

Paul's Discourse at the Areopagus

Acts 17:22-31 • Areopagus, Athens, Greece • 49-50 AD

THE UNKNOWN GOD

²² So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in all respects.

²³ For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD."

Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything that is in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made by hands;

TRANSCENDANCE & SELF-SUFFICIENCY OF GOD

²⁵ "nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;

PROVIDENCE OF GOD OVER HUMANITY

²⁶ "and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,

NATURAL REVELATION OF GOD

²⁷ "that they would seek God, if perhaps they might feel around for Him and find Him,

IMMANENCE OF GOD (SUPPORT FROM EPIMENIDES & ARATUS)

"though He is not far from each one of us;

²⁸ for 'in Him we live and move and exist', as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His descendants.'

THE FOLLY OF IDOLATRY

²⁹ "Therefore, since we are the descendants of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by human skill and thought.

CALL TO REPENTANCE

³⁰ "So having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now proclaiming to mankind that all people everywhere are to repent,

WARNING OF JUDGEMENT

³¹ "because He has set a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed,

EVIDENCE OF RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

"having furnished proof to all people by raising Him from the dead."

This sermon is likely a summary. Being invited/asked/directed to speak at the Areopagus would have required the speaker to not only make his case but do so with rhetorical skill. Being a city of people wholly focused on the sharing of ideas, a high standard was set for an advocate of any new idea. While Paul was no amateur speaker—likely having been one of 500 students Gamliel immersed in Greek literature for the sake of dealing with Roman government—employing as much of his rhetorical skills as possible for this paramount opportunity, he would not have been as practiced at nor as passionate about the skill of rhetoric as the audience was. His speech would have been as critiqued on its content (philosophy) as on its delivery (rhetoric). After this experience, Paul gives up on the use of rhetoric, as we can see in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1-4), recalling how it was he came to them after leaving Athens.

Sermon Does Not Mention: Israel; the Jewish people; Messianic Kingdom; Yeshua, by name; any biblical references; Hell/condemnation (or endorsement) of sin

Sermon Does Incorporate: Acknowledgement of their religious sensitivities; reference to their objects of worship; quotes from their pagan poets (Epimenides, Aratus); and limited rhetorical mechanisms