

NOON BIBLE STUDY: ACTS 17 (PART 2)

ACTS 17:16-21 - PAUL IN ATHENS

V. 18, 21 - WHY PAUL WAS INVITED TO SPEAK

EPICUREANISM - A PHILOSOPHY ADVANCED BY EPICURUS THAT CONSIDERED HAPPINESS, OR THE AVOIDANCE OF PAIN AND EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE, TO BE THE HIGHEST GOOD AND THAT ADVOCATED THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURES THAT CAN BE ENJOYED IN MODERATION. BELIEVED THAT IF THE GODS DID EXIST, THEY WERE VERY FAR AWAY FROM US.



STOICISM - AN ANCIENT GREEK SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY FOUNDED AT ATHENS BY ZENO OF CITIUM. THE SCHOOL TAUGHT THAT VIRTUE, THE HIGHEST GOOD, IS BASED ON KNOWLEDGE, AND THAT THE WISE LIVE IN HARMONY WITH THE DIVINE REASON (ALSO IDENTIFIED WITH FATE AND PROVIDENCE) THAT GOVERNS NATURE, AND ARE INDIFFERENT TO THE CHANGING EMOTIONS OF FORTUNE AND TO PLEASURE AND PAIN.

V. 18 - "PROCLAIMING JESUS & RESURRECTION" WOULD HAVE BEEN AN ODD CONCEPT FOR THE LEADING THINKERS OF GREECE/ATHENS. GREEK THOUGHT WAS ROOTED IN "DUALISM", SOMETHING PLATO & ARISTOTLE WOULD DEVELOP. "MATTER" (CREATION, BODY, ETC) IS BAD, "SPIRIT" (LIFE, "SOUL", ETC) IS GOOD.

CHARGE: "PROCLAIMING STRANGE DEITIES" - CP. SOCRATES: "SOCRATES IS GUILTY OF CRIME IN REFUSING TO RECOGNIZE THE GODS ACKNOWLEDGED BY THE STATE, AND IMPORTING STRANGE DIVINITIES OF HIS OWN; HE IS FURTHER GUILTY OF CORRUPTING THE YOUNG." - AS RECORDED BY XENOPHON, STUDENT OF SOCRATES WHO RECORDED DETAILS OF HIS TRIAL

GREEK VIEW OF DEATH:

"THE ANCIENT GREEK CONCEPTION OF THE AFTERLIFE AND THE CEREMONIES ASSOCIATED WITH BURIAL WERE ALREADY WELL ESTABLISHED BY THE SIXTH CENTURY B.C. IN THE ODYSSEY, HOMER DESCRIBES THE UNDERWORLD, DEEP BENEATH THE EARTH, WHERE HADES, THE BROTHER OF ZEUS AND POSEIDON, AND HIS WIFE, PERSEPHONE, REIGNED OVER COUNTLESS DRIFTING CROWDS OF SHADY FIGURES—THE "SHADES" OF ALL THOSE WHO HAD DIED. IT WAS NOT A HAPPY PLACE. INDEED, THE GHOST OF THE GREAT HERO ACHILLES TOLD ODYSSEUS THAT HE WOULD RATHER BE A POOR SERF ON EARTH THAN LORD OF ALL THE DEAD IN THE UNDERWORLD (ODYSSEY, 11.489—91).

THE GREEKS BELIEVED THAT AT THE MOMENT OF DEATH THE PSYCHE, OR SPIRIT OF THE DEAD, LEFT THE BODY AS A LITTLE BREATH OR PUFF OF WIND. THE DECEASED WAS THEN PREPARED FOR BURIAL ACCORDING TO THE TIME-HONORED RITUALS. ANCIENT LITERARY

SOURCES EMPHASIZE THE NECESSITY OF A PROPER BURIAL AND REFER TO THE OMISSION OF BURIAL RITES AS AN INSULT TO HUMAN DIGNITY (ILIAD, 23.71). (SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF GREEK AND ROMAN ART. "DEATH, BURIAL, AND THE AFTERLIFE IN ANCIENT GREECE". IN HEILBRUNN TIMELINE OF ART HISTORY. NEW YORK: THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART)

"PLATO'S MOST FAR-REACHING OBSERVATIONS IN TERMS OF THEIR RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS ARE THE FOLLOWING DECLARATIONS. (1) THE SOUL IS A DIVINE CREATION. (2) THE SOUL IS IMMORTAL (3) THE BODY AND THE SOUL ARE SEPARATE ENTITIES. (4) ALL SOULS PRE-EXISTED IN OTHER BODIES. (5) THE SOUL IS PERFECT BUT THAT PERFECTION IS CONTAMINATED BY HAVING TO BE ENCASED IN THE BODY.

PUT BLUNTLY, PLATO, MORE THAN ANY OTHER HISTORICAL FIGURE PRIOR TO HIS TIME, INTRODUCED THE WORLD TO FULL-FLEDGED, MIND/BODY DUALISM. TWO ENTITIES: THE BODY AND THE SOUL. BODIES COME AND GO. THEY ARE BORN AND THEN THEY DIE. BUT SOULS ARE IMMORTAL. SOULS FALL INTO BODIES AT BIRTH AND MOVE INTO OTHER BODIES WHEN THE BODY ENCASEMENT DIES. ACCORDING TO SOME OF PLATO'S MUSINGS (E.G. PHAEDO), THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A SOUL AND THE BODY IT OCCUPIES IS FREQUENTLY STRAINED. IN GENERAL, SOULS DO NOT LIKE BEING IN BODIES, IN PART BECAUSE THEY ARE CONTAMINATED BY THEM, AND IN PART BECAUSE THEY WOULD MUCH RATHER BE FREE. — (SOURCE: "A PARTIAL HISTORY OF AFTERLIFE BELIEFS", DR. DANIEL M. OGILVIE, SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM AT RUTGERS UNIVERSITY)

BIBLICAL VIEW: RESURRECTION (FOUNDATIONAL BELIEF OF CHRISTIAN FAITH)

DANIEL 12:2 - "MANY OF THOSE WHO SLEEP IN THE DUST OF THE GROUND WILL AWAKE, THESE TO EVERLASTING LIFE, BUT THE OTHERS TO DISGRACE AND EVERLASTING CONTEMPT.

JOHN 5:25-29 - JESUS' TEACHING ON DEATH AND RESURRECTION

LUKE 24:36-44 - JESUS' RESURRECTION APPEARANCE

1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-8, 12-23 - PAUL'S VIEW OF RESURRECTION

"RESURRECTION" 11X IN ACTS

ACTS 17:22-31 - PAUL'S MESSAGE TO AREOPAGUS

UNKNOWN GOD - IN ADDITION TO THE TWELVE MAIN GODS AND THE INNUMERABLE LESSER DEITIES, ANCIENT GREEKS WORSHIPPED A DEITY THEY CALLED "AGNOSTOS THEOS", THAT IS: "UNKNOWN GOD". IN ATHENS, THERE WAS A TEMPLE SPECIFICALLY DEDICATED TO THAT GOD AND VERY OFTEN ATHENIANS WOULD SWEAR "IN THE NAME OF THE UNKNOWN GOD" A NUMBER OF GREEK HISTORIANS MENTION THIS AS WELL (EX: APOLLODORUS, PHILOSTRATUS AND PAUSANIAS). THE UNKNOWN GOD WAS NOT SO MUCH A SPECIFIC DEITY, BUT A PLACEHOLDER, FOR WHATEVER GOD OR GODS ACTUALLY



EXISTED BUT WHOSE NAME AND NATURE WERE NOT REVEALED TO THE ATHENIANS OR THE HELLENIZED WORLD AT LARGE.

- IN PAUL'S DISCOURSE AT AREOPAGUS, HE NEVER ONCE QUOTES SCRIPTURE. DOING SO WOULD HAVE BEEN IRRELEVANT AND COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE BECAUSE OF HIS AUDIENCE. HOWEVER, ALL THAT HE SAYS COULD BE BACKED UP WITH SCRIPTURE IF NEED BE. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT EXAMPLE FOR US. OUR CULTURE IS BECOMING MORE LIKE THE AREOPAGUS THAN THE JEWISH SYNAGOGUE. WE NEED TO KNOW THE MESSAGE AND BE ABLE TO SPEAK IT IN LANGUAGE OF COMMON PEOPLE.

ACTS 17:32-34 - RESPONSE

V. 32 - SNEERING AT RESURRECTION BECAUSE THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN FOREIGN, EVEN FOOLISH CONCEPT, TO GREEK THINKER.

RESPONSE TO GOSPEL:

1 - REJECTION (V. 32)

2 - CONSIDERATION/FOLLOW UP (V. 32)

3 - ACCEPTANCE & BELIEF (V. 34)

1ST PART OF ACTS 17 - PAUL ABLE TO "REASON FROM SCRIPTURES"

2ND PART OF ACTS 17

- PAUL SPEAKING WITHOUT SCRIPTURES.

TO CONSIDER

1 - WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOUR PERSONAL BELIEFS ARE BASED ON WHAT YOU HAVE READ AND LEARNED IN THE BIBLE (LIKE THE BEREANS) OR IS PRIMARILY BASED ON WHAT YOU HAVE READ ELSEWHERE OR LEARNED IN CHURCH? DO YOU RECOGNIZE THAT OUR SOCIETY, CULTURE, AND TRADITION CAN INFLUENCE OUR THINKING?

2 - CAN YOU ARTICULATE THE GOSPEL BOTH IN "PLAIN SPEAKING" TO PEOPLE WITHOUT BIBLE KNOWLEDGE AND ALSO BY USING THE SCRIPTURES FOR THOSE WHO MIGHT BE FAMILIAR WITH THE BIBLE? IF NOT, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO GET BETTER?

3 - WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF ACTS 17:30-31 ON YOUR LIFE? WHAT ABOUT THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU?