

BIG QUESTION UNDER INVESTIGATION

We're in... Unit 1: The God Who Reveals Himself

Unit 1 Big Question and Answer:
How Can I Know What God Is Like?
He Shows Me What He's Like!

PFI NIV Songs 1, Tracks 3,4

Unit 1 Bible Verse: Amos 4:13, NIV 1984

"The LORD reveals His thoughts to man."

PFI NIV Songs 1, Track 5

BIBLE TRUTH

We're learning... Bible Truth 1:

God Made Our Hearts to Know and Love Him

When God created people, He made them with a special heart so they could know and love Him. This isn't the heart that pumps blood through our body. This is something very different. We can't feel this heart inside of us in the same way as we feel the heart that beats in our chest. This heart is even more amazing! THIS heart will never die—it lives forever!

The Bible also calls this heart, a spirit or a soul. And it's in this very special heart that God reveals Himself to us. God's Holy Spirit works in our heart, helping us to believe in God, turn away from our sins and to trust in Jesus as our Savior. When we do, God will work in our heart even more, making it brand new, and filling it knowledge of Him and with more love for Him and others.

BIBLE VERSE

How do I know this is true? The Bible tells me so!

Bible Truth 1 Bible Verse: Psalm 42:1,2

"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"

CASE STORY

Acts 17

Our story is called:

The Case of the Stone and the Seekers.

As you listen to the story, see if you can figure out:

1. Who first laid down this stone and who did they seek?
2. How did Paul use the stone? What did he tell the people of Athens about their hearts?

This story is a New Testament story, but it begins about 600 years before Jesus lived on earth.

What a place ancient Athens was to visit! Its white, stone temples and buildings were beautiful to look at. Its people were smart and loved to talk about interesting things for hours each day. No wonder so many people travelled great distances to visit Athens!

The people of Athens loved to build beautiful buildings and talk about important things, but they loved to worship things, too. Did you know the people of Athens worshipped HUNDREDS of gods and goddesses?! They would carve beautiful, stone statues of their gods and put them in huge temples. They honored them with gifts and wild, worship parties!

But even though the people of Athens worshiped many gods and talked about many important things, they left out Someone very important: the LORD, the one, true God who had made them. Why, they didn't even know His name! How sad!

But the people of Athens had even more sadness than this at the time of our story. Shh...listen! People are sick. People are crying. People are dying! Lots and lots of them! Can you hear them? They are saying, "May the gods help us! Who can stop this plague?"

A terrible plague—a deadly sickness—had been spreading through Athens. The leaders of Athens were frantically looking for a cure. They asked a wise man named Nicias to help them: "Tell us, Nicias, what should we do? We cry out to our gods, but nothing happens! The sickness doesn't stop! Help us!" they pleaded.

"I believe there is another god—one we don't know," Nicias told them. "We need to ask for His help."

"How will we ever find Him and ask for His help if we don't know Him?" they asked Nicias.

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"Then go...go, quickly, Nicias!" the leaders urged him. "Our people are dying. Every moment counts!"

So Nicias sailed on the fastest ship for Crete. He found Epimenides and brought him back to Athens.

As Epimenides walked with Nicias into Athens, he stared in amazement at the rows of idols standing along the sides of the road and up Mars Hill. "Look at all these gods!" he exclaimed to Nicias. "Do the people of Athens really worship them all?"

"Yes, they do," Nicias told him. "Yet none of these gods help us! The plague keeps going on! There must be an Unknown God who can help us, Epimenides!" Nicias said. "Help us to make a worship offering to Him and ask Him to end the plague!" Nicias pleaded.

Nicias took Epimenides to the leaders of Athens.

"Meet me tomorrow morning at Mars Hill-- that grassy hill where you have put the statues of your many gods," Epimenides said. "Bring a flock of sheep of all different colors. Make sure they are healthy and very hungry. Bring stonemasons with their carving tools. Bring lots of stones and mortar (like cement), too," Epimenides ordered. "We will cry out to this unknown God and offer Him worship gifts. Perhaps He will hear us and help us, even though we do not know His name," he told them.

"We will do what you ask," the leaders agreed, then sent off servants to make the necessary preparations.

The next morning, the leaders of Athens met Epimenides on Mars Hill with everything he had asked for. Many of the people of Athens came, too. Everyone watched and hoped.

"Very good," Epimenides said, as he looked at the hungry sheep. "Don't let them eat until I say so," he told the shepherds. "They must stay hungry!" This was not an easy job! The sheep kept trying to nibble the juicy grass of Mars Hill.

"Quiet!" Epimenides said, "I'm going to pray to the Unknown God and ask for His help." Everyone listened as Epimenides prayed: "Great Unknown God! Please hear our prayers and help us! These sheep are our offering to You. Show us that You hear us and accept our worship gifts by causing these hungry sheep to lie down on the grass instead of eating it. Please help us, though we do not know Your name. Please stop the plague," Epimenides begged.

When Epimenides finished praying, he turned to the shepherds and said, "Release the sheep! Watch them carefully! Notice which ones eat and which ones lie down. We will offer the ones who lie down as worship gifts to the Unknown God," he told them.

"This is crazy!" many thought. "These sheep are straining to eat the grass! It would truly be an act of God for sheep as hungry as these to not eat!"

But sure enough, sheep all over the hillside lay down instead of eating! "It's a sign from the Unknown God! These are the sheep to offer to Him as worship gifts!" everyone shouted in excitement.

"Come, stonemasons!" Epimenides ordered. "Bring your stones and tools. Make an altar where each sheep is lying down. On the side of each altar, carve these words: 'To an Unknown God,'" Epimenides told them.

Soon the air was filled with the loud banging of chisels and hammers of the stonemasons. When they finished, the sheep were placed on the altars as worship gifts. Then everyone prayed and waited.

Could there be an unknown God who was the one, true God? Yes, there was! It was the LORD! Only He could do what these people asked. He heard their prayers and answered them. Within a week, the plague had stopped completely! The people of Athens were overjoyed! They offered Him more worship gifts on the stone altars. They prayed to Him, saying, "Unknown God, even though we don't know Your name, we know You live. Thank You for stopping the plague."

This was the story of the great plague and the even greater, mysterious God, that a man named Laertes wrote down so the people might not forget the amazing thing that happened. And there on Mars Hill, stood the stones—a reminder to the people of Athens of the Unknown God who heard their prayers and helped them. But would this story and these stones with the words "To an Unknown God" carved on them be enough for the people of Athens to keep on remembering Him? And would they ever know His name?

Six hundred years passed. During that time the people of Athens forgot the plague and the Unknown God who stopped it. They went back to worshipping their idols. Some even stole the stone altars to the Unknown God and used them for other things.

But even though the people of Athens forgot the Unknown God, He did not forget them. He sent the apostle Paul to tell them who He was. At last they would get to know His name! At last they would hear how they could turn to Him and be saved!

As Paul walked into Athens and looked up at Mars Hill, he was just as shocked as Epimenides had been. The city was still filled with hundreds of gods!

"These people worship so many gods, yet not one is the true God, who made them to know Him. I must tell them about Him!" Paul thought. "But how?"

As Paul walked along, he came upon a small, stone altar with the words, "To an Unknown God," carved on it. It was one of the stones left over from the great plague, long ago! "This is how I will tell them about Jesus. He is the Unknown God their hearts tell them about, but have never found," Paul decided.

So Paul stood up and said, "I can tell by your hundreds of gods that you are seeking to find God. But the true God you are looking for is the one you call 'The Unknown God.' I want to tell you about Him," he told them. The people listened eagerly. Could it be, after all these years, would they finally hear more about the Unknown God?

"The God you worship as the Unknown God is the Creator of heaven and earth," Paul told them. He made everything that you see and enjoy. He is why we live. He created people to know Him, that they would seek him and find Him," Paul told them. "He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross for the sins of all who put their trust in Him as their Savior. He rose from the dead in victory over sin and death. Turn away from your sin and seek after this true God! Be saved from your sins!" he urged. "Be ready, for one day He will come back on the clouds of heaven. Yes, the Lord Jesus, Himself, who rose from the dead, shall come to judge all the world," he said.

"Ha!" laughed many. "A god who died on a cross and rose from the dead! How silly!" they said and left. They wanted to worship gods, but not one like this! They liked their fake gods who let them do what they wanted to do—like have wild parties to honor them. They wanted nothing to do with this Unknown God, even if He was the one, true God, as Paul claimed.

But others, like Damaris and Dionysius, listened to Paul and stayed. As Paul told them more about Jesus, the Holy Spirit worked in their hearts, helping them believe. They turned from their idols began to follow the Lord. At last these thirsty hearts were fully satisfied with knowing the one, true God!

Our Bible Truth is:**God Made Our Hearts to Know and Love Him****Our Bible Verse is: Psalm 63:1,5 ESV**

"O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water...My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips."

Our Bible Truth tells us that God gave us a heart to know and love Him. That include you and me! Who will we be like today? Will we be like the people of Athens who laughed when they heard the good news of Jesus? Or will we be like Damaris and Dionysius, with hearts thirsty for God? They wanted to know more about Jesus. They turned from their sins, trusted in Jesus as their Savior and were saved!

A Note on the Source of This Story:

Don Richardson, author of *Eternity in Their Hearts*, cites this incident in Greek ancient history. Diogenes Laertes is the Greek historian who records the plague and Epimenides' solution in his book, *Lives of the Philosophers* 1.110. Paul's quote in Titus 1:13, "All Cretans are liars..." is actually a quote from Epimenides, himself. Even though this story may be new to us, the Greeks would have been familiar with Epimenides as a philosopher, and the incident with him and the altar to the Unknown God.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. A Question about the Bible Truth, True or False:

We know God through the heart that pumps blood through our body.

Answer: False. We know God through a special, invisible heart that is different from the heart that pumps blood. It's also called a spirit and it never dies!

2. Crack the Case Questions:

a. Who first laid down this stone and who did they seek?

Answer: The people of Athens sought an Unknown God. They wanted Him to stop the plague. They laid down this stone (and many others) as altars on which to sacrifice sheep as worship offerings to this Unknown God.

b. How did Paul use the stone? What did he tell the people of Athens about their hearts?

Answer: Paul used the stone many years later to tell the people of Athens about the Lord, the one, true God, they had long ago worshiped as the Unknown God. He told them that the Lord made their hearts to worship and know Him.

3. Fill in the missing words from the Bible Verse:

Psalms 42:1-2

"As the ___ pants for streams of water, so my soul ___ for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and ___ with God?"

Answers: deer; pants, meet.

BIBLE TRUTH HYMN

Be Thou My Vision

PFI NIV Songs 1, Tracks 6,7

Verse 1

Be Thou my vision,
O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me,
Save that Thou art:
Thou my best thought,
By day or by night,
Waking or sleeping,
Thy presence my light.

Verse 2

Be Thou my Wisdom,
And Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee
And Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father,
I, Thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling,
And I with Thee one.

Words: Samuel J. Stone Music: Samuel S. Wesley

God's people want God to be their vision—the one they think about most of all, the one who is the best thing they can think of. They keep thinking about Him, both in a special time of praying and reading...and all through the rest of the day and night. They think about Him and know He is with them. His presence guides them, like a light in darkness. He lives inside their heart, giving them wisdom and showing them what He's like.

AN ACTS PRAYER FROM OUR STORY

A=Adoration, C=Confession, T=Thanksgiving, S=Supplication

A God, we praise You for being our Creator who gave us a heart to know You.

C God, we confess that we are sinners, like the Athenians were. And, even though we know that You are the One, True God, too many times we still do not seek You as we should. We need Jesus to be our Savior!

T God, we thank You for showing us who you are, especially in Jesus. Thank You for showing Yourself to us so we can know You.

S God, we ask that You would work in our hearts that we might turn away from our sins and trust in Jesus as our Savior. Help us to know You and love You more and more.

BIBLE VERSE SONG

As the Deer

PFI NIV Songs 1, Track 8

As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.
As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God.
My soul thirsts for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?
Psalm Forty-two, one and two.

Words: Psalm 42:1-2, NIV 1984 Music: Constance Dever ©2012

A thirsty deer searches for a stream of water to satisfy his thirst. He must have it if he is to live. That's how God made his body. In the same way, our heart (or soul) longs for God because He made us to need Him. We may try to satisfy ourselves with other things, but until we know God, we will still long for something more. That's how He made us. He is the living God and there's nothing in the whole world that we need or want more than Him.