

THE BOOK OF ACTS | GOD'S REVELATION OF TRANSITION

SESSION 56 | ACTS 17:19-31

ACTS 17:16-34 | THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY: ATHENS

- Verses 16-18 – see session 55
- Verses 19-20 –
 - To their credit, the philosophers wanted to hear more of **this new doctrine**.
 - They took Paul to **Areopagus**, or “Mars hill” (as in v. 22).
 - The word **Areopagus** is a transliteration while **Mars hill** is a translation (Ares = Mars, a reference to the Greek god, not the planet that bears his name).
 - Areopagus would have been a place where many people could hear Paul’s presentation.
- Verse 21 –
 - While we rightly credit the philosophers for hearing Paul’s presentation, it should be pointed out that they had an addiction **to hear something new**. This can become a “drug” just like other abused drugs.
 - There comes a time when one must weigh the evidence and settle somewhere. When this happens, they will not need to pursue every new idea. They become *principled* rather than endlessly curious.
- Verses 22-23 –
 - Paul says, **I perceive**, using the Greek θεωρέω [theoreo], a Greek word that is related to our English word *theory*.
 - Paul’s *theory* was that the Athenians were **too superstitious**.
 - The word is translated from δεισιδαιμόνων [deisidaimon]. You may recognize the second part of the compound, *daimon* from which we get *demon*. The first part of the compound means *reverence*. The literal meaning is “*reverent to demons*.”
 - The negative turn of the word is **superstitious**, a positive spin on the word would be “*respectful of the spirit world*.”
 - Our modern day understanding of superstitious concerns evil spirits. The Greek version of deities didn’t have the distinction between good spirits and evil spirits.
 - Paul’s next words were not terribly “seeker sensitive.” Rather, he expressed amazement that they would have an altar **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**.
 - Note that this is not just a *memorial* or an *image*, but rather an *altar* where sacrifices were made.
 - Paul said that the Athenians **ignorantly worship** this god, using the word ἀγνοέω [agnoeo], from which we get *agnostic*. Thus the Athenians worshiped a god without knowledge of the identity or characteristics of that god, or even of the god’s demands.
 - Though the Athenians had many gods, they were not satisfied that they had all of them. Paul was ready to show them the One they did not know.
- Verses 24-25 – Paul’s Sermon, point 1: God the Almighty Creator.
 - God as creator who **made the world and all things therein** offended the theology of the stoics, who were pantheists. God
 - God as **Lord of heaven and earth** offended the epicurean theology, for their theology was deistic, with god as absentee.
 - God who **dwelleth not in temples** was offensive to just about any Athenian, whose city was characterized by its temples.

- This unknown God now being revealed not worshiped **with men's hands, as though he needed any thing**. The word translated **worshipped** is not the usual word. Rather, Paul uses the Greek word θεραπεύω [therapeuo], which carries the idea of a doctor rendering service to a patient. That is, He is not a god that needs a massage! The choice of a physician's word by Paul ties into his statement that this unknown God is the one that **giveth to all life, and breath, and all things**.
- Verses 26-28 - Paul's Sermon, Point 2: God's Activity with Mankind.
 - First, God **made of one blood all nations of men**. That is, from Adam, all men came. This verse denies any evolutionary model. This verse also reminds us that we may be of different *ethnos* but we are all of the same **blood**. (Note: modern versions omit the word **blood**).
 - Second, God **determined the times before appointed** and thus placed a "horizon" on the nations (the word **determined** is ορίζω [orizo], from which we get *horizon*). We have known since Daniel's time that there were the *times of the Gentiles* and that those times have a boundary.
 - Third, God has done the two things above so that the nations **should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him**. That is, the nations should **seek the Lord** and if circumstances lead them to **feel after him** (grope in the darkness) they would **find him**, for **he be not far from every one of us**. He is, indeed, an every day experience, **for in him we live, and move, and have our being**. This last phrase is similar to poetry that was familiar to the culture, **For we are also his offspring**. The poet was Aratus, and the poem *Phenomena*, written before 240BC. The poem was very popular in Greco-Roman culture. It was about the constellations, and was not meant to be scientifically correct, but rather a teaching tool to remember the zodiac.

Let us begin with god, whom we mortals never leave unspoken.

For every street, every market-place is full of god.

Even the sea and the harbour are full of this deity.

Everywhere everyone is indebted to god.

For we are indeed his offspring ...

- Verses 29-31 - Paul's Sermon, Point 3: The Demanded Response
 - Paul says that **we are the offspring of God**, not in a direct sense, but because God created Adam and we descended from Adam, we are God's creation. Being created by God, **we ought not to think** that we can create god **by art and man's device**.
 - Paul says that God **winked at** the idol worship of the past. This is reference to the fact that God was not dealing with the nations in the past, but with Israel alone. He did not deal with their gods and idols during that time. Though that was true, **but now** there is a new dispensation, and God **commandeth all men** (a contrast to the Jews only) **to repent**. In its context, this word only makes sense in its "etymological" meaning of "change of thinking." A change of thinking will cause them to abandon the idols, so a change of behavior results.
 - The major cause of changed thinking should be that there is **appointed a day** of judgement, and on that day the standard of judgement is **that man whom he hath ordained**, specifically, the One who was **raised from the dead**.