

## **Gospel Juggernaut Makes its Way to Athens !**

**V 1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews.**

*“They came to Thessalonica.”* While travelling southwest from Philippi, they *“passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia”*, two cities where they stayed overnight before reaching Thessalonica. All three cities were about 30 miles apart. Thessalonica, population 200,000, was the capital of Macedonia and a major port city and commercial center. During this new phase of the journey, the Philippian church generously supported Paul and his team. *“In Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.”* (Philippians 4:16)

**V 2-3 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,**  
**explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.”**

*“As his custom was.”* For Paul, as a Jew, the synagogues provided an open door to preach and introduce the Gospel, so they were his usual starting point in most of the cities he went to. Although the synagogues often caused his team a lot of trouble, nevertheless, several ready-made disciples came out of these places of worship - Jews with a good, solid foundation in the Word, along with sincere seekers from amongst the Gentile converts.

*“This Jesus. . . is the Christ.”* Jesus of Nazareth was the long-awaited Messiah that the Old Testament had predicted would come to Israel. In his messages to the Jews, Paul always had to explain *“that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead”*. That was always a point of confusion for the Jews since they had been expecting the Messiah to come in power and establish a great Israeli nation. They weren’t expecting His first coming *“in the form of a servant of no reputation”*; they were only looking for Him to come *“with power and great glory”*. (Philippians 2:7, Matthew 24:30)

They were thinking mainly of certain Scriptures, like the following: *“To*

*Him [the Son of Man] was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13)* This great “*everlasting dominion*” will be established at Jesus’ Second Coming, but in the meantime we, His followers, have to bide our time, working to teach and live the Kingdom values now to prepare the world for this glorious event of Christ’s return to the earthly realm.

**V 4 And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.**

*“Some of them were persuaded. . . and a great multitude of the devout Greeks.”* The usual pattern continues: the Gentile converts turned out to be more appreciative of the Gospel than the Jews. *“Not a few of the leading women.”* They had better success with these women from Thessalonica than with the *“devout and prominent women”* from Pisidian Antioch. (Acts 13:50)

**V 5 But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.**

*“The Jews. . . becoming envious.”* Envy, and resentment over their loss of power and influence among their followers, again the root cause of persecution (as in Acts 13:45 and many other places in the Scriptures).

*“Some of the evil men”* (or in the KJV, *“Certain lewd fellows of the baser sort”*). Unable to refute the teachings of Paul, the unbelieving Jews resorted to underhanded methods to try to stop the new movement. *“And gathering a mob.”* As they often did, the unbelieving Jews used this tactic of enlisting the support of the mob, those who could be easily persuaded and corrupted into doing the dirty work for them.

*“Attacked the house of Jason.”* Jason was likely a Jew with a Greek name with whom Paul, Silas, and Timothy were staying; or at least that’s where the crowd thought they were staying.

**V 6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.**

*“These who have turned the world upside down.”* This saying certainly shows what a great effect the apostles were having. They were trying to bring the light of God into their world of darkness, but in the process that shattered too many old preconceptions and customs. Human nature tends to resist change, and rather than humbly receiving the truth and adapting themselves to the new Way, the unbelieving Jews started yelling and accusing them to the *“rulers of the city”* that they had *“turned the world upside down”*.

The apostles were actually turning it rightside up, of course, and if these particular Jews had been honest, they would have admitted it was just their own personal world that was being turned upside down. To them the apostles were “disturbing the peace” - their peace, their false sense of security. So often stiff opposition results from the task of being a “peacemaker”. The apostles were bringing real peace, but those whose weaknesses were being exposed by the spotlight of truth would have none of it.

**V 7 “Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king - Jesus.”**

*“Contrary to the decrees of Caesar.”* One of the more serious crimes in the Roman empire was to acknowledge allegiance to any king but Caesar. *“There is another king - Jesus.”* Of course, their accusers failed to mention that this newcomer “King” was dwelling in the heavenly realm, and that His “Kingdom” (of Heaven) was not of this world. Although they were not to worship their earthly rulers, the apostles exhorted believers to *“honor the king”* and to *“be subject to the governing authorities.”* (2Peter 2:17, Romans 13:1)

**V 8-10 And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things.**

**So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.**

**Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to**

**Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.**

*“Taken security.”* This was some kind of court procedure by which Jason and friends made a bond or pledge (of money presumably), either to get themselves out of incarceration or to pledge responsibility for the good conduct of Paul and Silas; they would have to forfeit the money if Paul and his companions were to cause more trouble. There wasn’t much chance of no trouble happening; their very presence there was itself a source of trouble.

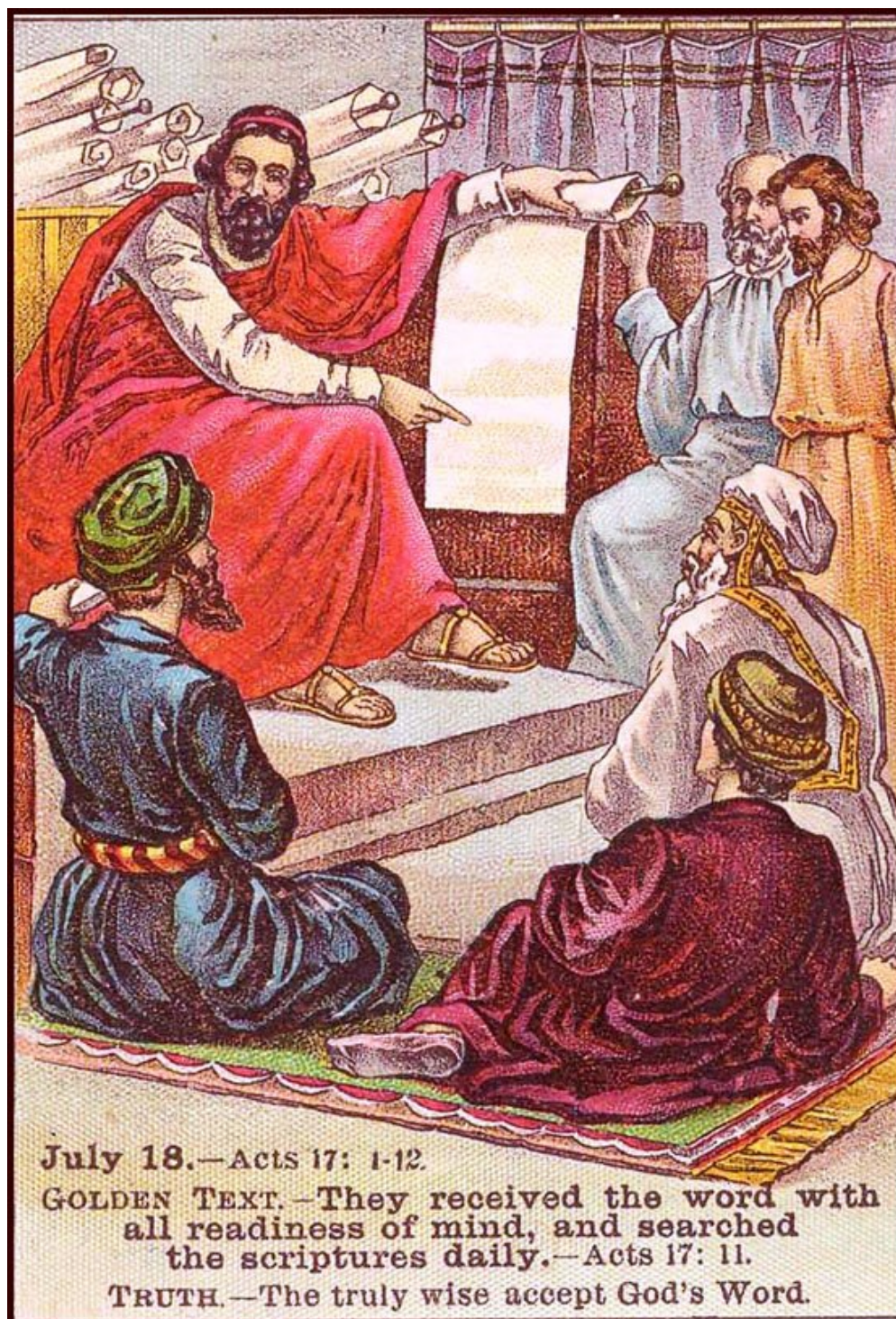
Jesus had once advised His disciples, *“When they persecute you in this city, flee to another.”* (Matthew 10:23) And so *“the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea”*. Berea lay to the southwest; it was an important town, but not on a main trade or travel route.

**V 11-12 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.**

**Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.**

*“These were more fair-minded [often translated as “noble”].”* The Bereans *“received the word with all readiness”*. They were diligent in their study and *“searched the Scriptures”* to see *“whether these things were so”*. They didn’t just rely on past thinking, or carnal reasoning, or even on what Paul had told them. But they based their faith on the Word, with an attitude that was positive and open - *“with all readiness”* - seeking to understand why they should believe and accept the new Way.

As Jesus brought out in His “Parable of the Sower”, it is wise to let the Word take deep root rather than just settle for a shallow acceptance of it (or even worse, look for excuses not to believe, as was the case with many of the Jews). As a result *“many of them believed.”* Again, as in Thessalonica, they were able to reach some of the elite circles, the *“prominent men as well as women”*.



**V 13** But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds.

*“The Jews from Thessalonica. . . came there also.”* As on other occasions, the Jews from the previous city followed Paul and his team’s trail to the next. Repeating their tactics from Thessalonica, these envious persecutors *“stirred up the crowds”*, the uninformed throngs who are easily swayed by false propaganda. This has been a common tactic in history used either by rulers to retain power or by would-be rulers to grab power.

**V 14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there.**

*“Sent Paul away.”* Since Paul was the main object of the Jews’ anger, the smartest move, in this case at least, was just to leave quickly. *“But both Silas and Timothy remained there”*, presumably to take care of any loose ends that needed tying up of the work in Berea.

**V 15-16 So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.**

**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.**

*“Athens.”* Cultural center of Greece. Home of the most renowned philosophers in history: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle. At that time the philosophers Epicurus and Zeno, founders of Epicureanism and Stoicism, exerted much influence. Although Athens had already passed its peak of historical prominence, it could still boast of having the greatest university in the ancient world. No surprise then that the famous temple, the Parthenon, was located in Athens and was dedicated to the worship of Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom. Besides being the meeting place of the world’s intelligentsia, Athens also harbored a great pantheon of gods who were worshiped there: *“He saw that the city was given over to idols.”*

This combination of intellectual thought and superstitious belief posed a daunting challenge to the Gospel. Generally, the Athenians, still basking in the glory of past years, felt culturally superior to the rest of the world, so what could any outsiders tell them? Nevertheless, *“his spirit was provoked [stirred - KJV] within him.”* Paul sensed the emptiness of their religious life and their great need for the Gospel.



**Map of Second Missionary Journey**

**V 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.

*“He reasoned in the synagogues. . . and in the marketplace daily.”* Paul went witnessing, not just in the synagogue, but also in the streets, something that was probably easier to do in a more cosmopolitan center like Athens.

*(Jesus speaking:)* As you step out to witness, to do the things you know you should do, I can open new and exciting doors and bring great opportunities across your path. Peter and John were on

their way to the temple to witness when they encountered the lame man. Philip was going about his business in Jerusalem when I directed him to the Ethiopian eunuch. Peter was on a witnessing trip when he was led to Cornelius. My servant Paul was faithfully witnessing in Athens when I opened the door for him to reach the upper crust by a witnessing speech on Mars Hill, which led to a work there in Athens (Acts 17:16-34). (from publication of [The Family International](#) - 11/2007)

**V 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.**

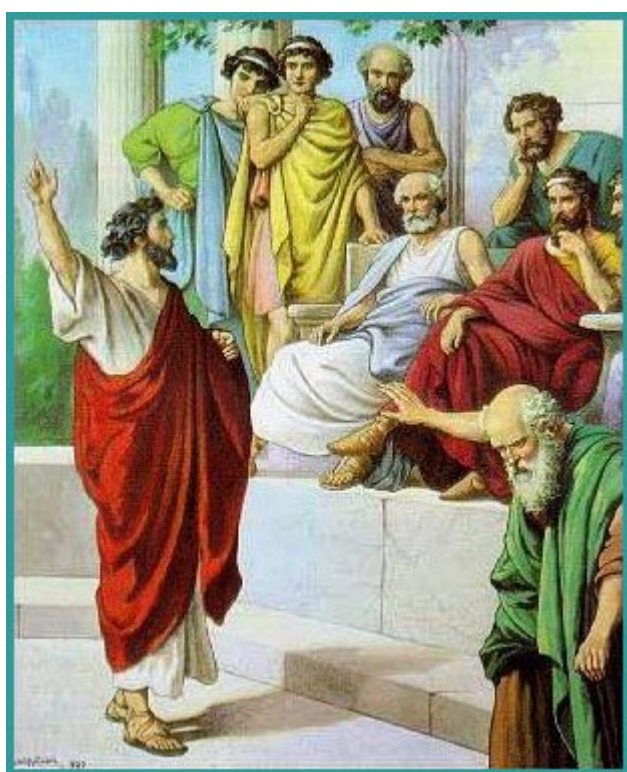
*“Epicurean philosophers”* taught that the chief end of man was to avoid pain. They were materialists who, although not denying the existence of God, believed He did not get involved in the affairs of men. At death a person’s body and soul disintegrated. So “eat, drink, and be merry” now while you can. The philosophy offered no hope of life after death - a bleak outlook to say the least, despite its appeal to the selfish nature of man to enjoy unrestricted pleasure.

*“Stoic philosophers”* taught that life’s goal was to achieve a place of indifference to pleasure or pain; it was a form of self-mastery that appealed very much to a person’s pride. Although their religion was mostly a moral philosophy, the Stoics also taught that the natural world was a material, reasoning substance, which to them was God. Many eastern and New Age religions teach similar ideas.

*“Babbler.”* Literally “seed-picker”. Some of the philosophers were a little too high-minded to believe that Paul could presume to tell them anything. They looked down on him as an amateur who had no depth or ideas of his own but only “picked” among prevailing philosophies - like some sort of opinionated buffoon trying to make the most of a few scraps of knowledge he had picked up from here and there. The more religious types saw him as a *“proclaimer of foreign gods”*.

**V 19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?”**

***“Areopagus.”*** This was a court named after the hill where its sessions were held, or used to be held; it was also known as “Mars’ Hill”. The place seemed to serve as a kind of informal meeting place or unofficial clearing-house for new ideas, attended by the more educated, elite circle of Athenian citizens. Paul was not being formally tried but only being asked to defend or expound on his teaching: *“May we know what this new doctrine is?”*



**V 20-21** *“For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.”*

**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.**

***“You are bringing some strange things to our ears.”*** The Athenians were mentally very curious about Paul’s ideas. Their outlook was open-minded; however, it seems their depth of interest was somewhat shallow for they *“spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.”*

**V 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;**

**“Very religious.”** Or **“in fear of the gods”**. The phrase could have been understood in two ways: positively as a commendation for their piety, or negatively as an admonition for harboring absurd superstitions.

**V 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:**

**“TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.”** The Athenians were open-minded enough, and superstitious enough, to realize that maybe there were gods they hadn’t heard of yet - a sort of miscellaneous category that it would be wise for them not to overlook.

It so happened once during their history (around 600 B.C.) that a plague was raging through Athens; after sacrificing to all their gods one after another for the staying of the plague, they were advised finally to loose a flock of sheep, letting them wander where they pleased, and, in the spots where they lay down, to build an altar; these altars were inscribed *“To the Unknown God”*. By so doing, the plague was stayed. Besides these, there were other similar altars to the gods of other countries (such as Israel), gods who were *“unknown”* to them.

In addition, many of the learned Greeks were bucking the tide of philosophical thought in those days. Instead of the materialist notions of the Epicureans and Stoics, they were entertaining the concept that supernatural powers intervened in the course of natural laws.\*

This was a step in the right direction, which made it easier for them to acknowledge the existence of a Higher Power beyond man’s comprehension who had made all things - some *“unknown God”* that was set apart from the rest of their idols and from the natural world. This awareness of theirs was the springboard Paul used to introduce them to the supernatural Creator of our natural environment who didn’t have to remain *“unknown”* any more but could now be made *“known”* to them.

So, whatever the story behind it was, this altar ***“TO THE UNKNOWN***

**GOD”** served as a good starting point in his discussion with the Athenian scholars. On the one hand, Paul wasn’t presuming to instruct them about some god they already knew, and on the other hand, he wasn’t imposing on them some totally foreign God since they were already honoring Him, albeit in a vague and veiled fashion.

When witnessing to Gentiles, Paul could not use the same methods he had been using for the Jews, expounding to them from the Old Testament, but had to be flexible and adopt a new strategy: in this case, he built on the knowledge the Greeks already had in their own philosophy and writings and on their almost instinctive belief that behind the scenes of the natural world (the usual object of their worship), there still had to be a Higher Power that had created it; this was also how he had approached the people in Lystra. (Acts 14:15-17)

**\*This trend of thought was given much impetus from Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.-50 A.D.), an influential philosopher of that era, a Greek Jew. He theorized that there was a “creative principle” at work in the universe, a supernatural power or mediator from God, who intervened in human affairs and in the natural world; this was called the *Logos*.**

**This philosophical concept did much to prepare man’s thinking to be more open to accepting Jesus as the Savior of mankind. The word *logos* was a very common one in the New Testament, being the word we would use in English for “word, utterance, saying”. It was translated most often as “word” (having to do with words and speech) or sometimes as “Word” (a term for Jesus Christ).**

**The Gospel of John, chapter 1, capitalizes on this aspect of Greek philosophy - this *Logos* - to identify Jesus as the embodiment of what was already understood by the Greeks in a rather abstract way as a supernatural power interacting with the earthly realm. John 1:14 puts it simply: “*the Word was made flesh.*”**

**In addition, the phrase “word of God” appears in the New Testament and referred to the ways that God could speak to mankind - through the Bible, prophecies, visions, inspired teaching, etc. And so, just as the “word of God” meant God’s communication with mankind through various means, so also, Jesus Himself, by His coming in the flesh, became the ultimate “Word of God”, the**

ultimate communication between God and man. *“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”* (1Timothy 2:5)

So that’s how this word *Logos*, when translated sometimes as *“the Word”* (with a capital “W”), could take on this extra dimension of philosophical meaning, as expressed in John 1:1-14, 1John 5:7, and Rev 19:13.

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When John was speaking of God the Son before He was born on earth, he referred to Him as *the Word*, not as *Jesus*. These verses show that the Word/Jesus had a hand in creation, as “all things were made by Him.” The word John used, translated into English as *Word*, was *Logos* in the original Greek. The term *Logos* was first used in the 6th century BC by a Greek philosopher named Heraclitus to designate the *divine reason* or plan which coordinates a changing universe. As such, to a Greek speaker at the time, *Logos* meant *reason*, so they would have understood the verses as “in the beginning was the *reason* or mind of God.” They would understand that before creation the *Logos* existed with God eternally. Therefore the *Logos*, the Word, God the Son, was in existence before any created thing—including time, space, or energy—existed. . .

John states clearly that the *Logos*, the Word, God the Son, became flesh and lived on earth. This means no less than that God the Son lived on earth for a time as a human being. It means that He, an eternal immaterial being, entered into His creation in time and space. This could only happen if God became incarnate, if He became man, which is exactly what happened when Jesus of Nazareth was born. He became the God-man, God in human flesh who dwelt amongst us.

[\["The Heart of It All: The God-Man \(Part 1\)"\]](#) by Peter Amsterdam - April 19, 2011]

**V 24-25 “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.**

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

***“God, who made the world.”*** This teaching flatly contradicted both the Epicureans, who believed that matter was eternal and therefore had no creator, and the Stoics, who, as pantheists, identified God with the universe; according to that belief, since God was part of everything, He could not have created Himself. Paul wrote elsewhere about those, who ***“became futile in their thoughts [vain in their imaginations” - KJV]*** and ***“professing to be wise, they became fools. . . who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature [or creation] rather than the Creator.”*** (Romans 1:21,22,25)

Nowadays, the philosophy of “evolution” echoes the ideas of the Epicureans and Stoics; it takes up where these ancient philosophies left off using a modern way of expressing the same beliefs in pseudo-scientific terms. This concept, whereby the creation takes on the role of God, is common also in the New Age movement of modern times. The Bible states clearly that this Being, whom we call God, is the supernatural Creator of the natural world.

***“Does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshipped with men’s hands. . . since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.”*** If God created everything, then it is absurd to confine Him to or identify Him with these things that are merely the works of men’s hands. By expressing it this way, Paul right away separated the truth of the Gospel from the confusing array of beliefs and religions in Athens that were all dependent on temples and man-made idols. As Jesus once said, ***“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*** (John 4:24)

**V 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,**

***“Has made from one blood [often translated as “one man”] every nation.”*** In God’s sight no nation is more privileged or deserving than another, for all men were descended from Adam; there is no distinction in God’s eyes because of nationality, inherited bloodline, royal house or dynasty, or any such thing. This might have been a needed message to the Greeks, especially Athenians, who had a great deal of national and intellectual pride and tended to look down on non-Greeks as lowly barbarians.

**V 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;**

*“Seek the Lord.”* Here is God’s desire that we *“might. . . find Him”*. Even though He is invisible to our physical senses, He is not *“far from each one of us”*. He is not a remote God, or an *“unknown god”* unconcerned about humanity, as they seemed to think, *“for God is love”*. (1John 4:8)

The power’s always on. The message is always there. God’s Spirit is like a broadcasting station broadcasting all the time. You must learn to contact His power through prayer, a spiritual seeking of contact with His Spirit through obedience to the laws of His Word. The hand of faith turns the knob which makes the contact and throws the switch which turns on what little power you have. The hand of hope tunes with expectancy, feeling for the frequency upon which God is broadcasting, and suddenly His great broadcasting station booms in with tremendous positive volume and power and certainty - and the messages come through loud and clear! If you’ve got an open channel and tune in, the Lord will fill you - your mind, your heart, your ears, your eyes! (from *“Let’s keep the connection strong. . .”*, *Daily Might 1:103*, publication of [The Family International](#))

**V 28-29 “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.’**

**“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.**

*“For in Him we live and move and have our being.”* A quote from the Cretan poet Epimenides. *“For we are also His offspring.”* Paul quotes another poet, Aratus, who came from his own native region of Cilicia. Adam was created by God, and thus all of humanity are *“His offspring”*. If God is the one who created us, it is foolish for man to turn around and work in the other direction, to try to create his own gods. We should not equate or debase the *“Divine Nature”* into images made of *“gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising”*.

Because of the irrational nature of superstition, it was easy for the Old Testament prophets to discredit the practice of idolatry - the worship of lifeless stone idols or other crafted images: *“Those who make an image. . . shall be ashamed together. . . They do not know nor understand. . . And no one considers in his heart, nor is there knowledge nor understanding to say, ‘I have burned half of it [the wood] in the fire, yes, I have also baked bread on its coals; I have roasted meat and eaten it; and. . . shall I fall down before a block of wood?’”* (Isaiah 44:9,11,18-19)

Despite its irrationality, the practice of idolatry did not die out fully in the western world until the Age of Reason in the 1700’s. It even existed in the church of that day in the form of worship of relics and images of saints and so on. But the rise of modern science and the rational way of thinking undermined superstition completely and discredited the use of crafted images in religion. In some ways, the new rational outlook was a big step forward; it succeeded in abolishing many of the foolish and harmful practices of superstition, including the belief that manmade crafted images could be objects of worship; the whole foundation on which idolatrous worship rested was starting to crumble.

However, the pendulum did swing too far in that direction, and the new wave of thought began to repudiate any form of supernatural reality; angels, the spirit world, and even God were explained away as mere figments of man’s imagination. By exaggerating the importance of man’s ability to reason, while at the same time downplaying the supernatural (which included faith in God), rationalism made way for a new set of false beliefs (or superstitions) to creep in: evolution, atheism, humanism and other such modern philosophies. Herein we find, covered by the mask of rationality, the new form of anti-God worship - the “idolatry” of modern times.

**V 30-31 “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,**

**“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.”**

**“God overlooked.”** God’s justice would demand that mankind should have been destroyed for their sins. But until Jesus came into the world,

these were as *“times of ignorance”*.

*“Who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.”* (Acts 14:16) Mankind did not have the power of the Holy Spirit, nor the guidance from the Word, to be able to live according to God’s principles. So He has mercifully overlooked his wandering ways.

*“But now commands all men everywhere to repent.”* God is now expecting a greater degree of godly, loving behavior. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, and His own living example, has set the standard of what is expected now from human society in contrast to how it was in the past. (Matthew 5-7)

*“He will judge the world in righteousness.”* This would have been a new concept to those who thought God was very distant, a mechanistic being or impersonal “force”, with little or no concern for what was going on in the world - as many of the Greek gods were, or as the Greek philosophers usually thought. Again, this line of thinking that was prevalent in ancient times continues nowadays in the New Age movement and is implied also in evolution theory.

*“Raising Him from the dead.”* This great event of the Resurrection was the *“assurance”* that Jesus would be the One whom God *“has ordained”* to *“judge the world in righteousness”*. (In John 5:17-29 Jesus expounds on this aspect of His divine authority.) Greek philosophy did not believe in bodily resurrection, however, and it seems that some choked on that doctrine. But it served the purpose of separating the sheep from the goats. *“Some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again.’”* (verse 32)

To *“judge the world in righteousness”* would not be possible unless humanity is to be raised from the dead, if not physically, at least in the spirit realm. That is to say, our existence doesn’t just come to an end at death as some Greek philosophers thought. This understanding about resurrection and accountability was an important concept for the world to grasp. It means *“each of us shall give account of himself to God”* for our lives on earth and will reap the benefits, or lack thereof, in the next life. (Romans 14:12) Without this understanding, there is no real motivation to live one’s life in a godly or responsible manner.

**V 32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, “We will hear you again on this matter.”**

**“Some mocked.”** In the world of academia there have always existed those who do *“not like to retain God in their knowledge”*. (Romans 1:28) In the ancient city of Athens and in our modern day, the same heady, high-minded tune is being piped in our institutes of learning. Pride is a temptation that every man or woman faces. And in the realm of intellectual activity, there exists the danger of leaving the path of God’s truth and simplicity and of clinging instead to knowledge that is not from God, but knowledge that makes a person feel more brilliant than or different from others.

And once the mind of man becomes exalted above the mind of God, then self becomes a person’s god, and rationality becomes his religion. (Colossians 2:8). Not surprising then that a concept as *“irrational”* as the *“resurrection of the dead”* appeared to some of the Athenian professors as foolishness.

These teachers habitually exude a condescending spin on “religion”, portraying it as antiquated, irrational, old-fashioned, or meaningless, just a product of men’s minds – God a product of man rather than man a product of God. Indeed, some religious expression has become a product of man. And to expose hypocrisy and those who use religion for their own ends is needful. But it is a mistake to conclude from this that there is no such thing as genuine religion, to look down on believers, or even to reject faith in God altogether.

Sadly, these teachers know all too well how to mold young minds to their skeptical views – by hiding behind the seemingly benign masks of humanitarianism, free thinking, logic, or advanced reasoning. Such heady and high-minded attitudes catch on quickly – a mocking spirit that puts a condescending label on believers as deluded, mind-controlled, or too simple to broaden their minds.

This does not mean to say that one should not be flexible, open, and broad-minded in his or her thinking. The problem comes when “open-mindedness” becomes idolized to the point that no judgments can be made as to whether beliefs are right or wrong, whether or not they accord

with God's Truth and principles.

In the Modern Age, for example, the atheistic philosophies of Darwinism and Marxism found fertile breeding grounds in the minds of intellectuals who were "open-minded" but not discerning or yielded to the mind of God. Did these philosophies benefit mankind? Hardly. Instead, they were the philosophical justification for the 20<sup>th</sup> century's worst murderous crimes - from Hitler's attempts to purify the Aryan race to communist genocides against those who wouldn't follow the party line. *"Therefore by their fruits you will know them."* (Matthew 7:20)

**V 33-34 So Paul departed from among them.**

**However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.**

*"Some men joined him."* Paul's faithful witnessing got results. *"Dionysius the Areopagite"* was a member of the Areopagus court.

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There is much to learn from Paul's witnessing approach, such as how he adapted his message so well to those who had never heard about Judaism or the Old Testament. As he wrote in 1Corinthians 9, *"I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. . . to those who are without law, as without law."* (verses 22, 21)

In the case of the Athenians, Paul tried to find points in common: the poets they were familiar with who had written godly material, or their belief in an *"unknown god"*, a supreme God who was set apart from all their "known" manmade gods; this assured his listeners that he wasn't trying to introduce them to some alien god, but only giving them more information about the One they were already honoring.

Then after winning their confidence and attention, he could point out to them the positive and hopeful aspects about his faith in Christ, things that were missing in the religious life of the Greeks. For example, the true God was a God of love, passionately concerned about mankind; forgiveness of sins could be found through Jesus' sacrifice; resurrection into the heavenly realm was a genuine reality, and death was not something one

**had to dread; the reality of divine judgment gives meaning and purpose to this present life, as well as a sense of accountability; and so on.**

**[\(Continue to ACTS, chapter 18\)](#)**