

III. *Other Altars*. In Acts 17:23 reference is made to an altar to an unknown god. There were several altars in Athens with this inscription, erected during the time of a plague, since they knew not what god was offended and required to be propitiated.<sup>1</sup>

Paul found among the many altars erected in Athens one bearing the inscription, “To the unknown God” (Acts 17:23), or rather “to an [i.e., some] unknown God.” The reason for this inscription cannot now be accurately determined. It afforded the apostle the occasion of proclaiming the gospel to the “men of Athens.”<sup>2</sup>

On his second missionary journey Paul visited this city (Acts 17:15; comp. 1 Thess. 3:1), and delivered in the Areopagus his famous speech (17:22–31). The altar of which Paul there speaks as dedicated “to the [properly “an”] unknown God” (23) was probably one of several which bore the same inscription. It is supposed that they originated in the practice of letting loose a flock of sheep and goats in the streets of Athens on the occasion of a plague, and of offering them up in sacrifice, at the spot where they lay down, “to the god concerned.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William Smith; revised and edited by F.N. and M.A. Peloubet, *Smith’s Bible dictionary [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997.

<sup>2</sup>Easton, M. G., M. A. D. D., *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1996.

<sup>3</sup>Easton, M. G., M. A. D. D., *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1996.