

## REFLECTION GUIDE

### ACTS 17:16-34 | BRIDGES AND BARRIERS

#### KEY TERMS

**Athens** - The home of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, Athens was a leading intellectual city. What stands out to Paul, though, is that the city was *full of idols* (v. 16). The word translated *full* is not used elsewhere in the NT or other Greek literature, but conveys the idea of “smothered” or “swamped.”

**Epicurean and Stoic philosophers** - As the two primary intellectual Greek worldviews of the 1st century, Epicureans believed that gods did not exist or did not care about human beings and that the good life was found in pleasure through materialism, while Stoics had a pantheistic view of god (i.e. “god” and the universe are one and the same) and stressed the importance of reason, logic, and duty.

**Areopagus** - The Areopagus was both a location, a small hill outside of Athens with stone seats, and a council of people who met there to investigate ideas.

#### BACKGROUND

Having fled to Athens, Paul arrives in this famous city apparently intent on *waiting* for his friends. However, Paul can't wait around long as his *spirit was provoked within him* when he saw that the city was *full of idols* (v. 1). This leads Paul to take his message to the Jews in the *synagogue* and the Greeks in the *marketplace* (v. 17). In Athens, Luke primarily focuses on Paul's interactions with Gentiles, first describing how the leading philosophers of the day thought Paul's message about Jesus and resurrection was *strange* (v. 18-20). In verse 21, Luke says that this sharing of ideas was common in Athens, and while some thought Paul was a crazy *babbler* (v. 18), others wanted to hear more (v. 20).

This leads Paul to an opportunity to tell the Areopagus, likely by invitation, about Jesus. Unlike in synagogues, when Paul starts his messages with the OT Scriptures, Paul begins by talking about an alter to an *unknown god* he noticed in the city (v. 23). He then describes to the Areopagus that God is actually not unknown, but has made himself known to mankind. In his speech, Paul cites Epimenides, a Greek philosopher, and Aratus, a Greek poet (v. 28), to aid his case, both of which have similarities with OT passages like Job 12:10. Paul's conclusion before the Areopagus is that God is not metal or stone, nor is he distant and uninterested in human beings; instead, God is calling all people to repent of idolatry and turn to him to experience forever life with him (vv. 29-31).

#### GOING DEEPER

Why do you think Paul emphasizes Jesus' resurrection in his speech? Read Romans 8:18-25, 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 & 54-56, & Revelation 21:1-4. What do these verses say about the future of the creation/human beings? Why is resurrection (for Jesus and his followers) central to the gospel?

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Because the philosophers accuse Paul of preaching *foreign divinities* (v. 18, notice the plural), it appears that they thought Jesus was one god and Resurrection (or *Anastasis* in Greek) was another.



## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

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*Reflection questions are available when Redemption Groups are meeting. Groups will begin meeting again in June. To sign up for a group, go to [redemptionokc.com/groups](https://redemptionokc.com/groups) or email Chace at [chace.ifland@redemptionokc.com](mailto:chace.ifland@redemptionokc.com).*