

**ECC Growth Groups – Term 4, 2014**  
**Behold our God – Study 1: Who is God? (Acts 17:16-34)<sup>1</sup>**

**Big Idea:** Paul’s speech to the Areopagus serves as a good starting point in thinking about who God is and what he is like.

**Study Aim:** That group members will: (i) engage with the various views of God held by others; and (ii) have their own view of God shaped and informed by Paul’s speech in Acts 17.

**Series Introduction<sup>2</sup>**

Deuteronomy 29:29 states, *“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law”*.

As we commence this series of topical studies on who God is, this verse reminds us of three important truths.

Firstly, there are some things about God that we will never fully know – *“the secret things belong to the LORD our God”*. As we acknowledge that God is so much bigger and greater, wiser and more wonderful, than we can ever think or imagine we are to grow in our humility before him.

Secondly, this humility should not lead to despondency. Although we can never know all things about God we are able to know God and be known by him – *“the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever”*. God has graciously made himself known to us through his Word and through his Son and therefore we are able to think about the one true God and to make accurate statements about him.

Thirdly, and finally, considering who God is can be a dangerous activity if we are merely doing it for academic purposes; to grow in our knowledge of him simply for knowledge’s sake. As our verse concludes, this knowledge of God is revealed ... *“that we may follow all the words of this law”*. God reveals himself to us so that we might respond in repentance and faith, worship and obedience.

J. I. Packer captures these sentiments well in the following quote. *“We should never forget that theology is for doxology: the truest expression of trust in a great God will always be worship, and it will always be proper worship to praise God for being far greater than we can know”*.

**Pray**

In light of the comments above, spend some time committing each other and this upcoming series of studies to the Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> This series of studies is loosely based on the booklet ‘Meeting God’ by J. I. Packer in the *Lifeguide Bible Study* series (1986, IVP).

<sup>2</sup> It would be a good idea to read this section out to the group before commencing the study in prayer.

### Discussion Starter<sup>3</sup>

If you were to ask people the question, ‘Who is God?’, what responses do you think you might receive?

### Bible Reading

Read Acts 17:16-34.

### Passage Questions

We are told that Paul is “greatly distressed”<sup>4</sup> by what he sees in Athens (v 16). How does he respond to these feelings of distress?

*It is interesting to note that in verse 17 we are told that Paul reasons with people both in the “synagogue” (the Jewish place of meeting for worship) and also in the “marketplace” (the meeting place for Athenians to discuss and debate).*

What are some of the different reactions that Paul receives?

*“What is this babbler trying to say?” (v 18). “He seems to be advocating foreign gods” (v 18). Paul is brought to the Areopagus (a respected and prestigious institution in Athens that dealt with moral and religious matters). He is brought there in response to the “new teaching” (v 19) and “strange ideas” (v 20) that he is presenting.*

Why do you think the people might have reacted in this way? What is Luke’s explanation in verse 18?<sup>5</sup>

*Luke points to the fact that Paul is “preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection” (v 18) as the basis for the various reactions that Paul receives.*

### Activity

Paul then addresses this meeting of the Areopagus and makes known to them the “unknown God”.

From verses 24-29, and using a whiteboard or butcher’s paper, have the group summarise what Paul says about who God is<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> This is a good opportunity for a number of the group members to contribute. The question is general and open enough for all to feel sufficiently confident to answer. If people share at this early part of the study they are more likely to share as the study progresses.

<sup>4</sup> A more literal translation is that “his spirit was provoked within him” (ESV).

<sup>5</sup> Be sure to allow sufficient time for group members to respond personally to the first question before asking the second, follow-up question.

<sup>6</sup> This is the heart of the study so be prepared to allow sufficient time here. Also, try and encourage your group members to either paraphrase what Paul says or capture the sense of what he says by using a one or two word descriptor. This will push them to not just regurgitate word-for-word what is said about God here but to also start processing the content and thinking it through for themselves.

*God made the world and everything in it (v 24).*

*God is the Lord of heaven and earth (v 24).*

*God does not live in temples built by hands (v 24).*

*God gives life, breath and everything else to people – meaning that he is not served by human hands as if he needs anything (v 25).*

*God made every nation of people from one man with the intention that they inhabit the whole earth (v 26).*

*God determined the times set for people (v 26).*

*God determined the exact places where people would live (v 26).*

*God's desire is that people would seek him, reach out for him and find him (v 27)*

*God is not far from each one of us (v 27).*

*In God we live and move and have our being (v 28).*

*We are God's offspring (vv 28-29).*

*God is not like gold or silver or stone – he is not an image made by man's design and skill (v 29).*

### **Passage Questions cont.**

How do verses 30-31 help us to understand Paul's distress over idolatry?

*The time of God overlooking ignorance in this regard is past. Now all people everywhere need to repent. God has set a day when he will justly judge all people by the man he has appointed (Jesus).*

What responses does Paul receive after he finishes his speech?

*Some sneer (v 32). Others indicate a willingness to continue to hear what Paul has to say (v 32). A few people believe – including Dionysius and Damaris (v 34).*

### **Application Questions**

Think back to the responses we shared at the beginning of the study and also look at the responses on the whiteboard/butcher's paper. What are some of the differences between how people often think of God and who God actually is?

In what ways is Paul a good model for us as we seek to respond to people with different views?

Look at the whiteboard/butcher's paper again. What corrections do you personally need to make in terms of your own view of God?

### **Close + Prayer**

See Appendix 1 – 'Theology to Doxology' and then close the study with a time of prayer.

## Appendix 1 – Theology to Doxology<sup>7</sup>

Each week, as a lead-in to finishing the study with a time of prayer, a suggested song has been included. You can either sing it together as a group, listen to a version online, or simply read out the lyrics. The suggested song is intended to be a creative way of informing our prayers as your group reflects on what they have seen in God's Word.

Given that this week's study introduces our series entitled 'Behold our God', the suggested song is 'Behold our God' by Sovereign Grace.

If you would like to listen to a version online, you can use the URL below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gqrli3Lkf58>

If you would like to sing together or simply read out the lyrics, they are included below:

### Verse 1

Who has held the oceans in His hands  
Who has numbered every grain of sand  
Kings and nations tremble at His voice  
All creation rises to rejoice

### Chorus

Behold our God seated on His throne  
Come let us adore Him  
Behold our King nothing can compare  
Come let us adore Him

### Verse 2

Who has given counsel to the Lord  
Who can question any of His words  
Who can teach the One who knows all things  
Who can fathom all His wondrous deeds

### Chorus

### Verse 3

Who has felt the nails upon His hand  
Bearing all the guilt of sinful man  
God eternal humbled to the grave  
Jesus Savior risen now to reign

### Chorus

### Bridge

You will reign forever (Let Your glory fill the earth) (REPEAT 4X)

### Chorus

CCLI Song # 5937510

Jonathan Baird | Meghan Baird | Ryan Baird | Stephen Altrogge

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<sup>7</sup> Theology – literally 'a word of/about God' is to lead to Doxology – literally 'a word of praise/glory'.