
ACTS 17 - THE UNKNOWN GOD



Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; "for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: **"TO THE UNKNOWN GOD"**.

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. "Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, "so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; **"for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'**

"Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, "because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." So Paul departed from among them.

However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Acts 17:22-18:17 (NKJV)

Altars have been found in both ancient Greece and Rome dedicated to unknown gods. For example Rome gave an order to restore the altar illustrated below which must have fallen into a state of disrepair. The altar was not dedicated to any one particular Roman god as was the majority of their altars. The inscription reads: "Whether to a god or goddess / Sacred C Sextius/son of Praetor C.F. Calvinus/ by order of the senate/ has restored it"



Altar found on Palatine Hill in 1820 states:
"Whether to a god or goddess"

Confirmation of these altars in Greece also come from two early writers, Pausanius in his account entitled "Description of Greece" as well as Philostratus in his work "Appolonius of Tyana". They both refer to "altars to an unknown god"

Paul also quoted to the Greeks two of their famous philosophers in order to point them to Christ, the true God. Their names were Aratus and Epimenides.

Aratus in his work entitled Phaenomena stated: "Let us begin with Zeus (the Greeks believed Zeus was the top god), whom we mortals never leave unspoken. For every street, every market-place is filled with Zeus. Even the sea and the harbors are full of his deity. Everywhere, everyone is indebted to Zeus. **For we are indeed his offspring.**

Phaenomena 1-5

You see the apostle Paul was trying to convey to them that the unknown God was not Zeus but the true God, Jesus Christ. The true God who created all things and every man.

The second philosopher Paul quoted was Epimenides who stated in his work entitled Cretica the following:

"They fashioned a tomb for thee. O holy and high one. . . . But thou art not dead, thou livest and abidest forever. For in thee we live and move and have our being."

Here Paul uses the poet's words to introduce the Greeks to the death and resurrection of the true God, Jesus Christ.

The historical account of Epimenides himself would also tie in nicely with presenting Christ to the Greeks for the first time. You see in the 6th century

B.C., when the poet Epimenides lived, there was a plague which went throughout all Greece. The Greeks thought that they must have offended one of their gods, so they began offering sacrifices on altars to all their various false gods. When nothing worked they figured there must be a God who they didn't know about whom they must somehow appease. So Epimenides came up with a plan. He released hungry sheep into the countryside and instructed men to follow the sheep to see where they would lie down. He believed that since hungry sheep would not naturally lie down but continue to graze, if the sheep were to lie down it would be a sign from God that this place was sacred. At each spot, where the sheep tired and layed down, the Athenians built an altar and sacrificed the sheep on it. Afterward it is believed the plague stopped which they attributed to this unknown God accepting the sacrifice.



The Greek writer by the name of Diogenes Laurantius mentions these altars. He writes: "Altars may be found all over Attica which have no names inscribed upon them, which are left as memorials to this atonement."

THE UNKNOWN GOD IS MADE KNOWN

"No one has ever seen God, but God One and Only, who is at the Fathers side, **He has made him known to us.**" John 1:18

THE MYSTERY IS MADE KNOWN

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, **having made known to us the mystery of His will**, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; in Him.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." Ephesians 1:4-14 (NKJV)

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the **revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations**, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith; to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.

Romans 16:25-27 (NKJV)

Sources:

The Holy Bible, Author: The Lord God

Scripture taken from the New King James Version unless noted.

In 1820 an inscription was found on Palatine Hill : "Whether to a god or goddess / Sacred C Sextius/son of Praetor C.F. Calvinus/ by order of the senate/ has restored it"

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Si_deus_si_dea

"They fashioned a tomb for thee. O holy and high one. The Cretens, always liars,evil beasts, idle bellies. But thou art not dead, thou livest and abidest forever. For in thee we live and move and have our being." Epimenides Cretica approx 600 B.C.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epimenides_paradox

"The Cretens, always liars,evil beasts, idle bellies." Also quoted by Paul in Titus 1:12

Aratus "Phaenomena 1-5": "Let us begin with Zeus, whom we mortals never leave unspoken. For every street , every market-place is filled with Zeus. Even the sea and the harbors are full of his deity. Everywhere, everyone is indebted to Zeus. For we are indeed are his offspring. <http://spindleworks.com/library/rfaber/aratus.htm>

Aratus (315-240 B.C), also Cleanthes (331-333) stated "we are his offspring."

<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/acts.pdf>

"The Book of Acts" F.F Bruce ISBN 0-0828-2505-2 pg.336
Diogenes Laertius, who tells (Lives of Philosophers 1.110) how the Athenians once, during a pestilence, sent for Epimenides, a wise man of Crete (C. 600 B.C.) Who advised them to release black and white sheep from the Areopagus and then, on the spot where each lay down, to build and sacrifice on that altar the sheep. He also stated that "Anonymous altars (altars to unnamed gods) might be seen throughout all Attica"

The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers by Diogenes Laertius, Translated by C.D. Yonge Book1. "Life of Epimenides" Paragraph III Epimenides Account of Athenian altars built without names as memorials to the sacrifice during the plague to appease the unknown God.
[Http://classicpersuasion.org/pw/diogenes/dlepimenides.htm](http://classicpersuasion.org/pw/diogenes/dlepimenides.htm)

Book Title: A People for His Name - A Church Bases Missions Strategy by Paul A. Beals pg 32
also [http://www.wikinfo.org/index.php/Epimenides:](http://www.wikinfo.org/index.php/Epimenides)

Diogenes Laertius : "Altars may be found all over Attica which have no names inscribed upon them, which are left as memorials to the atonement."

Pausanias "Description of Greece vol 1, 1:4" as well as Philostratus "Appolonius of Tyana" both refer to "altars to an unknown god"

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Pen and Ink Illustration of the Palatine Hill Inscription mentioning "To a god or goddess" by John Argubright based upon photo: © copyright 2009; John Argubright

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