



Paul Preaches in Athens- Mars Hill

Scripture Reference: [Acts 17:16-34](#)



Suggested Emphasis: God is the only one worthy of our worship. We cannot think or act like any person or thing is more important than him.

Memory Verse: “Come, let’s bow down and worship him. Let’s kneel before the Lord who made us.” [Psalm 95:6, ICB](#)



Story Overview:

Paul continues his 2nd Missionary Journey by stopping in the wealthy and cultured city of Athens. Idols and altars of false gods filled the city. Paul was able to address a group of philosophers meeting on a rock hill called the Areopagus (Mars Hill). Idols were humanity’s attempt to make gods, but Paul preached that humans cannot the true God. God has made humans and all that is in the world. There is only one God, and it is wrong to put anything above him.

Background Study:

[Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts](#)



Map available from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/>

This lesson is a continuation of Paul's [2nd Missionary Journey](#). He and Silas had set off from Antioch and travelled across Asia Minor re-visiting the churches that Paul and Barnabas had established during their [1st Missionary Journey](#). In Lystra, a young man named Timothy joined them on the journey. After many attempts to take the Gospel message north Paul received a [vision of a man in Macedonia](#) begging him to come and help them. Going on to the Macedonian city of Philippi Paul and his group taught and converted a [woman named Lydia](#) and a [Jailer from the prison](#) along with the people in their households.

In both [Thessalonica and Berea](#) Paul began sharing the good news of Jesus by first addressing the Jewish community in the local synagogues. Some Jews began following King Jesus while others used violence in an attempt to stop Paul and his companions from sharing the Gospel message. The new Christians in Berea escorted Paul to Athens for his own safety. The lesson today begins with Paul scoping out Athens while he waits for Silas and Timothy to arrive from Berea.

Athens was a wealthy city and full of culture. At the time Paul was there the population was probably around 250,000 people. The city had once been at the centre of the Greek Empire but even after losing its power and being controlled by a variety of different rulers, it had never been forced to lose its reputation and cultural status. Athens was now part of the Roman Empire

"but was granted local independence in recognition of her great history. As the seat of Greek art and science, Athens played an important role even under Roman sway-she became the university city of the Roman world, and from her radiated spiritual light and intellectual energy to Tarsus, Antioch and Alexandria...Although the city had lost her real independence, the people retained their old characteristics: they were still interested in art, literature and philosophy." Quoted from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Athens

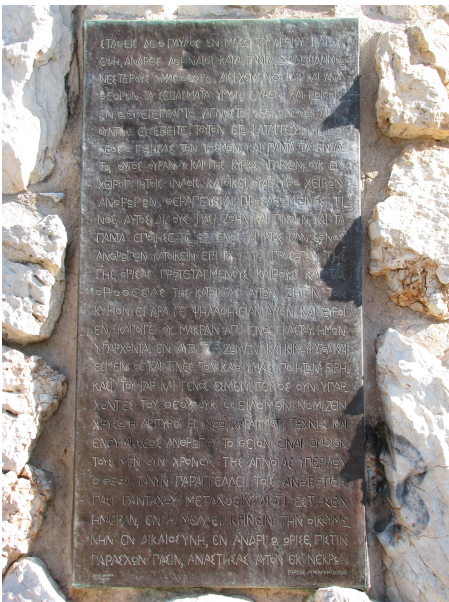


View of the Parthenon from the Areopagus

Athens was and is a city with many temples, altars, idols and statues. To an educated and conscientious Jewish teacher like Paul, this must have felt like an attack on the sovereignty of God. The writer of Acts says that “...he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.” [Acts 17:16 ICB](#)

An idol is an image or representation of an object of worship. Or it can be a person or thing that is greatly admired, loved, or revered. In Athens, there were idols built for many different gods. In case they accidentally left any out there were even idols with the inscription “To an unknown God”.

As was his custom, Paul first met with the Jewish community in the synagogue. The Jews were awaiting a Messiah. In Jesus God had fulfilled his promises so speaking to Jews was the right place to begin sharing the good news. But Paul did not stop with the Jews and others who already believed in God. The gathering place in cities of the time was called an “agora”. Paul entered this area full of people and markets and spoke about Jesus there.



At Areopagus- Inscription of Paul's Sermon (in Greek)

In Athens today the remains of the agora are overlooked by the hill called “the Areopagus” (or, Mars Hill, as the Romans liked to call it in honour of Mars, the god of war). The Parthenon towers over both. Even now one can climb onto the Areopagus and see in the distance some of the same temples and statues in Athens that Paul would have seen

throughout the city.

Paul's former education, perhaps in Tarsus where he was from, and in Jerusalem under the great teacher, Gamaliel ([Acts 22:3](#)) provided him with knowledge of philosophy and literature. Tarsus boasted of one of the best libraries in the ancient world as well as being one of the great centres of learning. Gamaliel was considered one of the greatest rabbis of all time. This background would have helped him greatly as he addressed the philosophers who met on the Areopagus. But it would only be through the power of the Holy Spirit that he would have been able to courageously preach a sermon opposing the very things Athens stood for. In the history of Athens, this group had performed a governing role and even now they had a say over any new religions introduced into the city.

Paul's sermon in [Acts 17:22-31](#) can be outlined as follows:

1. You worship many idols but you don't even know the real God.
[Acts 17:22-23](#)
2. God does not come from people.
[Acts 17:24-25a](#)
3. People come from God.
[Acts 17:25b-28](#)
4. Stop worshipping idols and start worshipping God.
[Acts 17:29-31a](#)
5. The resurrection of Jesus is God's way of proving to you that He is God.
"He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead"
[Acts 17:31, ICB](#)

Upon hearing Paul speak some of the philosophers sneered while others wanted to enter into more discussion. But Paul knew that many people in Athens only wanted to sit around discussing things never intending to take action ([Acts 17:21](#)). Perhaps this is the reason he left the meeting after giving his sermon.

Only a few people in Athens chose to follow Jesus. One was a member of the Areopagus and another was a prominent woman named Damaris. After this short time in Athens Paul continued his journey by heading for the city of Corinth.

The Athenians had created so many images that they did not even always know what the images were supposed to represent. But an idol does not have to be a statue. Any person or thing that we devote time to, admire or revere more than God could be referred to as an idol. This could be such things as sports figures, hobbies, TV, or even ourselves.

The definition of an idol from the [online Meriam Webster Dictionary](#) is:

- an image or representation of a god used as an object of worship
- a person or thing that is greatly admired, loved, or revered, or
- an object of extreme devotion

Bible verses relating to idolatry:

- [Exodus 20:1-6](#)
- [Psalm 115:3-8](#)
- [Isa.45:20-23](#)
- [1 John 5:20-21](#)



Way to Introduce the Story:

Before class cut five small pieces of paper for each student. In class ask the students to use the papers to write down their five most favourite things in the whole world. After everyone has done this then ask them to put the cards in order with the most important thing first. Lead the discussion so that the children will see how the most important things seem to take the most time, money, etc. Hopefully, some of the children will have put "God" on one of their papers. If they haven't, then give them an extra card so that they can do so now (without embarrassing them). "In today's story we are going to learn about a city that thought that their idols were the most important things in the world. (Idol- anything that is worshipped above God -often a statue or carving)"

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The Story:

Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey began in Antioch. He and Silas travelled through Asia Minor visiting the churches that Paul had helped establish on his 1st Journey. Then they sailed across the Aegean Sea to teach people in Macedonia. These men travelled wherever God wanted them to go to teach people about Jesus.

When Paul arrived in the city of Athens he looked around and saw many idols. The people of Athens were worshipping these idols instead of worshipping the true and living God. Paul was very distressed to see this and he wanted to tell the people about the real God and his son, Jesus.

The first thing Paul did was to go to the synagogue and talk to the Jews about Jesus. Then he went to the agora (the marketplace in the city where people liked to meet to buy and sell food and other goods) and told people there about God and Jesus. While he was talking in the agora some men overheard him. They were part of a group that met up on a big rock hill called the Areopagus and they wanted Paul to come and meet with them.

The men at the meeting of the Areopagus were an important group that met together to talk and think. Sometimes, instead of actually doing anything, they just liked to sit and talk about it instead.

The city of Athens had many kinds of idols and altars and the men of the Areopagus were the ones that decided whether or not people could bring new ones into the city. They asked Paul to tell them about the new ideas he was talking about to everyone.

So Paul told them that he had been looking at all of the idols around Athens. He had even noticed an idol with a sign on it that said, "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD" They were worshipping what they did not know but he would tell them about the God that he knew. He wanted to tell them about the only true God.

He said that all of the idols they were worshipping were made by people. But that didn't make sense. People can't make God. It is the other way around. God makes people! Paul then told them that they should stop worshipping idols. God is more important than any person or thing in the world so they should only worship God.

And finally, Paul told them one more very important thing. He told them that Jesus died and that God made him alive again. By doing this God had given them proof that he is real and that this Jesus will one day return to make all things right.

When Paul finished talking some of the men sneered at him. And some of the men wanted to just keep talking and talking about it. But Paul had told them the truth and he knew it was time to leave.

Not very many people in Athens decided to become followers of Jesus but a few did. One was one of the men of the Areopagus and one was a prominent woman named Damaris. But the time came for Paul to leave to go to other cities and tell people about God and Jesus. He hoped that the people of Athens would learn to worship God someday.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection, student interaction and/or emotion.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download the slideshow](#) or [click here to download the pictures to print.](#)

Each teacher is unique so only use the illustrations that best relate to the way YOU are telling the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Or use the video below. Thanks, David!

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Review Questions:

1. What city in Greece had many idols (even one to an “Unknown god”)? Athens
2. What is an idol? Anything that is worshipped above God -often a statue or carving.
3. Why is it wrong to worship an idol? There is only one God and He wants us to worship Him only.
4. What things can people love more than God? Sports, TV, money, toys, etc.

Song Suggestions:

- [Oh Be Careful Song](#)
- [My God is So Big Song](#)
- [Shake the Devil Off Song](#)
- [I Can Be a Missionary](#)
- [This Little Light of Mine](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Learning Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

- Ask the class to list things that people consider more important than God.
- Trace Paul’s second missionary journey on a map.
- Look up songs in the church songbook that talk about exalting God. (Above All Else, We Exalt Thee, etc.)
- Talk about God and why he is worthy to be worshipped.
[Download this list of reasons to respect God.](#)
- There is usually a really good selection of books about Athens in most public libraries. Bring books to show the children. Make sure you choose ones with good photos. Alternatively, do a little research online and find images to show. For instance, type “Areopagus” or “agora” into an online search engine such as [Google Images](#).
- To review, either you or the children can draw a large outline of Paul on a whiteboard or piece of paper (even drawing with a stick in the sand works fine if you are outside). Then, after you have taught the lesson ask the children to think about what they have just learned from the Bible. Have them write descriptive words and/or draw pictures inside and around the outlined illustration of Paul. When you see what the children are writing or drawing you may be surprised or encouraged by what insights they have picked up from the story. This is also a good opportunity to correct or add to anything you might not have covered as well as you could have when you



were teaching.

If you prefer, you can [download and print the illustration of Paul provided here](#) and then have the children write and draw on it for the review.

- Alternatively, if you are teaching a series of lessons about Paul then you might draw an outline of him on a large poster or paper and then add descriptive words about him each time you study a new lesson.
- [Click here for the 16 lessons about the Life of Paul grouped together as a set.](#)

Crafts:

- ‘Worship Only God’ Craft: Use painter’s tape (or other tapes that is not too sticky) to form the letters G-O-D on the centre of a piece of paper. Guide children in colouring the paper using crayons, markers or chalk. This can be done in a “messy” way and the colours should pass over the tape. As they are filling the paper lead the conversation into what kind of things people find important. Encourage the children to illustrate these and include them with their drawings as they fill the paper. To conclude the craft ask the children to carefully pull the tape away from the paper. The tape will have protected these areas so the letters should stand out clearly. Talk about how people consider many things important, but only God is worthy of our worship. He is more important than any other thing we can think of.
- Make a relief map of Paul’s Journeys featuring the place in today’s story. If you are studying Paul’s journeys over a few lessons, then you could add more details to the map each time you learn about another stop on the journey. Instructions on how to make a relief map at <https://www.weirdunsocializedhomeschoolers.com/step-by-step-to-making-salt-dough-map/>



- Print bookmarks, trading cards or timelines ([printable pages](#)).
- Visit the [Teaching Ideas](#) page for additional activities and crafts.

Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page and puzzle worksheets \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Craft: Doorknob hanger \(sundayschoolcrafts.net\)](#)
- [Review: Create a “passport” that covers the life of Paul. Good visual ideas and activities. Could be split up to go with several lessons or taught all together as a review of previous lessons concerning Paul \(kidsbibledebjackson.blogspot.co.nz\)](#)
- [Good list of attributes of God for you and your students to reflect on and discuss \(whatchristianswanttoknow.com\)](#)
- [More information about Athens \(bibleatlas.org\)](#)
- [More information about the Areopagus \(bibleatlas.org\)](#)

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