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## Athens

Various resources were used to compile this article, including the Thompson Chain Reference Bible.

Athens, one of the greatest cultural centers of Paul's day, grew up around a 520-foot-high rocky plateau called the Acropolis. Here, on this elevated area, stood the many-columned Parthenon, the far-famed architectural wonder, and so many other sacred edifices that the place was called "the many-templed Acropolis."

To the north of the Acropolis was the celebrated civic center and market place, known as the Agora, where people not only traded, but also visited and discussed questions of interest at the time. To the northwest there extended out from the Acropolis, on a somewhat lower level, a rocky hill called the Areopagus, or Mars' Hill, where the councils and the High Court met.

This limestone hill is situated between the Acropolis and the Agora. In Roman mythology Mars was the god of war; his counterpart in Greek mythology was Ares. Many translations of the Bible will use the word "Areopagus" instead of the phrase "Mars' Hill" when describing this location. The word "Areopagus" means "the hill of Ares."

Both of these well-known places were familiar to Paul. In the Agora he "disputed daily with them that met with him," among whom were the Stoics and Epicureans, who, with mingled admiration and curiosity, regarded him as "a setter forth of strange gods"; therefore brought him up the hill to speak before and to be heard by an informal session of the supreme court. Standing in the midst of Mars' Hill, before these representatives of the best learning of the earth, Paul took as his text "the Unknown God," and delivered, with telling effect, one of the most dynamic messages of all time. Some mocked, some were deeply impressed, while others were converted then and there.

According to Luke, the apostle Paul only paid one visit to this city. However, by the time Paul got to Athens most of its glory had already passed—most of Greece had been plundered by the Romans, and even Athens had been sacked by Sulla in 86 BC

While Paul waited for Silas and Timothy to join him at Athens, he traveled through the ancient city and was appalled by the high degree of paganism in the city. An ancient Proverb claimed that there were more gods in Athens than men, and wherever Paul looked he could see "that the city was given over to idols" (Acts 17:16). Paul then "reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there" (Acts 17:17).

Finally, he had the opportunity to address the philosophers on Mars' Hill and there proclaimed to them "God, who made the world and everything in it" (Acts 17:24).

Thanks to the American School of Classical Studies, the Agora has been uncovered, its streets have been charted, and its ruined buildings identified. The visitor may now walk among these ruins and contemplate the past.

The thirty-five stone steps carved in the rock up Mars' Hill, and traces of an altar and many rock benches on top of the hill, are visible today. Thousands of tourists from all parts of the world climb these self-same steps and, standing on Mars' Hill, are even now visibly moved by the words as well as the spirit and power of Paul's mighty address.

Away to the southwest is the ancient roadway leading to Corinth.

No remains of an altar inscription – "To the Unknown God," referred to by Paul, have as yet been found in Athens, but an identical inscription on an altar was found in 1903 during the excavations of the city of Pergamum.

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