

K.E.Y. Bible Study

Description: K.E.Y. Bible Study introduces the essential biblical narratives, concepts, and themes, and teaches the student how to apply the message of the Bible to daily living. Each teaching session is self-contained, which allows participants to join in the study at any time during the five years.

Purpose: To teach the most significant events, passages, and doctrines of the Bible in a manner and using methods which encourages and empowers the student to:

Keep the faith that we have received

Be Equipped to serve the Body of Christ

Become Yoked, or connect, with others for the purpose of ministry

Preaching Seminar 101 Acts 17:16-34 February 24, 2016

General Background

Today, the United States is a pluralistic culture. As a “melting pot” nation, the United States has always been inclined to welcome and tolerate a variety of cultures. Yet, for the most part, it has been a culture that was heavily built on a western European model. This means that while other cultures and religions were tolerated, the majority or prevailing culture was based on Christianity. Now, however, the informal and formal rules of the culture are becoming less and less Christian-based with no real prevailing culture. While as Christians we may find this a complication in our lives, we should not despair. The rapid growth of the church in the Book of Acts occurred in a pluralistic society. If we are going to evangelize and influence our culture for Christ, we need to know how to communicate in a society in which our views are no longer the majority. In K.E.Y. Bible Study this week, we study an example of a sermon that was preached to people who had not been exposed to Christian values or to a Christian worldview. This passage is not only an example of excellent evangelistic preaching, but it provides a model for us to use in witnessing about our relationship with Jesus.

Who

- **God**, who is revealed in Jesus, the Christ.
- **Paul** was a traveling church planter who grew up a strict Jew. However, he was reared in Tarsus, a non-Jewish city, which is 900 miles from Jerusalem by road (by air, over 355 miles).

When

These events occurred in approximately 50 A.D.

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Where

These events occurred in Athens, which had once been considered the cultural center of Greece. Although by this time the city had been in decline for over 150 years, it was still a place of ideas. Many pagan religions were practiced there because it would have prided itself in its tolerance. The pagan temples and idols would have been very visible in the city. The Roman Empire gave the city significant political freedom, and the Roman leaders were not deeply involved in the life of Athens. By the time Paul visited the city, the population was probably more than 10,000.

What Happened

Acts 17:16-17: Paul was concerned about the level of idolatry.

Paul had been forced to leave Thessalonica and Berea and had been escorted to Athens where he was waiting for Timothy and Silas, who continued to preach in Berea. There is no evidence that Paul planned to preach there, but he was so repulsed by the idols in the city that he went to the synagogues and the market place and began a dialogue with citizens. While speaking in the synagogues, he would have appealed to the Old Testament. However, in the market place, there would have been little respect for or understanding of the Old Testament.

Acts 17:18-21: Paul's teaching raised the curiosity of the people, so they invited him to the Areopagus.

- Both the Epicureans and the Stoics began to question and debate Paul. Epicureans believed the goal of life was to experience pleasure since there was no afterlife. The Stoics focused on living in harmony with nature and saw themselves as logical and self-sufficient. They both reacted to the good news of the resurrected Jesus.
- The Areopagus was where the city administrators had hearings. This was not just a meeting to satisfy the curiosity of the participants. It was probably to determine if they should continue to allow Paul to discuss his ideas with the people. Although tolerant of old religions, apparently they could be intolerant of new thought.

Acts 17:22-31: Paul appealed to their interests. Then, he connected them to the truth about God who is revealed in Jesus.

- v. 22: Paul acknowledged their interest in many idols. (Note: He did not begin with condemnation.)
- v. 23: He mentioned an altar to an unknown god. From extra-biblical sources, we know there were probably several such altars to unknown gods. If you were polytheistic, you would not want to leave out gods that you had not encountered.

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- v. 24: Paul introduced the true and living God by saying this God created everything but does not live in that which is created by human hands.
- v. 25: He said this God is not served by humanity; rather, He gives life to humanity. This would have been a radical thought. The idea of God meeting the needs of humanity was a foreign concept because they saw their gods as making demands of humanity rather than giving to humanity.
- v. 26: This God created all people and all people had the same source of being. The native Athenians believed they had originated separately from other people and were not like everyone else. He told the story of creation in terms of principles rather than through the details.
- v. 27: Paul described God as being near (the immanence of God).
- v. 28: All human existence is dependent on God. This is not the story of a God who created us and forgot us.
- v. 29: God is not like other objects or created things in the world. This is a strong statement showing the folly of worshipping objects or nature. Christians do not worship nature; instead, we worship the One who created nature. Today there are a growing number of people who see nature as worthy of worship; therefore, it might be wise for Christians to speak of “creation” rather than “nature.”
- v. 30: Paul announced that God would hold all humanity accountable and all people are to repent.
- v. 31: Jesus’ resurrection is the evidence that we are accountable to Him.

Acts 17:32-33: There was a mixed response to Paul’s teaching.

- v. 32: When Paul spoke of the resurrection of Jesus, some rejected it while others were interested and wanted to know more. The resurrection is a defining event. If it is true, then the Christian faith is a viable explanation of how people are to be reconciled to God. But if it is not true, then there is no need to believe any part of it. Most Greeks (with the exception of the Epicureans) believed in the immortality of the soul but did not believe in the resurrection of the body. Some rejected, some were interested and wanted more information, and some believed. These responses remind us of the parable of the sower.
- v. 33-34: Paul left the meeting, and he apparently continued the conversation with those who were interested. Some became believers, and Luke listed two of them by name. From extra-biblical sources, we learn that Dionysius became a Christian leader. It is possible that Theophilus, to whom Acts was addressed, may have heard of him.

K.E.Y Truth and Application

We are to speak the truth about God, who is revealed through Jesus, to people at the level of their understanding.

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