

OUR *Guide* FOR USE IN *the Protestant Reformed Sunday School*

Lesson 74

Paul Preaches in Athens

The Scripture Lesson *Acts 17:10-34*

After Paul and Silas left Thessalonica they went to the city of Berea. In that city Paul found again a Jewish synagogue. The two missionaries entered it on the Sabbath day in order to tell the Jews and proselytes the story of Jesus. And when they did that, they found that the Jews were ready to listen carefully to what they had to say. When Paul said that the Old Testament prophecies were about Jesus of Nazareth, these Jews in Berea took out their Bibles and studied them, to see for themselves if what Paul said was true. And when they did that, many of them believed.

When the Jews of Thessalonica heard about that, they were very much displeased. Berea was far away, but these Jews nevertheless traveled all the way to that city, in order to make trouble for Paul. They tried to stir up the people against the missionaries, as they had done in Thessalonica. When that happened, Paul and his new friends in Berea knew that it was time again for him to move on. So Paul went away to preach in another place.

The city to which Paul came next was Athens. Athens had for hundreds of years been a very important city. Many famous men had lived in it. Some of them were great thinkers, called philosophers. Others were great leaders, called statesmen.

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Still others were gifted architects and sculptors, who made beautiful buildings and statues. Athens was famous for all of this, and the Athenians were proud of all their wisdom and their abilities.

Paul went to the marketplace in Athens, where many people gathered every day to talk, and to hear what new things others had to talk about. When Paul began to talk about the one true God, and about Jesus, and about salvation, they were ready to listen to him because this was something that was *new*. Very soon the great thinkers, the philosophers, were also gathered around to hear what this stranger in Athens had to say.

After listening to Paul for awhile, these people decided to take Paul to the Areopagus, the highest Athenian court of law. The members of the Areopagus were judges, the best and wisest in all of Athens. Paul was invited to speak before these wise men, so that they too could hear what he taught.

So Paul had quite an audience. There were the judges, of course, but also the philosophers, as well as many other interested people who came to hear him. Paul told them that, in walking through their city, he happened to see an altar on which was written, "To the Unknown God." The Athenians, you see, had many gods. And they believed that there almost certainly was still another one, whose name they did not know. So, in

their sacrificing, they worshiped this unknown god too. What Paul tried to show them was that, by building that altar, they were admitting that none of their gods was really *God*. For if, for example, Zeus was really *God*, they would not need yet *another* god. Paul told them, though, that they were right when they thought there was another. But this God was not like their gods. He is the God who created all things and holds them by His power. He is the God who is far too great to live in temples made with hands. He is the God who must be served, and who will one day judge the world through the Man who was raised by Him from the dead.

Very few of Paul's listeners believed what he said. They were sure that there could be no resurrection of the dead, so they were not afraid of the judgment of which Paul spoke. The philosophers of Athens had so much knowledge — yet they were fools. How true it is that “the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.”

The Church Is Established in Corinth

Acts 18:1-17

After leaving Athens, Paul traveled on to the city of Corinth. Corinth was the capital of Greece and a very important trading center. Many Jews lived there.

When Paul arrived in Corinth he did not have very much money. So he went to look for a job. It happened that Paul was an experienced tent-maker. So he looked for a tent-maker who needed somebody to work for him. He soon found a Jew by the name of Aquila, who was willing to hire him. As they were working together, Paul must have talked to Aquila about religion. He told him about Jesus. And both Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, believed. They invited Paul to stay in their home; and for a year and a half Paul lived with these two wonderful Christians who became his best friends in Corinth.

Paul went to the synagogue every Sabbath day. There he reasoned with the Jews about the Messiah. Some of them believed Paul when he said that Jesus was the Messiah, but most of them did not. So Paul told them that he was going to go instead to the Gentiles.

One of the Gentile believers was a man by the name of Justus. He lived right next door to the synagogue. He told Paul that the believers could meet in his house for their worship services. Paul did that, and soon many other Gentiles, and even some important Jews, came to that house of Justus to hear the preaching of the gospel. And many of them believed and were baptized.

Paul figured that soon the unbelieving Jews would make trouble for him, just as the Jews had done so often before in other cities. But then the Lord came to him in a vision and said, “Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.”

For quite a while it seemed as if the Jews were not going to do anything to stop him. But they were becoming more and more angry at the success of Paul in their city. Finally they stirred up a crowd of people, who then grabbed Paul and dragged him off to Gallio, the governor.

The Jews proceeded to accuse Paul before the governor, telling him that this man taught things that were against the law. Paul was ready to open his mouth to defend himself, but the governor would not let him. Instead Gallio turned to those wicked Jews and told them that he had no time to waste on a matter that involved, not a breaking of any Roman law, but merely some questions about their religion. He ordered his attendants to drive the Jews out of the court.

So Paul escaped. And the gospel continued to be preached. The Lord's promises are sure.

MEMORY WORK

Group A

I Corinthians 1:26b, 27a “... not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.”

Group B

I Corinthians 1:26b “... not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.”

ACTIVITIES

This paper has been prepared in the hope that it will be used by students of all ages. The activities are designed so that the oldest will be challenged, and the youngest will find some of it within reach. Parents should encourage their children to attempt only what they can handle without frustration. For some that will be much, for others little.

DO YOU AGREE?

If you do, write Yes; if you do not, write No.

- ___ 1. In Berea the Jews were willing not only to listen to what Paul preached, but also to test the truth of his instruction by comparing it closely with the Scriptures.
- ___ 2. However, when they did that, very few of them believed the gospel as it was preached to them by the missionaries.
- ___ 3. What made matters worse was that unbelieving Jews came from Thessalonica and tried to stir up the people.
- ___ 4. It became necessary therefore for Paul and Silas and Timothy immediately to leave the city.
- ___ 5. From Berea Paul went next to the city of Athens.
- ___ 6. Some of the people who listened to Paul speak in the marketplace were philosophers.
- ___ 7. These philosophers tried immediately to stop Paul from speaking in the marketplace of Athens about the Christian faith.
- ___ 8. Paul was then brought to the Areopagus, to explain his views before some of the most important people in all of Athens.
- ___ 9. Because these people were pagans who knew nothing about a promised Redeemer, Paul did not immediately begin to talk about Jesus.
- ___ 10. When Paul spoke of the resurrection, the Athenians made it clear that they had no room in their minds for that idea.
- ___ 11. In Athens, therefore, no one was converted through the preaching of Paul.
- ___ 12. In the city of Corinth the apostle Paul found a job as a tent-maker.
- ___ 13. After being forced to leave the synagogue in Corinth, Paul began leading worship

services in a house right next to the synagogue.

- ___ 14. When the chief ruler of the synagogue himself was converted to Christianity, an angel of the Lord warned Paul to go into hiding.
- ___ 15. The unbelieving Jews, however, stirred up the people and brought Paul before the judgment seat of Gallio.
- ___ 16. Gallio was afraid of trouble with the Jews, so he warned Paul not to preach anymore in the name of Jesus.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUNGER READERS

1. To what city did Paul and Silas go after they left Thessalonica? What did the Jews in this place do when Paul preached Christ to them?
2. How did Satan try to destroy the work of Paul in Berea?
3. Athens had been a famous city in Greece for hundreds of years. What was it famous for?
4. Why was Paul brought to the Areopagus in Athens?
5. What did Paul say he had seen written on one of the altars in Athens? How, according to Paul, was the God he preached different from all the gods the Athenians served?
6. How did the Athenians show that they were not really wise?
7. Why did Paul, when he was in Corinth, spend time making tents? With whom did Paul work as a tent-maker?
8. When Paul was no longer allowed to preach in the synagogue in Corinth, what place for worship did he find in that city?
9. What was Paul afraid would soon begin to happen in Corinth? What did the Lord tell him?
10. What did the unbelieving Jews finally do to Paul? What did the governor tell them?

COMPLETING SENTENCES

1. The persecution in Thessalonica served the spreading of the gospel, for because of it Paul and Silas left that city and brought the Word to Berea, where they began immediately to preach in the _____ of the Jews. The missionaries found that the Jews in Berea were more _____ than those of Thessalonica. The Jews of Berea listened to the Word with _____ of mind, and they _____ the Scriptures _____ to see if the things he taught were indeed _____. And the result of their attentiveness to the Word was that many of them _____ — not only many of the Jews but also of the _____ (Acts 17:10-12).

2. When the Jews of _____ had _____ that the Word of God was being thus preached of _____ at Berea, they came thither also and _____ up the people. Apparently a tumult was avoided in Berea only because _____ the brethren sent away _____, who was the main object of Jewish hostility. Silas and _____ were able to abide still in Berea. Paul's Berean friends brought him to the city of _____, from which they returned to Berea with a message from Paul that Silas and Timothy come to him with all _____ (Acts 17:13-15).

3. Athens was known for its beautiful art and architecture. Most of the work of the artists and architects, however, was dedicated to Greek deities (gods and goddesses). Paul's spirit was _____ in him when he saw the city _____ given to _____. Without waiting for Silas and Timothy, therefore, Paul plunged into the work, disputing in the _____ with the Jews on the Sabbath, and in the _____ daily with them that gathered there. The "market" was the public square, where many Athenians would spend their time in nothing else but either to tell or to _____ some _____ thing. Some of these people were _____, like the Epicureans, who believed that the main goal of human life is pleasure, and the _____ who believed that man should re-

main unmoved by pleasure or pain. When these philosophers encountered Paul they asked, "What will this _____ say?" Evidently they understood little of the preaching, but they were impressed with the preacher. They therefore took Paul and brought him to the _____, saying, "May we know what this new _____ is? For thou bringest certain _____ things to our ears" (Acts 17:16-21).

4. The Areopagus was the highest court in Athens. Paul's audience, therefore, made up as it was of the Areopagites (supreme court justices), professional philosophers, and other interested Athenians, was the intellectual elite of this city renowned for its worldly wisdom. "Ye men of Athens," Paul said to them, "I _____ that in all things ye are too _____. For as I passed by and beheld the objects of your worship, I found an altar with this _____, To The _____ God." The Athenians themselves, in other words, recognized the inadequacy of their deities; for, if any of their gods were really *God*, they need not look yet for another. Paul tells the Athenians that they are correct, there *is* something else. The God who is really God has made the _____ and all things therein. This God does not dwell in temples made with _____. Neither is this God _____ with men's hands, as though He _____ anything, seeing that He gives to all their life and _____ and all things. So near is God to us that in Him we live, and _____, and have our _____. In fact, Paul says, even their own poets have said that "we are his _____." The poets' reference was to the Greek god Zeus; but if what they say is true, that we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the _____ is like unto gold, or _____, or stone, _____ by art and man's _____ (Acts 17:22-29).

5. In times past, Paul said, the nations were given up to their blindness. But now the light of the gospel is shining on the Gentiles; and God commandeth all men everywhere to _____ — for He has _____ a day in which He

will _____ the world in _____ by the Man whom He hath _____. And that Man He has already pointed out, in that He hath _____ Him from the _____ (Acts 17:30, 31).

6. The highly educated Athenian mind, however, had no room for the idea of resurrection. It was therefore at this point that some _____, and others politely waved Paul off, saying, “We will hear thee again of this _____.” So Paul _____ from them. Nevertheless, even here, a few believed, among them being _____, a member of the Areopagus (Acts 17:32-34).

7. Paul soon left Athens and came to _____, a city about 50 miles to the southwest of Athens. Corinth was an exceedingly wicked city. But because it was the capital of Greece, and also an important center of trade, many Jews had gone to live there. Especially was that true after emperor Claudius commanded all _____ to depart from _____. Among those who had recently come from Italy was a Jewish tent-maker named Aquila, with his wife, _____. Paul was of the same _____, and perhaps in the course of looking for work to earn money to support himself, he found Aquila, and not only worked for him but also _____ with him (Acts 18:1-3).

8. During his first few weeks in Corinth, Paul probably spent his time making tents during the week, and reasoning in the _____ every Sabbath, persuading the Jews and the _____. At first, Paul was alone in Corinth; for from Athens he had evidently sent Silas and Timothy back to Macedonia (Timothy to Thessalonica, and Silas probably to Philippi). His two friends and co-laborers now rejoin him in Corinth, with the result that Paul was _____ in the spirit, that is, greatly encouraged, so that with renewed energy he _____ to the Jews that Jesus was _____ (Acts 18:4, 5).

9. The vigor of Paul’s preaching resulted soon in organized opposition by the unbelieving Jews.

And when they blasphemed the name of Jesus, Paul shook his _____ against them — a symbolic act that testified that the gospel had indeed been faithfully preached in this place, but they had rejected it. “Your _____ be upon your own _____,” Paul said. “I am _____; from _____ I will go to the _____” (Acts 18:6).

10. Paul then began meeting with believers in the home of a man by the name of _____, whose house joined _____ to the synagogue. The meetings of the Christians must therefore have been a constant irritation to the unbelieving and hostile Jews next door — especially when none other than Crispus, the _____ ruler of the _____, was converted and baptized along with many of the _____ (Acts 18:7, 8).

11. Paul must have expected that he would very soon be driven out of Corinth. He may have wondered if it might be better for him and for the church of Corinth were he to leave the city. But the Lord spoke to him at night in a _____, “Be not _____, but _____, and hold not thy _____; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to _____ thee. For I have _____ people in this city” (Acts 18:9, 10).

12. As it turned out, Paul was able to stay in Corinth for a _____ and six months, during much of which time the enemies of Christ left the missionaries alone. However, when a new governor (over the province of Achaia) took office in Corinth, the Jews made _____ with one accord against Paul and brought him to the _____ seat, saying, “This fellow _____ men to worship God _____ to the law” (Acts 18:11-13).

13. The charge was deliberately vague. The Jews must have hoped to press the new governor into action by their numbers and loud noise. Gallio, however, though new to Achaia, was not unfamiliar with the Jews. He knew they were a belligerent people who, if allowed to do so, would be forever finding issues to quarrel about. And he

was determined not to let it start in Achaia. So, before Paul could open his _____ to defend himself, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of _____, or wicked _____, I would bear with you. But if it be a question of _____ or names, and of your _____, look _____ to it; for I will be no _____ of such matters.” And having said this he forthwith _____ them from the _____ seat (Acts 18:14-16).

14. It happened that in the process of their being driven out of the judgment hall, Sosthenes, the _____ ruler of the _____, received a beating, with the governor looking on. And Gallio _____ for none of these things. His steadfast refusal to become involved in the wranglings of the Jews made it clear to the enemies of the church that, in Corinth at least, the Christian message had the protection of Roman law. Paul therefore _____ there yet a good while (Acts 18:17, 18).

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. The Bereans tested Paul’s teaching by comparing it carefully with the Word of God. What do you think, should *we* do that too, or should we rather simply trust the ministers God has given us?
2. Paul left Berea as soon as it became clear that the Thessalonian Jews were stirring up the people. Why was that a wise move? Why, do you suppose, was it not considered necessary that Silas and Timothy leave too?
3. In Athens Paul found many ready listeners in the marketplace. Among them were Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. If their philosophies were anti-Christian, why were these men nevertheless willing to carry on friendly discussions with Paul?
4. Surely not every new teacher who appeared in the Athenian market was brought before the Areopagites. Why, do you suppose, was Paul given that kind of audience?
5. Paul started by telling his Athenian hearers that he had seen their altar “To the Unknown God.” Can you explain why that was a good introduction for his message to these pagans?
6. In dealing with Jews and Gentile proselytes, Paul began by preaching Jesus the Savior. In dealing with pagans he began instead with God the Creator. Why did he make that difference?
7. Read Acts 17:28. The Greek poets who were quoted by Paul wrote not about Jehovah but about Zeus. How did their writings serve nevertheless to prove Paul’s point in verse 29?
8. Read Acts 17:30. God never disregards sin. How can Paul say that in the past God “winked at” the ignorance of the heathen nations? Further, was there ever a time when God did *not* “command all men everywhere to repent”? Try to understand what it was that Paul was telling these pagans.
9. How does Paul’s experience in Athens prove the truth of I Corinthians 1:26, 27?
10. Luke tells us that Aquila and Priscilla came to Corinth from Rome when the emperor expelled all Jews from the Roman capital. Why would Jews who liked living in Rome be attracted to Corinth when they had to find new homes?
11. When Paul left the synagogue in Corinth he “shook his raiment” (Acts 18:6). That was a symbolic gesture that the Jews would have understood immediately. Can you explain what it meant?
12. Read Acts 18:8, 9. It would seem that the conversion of Crispus would be a most encouraging development in Paul’s work in Corinth. Why then did the Lord at this time tell Paul in a vision not to be afraid but to continue speaking out?
13. How can Acts 18:10 be used as biblical proof for the doctrine of election?
14. Paul’s enemies in Corinth did not simply bring charges against the apostle before the governor. They first “made insurrection against Paul with one accord.” What does that tell us about their confidence in the strength of their case against Paul?
15. Gallio knew how to handle tumultuous Jews. Show that his response to the Jews’ charge was politically expedient — that is, that it was in the best interests of this new governor. How was it used of the Lord for the good of the church in Corinth?