

Acts 17:13-34

November 11, 1976

Tonight we are in Acts 17. In my mind this is perhaps the greatest presentation in the Book of Acts by a man of God. And that perhaps is my reason that I feel so totally unqualified to handle it. I stand in utter amazement at the greatness of the revelation and the usage of that revelation by Paul and yet it's there in the Book of Acts where we're working the Word to see about rise and the expansion of the Christian Church.

A church was in need of a pastor and solicited applications. One of the deacons, interested in knowing just what kind of a minister they desired, wrote a letter as if he had received it from an applicant and then read it before the pulpit committee. And this is the letter:

“Understanding that your pulpit is vacant I should like to apply for the position. I have many qualifications I think you would appreciate. My religious and theological training was received from the best theologians. Academically I've made my mark. I preach with power and have had some success as a writer. Some say that I'm a good organizer. I've been a leader in most places where I've gone. I'm nearly 50 years of age, but I've never preached in one place more than three years. In some places I have been driven out of town after my work caused riots and disturbances. I have to admit that I've been in jail three or four times but not because of any real wrong doing. The churches I have preached in have for the most part been small, though located in several large cities. I have not gotten along too well with the religious leaders in town where I've preached. In fact, some have threatened me and even attacked me physically. I am not too good at keeping records. I've even been known to forget whom I baptized. However, if you can use me I shall do my best for you even if I have to work to help with my support.”

After reading the letter, the deacon asked the committee if they were interested in the applicant. They replied emphatically that he would never do for their church. They were not interested in any contentious, trouble making, absent-minded, ex-jail bird. In fact they felt insulted that his application had been presented. The committee then asked the name of the applicant whereupon the deacon answered, “the Apostle Paul”.

It's the record of that great man in Acts 17 that sits here like a diamond and just touches the very chords and fibers of the innermost part of a man's soul.

Acts 17:13

“had knowledge” - got to know

When the information got to them (that Paul was at Berea), they came after him. Paul, if you will recall, had left by night and none of the believers told anybody. They kept their lousy mouths shut. Today so many times Christians yak all the time, open their stupid mouths. But boy, “loose lips sink ships” - a Navy term. Loose lips get Christian believers killed when the times are tough. The time to learn to keep your mouth shut is when you don't have to. That's right. Most of the Corps kids still talk too much. If you can't say something positive and good, say nothing about an individual. And a lot of the things that happen in life that come to you for your experience, you put inside of your lock box and you shut up.

These disciples and apostles had said nothing where Paul had gone. But you and I know that when Paul left Thessalonica he went to Berea. Now finally, word dribbles back through the grapevine, which it always does, that this man Paul was at Berea.

“stirred up”- shaking like an earthquake

Boy, how the Adversary can get people so adamant. It’s sometimes unbelievable to me. Here Paul is teaching his heart out in Berea, blessing people. The unbelievers, the circumcision gang comes over there and in a matter of a day or two or three or a week, they got that whole community shaking like an earthquake. That’s the word “stirred up.”

The texts also have the word “troubled” following it - “Stirred up and troubled.” They did not only shake them up like an earthquake, but they troubled them. The word “troubled” that’s used here is “to disturb like a fantastic tornado.”

Acts 17:14

I believe, from the context and other things that come up, that they came after Paul because of the word “security” of **verse 9**. He had posted bail. They came over to get Paul to bring him back to Thessalonica. But instead of Paul staying there, they take Paul and move him out, yet Timothy and Silas stay there. In plain language he skipped bail. They should have had that in the argument. That’s exactly what Paul did. They had posted bail. Now they come after him and they want to take him back to Thessalonica. Paul just skips the coop. Isn’t that wonderful? I like him! Boy, I think that’s fantastic. You know, he put his \$100.00 down and said, “Take the damn stuff. I’m leaving”; let them keep the bail. Boy, it’s there if you can see it, but you’ve got to really have spiritual eyes to see that. I’ll show it to you:

“as it were to the sea” – they sort of took him out and said, “Well, we’re taking him to the ocean.” When they “dogged” Timothy and Silas and said, “Where’s that Paul?”, Silas said, “Well, he just went to the sea” – that’s the Aegean. You know, like you go to the Riviera or the Mediterranean.

“abode”- is basically the word “endured”. They stayed there to take the brunt of the persecution and the slack or junk that everybody was throwing at the ministry. But they wouldn’t let them touch Paul. They got Paul to go away and Silas and Timothy stayed there to endure the persecution; to endure the junk that these legalistic circumcision boys were endeavoring to lay upon them. That’s **verse 14**.

Acts 17:15

“they”- some of the brethren, the believers. Their names are not mentioned, but I guarantee you their names are written in the book of life. They may never mention your name or mine in the history books of the world. Nobody, generally, may know anything about us, but God never loses track. He keeps the record. These names are all written in that book of life and all it says is “they”; born again believers who believed in the integrity and accuracy of God’s Word, who dared to risk their lives for Paul and for the Word.

“conducted” – means they made the plans; they got the food together, etc. But they did not tell Paul. They got it all done and they conducted him. They didn’t have to tell Paul. All they had to do was get it ready because the Word of God, the revelation, was “move out, man, and do it real secretively; real quietly.” Timothy and Silas did not know, because the last part of the verse says that he gave them a commandment that they should go and tell Timothy and Silas to

come to him. As long as Timothy and Silas did not know where Paul was, they could endure the persecution. They could get the stripes laid on them, get beaten, or anything else and they couldn't tell because they did not know. So the brethren made the plans.

They acted like they were just going to the sea; taking a little holiday; going to have a party. No, no, no. They were going to Athens. Now to go to Athens from Berea is about 250 Roman miles. It takes about 12 days. If they went by sea, it would take about 3 days. Whether they went by land or sea, I don't know. They that made all the arrangements took Paul all the way to Athens.

“they... receiving a commandment” – these people, who had brought Paul to Athens. To those, Paul gave the commandment; the statement. Namely, that they should return to Berea and tell Silas and Timothy to come to him in their “jet”--all speed—“sandal in the fan blade, hammer to the floor.”

“departed” - with that commandment those from Berea departed. I do not know whether he went by land or sea. I can tell you what I believe he did. I believe he went by sea. He returned these men, by revelation, back to Berea as quickly as possible so they would not be missed too long, so that word would get from Paul to Timothy and Silas saying, “Look, I'm going on to Athens.” I don't know if it's right or wrong, but it's interesting.

“unto” - same word translated “as it were” in **verse 14** – means “as far as”

Acts 17:16

“his spirit was stirred in him” - not only the spirit of God within him, to will and to do of his good pleasure, but Paul became spiritually distraught. He was teed-off; hot under the collar spiritually. He was angry at the devil for what he saw with his senses eyes in this city of Athens.

“Athens” - in this day was considered to be one of the most beautiful cities of the world. It was a city that was located 5 miles inland from the Aegean Sea. It was northeast of the Saronic Gulf which is an arm of the Aegean Sea. It was surrounded by 4 famous mountains. And even more important than the famous mountains, were the 4 famous hills of the city of Athens. They were called Lycabettus and Acropolis. On the Acropolis they had the Pantheon, which housed so many of the great gods of the time. The 3rd hill was called, Areopagus, or Mars' hill. It was on Mars' Hill where the great council of the Athenians was held forth. This great council of the Athenians was conducted at night time only, so that the judges sitting could not see the accused or the accuser to be influenced by their facial expressions; by their weeping or crying; or whatever else they might do. Before they were brought before the counsel, they would set the accused on this side and the accuser over here and they would kill an animal between them indicating that if either one was caught in lying or not telling the truth, they would be killed.

In addition to that, they made them stand and swear that by the truth of the god next door “I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me god.” That's where it came from; from Mars' hill; the great Athenian council. And we use it in the court of law in the United States today. But it was the pagan god that stood for God, because they made them lay their hands upon the slain animal when they made that declaration. The 4th hill was called Pnyx. These are the 4 great hills within the city of Athens and Athens is surrounded by 4 great mountains.

“wholly given to idolatry” – Vertonius (sp?), in his writings, says of Athens, “it was easier to find a god there than a man.” He said it rather satirically. Xenophon, in his writing, called Athens, “the city of one great altar.”

“wholly given to idolatry” - literally means full of idols – the Greek word is *kateidōlos* - plumb full, pressed down, running over, idols

You see, you and I can sit back and read this and it’s like water off a duck’s back because we can’t identify with it. It’s very difficult for any of us to identify with anything unless we have really been there. You know, you talk about praying for the sick. It’s much easier to identify with the sick if you’ve ever been sick, I guess.

Into this city, the greatest city of its time in all the world perhaps, walked this man with the greatest revelation of God the world has ever had. And there was really nobody there to listen. He just walked in and started witnessing, that’s all. Boy, this takes a lot of guts; a lot of courage. It takes somebody that’s sold out. There would have been a million places to go, a lot easier than Athens, I guarantee you; a lot of other more wonderful places to go where he could have hidden out; not said anything, and the Jews, the circumcision gang, would never have found him. He could have gone undercover but you’ll never move the Word of God going under cover. You move the Word of God staying out of the covers on top; kicking the covers off of you and holding forth the greatness of that Word.

Paul was that kind of a committed man. That’s why he had the revelation. He dared to believe God and God knew he’d believe. And here he comes into that city. There is no city in the world today any more loaded with idols than that city. There is no city in the world today any more difficult than Athens was the day Paul arrived. There is no city in the world with more churches on the corner than Athens had. They had them on every corner and along every street. And yet this man went into that city, and that city was just full of idols.

These idols were idols that were made of gold. You know they dressed them in gold, they arrayed them in gold, they put fineries on them, and they put fresh flowers daily at the foot of the idol. They really took good care of them. That’s all included in that word “fully, or wholly, given to idolatry.”

Acts 17:17

“therefore”- why for? - because his spirit was stirred within him. He saw what was happening in that great city. God was at work within him to will and to do of His good pleasure. He saw this and he said, “Oh my God I just can’t help myself. I got to teach; I got to share; I got to witness; I got to talk.” That’s why he disputed.

“disputed” - is not argue -it means “reasoning”, but I think the Greek word gives me the greatest clue. It is the word *dialegomai*, which is transliterated into our English word “dialogue.”

You know why he dialogued? Paul started speaking in the synagogue and the moment he started speaking, somebody stood up and said “Paul where’d you get that from?” And then Paul would reciprocate. They had a dialogue going. And this he did in the synagogue. I want to tell you, that synagogue must have been dead, because it had had no effect upon the environment of

the Athenians. It had not influenced the amount of gods they had in that city. Most likely they succumbed to the whole society, and the move of the time, and they just drifted with the culture like we're doing today in our country today. Churches just go along with it. It's the easy way out; just to go along with it. But Paul went into that synagogue and he dialogued them. He shook them up. He reasoned with them.

“devout persons” - spiritually religious people

“market” - market place. It is called the Ancient Forum. If you ever make a trip to Athens and stand here at this place where I've stood, that market place today is still called the Ancient Forum. It is there that Socrates taught; same place where Paul taught. All the great philosophers of Greece; all the great teachers taught at that place. It's an electrifying place to be, but of course not as electrifying as Cana of Galilee, Nazareth, and a few other places. It's an electrifying place because all the great brains of all time spoke at that place; the market place, called the Ancient Forum.

“met with him” - I was going to do something on this but it's not that important. There's a fine shade of in-depth meaning here that I can't recall right now, but the thing is this went on daily.

If you are thinking, you have a question. “Where are Timothy and Silas?” He gave a commandment for them to come. They aren't coming. Where are they? In **Acts 18:1** it says Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. In **Acts 18:5** it says Silas and Timothy were come from Macedonia. Where did Silas and Timothy finally meet Paul again? In Corinth; they never did get to Athens. Why did they not get to Athens? Why did Paul keep teaching in the synagogue? He was waiting for Timothy and Silas. They never got there. Why? Because of what they were enduring at Berea. Had they been free to come, I know Timothy would have been there if he'd had to walk on his hands and knees, barefooted backwards, because when Paul said to Timothy, “I want you to come”, Timothy would have dropped everything and came. Why, then, didn't he come? There had to be something that made it impossible. The impossible thing that happened to him was the enduring of persecution and I believe perhaps imprisonment, which is not written in the Word. But imprisonment that made it impossible for him to come. Later on he must have been released because they joined them after Athens, back in Corinth. That's what I think it teaches.

How long Paul taught daily in the Forum or in the synagogue, I do not know. But apparently he spoke long enough that people at least began to hear and began to question. And they really thought he was of f his rocker. They really thought he was “flippy.” They were amazed that a person like him would say what he said. I am sure of this because of what comes up.

Acts 17:18

“philosophers” – the word “philosophy” in German is the word “*weltwissenschaft*” and it means “world wisdom.” The highest earned degree cannot be earned in any other place than world wisdom; a doctor of philosophy degree. PhD - piled higher and deeper. These were the intellects of the day.

“Epicureans” – A man by the name of Epicurus was the founder of what we know philosophically as the Epicureans. The Epicurean philosophy was “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you may die.” That was their whole philosophy; live it up. Epicurus lived from approximately 342 BC to 279 BC. The place where the Epicureans were educated in Athens was called “the School of the Gardens” because they did all their teaching and their

presentations in a garden area.

“Stoicks” – the Stoics philosophers were the students and disciples of the philosopher named Zeno. The word “*stoa*” is the word “porch.” The Stoics were fatalists. Boy, to have those two philosophical groups in that day must have really been interesting. One group said “Eat, drink and be merry; live it up,” and the other group said, “You can’t do anything about life anyways. What’s coming is coming. You can’t help it. If you’re going to get killed by an automobile, you’ll get killed by one. If you get run over by a train, if you get kicked in the face by a jackass, you can’t help it.” It’s just that whatever happens to you is going to happen anyways; nothing you can do about it. And the followers of Stoicism were called “disciples of the porch” because the academy; the training place where the Stoics met, was on the porch.

“encountered him” – means “met with him.” I think it was the kind of meeting that they requested, wherein they said, “Look, we’d like to meet with you.”

“babblers” - is a very interesting word – the Greek word is *spermologos*. The root meaning of that word is “seed-picker”. Some of them said, “What’s that old seed-picker going to say? Where did he pick up some of these crumbs of knowledge?” It was really a contemptible word among the intellectuals. If they wanted to belittle you, they’d say, “Well, you old seed-picker.” Today they say, “You old cult.” It’s a word of contempt and its usage literally was “small birds who eat small seeds.” Therefore they looked upon him as a small religious leader, what today we would call cult. “What will this seed-picker say?”

“a setter forth” – a proclaimer

“strange” – foreign

“gods” - devils - *daimonion*

Now there happened to be an Athenian law, and that is that nobody, but nobody, was allowed to preach any other god than the gods they had in Athens. If he did, he would be executed. Now I can see why the philosophers were engaging him; encountering him and saying, “Look, we want to talk about this.” Because they’re headed for the guillotine. They’re getting him ready, as far as they are concerned, because he’s bringing a new god and nobody was allowed to bring any gods to Athens because they had every god there in the world plus one just to make sure they didn’t miss anybody. The Athenian assembly did not allow it.

I also ought to tell you that, in that great court of justice in Athens, when the judges would sit at night, they had in front of them two tables, and the judges would never talk. They’d just listen and evaluate. And when they made a decision, they would take a flint stone and if the man was innocent, they’d cast it on the table to the right. If he was guilty, they would cast the stone on the table to the left. That’s how they made their decision; innocent or guilty.

“gods”- Now the word “devil” of course is one type of meaning to us. To them it represented gods.

They had two kinds of gods in Athens:

- 1 - They had *theoi* - which means gods of nature.
- 2 - And they had gods called *daimon* - which were deified men.

“preached” - as used here, is “the announcement of a joyful message.” It’s not the ordinarily used word “preached.” Its in-depth meaning is: to announce a joyful message. Can you imagine how enslaved and down in the mouth that city really was, with all those gods? Imagine Paul coming in positive. Imagine Paul saying, “Beloved now are you the sons of God”, “In all things more than conquerors”, “He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly.” Imagine that good news; that joyful news, hitting some of the people; some of the citizens of that great city. It did.

The word “preached” here means “joyful news regarding the subject matter.” The emphasis is on the regard to the subject matter that’s presented. And it is remarkable to me that he preached, unto them, Jesus. How come he did not preach unto them the Christ? How come he did not preach unto them the Lord? Because the Athenian counsel had a rule that nobody could bring or declare another god in the city.

Paul presented Jesus as a god under the category of men; not *theoi*. That’s why he used the word “Jesus” You’ll just never see it until you see the inner depth of greatness of that thing. Boy, you talk about technique; wisdom. Paul could have come right out and said, “Listen, you son-of-a-guns. What’s the matter with you? Jesus Christ is the living Son of God. He is the Christ. He’s the messiah.” Do you know what they would have done to him? He’d have never got them to listen. But he met them right on the ground that they understood and he told them the truth. He just didn’t tell them everything he knew.

He presented Jesus to them. And the word “Jesus” is always used in the Word when it relates itself to the humiliation and the humility, the humbleness, of the Son of God; Jesus upon earth, as the son of man. “The son of sorrows”, is the word “Jesus.” He is man, and he presented him as man. That’s what he was. He never once presents him as God. Had he presented him as God, what would have happened in Athens? Why, they’d have killed him so fast it would have made his head roll down the hill. But instead, he presented him as what he really is; Jesus, the Son of God; a man. That’s what it says. The word “Jesus” is always connected with the humanity; emphasis on the humanity side; what he accomplished, the humility he suffered. The word “Christ” always emphasizes his messianic position, of his blessing or his standing, before God. Like you and I are born again: we are not in Jesus, we are in Christ. That’s our standing before God; in Christ. Christ in you is his standing within you. You in Christ is your standing in him.

The word, “lord”, and you’ll see it at times: “the Lord Jesus Christ” or “the Lord Christ Jesus”, has its emphasis always on the authority and the power of that person. **Romans 10:9:**

...if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus [the one with the authority and power who was the humiliated one]...

You and I know that now he’s seated at the right hand. That’s why it says, “Lord Jesus.” The “Lord” emphasizes the authority, the power. The “Jesus” emphasizes the humility. The “Christ” emphasizes the position; the blessing, or the standing, before God.

Paul knew that Jesus wasn’t God. Had he preached Jesus was God, Paul would have been wrong to begin with and Paul would have been executed pronto.

Then he did something else. He preached the resurrection. To preach the resurrection is to preach that this man got up. That must have really rocked those brains of the Epicureans and the Stoics because neither one nor the other believed in the resurrection. The Stoics believed that finally everything goes back into God. The Epicureans didn’t believe anything like that.

They just believed “eat, drink and be merry. It’s all over with.” When he dared to show this man resurrected, no wonder they got shook, because no man, Stoic or Epicurean, ever dies and gets resurrected. No wonder they thought about him as a seed-picker. “Where’d you get that nutty idea?” Can’t you just see those intellectuals foaming at the gills? “Let me at him.” “Take him apart” attitude. “His theology is too strange.” You know what they did:

Acts 17:19

“took him” - does not imply “by force.” They simply said, “Hey, how about going up to Mars’ Hill; Areopagus?” This is the place where all the great speakers spoke. So they bring him up there and it’s a great opportunity for him to witness to the Athenian counsel. All the influential philosophers, all the great theologians, educators, are all there. Paul now gets the opportunity to hold forth God’s Word to them.

“may we know” - “Can we hear you out now?” – “You lay it on us, man. Tell us exactly what this new thing is that you are promulgating; those little seed things that you have picked up. We want to hear it.”

Acts 17:20

“strange” – foreign - in its deeper sense its, “you are lodging certain things in our hearing that we have never heard before.”

“would” – wish to

Acts 17:21

“time” - leisure

“in” – for

“nothing else” – no other thing

“new thing” - latent thing - literally “the latest idea”

Their whole life’s pursuit was to listen to the latest idea, to something new. The wealth of Greece, culminating of course with the great capital city of Athens, was so fabulous that so many people had so much leisure time. In their leisure time, instead of going boating on the Aegean, they got together to find out who had a new idea and to listen them out, and talk about it and rap about it. That’s what they did with Paul.

Acts 17:22

Paul stood on a raised dais which was in the Forum area, in the area of Mars’ Hill where Socrates spoke. The reason the Areopagus was called Mars’ Hill is because, according to their teaching, Mars’ was tried there and acquitted. And they called it Mars’ Hill. He was a god, I guess. I forget what he was. At this location he was surrounded by those great buildings. Some of them are still standing, not perfectly but basic structures are still there, with the Pantheons and the Thois is over here to his front, and to his left these other large buildings. All the gods were there in those buildings that they had. It was in that area where this great Athenian council met and they would sit on a raised dais. It’s like some of these shows that you see where the platform is in the middle of the crowd with the people to the back and on each side and to the front of them. This is where Paul stood up.

“Ye men of Athens” - today you and I would say, “Ladies and Gentlemen.” Very, very beautifully done, very courteous, very cultured, and very knowledgeable of technique.

“superstitious” - Paul never said that, because had he said that he would have killed his audience on the second line. He never said that. He said, “Ye men of Athens, I see that you are very religious.” The word “superstitious” is the word “religious”. He hasn’t lost his audience yet. He would have, had he said, “Ye men of Athens, you are too superstitious. You’re worshipping the wrong gods. What’s the matter with you?”

Acts 17:23

“For as I passed by” - which simply means “as I came up the pathway” to the Areopagus; Mars’ hill

“devotions” - the gods that ye worship

“found” - saw

“altar” - include “also” after the word “altar” – it is found in every critical Greek text

“inscription” - inscribed in it

“whom” - what

“worship” – *therapeuo* - transliterated into the English word “therapeutic” – “use therapeutically”

You see he preached unto them Jesus, but in order to preach Jesus unto someone you finally have to get to God. He does this so beautifully without getting the noose around his neck because they got an altar there inscribed, “to the unknown god.” So he transfers the preaching of Jesus, what he is after, using that as his spring board to get to the true God. Boy, what a fantastic step of genius spiritually. He must have had a course in Dale Carnegie or something.

Acts 17:24

“lord of heaven and earth” – that means He’s the Lord with the authority from heaven and upon earth.

“temples” – shrines

I just can’t figure out how Paul could have been so smart. We live almost 2,000 years later and so many people in Christendom think the only place you can worship him is in a temple made with human hands. For there the bread is broken, there the blood is shed, there you come to kneel to pray, there you come to bring your offering. Sorry, Paul did not know that. It says very plainly that this God who is the Lord of heaven and earth does not dwell in temples, shrines, made with men’s hands.

Acts 17:25

“worshipped” - therapeutically

“as though He needed any thing” – literally - “as needing something”

“he” - himself

“giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” - giving life and breath to all things

Boy, what a revelation; not worshiped by what men bring. You see, they would bring gifts: food, flowers; array their gods with beautiful, expensive garments. Paul said, “This unknown god does not live in temples made with human hands nor is there any therapeutic blessing by what man’s hands do. He’s not required to have anything. He’s not in need of something, but in turn, in truth it is He Himself who giveth (self giving) of life and breath and everything.” That must have really got them out of the bird picking, seed picking, category. And there comes that great 26th verse:

Acts 17:26

“one blood” - or the life of the flesh is in the blood [**Leviticus 17:11**] - hath made of one blood, life. Now it is remarkable that, as far as I know critical Greek texts today, we have not found a critical Greek text that has the word “blood” in it, but it’s in the Aramaic. I don’t care if we never find a Greek text. It’s okay with me. Because we do have the Aramaic and if the word “blood” was not there, it still would have to be there from other scriptures (remoter context) remember? If the life of the flesh is in the blood (remoter context), this indicates that here the life would have to be in the blood.

I know of no commentary; I don’t know any place of anybody believing what I believe is the explanation to all color. And it takes it and puts it on the accuracy of God’s Word and we have genetically and every other way a real solid footing to stand on, because you can change color, you can change characteristics genetically by putting different things together. That’s exactly the explanation of the color.

That verse then is not degrading to the white man. It’s not degrading to the Indian. It’s not degrading to the yellow man, or the black, or all the little colors in between. And it sets there after almost 2,000 years and nobody sees it, because man is so damn egotistical. He is his own god. You know that. If you’re white you hate the black. If you’re black you hate the white. If you’re red you hate the black and white. If you’re yellow you hate black, white and red. Black people dislike black people. White people dislike white people. In Africa, the blacks today are fighting the blacks. Other places, whites are fighting the whites. That’s the nature of the brute.

The Word of God declares the only truth regarding color that I know, and that is that God made one blood and out of that one blood came all the nations of men that dwell upon the face of the earth.

“and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation” - Some of the commentaries say that God determined the times of the nations; when they were to be killed and destroyed and He set the bounds of the nations; this particular group of Semitics live over here, these Aryans live over here, those skunks live over there. That’s the teaching.

I think Dr. Lamsa in his translation is accurate where he has **Acts 17:26**:

Hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth and he hath appointed seasons by his command and has set limits to the age of men.

Having made of one blood all the nations to dwell, God knew that they would live as long as they could believe. That's why the limit to the age of men is limited to their believing.

Acts 17:27

“the Lord” – God - He made of one blood, appointed seasons, set limits, whereby the limit is, as long as a man believes, he lives. He did this that the people should seek God; should turn to God.

“if haply” - that at least

“feel” - grope

If you'll just blindfold your eyes for a moment and somebody turn you around 12 times standing up, and then you come find me, that's that verse. They should seek God that they might feel after him, like a man with his eyes covered, That's why the word “grope” is used; groping. That has been man's quest for God, at best.

“He be not far from every one of us” - just like if you came up here to find me, if you were being circled around blindfolded, I wouldn't be far from you. That's the whole greatness of that verse.

Acts 17:28

“in him” - in God - not in Jesus; in God. This is absolutely unique in what is not said. For had he taught everything he knew he would have lost his people. I see the word of wisdom in here, just fantastically.

Every other place, in the Word, it talks about God seeking man: God looking for man; God going out for man; the “90 and 9” [**Matthew 18:12-13**, **Luke 15:4**]; Jesus looking for the one lost sheep; the man born blind, Jesus goes looking for him [**John 9:35**]; God calling man, and yet Paul, by divine revelation, in the greatness of this presentation in Athens says, “They seek after the Lord. They grope after God.”

Everybody is basically spiritually hungry. Every man, woman, boy and girl has to have God and in their way, they're groping. Really, like many of us, didn't know what they were groping for. He is not covering “God looking.” He's covering how they're groping, yet from the other side, I know God is there calling because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection and believing cometh by hearing and hearing cometh by the Word of God. [**Romans 10:17**] You see it!? Boy, he's just molding those people with the greatness of all the ability he has. What a fantastic thing! “In God” - and that's true because God is in Christ and Christ is in you, that puts you in God.

“your own poets have said” - The fellow who Paul is quoting here, and its remarkable to me, that Paul would use an illustration like you might use from Shakespeare or Chaucer or Playboy, he uses it as a poet of their own. The poet was Aratus, who was a Stoic, and he came from the city of Cilicia, originally, which was Paul's hometown. Do you think maybe Paul was a little more knowledgeable of things than just what Gamaliel taught? Do you think maybe Paul knew a little bit about the Epicureans and the Stoics before he got to Athens? I want to tell you, he

was up on his reading material. He knew what was happening. That's why he could meet those Stoics right on their own grounds. They thought he was a seed-picker, but when they got to that old boy, he axed them; he laid the sledge in their head. He just wasn't picking seeds. He was swallowing whole pumpkins or something. Here are the words literally from the hymn of Zeus:

“For we all greatly need Jupiter, for we are his offspring, full of grace, he grants men tokens of favor.”

“offspring” – *genos* – genus - How can you reconcile this unless you have more knowledge of the Word? Why sure you have to have more knowledge of the Word! Everybody is His offspring because of the original creation of **verse 26**; “He made of one blood” and to that end everyone is an offspring of that original creation. That does not mean that everyone has the true God in him, because the true God is not in the flesh; He's in the spirit. He's talking about the genus, the *genos* of natural existence; life. What they put in their own mind is their business. What he taught was still the greatness of God's Word.

Acts 17:29

“the Godhead...” – the head God - the Godhead is not three heads; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit head? No! The word “Godhead” here is the word *theios* meaning “divine one.” Referring to that great god the Greeks had, Aphrodite. The Romans, the Latins, had the same god called Venus.

“Is like unto gold, or silver, or stone” - Like a lot of those gods they had there were.

“graven” – engraved, or sculptured

“device” - thought

Lamsa translates it:

“worship resemblances made of gold, or silver, or stone shapen by the skill and knowledge of man into resemblances of the deity.”

I like the word “thought” better because that is where it happened!

Acts 17:30

Lamsa translates verse 30 as follows:

“For the times of ignorance God has made to pass.”

I would say that it would carry a literal translation according to usage:

“For these times of ignorance God are now past; over with.”

“repent” - That must have been a new word to them - at least a new thought concept to the Epicureans and the Stoics, the rest of the intellectuals. But I can see what he's building to, because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection. Now see how he's building this thing. He's just getting ready to put the noose around their neck and gather them in the fold with the ministry of reconciliation and the Word to do it with.

Acts 17:31

“hath” - delete

“judge the world in righteousness by *that* man” - God's going to have a righteous judgment. By

what? That god? No. Jesus Christ is NOT God! But by that who? “Man.”

“ordained” – determined

“assurance” – *pistis*

“unto all” - upon all and unto all that believe

This Jesus and the resurrection: boy, you see how he’s headed toward the new birth; teaching the whole Word so beautifully that anybody who wants to, after he finishes teaching, can be born again. He’s wrapping it all up here. This is perhaps the greatest homiletical presentation in the Book of Acts.

The unknown God; that God that you say is unknown; He’s the one who raised this Jesus from the dead. Now they can’t pin anything on Paul because he hasn’t brought any new gods into Athens because he took the same statue they had there and did the preaching from it. Isn’t that something?

Acts 17:32

“of” – concerning

“some mocked” - those very people who called him seed picker, the little old birds who picked small seeds, these are the mocking birds. They themselves are the small seed pickers. Basically this would come from the Epicureans and the Stoics.

“others said” - this perhaps was among the Stoics

“*matter*” - subject

Acts 17:33

I’ve often wondered why that one line was there. You know why it’s there? Teaching the greatness of God’s Word in the greatest pagan city of all time; greatest city of all idols, where the law is, that if you introduce any other god, than the gods we’ve got, you get executed: he walked out a free man. That’s why the verse is there.

“from among them” - out of the midst of them

I told you he was standing on a *dais* surrounded on all sides by the great intellects of all time at that age. He presented the greatness of the truth of God’s Word and walked out.

Acts 17:34

“Howbeit” - but

“clave unto him” - followed him out

“and believed” - they were men who believed what he taught. How many times did he speak at Mars Hill? Those that hunger and thirst after righteousness eat, the rest just talk about it. They tell you how hungry they are but they never eat. If you’re hungry, you eat if it’s made available. They ate.

“Dionysius the Areopagite” - one of the council; one of the Athenian assembly, got converted.

“a woman named Damaris” - a very prominent woman

Lamsa translates it:

“one of them was Dionysius, one of the judges of Areopagus and another, a woman named Damaris and others with them.”

There is no record that Paul stayed in the city after that. As a matter of fact, after these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth; left the poor church just by itself.

This idea that permeates people’s heads so many times, that you have to have a top leader in a community to keep it going, is just so much hog wash. It’s wonderful if you’ve got a top leader, what are you going to do if you don’t have any leader? It’s still God’s Word. Why Paul didn’t stay there and build up the body and appoint an elder? Don’t ask me, I don’t know. All I know is he didn’t do it. And yet he taught the Word, people got converted. Maybe the judge, the Areopagite, believed God big enough on that one meeting and said, “I’ll stand for that and I’ll keep the body, the household, together.” It’s quite a record isn’t it?

I made the following notes going through this that I just quickly want to share regarding what I see as God doing throughout this whole section:

In verse 24: He is the Creator
He is the Lord of heaven and earth
He is a God who dwelleth not in temples man made

In verse 25: He’s not worshipped by man’s hands
Universal providence

In verse 26: Made all men of one blood
Times, before; appointed seasons and set limits to the age of man; in other words, planned the ages.

In verse 27: God provided salvation
His omnipresence

In verse 28: The source of all light.

In verse 30: Revelation made known
Repentance

In verse 31: Assured judgment of righteousness
Jesus Christ the judge
That God via the resurrection guarantees justice

All of that I have seen in Acts 17 in the great sermon that was preached that day by a man of God called Paul in the most difficult city that any man could go to. That is our God: Same God today, same Word. That’s why I said when I began, any man teaching this has to be

tremendously humbled, because no man is qualified to teach the greatness of that Word, it's just so fantastically fantastic. You can work, and work, and work and yet things escape you because of the greatness of the divine revelation in the record. But again I've done my best and that's all a man can do.