

Our **GUIDE**

for little ones

Published by the
Protestant Reformed Sunday School Association
Writer: Don Doezema Artist: Connie Meyer
Designers: Judi Doezema & Brenda Brands

IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

Lesson 74

Paul Preaches in Athens

Acts 17:10-34

There is nothing in the whole wide world that Satan hates more than to see people believe in *Jesus*. So he paid special attention to *Paul*. Wherever Paul went, Satan made *trouble*. In Philippi, there was a *riot*. In Thessalonica, *another* riot. And, both times, Paul had to

leave the city. In today's story, Paul and Silas are just arriving in *another* city — the city of *Berea*.

The two missionaries didn't waste any time there. Very soon they are in the synagogue of the Jews in Berea. And here they are in for a *pleasant surprise*. Listen.

The Jews in Berea, the Bible tells us, "were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so."



Note to Parents: These papers are intended for the younger Sunday School students — grade 3 and below. Vocabulary and concepts are such that children in this age group, even the 3rd graders, will profit most if the stories are read *to* them, not *by* them. Most lessons have two stories, for two sittings if that proves to be beneficial. Our hope is that parents will find these lessons to be useful tools in the teaching of Bible stories and Bible truths to their children in the "off" season.

Let's try to understand that. First ... "with readiness of mind." That means that the Jews in Berea were *willing to listen* — carefully and thoughtfully. That's a good beginning. But then this ... they "searched the scriptures." The Bereans, you see, did not know Paul. Here comes this *stranger*, who teaches something that is far different from anything they had ever heard before. How can they know if he is telling them the truth? There's only one way. *Search the Scriptures!* See if what *Paul* says is the same as what *God* says.

So the Bereans searched the Scriptures. And they did it *daily*. They listened carefully to what Paul said. And then, every day, they checked it out, with their *Bibles*, to see if Paul was speaking the *truth*. For 2,000 years afterwards, the Bereans are remembered for that one thing — they searched the Scriptures, to test Paul's teaching.

And what did the Bereans find? They found that what Paul said about the Messiah was *true*. And many of them *believed*. Believed, that is, on *Jesus*. So also did many Gentiles.

To Paul and Silas, that was almost too good to be true. They wished they could stay here for a good long time.

But they couldn't. Satan, again, saw to that. The Jews in Berea were a disappointment to the devil. So he brought in Jews from another place. Thessalonica. That's 60 miles away! The unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica heard about what Paul was doing in

Berea. And they hated it. They were enemies of Paul. They were enemies of the gospel. They were enemies, especially, of the Christ whom Paul preached. So they traveled all the way to Berea. Sixty miles. On foot.

But what can these Jews do in Berea? Well, they can stir up the people. They can get a mob to start shouting against Paul. They can start ... a riot — and make it look like it's all *Paul's* fault.

The work of the devil it was. And Paul saw it coming. He saw trouble for him ... and trouble for the *church*. It was the *church* that Paul cared about. It would be better, he thought, for the church in Berea if he would move on. So he did — again. This time to ... *Athens*.

Yes, to Athens. Athens was one of the most famous cities in the world at that time. It was famous for its magnificent buildings, for its beautiful statues, and, especially, for its *wise men* — its *philosophers*. But many of the buildings were temples — of idols. Most of the statues were images — of gods and goddesses. And the philosophers were full of ... worldly wisdom. And the Athenians were *proud* of it all.

That was the Athens that Paul saw. It was a city of dazzling beauty and of great learning ... but a city that was "wholly given to *idolatry*."

There were Jews in Athens too. So Paul went first to the synagogue. But soon after that, we find Paul in downtown Athens, in the *marketplace*. That's where



the great thinkers were. That's where the *philosophers* were — the people who liked to ponder great thoughts and new ideas. The Bible tells us that the Athenians who went to the marketplace enjoyed nothing more than to be able to tell or to hear something *new*.

Well, Paul came with something *new* all right. He told them about a man named *Jesus*, and about ... *resurrection*. That was indeed something new, and strange to their ears. So they invited him to come to the "Areopagus" of Athens — a meeting of some of the smartest men in the city.

Can you imagine that? Here is Paul, in the famous city of Athens. He stands now before this assembly of great, wise men. Who knows what might come of *this*?



Paul started out by telling them what he had seen in their city. He had seen many altars — altars to all kinds of gods and goddesses. And then he spotted another altar, one that had this writing under it: "To the Unknown God."

You're *right*, Paul said, there *is* another God. But this God is not like any of those other gods. He is really *God*. He created the world and everything in it. Temples built with mere human hands cannot hold Him. Images of gold and silver cannot be made of Him. And by the preaching of the gospel, this God commands men everywhere to *repent*. Someday He will *judge* every man — by the Man whom He has appointed, and has *raised from the dead*.

Paul said much more of course. And he *explained* what he said. So these wise men of Athens, in their grand assembly, *understood* what he said. But they didn't like it. They didn't want to hear about sin and *repentance*. They didn't want to hear about *judgment*. And they didn't believe in a *resurrection*.



That's human wisdom — the wisdom of this *world*.

The great philosophers of Athens were able to think deep thoughts and search out answers to hard questions. But they didn't believe Paul. Human wisdom, you see, says that resurrection is ... *impossible*. So when Paul preached a *risen* Christ, the great thinkers of Athens just ... snickered.

How can that be — that the smartest of men do not believe the *gospel*? It's because the gospel isn't believed by human wisdom. It's believed only by *faith*. And that's a *gift* — of *God*.

Try hard to understand that. The *truth*, the *gospel*, is first *this*, that *God* became *man*. Astounding! And then, the gospel is that the Son of God died on a cross to redeem His people ... and then *arose*. Just as astounding! And, finally, the truth is that the Man Jesus will someday come again to judge all who have ever lived. Who can understand it?! Who can *believe* it!? The answer is — no one! Not the smartest of men. Not even the philosophers of Athens. Only those whose hearts are touched by the *Spirit*.

Think hard about that. Christ ...

crucified ... raised. Foolishness to *men* — but the wisdom, the *amazing* wisdom, of *God*. A few believed it even in Athens. And *we* believe it. Thanks be to *God* ... for *hearts to believe*.

How Well Did You Listen?

1. When Paul and Silas left Thessalonica, what city did they go to next?
2. How did the Jews in Berea *test* Paul's preaching, to see if what he said was *true*?
3. Who made trouble for Paul in Berea?
4. Did many people in Athens believe the gospel preached by Paul?

The Church Is Established in Corinth

Acts 18:1-17

After leaving Athens, Paul traveled next to the city of Corinth. And do you know what was one of the first things he did there? He made tents.



Yes, the apostle Paul, on his missionary journeys, often *worked with his hands*. Already as a boy, he had learned tentmaking. Now, as a missionary, he put that skill to good use. When he needed money for food and clothing, as he did in Corinth, Paul went to work — as a tentmaker.



In Corinth, Paul worked for Aquila and Priscilla. They were husband and wife. Like Paul, they were tentmakers. Like Paul they were Jews. And when they got to know Paul, it didn't take long at all before they knew that he was a *Christian missionary* first, and a *tentmaker* second. They listened to him. They believed him. They gave him a place where he could live in their home. And, for many years, they were his helpers. Try to remember their names, Aquila and Priscilla. We will hear about them again.

Aquila and Priscilla were not the only Jews in the city of Corinth. There were lots of them. And, of course, they had their synagogue. So every Sabbath day Paul went there and talked to the Jews about Jesus. Some of them believed. Most of them did not. And the unbelievers didn't just say, "Sorry, Paul, but we think you are mistaken." No, in their anger they *blasphemed*—they said bad things about the holy name of Jesus. Paul could not stay and listen to that. So he left the synagogue, never to return.



But that didn't mean that Paul's work in Corinth was ended. When he left the unbelieving synagogue, believers went along with him. It was only a small group. But it was the beginning of a Christian church in Corinth. They met together for worship in a *house* — the house of a Gentile believer named Justus. And the house was ... right next to the synagogue.



Every day, therefore, the unbelieving Jews could be reminded of Paul and of the Christian church. Those Jews hated the church of Christ. And there it was, growing up right before their eyes. And then, can you believe it, one of the chief rulers of the synagogue became a *Christian*. He and his whole family left the synagogue and joined the church.

How would the unbelieving Jews like *that*? Paul knew. He knew they would be furious. And he was quite sure, too, that they would soon be after *him*. That's the way it always went. The enemies of the church always took aim especially at ... Paul. Time after time Paul had been chased from the city in which he preached the gospel. What, now, will happen to him in Corinth?

Paul must have begun to worry, and maybe to wonder if he should just leave Corinth and go to another city.

And then the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision. He 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."

Just think! The enemies of the church are still there, big as life. And they still want to get rid of Paul. But will they be *able* to hurt him? Jesus said No! "No man shall set on thee to hurt thee." The One who sits in heaven at God's right hand can *guarantee* it. Why? Because none of Jesus' enemies can so much as lift a finger against any of His people unless *He wills it*.

And then this. "For I have much people in this city." Think about *that*. Jesus is talking here about people who had *not yet heard the gospel*. Already He calls them *His people*. How can He know, *ahead of time*, who will believe the gospel? It's because He, Jesus, knows His sheep. He loves them. And by His Spirit He softens their hard hearts, so that they believe.

That was Paul's vision. "Don't be *afraid*. Nobody will *hurt* you. And many people, in this city, will *believe* you." Can you imagine how happy Paul must have been to hear that?

And he found that it was *true* too. He worked in Corinth for a *year and a half*. Month after month went by, and the unbelieving Jews *left him alone*. And many people became Christians. Just as Jesus had promised.

But then, finally, trouble came. The unbelieving Jews start another ...



riot. They stir up the people. They drag Paul to Gallio, the governor. A noisy mob shouts accusations against Paul. They accuse him of breaking the law.

The Jews, this time, got the surprise of their life. The governor refused even to *listen* to them. "*You* may have a problem with Paul," the governor told them, "but *I* don't. This is a matter of *your* law, not of *Roman* law, so get out of my court!" And when the stubborn Jews began to *argue*, Gallio ordered his soldiers to drive them out. Which the soldiers did. And they gave Sosthenes, the

chief ruler of the synagogue, a good beating.

One thing that the unbelieving Jews in Corinth learned really well that day was this, that they had better not touch Paul again. And they didn't. Paul was safe. Just as Jesus had promised.

How Well Did You Listen?

1. What did Paul do in Corinth to earn money to buy food?
2. Who told Paul that his enemies in Corinth would not hurt him?
3. Who brought Paul before the governor?
4. What did the governor do to those Jews?

How Well

Do You Understand?

1. To the Bereans, Paul was a stranger. How could they test his preaching, to see if he preached the *truth*?
2. Satan was surely fighting against Paul. How did he make trouble for Paul in Berea?
3. In Athens, why did Paul go to the marketplace?
4. Only a few of the smart people in Athens believed. Did those few believe

because they were smarter than the rest?

5. In Corinth, the Lord appeared to Paul in a vision to tell him not to be afraid. How did Jesus know that none of Paul's enemies in Corinth would hurt him? How did Jesus know, too, that many people in Corinth would believe Paul's preaching?

6. The unbelieving Jews brought Paul to the governor, hoping that Paul would be punished. How did the Jews learn that they had better leave Paul alone?

Memory Verse

I Corinthians 3:19a "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."

Follow the dots to show what the Bereans searched.

