

How does God Connect with People?

Acts 17:1-34 October 18, 2020

Acts Series: Taking the Message of Jesus' Kingdom Everywhere

Acts 17 ¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?" ²⁰ You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." ²¹ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' ²⁹ As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

²⁹ "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." ³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴ Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others. ¹

¹ The New International Version. (2011): Zondervan.

1. Jealousy

Acts 17:1-9

But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. Verse 5

A. The Message

Acts 17:1-3

The Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead

Jesus is the Christ/Messiah/Anointed One

B. The Response

Acts 17:4-9

Some Jews and a large number of God-fearing Greeks believed

Jealousy among some Jews and deceitful practice

How is God connecting with people in Thessalonica?

By opening the Scriptures to reveal Jesus

Paul cares for these folks Read 1 Thessalonians 2:2, 14, 15; 3:1-5

2. Inquisitiveness

Acts 17:10-15

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Verse 11

A. The Message

Acts 17:9:10

Found it in the Old Testament

Is it true? The basic question we should always ask

B. The Response

Acts 17:11-15

Many Jews, a number of prominent Greek women and men believe

Jealous Jews brought their message

How is God connecting with people in Berea?

By his Spirit and through his Word, He speaks to hearts

3. Obliviousness

Acts 17:16-34

*So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship
—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you* Verse 23

A. An Unclear Message?

Acts 17:16-21

Or unclear reception?

Babbler – unable to make a cohesive rational argument

Epicureans were more influential in the educated upper classes, and their views about God were similar to deism (he was uninvolved in the universe and irrelevant to daily life); if there were gods, they were only those known through sense knowledge, like stars or planets. Life's goal was pleasure—the lack of physical pain and emotional disturbance. They did not believe in an immortal soul but thought death was the end of all existence.

Stoics were more popular, opposed pleasure, and criticized Epicureans. The Stoics found fulfillment by accepting the course of events, including pain and suffering. These should be endured quietly, almost gratefully since they are part of nature and are controlled by an impersonal divine necessity or 'fate'. Stoics accepted an immortal soul but one that was free of physical form or limitation; to have a resurrection body was unthinkable.²

Seems to be advocating foreign gods

Verse 18

Jesus (Ἰησοῦς – *Iêsous*) and **Resurrection** (ἀνάστασις – *anastasis*)

The people likely heard two names and presumed two gods possibly along the lines of Health (from he saves) and Advancement (from rising station/status)

B. Responding to the charge of 'Foreign Gods' Acts 17:22, 23

1. Seems it is already a problem
2. I can make the introductions

The Unknown God tradition - legend had it, there was a terrible plague in the city of Athens and attempts to appease the gods and stop the plague had no effect. One of the wise men of the day brought a flock of sheep to the top of Mars Hill and released them. Wherever these sheep stopped, an altar was set up to an 'anonymous god' and the animal was sacrificed. This course of action was allegedly effective, and the city returned to health.³

3. The unknown God problem

Agnostic – out there but unknown or unknowable

We might add the no god problem (atheist)

²Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. InterVarsity Press, 1993.

³Carson, D. A. *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. 4th ed.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994.

C. The revelation of God

Acts 17:24-31

1. **Creator** **Verse 24**

This is not too controversial for many people

2. **Provider** **Verses 25, 26**

Dependence on Him more than Him serving our needs

3. **Personal and Present** **Verses 27, 28**

A close, active, and interactive God

Epimenides of Crete is credited with 'for in him we live and move and have our being' although this phrase appears from time to time in the writings of others. **Aratus** of Cilicia wrote about Zeus, 'we are his offspring'. Paul is making a point about God that seems to be represented in current thought therefore is not so 'foreign' as he has been charged with.

4. **Transcendent** **Verses 29**

God who is who he is and not defined by anyone
Humanity has steady habit of shaping God to our own design

5. **Forgiving and Merciful** **Verse 30**

Repentance is agreement with God regarding our estrangement
Repentance is change of heart & direction to be in line with God

6. **Judge** **Verse 31**

God will set the world right side up
Whether we are right side up is an important question

D. Responses

Acts 17:32-34

1. Some sneered – A 'god' who is involved and interferes
2. A second chance? To present?
3. Some become believers
Dionysius (Dennis) and Damaris (Demi)

How is God connecting with people?

He speaks through Paul and us

Not everyone responds as we hope – that is not failure

How has God connected with you?

This may be a helpful part of your story to share