



Revealing the Unknown God

6

Key Theme

- God uses people to accomplish His perfect plans.

Key Passages

- Acts 2:1–41, 17:16–34; 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Distinguish between a culture of “Jews” and “Greeks.”
- Explain the importance of explaining the foundation to the “Greeks” so they can understand the gospel.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, “Was Peter a better preacher than Paul?”



Studying God’s Word

In a culture that is increasingly unfamiliar with what the Bible teaches and accepting of an evolutionary worldview, Christians must take care to communicate the gospel in a way that is understandable to those who will listen. When Peter spoke to a Jewish audience in Acts 2, he didn’t need to explain who God was since he had a common foundation with his hearers. Paul, preaching to Greeks in Acts 17, had to take time to explain who God is. In a similar manner, we need to know whether we are speaking to “Jews” or “Greeks” as we share the gospel.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.



Activity: Revealing the Unknown God

Students will watch a video presentation and discuss its teaching.

- Student Guides
- Pencils
- Computer or DVD player
- “Revealing the Unknown God” video clip from the Resource DVD-ROM



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above with this background.

As we consider all that is recorded for us in the book of Acts, the extraordinary efforts of the Apostle Paul certainly stand out as the emphasis of the book. As Luke writes about the events, many of which he witnessed, he records them just as they happened. There were successes. There were failures. There were moments of rejoicing and moments of fleeing for his life. As Paul traveled, whether as a free citizen or one under guard, he boldly proclaimed the truths of the good news of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. As we study the text, we see that Paul “reasoned from the Scriptures” with the Jews he encountered in various cities. He actively sought out his fellow Jews and used their Scriptures, what we now call the Old Testament, to show them that Jesus Christ was the Messiah they had been waiting for.

These Jews believed that God had revealed the Scriptures and that a Messiah was coming, but they weren’t all convinced. Some believed, and churches were founded, but many more did not. Many sought to run Paul and his companions out of town or kill them. As Paul shared these truths about Jesus, he had a common foundation with his hearers. He didn’t have to explain to them who God was, what sin was, or convince them of the authority of the Scriptures. The same can be seen with the Apostle Peter. As he stood before a large audience with a Jewish background on the day of Pentecost, Peter didn’t need to explain what sin was, and he could quote extensive passages from Isaiah and the Psalms to the people (Acts 2).

In contrast, Paul took a very different approach as he interacted with the Gentile audiences. The longest sermon we have comes from Acts 17 where Paul was

called to address the philosophers and others who gathered at the Areopagus. As he addressed this crowd, Paul did not have the common ground of the Scriptures to stand on. In fact, these people had an entirely different worldview. Paul had to explain that God was the Creator and that He was independent and needed nothing from man. He had to explain why they needed to repent to avoid God’s righteous judgment in Jesus who had been raised from the dead. Paul had to lay a foundation so that they could understand what he was talking about. Had he simply stood up and said, “You know what Isaiah has said about the coming judgment of God . . .” the people would have stared at him in confusion. In God’s wisdom and the guiding of the Holy Spirit, Paul spoke to his audience in a way that would help them connect to these truths they had never heard before. Some mocked, some wanted to hear more, and some believed (Acts 17:32–34).

We must remember that our job as ambassadors of Jesus Christ is to faithfully proclaim the good news to everyone that Christ died for sinners—not to save them from their sins. While we do our best to explain the gospel in a way that is understandable to the hearers, it is not the wisdom of our words or the eloquence of our speech that will draw them to Christ (1 Corinthians 1:20–25). Hearts are opened by the Holy Spirit, and people are drawn to Christ by the Father (John 6:44).

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

In a very real way, apologetics is a matter of wisdom. In 1 Peter 3:14–17, Peter instructs us to share the hope we have in Christ and answer our critics with meekness and fear (also translated as gentleness and respect). In Colossians 4:2–6, Paul instructs us to walk in wisdom toward outsiders so that we may answer each person. Evangelism and apologetics—two sides of the same

coin—are done with a view toward presenting the truth to the hearer in a way that is customized to their situation. If we use Bible lingo and church words with a person who has no idea what those words mean, we cannot expect them to understand what we are saying. If we do use those words, we must define them and explain them. You might understand what it means to be redeemed from your sin by the blood of the Lamb, but that is because you have a context to understand those words. If you say those words to someone who has no background in a Christian church, they might feel as confused as you would listening to two computer programmers or two astrophysicists using their jargon to talk to one another.

As we consider the broader Western culture, there used to be a much more widespread influence of the Bible. In the past, more people attended church and read the Bible, and more were exposed to the ideas regarding sin and salvation. Today, we are several generations removed from those ideas. On top of that, there is a much broader influence of beliefs from other religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Humanism, Islam, etc.) that taint the culture's understanding of who God really is and what sin is.

If we apply the examples of Acts 2 and Acts 17 to this situation, we should consider much of Western culture to be more like the Greeks in Acts 17. The West was much more of an "Acts 2" culture in the past, but today we are often speaking to "Greeks" rather than "Jews." Many do not even understand what sin is. They do not believe that God is the Creator or that Jesus is the Messiah—let alone know what "Messiah" means. Further, the contaminating influence of evolutionary views has led many to believe that man is nothing more than an advanced animal who cannot sin because there is no God to sin against. In order to explain the gospel to these modern "Greeks,"

we must help them understand that they have built their thinking on a foundation of sand and then try to replace that with a foundation built solidly on the truth of God's Word.

We must proclaim the truths of Scripture with boldness, but we must do so in a way that is understandable to those listening. While we see Peter quoting directly from Scripture in Acts 2, Paul does not use the same approach before the Greeks. Rather than directly quoting passages from the Old Testament, Paul used general truths. For instance, he said God "made the world and everything in it" (Acts 17:24) rather than quoting a passage like Nehemiah 9:6. It is absolutely necessary, however, that we do not water down the truths of the gospel, the sinfulness of man, or the holiness of God as we contextualize our message to fit each situation.

Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). Let us not shy away from being bold ambassadors for Christ, but let us do so in a way that communicates the message of the gospel clearly to those who will listen.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Your Word is sweeter than honey, O Lord. Learning of Paul's passion and faith encourages and convicts me to live more boldly for your name and truth. Father, I pray you will continue to use your Word, and the example of your apostle, Paul, to inspire my students to a higher level of confidence in you, your Word, and the gospel. Show them the value of your Word, and equip them through this lesson to share it with boldness and to always be ready to have an answer for the hope that is within them.

➤ **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.



Review

Over the last five weeks we have looked at Paul's work to spread the gospel and build up the churches that had been established in the northern Mediterranean region. As Paul went about his work, he used different strategies to share the gospel message.

- ? Who were the two groups Paul preached to? *Jews and Greeks/Gentiles.*
- ? How did his approach differ for these two groups? *When he preached to the Jews in the synagogues, he reasoned with them from the Old*

Testament Scriptures to show them Jesus was the Christ. When he preached to the Gentiles, he proclaimed the truth and explained ideas to them in a way they could relate to not knowing the Scriptures.

Our lesson today is intended to help us explore that idea in more detail. We will be watching a presentation by Ken Ham, of Answers in Genesis, that talks about the different approaches Peter and Paul used in their preaching and how we can apply that to the culture we live in today.



Revealing the Unknown God

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils
- Computer or DVD player
- "Revealing the Unknown God" video clip from the Resource DVD-ROM

INSTRUCTIONS

Encourage the students to take notes as they watch the video. The video is approximately 40 minutes long.

As we watch this video, you can take notes in your Student Guides and then we will discuss the video together. *Show the video to the students. Note that there is a small musical interlude at one point in the video as this is taken from a 2-part video. A portion at the end of the full video has also been removed for the sake of fitting the video into our normal lesson length.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

If time allows, read Acts 2:1–41 and 17:16–34 to remind students of the parallels and contrasts.

As we think about the responses to the gospel, whether in Acts 2 or Acts 17, we see three clear examples repeated—people believe and are saved, they doubt but are willing to listen to more, or they reject the truth and mock or seek to harm the preacher. The response is always the same, falling onto one of those three categories, but that doesn't mean that the presentation is always the same. We can tailor the message to make it as understandable as possible.





Studying God's Word

► Write on the board, "Was Peter a better preacher than Paul?"

READ THE WORD

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5 and let's briefly consider Paul's instruction there. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? In verse 1:18, how is the message of the Cross received? *It is foolishness to those who are perishing (unsaved) and the power of God to those who are saved.*
- ? From verses 1:20–21, what two forms of wisdom are contrasted? *God's wisdom and the world's wisdom.*
- ? How do Jews generally receive the message of the Cross? *They want a sign to prove the message; they see the Cross as a stumbling block to believing.*
- ? How do Greeks generally receive the message of the Cross? *They want it explained with "wisdom" of the world; it is foolish to them.*
- ? How do those who are called receive the message? *Whether they are Jews or Greeks, those God calls receive the message as wise and powerful in Christ.*
- ? According to verse 29, why has God chosen the foolish, weak, and base things rather than what the world values? *So that God alone may receive the glory in salvation, and it will never be credited to the wisdom of the hearer or the speaker.*
- ? How does Paul describe his proclamation of the gospel in 2:1–4? *He did not try to persuade them with worldly wisdom, but in the power of the Spirit and the testimony of God alone. He declared the "foolish" message of Jesus Christ crucified.*

Discover the Truth

Paul made it very clear that it is the power of the testimony of God and the Crucifixion of Jesus applied through the power of the Holy Spirit that brings about salvation in an individual. While we must communicate clearly, it is not the persuasiveness of our words or the wisdom with which we deliver them that changes a heart of stone to a heart of flesh—only God can bring that change.

- ? What attributes of God are demonstrated in this passage? *Sovereignty and wisdom are clearly taught in this passage. Discuss other attributes the students suggest.*



SOVEREIGN

WISE



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

The gospel is an unbelievable message. Our job as ambassadors is to proclaim the gospel in a way that can be understood by our hearers. We should not rely on our smooth words or our vast knowledge, but simply on the message of the power of God to save sinners through the Cross and work of the Holy Spirit. We do this so that no man receives the glory that is due God alone and so that the faith of those who believe is in the power of God.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? **As we seek to communicate the message of the gospel in various contexts to various people, what are the essential elements that we must include in our explanation?** *The basic elements should include: God is Creator; mankind was created perfect but has fallen from that perfection through sin; all of mankind is sinful through original sin and individual sin; Jesus, God in the flesh, was born, lived a sinless life, died on the Cross as a substitute, and then rose from the dead, conquering death; God provides redemption for sin only through what Jesus did on the Cross; the gift of salvation is received by repentance of sin toward God and faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior; a believer's sin is credited to Christ, and Christ's righteousness is credited to that person at salvation; the hope of eternal life is sure for all of those who are in Christ because of His Resurrection from the dead. Regardless of how we communicate these ideas, these are the key components of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.*
- ? **Even the Apostles Paul and Peter had many who did not respond positively to their proclamation of the gospel. How does knowing that it is the Holy Spirit who opens blind eyes and brings conversion influence the way you look at sharing the gospel with others?** *Knowing that the power of salvation is from God and not based on our eloquence of speech should be incredibly freeing and give us boldness and courage to work as instruments in the Redeemer's hands to share the gospel, trusting the Holy Spirit to bring regeneration of the lost.*

- ? **How does Ken's foundation analogy help you understand the different approaches to explaining the gospel to the different people you interact with?** *Discuss various answers, focusing on the idea that without a basic understanding of who God is, what sin is, etc. the gospel cannot be clearly communicated.*
- ? **What types of questions could you use to help you understand whether those you are speaking to are "Jews" or "Greeks"?** *Asking people about their background and whether they went to church or not or if they have any religious or spiritual views can be a good starting point. However, someone with a church background is not necessarily a "Jew," and someone without a church background could have studied the Bible and may not really be a "Greek." Asking good questions is a helpful tool in evangelism and apologetics.*
- ? **As you consider the results of Peter in Acts 2 and Paul in Acts 17, who was the better preacher?** *We should not look to results to justify our actions, but to what God has commanded us to do. Faithfulness and integrity are the marks of a successful ministry, not the number of people who come to Christ. Both of these men were faithful to proclaim the true gospel, though in distinct ways, and God granted salvation so that He would be glorified, not Peter or Paul.*



MEMORY VERSE

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for His mercy and grace.
- Praise God for His wisdom in calling people to salvation through the message of the Cross.
- Ask God for boldness in proclaiming the gospel and His Spirit to bring regeneration to the lost.

