

Acts 16:7

“The Spirit of Yeshua”

“and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Yeshua did not permit them.”

In Luke’s record leading up to Paul’s vision of the man of Macedonia, which invited Paul and his party into Philippi (Acts 16:9), Luke makes a very intriguing point concerning Yeshua the Messiah.²⁶⁸ Acts 16:7 actually records, “When they came to the frontier of Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit of Yeshua would not let them” (CJB/CJSB), or “When they came to Mysia, they were trying to proceed into Bithynia, but the *Ruach* of Yeshua would not allow them” (TLV). Immediately prior in Acts 16:6, Luke indicated “They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.”

Previously, Paul and his party “had been prevented by the *Ruach HaKodesh*” (Acts 16:6, CJB/CJSB) or the Holy Spirit, *tou hagiau pneumatos* (τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος), to go to Asia. It is then stated how “the Spirit of Jesus” or “*Ruach* of Yeshua” (Acts 16:7, TLV), *to pneuma Iēsou* (τὸ πνεῦμα Ἰησοῦ), prohibited them from going to Bithynia. What is to be deduced from the terms employed in Acts 16:6, 7?

It needs to be recognized how there is no conflict present between Luke speaking about “the Holy Spirit” on one hand, and then “the Spirit of Yeshua” on another. This actually provides Bible readers a unique perspective of the Godhead, which often gets overlooked by the most well-meaning of Believers. While it is safe to recognize how Luke fully upholds the Divinity of Yeshua in these statements, he may also suggest that the differences between the Son and the Spirit may not be as clearly defined or compartmentalized as one’s human mind may want them to be—and even the perception of some of the most thoughtful systematic theologians. While there are some differences in the functions of the Son and the Spirit, they are nevertheless unified as part of the mystery of the Godhead and God’s very being. This is perhaps why Paul is able to say, “it is written, ‘The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL’ [Genesis 2:7]. The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45).

In witnessing both “the Holy Spirit” and “the Spirit of Yeshua” being referred to in Acts 16:6, 7, we are each asked to pause and consider that tried and true direction: *Let God be God*. The Eternal One is not limited by any of the restrictions we place upon Him. If we affirm that *Elohim* is a plural unity, then let this plural unity present itself to us as we read the Holy Scriptures.

Acts 17:16-34

“To the Unknown God”

“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. 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. 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 Yeshua and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean.’ (Now all the Athenians and the strangers

²⁶⁸ This entry has been partially adapted from the commentary *Philippians for the Practical Messianic*, “Acts 16:11-40: Paul’s Visit to Philippi.”

visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.) So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. 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.' 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; 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; 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, 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; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, "For we also are His children." 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. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, 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.' Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer, but others said, 'We shall hear you again concerning this.' So Paul went out of their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them."

The exchange which took place between the Apostle Paul and the Athenians at the Aeropagus, or Mars Hill, is one of the most intriguing scenes in all of Scripture. Here, you have a representative of the God of Israel, speaking to those who are total pagans, about both his God and the Messiah He has sent. The exchange between Paul and the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers is commonly appealed to as an important scene not just for understanding apologetics, but also as an encounter to be probed and reflected upon for how the good news or gospel can and will confront godless society.

Those who hold to either a high Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being God, or a low Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being a supernatural but created agent sent from God, should both be honest enough with reading Acts 17:16-34 by recognizing how a figure like Paul was not going to delve into the minutiae of the nature of the Messiah, when his major goal was to get the Athenians focused off of their polytheism, focused onto the God of Israel, and thinking about how future history would reach a point where all human beings would be held accountable for their actions.

Paul had just been driven out of Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17:1-15),²⁶⁹ and was waiting in Athens for the remainder of his traveling party. Paul was greatly distressed at the idolatrous presence in the city of Athens (Acts 17:16), but the population was large enough so that he was able to encounter Jews and God-fearers in the synagogue (Acts 17:17a) and also those in the marketplace at large (Acts 17:17b), presenting them with Yeshua the Messiah. Among those who are noted to have taken an interest in dialoguing with Paul—although perhaps for some of their own self-serving reasons—were the Epicureans and Stoics (Acts 17:18). Although the Epicureans were well known for denying any sort of afterlife, hence meaning that people needed to fill their lives on Earth with total pleasure, and the Stoics were known for believing in some sort of reincarnation—readers of Luke's record who may not have known some of the nuances of these two philosophies, are told that they both took issue with "the Good News of

²⁶⁹ Consult the Appendix on "Acts 17:1-15: Paul's Visit to Thessalonica," appearing in the author's commentary *1&2 Thessalonians for the Practical Messianic*.

The Nature of Yeshua in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts

Yeshua and the resurrection” (Acts 17:18, TLV). It can be safely recognized how the gospel message was offensive because of its emphasis on repentance from sin, and that the idea of the resurrection of the dead was, at the very least, considered bizarre. Given how the Athenians were eager to hear the latest talk, it seems probable that many just wanted to hear Paul so that they could have a good laugh, or find a new fellow who they could easily patronize or antagonize in some way (Acts 17:19-21).

In spite of some of the pressures which were locked against him—as he spoke to an entirely pagan audience—the Apostle Paul was respectful in his words, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all respects you are remarkably religious” (Acts 17:22, Montgomery New Testament). Paul then makes light of something that he will use to communicate an important truth: “For while I was passing through and observing the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: ‘To an Unknown God.’ Therefore what you worship without knowing, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23, TLV). There were so many shrines, altars, and temples in Athens, that they even had a place dedicated “TO THE GOD NOBODY KNOWS” (The Message). Paul necessarily takes this presumably Unknown God to actually be the God of Israel, the One God who created the universe, and who made men and women (Acts 17:24-26). This is the God which all people should ultimately seek after, and for whom all people ultimately exist (Acts 17:27-28).

Paul testifies before the polytheistic Athenians how this True God is not constrained to “gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals” (Acts 17:29, NRSV). While Paul would here be reflecting upon many Tanach concepts, such as Isaiah 40:18-19,²⁷⁰ and some of his own further thoughts as explained in Romans 1:23,²⁷¹ his main thought is how “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30, ESV). To those engrossed in what the Scriptures of Israel plainly denounces as sin, this would have been a most offensive statement. But, a more confounding statement is seen in Acts 17:31: “For He has set a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness, through a Man whom He has appointed. He has brought forth evidence of this to all men, by raising Him from the dead” (TLV).

There is no avoiding from Acts 17:31, speaking of the God of Israel, that His judgment of the world will take place *en andri hō hōrisen* (ἐν ἀνδρὶ ᾧ ὤρισεν), “by a man whom he appointed” (Brown and Comfort),²⁷² with *anēr* (ἀνὴρ) notably meaning “man” or “male.” The focus of Paul’s presentation to the Epicureans and Stoics was not to go into a huge amount of detail about the nature of the Messiah he declared; the focus of Paul’s presentation was to focus on the centrality of Israel’s God as the True Creator God, and that the Yeshua (or Iēsous) resurrected from the dead is appointed as the final arbiter who will judge all human beings at a future point in history. Acts 17:31 actually presents a truth frequently lost on the Twentieth or Twenty-First Century Jewish or Christian reader, who believes in the God of Israel and the resurrection of the dead: **there will be a final judgment of all human beings.** *Where is a final judgment of all human beings ever found in Greco-Roman mythology, legend, or even drama?*

The Epicureans believed that a person just died, and that a personal annihilation from existence ensued. The Stoics believed in some kind of reincarnation, as an individual’s energy or life force was recycled by the cosmos. It is hardly a surprise why Luke records, “At the

²⁷⁰ “To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him? As for the idol, a craftsman casts it, a goldsmith plates it with gold, and a silversmith fashions chains of silver (Isaiah 40:18-19).

²⁷¹ “[A]nd exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures” (Romans 1:23).

²⁷² Brown and Comfort, 483.

mention of a resurrection of dead people, some began to scoff; while others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject’” (Acts 17:32, CJB/CJSB). Paul did find some who heard him who believed in the good news of Yeshua (Acts 17:34), but on the whole he did not find too many that interested.

Acts 20:17-28

“The Assembly Purchased With God’s Own Blood”

“From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the [assembly]. And when they had come to him, he said to them, ‘You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Yeshua the Messiah. And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Yeshua, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the [assembly] of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

Within discussions about the nature of Yeshua, the attention of the debate can tend to focus around only a few passages, such as the Johannine prologue (John 1:1-18), the *Carmen Christi* hymn (Philippians 2:5-11), and statements such as those of 1 Timothy 2:5. While no Bible reader should deny that material such as the Gospel of John, and many statements in the Pauline letters, among others, have a conscious intention to address the nature of Yeshua—it is in those places where there is, perhaps, a not-so-conscious intention to address the nature of Yeshua, where we should be considering whether the First Century *ekklēsia* considered Yeshua to simply be a supernatural but ultimately created agent of God, or indeed uncreated and integrated into the Divine Identity.

In his encounter with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:17-28, readers mainly encounter Luke’s record of Paul departing to Judea, and our attention is mainly directed at the concern present if Paul goes to Jerusalem. Paul reviews some of his ministry activities, noting how he had been “serving the Lord with much humility and with tears, in spite of the tests I had to undergo because of the plots of the unbelieving Jews” (Acts 20:19, CJB/CJSB). Paul describes how he had been consistent in his work, stating, “I did not shrink back from proclaiming to you anything that was profitable, teaching you publicly as well as from house to house, testifying to both Jewish and Greek people repentance to God and trust in our Lord Yeshua” (Acts 20:20-21, TLV). Textually speaking, the reference in Acts 20:19 to “serving the Lord” (*douleuōn tō Kuriō*, δουλεύων τῷ κυρίῳ) could be a reference to either God the Father or Yeshua the Son, but more likely the former. Following this, however, Paul says that his ministry was directed to Jews and Greeks, focused on *eis Theon metanoian kai pistin eis ton Kurion hēmōn Iēsoun* (εἰς θεὸν μετάνοιαν καὶ πίστιν εἰς τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν), “repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Yeshua the Messiah” (Acts 20:21, PME). Here, questions can actually be raised as to why the titles “God” and “Lord” are employed side by side, the latter employed to refer to Yeshua the