

Worldview Noise: Case Studies from the Early Church

Jerusalem Worldview Culture

Acts 2:5-41 (NKJV)

⁵ And there were dwelling **in Jerusalem Jews, devout men**, from every nation under heaven. (skip to verse 10)

¹⁰ ... both **Jews and proselytes** (skip to verse 14)

¹⁴ But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, ... (skip to verse 22)

²² **“Men of Israel**, hear these words: **Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God** to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— ²³ Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; ²⁴ whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. ²⁵ For David says concerning Him:

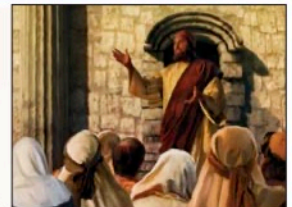
‘I foresaw the LORD always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. ²⁶ Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. ²⁷ For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. ²⁸ You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.’

²⁹ **“Men and brethren**, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, ³¹ he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. ³² This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. ³³ Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. ³⁴ **“For David** did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: *‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, ³⁵ Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”’* ³⁶ **“Therefore** let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” ³⁷ Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, **“Men and brethren**, what shall we do?” ³⁸ Then Peter said to them, **“Repent**, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” ⁴⁰ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, **“Be saved** from this perverse generation.” ⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

PETER and the Jews at Pentecost (1 Corinthians 1:23 But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a *stumbling block*...)

Counts cost of a faith response	-1
Confronted with a faith response	-2
Senses personal spiritual conviction	-3
Understands some gospel concepts*	-4
Interested in Jesus and the gospel	-5
Exposed to other Christian concepts	-6
Realizes there is only one true God	-7
Vulnerable to false religious beliefs	-8
Seeks to fill personal spiritual void	-9
Senses personal spiritual emptiness	-10
Aware of higher Power or powers	-11
Born with a God-vacuum	-12

1. Knowing what you already know about Peter’s audience as well as what you read here, where do you think they were on the Good Soil E&D Scale when he began preaching?
2. In what ways were these Jews an exception to the way most people groups initially appear in relation to the E&D scale?
3. Of the eight gospel concepts given below, which of these did the Jews already understand fairly well?
4. With which gospel concept could and did Peter begin to witness? Why?



God Man Sin Death¹ Christ Cross² Faith Life³

¹Death = as divine judgment for sin

²Cross = including the resurrection of Jesus

³Life = spiritual & eternal life

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Lystra Worldview Culture

Acts 14:6-18 (NKJV)

⁶ But they...fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, ⁷ where they continued to preach the good news.

⁸ And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked. ⁹ This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, ¹⁰ said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.

¹¹ Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" ¹² And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

¹³ Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out ¹⁵ and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, ¹⁶ who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷ Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." ¹⁸ And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.

The Cultural-Worldview Background

Ovid the Roman poet relates a legend of a previous visitation by Zeus and Hermes to the Phrygian region [near where Lystra was located]. They came in human form and inquired at one thousand homes, but none showed them hospitality. Only a poor elderly couple, Baucis and Philemon, took them in. The pair were rewarded by being spared when the gods flooded the valley and destroyed its inhabitants. The couple's shack was transformed into a marble-pillared, gold-roofed temple, and they became its priests.

-From pages 212-213 of Acts by William J. Larkin, Jr. (The IVP NT Commentary Series)

PAUL and the Zeus Cultists

(1 Corinthians 1:23 But we preach Christ crucified, to the Greeks *foolishness*...)

Counts cost of a faith response	-1
Confronted with a faith response	-2
Senses personal spiritual conviction	-3
Understands some gospel concepts*	-4
Interested in Jesus and the gospel	-5
Exposed to other Christian concepts	-6
Realizes there is only one true God	-7
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Born with a God-vacuum	-12

1. Where do you think the people in this Lystran crowd were on the Good Soil E&D Scale when Paul began preaching to them?

2. Of the eight gospel concepts given below, which of these did the Lystrans already understand fairly well?

3. With which of the eight gospel concepts could and did Paul begin to explain the gospel once he encountered their worldview noise? Why?

4. What did Paul say to challenge and correct their faulty worldview concepts?



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¹Death = as divine judgment for sin

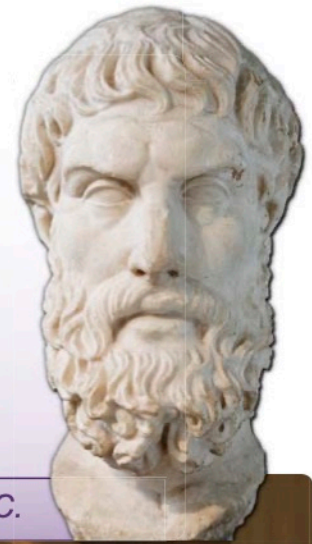
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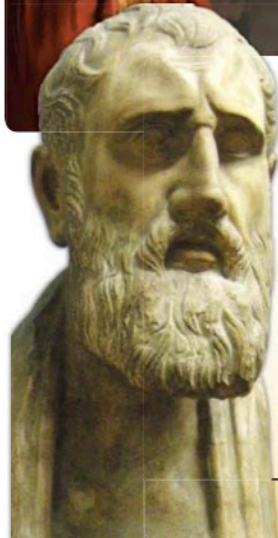
This may have been Paul's first encounter with a totally pagan Greek audience.
What missiological (missions-related) principles do we see in this story?

Epicureanism

- The essence and extent of the universe is eternal, non-created matter/ atoms (materialism).
- “Gods” do exist and are immortal but they are made of atoms too; they do not intervene in human affairs and need/should not be feared.
- Humans evolved and there is no afterlife for them.
- The ultimate “good” of life = pleasure and the absence of pain in this life (tranquility).



Epicurus, 341 - 270 B.C.



Stoicism

- Everything is matter (materialism) but a divine reality pervades the universe (pantheism).
- Human souls will all ultimately perish; there is no personal immortality.
- Everything is subject to the laws of fate; human freedom is only like eddies in a stream.
- The ultimate “good” of life = submit to the will of nature (“god”), to “go with the flow.”

Zeno of Citium, 334 - 262 B.C.

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Athens Worldview Culture

Acts 17:16-34 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Now while Paul waited for them **at Athens**, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. ¹⁷ Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the *Gentile* worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Then certain **Epicurean and Stoic philosophers** encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine *is* of which you speak?" ²⁰ For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." ²¹ For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

²² Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; ²³ for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I **proclaim to you:** ²⁴ **God**, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. ²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. ²⁶ And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, ²⁷ so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that 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 have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' ²⁹ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. ³⁰ Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹ because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." ³² And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this *matter*." ³³ So Paul departed from among them. ³⁴ However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Optional activity: Do a Wikipedia search on Epicureans and Stoics, if an internet connection is handy.

PAUL and the Epicureans & Stoics (1 Corinthians 1:23 But we preach Christ crucified, to the Greeks *foolishness*...)

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Senses personal spiritual emptiness	-10
Aware of higher Power or powers	-11
Born with a God-vacuum	-12

1. Knowing what you already know about Epicureans & Stoics as well as what you read here, where do you think they were on the Good Soil E&D Scale when Paul **began** evangelizing?



2. Of the eight gospel concepts given below, which of these did the Epicureans and Stoics already understand fairly well?

3. With which of the eight gospel concepts could and did Paul begin to witness? Why?

4. What did Paul do and say to challenge and correct their faulty worldview concepts?

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Is your host culture more like Jerusalem, Lystra, or Athens?