, is recording it, we get Paul quoting a foreign text, a pagan source. Scholars and classicists have identified this quotation as being from Aratus's poem called *Phaenomena*. Again, it's a pagan source. There's nothing spiritual, nothing theologically warm about it. It's just something produced in classical Greek literature. So this isn't the only sort of situation like this.

The famous quotation of Paul to the Corinthians, bad communications corrupt good manners, that's from Menander, the Greek poet. Old Testament will draw things from the Baal cycle of all places about Leviathan, talking about God using the language of text like that. Enoch is another one. We know that Jude draws upon Enoch. We know Peter and Jude, conceptually at least if not a direct quotation, draw upon the book of Enoch as well. So what about the use of these kinds of sources? Now I thought this was a good place to rabbit trail a bit because I often get this question. Mike, should we consider the book of Enoch canonical? That's usually the way it's cast because people like Enoch. We have Enoch fans out there. They never ask, Mike, should we consider the Baal cycle canonical because they don't know the Old Testament quotes the thing or any number of books, you know, the Wisdom of Amenemope from Egypt or something like that.

All of these things need to be put in the same category. The short answer's no, we don't need to consider Enoch canonical because it's used in the New Testament anymore that we would consider the Baal cycle canonical because it's used in the Old Testament. And frankly, the question just doesn't matter. And why do I say it that way? These sources were used because they helped a biblical writer, Old or New Testament, articulate something they wanted to articulate well, and if drawling on some source like this helped, they did it, because they were familiar with the material. They read it and understood it. It was part of their culture. It was part of their worldview. They weren't uninformed hacks. They had a knowledge of what people were

reading, what people were thinking about, what informed them and when that was useful, they used it to help them articulate some point of theology in their own writings, in the writings across-the-board within the believing community people are going to embrace as inspired, the books we now consider canonical.

On one level the question doesn't even matter. We ought to be familiar with that stuff why? Because your biblical writers were. If you were familiar with this stuff, if you read the apocrypha, if you read Enoch, and if you read other pseudepigraphical books, if you read ancient near Eastern material, you would be able to follow their thinking better. I like to use this illustration. A modern illustration I think that people who might be new to this idea, this notion, can identify with. If you know somebody in let's say a reformed church or a reform congregation, whether it's CRC, RCA, or some Presbyterian Church, or whatever, the big guy in those circles is John Calvin. So if you or your pastor had read Calvin's institutes and Calvin's commentary on Romans, it's going to be really hard for you to talk about Romans without having Calvin in your head. In that respect or by analogy, biblical writers read lots of stuff. They read Enoch. They read second Temple Jewish literature.

They read ancient near Eastern material, so that when they're writing their own stuff that is in their head. It's floating around there somewhere and at times it's useful for articulating a point of theology that they are going to write down that we cast as inspired canonical material. It doesn't mean the source is inspired. It doesn't mean the thing floating around their head is inspired. If we were getting the Bible today, it might be a movie. It might be a you tube video. Who knows what it would be? But if it had a wide enough circulation and it had value, explanatory power for something and a biblical writer, putting in modern terms if the Bible was being composed today, if it was useful to articulate a point that's what they're going to do, because that's what they did.

So the question is kind of misguided but it's also understandable at the same time. So here we have an instance in Acts 17. I just thought it'd be a good place to rabbit trail on that thought because I do get that question a lot. So I want to wrap up with Acts 17 sort of at that point. We get this sermon by Paul, the famous sermon in the Areopagus. I think the key is Paul telling them in verse 30 look, the times of ignorance God overlooked, okay? It doesn't mean that everybody gets a free pass up until that point, but what it means is they weren't judged. God is allowing them opportunity to repent, opportunity to seek Him because it can work. It's possible you can find me. Why do I put it that way? Because what Paul says in verse 31, right after verse 30. Let's just go back to verse 30 and read it.

³⁰The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

MSH: And that's what sets off the crowd. Some of them believe, some of them reject the message. That should be our focus. That our context for understanding what Paul is saying here. God didn't lower the boom in days past, but now he is bringing things full circle and it's time to choose. It's time to choose because now we have the central figure in this entire plan, this man, Jesus of Nazareth whom God has raised from the dead who is the Christ, the whole theology of the book of Acts. Now it is time to choose because this is the way God is propelling history at this

point, not only for us, not only for us Jews that's standing here in front of you, but for you guys, you Gentiles, the people whose history's just like ours, and whose boundaries have been allotted by God, by the most high. It's time to make a choice. So I think that just helps orient our thinking in what Paul is saying here at the end of Acts 17.

TS: Yeah, I really enjoyed the python Greek. I think that's interesting. That's just something that if you're not a scholar of Greek, you're not going to know.

MSH: Yeah, it's got that Greco-Roman context. You're just going to fly right over it.

TS: Absolutely, that's very fascinating.

MSH: Think about it. I mean, for an English translator, ESV uses divination, which captures the point because if you put the English word python in there, you're going to go what? That just doesn't mean anything to an English reader.

TS: That's the kind of stuff I enjoy.

MSH: Well good.