

Calvary Chapel  Philadelphia



CHILDREN'S MINISTRY  
TEACHER'S PACKET

1st Grade

Sunday Morning

Study 45

*Athens*

# Athens

The Objective is the key concept for this week's lesson. It should be the main focus of the study.

These are the key verses that you will find helpful in teaching your study this week. The "Main passage" is the basis of the study, where the other verses support the objective of the lesson.

There is a memory verse for the students that relates to every study. If a student can memorize the verse for the following week you may give them a prize from the "reward box" found on your cart.

An introductory activity or question that will settle the class, draw their attention to the study and prepare their hearts for God's Word.

**Objective** This lesson will show the students that we may have untrue ideas about God and encourage them to search Scripture to know what God really is like.

## Key Verses

Acts 17:15-34—Main Teaching Passage

## Memory Verse - John 17:3

"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

## Hook

Review last week's memory verse, Acts 16:31.

Ask the students what a velociraptor looks like. Invite a student to draw a picture of one on the board. Then inform the students that velociraptors do not look how most people think they do. Scientists think they actually had feathers, not scales, and looked like the picture on your cart and at the back of this packet.

Just like the class had wrong ideas about what a velociraptor looks like, many people have wrong thought about who God is and what He is like. Today, Paul will address a crowd that had many wrong ideas about God.

What does the Bible say? This is where we will read a passage or series of passages that teach on the subject of the day.

# BOOK

As Paul's missionary journey continued, he arrived at Athens, the capital of Greece. Paul was waiting for his companions, Timothy and Silas, to arrive when he began observing the city and noticed that it was totally given over to idolatry. The Spirit provoked him to begin sharing the Gospel with Jews in the synagogue and with Gentiles in the marketplace.

Now in Athens, there were many philosophers and people who believed all kinds of strange things. One thing they did for entertainment was listen to people of different beliefs present their ideas. When they heard what Paul was doing and how he was teaching about Jesus and the resurrection, they asked him to explain this teaching to them.

Paul stood on Mars' Hill and addressed the people. He noted how they city was so religious that they had even created an altar for "the unknown god," and he wanted to tell them who this "unknown god" is. In contrast to the idols, Paul's God is the One who created heaven and earth. He does not dwell in man-made temples or need man's worship. Instead, mankind needs Him. He is the One who gives us life and allows us to go and do all that we do. This God has made Himself known to mankind, and He calls all of us to reject idols of gold and silver and to repent, because He is coming back to judge the world through Jesus, His Son whom He raised from the dead. At hearing this, some of the Athenians mocked Paul and others were not sure about what he was saying, but a few believed.

# LOOK

So far in Acts, we have seen that most of the people that Peter, Paul, and the other apostles have met had at least some understanding of who God is and what the Bible says. But when Paul went to Athens, he found that he was surrounded by people who had little knowledge of the God of the Bible. Their worship of idols had distorted their view about God. It was these wrong ideas about God that Paul attempted to correct in his sermon in our story today.

The first and most obvious mistake the Athenians made about God is that they believed in many gods, but the Bible teaches that there is only one God. The Athenians thought they needed to make a temple for and take care of their idols, but Paul told them that it is God who takes care of us and gives us life. They also believed that these idols of gold and silver and stones were gods, but Paul again pointed out that God is not created by man, but is our Creator. In order for the people to turn to Jesus and believe in Him, they first needed to change their understanding of who God is so that it matched what the Bible says.

The interpretation/  
exegesis of the  
passage. What does  
this passage mean?  
How does this passage  
apply to my life?

# LOOK (Continued)

People today also have all sorts of strange ideas about God. Some think that God is mean and angry. They believe that all God cares about is making rules and taking away our fun, but the Bible tells us that God is gracious and loving. He gives us His law to protect us. Others say that God doesn't care what we do, that we can live however we want and God will accept us for who we are, and that it doesn't matter what we believe in as long as we believe it. However, the Bible is clear that Jesus is the only One who can save us from our sins (Acts 4:12) and that without Him, we will be eternally separated from God. There are others who think that God created us but doesn't have anything to do with how we live our lives, but the Bible tells us that He is intimately involved with even the littlest details of our lives.

As Christians, we desire to have a relationship with God, and as with any relationship, it is important for us to have true ideas about who God is and what He is like in order for that relationship to flourish. The entire Christian life is about getting to know God more and more and becoming like Him. The best way to know what God is like is by reading the Bible. Whenever we study God's Word, we should look for what we can learn about Him in the passage. The more we know God, the more we can, like Paul, share the Gospel with others and correct people's misunderstandings about who God is.

What is my response to this passage of Scripture? How should my life change according to what this passage teaches me? What are the practical things I can do throughout the week to make this true in my life?

# TOOK

As a class, memorize John 17:3.

Go through Paul's message in today's passage (verses 22-31) and look for all the things Paul teaches us about God in these verses. Make a list of them on the board.

**Pray:** Thank God for wanting to be in a personal relationship with us. Ask Him to take away any false ideas we might have about Him and replace them with the truth.

**Parent question:** How can we learn what God is like?

# FURTHER STUDY

## Commentary on Acts 17:16-34 by David Guzik

### C. God's work in Athens.

#### 1. (Acts 17:16-17) Paul is provoked to preach in the city of Athens.

**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. 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.**

a. **Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him:** The sense is that Paul would have preferred to wait until Timothy and Silas came from Berea before he began ministry in Athens. But **when he saw that the city was given over to idols**, he was compelled to preach the gospel immediately.

i. As Paul sailed to Athens from the sea near Berea, he came to a city he had probably never been to before, and like any tourist, he was ready to be impressed by this famous and historic city — which, hundreds of years before, was one of the most glorious and important cities in the world. But when Paul toured Athens, he was only depressed by the magnitude of the idolatry he saw all around.

ii. The idea behind **given over to idols** (*kateidolos*) is really *under* idols, or *swamped by idols*. Paul saw the beauty of Athens, having the best that Greek sculptors and architects could offer; but all that beauty did not honor God, so it did not impress him at all.

b. **Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue... and in the marketplace daily:** Paul's practice was to preach wherever he could get an audience. Here it was both in the **synagogue** and in the **marketplace**.

c. **Those who happened to be there:** Paul faced a challenging audience in Athens. It was a cultured, educated city that was proud of its history. It was an intellectual center, much like Oxford or Cambridge. Paul spoke to a city perhaps different than any other city he had preached in.

i. "Although Athens had long since lost the political eminence which was hers in an earlier day, she continued to represent the highest level of culture attained in classical antiquity." (Bruce)

ii. "By now the greatest days of Athens were behind it, but it could still be fairly described as the intellectual capital of the Greco-Roman world and, at the same time, the religious capital of Greece." (Williams)

#### 2. (Acts 17:18-21) The novelty of his message earns Paul an invitation to preach at the intellectual center of the city, the *Areopagus*.

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

a. **Then certain Epicurean... philosophers encountered him:** The *Epicureans* pursued pleasure as the chief purpose in life, and valued most of all the pleasure of a peaceful life, free from pain, disturbing passions and superstitious fears (including the fear of death). They did not deny the existence of gods, but believed

that they had nothing to do with man.

b. **Then certain... Stoic philosophers encountered him:** The *Stoics* were pantheists who put great emphasis on moral sincerity and a high sense of duty. They cultivated a spirit of proud dignity, and believed that suicide was better than a life lived with less dignity.

i. The Stoics believed that everything was god, and god was in everything. So they believed that all things, good or evil, were from “god,” and so nothing should be resisted, and they believed there was no particular direction or destiny for mankind.

c. **And some said:** Some mocked Paul because he did not speak with the philosophical niceties popular in Athens (**What does this babler want to say?**). Others thought Paul was an exotic **proclaimer of foreign gods**.

d. **He preached to them Jesus and the resurrection:** Though Paul spoke in a different place, to a different kind of audience, his message did not change in Athens. He focused on **Jesus and the resurrection**.

e. **For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or hear some strange new thing:** It was the *novelty* of Paul’s message that earned him the invitation to the **Areopagus**. These ancient Greeks loved a constant and always changing stream of news and information.

i. In the early nineteenth century, Adam Clarke described the situation of his day, and it sounds like it is even truer of our own time. “This is a striking feature of the city of London in the present day. The itch for news, which generally argues a worldly, shallow, or unsettled mind, is wonderfully prevalent: even ministers of the Gospel, negligent of their sacred function, are become in this sense Athenians; so that the book of God is neither read nor studied with half the avidity and spirit as a *newspaper* ...It is no wonder if such become political preachers, and their sermons be no better than husks for swine. To such *the hungry sheep look up, and are not fed.*”

3. ([Acts 17:22-23](#)) Paul begins to speak on Mars’ Hill (the **Areopagus**).

**Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 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:**

a. **Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious:** Paul did not begin with an exposition of Scripture, which was his custom when dealing with Jews or Gentiles who were familiar with the Old Testament. Instead, Paul began with general references to religion.

b. **In all things you are very religious:** Many ancient observers noticed the religious character of Athens, and some thought that Athenians were the most religious of all people. But when Paul said this of the Athenians, he didn’t necessarily mean it in a positive way. Religion can lead one away from God, and if we trust in a false religion, it is little credit to say of us that we are “religious.”

c. **I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD:** Paul understood that in their extensive pantheon, the Greeks had an **UNKNOWN GOD**, who covered any god that may have been neglected. Paul wanted to reveal the identity of the **UNKNOWN GOD**.

i. Athens was filled with statues dedicated **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**. Six hundred years before Paul, a terrible plague came on the city and a man name Epimenides had an idea. He let loose a flock of sheep through the town, and wherever they lay down, they sacrificed that sheep to the god that had the nearest shrine or temple. If a sheep lay down near no shrine or temple, they sacrificed the sheep **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**.

4. ([Acts 17:24-29](#)) Paul tells the Athenians who God is.

**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. 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, 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; 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.**

a. **God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth:** Paul spoke about the God who created everything, yet is distinct from His creation. Paul told them that God was bigger than any temple men's hands could build (**does not dwell in temples made with hands**), and could not be represented by anything men could make with their hands (**Nor is He worshipped with men's hands**).

i. In explaining God to them, Paul started at the beginning: God is the Creator, and we are His creatures. "This view of the world is very different from either the Epicurean emphasis on a chance combination of atoms or the virtual pantheism of the Stoics." (Stott)

ii. Paul recognized that these philosophers had to change their ideas about God. They had to move from their own personal opinions to an understanding of who God is according to what He tells us about Himself in the Bible.

b. **And He has made from one blood every nation of men:** Paul told them we are all descended from Adam through Noah, and that there is one God who created us all and to whom we all are obligated. Since God created us all, we **should seek the Lord... though He is not far from each one of us**.

c. **For in Him we live and move and have our being...For we are also His offspring:** These two quotations Paul used from Greek poets are attributed respectively to Epimenides the Cretan [600 B.C.] (who Paul quotes again in [Titus 1:12](#)) and Aratus [310 B.C.].

i. Paul did not quote these men because they were prophets or because all their teaching was of God. He quoted them because these specific words reflected a Biblical truth, and by using them he could build a bridge to his pagan audience.

d. **Therefore since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone:** Paul told them of our responsibility to God because we are His **offspring**. Since we are His **offspring**, we are responsible to have right ideas about God, and therefore must reject the wrong idea that **gold or silver or stone** could represent God.

i. "The Athenians have acknowledged in their altar inscription that they are ignorant of God, and Paul has been giving evidence of their ignorance. Now he declares such ignorance to be culpable." (Stott)

5. ([Acts 17:30-31](#)) Paul tells the Athenians what they must do because of who God is.

**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."**

a. **Now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness:** Paul went from knowing who God is (our Creator), to who we are (His offspring), to our responsibility before Him (to understand Him and worship Him in truth), to our accountability if we dishonor Him (judgment).

i. Paul didn't preach a "soft" gospel. He boldly confronted the wrong ideas the Athenians had about God, and confronted them with the reality of coming judgment.

b. **He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man who He has ordained:** Now, for the first time in his message to the Athenians, Paul referred to Jesus. His first mention of Jesus presented Jesus as a righteous judge.

i. Certainly, Paul did not want to leave the Athenians with the idea that Jesus was *only* a righteous judge. However, he was stopped short before he could tell them everything he wanted to about Jesus. Probably, all that Paul said before was introduction. He would now begin at what he really wanted to speak about: The person and work of Jesus.

c. **He has given assurance of this by raising Him from the dead:** The emphasis on the resurrection is important. Paul saw the resurrection of Jesus as the **assurance of this**; it demonstrated that Jesus Himself, His teaching, and His work were all perfectly approved by the Father.

i. Paul seemed unable to preach a sermon without focusing on the resurrection of Jesus. For him, none of the Christian life made sense without the triumph of Jesus' resurrection.

#### 6. ([Acts 17:32-34](#)) The reaction of the listeners at Areopagus.

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

a. **When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked:** The resurrection was not a popular idea among Greek philosophers. Some thought Paul foolish for even believing such a thing, and others wanted to hear more about this new teaching (**others said, "We will hear you again on this matter"**).

i. The Greeks were fond of the idea of the immortality of the soul, but not of the idea of the resurrection of the body. They felt that anything material was inherently evil, so there really could be no such thing as a glorified body. They thought the ultimate form of glory would be pure spirit.

ii. "All Greeks thought that man was composed of spirit (or mind), which was good, and matter (or body), which was bad. If there was to be a life to come, the one thing they certainly did not want it cluttered up with a body." (Boice)

b. **So Paul departed among them:** Paul wanted to talk about Jesus. He could have, if he wanted to, stayed there and discussed Greek philosophy all day long. But Paul was not interested in that; if he couldn't talk about Jesus, he didn't have much to say.

i. Without doubt, Paul was really just beginning his sermon. Far more than wanting to quote Greek poets, he wanted to tell them about Jesus. But as soon as he mentioned the resurrection, they stopped him short. Certainly, Paul discussed more with people one-on-one. But he was prevented from saying all he wanted to in his speech at the Areopagus.

c. **However, some men joined him and believed:** The results at the Areopagus seemed small, yet some did believe. Among those believing were a man named **Dionysius** (who must have been a regular participant at the Areopagus) and a woman named **Damaris**.

i. Some criticize Paul's sermon in Athens because there is no detailed reference to the cross or specific quotes from the Old Testament. Some think Paul compromised his message for an intellectual audience, and therefore there were few conversions.

ii. This idea continues, saying that when Paul went next to Corinth, he decided to preach the cross and the cross only, even if it seemed foolish ([1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5](#)). Because Paul preached this way in Corinth, the thinking goes, he saw much better results.

iii. Ramsay popularized the theory that Paul was disappointed by his "meager" results in Athens, and went on to Corinth preaching the gospel with a pure focus on the cross, and without any attempt at philosophical explanation.

iv. Yet Paul's sermon here *was* eminently Biblical. "Like the biblical revelation itself, his argument begins with God the creator of all and ends with God the judge of all...The speech as it stands admirably summarizes an introductory lesson in Christianity for cultured pagans." (Bruce)

v. As well, Paul *did* preach Christ crucified in Athens. In [Acts 17:30-31](#) he specifically mentioned the resurrection, and how could he preach the resurrection without preaching the cross which came before it? This is obviously a short extract of Paul's speech on the Areopagus; what is recorded takes barely two minutes to say.

vi. "We learn from Paul that we cannot preach the gospel of Jesus without the doctrine of God, or the cross without the creation, or salvation without judgment." (Stott)

vii. In addition, it is dangerous to judge the content of the message by the magnitude of the response. "The reason the gospel did not take root there probably lay more in the attitude of the Athenians themselves than in Paul's approach or in what he said." (Longenecker)

What a Velociraptor  
actually looks like

