

# Athens, Greece

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- Athens was the capital city of Greece.
  - Named for Athena, the Greek goddess.
  - Located some five miles from the seaport of Piraeus. Paul would have landed there and walked to Athens. Upon arriving in Athens, the first thing he would have seen was the Acropolis.
  - It was a cultural city of:
    - Philosophy
    - Literature
    - Science
    - Art
  - There were three great university cities in the Roman world. Of the three Athens was the foremost.
    - Athens, Greece
    - Alexandria, Egypt
    - Tarsus, Cilicia (The hometown of Paul)
  - Acts 17:15-34 tells of Paul's visit and missionary efforts in the city of Athens.
  - The city was given wholly to idolatry. Here Paul saw the altar dedicated to the "unknown god."
  - Mars Hill. While standing on Mars Hill, Paul preached to the Athenians.
    - The King James translation calls the place "Mars lull."
    - The American Standard translation calls it the "Areopagus."
    - Mars was the Roman god of war, and Ares was the Greek god of war.
    - The real name of the hill is the "11111 of Ares" or "Areopagus."
    - It is said that Ares stood here when he slew the son of Poseidon, the sea god.
    - The Areopagus served as a meeting place for the council and the

court of the Athenians.

- The Areopagus, or Mars Hill, is 377' high
- Toward the west from the Areopagus is the Agora or Market place. It was here that Paul reasoned with the people daily.

#### ■ The Acropolis

- "Acro" means high and "polis" means city. Hence, "high city, or the high part of a city.
- The buildings on the Acropolis were there when Paul visited Athens which possibly was in the autumn of 51 A.D.
- The Acropolis is 512' high.
- The Propylea is passed through by anyone entering the Acropolis, in that it is the only entrance to the Acropolis.
- Paul apparently did some sight-seeing while in Athens while awaiting the arrival of Silas and Timothy..
- Oscar Bonner in an article in the February, 1958 issue of Biblical Archeologists, said William Ramsey translated **Acts 17:23** as "As I went though your city surveying the monuments of your city.
- Paul may have been referring to the Propylea in Acts 17:23 for it was where about 40 different temples dedicated to the gods and goddesses of the Athenians stood.

#### ■ Buildings on the Acropolis.

##### **The Parthenon**

- Certainly the most prominent building on the Acropolis.
- Probably the most photographed building in the world.
- "Parthenon" is the Greek word for "virgin," and was dedicated to Athena.
- Inside the Parthenon was a large 20' high gold and silver statue of Athena.
- Was begun in 447 B.C. and completed some 9 to 10 years later in 438 B.C.
- In 447 B.C. Pericles decided to begin a building program.
  - It was after the war with Persia. The peace treaty had been signed and the people needed something to do.
  - Xerxes was the Persian emperor, and Esther was his wife.
  - The age of Pericles was the golden age of Greece. It lasted a little over 200 years.
- 238' long and 111' wide.
- 46 Doric columns.
  - 27 on each side.
  - Each column is 34' high.
  - The base of each column has a diameter of 6'.
- The highest point of the Parthenon is 65'.

- Carvings around the top are called opes, which are squares separated by triglyphs.
  - The opes and triglyphs together formed a Doric frieze.
  - There are 92 of these panels which begin at the southwest corner.
  - These metopes contain carvings of more than 400 human figures and 200 animals.
  - They are shown in a procession which took place every four years for the purpose of bringing a robe to Athena.
  - 420' of these metopes are in existence. Of these, 247' of the sculptures are in the British Museum in London, England.
- Entrance is on the east end. Entrance to the Acropolis comes up the west end.
- **Interesting facts about the Parthenon.**
  - There is not a straight line nor a perpendicular line in the entire building.
  - Since the eye has a tendency to make a horizontal line dip in the center, the floor line of the Parthenon was designed to follow a curve with a 3½ mile radius.
  - A perfectly flat floor would have appeared to sag in the center.
  - The columns lean toward the center. If they were extended for the distance of a mile and a half, they would meet.
  - The building was a temple to Athena for 900 years.
  - It was a church dedicated to Mary for 1,000 years.
  - It was a Moslem mosque for 200 years.
  - In 1687, when Venetian forces were attacking the Turks on the Acropolis, a powder magazine in the Parthenon exploded, destroying the interior.
  - Restoration on the Parthenon began in 1859.
- **Builders:**
  - Phidias was the designer.
  - Ictinus was the architect.
  - Callicrates was the contractor.
  - Skilled workmen were paid about 1½ drachma per day. That is about 35 cents in our money.
- A full size replica of the Parthenon has been built in Centennial Park in Nashville, Tennessee. Nashville is known as "The Athens of the South."

### **The Erechtheum**

- Second most important building on the Acropolis.
- Constructed in four parts.
- 78' long and 42' wide.
- The Ionic columns are 27' high

- Was built to enclose the site of the contest between Athena and Poseidon for the control of Athens.
  - Legend has it that Poseidon struck a rock with his trident and sea water, symbolic of the naval power of the Athenians gushed forth.
  - Athena struck the rock with her spear and a fruit-bearing olive tree sprang forth.
  - The olive tree was considered more important, so the city came under her protection.
- Located on the north side of the Parthenon
- Was used by the Byzantines as a church. Somewhere between 400 and 500 A.D, they knocked out the inner walls and made it into an auditorium.
  - Nike-Zeus Temple
- Begun in 427 B.C. and completed three years later.
- Zeus was the chief god of the Athena pantheon.
- “Nike” means victory. One of our missiles is named after Nike.
- In 1685 the Turks dismantled the building completely and reused it blocks in the fortification of the walls of the Acropolis.
- The Greeks rebuilt it in 1835.
- Orlandus dismantled it and rebuilt it between 1935 and 1940.
- In its prime, the Acropolis must have been a magnificent sight to behold.

## The Biblical Significance of Athens is Associated with Paul in Acts 17:15-34

### Acts 17:15-34

15 “So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.

16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.

17 Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.

18 Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, ‘What does this babblers want to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,’ because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.

19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?’

20 For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.’

21 For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

22 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious;

23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the one whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:

24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.

25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,

27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

28 for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'

29 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, 'We will hear you again on this matter.'

33 So Paul departed from among them.

34 However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them."

■ In verse 18 Paul was confronted with Stoic and Epicurean philosophers.

- Stoics felt that virtue was obtained through self-denial, pain, and suffering.

- Epicureans said, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die."

■ Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. **Acts 18:1**

