

Athens

To the Ends of the Earth - Paul's second missionary journey

Foundation

Bible passage : Acts 17:16-33

Athens was a large city with a proud past. It was, and still is, famous for its philosophers who liked to think and argue and write about everything and anything. They particularly liked to talk about things like why we exist, what is the world, why we think, and so on. But when Paul arrived in Athens on his second missionary journey was was not impressed by the city. Everywhere there were statues (idols) to worship different gods.

As an Israelite who believe in Jesus, Paul knew that in the Bible God tells us not to worship statues and the like. Acts therefore tells us that “Paul’s spirit was provoked within him” and he went to the synagogues and the marketplaces to talk to people about Jesus to both fellow Jews and Gentiles. Some of the people who heard Paul were philosophers and they hadn’t heard the things he was saying before, so they invited him to speak at the Areopagus.

“times of ignorance God overlooked,
but now commands all men
everywhere to repent” (v30)

This was originally the principal council of ancient Athens, centuries before Paul arrived. There was a particular area where the council had met but by Paul’s time they probably met in a building nearby. We don’t know whether Paul was invited to speak to the council itself or just to a general gathering of leaders, but they were interested to hear of old ideas, and new.



At the original site of Areopagus meetings there is a more recent plaque containing the words of Paul’s talk as recorded by Luke in Acts.

Paul gladly took the opportunity to talk to them. He first talked about the statues in their city and about God, and even quoted some sayings of their own philosophers. Then he told them that should not worship statues and began to talk about Jesus and how he was raised from the dead. This caused a stir and some people said it was foolish talk. Later in one of his letters would write that the resurrection is “foolishness to Greeks” but the wisdom of God to shame the wise (1 Cor 1.23). Paul would have known that some would think the idea of a man being raised from the dead was foolish and so he could have just talked about other things, but he had been sent to spread the light of Christ and that meant telling people why Jesus had died and why He had been raised from the dead. Paul also talked about how through Jesus God will judge the whole world because of sin.

Some of those who heard Paul went with him and after learning more about Jesus they themselves became followers of Jesus too. So they too came **to see the light of Christ.**



To many the message about Jesus seems foolish nonsense, but to those who believe it is the wisdom of God.