

## Travels in Greece - Mission Athens

### On your marks:

Ever since Saul, who later chose to be called Paul, first met with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was on fire with his God-given mission to take the gospel to as many other countries as he could. He began his mission in Asia Minor - modern-day Turkey - but then was called to Europe, beginning with Greece.

Paul arrived in Athens alone. In the previous three weeks, he had shared the good news of Jesus in at least two other major Greek cities. In these places, some people had believed and become Christians but others had started riots that forced Paul and his companions to move on quickly.

Along with the similar sessions [Mission Corinth](#) and [Mission Philippi](#), these outlines could form a holiday-time series for your Sunday group or used as the basis for a series of all-age services.

### Get set:

You will need:

- magazines with colour adverts for a wide range of products
- a set of symbols for the storytelling (see below)
- playdough, air-drying clay or plasticine.

You can find the story in Acts 17:16-34. There is a retelling of the story in [The Barnabas Children's Bible](#) (story 341).

### Go!

#### Opening up the story

Athens was a meeting place for many new ideas and philosophies (Acts 17:21) - lots of great thinkers of the time gathered in this famous city.

Collect together lots of coloured adverts from magazines for a wide range of products: beauty, status, comfort, food, speed, pleasure, long life and financial investment. Talk about how effective, or not, these adverts are. Who are they appealing to? What are they saying about what's important in life?

When Paul walked around Athens, he saw lots of statues and shrines, which in a way advertised what the Athenians thought life was all about. This upset Paul - perhaps he

was thinking about what Jesus had said about wealth and possessions in the Sermon on the Mount - see Matthew 6:19-20, 31-34.

- What advertisement might you create to illustrate what you think life is really all about?
- What advertisement might Jesus have created to illustrate his words in Matthew 6?

Paul believed that knowing God through Jesus was the most important thing in life - and this is what he began to talk to people about.

### **Telling the story**

Paul knew it was no good using Old Testament examples to point to Jesus, as he had done in other places on his travels. Here in Athens, his audience wasn't Jewish. The Athenians believed in all sorts of gods, or maybe 'the god' of having a good time (= The Epicureans) or 'the god' of self-control (= The Stoics).

Using the following symbols, unpack how Paul decided to share the gospel in Athens:

**Question mark (?)** - He starts with noticing that one of the shrines is dedicated to a god they do not know. Paul recognises that there is a spiritual hunger in his audience.

**A globe** - He continues by saying that God made the earth and all that is in it, including all the people.

**An open book** - He quotes from one of the Greek poets who recognises that God is everywhere and close.

**Open block capital letters for GOD** - He reminds them that the true God isn't a statue but is invisible...

**A heart** - ... and that this God loves them and forgives them...

**A cross** - ... and that this God has come as Jesus to show us the way to heaven through his death...

**The stone and open grave** - ... and through his resurrection.

Paul knows he's talking to an educated audience and so he uses ideas and quotations that they will recognise. When he mentions Jesus, some of them mock him but others go on to believe, including members of the council who had arranged the debate.

### **Talking about the story**

- What do you think about the way in which Paul explained the gospel?
- How might it be helpful for those people who do not know anything about the Bible?

Try this challenge: in one minute, explain what Christians believe **without** using any religious jargon or language, or quotes from the Bible, and using only simple, plain English. Others can interrupt and challenge if they think any of these rules are being broken.

### **Playing with the story**

Using some playdough, air-drying clay or plasticine, design a statue to join the other statues/shrines in Athens which will point everyone to Jesus and God's love for the whole wide world. Try to make it as simple and as powerful as possible, with a design that is self-explanatory but which gets people talking.

### **Reflecting on the story**

Many people today have their own ideas about the best way to live their lives, just like the philosophers in Athens did. Others believe in modern-day 'gods' of money or fame or power. Paul wanted everyone to hear the story of Jesus because he believed this was the key to the real meaning of life.

Use the symbols from the storytelling section to help pray for those people you know who do not yet believe in Jesus. For example:

*Please help my friends to ask questions; to see your presence in the world around them; to recognise God at work in the things they hear and read; to realise that God is invisible but has made his love visible for us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.*

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