

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
Fourth Quarter 2023: *God's Mission—My Mission*
Lesson 10 “Mission to the Unreached: Part 1”

Read for this week's study

Acts 17; 1 Corinthians 2:2; Romans 1:18–25.

Memory Text

“ ‘The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands’ ” (Acts 17:24, NIV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. A Hebrew in Athens
- III. Paul in the Areopagus
- IV. Paul and the Unknown God
- V. Introducing a New God
- VI. Crossing a Line
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “Paul could have worked just with the ‘God-fearing’ Gentiles, whose worldview already had undergone substantial change. [...] But, while in Athens, a city famous for its philosophy, Paul sought to reach the people there as well. Many of these had a radically different background and worldview from that of the Hebrews and their sacred history, which formed the foundation of the faith that Paul wanted to teach the Athenians. How did Paul go about seeking to reach these people, and what can we learn from his attempts?” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. How did Paul feel in Athens, a city famous for its analytical thinking, intellectual freedom, democracy and humanism; philosophy and education, culture and myths, but also immorality and paganism (Acts 17:16-21)? (Sunday's lesson) Paul – just as the whole of Christianity – is facing a new historical situation. What should he do? How would his Old Testament heroes approach this? How would Joshua, Gideon or Elijah react?

3. Paul is taken to the Areopagus, a part of the city where legal and religious matters were adjudicated. He does not seem to be facing any kind of legal trial (Acts 17:18-21). (Monday's lesson) Though he can feel some pressure from the group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers ("What is this babbler trying to say?"), they still give him and his "new doctrine" a fair hearing. What does that teach us about the work of the Holy Spirit *around* us?
4. Notice how Paul is able to turn his frustration (17:16) into a compliment (17:22)! (Tuesday's lesson) That requires a mature person who can be constructive, in spite of his emotional distraught state. "The altar to an unknown god" allows Paul to talk about his God so naturally he can introduce God as soon as his third sentence! With all this he effectively communicates to his audience: "I have spent time studying you, thinking about you, I know something about you. I know to whom I am speaking today. I do not use the same old speech for you that I previously prepared for the Jews or for somebody else."
5. How does Paul introduce the new God to the Athenians (17:23-29)? (Wednesday's lesson) How many times does Paul quote the Scripture in his speech? Sure, his speech is steeped in biblical concepts, but he will not directly quote the Scripture even once! He doesn't include any quotations from Moses, the prophets or use any Hebrew terms. How did Paul proclaim the highest God to the Greek philosophers in a way that appealed to their knowledge, understanding and imagination?
6. How does Paul introduce the good news in his speech (17:30-31)? (Thursday's lesson) Paul summed up the whole Gospel in two sentences! He did not speak about sin, repentance, grace, yet all those concepts including the aspect of responsibility and judgement are there. But he said it in a very simple and acceptable manner. The Gospel is all about Jesus. But Paul does not speak about Jesus as a Hebrew rabbi named Jehoshua. He is a "man God has appointed and resurrected from the dead." This is Paul's contextual translation of Jesus for Athens in the 1st century AD. Paul does not even mention Jesus' name (cf. Acts 4:12)!
7. To speak the language of your listeners means more than using their terms. It means to understand the essence of their thinking, their reality, and not only using their vocabulary! The world today does not think in terms of sin, repentance, justification, salvation, or glorification. The world rarely uses those terms at all! (And Paul did not use them either in his speech in Athens.)
8. Paul is willing to think and speak in such a way as to connect with his philosophically and spiritually multifaceted audience. He will use whatever it takes – even quoting pagan Greek poets. Paul discerned as the early church did too – that if we want to succeed in addressing people and fulfilling the mission that we received from Jesus, we need to understand the world in which we are preaching and living.
9. God longs to be introduced in such a way that people can understand Him. God longs for people to connect with Him. If we connect with the people in a new and fresh way, we can be part of that process. If we only stick with what worked in the past, we make it more difficult for God to get through to the people. The Word of

God is still capable of reaching each person of this world in a new and meaningful way. But for that to happen, we need to realize that God's Word has not finished with Gideon, Elijah, nor even with Paul, or EGW! All of us have a role to play in listening, understanding and passing it on.

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Well, what do you think of Paul? He devoted himself to evangelism. And he arrives in Athens. And he appears on Mars Hill, and he delivers a very erudite presentation. And he shows that he really knows his Greek. And you'd have to do that in Athens, wouldn't you? So Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said, "Men of Athens, I perceive," now, which version shall we use? "that in all things ye are most superstitious." One of the fundamental principles one learns in public speaking is, that you do not antagonize your audience in the first sentence if you hope to persuade them later on. And to say they were "very superstitious" in the modern idiom would not be polite. Well, he didn't. What he said in Greek was, "Oh men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are," the longest word in the Greek New Testament, *deisidaimonesterous*. That's all one word and it means "very religious."

That's 17:22. It's a compliment. He didn't insult his audience.

He was very winsome. I mean, this is after Damascus road, remember. "Oh, Athenians," he said, "I see that you are very religious." And then he goes on to explain how very religious they were. He said, "Why, as I passed through your city, I found representations of all the gods I've ever heard of. That's how religious you are. I even found an altar to the unknown god." Now, that's being very, very religious! "Now it so happens that I know this unknown god, and I come to tell you about Him." Now, there's one skillful introduction to a public presentation! He complimented them. He turned their idolatry into a compliment. Isn't that the only way to go? And then he gave this speech, and he quoted the right authors, the philosophers and the poets, and he won a few at the end, didn't he?

But some of them said, 'Well, that's very interesting. We'll give that study and see you here another day.' Which is what often happens after deeply philosophical and theological presentations. And Paul said, "I did win a few, but I don't think that's the best way." Though Ellen White says, look at him meet philosophy with philosophy, logic with logic. She expresses admiration for Paul in this Mars Hill presentation. But good as it was, Paul says, "I'm not going to do it that way again. From now on I'll preach nothing but Christ and Him crucified." And one of the first examples of that will be Romans, next time. What does he mean when he says, "I'll preach Christ and Him crucified?" A narrower message, or a more focused message? Using different methods. He doesn't quote poets and philosophers much anymore. And I just wonder

what this says about our public presentations at the present time. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Acts, recorded April 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/59MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/60MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Further Study with Ellen White

The gospel invitation is not to be narrowed down and presented only to a select few, who, we suppose, will do us honor if they accept it. The message is to be given to all. When God blesses His children, it is not alone for their own sake, but for the world's sake. As He bestows His gifts on us, it is that we may multiply them by imparting. {MH 102.1}

The promise of the Holy Spirit is not limited to any age or to any race. Christ declared that the divine influence of His Spirit was to be with His followers unto the end. From the Day of Pentecost to the present time, the Comforter has been sent to all who have yielded themselves fully to the Lord and to His service. To all who have accepted Christ as a personal Saviour, the Holy Spirit has come as a counselor, sanctifier, guide, and witness. The more closely believers have walked with God, the more clearly and powerfully have they testified of their Redeemer's love and of His saving grace. The men and women who through the long centuries of persecution and trial enjoyed a large measure of the presence of the Spirit in their lives, have stood as signs and wonders in the world. Before angels and men they have revealed the transforming power of redeeming love. {AA 49.2}

God gives light to those who love light. He imparts truth to those who search for truth as for something of most precious value in order that they may impart light to those who are in the valley and the shadow of death. {TMK 217.5}

Jesus sought an avenue to every heart. By using a variety of illustrations, He not only presented truth in its different phases, but appealed to the different hearers. Their interest was aroused by figures drawn from the surroundings of their daily life. None who listened to the Saviour could feel that they were neglected or forgotten. The humblest, the most sinful, heard in His teaching a voice that spoke to them in sympathy and tenderness. {COL 21.2}

In Christ's parable teaching the same principle is seen as in His own mission to the world. That we might become acquainted with His divine character and life, Christ took our nature and dwelt among us. Divinity was revealed in humanity; the invisible glory in the visible human form. Men could learn of the unknown through the known; heavenly things were revealed through the earthly; God was made manifest in the likeness of men. So it was in Christ's

teaching: the unknown was illustrated by the known; divine truths by earthly things with which the people were most familiar. {COL 17.1}

Christ did not deal in abstract theories, but in that which is essential to the development of character, that which will enlarge man's capacity for knowing God, and increase his efficiency to do good. He spoke to men of those truths that relate to the conduct of life, and that take hold upon eternity. {COL 23.1}

Instead of directing the people to study men's theories about God, His word, or His works, He taught them to behold Him, as manifested in His works, in His word, and by His providences. He brought their minds in contact with the mind of the Infinite. {Ed 81.2}

The people "were astonished at His teaching (R.V.), for His word was with power." Luke 4:32. Never before spoke one who had such power to awaken thought, to kindle aspiration, to arouse every capability of body, mind, and soul. {Ed 81.3}

Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, "Follow Me." {MH 143.3}

The prince of teachers, He sought access to the people by the pathway of their most familiar associations. He presented the truth in such a way that ever after it was to His hearers intertwined with their most hallowed recollections and sympathies. He taught in a way that made them feel the completeness of His identification with their interests and happiness. His instruction was so direct, His illustrations were so appropriate, His words so sympathetic and cheerful, that His hearers were charmed. The simplicity and earnestness with which He addressed the needy, hallowed every word. {MH 23.1}

Jesus taught by illustrations and parables drawn from nature and from the familiar events of everyday life. . . . In this way He associated natural things with spiritual, linking the things of nature and the life experience of His hearers with the sublime truths of the written word. And whenever afterward their eyes rested on the objects with which He has associated eternal truth, His lessons were repeated. {CT 140.1}

Christ came to preach the gospel to the poor. He reached the people where they were. He brought plain, simple truth to their comprehension. How simple his language! Even the poorest, the unlearned and ignorant, could understand him. Not one needed go to a dictionary to obtain the meaning of the high-sounding titles or words that fell from the lips of the greatest Teacher the world ever knew. While the priests, the rulers, and the expounders of the law were considering themselves as the only teachers of the people, he told these learned rabbis that they were both ignorant of the Scriptures and of the power of God. {RH, July 19, 1887 par. 13}

During His earthly ministry Christ began to break down the partition wall between Jew and Gentile, and to preach salvation to all mankind. Though He was a Jew, He mingled freely with the Samaritans, setting at nought the Pharisaic customs of the Jews with regard to this despised people. He slept under their roofs, ate at their tables, and taught in their streets. {AA 19.2}

The Saviour longed to unfold to His disciples the truth regarding the breaking down of the “middle wall of partition” between Israel and the other nations—the truth that “the Gentiles should be fellow heirs” with the Jews and “partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel.” Ephesians 2:14; 3:6. This truth was revealed in part at the time when He rewarded the faith of the centurion at Capernaum, and also when He preached the gospel to the inhabitants of Sychar. Still more plainly was it revealed on the occasion of His visit to Phoenicia, when He healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman. These experiences helped the disciples to understand that among those whom many regarded as unworthy of salvation, there were souls hungering for the light of truth. {AA 19.3}

Thus Christ sought to teach the disciples the truth that in God’s kingdom there are no territorial lines, no caste, no aristocracy; that they must go to all nations, bearing to them the message of a Saviour’s love. {AA 20.1}

The angels of glory find their joy in giving,—giving love and tireless watchcare to souls that are fallen and unholy. Heavenly beings woo the hearts of men; they bring to this dark world light from the courts above; by gentle and patient ministry they move upon the human spirit, to bring the lost into a fellowship with Christ which is even closer than they themselves can know. {DA 21.1}

It is a law of the mind that it gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is trained to dwell. If occupied with commonplace matters only, it will become dwarfed and enfeebled. If never required to grapple with difficult problems, it will after a time almost lose the power of growth. As an educating power the Bible is without a rival. In the word of God the mind finds subject for the deepest thought, the loftiest aspiration. The Bible is the most instructive history that men possess. It came fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, and a divine hand has preserved its purity through all the ages. . . . Here the great problems of duty and destiny are unfolded. The curtain that separates the visible from the invisible world is lifted, and we behold the conflict of the opposing forces of good and evil, from the first entrance of sin to the final triumph of righteousness and truth; and all is but a revelation of the character of God. In the reverent contemplation of the truths presented in His word the mind of the student is brought into communion with the infinite mind. Such a study will not only refine and ennoble the character, but it cannot fail to expand and invigorate the mental powers. {PP 596.2}

All things tell of His tender, fatherly care and of His desire to make His children happy. {MH 412.1}

From the beginning it has been Satan's studied plan to cause men to forget God, that he might secure them to himself. Hence he has sought to misrepresent the character of God, to lead men to cherish a false conception of Him. The Creator has been presented to their minds as clothed with the attributes of the prince of evil himself,—as arbitrary, severe, and unforgiving,—that He might be feared, shunned, and even hated by men. Satan hoped to so confuse the minds of those whom he had deceived that they would put God out of their knowledge. Then he would obliterate the divine image in man and impress his own likeness upon the soul; he would imbue men with his own spirit and make them captives according to his will. {5T 738.1}

So in Israel, man's teaching had been put in the place of God's. Not only the things of nature, but the sacrificial service and the Scriptures themselves—all given to reveal God—were so perverted that they became the means of concealing Him. {COL 18.2}

Christ sought to remove that which obscured the truth. The veil that sin has cast over the face of nature, He came to draw aside, bringing to view the spiritual glory that all things were created to reflect. His words placed the teachings of nature as well as of the Bible in a new aspect, and made them a new revelation. {COL 18.3}

Christ imbues men with the attributes of God. He builds up the human character after the similitude of the divine character, a goodly fabric of spiritual strength and beauty. {DA 762.2}

God speaks to us in nature. It is His voice we hear as we gaze upon the beauty and richness of the natural world. We view His glory in the beautiful things His hand has made. We stand and behold His works without a veil between. God has given us these things that in beholding the works of His hands, we may learn of Him. {TDG 241.2}

God has given us these precious things as an expression of His love. The Lord is a lover of the beautiful, and to please and gratify us He has spread before us the beauties of nature, even as an earthly parent seeks to place beautiful things before the children that he loves. The Lord is always pleased to see us happy. Sinful as it is with all its imperfections, the Lord has lavished upon this earth the useful and the beautiful. The beautiful tinted flowers tell of His tenderness and love. They have a language of their own, reminding us of the Giver. {TDG 241.3}

We may look up through nature to nature's God. In the beautiful lofty trees, the shrubs, the flowers, God reveals His character. {TDG 241.4}

The Bible shows us God in His high and holy place, not in a state of inactivity, not in silence and solitude, but surrounded by ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of holy beings, all waiting to do His will. Through these messengers He is in active communication with every part of His dominion. By His Spirit He is everywhere present. Through the agency of His Spirit and His angels He ministers to the children of men. {MH 417.2}

The God of heaven is constantly at work. It is by His power that vegetation is caused to flourish, that every leaf appears and every flower blooms. Every drop of rain or flake of snow, every spire of grass, every leaf and flower and shrub, testifies of God. These little things so common around us teach the lesson that nothing is beneath the notice of the infinite God, nothing is too small for His attention. {8T 260.1}

There may be some things here that we do not understand. Some things in the Bible may appear to us mysterious, because they are beyond our finite comprehension. But as our Saviour leads us by the living waters, He will make clear to our minds that which was not before clearly understood. {Mar 317.7}

Peace comes with dependence on divine power. As fast as the soul resolves to act in accordance with the light given, the Holy Spirit gives more light and strength. {TM 518.1}

The minds of all who make the Word of God their study will enlarge. Far more than any other study its influence is calculated to increase the powers of comprehension and endow every faculty with a new power. It brings the mind in contact with broad, ennobling principles of truth. It brings all heaven into close connection with human minds, imparting wisdom and knowledge and understanding. {OHC 35.4}

The wisest of his hearers were astonished as they listened to his reasoning. He showed himself familiar with their works of art, their literature, and their religion. {AA 237.2}

The people were carried away with admiration for Paul's earnest and logical presentation of the attributes of the true God – of His creative power and the existence of His overruling providence. {AA 238.1}

Paul's words contain a treasure of knowledge for the church. He was in a position where he might easily have said that which would have irritated his proud listeners and brought himself into difficulty. Had his oration been a direct attack upon their gods and the great men of the city, he would have been in danger of meeting the fate of Socrates. But with a tact born of divine love, he carefully drew their minds away from heathen deities, by revealing to them the true God, who was to them unknown. {AA 241.1}