

The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

Introductory Lesson

Acts 17:16-34

Background

The book of Acts was written by a physician named Luke, probably around 60-62 AD. Acts is an historical narrative, or story, that picks up where the Gospel of Luke leaves off, and traces the rise and spread of the early Christian church. In Acts 17 we see a snapshot of the life of the Apostle Paul. Paul had been a Jew who was so devout in his faith that he actually persecuted and killed Christians. But one day Jesus, who had already lived on earth, been crucified and resurrected, appeared to Paul in person while Paul was walking down the road (see Acts 9). The encounter was so powerful that Paul became not only a Christian, but also the greatest Christian missionary who has ever lived. Luke was a close friend of Paul's who often traveled on his missionary trips with him. The events of Acts 17 take place in Athens, Greece, the intellectual capital of the world at the time.

Read Acts 17:16-34

In this passage, Paul stands up in the meeting of the Areopagus and makes known the "unknown god". What facts does he emphasize about God in vv. 24-27?

v.24 God created the whole world

v.24 He is the Lord, or Ruler, of Heaven and Earth

v.25 He doesn't need anything we, as humans, can give Him

v.25 He is the source of all life

v.26 He determined exactly when and where every person would live

v.27 God desires people to seek Him

v.27 He is not far from us

***Ask the members of your group which of these is most meaningful to them and why.*

Notice how many times Paul uses words like "all", "every" and "everything". What do you think is the significance of this?

How does God make Himself known today?

The key answer here that we want to get across is "from His word, the Bible"—but he does also make Himself known through nature, and expresses Himself through the lives of Spirit-filled Christians

Paul's statements certainly challenged the Athenians' view of God. (Some further background: the Epicureans' main goal in life was seeking pleasure, and the Stoics emphasized rational thought and self-sufficiency.) How does the Bible, particularly the above passage, challenge today's misconceptions about God?

The whole issue of creationism—People think they run their own lives and don't have to answer to anyone—Many think that God doesn't really care about the day in/day out of our lives—He seems distant—Humanistic thought (that man is the highest being)—etc.

In vv. 29-31, Paul was obviously concerned that people would not worship idols, but instead worship the one true God, "the God who is". Today in America, we wouldn't usually form idols out of "gold or silver or stone" (v.29), but we can still worship other people or things above God. What are some of the things we "idolize" above God?

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Paul explains that God doesn't want people to worship idols, but instead "He commands all people to repent" (v. 30). What does the word "repent" mean?

Some dictionary definitions: "to feel regretful for past conduct", "to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life", "to change one's mind"

It's the idea that where we once thought that WE were right, we now see that GOD was right and we were wrong.

Who is "the man" that Paul writes about in v. 31?

Jesus Christ

How does it make you feel that one day God will "judge the world with justice" (v.31)? When God judges you, will you be declared "guilty" or "innocent"?

We learn from other passages in the Bible (Romans 3:21-26; Hebrews 9:26-28) that Jesus is not only the man who will justly judge us as "guilty", but He will also serve our sentence (of death) in our place if we will only trust in Him. How does that make you feel?

The main point that we want to get across here is that God has to be totally JUST (and we're guilty sinners deserving punishment), and so it wouldn't be right for Him to just "let us off the hook". But because He is also totally LOVING, He sent His Son Jesus to serve our punishment for us. This way God doesn't have to be a wimp, but He can be loving at the same time.

***The end of this lesson has probably focused more on God's JUSTICE, but we want everyone one to know God is LOVE, too. Let everyone know that next week we'll be focusing in on God's LOVE.*

***Also explain to them that the passages in the right column and the questions below are for their own personal study to get to know God better (especially some of the aspects of Him we looked at today).*

Questions For Personal Reflection:

1. Reread Acts 17:32-34. When you hear about the resurrection of Jesus, are you:
 - 1) One who sneers?
 - 2) One who wants to hear more on the subject?
 - 3) One who believes and follows?
 - 4)
2. Are you trusting in yourself to be declared "innocent" when God judges you, or are you trusting in Jesus Christ to be your substitute?
3. What do you need to repent of? Is there sin in your life you need to turn from?
4. Do you know God well enough that if the "leading philosophers" of our day—say, your professors--asked you to explain Him, you could?
5. What can you do this week to get to know "the God who is" better?
6. Go back this week and look at Acts 17:24-27 and reflect on "the God who is".

Passages For Further Study:

Job 38-41
Colossians 1:13-23
John 1:1-5
Hebrews 9:26-28
Romans 3:21-26; 5:6-8