

Power to Witness in Word and Deed

The Book of Acts – Part 2

Acts 17:16–34

Read Acts 17:16–34.

1. As the Spirit leads Paul from place to place he finds himself going from the heart of the Jewish nation, Jerusalem, to the pagan city of Athens, known for its art, history, and architecture.
 - a. Describe Athens. (You may also want to Google “Athens in biblical times” to get more insight.)
 - b. What does he do when he arrives in Athens? (vv. 16, 23)
2. Why is Paul so distressed that this city is full of idols?
Rom. 1:25

Ex. 20:3–5a

Is. 44:9–20

Jn. 4:23
3. How does Paul respond to his distress? (v. 17)
4. Why do you think it is important for Paul to go and reason with “the Jews and God-fearing Greeks” (v. 17) in the synagogue? (Jer. 10:1–5; Rom. 10:1–2)
5. What does Paul preach in the marketplace? (v. 18)

***NOTE:** Epicureans “considered gods to be remote.... [T]he world was due to chance.... [T]here would be no survival of death, and no judgment. So human beings should pursue pleasure. The Stoics...acknowledged the supreme god but in a pantheistic way [believing that all things are god].... [They resigned] themselves to live in harmony with nature and reason, however painful this may be, and develop[ed] their own self-sufficiency.”¹*

¹ John Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 281.

6. How do the people respond to Paul, since they have no knowledge of who Jesus is? (vv. 18–20)
7. Paul is taken to the Areopagus, a council that was considered “guardians of the city’s religion, morals and education.”²
 - a. How does Luke describe the Areopagus? (v. 21)
 - b. How would you characterize Paul’s opening statement at the Areopagus? (vv. 22–23)
 - c. What attitude might Paul have been tempted to have as a devout Jewish Christian? (Consider question 2.)
8. Paul’s message is concise but comprehensive. List all the ways Paul describes the one true God. (vv. 23–31)
9. How does Paul’s description of God confront the idolatry of the Athenians?
10. In the past Paul has “reasoned from the Scriptures” (17:2). Why do you think he takes a different tack here, even quoting Greek poets in verse 28?
11. How is this first-century generation different from all previous generations? (vv. 30–31; Rom. 16:25–26; 1 Pet. 1:20)
12. Paul’s talk of the resurrection has stirred up interest and persecution wherever he has gone. Why is preaching the resurrection central to sharing the good news? (1 Cor. 15:3–4, 12–23)
13. Don Richardson, missionary to Dutch New Guinea in the 1960s, authored *Peace Child*, a book detailing his life among the Sawi people. From his experience he came to believe that in every culture God has placed some concept, belief, or custom that can be used as a touchstone for sharing the gospel. Paul says it this way in Acts 14:17: God “has not left himself without a testimony.”

In today’s passage, Paul sees the altar to the unknown god as a way to share the gospel with the Athenians. What are some concepts, beliefs, or customs in your own “people group” that can help you share the good news?

² Ibid., 283.