

~ATHENS (352)

(Ath'ens) [Of, or Belonging to Athena]

.. Cultural and Religious Center

.. Early History

.. Paul's Activity In Athens

- The modern capital of Greece, and its most prominent city in ancient times. It is located toward the southern end of the Plain of Attica, about 8 kilometers (5 miles) from the Aegean Sea, being served by its neighboring seaport Piraeus, with which it was connected in pre-Christian times by long, nearly parallel walls.

- Its geographic location contributed much to its greatness in history. The mountains surrounding the city provided a natural defense, and the mountain passes were sufficiently far away to avoid the possibility of a surprise land attack. It was also far enough from the sea to be safe from an invading fleet, yet its three natural harbors in neighboring Piraeus were readily accessible from the city.

.. Cultural and Religious Center

- Although **Athens** enjoyed some military fame as the capital of a small empire and as a strong naval power in the **Fifth Century B.C.E**, it was distinguished primarily as the center of Greek learning, literature, and art.

- It became a university city filled with professors, lecturers, and philosophers, being the home of such famous philosophers as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Four schools of philosophy were established there, the **Platonic, Peripatetic, Epicurean, and Stoic**

- But certain one's of both the **Epicurean and the Stoic philosophers** took to conversing with him controversially, and some would say; What is it this chatterer would like to tell? Others; He seems to be a publisher of foreign deities. This was because he was declaring the Good News of Jesus and the resurrection. (**Acts of Apostles 17:18**)

- And these were attended by students from throughout the empire in Roman times.

- **Athens** was also a very religious city, provoking the apostle Paul's comment that **Athenians** seem to be more given to the fear of the deities than others are.
- Paul now stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said; Men of **Athens**, I behold that in all things you seem to be more given to the fear of the deities than others are. (Acts of Apostles 17:22)
- According to the historian Josephus, the **Athenians** were the most pious of the Greeks. [Against Apion, II, 130 [11]] The State controlled religion and encouraged it by paying for public sacrifices, rites, and processions in honor of the gods. Idols were to be found in temples, in public squares, and on the streets, and people regularly prayed to the gods before engaging in their intellectual feasts or symposiums, political assemblies, and athletic contests. In order not to offend any of the gods, the **Athenians** even built altars To an Unknown God, to which fact Paul refers in;
- For instance, while passing along and carefully observing your objects of veneration I also found an altar on which had been inscribed To an Unknown God. Therefore what you are unknowingly giving godly devotion to, this I am publishing to you. (Acts of Apostles 17:23)
- Second-century geographer Pausanias confirms this, explaining that while he was traveling along the road from Phaleron Bay harbor to **Athens**, perhaps traversed by Paul on his arrival, he noticed altars of the gods named Unknown, and of heroes. [Description of Greece, Attica, I, 4]

.. Early History

- The city grew up around the Acropolis, an oblong hill about 150 meters or 500 feet high, which rises sheer on three sides. During the **Seventh Century B.C.E.** it was ruled by a hereditary nobility or aristocracy known as the Eupatridae, who had a monopoly of the political power and also had control of the Areopagus, the chief criminal court at the time.
- During the early part of the **Sixth Century B.C.E.**, however, a legislator named Solon made constitutional reforms that improved the lot of the poor and laid the foundation for a democratic government. However, it was democracy for only the free citizens of the land, as a large section of the population was made up of slaves.

- Following victories over the Persians in the **Fifth Century B.C.E**, **Athens** became the capital of a small empire, controlling most of the coastal areas around the Aegean Sea and extending its trade and influence from Italy and Sicily in the West to Cyprus and Syria in the East. The city became the **cultural leader of the ancient world**, enjoying brilliant achievements in literature and art.
- At this time many beautiful public buildings and temples were erected, including the Parthenon, the temple of **Athena**, and the Erechtheum, the ruins of which can still be seen atop the Acropolis in modern **Athens**.
- The Parthenon was considered the principal architectural monument of ancient pagan religion and was ornamented by a 9-meters (30 foot) gold and ivory statue of **Athena**.
- This material beauty, however, did not produce true spiritual uplift for the **Athenians**, for the gods and goddesses honored by it were themselves depicted in Greek mythology as practicing every immoral and criminal act known to human's.
- Thus, in Paul's day, the Greek philosopher Apollonius criticized the **Athenians** for their **orgiastic dances** at the Festival of Dionysus or Bacchus and **for their enthusiasm for the shedding of human blood** at the gladiatorial contests.
- The **Athenian** Empire dissolved after its defeat by the Spartans in the Peloponnesian wars at the end of the **Fifth Century B.C.E**, but its conquerors showed consideration to the city on account of its culture and did not totally ruin it.
- It was conquered by the Romans in **86 B.C.E** and was stripped of its trade and commerce, so, by the time Jesus and the early Christians came on the Palestinian scene, **Athens** importance lay primarily in its universities and schools of philosophy.

· Paul's Activity In Athens

- In about **50 C.E** the apostle Paul visited **Athens** on his second missionary tour. He had left Silas and Timothy behind in Beroea with instructions to follow as soon as possible.
- But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was published also in Beroea by Paul, they came there also

to incite and agitate the masses. (**Acts of Apostles 17:13**)

- Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off to go as far as the sea, but both Silas and Timothy remained behind there. (**Acts of Apostles 17:14**)
- However, those conducting Paul brought him as far as **Athens** and, after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as quickly as possible, they departed. (**Acts of Apostles 17:15**)
- While waiting for them, he became irritated at the many false gods of the city and so began to reason with the people, both in the Jewish synagogue and in the marketplace.
- Now while Paul was waiting for them in **Athens**, his spirit within him came to be irritated at beholding that the city was full of idols. (**Acts of Apostles 17:16**)
- Consequently he began to reason in the synagogue with the Jews and the other people who worshiped God and every day in the marketplace with those who happened to be on hand. (**Acts of Apostles 17:17**)
- In recent years this marketplace, or agora, to the Northwest of the Acropolis has been fully excavated by the American School of Classical Studies. The agora was evidently not only a location for transacting business, but also a place to debate and conduct civic affairs. The inquisitive attitude of the **Athenians** described in the account at;
- But certain one's of both the **Epicurean and the Stoic philosophers** took to conversing with him controversially, and some would say; What is it this chatterer would like to tell? Others; He seems to be a publisher of foreign deities. This was because he was declaring the Good News of Jesus and the resurrection. (**Acts of Apostles 17:18**)
- So they laid hold of him and led him to the Areopagus, saying, Can we get to know what this new teaching is which is spoken by you? (**Acts of Apostles 17:19**)
- For you are introducing some things that are strange to our ears. Therefore we desire to get to know what these things purport to

be. (**Acts of Apostles 17:20**)

- In fact, all **Athenians** and the foreigners sojourning there would spend their leisure time at nothing but telling something or listening to something new. (**Acts of Apostles 17:21**)
- Is reflected in the criticism by Demosthenes of his fellow **Athenians** for their love of moving around the marketplace continually inquiring; What news?
- While in the marketplace Paul was accosted by Stoic and Epicurean philosophers and was viewed suspiciously as being a publisher of foreign deities.
- But certain one's of both the Epicurean and the Stoic philosophers took to conversing with him controversially, and some would say; What is it this chatterer would like to tell? Others; He seems to be a publisher of foreign deities. This was because he was declaring the Good News of Jesus and the resurrection. (**Acts of Apostles 17:18**)
- There were many sorts of religion in the Roman Empire, but Greek and Roman Law prohibited the introduction of strange gods and new religious customs, especially when these were in opposition to the native religion. Paul evidently encountered difficulty due to religious intolerance in the Romanized city of Philippi.
- Well, when her masters saw that their hope of gain had left, they laid hold of Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the rulers. (**Acts of Apostles 16:19**)
- And, leading them up to the civil magistrates, they said; These men are disturbing our city very much, they being Jews. (**Acts of Apostles 16:20**)
- And they are publishing customs that it is not lawful for us to take up or practice, seeing we are Romans. (**Acts of Apostles 16:21**)
- And the crowd rose up together against them, and the civil magistrates, after tearing the outer garments off them, gave the command to beat them with rods. (**Acts of Apostles 16:22**)
- After they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them

into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them securely. (**Acts of Apostles 16:23**)

- Because he got such an order, he threw them into the inner prison and made their feet fast in the stocks. (**Acts of Apostles 16:24**)
- The inhabitants of **Athens** proved to be more skeptical and tolerant than the Philippians, but they were still evidently concerned about how this new teaching might affect the security of the state. Paul was taken to the Areopagus, but whether he spoke before the court known as the Areopagus cannot be definitely stated. Some say that in Paul's day the court itself was no longer meeting on the hill but in the agora.
- Paul's eloquent testimony before these learned men of **Athens** is a lesson in tact and discernment. He showed that, instead of preaching about a new deity, he was preaching about the very Creator of heaven and earth, and he tactfully made reference to the **Unknown God**, whose altar he had seen, and he even quoted from **Phaenomena** by Aratus, a Cilician poet, and from **Hymn to Zeus** by Cleanthes.
- Paul now stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said; Men of **Athens**, I behold that in all things you seem to be more given to the fear of the deities than others are. (**Acts of Apostles 17:22**)
- For instance, while passing along and carefully observing your objects of veneration I also found an altar on which had been inscribed, **To an Unknown God**. Therefore what you are unknowingly giving godly devotion to, this I am publishing to you. (**Acts of Apostles 17:23**)
- The God that made the world and all the things in it, being, as this One is, Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in handmade temples. (**Acts of Apostles 17:24**)
- Neither is he attended to by human hands as if he needed anything, because he himself gives to all persons life and breath and all things. (**Acts of Apostles 17:25**)
- And he made out of one man every nation of men, to dwell upon the entire surface of the earth, and he decreed the appointed times and the set limits of the dwelling of men. (**Acts of Apostles 17:26**)

- For them to seek God, if they might grope for him and really find him, although, in fact, he is not far off from each one of us. (**Acts of Apostles 17:27**)
- For by him we have life and move and exist, even as certain one's of the poets among you have said; For we are also his progeny. (**Acts of Apostles 17:28**)
- Seeing, therefore, that we are the progeny of God, we ought not to imagine that the Divine Being is like gold or silver or stone, like something sculptured by the art and contrivance of man. (**Acts of Apostles 17:29**)
- True, God has overlooked the times of such ignorance, yet now he is telling mankind that they should all everywhere repent. (**Acts of Apostles 17:30**)
- Because he has set a day in which he purposes to judge the inhabited earth in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and he has furnished a guarantee to all men in that he has resurrected him from the dead. (**Acts of Apostles 17:31**)
- Although the majority ridiculed him, some **Athenians**, including Areopagus Judge Dionysius and a woman named Damaris, became believers.
- Well, when they heard of a resurrection of the dead, some began to mock, while others said; We will hear you about this even another time. (**Acts of Apostles 17:32**)
- Thus Paul went out from their midst. (**Acts of Apostles 17:33**)
- But some men joined themselves to him and became believers, among whom also were Dionysius, a judge of the court of the Areopagus, and a woman named Damaris, and others besides them. (**Acts of Apostles 17:34**)
- It is possible that Timothy joined Paul at **Athens** and was then sent back to Thessalonica, but it appears more likely that Paul sent word to him at Beroea to make this trip, thus leaving Paul without companions in **Athens**. The expression we at;
- Hence, when we could bear it no longer, we saw good to be left

alone in **Athens**. (1 Thessalonians 3:1)

- And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's minister in the Good News about the Christ, in order to make you firm and comfort you in behalf of your faith. (1 Thessalonians 3:2)
- Appears to be used in the editorial sense by Paul as applying simply to himself.
- For this reason we wanted to come to you, yes, I Paul, both once and a second time, but Satan cut across our path. (1 Thessalonians 2:18)
- But Timothy has just now come to us from you and given us the Good News about your faithfulness and love, and that you continue having good remembrance of us always, yearning to see us in the same way, indeed, as we also do you. (1 Thessalonians 3:6)
- If such was the case, then Paul departed alone from **Athens**, going on to Corinth, where Silas and Timothy eventually rejoined him.
- When, now, both Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began to be intensely occupied with the word, witnessing to the Jews to prove that Jesus is the Christ. (Acts of Apostles 18:5)
- It is likely that Paul revisited **Athens** on his third missionary tour **55 or 56 C.E.**, since the record states that he spent three months in Greece at that time.
- After going through those parts and encouraging the one's there with many a word, he came into Greece. (Acts of Apostles 20:2)
- And when he had spent three months there, because a plot was hatched against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he made up his mind to return through Macedonia. (Acts of Apostles 20:3)