

## Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Lecture 18, Acts 17

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 18 on Acts 17.

Although Paul faced a hostile response in Thessalonica, he left the church there just like he did in Philippi.

Well, hopefully, things would get better for him, but not quite yet. The response at Berea is more positive initially, verses 10 through 15. The Via Ignatia, on which they had been traveling in 17:1, continued westward, but Paul instead took a road southward to Greece, to Achaia, that led through Berea.

Berea was 60 miles west of Thessalonica and the Via Ignatia, so he was putting some distance between him and those who wanted to persecute him. And if they went looking for him, they'd probably go looking for him on the Via Ignatia. However, word gets around from one city to another because people were always traveling on these roads.

17:11, Judaism regarded nobly those who checked everything against the scriptures and diligently listened to good teachers. And of course, we believe that as well. Greek philosophers likewise praised those who listened attentively to truth.

Well, at the synagogue in Berea, people listened to Paul and they searched the scriptures. They presumably had a Torah scroll, probably in Greek translation, and probably some scrolls of the prophets as well. Those weren't easy to come by.

Probably not all synagogues had them, but most of them did if we can gather from what Philo and Josephus tell us, even though these had to be hand-copied. And also, we have a special mention of women in 17:12, which fits Luke's interests as in 17:4. 17:13, Thessalonians had no legal jurisdiction in Berea.

So, these Thessalonian Jews who hear that Paul is speaking in the synagogue at Berea, they come here and stir up trouble for him in Berea as well. They had no legal jurisdiction. Even if they were officials, they'd have no legal jurisdiction. They couldn't bring a decree from Thessalonica, but mobs don't function legally. Well,

17:14-15, messengers rarely traveled alone. Travelers were safer with others.

Some people accompanied Paul on his way as they sent him out for his safety. He could leave others behind, but Paul was the main target. And Luke summarizes this in a way.

We get some more details, some different details in 1 Thessalonians 3:1. There are ways to harmonize it, but Luke isn't really interested in giving you every detail. Luke is just summarizing. Paul ends up going to Athens, which is considerably southward.

But outside of Macedonia, he's not going to be facing as much trouble. And nobody's going to follow him this far to the south. It's outside of their province altogether.

Athens had a couple of ports. Paul may have come into the Piraeus. He may have come into another port.

At least in one of these ports, he would have, as they were rounding the Cape, he could see the Parthenon on top of the Acropolis. He could see the tip of Athena's spear already coming in from the sea. He also could see, as he was coming in, an altar of an unknown god right there at the harbor.

There were a number of these altars of unknown gods. And if you read Pausanias, Pausanias was a second-century Greek geographer, and he tells us all about all the statues and all the cities that you could see. And of course, some things were built after Paul's day.

But if you want to know exactly what Paul could see in the market of Athens, and exactly what Paul could see on the Acropolis, if he went on the Acropolis, there were statues everywhere you turned. There were temples everywhere you turned. So, when Paul's spirit was stirred within him, I mean, here Athens had this reputation for great philosophy, but everywhere you turned, there was the worship of these gods.

And Paul was so stirred inside by this idolatry in a supposedly intellectual place like Athens. I say supposedly. Gentiles thought it was an intellectual thing, some of them, but Jewish people did not.

They thought this was so stupid. Why would somebody worship inanimate objects that are made by people when we are made by God? So, in verse 16, his spirit is stirred within him. If you read Pausanias, you also can get all those kinds of details on Corinth and so on as well.

So, if you want them, read Pausanias. You can read a secondary source, but they're just going to take most of it from Pausanias unless they give you some archaeological evidence, which also is available now. Philosophy.

In Roman times, philosophers focused more on ethics than on what we call philosophy. Religion didn't deal as much with ethics as philosophy did. Religion was more interested mainly in ritual.

Many people thought that philosophers actually were unreligious. Some of them, like the Epicureans, were unreligious in terms of religious ritual, but many philosophers discarded gods as superstitious, although they said it's all right if the masses do it. Most of them weren't atheists, in any case.

Some of them were, but they believed that the gods were too far removed from human existence. That's what the Epicureans believed, and that the real gods were just things like the sun, the moon, and so forth. They were often considered atheists, but technically they weren't atheists.

They were more like deists, but people criticized them as atheists. But many discarded the gods as superstitions and worshiped the superstitions, but they weren't out to convert people to their views. This was just their views, and they said, well, this is helpful for the masses.

To have some sort of religion keeps them in line. Even Plato said religion keeps people in line. Plato said it's necessary for the proper functioning of the state, although he would have liked to have eradicated private worship.

Some philosophers, though, did attack religion as superstition. The Stoics, who were the most popular form of philosophy in this period, didn't attack religion. Sometimes they even defended the existence of the gods, although they didn't practice popular-level rituals.

Romans didn't always trust philosophers, although that was especially in an earlier period. There had also been an ongoing war between rhetoric and philosophy, but again that was mainly in an earlier period and not so much at this point. Philosophy was highly respected in Athens.

Athens was famous from an ancient period and was still the subject of lectures on great cities. But its actual glory had faded. It had a reputation for great philosophers.

After all, Socrates was from there. But now, in terms of actual philosophic education, it had fallen behind Alexandria and Tarsus, also university centers. You can understand that.

Today there are some places that run on their elite reputation, but there are some other schools that have reputations that are less elite, and yet the quality of education there is quite good. In any case, Alexandria and Tarsus had already

surpassed Athens as university centers. It's also interesting to recognize that Athens, like Thessalonica, was a free city.

That's important to recognize because some people say, well, Paul never preached in Athens. He mentions being in Athens in 1 Thessalonians, so nobody denies that. But also, in 1 Corinthians 16:15, Paul speaks of somebody in Corinth as the first fruits of the province of Achaia.

And they say, well, Athens was in the province of Achaia, even though Corinth was its capital. If the first convert wasn't in Athens, then even if Paul did preach in Athens, he didn't make any converts in contrast to what you see in Acts 17:34. Unfortunately for this argument, Athens was a free city, and therefore, even though geographically it was part of Achaia, it technically was not part of the province of Achaia. And therefore, Paul doesn't have to, you know, speaking of somebody else's first fruits of Achaia, even if Paul is speaking explicitly of the very first converts, doesn't rule out converts in Athens.

And most people who make that argument have not taken into account the fact that Athens was a free city for a few more centuries. Rabbinic debates with philosophers appear in rabbinic literature, often just as a way of showing, you know, we rabbis are so smart we could even beat philosophers. That was the literary function.

And the function of this narrative may be similar, although this isn't something that was like haggard information based on legend or made up. This is in a work of ancient historiography from a traveling companion of Paul, writing about something that had happened within a generation of his own time. Speeches may make up about a quarter of Acts, depending on how you count it, and often they perform an apologetic function, defending the faith.

And that's the case here. Apologetics and philosophy. Jewish apologists in the Greco-Roman world had already plundered the most useful contributions of Greek philosophy, and they'd been doing this for centuries.

They actually claimed that the philosophers had plagiarized Moses, which is not very likely true, but Christian apologists like Justin followed that. And some Greeks also thought that some of their philosophers, such as Pythagoras, drew from Judaism. Hellenistic Jews often depicted Abraham as a philosopher.

He's depicted that way in Philo and 4th Maccabees and the pre-Christian Epistle of Aristeeus. So, a lot of Jewish apologetics interacted with engaged philosophy, especially by this period Stoic philosophy, but in Alexandria, a lot of Platonic philosophy. So, Paul may already have some training in this, and Paul certainly has had the opportunity to pick up some of this along the way and make use of some of this.

Now sometimes, he doesn't say philosophers stole this from Moses, but he is willing to look at overlap. Sometimes today I get so annoyed that some people will call, if you're skeptical of some things in the Bible, they call you a critical scholar. If you are defending some things in the Bible, they say you're doing apologetics, as if that's something other than being a critical scholar.

An apologia, a defense, means that you're defending a position. And scholars who are skeptical of something are defending a position, a position that's skeptical towards it. If I defend a position that is more honoring of it, well, I have good reason to do so.

It's not because I haven't done my research. I'm treating Acts the same way I would treat comparable Greco-Roman literature. And I don't necessarily come to all the same conclusions that every other conservative scholar does.

We don't all come to the same conclusions as one another, because we are critical scholars. We look at the evidence, see where it points. And skeptics don't always come to the same conclusions as one another either.

I'm not denying that they can be critical scholars. I'm just saying that sometimes people have a way of framing the discussion that is actually not very fair. So, do I defend a position? Yes, but only after I've done my research and come to conclusions on the position.

And so, am I an apologist? Yes, but so are many skeptical scholars, and apologists for their own position. So, I'm just trying to be a good scholar as well as a good Christian, but I don't see them in conflict. I had been an atheist before my conversion, and the evidence that I've seen has always pointed me more towards God and not away from God.

In any case, chapter 17 and verse 18. There was a danger of initiating worship of foreign gods, which is what is said about Paul here. I mean, he's already been said to be proclaiming Jewish customs that don't fit Roman customs in chapter 16 verses 20 and 21.

Accused of speaking of another king besides Caesar in chapter 17 and verse 7. Well, here in 1718, people are accusing him of initiating the worship of foreign gods, although here it's educated philosophers who are engaging in lively discussion. It's not so much a legal charge yet, but it was a potentially dangerous charge. In the 5th century BC, a priestess in Athens was, according to Josephus, stoned to death for such a charge.

But it is especially an allusion to Socrates. The main charge against Socrates was that he was preaching new foreign deities. You find that all over the place in ancient literature.

And then Socrates was hauled before the leading council of Athens, which was the Areopagus, before which Paul is going to be hauled in the next verse. So, Luke may be portraying Paul as something like a new Socrates. You know, Athens, you didn't listen to Socrates.

You better listen to this one. Just like Paul is going, usually Acts portrays him as speaking under the mantle of the prophets and following in the footsteps of Jesus, who was the ultimate of the prophets. So, it's especially an allusion to Socrates.

And Luke may be having some fun at these philosophers' expense, just like he did at the expense of the church in Acts chapter 12. You've got kind of a joke that makes fun of these philosophers' intelligence or intelligence and where it matters, the truth about God, where it matters the most, I should say. Because they say that this man is a spermalagos.

That was a term, literally it meant birds that would go pecking up grain around the marketplace. But it came to be applied to men who would pick up odds and ends in the marketplace. And finally, it was applied, as pointed out a long time ago by Lake and Cadbury, finally, it was applied to worthless people.

People who just, didn't really know anything, but they sounded like they knew something because they could quote this and they could quote that. You know, Paul isn't going to have the range of knowledge, of quotation, of philosophers that they can of their respective schools. Stoics wouldn't know a whole lot about Epicureans and vice versa, except for their criticisms of each other.

But in any case, some of them say this is a spermalagos and he's introducing foreign gods. Well, Paul's audience includes people from both Epicureans and Stoics at this point that he's dialoguing within the marketplace. And this idea of introducing foreign gods, notice they use the plural.

Because Paul has been preaching to them, Luke says, Jesus and Anastasis. Anastasis means resurrection, but it was also a woman's name in Greek. So, ah, okay, he's one of these people, he's blending the male deities into one and blending the female deities into another.

They don't understand what Paul is saying. Even though he's trying to contextualize for them. And so, they're willing to pontificate, and yet they miss the point.

And we have a lot of people who do that today, who don't even understand Christianity or real Christianity. They don't understand the Gospel, they don't understand the biblical text, but they're willing to mock it. But probably not everybody's mocking Paul equally.

Some may be listening to him more. Paul is going to end up dividing and conquering among his hearers, just the same way he does in Acts 23.6 with the Pharisees and the Sadducees. And he gets the Pharisees, you know, well, there's nothing wrong with this guy, he's just preaching the resurrection.

And what if an angel or a spirit has spoken to him? I mean, we may not believe that Jesus rose from the dead, but we may believe that he's an angel or a spirit now and that he spoke to him about the resurrection. And so, the Pharisees and the Sadducees go at it there. Well, Paul's going to divide his audience a little bit here as well, when they take him before the court.

Epicureans, verse 18. Epicureans said either no gods or, more often, only those gods that are known through sensation, nature. But you can't really have contact with these gods.

So, they opposed the old myths, and on deity, they were very similar to deism, except they allowed for more than one deity. For them, the aim of life was pleasure. Well, we know pleasure is good.

We experience it as good. But what they meant by pleasure, contrary to what their opponents said that they meant by pleasure, what their own writings attest, they didn't mean the pleasure of sensuality, but they meant the absence of pain in the body and the absence of trouble in the soul. And therefore, they viewed death as not something bad because in death you didn't have any more pain in the body or any more trouble in the soul, at least according to their view.

They were only influential in the educated upper classes. They had declined some in the first century, so they weren't as strong as they had once been. But there were four main schools of thought in Athens.

In the second century, you still have Epicureans, you have the Stoics, you have Platonists, you have the Sceptics. Well, they were related to the Aristotelians, the Peripatetic school, so maybe the Peripatetics would be more important. But at this point, it's especially the Epicureans and the Stoics that Paul is talking with.

The Stoics were much more popular in this period than Platonists, who came into vogue more in subsequent centuries, more than the Stoics. Verse 18 of Chapter 17, the Stoics. Stoics criticized Epicureans, although the differences weren't as great as they'd once been because the schools had borrowed from each other somewhat.

Seneca, a Roman Stoic who was alive at the time that Paul was before this council that he'll be before in Athens. Seneca praises Epicurus but invites Lucilius to leave Epicureanism. Well, your original founder, he was a good man, but it's been twisted by your school, you ought to come over and join us Stoics, and he dialogues with them.

Stoics were more popular with the people than Epicureans were, just like Pharisees were more popular with the people than Sadducees were, because Stoics agreed with the common people more on more of their beliefs, at least in public. Some of them were more like cynics, and we read that in Diogenes Laertius in Juvenal and elsewhere. But the Stoics, well, we'll talk more about the Stoics and the establishment in a few moments, but first of all, they didn't regard pleasure as the highest ideal.

They regarded virtue as the highest ideal. They regarded pleasure as a vice. Their cosmology was that there were two forces.

There was logos, reason, and phusis, nature. Logos would act on nature. So, you had the principle of reason that organized nature into the patterns that we see.

That's why some of them said, if you can look at nature and not believe that it was designed, and not believe that there's a supreme deity, the logos, or fate, then you must be very ignorant indeed. The Stoics had an ethic of equality that was similar to Christianity, but it was subverted once they became part of the establishment, which they fairly quickly did. In fact, late second century Marcus Aurelius is an emperor who is a Stoic thinker.

They were strict on household codes from the time of Aristotle on. Household codes. Aristotle has these rules of how the male head of the household should rule his wife, his children, and his slaves.

You have that picked up and developed in Ephesians, but in quite a different way than what they did, so that instead of telling the husband how to rule his wife, Paul says how the husband should love his wife. The wife submits to the husband. He also puts that in the context of 5:21, believers submit themselves one to another.

I won't go into the details on that because that's what I'm doing now. But just to say, Paul in his writings often uses some Stoic ideas. The idea of divine design in nature in Romans chapter 1 is very similar to Stoic ideas.

It had already been adopted and adapted through Judaism, so he was able to make use of that to say, look, you can see God's work in nature. That's not to take a



position on how exactly. Today I believe we know a whole lot more about nature and we can see God's glory a whole lot more in nature without taking certain positions.

I don't know if I should get into all this, in this kind of thing. I should let the Genesis professor deal with it. But anyway, without taking a particular position on how that design is expressed, this is something that has been argued by Christians throughout history.

God is intelligent and God is the creator. So, without taking a position on the details, at least we believe God is really smart and God designed things in a really cool way. And Stoics believed you could see that in nature.

So, they had a bit more common ground with Jews and Christians than Epicureans did. They also believed in providence. They believed that the divine nature worked in the world.

Although at one point they'd been pantheists, now they were closer to one supreme deity. But they also acknowledged that there were all these other gods, but these gods would be resolved in the primeval fire every so often, every few thousand years when the world would collapse in unto itself, burn up in a cosmic conflagration. But the supreme fate or logos would then reorganize the world again.

So, they believed in a cyclical universe, not a Big Bang-type universe. Anyway, bringing Paul to the Areopagus. Well, philosophers weren't Paul's only audience in Athens.

Although many of the people in Athens would have some knowledge of philosophy, many of the educated people in Athens would. These philosophers bring him to the Areopagus. This was the high court of Athens.

It had about a hundred members, so he's got a pretty good audience. Plus, they were meeting in public. Probably they were meeting in the Stoa Basilikos, in the Agora.

So, Paul doesn't have to move somewhere to, doesn't have to move to the literal Mars Hill. The council itself was called the Areopagus in this period, even though they no longer met on Mars Hill, the Hill of Ares. So, he didn't have to be taken very far to be there.

Well, why would they take him to the Areopagus? Just like, hey, this guy has some really good stuff. You guys should take a break and listen to it. Well, the Areopagus is the high court of Athens.

So probably they're taking him there for the purpose of evaluation. If somebody's going to set up shop and teach in Athens, or in any ancient city, if you're going to set

yourself up as a lecturer there, and you were going to have a lot of people follow you, well, you might want to be accredited by the city council. You could first call a big gathering and say, okay, I'm going to give an oration.

If people liked your oration, you could set up a school. And if people didn't like your oration, well, you could try it in another town. But anyway, they may have been functioning not only as a court but also as something like a board of education to see whether this guy is going to be allowed to speak.

Paul didn't really face a risk of execution there in this period, but it can still raise suspense because everybody in the Diaspora, at least in urban areas, at least people who were educated enough to follow the Book of Acts, everybody knew about Socrates. And everybody knew Socrates had been tried before the Areopagus and had been condemned and executed. And everybody also knew by this point that Socrates was right and the Areopagus was wrong, including everybody in the current Areopagus knew that.

Anyway, Paul speaks before them, and he gives an exhortium. An exhortium or a proem was the introduction to your speech where you would kind of butter up the audience normally. You'd start out by praising the audience.

And so, when Paul says to them, I see how religious you are, sometimes it's translated as superstitious, the word is potentially ambiguous, but he's probably not starting off by insulting them. That would not be a good way to start off, and he wouldn't get to finish his speech. Instead, probably he's speaking to them in a way that they would understand to be positive.

I mean, you can usually find something positive to say. If somebody's religion is false, you can at least appreciate the fact that they're devoted to what they believe, and Paul does that. However, the term is ambiguous.

It doesn't mean Paul's affirming what they believe. And Luke's audience, as they hear this, is probably going to hear it from the other side. Yeah, this is kind of superstitious.

But he finds a point in common with his audience first. And that's a good way to relate to people, right? He speaks to them in verse 23 about the unknown God. Well, there were all these altars of unknown gods.

He's already seen one. So, he says, I want to talk to you about this unknown God. And of course, he's not going to be talking about unknown gods.

He's going to be talking about the unknown God because he's speaking about one true God. But the story of how this unknown God was first identified as an unknown

God is perhaps relevant here because centuries before, there had been a plague in Athens, and they'd sacrificed all the gods they knew, and none of them worked. But finally, they were advised to offer to an unknown God.

And they would let some animals go loose wherever the animals sat down to rest. You have something similar to this in 1 Samuel. But wherever the animals would sit down to rest, they'd build an altar there of the unknown gods or unknown god and sacrifice them there.

Well, the altars were still standing in Paul's day. And it was actually a theme in ancient speeches to praise public works, to praise local monuments. So, Paul is still in good with them.

He's going to speak of this unknown God, this God you don't know about. Well, if you're going to call people ignorant, say that there's something that they don't know about, agnoeo, you can at least say it in a nice way, which Paul did. They wouldn't have appreciated being told that there was something they didn't know.

But they always wanted to learn and hear new things. And Athens had a reputation for that, actually. So, he's going to tell them, I'm going to tell you something about this unknown God to help make him known.

17, 24, and 25, he speaks of God's self-sufficiency. I mentioned earlier about a philosophic trend toward blending deities, toward deity, not that they didn't believe in other deities, but they had a way of kind of assimilating them. Diaspora Jews sometimes even went so far as to call God Zeus, as the supreme God.

Now, Paul doesn't go that far, and some other Diaspora Jews didn't go that far. But some would go that far in identification. I think there's probably a good reason why Paul didn't.

But in any case, Stoics believed that God permeated the universe, or they could say that God, or logos, or fate, actually is the universe. Earlier Stoics tended to be more pantheistic than in this period. And they believed that God was not localized in temples at all.

Well, Paul wouldn't have believed that either. I mean, after all, he had heard Stephen preach on that, right? Some good things came out of Stephen's martyrdom. You don't always have to... Sometimes things look very bad to us.

I mean, here's this great theologian of the gospel going forth, and we think, with his death, it's going to die, the vision's going to die. But actually, the vision was multiplied as the church was scattered through persecution, as people could think about the theology that he actually articulated. And a seed was sown that was later

reaped on the road to Damascus because Paul had some content of some understanding when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus.

He'd already heard Stephen's speech. He already knew about this non-localized vision. Well, here it comes to the surface again.

Isaiah 66:1, God doesn't need temples made with hands because heaven is his throne and earth is his footstool. So, the Stoics would have agreed with that. Paul is again establishing common ground, and some of the other thinkers would have agreed with that.

But Paul does have a lot of audacity because everywhere you looked, all the way around, Paul may have even gestured with his hands, God doesn't need these temples. He also said, *pros deo mai*, in verse 25, God doesn't need to be served with human hands. This was something also that you found in Greek philosophy.

God was *apros deis*. In Greek philosophy and also in Diaspora Judaism, the letter of Aristeas again, 3rd Maccabees, Philo, and other Diaspora Jewish sources spoke of God needing nothing. That agreed with the Stoics.

So again, common ground. Paul believes it, the Bible taught it, and it also agrees with the Stoics. So, he gets to say more by building this common ground.

There's more that they'll listen to him to before he has to get to what's controversial. Again, this shows us the importance of contextualization. Although contextualization means that we make it more relevant and more understandable, not always more agreeable, because sometimes when it gets more understandable, it becomes more disagreeable to people.

They just understand better what God really demands of them. In verses 26 to 29, he's still contextualizing. He's talked about God not needing things from us, from humanity, in terms of sacrifices and so on.

But humanity's need for God, verses 26 through 29. Both Jews and Greeks recognized God as creator or gods as creator in some cases. They also recognized that the boundaries of nations had been divinely established, although those boundaries changed periodically.

But the boundaries in Genesis 10, the list there, Acts 2, verses 9 through 11, almost reads like an updating of Genesis 10 for the language of Luke's day. But God divided nations' boundaries and divided history's epics as well. Stoics spoke of a cyclical universe and seeing epics in that way, resolving itself back into the primeval fire, dissolving everything back into the one periodically.

But the idea here is more like God being in charge of the boundaries of the nations and over the epics of history, just like you have in the Old Testament. But philosophers would have agreed with this. He speaks of God as Father.

Well, here again, he's relating, he's contextualizing, he's understanding enough of his audience to use language that was intelligible to them. He's not trained as a philosopher, but at least he's reaching out to them. Jews and Greeks both would speak of the Supreme God as Father.

Judeans normally expressed that he was the father of God's people, the father of Israel. But Greeks and very often diaspora Jews spoke of God as the father of the world by virtue of creation, or Zeus is the father of the world for Greeks, by virtue of creation. So, Paul could use the language in a way that was intelligible.

Well, God was the creator of the universe. Normally in the New Testament, he's the father of his people, we are his children. But here he can use it as you have it once, I think, in Malachi.

You have it occasionally in other places where God is father also by virtue of creation. It's not contradicting the other, it's just giving a different angle, not the intimacy, but we do owe our existence to him also. In verse 28, he quotes from Greek poets, although these were fairly well-known lines from Greek poets, and Paul may have gotten them from a Jewish apologetics manual, for all we know.

They were gathered in collections of quotations, so even minimal training in Greek sayings could have given you some access to this. But these quotations are aptly chosen. Homer and other poets, but Homer was the most famous and most often cited, were cited as proof texts in a way similar to the way Jewish people cited Scripture.

And Paul cites Scripture when he's speaking in synagogues, but he recites poets, although not as abundantly as he cites Scripture. But he doesn't cite Homer, he doesn't cite the divine Plato, as some called him. He cites apparently Epimenides and Aratus.

The line, in you, we live, and move and have our being, is attributed to Epimenides. Well, it's interesting, Titus chapter 1 and verse 12, one of the other places, the other place in the New Testament where Epimenides is quoted, is there. In a letter that's attributed to Paul, Epimenides was from Crete, and that's relevant in Titus because he says a Cretan, one of their own.

Now, in the next saying, the first saying, in you, we live, and move and have our being, that's from Epimenides. Actually, Epimenides was also, according to the story, he was the one who advised people to build these altars to unknown gods. And so,

it's natural that in that context, in Athens, as he's speaking about the unknown god, he would cite Epimenides and expect that his audience would recognize, oh, this is associated with Epimenides.

Epimenides, by the way, also was said to have had a very long nap for many years. So, if any of you have heard of Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle and thought that that was an original American tale, well, he wrote it himself, but he did have some precedent in Greek mythology, and there were actually some other stories like that in history as well. But anyway, it's a fictitious story.

But the association with Epimenides makes sense. He gives another quotation. This one is a quotation, we also are his offspring.

This quotation is normally attributed to Aratus. Aratus was from Cilicia. Well, where was Paul from? So, it makes sense that Paul actually would have cited something from Aratus.

The use of poets also appears in diaspora Jewish anthologies of useful proof texts for apologetics. That's why I said earlier he might have gotten it from Immanuel for that. Some criticize the poets as too mythological.

You have that a lot among philosophers. Stoics allegorize that. Well, Zeus wasn't raping women and boys.

He was just a virtue mating with other virtues or so on. And Platonists really developed that very far in a later period. But others use the wording of the poets very freely to prove their own case.

Well, notice Paul goes very far in making contact with his culture, and I try to do that insofar as I can. Some of you can do it, well, certainly you can do it better with your own context than I can. We each need to see how we can make the gospel relevant in our context and yet make it relevant, not compromising it, not changing it, but communicating it in terms people can understand, and finding some common ground.

That's a good missiological principle. It's a good principle for dialogue. It's a good principle for being nice to people as well.

But the fact that Paul is taking any side means some people are going to agree with him, some people aren't. The Epicureans may agree with him on, well, no need for temples, and what he's going to go on to say, no need for statues, but they won't agree with him on all these things he said, because clearly, he believes in a providential God who acts in history. Verse 29, most philosophers thought that the

statues were not deities themselves, but some regarded these statues as memory aids to remind you of the deity, to get you to think about the deity.

We've had Christian traditions of artwork that develop that depict humans, but we recognize that God is God. There's no picture we could draw of him. There are some traditions that use kind of memory aids to point you to God, but Christians agree with Jewish tradition that we should not have idols.

But the philosophers didn't always understand them as idols. Sometimes they viewed them as memory aids, which was something the Christians didn't accept either for God, at least not in something that was meant to actually portray what he might actually look like, as opposed to maybe a symbol for God. 1730, he speaks of their ignorance.

God has not judged the world so much yet because of their ignorance. Well, as we saw back in 3:17, ignorance reduces culpability. It doesn't eliminate it, but it reduces it.

Some people are more guilty than others. Some people are less guilty than others, and God can take that into account. The Gospels speak of the servant who knew the master's will would be beaten with many stripes if they disobeyed, but with few stripes if they didn't know the master's will.

In any case, 17:23 spoke of the unknown God. Well, that's the ignorance he speaks of here. So now he's revealing to them this God who had previously been unknown to them.

But they wouldn't want to be thought ignorant. The language here is kind of strong, although it's about to get stronger. Now, if they wanted to be like Socrates, Socrates just said, well, I'm just very ignorant.

You know, the Oracle said I'm the wisest person, but I'm just very ignorant. I'm just trying to learn something here. But they wouldn't have appreciated Paul bringing to their attention that there was something they really did not know that was so important.

But anyway, verses 30 and 31. Here is where Paul finally has to go beyond common ground and summon them to what the Gospel really summons people to do. He summons them to repentance.

Well, that was an idea that Jewish people could appreciate, but it wasn't an idea that most of the Greeks would have appreciated. They accepted the idea of conversion to philosophy. Philosophers did.

But probably the kind of repentance he's speaking of, they would have to repudiate other gods. And anything in their system that didn't agree with this would have to be repudiated, including the thing he's about to mention because there's one thing that can't be compromised. Paul says he's going to judge the world.

Well, you know, many Greeks believed in a judgment in the afterlife, but they weren't looking to some future time, concrete moment when God would judge the world. Even for the Stoics who believed in a cosmic conflagration, it was cyclical. They weren't looking to something like the day of the Lord, a linear view of history moving on to this time when there would be a massive transformation.

God is going to judge the world through a man whom he's appointed, and he's given evidence to everybody. This is not blind faith. He's given evidence by raising him from the dead.

No, that's when he lost them. But he couldn't compromise it. That's the gospel.

Paul wasn't speaking of a theoretical God who was just an idea, the God of the Platonists who was emotionless and unapproachable, except he was pure mind, pure intellect, so you'd approach him with the mind. He was speaking of the God of Scripture. He was speaking of a God who acted in real history, a God who reached out to people, and not just people through meditation, working their way to God, as some of the Greek philosophers thought.

So, he speaks of raising him from the dead. As far as Greeks were concerned, that would be like some corpse coming out of the tomb. That wasn't a very appealing notion, or maybe a cremated corpse reorganizing itself and coming back.

That was kind of a scary idea, even. Paul is appealing to, and certainly not dying and rising gods who died and rose, as they came back every year with seasonal vegetation. In the spring they'd come back, and it wasn't really a bodily thing to begin with.

But Paul is speaking of the Jewish notion of the resurrection, Daniel 12:2, and widely developed as a common Jewish belief, certainly by the Pharisees and the majority of people who agreed with them in Judea, not the Sadducees, and many Diaspora Jews also didn't believe it. But God had done it in Jesus. God had demonstrated this is true, that life, full life, is bodily life.

When God created the world, he said it is good. And some of these philosophers, they thought, well, the best thing, soma sema, get out of this body. It's a tomb.

The soma, the body, is a tomb, a sema. Many Greek thinkers, there were a variety of views, but many Greek thinkers thought when you were out of the body, your soul,



which was light, wouldn't be held down by this heavy body. It was a lighter element made of fire or air, and it would float up to the pure heavens.

But for the biblical worldview, existence is bodily existence. Not to say that there isn't an afterlife in between. But existence is bodily existence.

The creation is good. The creation will be renewed. There will be a renewed creation, and the body will be resurrected, and we will have joy in bodily existence.

1 Corinthians 15, 2 Corinthians 5, not the same kind of body we have now. I mean, there are differences, obviously, just as there were differences with Jesus' resurrection body. But it's corporal.

The world is a real place. The world matters. That's why we can care about the environment.

We can care about people going hungry. We can care about people being sick. It's a real world.

And evil and suffering are not our imagination, as in some worldviews. It's something that God cares about, and we can care about it. And there's coming a time when it will all be made right.

That did not fit Greek thought. It didn't fit Epicurean thought. It didn't even fit Stoic thought.

Why does Paul save this for the end? Well, because whenever he says it, that's the end. They're not going to listen to him for the rest. Why can't Paul just leave these out entirely? Because if he leaves them out entirely, well, we're looking for common ground, but he's not preaching the gospel.

I had a friend many years ago, and in his faith, Jesus was a great prophet, a great teacher. Well, we had a lot of common ground to start with. He believes in one true God.

Well, a whole lot of ground to start with. We have so much common ground. I said, well, Jesus is also the Word of God.

He said, oh, oh, we believe that. In his tradition, they believe that. There was a lot of common ground.

I said, and we believe in the resurrection from the dead, the promised resurrection from the dead. Yes, we believe in that. I said, and we believe that Jesus actually was raised from the dead.

Well, no, in his tradition, they didn't believe Jesus died. But we have a lot of common ground to work from. He believed in the virgin birth, believed in miracles.

If there's common ground, by all means. I mean, there was more common ground there than Paul had to work with here. So, when you find common ground, use it.

And be polite and be gracious. But still, people need to know the other things we believe too, that are central to our faith. God raised Jesus from the dead.

And that is our hope of eternal life. Verses 32 through 34. What are Paul's results in Athens? Some say, oh, you know, he went on after this to Corinth.

1 Corinthians, he says, I determined when I came to you in Corinth after he'd been in Athens, I determined when I came to you to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. Well, they say, well, Paul did that because it had gone so badly in Athens, where he wasn't focusing on Christ crucified.

You know, actually, it was a common rhetorical device to lower expectations by saying what a bad speaker you were. Dio Chrysostom, Dio the golden-mouthed orator in the early 2nd century, would do that in his speeches often. He'd say, you know, I'm not a very good speaker.

And then he'd blow him away with this eloquence. Now, Paul, if you read his letters and you study ancient rhetoric, Paul was pretty good. I mean, most rhetoricians didn't even include rhetoric in their letters.

But then again, they weren't doing argumentation. But you have a number of at least micro-rhetorical devices in Paul's letters that are unusual by the standards of ancient rhetoric in terms of having them in letters. And yet, at the same time, we also read from Paul's letters, actually, people didn't think he was a good speaker.

2 Corinthians 10, 2 Corinthians 11. But it seems not to have been the nature of his argumentation or the nature of his logic. There were other things that determined whether a person was a good orator.

How they dressed, how they groomed themselves, their gestures. And perhaps even more relevant in Paul's case, or perhaps the only thing relevant in Paul's case, maybe their accent. Paul wasn't from Athens.

He wasn't from Corinth. He didn't have maybe a pure Attic accent, although he seems to have developed it better because when he starts speaking Greek, Kiliarch in Acts chapter 21 says, O, so you're not the Egyptian who led the people into the

wilderness? Well, in Egypt, a lot of people spoke Greek. Jewish people in Egypt certainly spoke Greek.

But they didn't speak Greek the way somebody from the Aegean would, and especially from a place like Athens or Corinth would. And it so happens that this Kiliarch is Greek himself. His name is Lysias.

So he's impressed with the quality of Paul's Greek. Not so much that he can speak Greek at all, but the quality of it. So, in any case, Paul was not the world's best speaker.

But when he says that I am determined to preach nothing among you except Christ and am crucified, that's because of his emphasis on the Corinthians who are all into power, worldly status and power, and so on. Paul is reminding them of the cross. He does this both in 1st and 2nd Corinthians.

But yeah, Paul preached the cross. But that doesn't mean he didn't contextualize. He does it with the Corinthians through the letters.

Even using rhetorical devices with people who are criticizing his rhetoric. What are Paul's results in Athens? Luke tells us that among the converts there, one of them was an Areopagite himself. Well, there were about a hundred members in the Areopagus, but still, in his brief preaching there, he's won a city council member.

That's got to be the work of the Holy Spirit. Nothing against city council members, if you're a city council member. But just saying, in this one preaching, to people who were so culturally different from what he was communicating, one of them became a believer.

The Holy Spirit must have touched the man. His name is Dionysius, and according to the later tradition, he became the first bishop of Athens. Demarus.

Why is this woman there? She probably wasn't a member of the city council, given what we know of Athens in particular. But she may have been one of the Stoic or Epicurean philosophers because some philosophers did have women disciples. Also, you could have crowds gathering there.

But in Athens, traditionally, that was one of the places where women were most restricted. So probably she's an upper-class woman. In traditional Athens, usually, the only women out in public with the high class were high-class prostitutes, the heteri.

But she could have been a philosopher, especially given the people among whom Paul had been speaking, who would be there as he was giving this message. Now, this has probably seemed as good and not bad. I mean, some of them mocked him.

Some of them said, well, we'll hear more from you on some occasion. But remember, there were divided responses elsewhere, like in Acts chapter 14. Often there are divided responses in Acts.

That's not the problem of the gospel, and it's not a bad thing, because some people had become believers, and that's what happens here. Now, after this, Paul moves on to the next city further south, and that city is Corinth. That'll be Acts 18.

I'm not going to do all of Acts in equal detail, but I'm going to do some details on Corinth, the capital of Achaia, because I want to illustrate some sections of Acts in great detail so that you can see how it's done if you want to go into great detail, and then other parts I'm going to summarize as we move beyond that. I have massive detail, if you really want massive detail, in my four-volume Acts commentary, but most people are not going to want that. Most people are not going to have access to that.

It is summarized in a hundred-page summary. The background material, which is what you won't get on your own without reading the ancient sources, is summarized in my background commentary, the revised version that came out in 2014. It's also summarized in even more summary fashion in study notes for the cultural background study Bible that's being published by Zondervan, where I wrote the notes on Acts and the rest of the New Testament, or, well, most of the notes for the New Testament, not quite everything.

And also, most commentaries have some of the background material. So, it's out there if you want the details, but I'm just going to illustrate that you can really go into a lot of detail on the background if you want to. And I'm going to be illustrating that as we go into the beginning of Acts Chapter 18, which also provides some good background for 1 Corinthians.

Again, a lot of Corinthians commentaries and other studies. I have students doing dissertations on Corinth, and I actually try to discourage some of them from doing it because there are so many dissertations being written on Corinth, but so much archaeological evidence from Corinth, volumes, and volumes of published inscriptions from Corinth. So, there's a lot that we know, and I'm just going to give you a sample of that starting in the next lesson.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 18 on Acts 17.