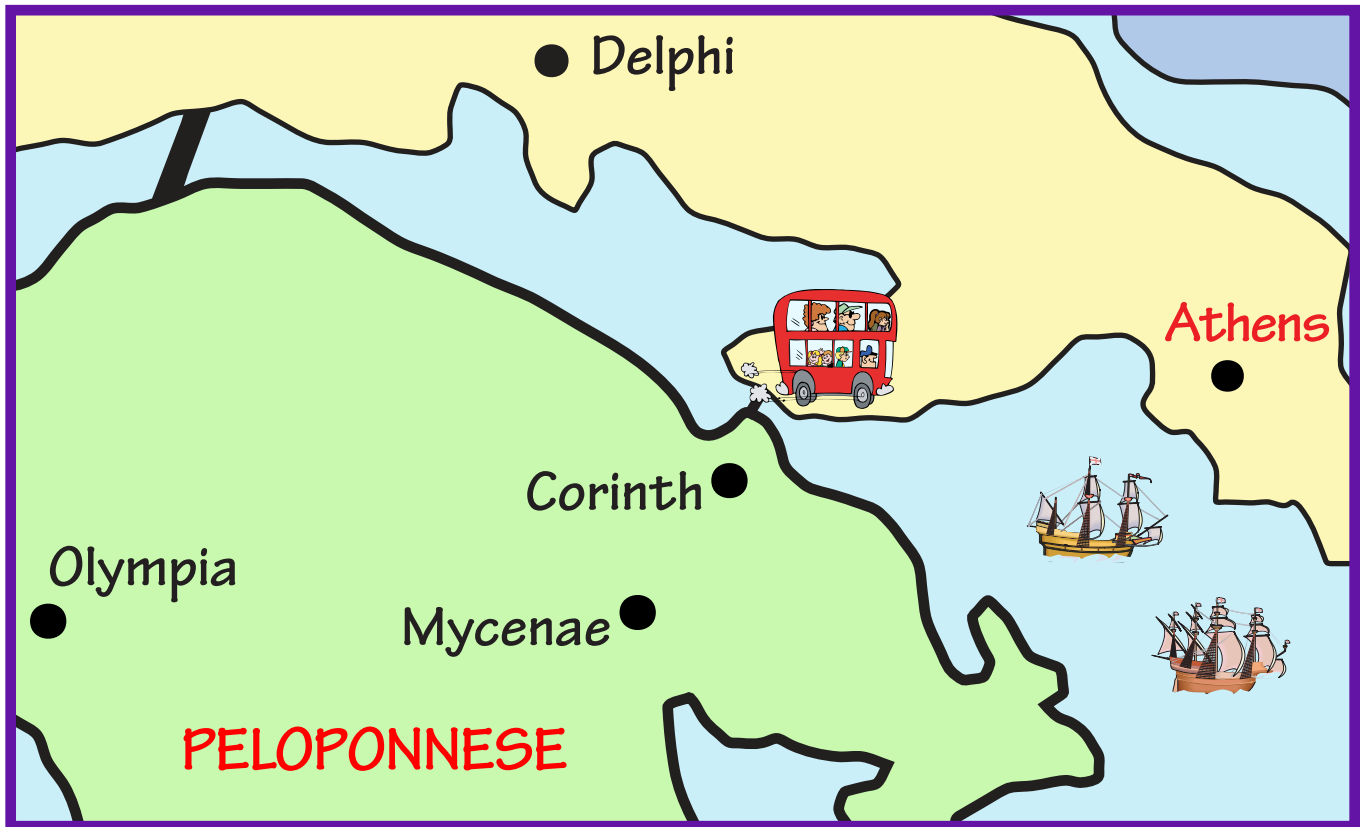


Tour of the Holy Lands - Athens



As we leave the Corinth Canal, our bus is driving east, following the coastline on our right. Next stop: Athens! If Paul had a calendar, the year would be 50 CE. Imagine living w-a-y back then!

About an hour later, we begin to see ships in Athens' harbor, which is called Piraeus (pee-ray'us). This is where the ships unload cargo and sailors. In ancient times, sailors would hurry down their ship's gangway and race up the 5-mile road to the city for their "shore leave" – their free time off the ship.

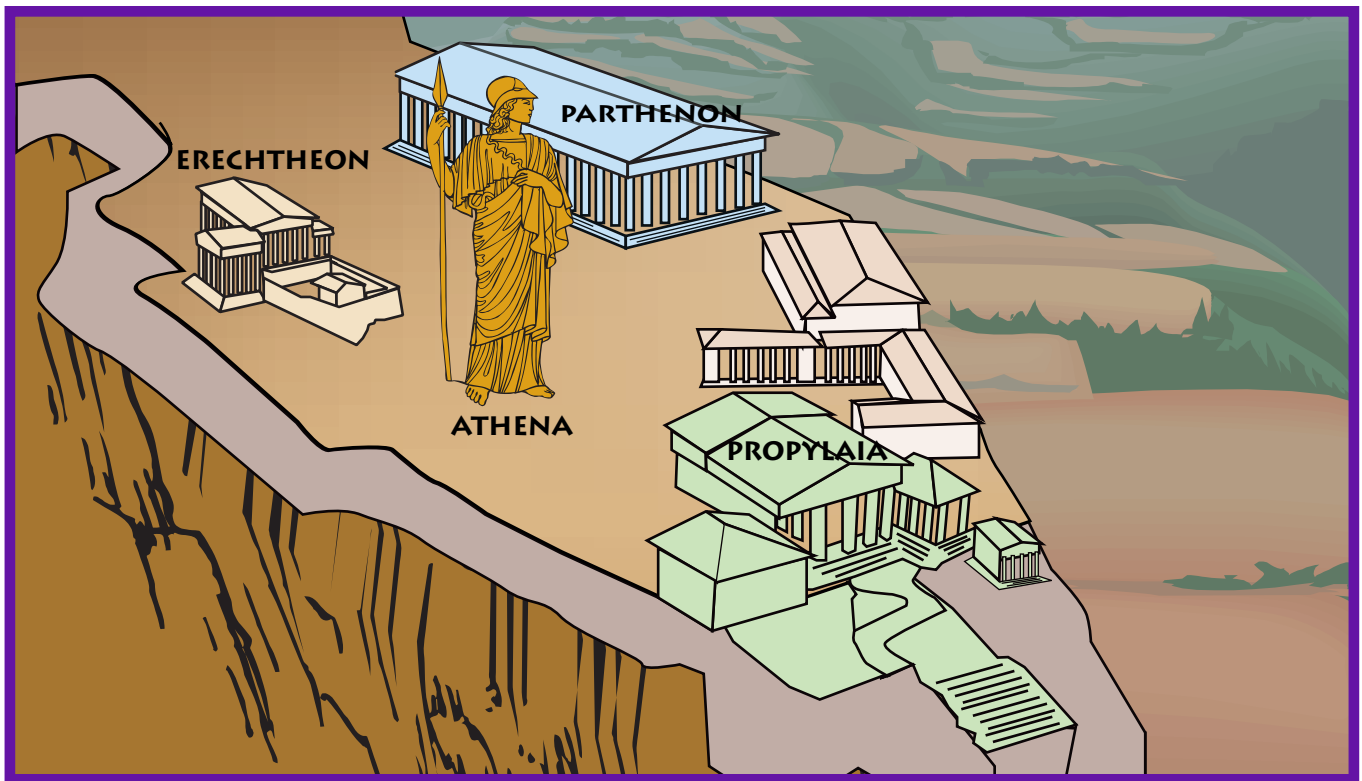


We have arrived in Athens. We can see the outline of the famous Acropolis (meaning "high city") ahead of us. Sailors in Paul's time wanted to be the first to see the glint of the sun on the raised spear of the famous bronze goddess Athena rising 30 feet above the ground. You and I can't see the statue because by the year 540 CE, Athena had been taken to Constantinople.

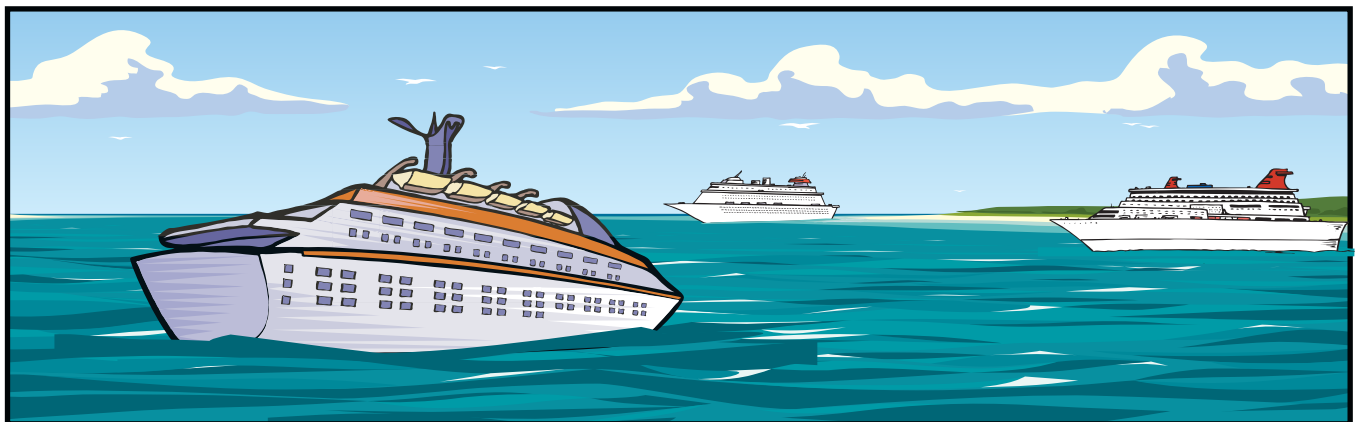
Other statues and temples of gods and goddesses lined the road to Athens. They say there were 30,000 gods there – more gods than men!



ATHENA



Here we are on top of the Acropolis. (Remember the Acropolis at Mycenae?) Paul must have visited this monumental upper city when he first arrived. Everyone had heard of it. After climbing the many stairs to the top, the sailors in Paul's day would have turned around and gazed out at the harbor to see their own cargo ships from Africa and Asia and other parts of the world. When you and I turn around and look out, we see giant modern cruise ships in the harbor ready to carry hundreds of tourists to the Greek islands. We'll sail on one of those soon.





On the Acropolis to our right is the most famous and most beautiful of all the Greek temples and the symbol of ancient Greece – the Parthenon. Architects (people who design buildings) down the centuries have copied its design. In Paul’s day, the Parthenon was 400 years old. Now, it’s over 2,400 years old.

What made this building so pleasing to the eye? It’s mostly the tricky way the columns were designed. There are 46 outer columns and 23 inner columns. You have to really study them to see what’s unusual about them. Take a close look at the outer columns. Do you see the slight bulge in the middle? And can you see that each column slants toward the middle of the building? In fact, there are not many straight lines in the entire temple. Yet, these design techniques make the whole building look perfectly straight and graceful. Our eyes have been “tricked” into seeing something that isn’t really there!



Let's study this picture of a perfect Parthenon copy. It was built in Nashville, Tennessee. Can you see the same tricks played by the architect?



In addition to the 30 foot bronze statue of Athena that stood outside the Parthenon, another statue of this goddess stood inside the Parthenon. According to myth, Athena was born out of the head of Zeus. The statue inside the temple was made of wood covered with gold and ivory. If you walk into the Nashville Parthenon, you'll see what the original statue looked like.

By the time Paul saw the statue here in the year 50 CE, the gold sheets had been removed to pay soldiers and then replaced with bronze.

Today, as you and I peek inside the Parthenon here on the Acropolis, it is empty.



The Erechtheon (e-rek'thee'on) is the building to the left of the Parthenon on the Acropolis. Look at its famous side porch. Instead of marble columns, the porch roof is held up on the heads of five beautiful ladies carved in marble. They are called caryatids (kayr-ee-ah'tids). Half of the caryatids are standing on their right legs and half on their left. One caryatid now stands in the British Museum. The fine art of sculpting the human form had reached its final stage in the years 500-450 BCE. Each lady was carved separately and differently. They resembled dancing girls with baskets of live reeds on their heads. The Romans appreciated this art and copied it in several places around Rome.

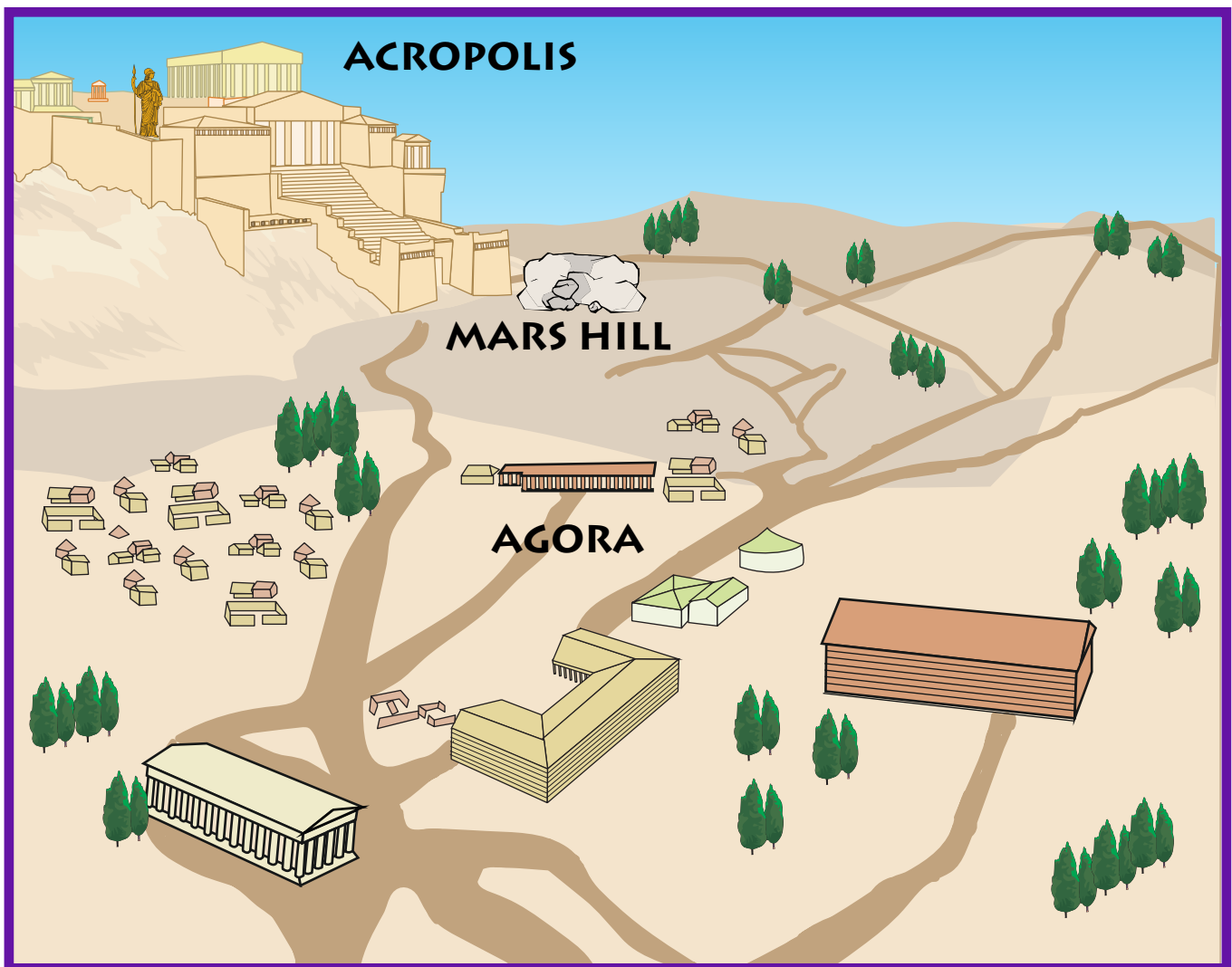


CARYATIDS



Let's see what Paul has been doing while we've been looking at these famous buildings. Remember, the synagogue was his first stop in every city he visited. There and at the city center and marketplace, called the agora (a'gor-aw'), he debated and argued with anyone he met. But the motto of some of the people was "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we may die." They were not interested in Paul's teachings on God, Jesus, and the resurrection. The people called him names – "Babbler" and "Seed-picker"!

After walking around and listening in on different conversations, Paul had learned that the Athenians spent their time discussing the latest news and ideas. Paul certainly had plenty of both to tell them! But, he was unhappy to see so many idols around the city. Plus, he could tell that the Athenians weren't really hearing what he had to say.



As you look at the city map, find Mars Hill. The philosophers, wise and educated men, told Paul to try out his new ideas on the Council of the Areopagus (air'ee-aw'pa-gus) before he shared them with the people. In Greek, "Ares" means "war god" and "paw-gus" means "hill." In Latin, it means "Mars Hill."



The council was a committee that met on that large marble hill below the Acropolis. Follow me and we'll climb to the top to hear Paul's famous speech from where he might have stood 2000 years ago. These original marble stairs have been climbed by pilgrims for hundreds of years. Watch your step! All those feet have worn down the steps, making them slippery. Now, sit on the top step and look out at the scene in front of you.

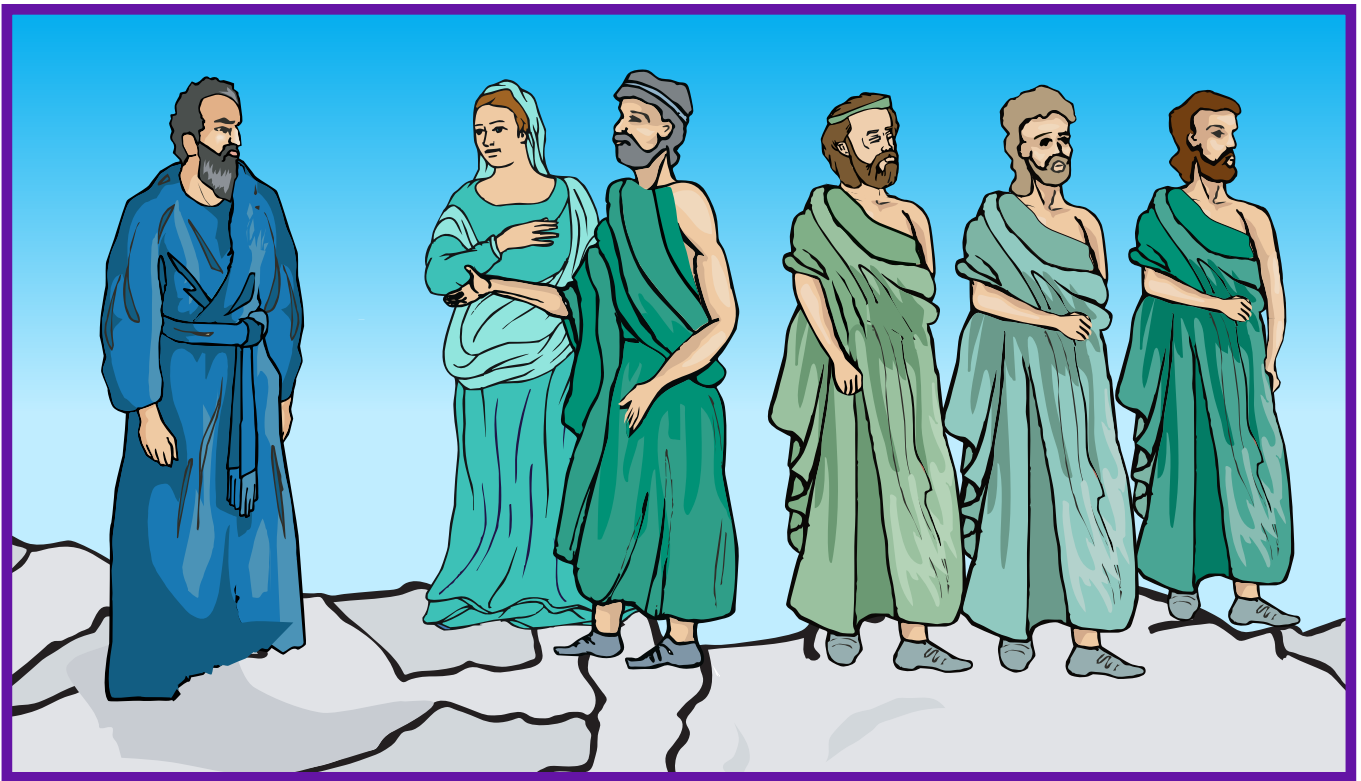


Do you see the simple robes that the council and other important people are wearing? It was believed that the citizens of Athens wore such plain robes so they would not outshine the perfect buildings and beautiful statues in their city. Are you surprised at the colorful clothing? It was not unusual to dye clothing from colors in nature, such as flower petals, berries and leaves.

How would Paul teach these philosophers about the one God and the resurrection of His son, Jesus? Instead of telling the Athenians how wrong they were to worship false gods, he praised them simply for worshiping. He said, "You people are so religious. You even have an altar, 'to the unknown god.' I'm here today to introduce you to this God, the one invisible God, the God who made all and rules all."

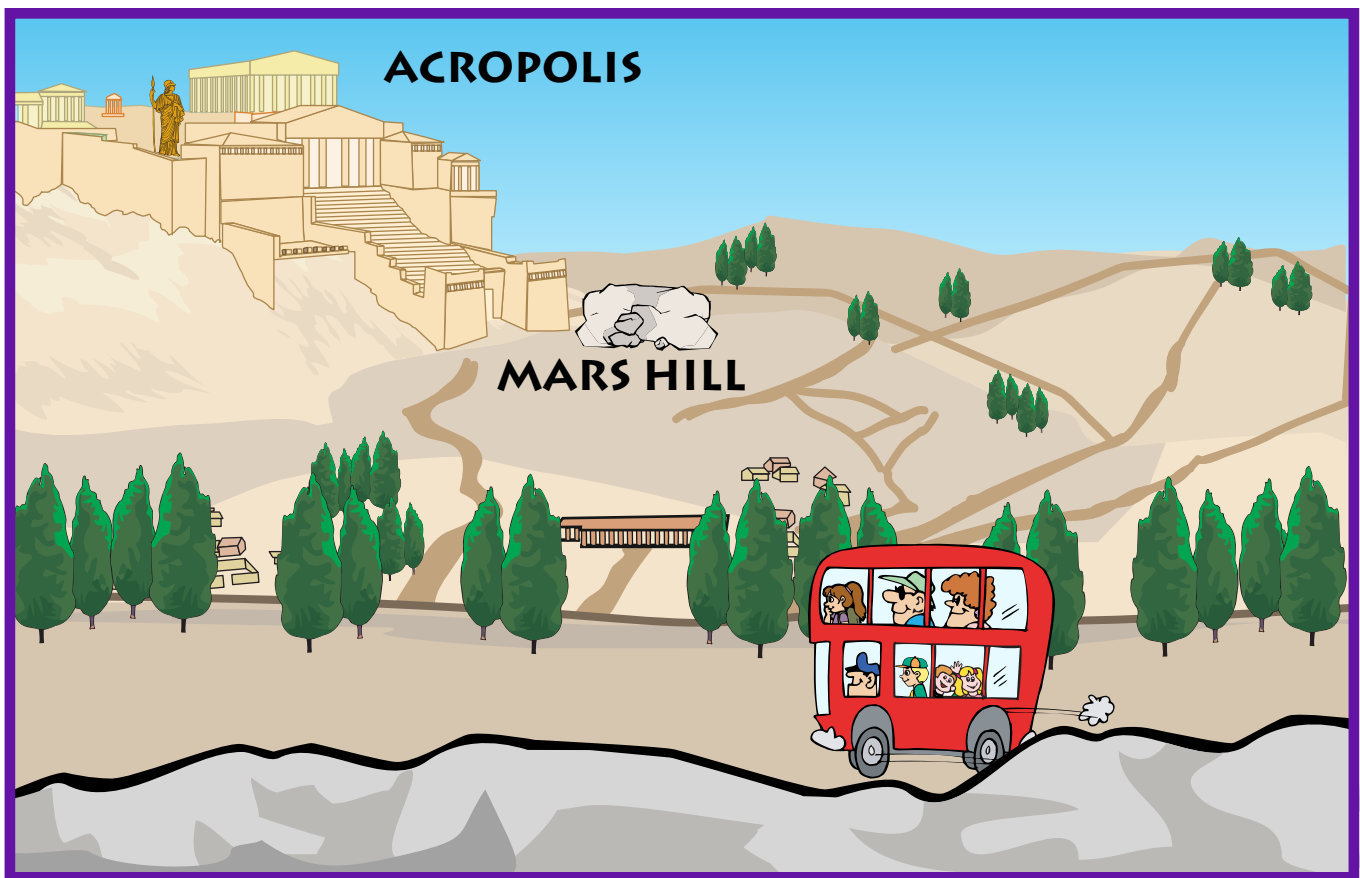


Because these people were unfamiliar with Scripture, Paul explains in simple words that God makes man; man does not make God. He doesn't live in buildings. He can't fit into a temple. He is everywhere. You can't give Him anything since He needs nothing. He needs no food, no house, no rest. You can't make Him more glorious. He is the source of all glory. He is the source of all life, and He continues to give life. Paul spoke boldly about the one God, even quoting their own poets when he said, "In Him we live and move and have our being," and then added, "For we are also His offspring." (Acts 17:28) How can we make the one who made us? Even if we have the finest materials (gold, silver or marble) or the most famous architects or artists, we cannot make an image of God. You have misunderstood Him for a long time, but now that you know the truth, He commands you to change your way of worshiping. And here Paul ended his speech.



He also explained how and why Jesus was raised from the dead. How did the Council react? Most laughed at Paul and walked off. They misunderstood Paul's message because in Greek the word for "resurrection" is "Anastasis" (an'-a-sta'-sis), which sounds like someone's name. These Council members thought Paul was introducing two new gods - Jesus and Resurrection (Anastasis). The idea of someone rising from the dead was too much for them to believe.

Yet, there were others in the crowd who said, "We'd like to hear more." But at the end of Paul's sermon, there were only two people left who were still interested in Christianity—a man named Dionysius (Dy'o-ny'-see-us) and a woman named Damaris (Dam'ar-is). Paul must have prayed that they would carry on his enlightened teaching. Scholars don't know for sure what happened to Damaris, but Dionysius became the first Bishop of Athens.



Paul had done what he set out to do in Athens – introduce the people to the one God – now the "known" God! Now he's going to move on to Corinth, where he hopes Silas and Timothy will join him and bring him news from the new churches up north. How were they doing? Were they surviving the attacks from Jews and Greeks? Paul hopes to hear good news from his good friends.

By now, we too are Paul's friends, so let's get back on our bus and follow him to Corinth!