

**LESSON 11**

**Using the Principles for Understanding Scripture (2)  
Background Information for the Teacher**

Objectives:

1. The student can use the ten principles for understanding selected passages.
2. The student can assist in studying Paul's Sermon on the Areopagus.

Preparation:

1. Have ready to distribute Written Review No. 10.
2. Have ready to distribute Worksheet No. 11. (Fill in one for yourself.)
3. Have sufficient Bibles and pens.
4. Have access to a chalkboard or overhead projector.

**Lesson Plan for the Teacher**

Introduction: (10 minutes)

1. Call the role and plan contact with those who are absent.
2. Make necessary announcements.
3. Songs and prayer as desired.
4. Give answers to Written Review No. 10. 1—the list of ten. 2.a—language, studied. b—Pentecost, baptism. c—6. d—language, metonymy. e—baptism, apostles, Cornelius.

Learning Experiences (30 minutes)

1. Today we will study a passage from Acts 17:22-34. As we study this passage, you should contribute to the class discussion in two ways. First, by responding to questions I ask as we study the passage. Second, by volunteering information you have gathered about the passage at the appropriate time. Feel free to add something when you think it will help our understanding.
2. First, let's get some background for the passage we are studying. **Q:** Why was Paul in Athens? **A:** (Acts 17:13-15). Paul had left Berea because the brethren thought it was not safe for him there. **Q:** Who was with him in Athens? **A:** No one but he was waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him there (v. 15). **Q:** What was Paul's response to conditions in Athens? **A:** He was distressed to see that the city was full of idols (v. 16). **Q:** What do we know from sources outside of the Bible about this? **A:** The Acropolis of Athens is still standing, although the buildings are no longer in good condition. These buildings, such as the famous Parthenon, were built to honor Athena and other Greek gods. Many historical records, remains of statues and buildings, and the literature of the Greeks certainly confirm that they worshipped many gods. **Q:** Where did Paul go first to



- preach? **A:** To the Jewish synagogue (v. 17). **Q:** Where else did Paul discuss religion in Athens? **A:** In the marketplace (v. 17). **Q:** What have we learned from archaeology about this marketplace? **A:** Extensive excavations have been done on the marketplace area once entirely covered with dirt. It was a mixture of places for buying and selling, political activities, and religious worship of Greek gods. Many temples and altars to Greek gods and even to Roman emperors have been found there. **Q:** What philosophers began to dispute with Paul in the marketplace? **A:** Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (v. 18). **Q:** What do we learn from Greek history and culture about these? **A:** The Epicureans lived by the philosophy that one should indulge himself in the pleasures of life because he might die soon. This is sometimes characterized by the statement, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you may die." The Stoics, on the other hand, thought it was better to refrain from pleasures because the more one got joy from life, the sadder he was when those joys were lost. **Q:** What message was Paul sharing with them? **A:** "The good news about Jesus and the resurrection" (v. 18). **Q:** Where did these philosophers take Paul for further discussion. **A:** To the Areopagus or Mar's Hill, a hill dedicated to the God of war that overlooked the marketplace. (Some say the reference here could be to the council called the Areopagus which could have met elsewhere rather than to the hill called the Areopagus. In either case, Paul would have been somewhere in or near the marketplace. **Q:** Where was the hill called the Areopagus? **A:** It was a hill that stood to the south of the marketplace and overlooked it. From here Paul would have had an excellent view of both the marketplace to the north below him and of the acropolis, on a higher hill to the east. **Q:** Why did the philosophers want to hear more? **A:** One of their favorite occupations was to discuss the latest ideas and Paul was bringing something new (v. 21). **Q:** What principles of understanding Scripture have we used so far? **A:** Conditions with discussions of situation, history, geography, archaeology, and culture. We have also studied the meaning of the words Stoic and Epicurean.
3. Now let's turn to verses 22-31. **Q:** What genre are we dealing with here? **A:** A sermon set in a narrative context. (Genre) When we deal with a sermon we should look at it as a speech to a particular audience. **Q:** What do we know about the speaker? **A:** Paul was on his second missionary journey and wanted to spread the word about Jesus and His resurrection wherever he could. He sought every opportunity to speak to Jews and Gentiles wherever he could and was not afraid to confront anyone. **Q:** What do we know about the audience? **A:** The famous Greek philosophers were known throughout the world for their discussion of ideas. They followed in the footsteps of



Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato, although there clearly had been some degeneration of their standards since the days of those men. (Speaker/audience)

4. When we deal with a sermon, we should look for the central theme and the structure of the message. **Q:** What does Paul say is the theme of his message? **A:** The Unknown God. Paul says he will declare to them the nature of this God they have not known (v. 25). The first part of his sermon is about the nature of God. **Q:** From verses 24 through 29, where Paul describes this God, what qualities would you say he wants the audience to understand about the God he declares to them? **A:** (a) He is creator—He made the world and everything in it (v. 24). (b) He is super-human—does not live in human-made temples and is not served by humans as though He needed anything. The Parthenon was within about two hundred yards of where Paul was when he delivered this message. Around the outside wall of the Parthenon was a frieze, most of which is now displayed in the British Museum. **Q:** What was depicted on that frieze? **A:** A procession held every four years in which the Athenians brought gifts to their goddess Athena to supply her with what they thought she needed. Note the great contrast between this and the God Paul preaches. (History and Culture) (c) He is powerful—He not only made all nations but controls where they live (v. 26). (d) He is approachable—God desires that men seek Him and reach out to Him and find Him because He is not far away (v. 27). Many Greek gods were very far away and the myths about them showed them to be vengeful and unapproachable. (History) (e) He is father—we are His offspring. (v. 28). **Q:** What should we understand from the word “offspring?” **A:** We are His children. There is something in us that is like Him. (Words) **Q:** Is “offspring” used literally or figuratively. **A:** Figuratively because we are not the offspring of God in the physical sense. (Figures) **Q:** What does Genesis 1:27 add to this? **A:** We are made in the image of God. This does not mean our bodies are like God’s physical body for He does not have a body like this. It means, rather, that we are like God in that we have an eternal spirit and we have the capability of choice like God does. (Other passages) **Q:** Noticing the word “therefore,” what does Paul infer from the truth that we are the offspring of God? (Syntax) **A:** That God is not made of gold or silver or stone. (f) He is divine—since He is not made of gold or silver or stone (v. 29). **Q:** How does this description of Paul’s God compare with the Greek gods? **A:** No one of their gods was thought of as creator of all. They needed help from people. None of them was thought of as controlling all nations. They were often distant and aloof. While they had said people were offspring of the gods, they had not realized what this meant about the nature of their gods. So Paul



puts the Unknown God in stark contrast with the heathen gods.

5. Now Paul comes to the second part of his sermon—verses 30-31. **Q:** If the first part might be called “the nature of God,” what would you call the second part? **A:** The command of God, or demand of God, or expectation of God, or judgment of God. **Q:** What does Paul mean by “such ignorance” in verse 30. **A:** In the context here, having just mentioned idols of gold, silver, and stone, he means idol worship and the immorality that went with it. (Context) **Q:** What does it mean that God “overlooked it?” **A:** This does not mean he excused it for then they would not have been called on to repent. It means, rather, that He had not made a concerted effort to send out a world-wide message against idolatry and to bring people to Him as the one God. He had worked primarily with the nation of Israel as the nation through whom to bring the Messiah. (Words and Theology) **Q:** Had God made some efforts to show the contrast between Himself and pagan gods during Old Testament times? **A:** Yes. Plagues on Egypt. Many victories of God’s people over surrounding countries. Sending Jonah to Nineveh. Defeat of Sennacherib by killing 185,000 of his soldiers in Hezekiah’s day. Putting Daniel in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, who acknowledged Daniel’s God, and of Darius the Persian king who put Daniel in the lion’s den and then acknowledged Daniel’s God. Esther with Xerxes. But now, Paul says, God is calling on all the nations to repent of serving idols and turn to Him. Romans 1:18-31, 2:12 and 3:23-26 also deal with this issue. (Other passages) **Q:** What does the word “repent” mean? **A:** To turn around, to change what one is doing. **Q:** In this context to what does it specifically refer? **A:** Turning from idols. (Words and Context) **Q:** What does “repent” mean in Acts 2:38 where Peter makes it a prerequisite for baptism? **A:** To turn from sin and to commit to living a life directed away from sin. **Q:** What motivation does Paul use to get the Athenians to repent? **A:** God will judge the world (v. 31). **Q:** Who will be involved in this judgment? **A:** Jesus, the man He has appointed. **Q:** How did God certify that there will be a life after death and therefore a time for judgment of what we have done in this life? **A:** By raising Jesus from the dead (v. 31). (Application: Inference)
6. **Q:** What was the response of those who heard Paul’s sermon. **A:** Some sneered but others wanted to hear more. A few became followers of Paul and believed.

Application:

1. **Q:** What should we learn from Paul’s sermon to the Athenians? **A:** We also need to understand the nature of God and to have great respect for Him. We also need the command about repentance so nothing will stand between us and God. We also need to realize there is a coming



judgment. We can learn about Jesus as the proof of our resurrection of the dead. (Application)

2. **Q:** What can we learn from Paul's example. **A:** To be willing to teach others, even when the circumstances don't seem very promising. The gospel message can stand up against all philosophies. **Q:** Where might we take the gospel like Paul did? **A:** To our workplace, to our friends, to our schoolrooms, to the broad marketplace of ideas.

Assignment:

1. Prepare for the written review over the lesson
2. Study Daniel, chapter 8 for next time. Be prepared to enter discussion about this passage with observations and background information.



**UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE  
WORKSHEET NO. 11**

Notes about Paul's sermon in Athens  
Acts 17:22-34

1. What was Paul's response to conditions in Athens?
2. What two types of philosophers did Paul encounter in the marketplace?
3. What genre are we studying in Acts 17?
4. What is the theme of Paul's sermon?
5. What qualities of God does Paul present to the Athenians?
  - a.
  - b. (This point may have a connection with the famous Greek building, the \_\_\_\_\_).
  - c.
  - d.
  - e. With what Old Testament passage can we link Paul's statement?  
We are \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_ of God.
  - f.
6. The first part of Paul's sermon could be called: the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.  
The second part of Paul's sermon could be called: the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Before the time of Christ, God worked primarily with the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ to make Himself known. What are some occasions on which He revealed Himself to Gentiles?
8. Paul calls on the Gentiles to \_\_\_\_\_ of their \_\_\_\_\_ because there is coming a time when He will \_\_\_\_\_ the world by the one He has appointed, who is \_\_\_\_\_. He certified that there would be life after death by \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus from the \_\_\_\_\_.



