Paul Preaches in Athens- Mars Hill



Scripture Reference: Acts 17:16-34

Suggested Theme: God is the only one worthy of our worship. We cannot think or act as if 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 continued his second Missionary Journey by stopping in the wealthy and cultured city of Athens. Idols and altars of false gods filled the city. Paul addressed 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 create 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



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 Paul and Barnabas established during their 1st

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Missionary Journey. Timothy and Luke had also joined Paul.

Paul was now in Athens, alone. He had been sent on to Athens for his safety after Jewish leaders had opposed him in Thessalonica and Berea. Today's lesson begins with Paul scoping out Athens while he waits for Silas and Timothy to arrive from Berea.

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

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 Paul *"was troubled because he saw that the city was full of idols"* Acts 17:16 ICB

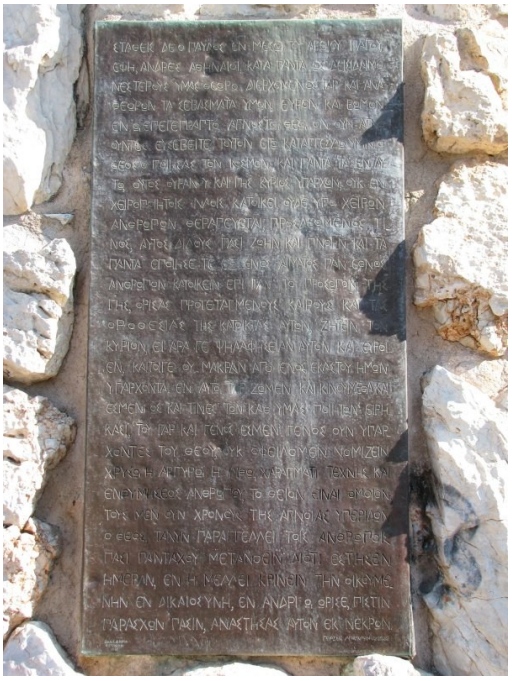


An idol is an image or representation of an object of worship. Or it can be a person or thing that is greatly admired, loved, or revered.

In Athens, idols were built to represent many different gods. In case they accidentally left any out, there were even idols with the inscription *"To an unknown God."*

Paul first met with the Jewish community in the synagogue, which was his custom. 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 to the people there.

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 received an excellent formal education in Jerusalem under the great teacher, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). This qualified him to speak confidently about philosophy and literature. His birthplace, Tarsus, boasted one of the best libraries in the ancient world and was one of the great centres of learning. Gamaliel was regarded as one of the greatest rabbis of all time.

These credentials 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. This group performed a

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governing role and even had a say over any new religions introduced into the city.

An Outline of Paul's Sermon (Acts 17:22-31):

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 why 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 to the city of Corinth.

The Athenians had created so many images that they did not even always know what they 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 sports figures, hobbies, TV, or even ourselves.

The definition of an idol from the online Meriam Webster Dictionary is as follows:

- 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 the teaching session begins, cut small pieces of paper so that each child will have five. Ask the children to use the papers to write down their five favourite things in the whole world. After everyone has done this, 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

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worshipped above God -often a statue or carving).”

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 who 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. 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 gave them proof that he was real and that Jesus would 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 the other 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 various 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 or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details

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you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- What city in Greece had many idols (even one of an "Unknown god")? (Athens)
- What did Athenians like to spend time doing that made them want to hear Paul's message? (They liked to talk about and hear new ideas)
- What is an idol? (Anything that is loved or worshipped above God -often a statue or carving)
- Why is it wrong to worship an idol? (There is only one God, and He wants us to worship Him only)
- What things can people love more than God? (People, sports, TV, money, toys, ourselves, etc.)
- What idea did some people want to hear more about from Paul? (That God will raise people from the dead)
- Who decided to follow Jesus after hearing Paul preach in Athens? (Dionysius, Damaris and others with them)
- What does this story show you about God?
- What does this story show you about people?

Reflection:

- What do you think Athens and the people in Athens looked like? What kind of weather do you think Athens had when Paul was there?
- How do you think Paul felt when he saw idols all around Athens?
- Even though Paul and the Athenians had different beliefs, how did Paul treat the people and talk about their religion?
- Why do you think Paul left Athens quickly and didn't stay to talk with the people more?
- What do people you know follow instead of God?
- Why do you think people make idols?
- How is God different from other 'gods' or things people worship?
- What do you love about God? Why do we worship and follow Him?
- Is there something you love more or is more important to you than God? (If the children say yes, talk about this with them. Sometimes, 'idols' in our lives are not bad things. They may be good things, such as people, but they are not good gods. Help the children understand God is the only God and talk about

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His love, sacrifice and sovereignty. Lead the children in prayer to repent or ask for help to follow and love God first)

- What question do you have for God about this story?
- What do you wonder about in this story?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

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
- ABC: Jesus Died for You and Me Song
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- Our God is an Awesome God Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Ask the children 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 exalt 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.
- You or the children can research Athens online or at a public library. If possible, show the children illustrations.

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- To review, 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 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.
- Click here for the 16 lessons about the Life of Paul grouped together.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- ‘Worship Only God’ Craft: Use painter’s tape (or other tape that is not too sticky) to form the letters G-O-D in 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 the children continue colouring over the tape, talk about what things people find important.

  Have the children carefully pull the tape away from the paper to complete the craft. 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 anything else 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 and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page and puzzle worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)
- Craft: Doorknob hanger (sundayschoolcrafts.net)
- Review: Create a “passport” that covers Paul’s life. Good visual ideas and activities. It 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 to reflect upon and discuss (whatchristianswanttoknow.com)
- More information about Athens (bibleatlas.org)
- More information about the Areopagus (bibleatlas.org)

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