

***Excerpts from a B. Cobbe Crisler Talk on Paul's at Athens (Acts 17:14-34) from  
"After the Master, What? The Book of Acts"***

*[With permission from the transcriber, Sue Merrill]*

Well, now Paul is heading for the cultural capital of civilization, **Athens**. And you can't even go to modern day Athens without appreciating somewhat of what Paul saw, looking around at the remnants of that great city and "the columned buildings that were dedicated to so many gods. It must have moved Paul." (See below, Acts 17:15, 16, paraphrased)

It sounds like he wasn't going to say anything until his companions, "Silas and Timothy joined him." (See below, Acts 17:15, paraphrased)

Acts 17:14 And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

Acts 17:15 And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

Acts 17:16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, **his spirit was stirred** in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

"But, he was stirred – his spirit was stirred within him." (above paraphrased)

And so he opens his mouth and begins right away to talk in Athens. Now this is a tough area in which to introduce Christianity, except at least they were willing to listen because everybody talked about anything. I mean there were a lot of weirdo sects and ideas that they welcomed without question in Athens because everybody liked to dispute these ideas anyway.

"He's in the market, the agora, as well as in the synagogue. He runs into Epicureans; he runs into Stoics." Now Tarsus happens to be a Stoic stronghold where Paul came from. So he must have been certainly aware of that philosophy. "They call him 'a babbler.'" (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 17:17 Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

Acts 17:18 Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say?

other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection.

“They bring him to Areopagus, the hill of Mars or Aries, and they asked him to explain what he has to say.” (See below, Acts 17:19,22, paraphrased)

Acts 17:19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?

Acts 17:20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

Acts 17:21 (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

Acts 17:22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

Paul, standing there, shows how a lecture can be tailor-made to any environment. And, it's better than uniformity if you want to get the ear of the locals. And in this way, you will find at no point does Paul mention the Old Testament. Why? (Pause) What would that mean to the Athenians? (See below, Acts 17:23, paraphrased)

Instead, he kind of says, “On my way to the forum...you know. In other words, here I was, and I saw something you had back here. And, it says TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 17:23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

Would everybody be listening? It relates. He's picked up something locally. And, would you also be listening if he said “That monument you put 'TO THE UNKNOWN GOD', I want to tell you a little something about him. He's unknown to you, but here's some information that might be helpful. (See above, paraphrased) And then, in Acts 17, verse 24, he describes “that God who made all, and therefore, couldn't dwell in temples made with hands.” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 17:24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

We're reminded of whom? Yes, but since Jesus, we heard that from Stephen, remember? And Saul, himself, had heard that.

"He dwelleth not in temples made with hands." (repeated paraphrased)

What do you think that comment does when you're looking at the Parthenon and buildings like it? "God doesn't dwell in all of this. He made everything. How can you contain Him?" (See below, paraphrased) Very interesting point.

Acts 17:25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

And also, Acts 17, verse 26, if you want to see where the concept of church was in Paul's thinking. "He hath made of one blood all nations...." (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 17:26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

Have we even arrived at that point today in our thinking? "One blood all nations." (See above, partial)

I doubt the Athenians had either. (Now, that's verse says races and sexes.) "That everyone should seek the Lord," Acts 17:27. (Below paraphrased)

Acts 17:27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

"The search where God is..." will end up with the conclusion in the last line of Acts 17, verse 27, "that He's not very far from every one of us." (See above, paraphrased)

And then Paul very cleverly introduces lines from local poets: "In him we live, and move, and have our being" and "for we are also his offspring" –

parts of poems we have identified, and they even know the authors. (See below, partial)

Acts 17:28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

And Paul has used this as a springboard to show that even Greek thought has embraced the concept of God creating man, and therefore, “how could we make statues of God? We are made of gold and silver. Then how could God be made and so forth?” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 17:29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.

Now this gets a good receptive audience for a while, “until he comes to the point of talking about resurrection from the dead.” (below, paraphrased)

The minute he gets to that, “the mockery begins.” (Acts 17:32 paraphrased)

Acts 17:31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

Acts 17:32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.

Acts 17:33 So Paul departed from among them.

Acts 17:34 Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

They lose interest; they leave. “And Paul leaves, but a few are the core in the church in Athens – Dionysius the Areopagite, and Damaris, a woman, and others with them.” (See above, Acts 17:32, 33, paraphrased)

Matter of fact, the patron saint of Greece today is not Paul, but Dionysius as a result of that.