



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Paul and the Greatest Philosophers

JUNE 6-8, 2018

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Acts 17:16-21 *“Now while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols. 17) So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. 18) And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. And some were saying, ‘What would this idle babbler wish to say?’ Others, ‘He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,’ because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. 19) And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? 20) For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; we want to know therefore what these things mean.’ 21) (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)”* (NASB)

“IT IS OBSERVABLE THAT THERE, WHERE HUMAN LEARNING MOST FLOURISHED, IDOLATRY MOST ABOUNDED, AND THE MOST ABSURD AND REDICULOUS IDOLATRY, WHICH CONFIRMS THAT OF THE APOSTLE, THAT WHEN THEY PROFESSED THEMSELVES TO BE WISE THEY BECAME FOOLS (ROM. 1:22), AND, IN THE BUSINESS OF RELIGION, WERE OF ALL OTHER THE MOST VAIN IN THEIR IMAGINATIONS. THE WORLD BY WISDOM KNEW NOT GOD, (1 COR. 1:21).” MATTHEW HENRY

Even while Paul was waiting for his team, did he ever assume the role of a tourist? How many idols was in this intellectual and cultural capital of the world? Why does Paul always begin in the synagogue? Is this the first and only time Paul is said to have ministered in the market place? Was this the city of the

greatest philosophers? What did these two competing schools of philosophy believe? Was Paul given the opportunity to witness to the greatest intellectuals of his day? Did their desire to hear something new override their willingness to hear truth?

FOCUS ON FUTURE BIBLE STUDIES:

- JUNE 13-15: ACTS 17:22-28 PAUL PROCLAIMS THE UNKNOWN GOD AT PHILOSOPHY'S PINNACLE
- JUNE 20-22: ACTS 17:28-34 LEADING THE GREATEST MINDS TO CHRIST

In the wealthy Roman colony of Philippi, the “miniature Rome” of Macedonia, Paul had planted and protected an infant church, meeting in Lydia’s home. The belligerent generals leading the city had beaten Paul and Silas, but their prayers had been answered with an earthquake and witness that brought the Jailer and his family to Christ. Revealing their citizenship had humbled the generals and they requested that Paul and his team leave immediately. At Thessalonica, the great port city and capital of Macedonia, Paul found his most successful opportunity as he carefully presented a Scripture series leading up to the revelation of Jesus as the Messiah in only three weeks. The “*great multitude*” and numerous “*prominent women*” as well as the Jews who believed may have been about half of the city. The jealous Jews were only able to initially acquire a security for Paul’s immediate departure, but they continued to intensely persecute the newborn church. In Berea, the closest provincial capital, Paul’s message is finally received by his people the Jews, so that the synagogue instantly becomes a church. From the humble saints in Berea, Paul is faced with the pride of the scholars in the greatest intellectual capital in the world!

“THIS CITY HAD FOR AGES BEEN THE SOURCE AND CENTRE OF HELLENIC CULTURE, THE METROPOLIS OF GENTILE SCIENCE, ART AND WISDOM.” J.A. ALEXANDER

BIBLE STUDIES

WEDNESDAY @ 7:30AM –BIBLE STUDY – FREDERICKSBURG – BOB EVANS ON RT. 3 & 11:30AM – WOODBRIDGE – BOB EVANS, 14490 SMOKETOWN RD.
THURSDAY @ 7:00AM –BIBLE STUDY – CHESTER – SHONEY’S AT RT. 10 (IRON BRIDGE ROAD) & 301(12531 JEFFERSON DAVIS HIGHWAY)
FRIDAY @ 7:00 AM –BIBLE STUDY – NORFOLK – GOLDEN CORRAL, 6103 N. MILITARY HWY, NEAR THE NORFOLK AIRPORT

Virginia

Paul and the Greatest Philosophers

I. RESPONDING TO DARKNESS ACTS 17:16-17

As Paul walked the streets of Athens, acquainting himself with the capital of arts and eloquence while he awaited his team, he was astonished at what he saw. He would have expected to see the beautiful Parthenon, presenting a model of some of the greatest architecture in the empire. Massive marble temples had been in many of the other capitals of his missionary journeys. What most astounded the great apostle and even provoked his spirit within him, was the thousands of idols that lined the streets everywhere within this greatest university city. It was “*full of idols*” like a forest is said to be full of trees. In the name of art, there was a sculpture representing almost every false god that had been worshipped in the last 400 years since its zenith when its universities had offered the wisdom of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. What was Paul’s answer to such a vast plague of demonic worship? “*Therefore indeed he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and ones worshipping,*” is the literal rendering, “*and in the market place every day with those happening to be there.*” Paul knew that the only way to overthrow the doctrines of demons inherent in idol worship (Deut 32:16-17) was to clearly present the truth of the Scriptures both to those exposed to it in the synagogue and those who had never heard it in the town square.

“THE APOSTLE STARED LONG AND HARD AT WHAT HE SAW, FOR THE CITY WAS TRULY ‘FULL OF IDOLS.’ PAUSANIUS, WHO VISITED ATHENS FIFTY YEARS LATER, SAID IT WAS EASIER TO MEET A GOD OR A GODDESS ON THE MAIN STREET OF ATHENS THAN TO MEET A MAN. THIS WAS STATISTICALLY TRUE BECAUSE THE POPULATION WAS ABOUT 10,000, BUT THERE WERE 30,000 STATUES OF GODS.” KENT HUGHES

II. REASONING WITH DOUBTERS ACTS 17:18

In the town square Paul was met by two groups of philosophers who scoffed or questioned his teaching.

The Epicurean philosophers loyally held to the teachings of Epicurus (341-270 BC) and boasted of his saving them from delusion and the obligations of religion. Like the evolutionists today, they could ignore the intricate design of creation and the statistical impossibility of its complex systems all smoothly working together without God’s design and they embraced the philosophical lie that it was all made by chance. Building upon that first lie, they reasoned that pleasure was the only good and pain was the only evil. “If it feels good, do it!” True pleasure was found by being at one with nature, so that the body and soul evaporated into it at death (with no future life). In contrast, the Stoics followed Zeno (340-265 BC), who taught that God was everything and the soul of the universe and that everything was God, which was actually pantheism. They sought unity within humanity and relationship with the divine so that self-sufficiency, reason, obedience, and a one world state were its ideals. Their mantra included self discipline and enduring hardship for the greater good of society. These believed in God and the afterlife, but thought they could earn their way to heaven. These opposite thinkers only agreed that the teachings of Paul were not to be tolerated, so they brought him before the authorities on Mars Hill.

“OUR IDEA OF GOD (OR DENIAL OF GOD) WILL ALWAYS GIVE SHAPE TO WHAT WE THINK.” JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE

III. REQUIRING A DEFENSE ACTS 17:19-21

Their taking Paul and bringing him before their highest court was the closest thing to an arrest without actually doing it. Because of the judicial limitations of this court, they couch their questioning with an inquisitive spirit as if to learn more fully what he is teaching and as if he is being brought before this prestigious body because he has something new to present to them. Yet their goal is to quiet him and as soon as possible get him out of town.

Questions to Ponder:

- 1) Are you agitated by the deceit of false religion enough to present the truth of the Gospel to those around you?
- 2) Have you abandoned the philosophies of false religion and turned from your sin in repentance to embrace Jesus as Lord?
- 3) Do you find yourself defending the truth of Scripture publically or in contempt requiring others to defend it?