

Paul's "PowerPoint"
A Bible Study About Apostle Paul's
Proclamation at the Areopagus in Athens - Acts 17: 24 - 31



How to use this Bible Study

Welcome to this Bible study. It will be a blessing to you. The focus of this Bible study is Apostle Paul's proclamation in the Areopagus in Athens. It consists of background thoughts, scripture references and questions. There are no wrong or right answers to the questions and the scripture references are given as a help. This Bible Study can be completed individually, or you may wish to invite some friends or family members to do it with you.



Backdrop

The apostle Paul is on route with his second missionary journey through Greece which at that time was part of the Roman Empire and called Macedonia. He was well into his journey through Macedonia when he arrived in Thessalonica. It was his custom to visit the Jewish Synagogues on the Sabbath and to reason with the Jews aiming to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah. Paul did so for 3 consecutive Sabbath's but only a few of the Jews in Thessalonica were persuaded as well as some Greeks and some prominent women. Most of the Jews were so jealous that they rounded up a group of bandits through whom they instigated a riot. The local municipality also got involved in the whole fracas and Paul's followers had to whisk him away early one morning.

He left for Berea, a city to the west of Thessalonica where he had a more friendly reception from the Jews as the Jews there were more "noble" than those in Thessalonica. It was not long before the Jews in Thessalonica found out that Paul was once again occupying the Synagogue in Berea. The local Jews were so interested in what Paul was teaching them that they got down to studying scripture daily. This did not go down well with the Jews from Thessalonica who sent a few over to Berea to get another riot going over there. Paul once again had to pack his bags and left for the coast with an escort. Silas and Timothy had to stay behind in Berea with the task to clear things up and to follow up on those who had discovered that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

Paul arrived in Athens and once again found his way to the synagogue. Observing the many Greek idols in the city of Athens he became distressed. So much so that, apart from the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks in the Synagogue, he engaged some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in the local market. They became so intrigued by what Paul was teaching that they took him to the Areopagus where there was a bigger audience of Greeks and foreigners who liked to do nothing other than to sit and talk about and listen to new ideas. This was the ideal scenario for Paul to vent his distress and he jumped to his feet to formally address the "people of Athens." He reminded them about the altar with the inscription, "to

The Unknown God". Paul quickly took the gap which enabled him to make his proclamation. This proclamation brings us to the topic of our study found in Acts 17 verse 24 to 31. It consists of 8 "announcements". If Paul was talking to us today, he most probably would have used PowerPoint slides to bring his point across. The following would have been good headings for those slides:

- **1 God does not live in buildings**
- **2 He is not served by man**
- **3 He made all the nations**
- **4 So that they should seek Him**
- **5 We are His offspring**
- **6 No image can be made of Him**
- **7 Man should repent**
- **8 Jesus will be the final Judge**

Let's look at it in more detail as Paul starts his presentation.



Verse 24 "Slide 1"

"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."

As Paul was walking through Athens, he very carefully observed all the different objects of worship and the buildings that were made for them. One can only imagine that, as he was walking from the one to the other, he stood still at each one to ponder about it in amazement. He understood very well and must have been zealous about the fact that the God whom he served, was not confined to any building made by human hands.

Questions for reflection:

- What do you think were Paul's thoughts and emotions as he carefully observed the numerous objects of worship?
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- How would you describe God's present dwelling place?
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- How would you describe God's future dwelling place, and when do you think it will come to pass?
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Scripture for further reading:

1 Timothy 6:16; Revelation 21:1-4

Afterthought: God is in fact the Creator of the heavens and the earth and there was no reason that He had to confine Himself to a space, created by the one He created. God's current dwelling is far beyond the reach of any living person. No living person can see Him, and no living person will see Him, until the appointed time when we, as believers will, be

united with Him. Even then, when He will dwell amongst us, His dwelling will still be His own handiwork.



Verse 25 "Slide 2"

"Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. "

Greek gods and goddesses were served by their worshippers at the various places of worship through the Empire at the time. In anticipation of a favour from a particular god or goddess worshippers would leave a gift at the altar. Different gods and goddesses required different sacrifices. This was mostly in the form of food or drink. Most probably Paul observed these practices on several occasions during his missionary journeys through the region.

Questions for reflection:

- What do you think is the difference between breath and life?
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- At what point of a person's existence does he or she receive breath, and life?
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- What do you think is the "all things" Paul refers to?
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Scripture for further reading:

Gen 2:7; Job 12:10; Is 42:5; Psalm 139:13

After-thought: In contrast, the God Paul served, was the One who gave breath and life and everything else to man. He does not need anything from us to be able to exist.



Verse 26 "Slide 3"

"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".

Paul knew the Old Testament very well, the history of the world and its beginning as described in the New Testament. He often taught the Jews in their synagogues the fundamentals of their own faith. He understood very well at that time that he would play a critical role in making it known, also to the Greeks.

Questions for reflection:

- What do you think was God's purpose for creating all the different nations?
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- And why was it necessary for them to inhabit the whole earth?
-

- What do you understand by the preappointed time of a nation?
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Scripture for further reading:

Genesis 10:32, Ezekiel 47:13; Psalm 86:9; Revelation 15:4

After-thought

God desired for the earth to be filled with His glory, not through one single nation, but eventually through all the nations of the earth. Paul played a critical part in sharing this mystery with others and he was the pioneer to establish the church amongst them. The Greeks were meant to be one of the first of these nations after Paul was diverted supernaturally from going to Asia. Do you know the date when the first church was planted in your nation?



Verse 27 "Slide 4"

"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."

Paul at this stage of a long journey, after encountering many nations, understood very well that the purpose of these nations was to grope or feel for God as one would feel in the darkness for something. Wherever he went, he shed some light on the mystery of the gospel to make it easier for people of different nations to find God. For the Jews he taught them from the Old Testament in the hope that they would understand and discover that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

Questions for reflection:

- According to Paul it is not a certainty that all nations on earth would seek Him. Why is this?
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- How does a nation search for God, or feel for Him?
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- How would you explain to someone that God is not far from him or her?
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Scripture for further reading:

Deuteronomy 4:7; Zechariah 8:22; Ezra 4:2

After-thought

Although God is near to everyone, Paul understood that the onus is still on the individual to seek for Him. Maybe you have experienced being in a darkened room, without any light, and needing to find something. In the same way it was God's intention for all the nations on the earth to feel for Him until they would find Him.



Verse 28 "Slide 5"

"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.'"

Here Paul was quoting Aratus, a well-known Greek poet before Paul's time. Most probably Aratus's writing was freely available to the public as Paul must have read it somewhere along the road. Aratus was known for writing about the universe and astronomy, and he described several constellations and individual stars as we know them today. He must have also understood the origins of man.

Questions for reflection:

- What do you understand by this statement "that man is the offspring of God?"

- Are all people the offspring of God?

- Who comes to live and move in Him?

Scripture for further reading:

Rom 8:16



Verse 29 "Slide 6"

"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."

To Paul it was impossible to even think that men, as the offspring of God, could worship an image of God made of gold, silver or stone. After all, as man is made from none of these, so would man's Creator not be made from gold, silver or stone either.

Questions for reflection:

- What do you think God is made of?
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Scripture for further reading:

John 4:24

After-thought

For Paul God was the Creator of the heavens and the earth. His knowledge of the Old Testament equipped him with confidence which enabled him to boldly proclaim and explain God's existence and relationship with man.



Verse 30 "Slide 7"

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,"

This was bad news for Paul's audience as he was concluding his presentation. It came with a stern warning that the time of grace has run out and that everyone had to repent of serving any idols made by human hands. One can imagine the stirring it must have caused.

Questions for reflection:

- What was the ignorance that Paul was talking about?
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Scripture for further reading:

Like 5:23

After-thought

There was an urgency in Paul's presentation at this point. The gospel that Paul was sharing was relatively speaking, breaking news and not yet heard by many. Paul also mentioned this fact in his first letter to the church in Thessalonica. But as it became known to more and more people, there was little room left for ignorance anymore.



Verse 31 "Slide 8"

"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."

Paul concluded his presentation with a warning that there is looming an unavoidable day of judgement for those that did not repent from seeking their salvation in manmade objects. And the best of all he kept for last as he very well knew that that appointed Judge was the One that he met on the Damascus Road.

Questions for reflection:

- When and where will be the day of judgement?

Scripture for further reading:

Psalms 98:9; Romans 2:16; 2 Timothy 4:1; Revelation 20:12

After-thought

Jesus had to die for our sins. But He would also be the Judge on the day of judgement. The only way for this to be possible was for Jesus to be raised from the dead. And that was indeed the proof with which Paul was concluding his proclamation. It caused quite a stir as one would read later.



A Prayer to Pray

Father God in heaven. We thank You that You do not stay in temples or buildings or any other confined space but that You inhabit the heavens, and that You in turn made the earth and everything in it. We thank You that You do not need anything from us to be able to exist and that it is not necessary for You to be served by human hands. We thank You that we can be part of one of the nations on earth and that You have set boundaries for it and that You have set an appointed time for our nation to seek You. Forgive us as a nation for forsaking You. Forgive me for the times I have forsaken You and have put my hope in things that are made by man. Lord Jesus, I thank You that You were raised from the dead, that You have died for my sins and that You have forgiven me for all my sins. And that I do

not have to fear the day of judgement. Amen



Some scary facts about the Greek's and their many god's (Greek Mythology)

- Greek mythology figures are so numerous that every time someone tries to count the numbers it seems as if there is a different total. Greek Mythology discerns between titans, Olympians or gods and less important gods or half gods. There were 42 titans. Atlas was one of the prominent titans. Titans were the forerunners from the 12 better known Olympian gods of whom Zeus was the king. In addition, there were more than 50 other gods that included sky gods, sea gods and underworld gods. Each of these titans, gods and semi gods had its own history, make up and were very intertwined with one another. Whole libraries were written over the ages to supplement original works drafted by Greek poets. A poet with the name of Hesiod was the first person to put "pen to paper" and wrote what is today known as Hesiod's Theogony, a well-studied manuscript that tells the story of the origins of the deities and how their lives unfolded.

- Greek mythology must have consumed a large chunk of Greek cultural life, and apart from all the festivals honouring these deities, it must have taken up an awful lot of time making sure the ordinary Greek on the street knows everything about every deity or at least the most important ones. One can only imagine the time spent by parents telling stories to their children about all these mythical figures daily. And by others in public wasting their time away by talking about every new fact discovered in Greek mythology.

- Greek temples were not places of worship but served the purpose of housing the statues of the gods along with the gifts offered to them. Greeks had full access to these temples. Religious rituals were performed in the open air, and Greek citizens were expected to attend it as part of their civic duty.

- The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers Paul encountered were representing the two main Hellenistic schools of philosophy. These philosophers and the different schools they represented, must have had a prominent influence on Greek culture. Apart from serving all the tenants, gods and half gods Greek's were challenged by these philosophic schools to constantly attain a higher goal well knowing that it is unattainable. No wonder Paul got so agitated. While differing in their fundamental teachings, both these schools recognized the goal of philosophy to be the transformation of the self into a sage. A sage is one who has attained a 'plenitude of being', or 'perfection of being'. According to them this state is unattainable to men, and therefore, like wisdom, an unrealizable ideal. According to these schools no human being can ever become a sage. Nevertheless, a person can progress towards a greater state of perfection of being. This was the goal of both Stoicism and Epicureanism.

- Greek mythology largely disappeared from mainstream Greek culture over the past 2000

years. This is largely attributed to the growth of Christianity in the region. Greek temples and statues are therefore mainly a tourist attraction and not places of worship. "Hats off" to Paul who did a great job of planting the first churches in the region. Nevertheless, paganism was recognized by the Greek government as a religion in 2017 and there are efforts to revive what is referred to as Hellenism by a small group of adherents.



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