

Woodland Baptist Church

July 25, 2012 - Wednesday Night in the Word

Acts 17:16-21 Strange Things to Our Ears, part 2

1) INTRODUCTION

2) READ VERSES 16-21

3) Verse 16 - Seeing people worship _____ gods should deeply _____ us

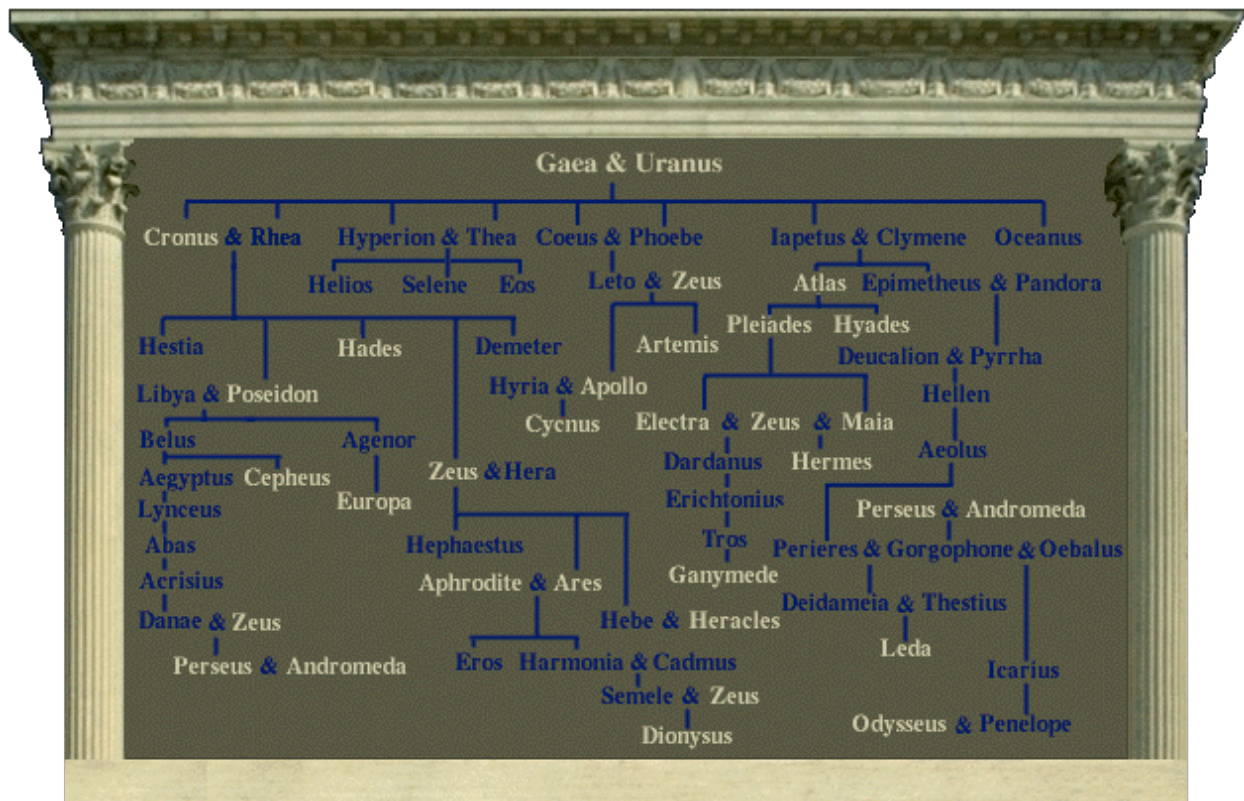
a) 16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.

- i) **Athens** - (ath' ihns) Capital of Attica, an ancient district of east central Greece, where Paul preached to the Greek philosophers (Acts 17:15-34). Paul saw the Athenians were very religious and even had an altar to an unknown God. He based his sermon on this. Though some converts were won to faith in Christ, no biblical record exists of a viable church being established. The city, which probably was named for the wisdom goddess Athene, was already an ancient place by the time Paul visited it. Indeed, human occupation of the area seems to date before 3000 B.C. In the sixth century B.C. Athens became the scene of the world's first great experiment with democratic government. It was destroyed by the Persians early in the fifth century B.C., but during the administration of Pericles the city was rebuilt into an architectural wonder. [Holman Bible Dictionary]
- ii) **his spirit** - pneuma - 4151 pneúma – properly, spirit (Spirit), wind, or breath. The most frequent meaning (translation) of [4151](#) (pneúma) in the NT is "spirit" ("Spirit"). Only the context however determines which sense(s) is meant. [Any of the above renderings (spirit-Spirit, wind, breath) of [4151](#) (pneúma) is always theoretically possible (spirit, Spirit, wind, breath). But when the attributive adjective ("holy") is used, it always refers to the Holy Spirit. "Spirit" ("spirit") is by far the most common translation (application) of [4151](#) (pneúma). [biblos.org]
- iii) **Provoked** - paroxuno - 3947 paroksýnō (from [3844](#) / pará, "alongside" and oxys, "a sharp edge") – properly, cut close alongside, i.e. to incite ("jab") someone and stimulate their feelings (emotions); "**become emotionally provoked (upset, roused to anger)**" (A-S), as personally "getting to someone"; (figuratively) "**to provoke feelings, spurring someone to action**" (Souter).
- iv) **He saw the city was full of idols** - kateidolos - full of images of idols, grossly idolatrous - there is one occurrence of this verb in the Scriptures, right here in Acts 17; it means the city was "completely full" of idols - the city was fully given over to the worship of false gods.



- 4) The Greek pantheon of gods was incredibly large and too lengthy to properly represent in one small paragraph of a Bible study. One of the best websites I found that is automated and well cited is www.webexhibits.org. It will show you the magnitude of “fullness of idols” that Paul was speaking about.
- a) According to the early Christian church fathers the ancient Greeks believed that their Gods were originally real people who their ancestors deified and to whom they prescribed divine rites derived from the **Egyptians and Phoenicians** whose Gods were also once mortal men. “[Diodorus] The gods, they say, had been **originally mortal men**, but gained their immortality on account of wisdom and public benefits to mankind, some of them having also become kings: and some have the same names, when interpreted, with the heavenly deities, while others

have received a name of their own, as Helios, and Kronos, and Rhea, and Zeus," (Eusebius: The Preparation of the Gospel Book 2.1) In the [Preparation of the Gospel](#) Eusebius quoting from original Greek sources tells how the **Hellenic religion was created from the corruption of written histories that dated back to the time of Ahmose I and even earlier.** Over the generations the biographies of the kings of Greece and the events which occurred during their reigns **were mixed up with Egyptian theology by the poets and the caretakers of the tombs of these kings and thus the kings were turned into Gods, their tombs into temples and the caretakers into priests.** Centuries later because of the imperfections of the Gods characters, their incestuous relationships, the wars they waged against their own offspring and their bizarre initiation ceremonies Socrates thought that their acts should best be left to be forgotten by no longer being taught and a new form of natural philosophy should be adopted. Fortunately Socrates view did not prevail and the true history of the kings that became the Gods remains to be reconstructed.[<http://www.argyrosargyrou.fsnet.co.uk/Myths4.htm#Beginning>]



b) What is **IDOLATRY**?

i) **Physical or material image or form representing a reality or being considered divine and thus an object of worship.** In the Bible various terms are used to refer to idols or idolatry: “**image**”, either graven (carved) or cast, “**statue**,” “**abomination**.” Both Testaments condemn idols, but with idols the Old Testament expresses more concern than the New, probably reflecting the fact that the threat of idolatry was more pronounced for the people of the Old Testament. **The ancient Hebrews lived in a world filled with idols.**

- (1) Egyptians represented their deities in various human-animal forms.
- (2) Mesopotamian cultures used idol representations of their deities [Hittites]
- (3) Canaanite Baal and Asherah fertility images.
- (4) Greek and roman religions

ii) One of the prominent distinguishing features of biblical religion is its ideal of **imageless worship**. Clearly expressed in the decalogue is the command: “**Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image... thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them**” (Exodus 20:4-5). This is usually interpreted to be a negative statement concerning idols but with positive implications toward the spiritual worship desired by God. Idols were a problem of long standing.

- (1) **The first rebellion** of the Hebrews centered around the golden calf made under Aaron's leadership in the wilderness (Exodus 32:1).
- (2) **The bronze serpent** illustrates the Hebrews' propensity for idol worship. Moses set it up in the wilderness to allay a plague of serpents (Numbers 21:1), but Israel retained it and made it an object of worship (2 Kings 18:4).
- (3) Joshua called on the people to **put away the gods their fathers had served** in Mesopotamia and in Egypt (Joshua 24:14).
- (4) Perhaps a misguided King Jeroboam intended to represent Yahweh by the **gold calves set up in his temples at Bethel and Dan** when he led the northern tribes to secede from the kingdom inherited by Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:28-33).

iii) Biblical writers often denounced idolatry. None is more graphic and devastating than that in **Isaiah 44:9-20**. The idol is made by a workman but is powerless to sustain the workman to complete his task. Further, the idol begins as a leftover piece of a tree from which a person makes a god. He then worships no more than a block of wood. The most noted problem in the New Testament concerns the propriety of eating meat which has previously been

offered to an idol (1 Corinthians 8-10). Paul seemingly broadened the scope of idolatry for Christianity when he identified covetousness with idolatry (Colossians 3:5). [Holman Bible Dictionary]

iv) What about idolatry in the church today? How is it manifested?

5) **Verses 17** We should desire to _____ all people from their false _____

a) **17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.**

i) **Reasoned** - dialegomai - to preach, lecture, argue, address - dialégomai ("getting a conclusion across") occurs 13 times in the NT, usually of believers exercising "**dialectical reasoning**." This is the process of giving and receiving information with someone to reach **deeper understanding** – a "going back-and-forth" of thoughts and ideas so people can better know the Lord (His word, will). Doing this is perhaps the most telling characteristic of the growing Christian!

(1) **Romans 12:1-2** - I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

ii) **Devout persons** - sebomai - I reverence, worship, adore - 4576 sébomai – properly, personally esteem; **to hold something (someone) in high respect**; showing the reverence or awe (veneration) of someone who is devout.

iii) **Marketplace** - agora - marketplace, forum, public place of assembly - such as a town square...etc.

iv) **Those who happened to be there** - paratugchano - I come by chance - random opportunity or meeting.

6) **Verses 18** Idolatry is _____ ground for _____ and _____ philosophies

i) **Colossians 1:8-10** - 8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

b) 18 Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbler wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

i) What are Epicurean and Stoic Philosophers?

(1) Epicureans

- (a) Epicureanism is a system of philosophy based upon the teachings of Epicurus, founded around 307 BCE. Epicurus was an atomic materialist, following in the steps of Democritus. His materialism led him to a general attack on superstition and divine intervention. Following Aristippus—about whom very little is known—Epicurus believed that pleasure is the greatest good. But the way to attain pleasure was to live modestly and to gain knowledge of the workings of the world and the limits of one's desires. This led one to attain a state of tranquility (ataraxia) and freedom from fear, as well as absence of bodily pain (aponia). The combination of these two states is supposed to constitute happiness in its highest form.
- (b) Although Epicureanism is a form of hedonism, insofar as it declares pleasure as the sole intrinsic good, its conception of absence of pain as the greatest pleasure and its advocacy of a simple life make it different from "hedonism" as it is commonly understood.
- (c) Epicureanism was originally a challenge to Platonism, though later it became the main opponent of Stoicism. Epicurus and his followers shunned politics. After the death of Epicurus, his school was headed by Hermarchus; later many Epicurean societies flourished in the Late Hellenistic era and during the Roman era (such as those in Antiochia, Alexandria, Rhodes, and Ercolano). By the end of the Roman Empire, having undergone Christian attack and repression, Epicureanism had all but died out, and would be resurrected in the 17th century by the atomist Pierre Gassendi, who adapted it to the Christian doctrine.
- (d) Some writings by Epicurus have survived. Some scholars consider the epic poem *On the Nature of Things* by Lucretius to present in one unified work the core arguments and theories of Epicureanism. Many of the papyrus scrolls unearthed at the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum are Epicurean texts. At least some are thought to have belonged to the Epicurean Philodemus. [Wikipedia]

(2) Stoics

- (a) **Stoicism** is a school of Hellenistic philosophy founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium in the early 3rd century BC. The Stoics taught that **destructive emotions resulted from errors in judgment, and that a sage, or person of "moral and intellectual perfection," would not suffer such emotions.**
- (b) Stoics were concerned with the active relationship between **cosmic determinism and human freedom**, and the belief that it is virtuous to maintain a will (called prohairesis) that is in accord with nature. Because of this, the Stoics presented their philosophy as a way of life, and they thought that the best indication of an individual's philosophy was not what a person said but how he behaved.
- (c) Later Stoics, such as Seneca and Epictetus, emphasized that because "virtue is sufficient for happiness," a sage was immune to misfortune. This belief is similar to the meaning of the phrase "stoic calm", though the phrase does not include the "radical ethical" Stoic views that only a sage can be considered truly free, and that all moral corruptions are equally vicious.
- (d) From its founding, Stoic doctrine was popular with a following throughout Greece and the Roman Empire, including the **Emperor Marcus Aurelius**, until the closing of all philosophy schools in 529 AD by order of the Emperor Justinian I, who perceived their pagan character as **being at odds with the Christian faith.** [Wikipedia]
 - (i) **Epicurean summary** - emphasized chance, escape and the enjoyment of pleasure.
 - (ii) **Stoics Summary** - fatalism, submission and endurance of pain; spark of divinity called logos = cohesive rational principle that bound the entire cosmic order together.

ii) **1 Corinthians 1:18-25** - 18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, "I will destroy the **wisdom of the wise**, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." 20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the **debater of this age?** Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and **Greeks seek wisdom**, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ

the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

c) **And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.**

i) **Babbler** - spermologos - one who picks up seeds and trifles as does a bird; of men: "lounging about the market-place and picking up a subsistence by whatever may chance to fall from the loads of merchandise" (Eustathius on Homer, Odyssey 5, 490 σπερμολογοι. οί περί τά ἐμπορία καί ἀγορᾶς διατρίβοντες διά τό ἀναλέγεσθαι τά ἐκ τῶν φορτιῶν ἐπορροεοντα καί διά ζῆν ἐκ τούτων); hence, beggarly, abject, vile (a parasite); getting a living by flattery and buffoonery, Athen. 3, p. 85 f.; Plutarch, mor., p. 456 d.; a substantive, ὁ σπερμολόγος, an empty talker, babbler (Demosthenes, p. 269, 19; Athen. 8, p. 344 c.): Acts 17:18

(1) “Dilettante - someone who picked up scraps of ideas here and there and passed them off as profundity with no depth of understanding whatever.”

(2) How ironic they were making Paul into a polytheist like themselves - they probably thought of Jesus and the resurrection as two separate gods, instead of an action attributed to the other.[Polhill]

ii) **preacher of foreign divinities** - preachers/proclaimer - foreign [xenos] - new novel, a foreigner.

7) Verse 19-20 God will _____ opportunities for Gospel _____.

a) **19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20 For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.”**

i) **Areopagus** - “**hill of Ares**,” Ares was the Greek god of war - the Roman equivalent was Mars, hence, KJV = Mar’s Hill.

ii) From ancient times a court met there that decided on civil and criminal cases and seems to have had some jurisdiction in matters of religion, since it traditionally met on the Areopagus, it came eventually to be known by the name of the hill, just as for us Wall Street would designate either the street of the stock exchange.” [Polhill]