

## WHILE PAUL WAITED IN ATHENS

Text: Acts 17:16

INTRO: Paul had been persecuted in Thessalonica & departed to Berea & preached there till Jews from Thessalonica came down & stirred up resentment against him. Then he departed to Athens & sent for Silas & Timothy to meet him there. Silas apparently never made it to Athens. Timothy did arrive there, but Paul sent him immediately back to Thessalonica, 1 Thess. 3:1-2. But in the mean time...

### I. WHILE PAUL WAITED IN ATHENS.

A. He saw a city given over to idolatry, vs. 16.  
Athens was a city with a great & splendid past. During the days of the Grecian Empire, Athens had been one of the most powerful cities in the world. During the Roman Empire, Athens had lost much of its splendor, but it was still one of the cultural centers of the world. The city contained numerous temples dedicated to pagan gods of which 5 still stand today. It contained idols too numerous to count. There was a common saying that it was “easier to find a god in Athens than a man.”

B. While Paul waited for Timothy & Silas he did not waste his time. He went to the synagogue as was his usual practice & reasoned with the Jews & God fearing Gentiles who gathered there, vs 17.

C. Meeting with little or no success in the synagogue, he took to the streets with his message, vs 17b.

D. His market place preaching also was apparently without success, except that it occasioned the opportunity to address the culturally elite philosophers in the Areopagus, vs. 18-20.

At this point, it would seem that a few definitions are in order:

1. Areopagus:

- a. Mars' Hill. A hill 377 ft high on the western side of the city.
- b. A council which traditionally met on Mars' Hill to decide matters pertaining mostly to religion & education.

2. Epicureans: A group of philosophers who taught that pleasure or happiness is the supreme good. They did, however, urge that long-range consequences should be considered more important than momentary whims.

Paul was familiar with both the weakness & strengths of Epicurean philosophy. In 1 Cor 15:33 he quoted Meander: "Evil company corrupts good habits."

3. Stoics: A group of philosophers who believed God was not a personal Being, but simply a spiritual force operating in all of nature. To the Stoics, the highest good was to be found in suppressing the emotions & following only reason & virtue.

Paul showed his familiarity with their teachings, quoting their poets, Aratus & Cleanthes, vs 28.

- E. In these philosophers, Paul found a ready audience but there was one thing that detracted from their willingness to hear him--their motive, vs. 21.

## II. PAUL'S SERMON ON MARS' HILL.

- A. In his intro, he seeks to establish a desirable reaction on their part by commending them on being very religious (Gr. demon-fearing). He also took as his text a statement he had seen inscribed on one of their own altars, vs. 22-23.

It would have been meaningless to them to have quoted from the Jewish Scriptures, for they were not familiar with those Scriptures nor the God who revealed them. After a statement of his intentions, he proceeded to

inform them of the God they ignorantly worshipped.

B. God, the Creator & Provider of the universe, vs. 24.

1. Does not dwell in man-made temples, vs 24b
2. Is not worshipped with men's hands as tho He is in need of such service, vs. 25.

a. He does not need the kind of service that took place in their temple ceremonies nor the work of the craftsman to represent Him in idols.

b. The only sense in which we can really give to God is to give ourselves to Him as He directs--& even then, He is not the beneficiary of such giving. We are.  
MT 25:40, 34.

C. God, the Upholder & Governor of the universe.

1. Made all nationalities of men from one blood, vs 26

a. The Jews were accustomed to dividing men into 2 categories, Jews & Gentiles.

b. The Greeks were accustomed to dividing them into Greeks & barbarians, Rom 1:14

c. In this gospel age all such distinctions are unwarranted.

[In Christ] there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. (Col 3:11).

2. It is God who has determined man's times & boundaries as nations.

But in the 4th generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. (Gen 15:16). Dan. 5:26-28.

3. God deals with nations & individuals in such a way as to encourage them to seek Him, vs. 27.
  - a. It is not easier to find the true God than a man. It is unlikely that a man will stumble upon a proper knowledge of God by accident.
  - b. But He is never far from any of us when we are determined to find Him, vs. 27.
4. Whether we acknowledge Him or not, we owe our existence to Him, vs. 28.

NOTE: We really have nothing to give Him; He gives us everything.

5. Even some of the Stoic poets had unwittingly spoken a great truth: "We are His offspring," vs. 28.
6. A realization that we are offspring of God should have been sufficient to teach these poets & their listeners that God is not something man has formed of wood or stone or metal fashioned by human hands, vs. 29.

D. God is the righteous Judge of all, vs. 30-31.

### III. THE RESPONSE TO PAUL'S SERMON.

- A. Some mocked, vs. 32a.

For the Jews request a sign, & the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block & to the Greeks foolishness.  
(1 Cor 1:22-23).
- B. Some delayed a decision--but made one nonetheless, vs 32.

Like Felix, Acts 24:25-27.

NOTE: They said, "We will hear you again on this matter," but they probably never did, 18:1.

- C. A few joined Paul in the faith of Christ, vs. 34.

1. After 1,950 years, Dionysius & Damaris have the honor of being remembered by name every time this portion of Scripture is read.
2. Dionysius the Aeropagite even has a street named after him in his home town of Athens.
3. But for these 2 & the other believers there, & for all faithful Christians of every era, there is a greater honor by far--their names are in the book of life.  
READ REV 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:14

CONCLUSION: Your name can be enrolled in the Lamb's Book of Life today if you will not harden your heart; if today you will give your heart to Jesus in obedience to His will.

La Porte, TX, January 18, 1981

Exton, PA, September 18, 1988

Shiloh, Mexia, TX, September 26, 1993

Susquehanna, Marietta, PA, March 5, 2000