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BIBLE STUDY

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**“REASONING IN THE SCRIPTURES”**

**Acts 17:17-34**

***Acts 17:17 "Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him."***

***Acts 17:18 "Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection."***

In the previous verses we saw Paul whisked off to Athens to keep the people of Berea from capturing him. He left Timothy and Silas behind. He sent word for them to join him in Athens. While he is waiting for them in Athens, he discovers that Athens is completely idolatrous. Paul became deeply distressed because of the idols filling the city. Whether in the Jewish synagogue or in the city marketplace, the apostle disputed (reasoned) with anyone who happened to be there. He considered no location off limits for sharing the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

***Isaiah 1:18 “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”***

Reason means he argued (debated) with them. Devout means religious. The synagogue was Jewish and these people Paul was disputing were the leaders of the Jews. They were students of the Old Testament but did not believe Jesus was the promised Messiah. It seems this dispute was not occasional, but daily. Epicureanism and Stoicism were two popular schools of philosophical thought. The former was founded by Epicurus, who did not believe in the afterlife and emphasized the pursuit of pleasure and freedom from pain. Founded by Zeno, Stoicism was pantheistic and emphasized the pursuit of virtue. These philosophers of the Epicureans taught that through philosophy a person could find happiness. True pleasure, and not absolute truth, is what they taught. In Athens, this philosophy of materialism was strongly supported at this time. So Epicurean and Stoic philosophers decided to debate with him, thinking he was an ignorant show-off. The Stoics taught pride, individual independence, and believed in fate, not faith. You see, neither of these were even vaguely associated with God. In fact, they both remind me of secular humanism which is centered on self, and not God. They did not know God nor His Son Jesus, and they did not believe in life after death.

***Acts 17:19 "And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, [is]?"***

***Acts 17:20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean."***

***Acts 17:21 "(For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)"***

They led Paul to the Areopagus, meaning “Mars Hill,” a place where philosophical and religious beliefs were debated and discussed, and they asked him to explain his strange teaching to a wider audience. This Areopagus seems to be a court named after their false god of war. These people, who were so possessed with having every bit of knowledge they could get, would be wanting this new knowledge, as well. They were fascinated with the mind, not the spirit. They analyzed everything they heard. They checked out all new things, just as people today are always looking for something new. You cannot analyze God. He must be accepted on faith, not fact. These people worshipped their own mind. If they could not prove it, they did not believe it. They had faith in no one and nothing. They dealt only with their so-called facts. Those who came loved to spend time on nothing else but telling or hearing something new. Some things never change. There will always be people who love to debate theology and spirituality but who are never willing to commit. They like to know about new religious and philosophical ideas. But God wants us to know him.

***1 Peter 3:15-16***

***15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man who asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.***

***16 Have a good conscience, that, whereas they speak evil of you as of evildoers, they who falsely accuse may be ashamed by your good manner of life in Christ.***

It should be noted that Paul reasoned with them concerning the scriptures. Engaging in non-scriptural debating is ill-advised and not profitable.

***Acts 17:2-4***

***2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,***

***3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.***

***4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.***

***Titus 3:8-9***

***8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.***

***9 But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.***

***Acts 17:22 "Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, [Ye] men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious."***

Areopagus and Mars' hill is the same place. Superstitious, here, means more religious than others. He does not say they are involved with God, just that they are religious. A person can be religious about any thing. Any habit you have, you are religious about it.

***Acts 17:23 "For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you."***

Paul began by observing how extremely religious they were (today, he might say, “spiritual”) based on their objects of worship. They even had an altar honoring an Unknown God, just to make sure they had all of their bases covered! Paul took this as an open-door opportunity. That which was unknown to them, Paul would be happy to explain. You see, these intelligent people knew that there had to be something, or someone, who started all of this. In science you can go so far back, but science does not really know where it all began. Paul says here, you really are worshipping God, but you are ignorantly worshipping you know not what. For them to be told they are ignorantly doing anything, is quite a shock to them. They think themselves to be very intelligent. Paul says to them, listen and I will tell you who this God is.

***Acts 17:24 "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;"***

***Acts 17:25 "Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;"***

***Acts 17:26 "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;"***

***Acts 17:27 "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:"***

Paul, here, is starting out with very fundamental teaching. He touches first on something that they will agree with. They know that they have no idea who made heaven or earth, so they will go along with this much of Paul's message. They know that they have never seen Him, so they would, also, believe that he dwelleth not in temples. We see, here, that boldness of Paul, because on this very Mars' hill they have temples to false gods. The Parthenon is one of the well known temples here. Paul proclaimed God as the Creator of all things in heaven and earth. He is the source, ruler, and sustainer of life. He neither dwells in temples nor depends on humans to serve him because he is transcendent, above, beyond, and independent of the physical universe that he made. God needs nothing. From one man (Adam), he created all people so that they might seek God.

***Acts 17:28 "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."***

Since God made the world, and everything, and everyone in it, He really doesn't need us, or the things we might do for Him. We need Him. Paul says, here, that God causes us to live. We Christians know that the very breath of life breathed into us at creation is our life He (God) put within us. These words Paul quoted had been written by one of their Greek poets. In Him we live, and breathe, and have our being. These proud people do not want to hear that all these people of the world, that they look down on, were made from the same blood line as they were. God decided what color our skin would be and where we would live. Paul is showing that all people everywhere are sisters and brothers, and that we should all worship the one true God who gave us all life. God is with us all the time. He never moves away from us. We sometimes wander away from Him. If we seek Him, we will find Him. The heathens are stumbling through life looking for something (they know not what). They are really looking for God and do not realize it. His handiwork is around every one of us. The flowers, trees, skies, and for that matter, everything shows His handiwork. Paul is saying to these people, reach out, He is right here with you.

***Acts 17:29 "Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device."***

Paul is explaining here to them why it is wrong to worship a statue of gold, or silver, or any other engraved thing. These are creations of man. We must only worship Creator God. Paul is saying, if you are God's offspring, then you know these images are not God. God is not only transcendent, He is immanent, he is present within and interacts with the world he has made. He exists outside of time and space yet is closer to you than your own breath. Since God is the sum total of all of life, it is in getting to know him intimately that you truly come to know who you are and what you were created to be. Paul even quoted one of their poets to make his point that God is our Creator. Given this role, we shouldn’t represent the divine nature using gold or silver or stone. Idols are any nouns (person, place, thing, or thought) that you look to as your source. They misrepresent and diminish the glory of the living and true God.

***Acts 17:30 "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:"***

***Acts 17:31 "Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by [that] man whom he hath ordained; [whereof] he hath given assurance unto all [men], in that he hath raised him from the dead."***

Paul says that God overlooked their sin in the past, because it was done in ignorance. God now has revealed Himself to mankind, and man must repent of all those sins he has committed and come to the one true God. Since the knowledge of God has come, God will not look the other way any longer at sin. Man must repent and start over again worshipping God. We see here that Paul has led them to the place and time of decision. Do they go on worshipping their idols, or do they repent and start life anew with this God that Paul is telling them of? Paul tells of a day of judgment, when even these people of Athens will stand before this Judge of all the world. Paul tells them that the one who will judge the world is the very same Jesus that rose from the grave. His rising from the grave is evidence of who He is. His judgment will be righteous. Having begun with the truth of God’s nature and work, Paul made a beeline to Jesus Christ. When evangelizing Jews, Paul sought to show them from Scripture that Jesus is the Messiah. When evangelizing Gentiles who didn’t know the Bible, Paul started with their general interest in religion, moved to the living and true God who created the world, explained human sin and accountability before God, and then made his way to Christ. His approach serves as a good model for our own evangelism efforts. We must tailor our methods to meet our listeners where they are and take them to what they need, the gospel, the free gift of eternal life through faith alone in Christ alone.

***Acts 17:32 "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this [matter]."***

***Acts 17:33 "So Paul departed from among them."***

***Acts 17:34 "Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which [was] Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them."***

Paul had turned some of them completely off when he mentioned the resurrection, because they did not believe in life after death. Some, however, were interested and were eager to hear more about this life after death. All men fear death, until they have the blessed hope of the resurrection. Paul received varied responses to his preaching: some believed, some mocked him with ridicule, and some wanted to hear more. As we share the gospel, then, we can expect the same kinds of reactions. Whenever and wherever you have opportunity, be faithful to make Jesus known and invite people to place their faith in him for the gift of eternal life. Then leave the rest in God’s hands as the Holy Spirit works in their hearts. Paul had done and said all that he could. Secular history teaches that a Dionysius was the pastor of a diocese in Corinth. An Areopagite was a member of the Athenian high council. Scholars debate who this woman named Damaris was. Usually, women were not present in Areopagus meetings, thus Damaris has traditionally been assumed to have been a courtesan, high-status prostitute. Modern commentators have suggested she might also have been a follower of the [Stoics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stoics) (who welcomed women among their ranks or a foreigner visiting Athens. The Georgian text of Acts makes Damaris the wife of Dionysius. Whoever or whatever she was, is not important. The significance of the mentioning of Dionysius, Damaris and others in vs 34 is that when they heard the message of Christ, they clave (joined) to Paul desiring to hear more.

***Mark 8:34 “And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”***

***Revelation 22:17 “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”***

**QUESTIONS**

1. Why was Paul whisked off to Athens?
2. What did Paul find out about Athens?
3. Who did Paul dispute with in the synagogue?
4. How often did Paul do this?
5. What philosophers encountered him?
6. They said he seemed to be a setter forth of what?
7. What did Paul preach to them?
8. What did the Stoics teach?
9. What, in our modern society, are they like?
10. Where did they take Paul when they took him?
11. Why did they want to hear the new doctrine?
12. What was another name for Mars' hill?
13. What did Paul say he perceived about them?
14. Paul had found an inscription on an altar to whom?
15. Where did Paul tell them God did not dwell?
16. Where did Paul tell them He was Lord of?
17. In verse 25, Paul says that God gives all people what two things?
18. How does verse 26 teach against prejudice?
19. Who should seek the Lord?
20. "For in Him we\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and have our \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_;
21. Whose words had Paul quoted to them?
22. What should we know about the Godhead since we are his offspring?
23. What were all men now commanded to do?
24. Who will judge the world?
25. When they heard what, some mocked?