

Explore the Bible: October 13

Believe • Acts 17:22-34

By Becky Brown



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Just after Paul was saved on the road to Damascus seeking to destroy people of “The Way,” God struck him blind for three days and three nights. During that time of sightlessness, God opened the Old Testament “heart” of Paul and traced a red line of shed blood across those sacred writings he had memorized from his youth. The salvation story line of Jesus stretched from Creation to Calvary to the resurrection and the ascension and the promised return of Jesus for his church. Primogenitors, patriarchs, priests, judges, potentates and prophets all pointed to a Savior named Jesus. Now it was time to take this message from Israel through Asia Minor and on into Macedonia.

Acts 17 begins with the mission team leaving Philippi and traveling to Thessalonica. Paul, Silas, and Timothy spent three sabbaths there in the Jewish synagogue. The word on the street was that “these men who have turned the world upside down have come here also!” The jealous Jews accused them of treason for calling Jesus Lord rather than Caesar. They were sent to nearby Berea. They saw many come to faith there. However, the same Jewish enemies from Thessalonica came to

cause the same trouble in Berea. Paul went to Athens, waiting there for Silas and Timothy to arrive.

In the Jewish synagogue, Paul used his "Jesus in the Old Testament" messages, connecting the salvation dots. In the Greek market places of Athens, Paul used their well-displayed images of idolatry to point out truth to these philosophers who simply loved a great debate. These men were about to meet their match with Paul's oratory prowess. Some of them were about to meet Paul's Jesus.

In Athens, Greece, across from the Parthenon resting on the Acropolis, there still stands the market place where Paul would meet and debate with the Greek philosophers in Acts 17. The Areopagus (Mars Hill) overlooks that market area. I spent an afternoon on that hill in November 2002. During the first century, idols and statues to every known god (little "g") were displayed in the marketplace called the "agora." Just in case they might have missed one, there was a statue to "an unknown god." These philosophers were about to be introduced to the God of the entire universe.

They invited Paul to join them on Mars Hill to explain this new teaching he was proclaiming in their city. They called Paul an "idle babbler," affording him very little credibility. They condescended to listen to this "picker upper of bits and scraps of knowledge." They accused Paul of being a proclaimer of strange deities. He had been preaching about the resurrection of Jesus.

Paul pulled the philosophy card to expose their idolatry. His desire was to reach into their vast lost-ness and offer them intimate found-ness. He complimented their "religiosity." Then, from piece to piece, he exposed their ignorance of the One True God. With the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul revealed to them the KNOWN God, Maker of the universe, the Author and Sustainer of all life and breath. God, who is completely self-sustaining. God, the creator of mankind. God, who is available

to everyone and approachable by anyone. In verse 28, Paul shrewdly uses a poetic quotation of one with whom they were acquainted.

The God known to Paul should never be displayed in the form of an idle idol. Gold or silver or any other precious metal could never depict the glory of God. Personal relationship with God is the goal and repentance is the key. God sent His man (Jesus) to reach out to those who need to come to Him. Judgement is coming. God marks our days whether we accept Him or reject Him. The One who conquered death is proof. Some sneered and scoffed. Some said let's talk later. Some believed in Jesus and partnered with Paul.

Brown leads LittleBrownLight Ministries.