

## **“What you worship as unknown I am going to proclaim to you....”**

Today is Wednesday, August 31, 2011. As of yesterday I was looking through a book that my wife purchased in March of this year. The title of the book is Petra. It is filled with absolutely beautiful pictures of this ancient city in Jordan. It becomes quite obvious that the Nabataeans, the builders of Petra, were worshippers of pagan gods. Of course this is not unusual for ancient civilizations but the beauty of this place and its importance in Biblical history makes you want to think that they were the exception. They were not. They worshipped pagan gods. This region of the world goes back to Stone Age times, later the Edomites and the Nabataeans, the Romans and the Byzantine Empires. This region has history.

Pagan worship is the acceptance of some form of deity that people would choose to worship as a god. People might associate pagan worship with past gods from past civilizations. Examples might be gods worshipped by ancient Egyptians, Greeks, or Romans. The next logical step might be for people to make some type of an idol that they would worship as this god. Of course, there are some people that might argue there is a difference between pagan worship and the worship of idols. Fine. I have heard some of these arguments and understand where they are coming from as well as where they are heading. I would suggest that if these pagan gods or idols had any significance historically or spiritually they might have survived the test of time and have no need to be revived by more recent peoples as an object of worship. Pagan worship and the worship of idols have occurred for a long time. You might even know someone who proclaims to worship idols or a pagan god.

In Biblical times the apostle Paul did a considerable amount of traveling. It was during his second missionary journey that he came in contact with a group of people who were worshippers of pagan gods and had many idols to represent these gods. But first, do you remember Paul before he was Paul? Yes, his name was Saul and he did his best to persecute followers of Christ. He was a straightforward, get in your face kind of guy that had no concern for any type of religious beliefs and when these people who were speaking about Jesus came into his life he did what came naturally. He persecuted them. Do you remember what happened to Saul on the road to Damascus? Yes, Saul had an encounter with God and was humbled quickly.....loss of sight and given orders and he did exactly what he was told. This Saul, who would be later named Paul, would be the spokesperson for God to the Gentiles and anyone who would listen. Back to Paul's second missionary journey and his many travels over a period of about three years. It is during these travels that he came to the city-state called Athens. Athens was a place of thinkers and people who talked about new ideas. The concept of democracy came from the thinkers of Athens. They did not practice democracy. They just talked about this new concept of governing. What he saw in Athens was a large collection of idols which he absolutely despised. Paul used the idols to do two things:

- a. “Men of Athens! I see in every way you are very religious.” (Acts 17:22)  
He now has their attention and .....

- b. “For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.” (Acts 17:23) And this is exactly what Paul knew would hold their attention. Talk about a new religious concept. But Paul did most of the talking as well as ..

.... proclaim to the people the good news of Jesus and his resurrection. Paul let the people be aware that they no longer had to worship an unknown god because they now had Jesus. And he proclaimed the power and love of God. (Acts 17:24-31) Paul proclaimed that it was time for the ignorance of man and his worship of idols to end because of a coming judgment. And what Paul received in return was sneers and jeers *except* for a few men who became his followers. What changed those few men who chose to follow Paul? The same God that changed Saul on the road to Damascus. And what about our responsibility to a world of idols and worship of things not of God? Follow in the footsteps of Paul and his followers and all of those that proclaim the Good News of Jesus. Be the *exception!*

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