

## Judgment Ahead (Acts 17:30-34)<sup>a</sup>

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### Context

1. Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke on what will become known as Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey
2. Paul leaves the others in Berea and sails south to Athens
3. Preaches in the synagogue, in the marketplace—eventually taken to the Areopagus where he corrects the Athenian's misconceptions concerning the nature of God and man (last time)
4. In today's passage, Paul brings in the heart of the gospel: the coming judgment and the need of escape.

### Passage (Acts 17:30-34)

[30] "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, [31] "because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." [32] And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this [matter]." [33] So Paul departed from among them. [34] However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.<sup>1</sup>

### God overlooked

1. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, . . . (Acts 17:30).
  - A. Contrasting two points in history: these times vs. now
    - I. *these times* - times which preceded the actual historical events of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus
    - II. *now* - the time in which Paul spoke (extending down to our day)
      - a. Times which follow the crucifixion and resurrection events history
      - b. Times during which the Great Commission is actively underway, communicating the significance and purpose of the crucifixion and

## resurrection to all nations

III. The dividing point: the crucifixion as an historical event

IV. What differs between these two periods and why do the nations now have greater responsibility to respond?

B. These times - the times of ignorance

I. Incomplete, partial revelation concerning the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross

II. This partial revelation was given to Israel, not to the nations at large

a. It was to the Israelites, to whom God gave the Law (Rom. 9:4)

III. The times of ignorance had at least two dimensions

a. FIRST: the Gentile nations, for the most part, were ignorant of the Old Testament

i. Thus, Isaiah characterized “Galilee of the Gentiles” as a “people who walked in darkness” (Isa. 9:1-2)

ii. This is why Isaiah described the ministry of Jesus as being two-fold (Isa. 49:6-7):

- + *to raise up the tribes of Jacob . . . to restore the preserved ones of Israel*
- + *I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles*

iii. This why Paul said to those in Lystra (in Acts 14) that God *in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways*(Acts 14:16)

iv. In other words, His focus was mainly working with His covenant nation, Israel—who had greater responsibility by also having been provided with greater revelation

b. SECOND: although the Old Testament pointed toward the work of Jesus on the cross, it was incomplete in what it revealed

i. Even Israel, having the Old Testament, had some measure of ignorance—although far less than other nations

ii. The righteousness of God apart from the law was merely *witnessed by the Law and the Prophets*, it hadn’t actually worked itself out historically

C. Now - a time of full revelation, of complete knowledge of God’s remedy for sin

I. The predicted events of the Jewish Old Testament had now become reality in history

II. The partial revelation of the Old Testament—the witness of the Law and Prophets—is now complete in the testimony of the Apostles

III. The completed testimony is now promoted to a global extent such that God *commands all men everywhere to repent* (Acts 17:30)

D. What else changed between these periods?

I. God's means of dealing with sin

- a. The [previous] times of ignorance “God overlooked”, but not so now.
- b. “Overlooked” is from ὑπεροράω [*hyperoraō*], to *disregard*.<sup>2</sup>
- c. How is it possible that God “overlooked” or “disregarded” sin—wouldn't that violate His nature?

II. We find help on this in another passage by Paul on these same themes: Romans 3 (a passage within which he also convicts all the world of sin)

a. *Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law [is] the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets* (Rom. 3:20-21).

b. Previously

- i. The righteousness of God apart from the law wasn't fully revealed (as it has now)
- ii. The redemptive work of God in Christ was only witnessed by the Law and the Prophets
- iii. The Old Testament pointed toward it, but it hadn't actually come to pass and details were lacking

c. We find the same concept expressed by Paul in Romans 3 as in Acts 17—the idea that God extended “forebearance” in “passing over sins” that were committed before the cross.

i. *[Jesus,] whom God set forth [as] a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forebearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus* (Rom. 3:25-26)

ii. “Forebearance” is from πάρεσις [*paresis*], to “disregard, leaving unpunished”<sup>3</sup>

iii. In what way did God disregard or leave unpunished sins accomplished prior to the cross?

- Does this imply he “looked the other way” in that he winked at injustice? That he let it pass?
- No, this would violate God's nature, His character as perfectly righteous—He *cannot* let sin pass.

iv. So what *does* it mean?

v. Here we find help, both from the book of Hebrews, and a Greek Lexicon

- First the Lexicon:

**πάρεσις** [*paresis*] . . . *overlooking (for the time being)* . . .  
 . used of God's way of dealing with sins committed during Old Testament times and only symbolically atoned for by sacrifices until Christ should come and offer up himself as the adequate sacrifice; distinguished from **ἄφεσις** [*aphesis*] (release, pardon), which is a doing away with sins through an adequate atonement<sup>5</sup>

- Now, to the book of Hebrews:
  - . . . “*Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.*” Now where there is remission of these, [there is] no longer an offering for sin (Heb. 10:18)
  - The animal sacrifices were perpetual because they could not fully remit sins and lawless deeds.
- In summary, we might say that “God put up with” inadequate, temporal, ongoing animal sacrifices in lieu of the once-for-all permanent remedy which was to come, the *new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh* — the death of Christ on the cross.

## Judgment ahead

### 1. God's judgement is certain (an appointed day)

A. “Appointed” is from **ἵστέμαι** [*histemai*] meaning, “to fix a time.”

I. God has “fixed a day” (ESV), He has “set a day” (NET)

II. Days come and days go, pages of the calendar turn, but not all days are alike

III. One day, on a specific “appointed day,” God will weigh the minutest of the deeds of men in His scales of perfect justice

B. The day is fixed in the eternal counsel of God—history is a clock winding down to this certain end point

### 2. God's judgment is universal (the world)

A. *He will judge the world* (Acts 17:31)

I. “World” is from **οἰκουμένη** [*oikoumenē*] denoting “people, humankind”<sup>6</sup>

B. All nationalities: both Gentile and Jew

I. All men will be accountable to God's Law —either written on stone or on the heart

II. *For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law [are] just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves [their] thoughts accusing or else excusing [them]) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel (Rom. 2:12-16).*

- a. There are those who have sinned without law — yet they are still destined to perish. These are the Gentile nations who lacked the Old Testament, but had the work of the law written in their hearts—their conscience judging them.
- b. There are those who have sinned in the law — they too will find judgment by the written law revealed to them by God. These are the Jews.

### C. All socio-political and economic levels

- I. “. . . I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is [the Book] of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. . . . And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” Rev. (20:11-15)
- II. The significance and accomplishments of men’s lives may differ, but death and subsequent judgment are the great equalizers
  - a. Historically famous men, the likes of Alexander the Great and Hitler, will be among the crowd—standing alongside those who lived and died in obscurity: hermits, untouchables, so-called “little people” of all walks.

### 3. God’s judgment is righteous (He will judge . . . in righteousness)

A. The righteousness of God’s judgment is emphasized throughout Scripture:

- I. *He shall judge the world in righteousness, And He shall administer judgment for the peoples in uprightness (Ps. 9:8).*
- II. *Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns; The world also is firmly established, It shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously.” Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; Let the sea roar, and all its fullness; Let the field be joyful, and all that [is] in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before*

*the LORD. For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth (Ps. 96:10-13).*

III. *Let the sea roar, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell in it; Let the rivers clap [their] hands; Let the hills be joyful together 9 before the LORD, For He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world, And the peoples with equity (Ps. 98:7-9).*

B. Righteous judgment should strike fear into the heart of the unconverted

I. Being perfectly just by nature, God *cannot* judge on a relative scale

II. Being imperfect by nature, man *cannot* measure up to the perfection required by God

III. These dual truths are intended to drive men to seek God's forgiveness—which is Paul's point in this passage

4. **God's judgment is intimately familiar with the human condition, being adjudicated by a man**

A. Paul indicates a specific individual—a *man* has been ordained, appointed, as judge

B. But what man could possibly fulfill such a role?

C. How could God be so irresponsible as to place the eternal destiny of all other men beneath one of their peers?

D. The answer, as Scripture reveals, is this man is a very special man: the God-man Jesus Christ, born of the virgin Mary.

E. Here again we see testimony to the divinity of Jesus—who stands fully in a position reserved for God alone.

F. This is the man Whom Daniel saw in his night vision

I. *I was watching in the night visions, And behold, [One] like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. (Dan. 7:13-14a).*

G. Intimately familiar with what it is to be human

I. *For we do not have a High Priest [or Judge] who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all [points] tempted as [we are, yet] without sin (Heb. 4:15)*

The fact of it is the ground that he who knows what is in man should be the Judge of men. By personal experience of man's temptations and frailties; by knowing every palliation of our sins, every extenuation of our failures, every aggravation of our weakness; by gazing through human eyes with human consciousness upon our mysterious destiny, he is competent to judge; whereas by being Son of God as well as Son of man, he is entrusted with power to execute the judgment of the Eternal.<sup>7</sup>

The appointment of a Judge in our own nature is one of the most beautiful arrangements of divine wisdom in redemption.<sup>8</sup>

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## Who can stand?

1. **Anyone listening carefully to Paul's message in Athens should have been asking themselves this question: "In view of our errors and the certainty of God's coming day of judgment, who can stand?"**
2. **This question was also on the mind of the prophet Nahum in the 7th century when he wrote:**
  - A. *The LORD [is] slow to anger and great in power, And will not at all acquit [the wicked]. The LORD has His way In the whirlwind and in the storm, And the clouds [are] the dust of His feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, And dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither, And the flower of Lebanon wilts. The mountains quake before Him, The hills melt, And the earth heaves at His presence, Yes, the world and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, And the rocks are thrown down by Him. (Nah. 1:3-6)*
3. **Fortunately, Nahum also provided the answer in the very next verse:**
  - A. *The LORD [is] good, A stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him (Nah. 1:7).*
  - B. Those who exercise faith in God.
4. **Those who "trust in Him" won't have to stand in the appointed day of judgment Paul describes here because the man who is the judge is also their justifier**
  - A. *Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? [It is] God who justifies. Who [is] he who condemns? [It is] Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us (Rom. 8:33-34)*
  - B. The very man whom God has appointed judge of each individual's eternal destiny is also the defence lawyer for those who trust in Him.
  - C. Because of this, the believer will not stand in the resurrection of condemnation, but will be escape unto the resurrection of life

## D. As Jesus Himself said

- I. *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation (John [5:24-29](#))*
- II. The one who trusts in Christ will not come into judgment, having already passed from death into life at the moment of faith.
- III. Instead of standing in the resurrection unto condemnation fearfully subjecting our foibles and frailties to God’s all consuming stare, we will occupy a better resurrection—one where our judgment is for degree of reward and our salvation is assured (2Cor. [5:10](#)).

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## Endnotes:

1. [Acts 17:30-34](#), NKJV
2. Made up of two Greek words, one meaning “to look” and the other meaning “over”.
3. [Ref-0377](#), #4217
4. [Ref-0094](#)
5. [Ref-0140](#), 300
6. [Ref-0377](#), #3876
7. [Ref-0932](#), John [5:27](#)
8. [Ref-0187](#), John [5:27](#)

## Sources:

- Acts 17:30-34** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0094** Trinitarian Bible Society (U.S.A.), 1600 Leonard NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504 <mailto:tbsusa@aol.com>.
- Ref-0140** G. W. Anderson, *The Theocratic Kingdom*. See <sup>4</sup>



- Ref-0187** Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).
- Ref-0377** Farkas, J. R., & Reed, D., A. (1997, c1995). *Mormonism : Changes, contradictions, and errors* (electronic ed.). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Ref-0932** H. D. M. Spence, Joseph S. Exell, *Pulpit Commentary* (n.p.: 1890).
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**Links Mentioned Above**

- a - See [http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts\\_by\\_Tony\\_Garland/61\\_Acts\\_17\\_30-34/index.htm](http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/61_Acts_17_30-34/index.htm).
- b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.