

PAUL IN ATHENS

Acts 17:15-34

STRUCTURE

Key-person: Paul

Key-location: Athens

Key-repetitions:

- People in Athens were religious: statues of false gods were everywhere (Ac 17:16); Paul recognized that they were very religious (Ac 17:22).
- Paul held discussions: in the synagogue (Ac 17:17); in the marketplace (Ac 17:17); with Stoic philosophers (Ac 17:18); in the Areopagus (Ac 17:19-31).
- Reactions: Paul saw statues of false gods and became upset (Ac 17:16); philosophers discussed with Paul and then took him to a meeting at the Areopagus (Ac 17:18-19); listeners heard Paul speaking about a person who came back from the dead, and some joked about his speech while others said they would hear him another time (Ac 17:32); Paul's listeners joked about his message and Paul left the Areopagus (Ac 17:33); some heard Paul and became believers (Ac 17:34).

Key-attitudes:

- Paul's revulsion in seeing the city full of idols.
- Philosophers' curiosity about Paul's new teachings.
- Philosophers' mockery when Paul spoke about the resurrection.
- Paul's dismissal of those who mocked the gospel.

Initial-situation:

Paul chose Silas to accompany him on his second missionary journey. Paul and Silas arrived in the town of Lystra where Timothy joined the team. They went to the city of Troas where Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia urging him to come to Macedonia. Dr. Luke joined the team and they traveled to Philippi, a leading city in Macedonia. From Philippi they went to Thessalonica, and then to Berea. At each place new believers were left to continue the church. Also, they left each place after being persecuted.

Initial-problem:

Paul fled persecution in the city of Berea and went to Athens. Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea.

Final-situation:

Paul spoke in the Areopagus about Jesus being brought back from the dead. Some listeners joked about it. At that reaction, Paul left the Areopagus. Some people joined Paul and became believers.

BIBLE STORY

Paul fled persecution in the city of Berea and went to Athens. Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea. Paul sent instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him. Paul waited for Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens (Ac 17:13-16).

Paul became upset when he saw statues of false gods everywhere in the city. Paul held discussions in the synagogue with Jews and God-fearing non-Jews. Daily, Paul held discussions with people who happened to be in the marketplace. A group of Stoic philosophers had discussions with Paul. Paul kept talking about Jesus and saying that people would come back to life. The philosophers thought Paul was talking about foreign gods; they misunderstood Paul's discussion of the resurrection with the description of a new god they had not heard about. The philosophers took Paul to a meeting at the Areopagus where philosophical and religious ideas were debated. The philosophers told Paul, "Explain to us this new teaching that you're presenting. You're bringing strange ideas to us, and we want to know what they mean." The Athenians and the foreigners who lived there loved talking about and listening to the latest ideas (Ac 17:16-21).

Paul stood up in the Areopagus and said, "I see that you men of Athens are very religious. I've walked around and looked at your objects of worship. I found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as an unknown god, is the God I'm talking about.

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth. God doesn't live in temples built by hands. God is not served by human hands, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. God began by making one man. From the one man God made all the people who live everywhere on the whole earth. God wants people to seek him, and reach out for him, and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. As some of your poets have said, 'We live in him. We move in him. We have our being in him. We are his children.'

"Since we're God's children, we should not think that God is like gold, silver, or stone, an image made by man's design and skill. In the past, God ignored such ignorance, but now God commands all people to repent. God has set a day when he'll judge the world with justice by the man he chose. God proved this to everyone by bringing back that man from the dead" (Ac 17:22-31).

The listeners heard that a person had come back from the dead. Some joked about it. Others said, "We want to hear you talk about this some other time." At that reaction, Paul left the Areopagus. Some people joined Paul and became believers (Ac 17:32-34).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who were some of the people that Paul spoke to in Athens?
2. What distressed Paul about the spiritual situation in Athens?
3. What distresses you spiritually about the area in which you live?
4. What was Paul's message in Athens?
5. How did the fact that the Athenians and foreigners enjoyed talking about the latest ideas, influence the way they responded to Paul's message?
6. How did Paul use their culture to share truths about God?
7. How did the Athenians respond to Paul's presentation?
8. Paul referred to local statues and Greek poetry to relate the gospel to the Athenians. How can we use movies, books, TV shows, and music to relate the gospel to our culture?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **A Christian should begin to evangelize by speaking to non-believers about their present situation.** In Athens, Paul began his speech by mentioning an altar in their city with the inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD (Ac 17:23).
2. **People who evangelize should know their listeners' culture.** In Athens, Paul used Greek wisdom to combat paganism and to present the gospel. The Athenians had dedicated an altar TO AN UNKNOWN GOD, because they feared that some god, who they knew nothing about, might resent their ignoring him. Paul referred to their unknown god in order to talk about their ignorance of the Lord God. This protected Paul from the accusation that he was speaking about a foreign god. Paul also quoted one of their poets (Ac 17:22-31).
3. **Being religious is not synonymous with knowing God.** Athens had more images than other Greek cities. It is estimated that Athens had more than thirty thousand idols. The citizens of Athens were religious; however, they didn't know the one and only true God. Paul presented to them the true God who was unknown to them (Ac 17:22-31).
4. **When a Christian is evangelizing and his listeners begin to mock Jesus, the Christian should give up on that group and search for others who are open to listening to the gospel.** When Paul spoke in the Areopagus at Athens about the resurrection, some made fun of him. Paul left the Areopagus. (Ac 17:32-33). Jesus alerted his followers to not cast their pearls to pigs (Mat 7:6).
5. **God's servants will not be equally successful every time.** Paul's efforts in Athens were not as successful as at other cities since he was unable to plant a church there; however, there were a number of converts (Ac 17:34).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Interactive Sharing:

- Paul had limited success in Athens. He left the Areopagus when his listeners joked about his message. He left only a few believers. Invite the listeners to share an experience where they experienced limited success.
- Paul referred to local statues and Greek poetry to relate the gospel to the Athenians. Invite listeners to share ideas about movies, books, TV shows, and popular music that could relate the gospel to our culture.