

## THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

### Acts 17:22-34 | Session 46 | The Unknown God Made Known

Paul is alone in the city of Athens (now in Greece). As he waits for Silas and Timothy to join him from Berea, he has time to wander around the city noticing the rampant idolatry. As is his custom he makes his way to the synagogue of the Jews where he spends time *disputing* or reasoning with them about Jesus being the Christ (Acts 17:3; or Messiah). This is Paul's main message to the Jews, as well as to those who embrace Judaism (sometimes called *devout persons*; 17:17). But now he encounters the philosophers of the city known as the **Epicureans and Stoicks** (See session 45 notes on their identity), a different audience that requires a different message.

You might agree that a person must first have understanding who it is they are to believe in before they can believe. Paul, in our passage today is going to introduce them to the true God they should worship.

Verse 22—**Superstitious**, is **δεισιδαίμων** (*deis daimon, which is loosely translated: fearful demon*). *“You men are religious, but your object of worship is demonic.”*

Verse 23—Paul gives an example... as he wandered through the city and **beheld your devotions** (that is, gods scattered around Athens). **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**. The Athenians, sensing there had to be more, **ignorantly** created another god, without a name, but their worship to *it* was just like all of the other gods. Paul addresses this innate sense of God within man in Romans 1:19-25. He doesn't beat around the bush; *I am going to declare this unknown God unto you*.

Verse 24—**First**, there is a Creator, **God that made the world and all things therein**. There was nothing before God. *“For by him all things were created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.”* (Colossians 1:16). **Second**, this God **that made the world, he is Lord of heaven and earth**. The word **Lord** (Greek: *kurios*), and it means *supreme master*. **Third**, this **Lord** doesn't live in **temples**. We might picture Paul sweeping the vista from Mars Hill with his hand at all the surrounding temples—*whatever or whoever you are worshipping it's not the Creator because he doesn't live in temples made with hands*. In his statements, he goes against the philosophy of the Stoics, that god was in everything, and against the Epicureans who really only believed in the here and now, certainly not in **heaven and earth** and an afterlife. Paul's evangelistic method is not *meeting them halfway*, he zeroes in on their core philosophy and challenges it.

Verse 25—**Neither is worshipped with men's hands**, (worshipped: *therapueo*). God doesn't need men to craft him or to be fashioned by the hands of men, **as though he needed anything**; In fact, God is self-sufficient and needs nothing from man, because he is the one who **giveth to all life, and breath, and all things**. Paul turns the tables on the philosophers.

Verse 26—Paul elaborates on his second point in verse 24; When he *made the world all the nations of men* were **made of one blood**. We all came from the same parent, Adam. There was no evolutionary process from mud and goo. God fashioned man in His image first through Adam, and

then through Noah all the nations and peoples of the earth have come from that same **blood**. The KJV is based on the majority of Greek texts. It is a shame that modern translations omit the word **blood**. Nevertheless, God has determined the locations of the nations on the earth.

*God demonstrates his majesty by “separating” both time and space (Genesis 1:4, 7), but he also “separated” peoples (Genesis 10:5, 32; Deuteronomy 32:8). God arranged the cosmos (Psalm 74:16–17) but also the nations. Psalm 74:17 declares God's sovereignty over both seasons and boundaries.<sup>1</sup>*

Verse 27—The purpose of God making man from *one* blood and *determining their times and habitation* was for him to **Seek the Lord, if haply (therefore) they might feel after him** (grope in the darkness), **and find him, though he be not far**. Man, however, has done the opposite of God's plan, *“There is none that seeketh after God”* (Romans 3:11).

Verse 28—They attributed a lot to their *unknown God*, without knowing why. **In him we live, and move, and have our being**. Paul's point is if we seek God, we will find him because he is an everyday occurrence. Again, speaking of the *unknown God* the Athenians worshipped, Paul shows his own philosophical acumen by quoting one of their **own poets** (probably referring to Zeus) lending to his credibility; **For we are also his offspring**.

Verse 29—Therefore, if we are **the offspring of God**, how can the **Godhead** be made of **gold, silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device**? Paul is appealing to their logic—can the offspring of God be made by man? It does not make sense.

Verse 30—The Gentiles (like these philosophers) did all of this in **ignorance**, and because of that **God winked at** it (he looked the other way), because in the past he was not dealing with the nations, but the nation of Israel alone. But now, Paul is pointing out, there is a new dispensation and God **commandeth all men every where to repent**. The word *repent* here is have a *change of mind*. It's time to change your mind about this unknown God and accept the fact that there is one true God. Change your mind about these idols and start worshipping the truth.

Verse 31—**Because he hath appointed a day**. Paul does not give the grace message here. He focuses on the kingdom gospel because it is his hope that Israel will believe and Jesus Christ will return to set up his kingdom ruled by the one who **will judge the world in righteousness**, and while not stating Jesus's name he pronounces that this **man, God has raised from the dead**.

Verse 32-33—

Nevertheless, whether it is the kingdom gospel or the gospel of grace, the **resurrection** is foundational. Both gospels are dependent on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Luke does not record Paul going any deeper into either gospel message. It appears that the point of the **resurrection** *discornted* some in the crowd and they **mocked**, and the meeting was over, but others said **we will hear thee again**. **So Paul departed**. Some followed him and two are specifically mentioned **Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them**.

<sup>1</sup> Keener, Craig S. [Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 15:1–23:35](#). Vol. 3. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014. Print.