

Study Notes and Questions for Acts 17 (Part 2) :16-34

- What is going on in these verses?
- **Study Note: The City of Athens.** The golden age of Athenian art, literature, philosophy, and democracy was five centuries earlier, and by Paul's time the city's pride rested on faded laurels. It had a major university and was the first home of the four chief philosophical schools, but the best students went to Alexandria and other centers. However, Athens was still a beautiful city and a free ally of Rome with at least the forms of democratic government, and the name of Athens retained a certain mystique.
- **Study Note: Epicurean Philosophers (17:18).** These were followers of Epicurus (341–270 BC), who taught that everything that exists is made of particles of matter called “atoms.” His conclusion was, therefore, there is no immortal soul; when you die, your atoms disintegrate and form other objects. (Kind of like “the Force” in Star Wars.)
- **Study Note: Stoic Philosophers** founded by Zeno (335–263 BC), who taught in a “stoa” (i.e. a covered porch) in Athens. Stoics believed that a person should seek to cooperate with and submit to destiny. They believed self-sufficiency is the highest human virtue and that one should tolerate and endure life as far as possible, then commit suicide with dignity if things become unbearable. As far as a belief in God goes, they believed God is not a person, but rather the soul of the universe and a spark in each thing. At death, the soul survives and becomes part of the “world-soul.”
- Do you know any people who hold views like those of the Epicureans or Stoics? What is attractive about those beliefs, and how can a Christian counter them?
- How should we deal with intellectuals who consider Christians “babblers”? Should we adopt the language of current philosophy? Should we ignore intellectuals?
- How does Luke describe Athens and its people (see 17:16, 21)?
- Why do you suppose it is often so hard for sophisticated people to accept the gospel? How can Christians help them?
- What did the cultured men think of Paul, and why (see 17:18, 32)?
- Put yourself in Paul's place, addressing wellborn, well-dressed intellectuals in an age where class distinctions were stone walls between people. Why do you think Paul was able to face those men confidently?
- Why do you think Paul addressed the Athenians differently than Jews? (What principle of evangelism was he practicing, and why is it important?)
- How do non-Christians today feel about the idea of resurrection, as opposed to reincarnation, the immortality of the soul, or permanent death?