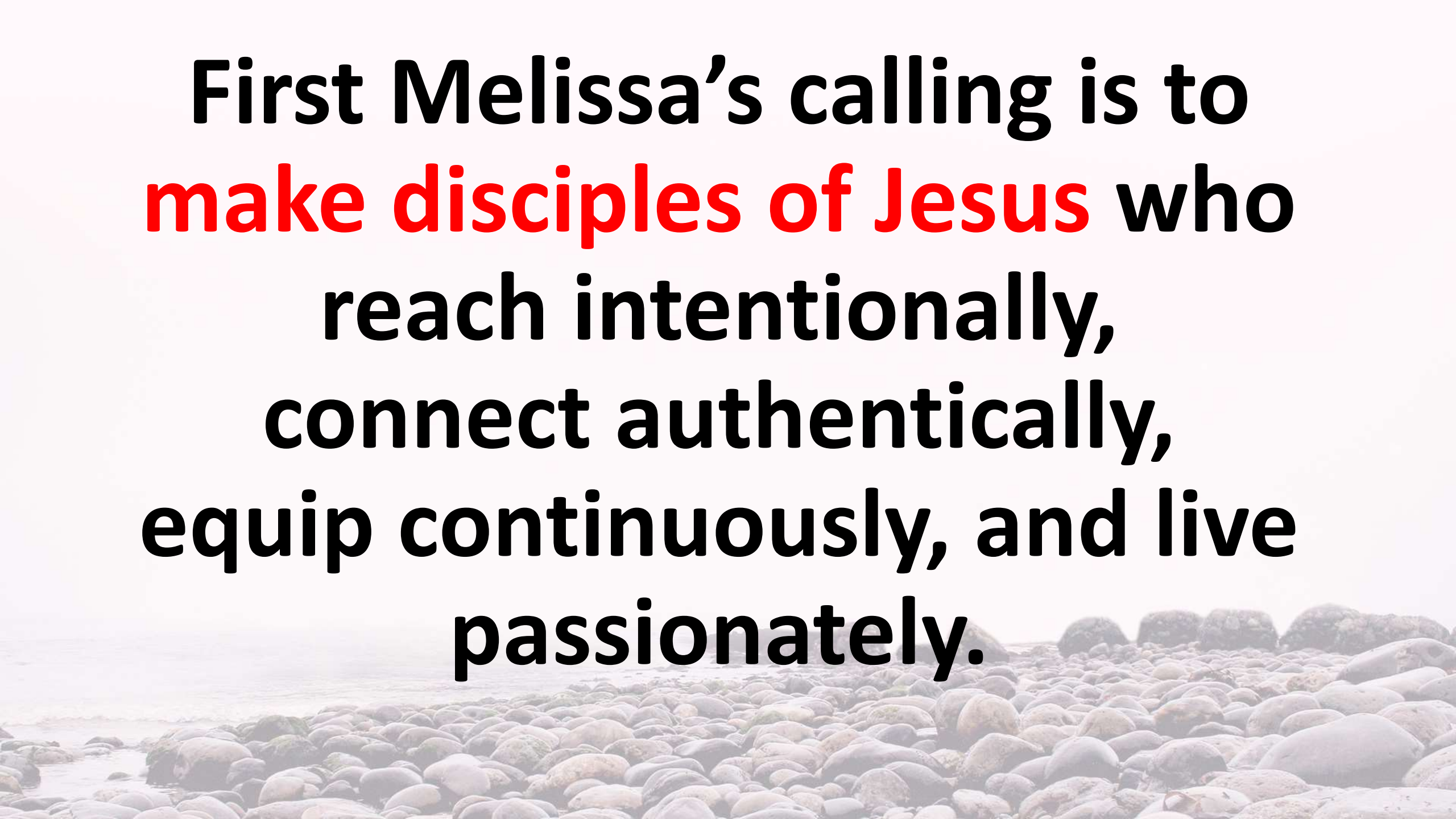


RELEARNING ANCIENT BIBLE STORIES IN A BRAND-NEW WAY

EPIC TALES

TOO





**First Melissa's calling is to
make disciples of Jesus who
reach intentionally,
connect authentically,
equip continuously, and live
passionately.**

Jesus said, “Go therefore and **make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”**

Matthew 28:19-20

How do you “make disciples?”



Acts 17



World of the New Testament, Around A.D. 50



Apostle Paul Travel Log

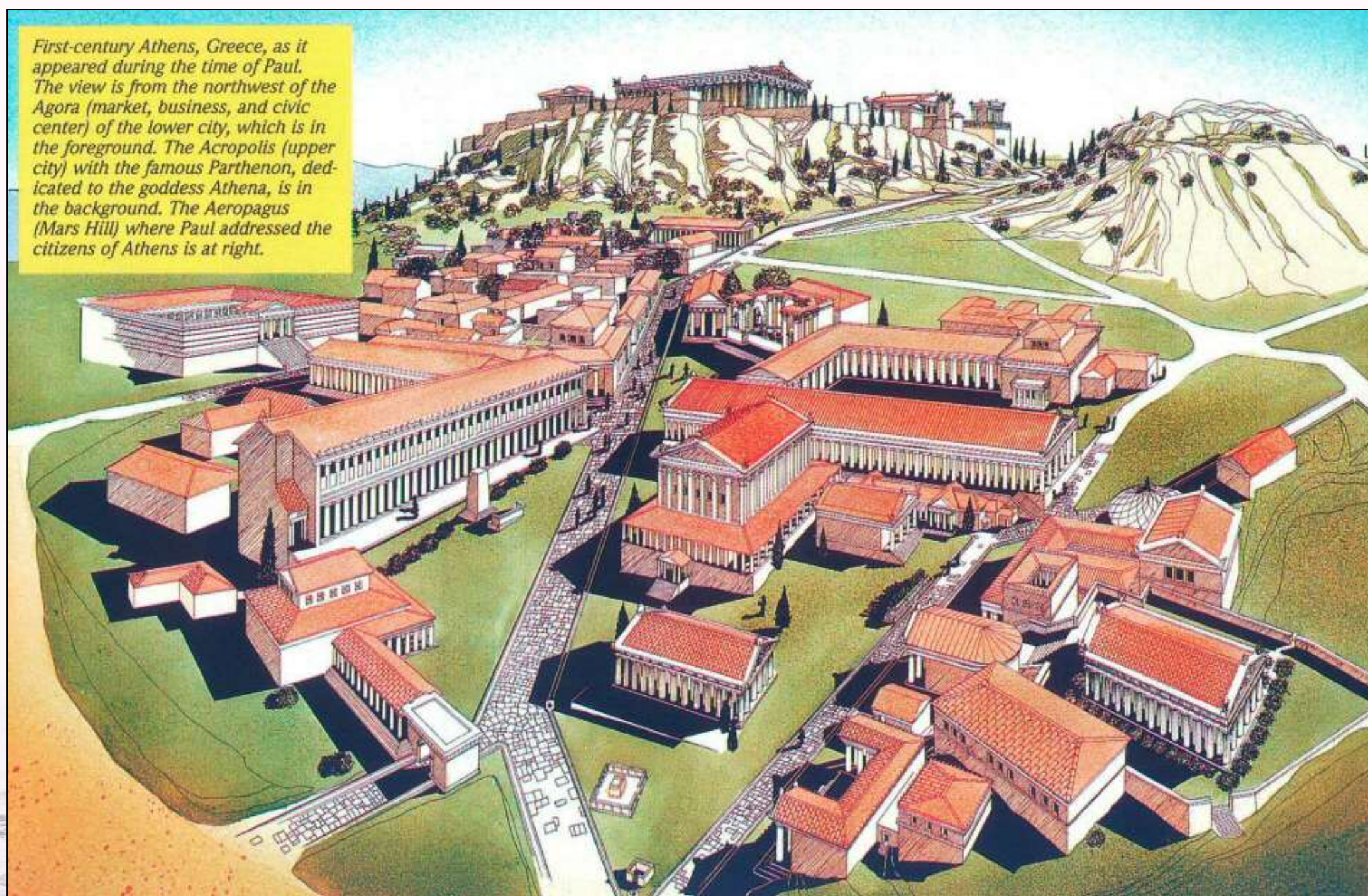
1. Acts 15 –
Jerusalem

2. Acts 16 –
Philippi

3. Acts 17 –
Thessalonica
then to
Athens

- **Athens was the capital of Attica, the most celebrated city of the ancient world, the seat of Greek literature and art during the golden period of Grecian history. Its inhabitants were remarkable for their zeal in the worship of the gods. It was a sarcastic saying of the Roman satirist that it was “easier to find a god at Athens than a man.”** – Easton’s Bible Dictionary
- **In the sixth century BC, Athens became the scene of the world’s first great experiment with democratic government. It was destroyed by the Persians early in the fifth century BC, but during the administration of Pericles the city was rebuilt into an architectural wonder.** – Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary
- **By Paul’s day (first century AD), Athens had lost its political and economic power. It was still the intellectual and cultural center for all of Greece. The remnants of its former grandeur were everywhere, particularly its many statues. Paul was offended by the idols of the Greek gods.** – Holman Concise Bible Commentary

First-century Athens, Greece, as it appeared during the time of Paul. The view is from the northwest of the Agora (market, business, and civic center) of the lower city, which is in the foreground. The Acropolis (upper city) with the famous Parthenon, dedicated to the goddess Athena, is in the background. The Aeropagus (Mars Hill) where Paul addressed the citizens of Athens is at right.



Now while Paul was waiting for them [Silas and Timothy] at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city **full of idols.
Acts 17:16 (event took place in approx. 50 AD)**

This week's Torah Portion (Eikev עֵיקֵב)

1,400 years earlier, Moses told the people of Israel...

“For the Lord your God is the God of gods** and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe.”**

Deuteronomy 10:17

So he [Paul] was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles [Paul's usual practice as an observant Jew], and in the market place [agora] every day with those who happened to be present. Acts 17:17

Paul went to the market square, the most prominent public gathering place... he went to where people had time to talk with him and listen. He did not expect others to approach him but went to them, and he was tireless about it—he went every day seeking to make disciples. – Jewish New Testament Commentary

And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. 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. Acts 17:18

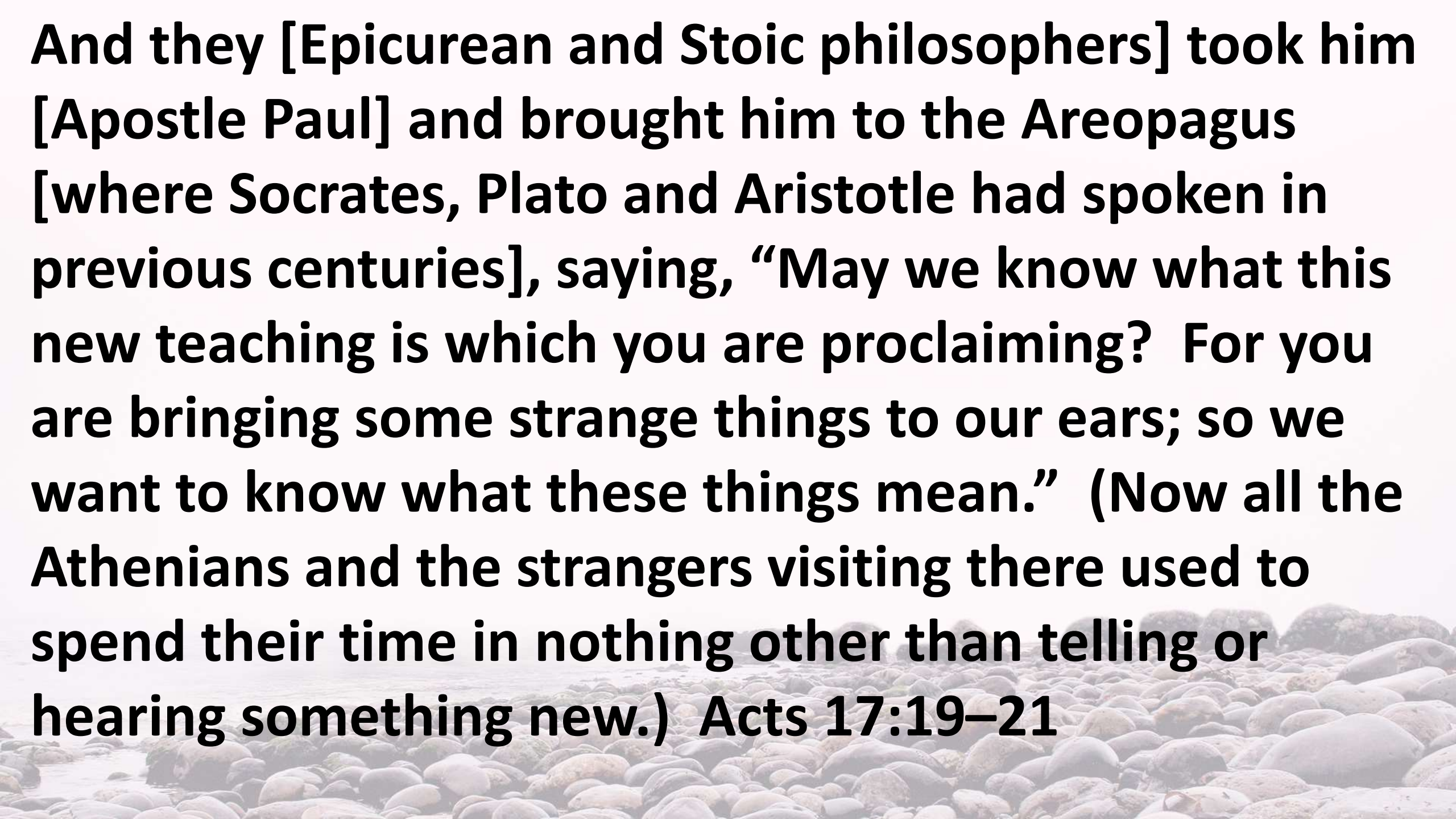
Paul was accused of a serious crime: advocating foreign gods. This was the very crime of which the great philosopher Socrates had been accused, also in Athens, some 450 years earlier, and which led to his death.

- **Epicureans** taught that one should pursue fulfilment and actively avoid displeasure. The role of the gods in a person's life was seen as strictly marginal. The followers of Epicurus (341–270 BC), said the chief end of man was pleasure and happiness. This pleasure, they believed, is attained by avoiding excesses and the fear of death, by seeking tranquility and freedom from pain, and by loving mankind. They believed that if gods exist they do not become involved in human events.
- **Stoics** were followers of Zeno (ca. 320 - ca. 250 BC) and got their name from the painted portico or stoa where he traditionally taught in Athens. Pantheistic in their view, they felt a great "Purpose" was directing history. Man's responsibility was to fit himself and align himself with this "Purpose" through tragedy and triumph. This outlook, while it produced certain noble qualities, also resulted in inordinate pride and self-sufficiency. The Stoics thought that one attained fulfilment by accepting the course of events, including pain and suffering. These should be endured quietly, almost gratefully, since they are part of nature and are controlled by an impersonal divine necessity or 'fate'.

Neither school was bound up with the many gods and idols, and monotheism would not have been regarded as unlikely in theory by either philosophy.

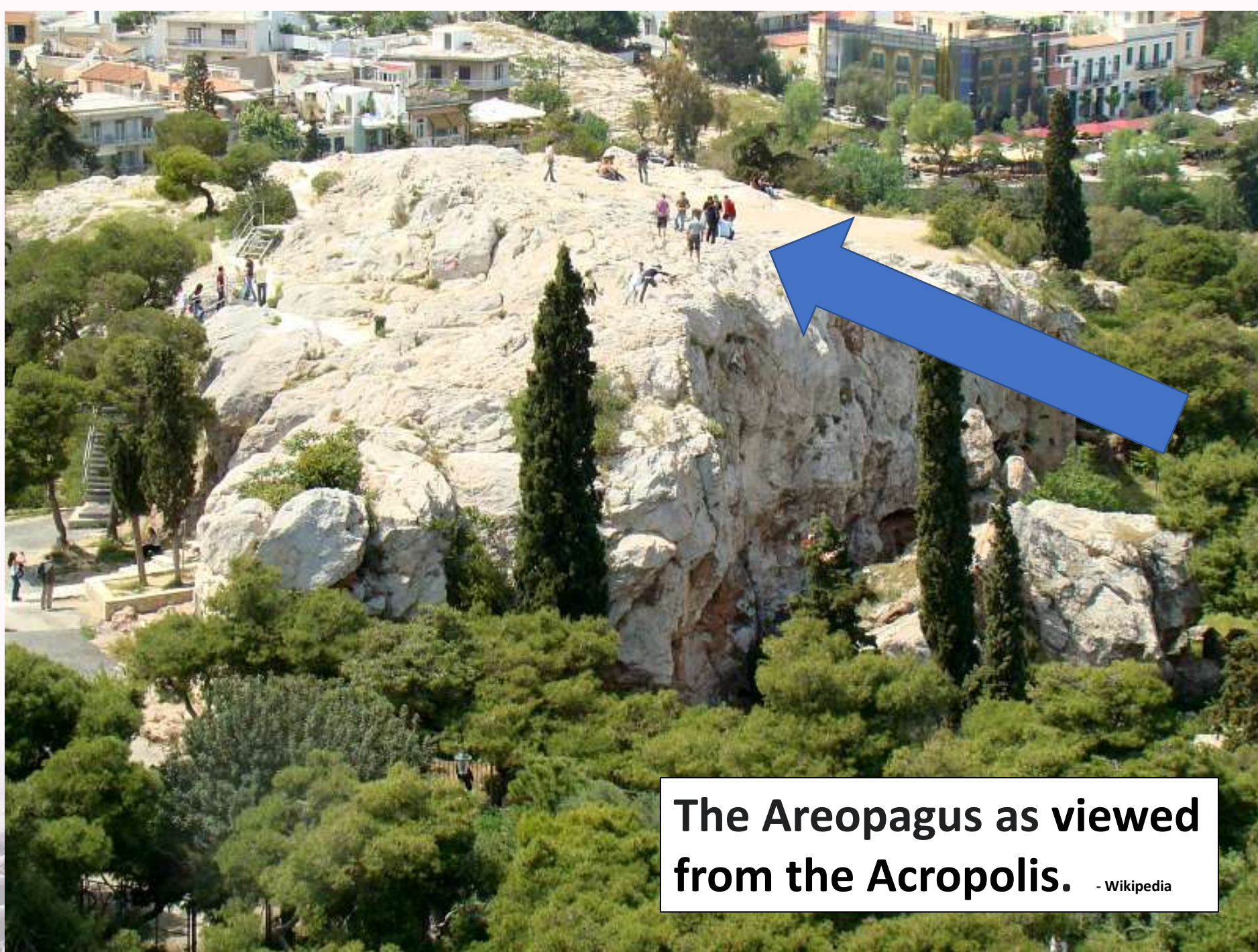
Both Stoicism and Epicureanism (and their successors) oppose biblical religion. In these verses we see how Paul, expressing God's love, dealt with people—sinners like everyone else—whose primary channel of life-expression was intellectual.

And they [Epicurean and Stoic philosophers] took him [Apostle Paul] and brought him to the Areopagus [where Socrates, Plato and Aristotle had spoken in previous centuries], saying, “May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean.” (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.) Acts 17:19–21



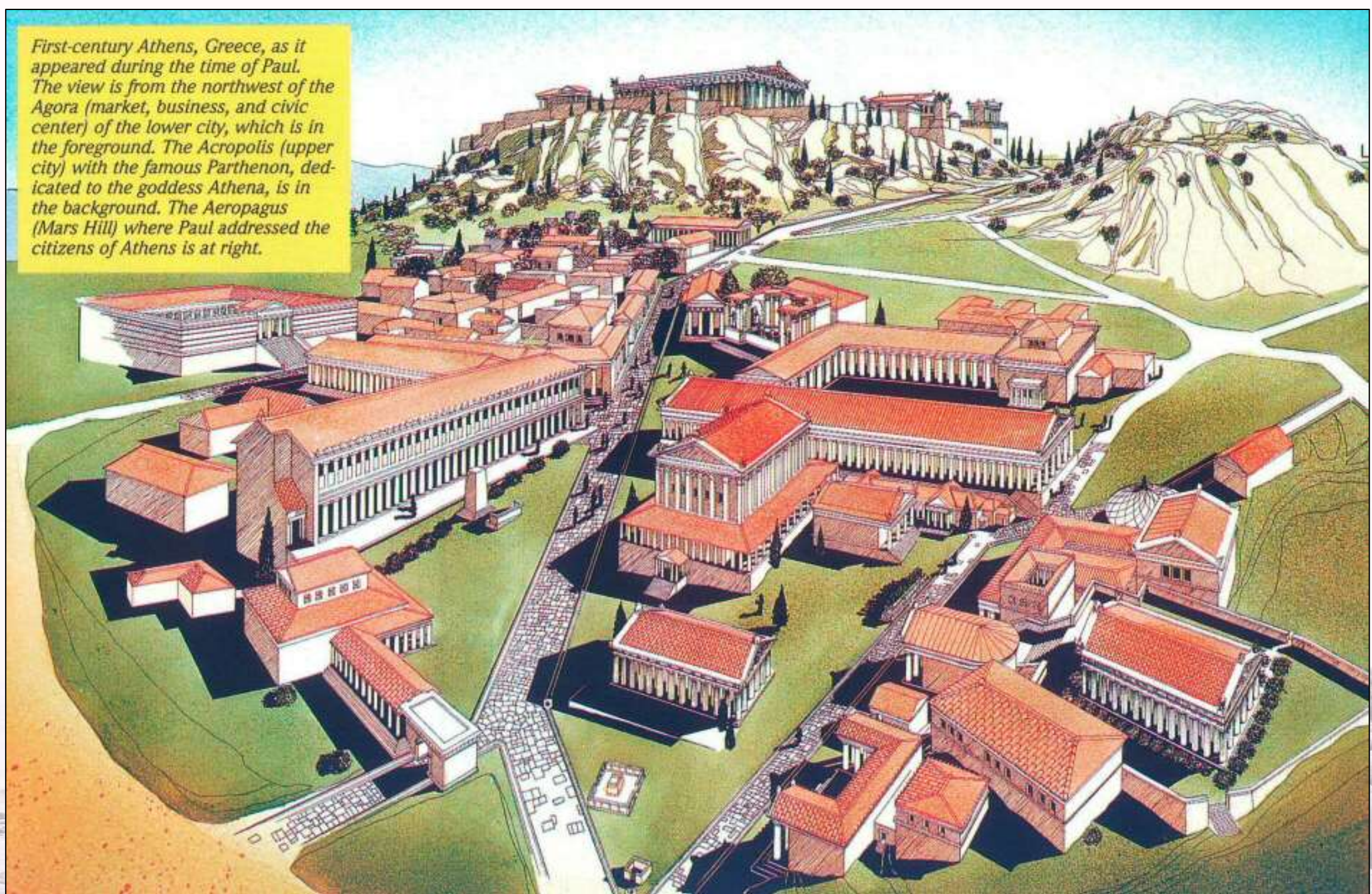
Greek *Areios pagos* means ‘the hill of Ares’, the Greek god of war, corresponding to the Roman god ‘Mars.’ Some call this “Mars Hill.” It is a place, but was also the term for the council which met there, the supreme body for judicial and legislative matters in Athens.

– New Bible Commentary



The Areopagus as viewed from the Acropolis. - Wikipedia

First-century Athens, Greece, as it appeared during the time of Paul. The view is from the northwest of the Agora (market, business, and civic center) of the lower city, which is in the foreground. The Acropolis (upper city) with the famous Parthenon, dedicated to the goddess Athena, is in the background. The Aeropagus (Mars Hill) where Paul addressed the citizens of Athens is at right.





**The Parthenon on the
Acropolis (“high city”)
in Athens.**

Picture of the Acropolis taken from the Areopagus - Wikipedia

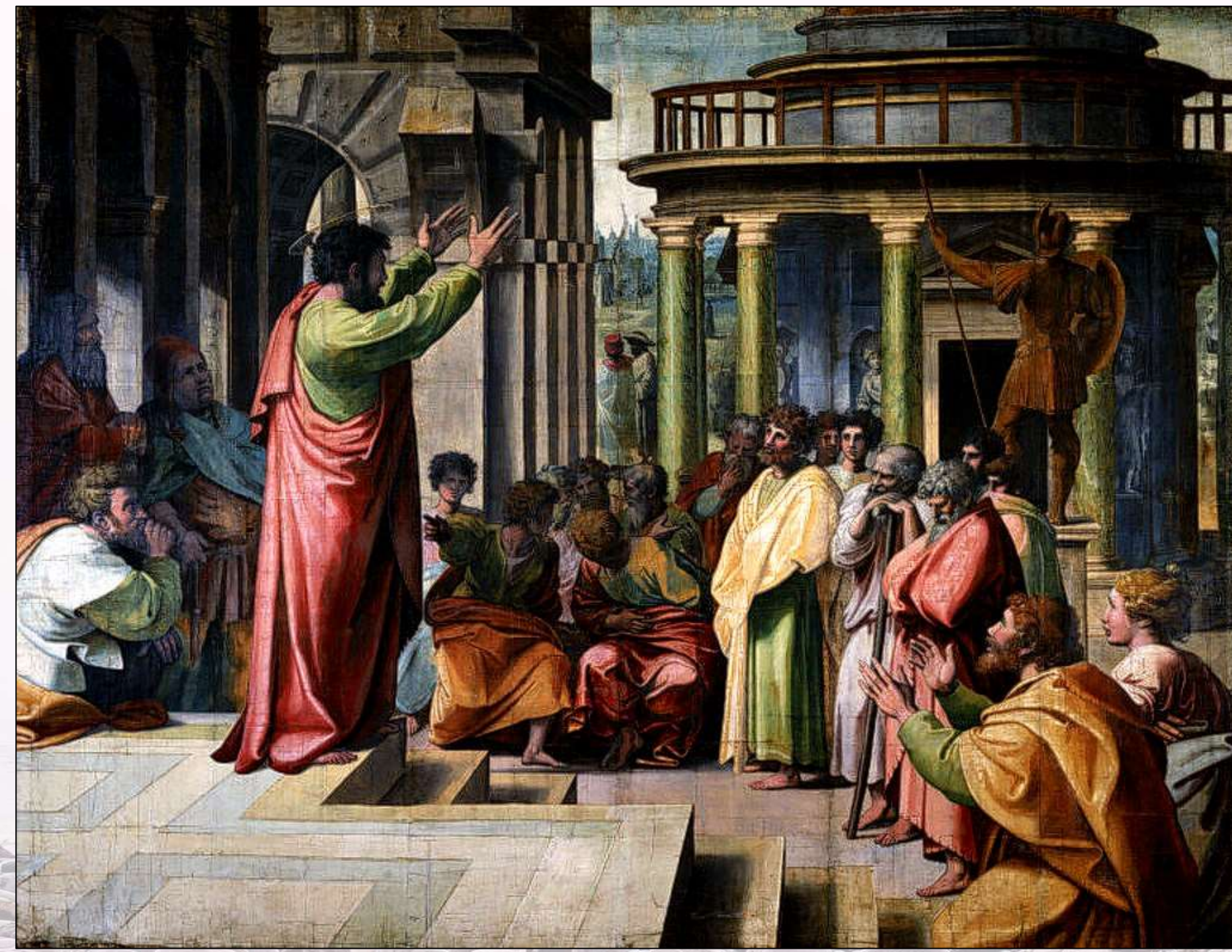


**So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus
[“Mar’s Hill”] and said, “Men of Athens, I observe
that you are **very religious** in all respects. For
while I was passing through and examining the
objects of your worship, I also found an altar with
this inscription, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’
Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I
proclaim to you.” Acts 17:22-23**

***Disciple-makers help others find spiritual answers**

**Saint
Paul delivering
the *Areopagus*
Sermon in
Athens.**

**Painting
by Raphael,
1515.**



Why build an altar “to an unknown god”?

- As humans, we were made to worship
- We long to worship someone or something greater than ourselves
- We even resort to the worship of things we do not know or understand

“What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since **this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.**” - Blaise Pascal

Why build an altar “to an unknown god”?

- The Greeks built this altar in case they might have left a god out whom they would not want to offend.
- Once, legend had it, there was a terrible plague in the city of Athens, and attempts to appease the gods and stop the plague had no effect. One of the wise men of the day brought a flock of sheep to the top of Mars Hill and released them. Wherever these sheep stopped, an altar was set up to an ‘anonymous god’ and the animal was sacrificed. This course of action was allegedly effective and the city returned to health. – New Bible Commentary

“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, **does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;”**

Acts 17:24-25

- God is above human temples, but He is also self-sufficient and is not sustained by human provisions. This truth would appeal to the Epicureans who believed that what god or gods existed were above human events.
- The last part of the verse, dealing with God’s providing people with life and material needs, suited the Stoic philosophy of aligning their lives with the “Purpose” of the Cosmos.
- Paul was thus beginning where his listeners were and was leading them from their inadequate concepts of the truth. – Bible Knowledge Commentary

“and He made from one man [Adam in the Book of Genesis] every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,” Acts 17:26

***The One True God is sovereign over all nations, including Greece**

“that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” Acts 17:27

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Romans 1:18-20

“for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’” Acts 17:28

***Paul quoted a Stoic poet... possibly from a poem to Zeus by the astronomer Aratus**

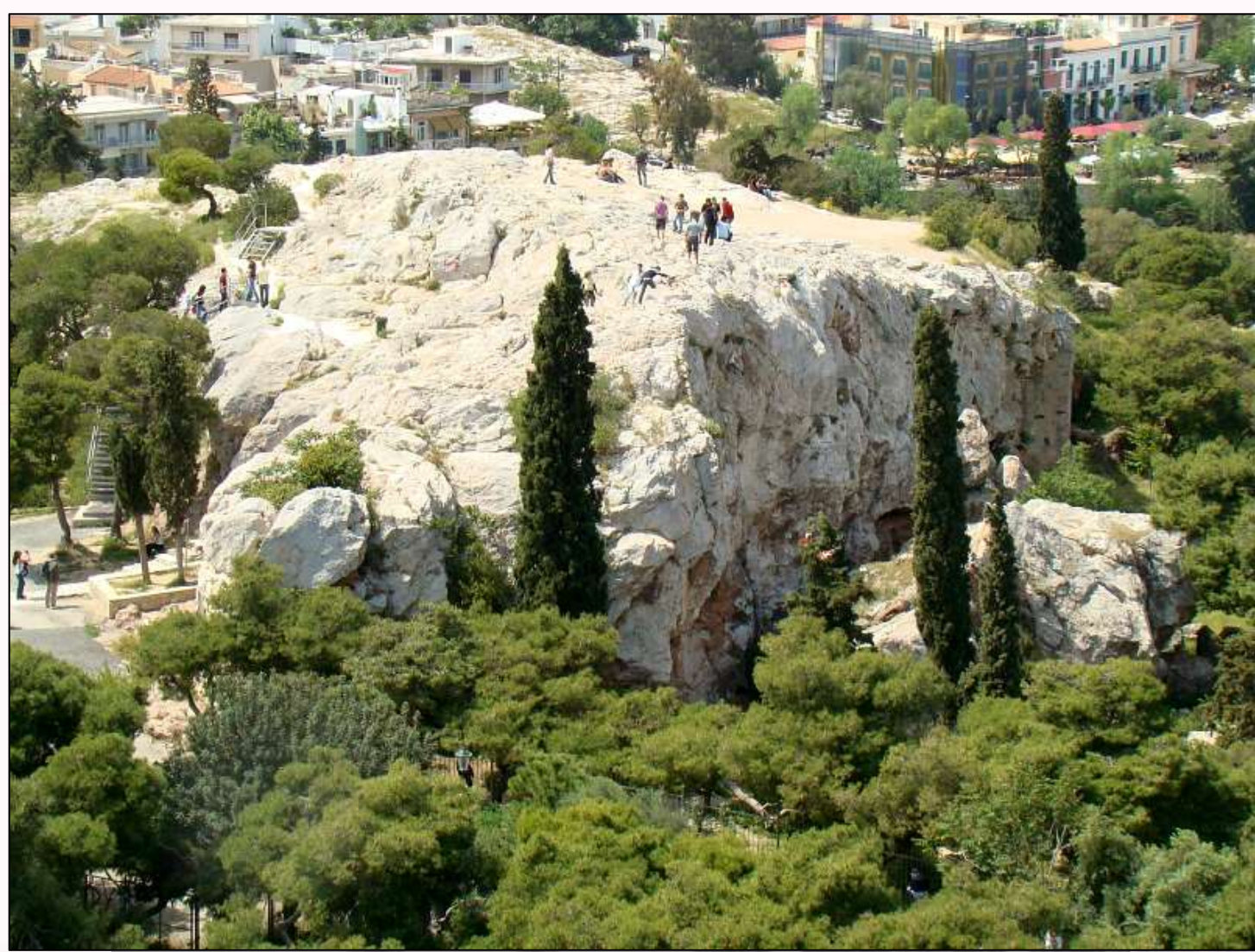
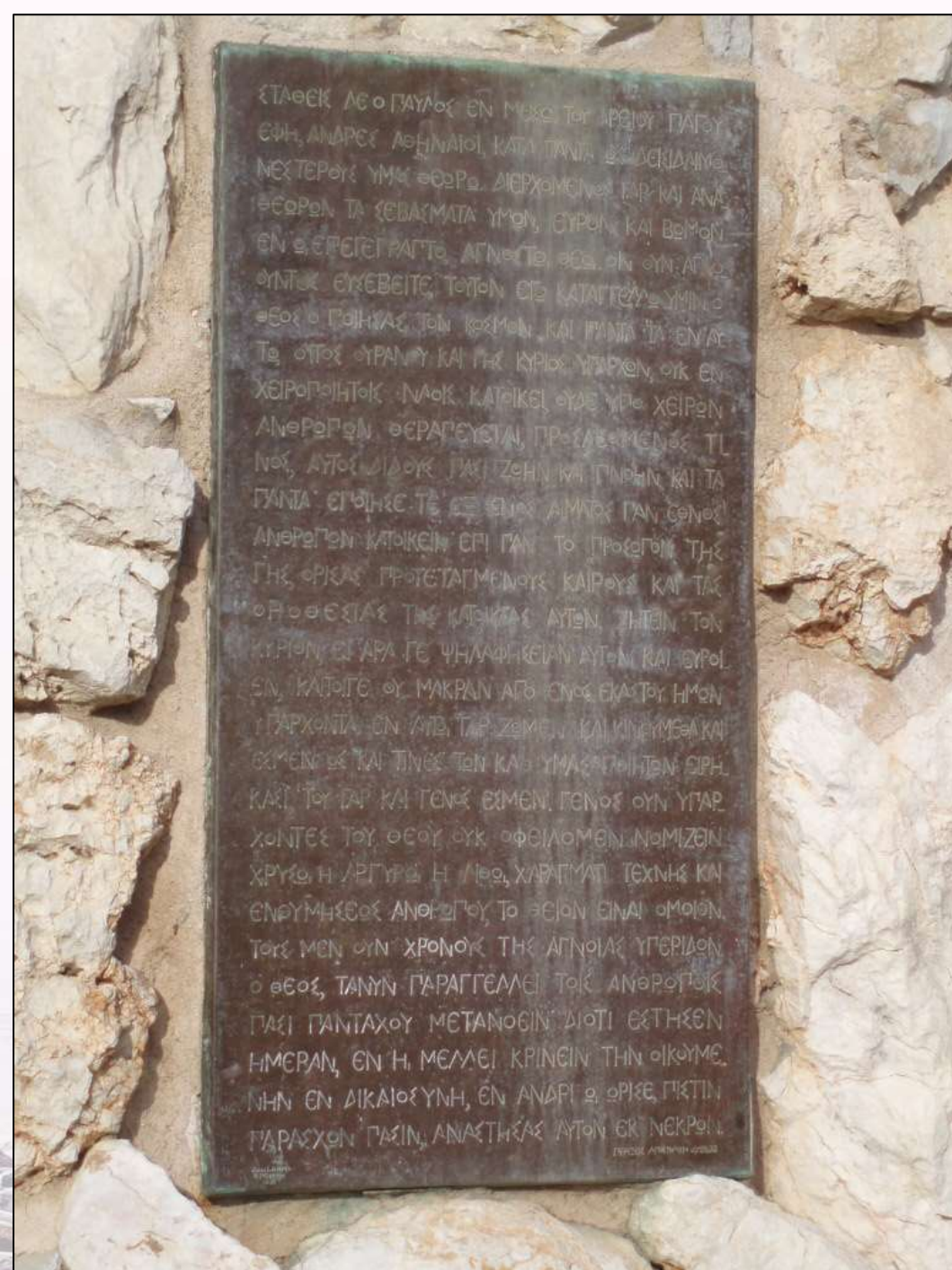
“Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should **repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man [Messiah Jesus] whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.” Acts 17:29-31**

Apostle Paul's Sermon

Paul began to attack the Greek culture more directly. If we are born in God's image, he said, then we are wrong when we make idols. Idolatry gets things backward; it makes God into man's image. God will no longer tolerate such ignorance, Paul continued. He is coming to judge us for our ignorance and idolatry, to judge us by a person whom He raised from the dead. Paul lost most of his Athenian intellectuals right there. The idea of a man rising from the dead was sheer folly to their thinking.

Now when they heard of the **resurrection** of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, “We shall hear you again concerning this.” So Paul went out of their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite [a member of the council in Athens] and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Acts 17:32-34



**Engraved plaque containing
Apostle Paul's sermon, at
the Areopagus, Athens, Greece.**

How Apostle Paul shared the gospel story

To those who approach life intellectually Paul offers knowledge in lieu of ignorance. He does not use the Scriptures at all, since these would carry no weight with these highly educated pagans. Instead, he quotes from Greek poets in Acts 17:28 (first Epimenides, then Aratus or Cleanthes); elsewhere he quotes Menander (1 Corinthians 15:33) and Epimenides of Crete (Titus 1:12). He presents God as Creator, Giver of all, and Ruler of nations and history (vv. 24–26), and as One who seeks our love (vv. 27–28), which consists not in idol-worship (vv. 24–25, 29) but in turning from sins (v. 30), because a day is coming when everyone will be judged by God through the resurrected Messiah Jesus (v. 31). Yeshua's resurrection gives public proof that the Gospel is true and therefore objectively demands belief (see Acts 26:8).

The theme of Paul's sermon is clear: the Creator God, who has revealed Himself in Creation, has now commanded all to repent, for everyone must give an account to Jesus Christ whom God raised from the dead.

There were three responses to Paul's address...

1. Many mocked him.

2. Others wanted to hear him further.

3. A few believed.

**First Melissa's calling is to
make disciples of Jesus who
reach intentionally,
connect authentically,
equip continuously, and live
passionately.**



Jesus said, “Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20

*God gives us a **brain** and a **heart**... to speak intelligently to the world about the amazing gift of salvation



Guess what happens **today when we share the story of Jesus with family members and friends?**

- 1. Many will mock us.**
- 2. Others will want to hear us further.**
- 3. A few will believe.**



First Melissa's calling is to **make disciples of Jesus**

If you don't yet follow Jesus... will you believe?

If you already follow Jesus... will you share?

