

***“Paul’s Second Letter to Timothy —
The Great Transition, The Glorious Sweep of God’s Abundant Grace — Part 14
The Second Missionary Journey: Paul in Athens, Pagan Capitol of the Gentiles —
Part 2”***

Review:

- ***Last time our theme was concerning Paul in Athens and his “formal” presentations before the Athenian “high court” as demanded by the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers. Paul waited for his associates, Timothy and Silas and others, but his spirit stirred within him due to the gross idolatries demonstrated everywhere around him. With Athens and its Parthenon and Mar’s Hill being the location for many temples and monuments to the panoply of Greek (and now also Roman) gods. We can only wonder what it was like in Paul’s day when it would have been splendor upon splendor. Built in the 5th century B.C., its center piece was the statute of the Greek supposed goddess Athena after which the city of Athena (or Athens) was named. This statue we are told by historians was nearly 50 feet high and made of wood, bronze and ivory with a gold covering.***
- ***But although Athena and the other Greek gods and goddesses (in all numbering in the hundreds) were the center of attraction here, there was a competing and compelling challenge to their historical religion here as well, and that was their focus on philosophy and philosophers as we see next here in chapter 17:***
- ***Paul’s Introduction to the Athenian Court — He was in a sense welcomed by the Athenian Philosophers who for hundreds of years had represented the highest wisdom available in ancient times. In fact the philosophers had come to be a significant part of the ruling class here. They seemed to think that Paul was promoting an entirely new and different kind of religion based on two new gods and goddesses named “Jesus” and “Anastasia”. “Anastasia”, the word means “resurrection”, by the way. So Paul preached Jesus and the resurrection and they may have misunderstood him to be talking about two news gods to be added to a long list of apparently acceptable Greek and Roman gods and goddesses (which list numbered in the hundreds).***
- ***They brought him to the Aerogapus or to the Hill of Ares (the Greek name) (or Mars, the Roman god of war and agriculture). This was a special place of pagan worship over the centuries since Athens was founded 500 or more years before and now was primarily the center for the Athenian***

government and here for their “supreme” court. This would be formal review indeed for Paul and a decision on these new gods would soon be forthcoming. By the way, Socrates was condemned in this very place 450 years before for promoting false gods and such like, confusing it seems philosophy with religion. It seems that this was happening here too and Paul was now being “tried” in the high court just like Socrates was. Perhaps their philosophical interests had become strangely religious:

Acts 17:19-23

19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?

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

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.)

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.

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's initial preaching before the Areopagus surely had challenged the hearts. With much boldness, he got to the heart of the issue, spiritually speaking, and transitioned to his main message after a quick introduction addressing what he saw around him there in Athens, with its gross idolatry everywhere and with the temple of Athena most visible to all. Paul's words were simple and yet bold:*
 - *“I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious [or, ‘very religious’] ”: This was not in itself perhaps a condemnation, but rather an opening statement to what he really wanted to say which he hoped would soon follow as the following verses indicate.*
 - *“I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD ...”: Paul considered this to be rather striking as he will now explain ... For this to be found here in the center of both philosophical learning and pagan religion amazed him. But it provided an opening for speaking into the very hearts of these sinners. He continues to his opening words of challenge: “... Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you”:*
 - *I think Paul's introduction here was quite brilliant though its effect, as we shall see, was far from dramatic.*

Our Outline Today: “The Second Missionary Journey: Paul in Athens, Pagan Capitol of the Gentiles – Part 2”

- ***Paul’s Reception by the Athenians – To Believe What All Mankind Should***
- ***Paul’s Reception by the Athenians – Honoring or Not the Risen Judge?***
- ***Paul’s Departure from Athens – For a Few, Following Paul!***

I. Paul’s Preaching before the Areopagus – To Believe What All Mankind Should:

- ***The introduction is now over. But had the apostle struck a common chord upon which to build in his following words and final exhortation? It seems to the contrary... He continues in this fashion:***

[READ] Acts 17:24-29

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; 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;

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; [And they all knew that Athens had had her day!]

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:

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. [“Aratus, who wrote about 200 years before. Also Cleanthes, in his ‘Hymn to Jupiter.’”]

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.

- ***Here the Apostle of the Gentiles begins to instruct them step by step concerning the truth about 1) the creation of the world by the Lord God; 2) The creator is Lord over all, heaven and earth; 3) what true and authentic worship was and how in no way were idols acceptable; 4) God alone is the giver of all life; 5) that God the creator was in total control of all men who are therefore on the same plane without any differences between them; 6} that all men therefore should seek to Lord for 7) all are God’s creation and are therefore his offspring.***

Therefore, he concludes, the true God shares nothing in common with an idol made by human hands.

- ***So the argument he makes here is the same as in Rom. 1. God has already provided sufficient evidence of personal accountability before Almighty God in the creation itself. The bottom line is this: God manages all human affairs so as to make sinners accountable to him as the rightful and only righteous judge.***

We shall provide the Acts and Romans background teaching now to understand better what the apostle's approach is as we read here with the Athenians:

- ***This emphasis on the testimony of creation is common to Paul's other witnesses to the Gentiles. We could spend some time looking at all these Biblical references. But instead let's just select a few. We begin where we were several studies back in chapter 14 of the Acts:***

Acts 14:11-12

11 And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.

12 And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.

Acts 14:15-18

15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:

16 Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.

17 Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

18 And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

- ***So, though the Jews ALSO had this witness in the creation that the Gentiles had, the appeal here is to what everyone, Jew or Greek, should have been able to agree with. These are Gentiles however and so they are held to a different standard***

*than were the Jews who had the Law and the Prophets.
Seeing that underscores that all mankind had this witness.*

- *That is our main point today. Paul's speech before the Areopagus was based on the testimony of God in the creation up until his statement here about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But unfortunately he was shut down here as he just had been previously in Lystra before he could transition to the gospel itself that he so loved to share with all.*
- *Looking more broadly at the entire Bible, we see the universality of all mankind's accountability to Almighty God displayed so clearly. For example in the Hebrew scriptures:*

Jer. 5:20-24

20 Declare this in the house of Jacob, and publish it in Judah, saying,
21 Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not:

22 Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?

23 But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone.

24 Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.

- *So the Jews were also expected to by God to know what God had revealed in the creation as Psalm 19 reveals so clearly:*

Ps. 19:1-4

1 To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

2 Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

3 There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.

4 Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, ...

Jer. 14:22 Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? art not thou he, O LORD our God? therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou hast made all these things.

- ***And in the Gentile scriptures as well, we see the same message as in the greatest of all in Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 1:***

[READ] Rom. 1:16-23

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

- ***This is, it seems to me, the greatest statement by Almighty God of his work of creation and how that work testifies so clearly as to its creator that all may know and be assured of who he is. Whether Jew or Greek, all are thereby held accountable. There are no excuses therefore.***

I cannot forget to quote from one more verse among many from the Old Testament where the Lord God reminds the Jews of who he is and who they are. It is so appropriate for today's study:

[READ] Deut. 32:18 Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee.

II. Paul's Reception by the Athenians — Honoring or Not the Risen Judge?

- ***So the question remains: Whether to honor or not the risen judge, the one who created all things and who sustains the creation by his mighty hand so evidently seen in all that is made.***

[READ] Acts 17:29-32

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.

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

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.

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

- ***“But now ...”: These words clearly signify that from the perspective of Almighty God the dispensational plan for the Gentiles had changed due to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ! And, as we have been observed here in our studies in the Book of the Acts, God was using Paul, apostle of the Gentiles, to set aside Israel from their favored position in God’s plan instead place Gentiles in their privileged position as the focal point in the Lord’s working. “But now!” — these are the words found here signifying this change. Take note of them.***
- ***The Jews ALSO had this same witness in the creation that the Gentiles had, they also had Moses and the prophets. But here the appeal is to what everyone, Jew or Greek, should have known. These in Athens are Gentiles however and so they are held to a different standard than were the Jews who had the special revelation of God’s word as given by his chosen spokesmen.***
- ***And that is our main point today. Paul’s speech before the Areopagus is based on the testimony of God in the creation up until his statement here about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But unfortunately he was shut down at this point as he had been previously in Lystra before he could transition to the gospel itself that he so loved to share with all.***
- ***But The Lord God had appointed a day of judgment and that fact remained. Grace was never mentioned and from the record here***

Paul did not preach the gospel of grace. Later he would say more to those that followed after him, but not on this day. He had been silenced it seems by the darkness of heart of these elders of Greece sitting here in the highest court of the land to rule on his preaching. This audience of philosophers would hear enough, he hoped, to draw them to follow him for more — if they would.

III. Paul's Departure from Athens — Some Few Follow Paul and Believe!

- *But some did cleave and follow! Praise God. There are at least four. Two names are listed here and they go down in history, Dionysius and Damaris.*

[READ] Acts 17:33-34

33 So Paul departed from among them.

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.

- *Why is there no letter to the church in Athens? There were some that believed, and “Dionysius the areopagite” and a woman named Demaris?? See verse 32. Praise God for his abundant grace! An aeropagite and a woman, and a few others.*
- *So the grand interrogation was over, it seems, without the perhaps hope for response. It was the same in Antioch of Psidia, and Iconium, and Lystra, remember? There was NOT a great revival here, but it was enough. Amen.*
- *In fact, it was to be the tenor of the times for Gentile ministry as the apostle wrote at the end of his life:*

[READ] 2 Tim. 3:10-11

10 But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience,

11 Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me.

Conclusions:

- *Paul went first into the synagogues. Some believed, both Jews and Gentiles. He left and continued his ministry with those who were saved.*

Turmoil developed, often due to leading Jews from other cities formerly visited. Paul and his associates left town under fierce opposition by unbelieving sinners, often Jewish leaders, and sometimes after stonings. Philippi seems to be an exception.

- ***Opportunities to speak before the Gentiles apart from in the synagogues seemed not to deliver much. The prime example here was in Athens where a few were saved, including a leading Gentile. But the churches were established and the foundation was laid, Praise God.***

The bottom line: Paul's ministry is to the Jews first and then to the Greeks. Some are saved. But many are saved through the ministry by the churches and in the churches. But this occurs under much persecution and it seems to be as Paul had written in multiple places, through much suffering the work of the gospel ministry would precede. This was the work of God and it was his pleasure to bless in this manner. This would be the tenor of the dispensation of the grace of God. Amen.