

The Unknown God

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INTRODUCTION

While visiting Athens, Paul preached on the nature, characteristics and concerns of the One True God (Acts 17:22–23). Significant lessons can be drawn from this discourse that have continuing relevance.

Many people are religious. Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects” The Greek word *deisidaimonesteros*, here translated “very religious,” refers to one who is “very fearful of gods, religious, superstitious” (Thomas 1174). While it can be used in a denigrating sense, of one who is “superstitious” or a “flatterer of the gods,” “in the laudatory introduction of Paul’s speech before the Areopagus it must mean devout, religious” (BDAG).

Yet, men often worship in ignorance. Paul said, “Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.” The Greek word *agnoēma*, translated “ignorance,” means “to be ignorant, not to know” (Thomas 50). BDAG say it means “(1) to be uninformed about, not to know, be ignorant (of); (2) to pay little or no attention to, not to recognize, disregard, ignore; (3) to fail to understand, with the implication of lack of capacity or ability, not to understand; (4) to be unaware about one’s wrongdoing, lapse/do wrong/sin unintentionally.”

Through the proclamation of the gospel message, we come to know the unknown God (Acts 17:24–31). Let us consider the various points Paul emphasized, making relevant application to our own day and time.

JEHOVAH MADE THE WORLD AND ALL THINGS IN IT.

Despite the denials of atheists, agnostics, and adherents of a mechanistic view of the universe, Sacred Scripture affirms, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1; cf. Psa. 102:25–27).

JEHOVAH IS LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH.

Having exalted himself against the Lord of heaven, Belshazzar, king of Babylon, faced the consequence of being weighed in the balance and found wanting (Dan. 5:22–28). Waging war against the Lamb, the Roman empire was similarly doomed because they did not understand that Jesus Christ is Lord of lords and King of kings (Rev. 17:14).

JEHOVAH DOES NOT DWELL IN TEMPLES MADE WITH HANDS.

Dedicating the temple to the worship of Jehovah, Solomon said, “Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27–29).

JEHOVAH IS NOT SERVED BY HUMAN HANDS, AS THOUGH HE NEEDED ANYTHING.

Having collected vast offerings for the temple, David prayed, “But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You” (1 Chron. 29:14–16).

JEHOVAH GIVES TO ALL PEOPLE LIFE AND BREATH AND ALL THINGS.

In the beginning, God created man, forming man from the dust of the ground, and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life (Gen. 2:7). He is the maker of all things (Isa. 44:24–26).

JEHOVAH MADE FROM ONE MAN EVERY NATION OF MANKIND TO LIVE ON ALL THE FACE OF THE EARTH.

All humanity has descended from Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:20). Acknowledging this reality, Malachi said, “Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us?” (Mal. 2:10).

JEHOVAH DETERMINED THEIR APPOINTED TIMES AND THE BOUNDARIES OF THEIR HABITATION.

The Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, bestowing authority on whom He wishes, setting the lowliest of men in positions of power, defining the duration of the rule and reign (Dan. 4:17; 11:27; John 19:10–11).

JEHOVAH DESIRES THAT THEY WOULD SEEK GOD, IF PERHAPS THEY MIGHT GROPE FOR HIM AND FIND HIM.

Before the foundation of the world, God had a plan for saving mankind (Eph. 1:3–4), involving Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:1–3), but extending to all humanity, Jew and Gentile alike (Acts 15:15–18).

JEHOVAH IS NOT FAR FROM EACH ONE OF US.

Some view deity as distant and remote, but the Lord God hears and heeds the cry of those who trust in Him (Psa. 34:17–18; Acts 10:1–4).

JEHOVAH IS THE GIVER AND SUSTAINER OF LIFE: IN HIM WE LIVE AND MOVE AND EXIST, AS EVEN SOME OF YOUR OWN POETS HAVE SAID, “FOR WE ALSO ARE HIS CHILDREN.”

Jesus Christ was the active agent of creation, and the One who upholds and sustains all things (Col. 1:15–17).

JEHOVAH IS NOT LIMITED BY MAN’S MISCONCEPTIONS: “BEING THEN THE CHILDREN OF GOD, WE OUGHT NOT TO THINK THAT THE DIVINE NATURE IS LIKE GOLD OR SILVER OR STONE, AN IMAGE FORMED BY THE ART AND THOUGHT OF MAN.”

Graven images can never capture the essence and grandeur of God (Exod. 20:4–6).

THE LORD GOD (JEHOVAH), HAVING OVERLOOKED THE TIMES OF IGNORANCE, IS NOW DECLARING TO MEN THAT ALL PEOPLE EVERYWHERE SHOULD REPENT.

Repentance is an essential, universal requirement (Luke 13:1–5; Acts 2:38–40).

THE LORD GOD (JEHOVAH) HAS FIXED A DAY IN WHICH HE WILL JUDGE THE WORLD IN RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH A MAN WHOM HE HAS APPOINTED.

Preaching to Cornelius, Peter affirmed that Jesus Christ has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42). We must, therefore, honor God’s Son through faith and obedience (John 5:22–24).

THE LORD GOD (JEHOVAH) HAS FURNISHED PROOF TO ALL MEN BY RAISING HIM FROM THE DEAD.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter’s message regarding the Resurrected Redeemer was reinforced by credible proofs: fulfilled prophecy, eye-witness testimony, and the confirming signs of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:29–36).

CONCLUSION

Some sneered at Paul’s message, others showed a willingness to listen, and a few believed; to which class do you and I belong (Acts 17:32–34)?