



# Paul Preaches the Gospel in Athens

Acts 17:16–34



## LESSON GOAL

The child will have the right response to the right knowledge of God.

## BIBLE TRUTHS

- Paul was angry about the many gods he saw in Athens.
- Paul shared the Gospel with the Athenians.
- Some people believed the gospel and others did not.

## KEY VERSE

“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.” —Acts 17:30

## APPLICATION

- Be sad when you see people worshiping something besides God.
- Remember that God will judge each person.
- Praise God for giving all people life.

## NEXT WEEK

Paul Is an Example of Christ  
Acts 20–23 Selected Scripture

### Symbol Key



Craft



Finger Play



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Center



Activity



Q & A



Age Group

# Teacher Planning Sheet

## PREPARE

Objectives/Truths to cover this week

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Personal Application

*As a result of my study in this passage, God wants me to...*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

*Three ways students need to apply this passage are...*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## POINT

*Choose from various ideas to point them to the coming Bible lesson.*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## PROCLAIM

*Choose from various ideas to proclaim the Bible lesson.*

### Presentation Ideas

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Praise/Music Ideas

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## PRACTICE

*Choose ideas to help review and apply today's lesson.*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Materials Needed:**

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## PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

*“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul... you shall teach them to your children.” —Deuteronomy 11:18–19*

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here that will aid you in understanding the Scripture.

### Bible Background

#### Introduction

After leaving Philippi (Acts 16:16–40), Paul continued on his second missionary journey. In both of Paul’s next two major destinations, Thessalonica and Berea, Paul proved from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 17:2–3,11), and in both cities, Jews and God-fearing Greeks responded in faith to Paul’s presentation of Christ (17:4,12). Because non-believing Jews of Thessalonica were jealous of Paul’s reception, they stirred up a riot against Paul in Thessalonica, forcing him to leave the city by night (17:5–10) When they heard that the “word of God was preached by Paul at Berea,” they went to the city and attempted the same tactic, forcing Paul to once again flee (17:13–15). Paul hurried to the city of Athens in the south of Greece where he waited for Silas and Timothy to join him (17:15–16). While in Athens, Paul proclaimed who God was and called upon the Athenians to have the right response toward Him.

#### Paul’s Provocation (Acts 17:16–17)

Although Athens had been replaced by Corinth as the most powerful city in Greece, it was still the cultural and intellectual center of the Roman Empire. In Athens, Paul saw “that the city was given over to idols” (17:16). Wherever Paul looked, he saw the evidence of idolatry. The streets were lined with statues, every buildings was dedicated to a pagan god and temples abounded in the city. The Athenians’ love for philosophical speculation created an atmosphere in which every person had the freedom to worship however he thought best. In truth’s void rushed in every kind of pagan worship.

Paul had apparently intended to wait to preach in Athens until Paul and Silas joined him, but when Paul saw the idolatry of Athens, “his spirit was provoked within him” (17:16). The full force of the word translated “provoked” would be better captured by “infuriated.” Paul was infuriated by the worship which was being directed to the idols and away from God.

Because he was jealous for God’s honor, Paul began to preach in the city. On the Sabbath, he “reasoned in the synagogue” that Jesus was the Messiah while during the week he reasoned “in the marketplace with those who happened to be there” (17:17). Among those whom Paul reasoned with were both Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (17:18). The Epicureans were materialists who did not believe in the resurrection and who thought the goal of life was to enjoy pleasure and escape pain. The Stoics were pantheists who sought to rule their lives by reason and be indifferent to pain and pleasure. Paul responds to aspects of both Stoic and Epicurean philosophy in his later address (17:22–31).

### **The Athenians' Curiosity (Acts 17:18–21)**

The Athenians, who previously had never heard anything like the Gospel, were curious about Paul's message. In describing the intellectual atmosphere of the city, Luke writes, "The Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing" (17:21). Since the Athenians loved hearing and discussing new ideas, Paul's message quickly became the topic of conversation. Some of those who heard Paul dismissed him as a babbler, somebody who had simply collected various thoughts and passed them off as his own, but who did not really understand what he was saying (17:18). Others thought he was a "proclaimer of foreign gods" because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection" (17:18). These Athenians thought Paul was preaching two god: Jesus and a deity named "Resurrection." The Athenians clearly had not understood Paul's message.

Because the Athenians wanted to know more about this "new doctrine," they brought Paul before the Areopagus. The Areopagus was a court which was originally named after the hill Ares where the court met. At this time, the Areopagus may have met in the Royal Portico in the northwest of the marketplace (where Paul reasoned with the philosophers) instead of on the hill. Although the court had civil power, there is no indication any charges had been brought against Paul. Because Paul was "bringing strange things" to the Athenians' ears, the Athenians simply said, "We want to know what these things mean" (17:20). God had been given Paul a chance not only to confront the Athenian's wrong understanding of God but also to call them to repentance.

### **Paul's Proclamation (Acts 17:22–31)**

Paul began his proclamation before the Areopagus by exposing the Athenians' need to know God. Even though the Athenians were clearly "very religious in all respects," their abundance of idols and temples and their worship of every known god had left them without any assurance (17:22). Paul confronted the Athenians' doubt by describing something he saw in the city: "While I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with the inscription 'To an Unknown God'" (17:23). The Athenians were so afraid they would offend a god by leaving him out of their pantheon they even erected an altar to an "unknown god." Paul used the Athenian's own admission as a launching pad for his proclamation of the one, true God. Paul announced to them, "The One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you" (17:23). Because the Athenians were ignorant of God and incapable of discovering Him through their own reasoning, Paul proclaimed God to them.

In his speech, Paul both revealed the truth of who God is and corrected the Athenians' misunderstandings about God. Paul began by revealing how great God is. He told the Athenians that God is the creator of "the world and everything in it" (17:24), that He is "Lord of heaven and earth" (17:24), and that "He gives to all life, breath, and all things" (17:25). From the onset, Paul establishes that God is superior to man. God made man, He rules man, and He sustains man. Paul also contrasted the one true God with the Athenians' beliefs about their gods. While the Athenians could contain their gods "in temples made with hands" (17:24), God does need to "dwell" in a man-made building. Neither is God "worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed any anything" (17:25). The Athenians thought they could manipulate their gods with their cultic practices and temple offerings, but the one true God does need to be appeased by men. While the Athenians ultimately had gods that were dependent upon them, the true God is independent from man.

While Paul continued to reveal God to the Athenians, he began to argue that the Athenians had responsibilities to God. Paul already proclaimed that God “gives to all life, breath, and all things” (17:25). Not only does God sustain man, but He is sovereign over man. God is the maker of all men: “He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth” (17:26). Unlike the pagan gods, God is not a God over just one people group, but because He has made all men He is God over all men. God has also “determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings” (17:26). Even before creation, God determined both the physical and the temporal boundaries of each nation. God has created and sustained men from every nation “so that they should seek the Lord” (17:27). Man’s responsibility is to seek God. When men wonder why they exist, they should respond to the myriads of God’s blessings and the reality of God’s dominion by seeking Him, not by creating gods for whom they could build temples and whom they could manipulate with their offerings. But when men try to seek for God, their attempts amount to groping in the dark and stumbling about. All men have is the unlikely possibility “that they might grope for Him and find Him” (17:27). Because of man’s sin nature, man is unable to come to right conclusions about God (Rom. 1:21–23).

Paul explains that God is not to blame that man does not seek God nor come to know Him. God is “not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27). God has not hidden Himself from man but has revealed His attributes in through His creation and providence over men (Rom. 1:19–20). The only way humans live is because God sustains them. Paul cited two quotes from Greek poets to demonstrate that the Athenians should have understood that their lives were dependent upon God. The first quote is from the poet Epimenides says that “in Him we live and move and have being” (Acts 17:28). The second quote from Aratus who says, “For we also are His offspring” (17:28). Although neither quote was written to honor the one, true God, both demonstrate the principle that man understands his life is dependent upon God. Since man is the “offspring is God,” it is foolish for man to think that the “Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising” (17:29). Man’s attempts to either form a physical or mental depiction of God are not man’s attempts to find God but an expression of man’s rebellion against a God who has made Himself known.

After Paul proclaimed who the true God is and condemned the Athenians for exalting their own imaginations instead of seeking God, Paul called upon the Athenians’ to repent. Referring to their idolatry, Paul said, “These times of ignorance God has overlooked” (Rom. 17:30). He reminded the Athenians that God had patiently allowed them to live even though they deserved punishment for their ignorance. God had been patient with the idolatrous Athenians but God “now commands all men everywhere to repent” (17:30). The resurrection of Christ marked a new beginning in God’s relationship with Gentiles. Since the resurrection, God had called the Gentiles to turn away from their sins and place their faith in Christ. Paul warned the Athenians that they must repent “because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained” (17:31). The Athenians could be certain that Jesus was going to judge them because God “has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (17:31). Jesus’ resurrection is not only good news for those who need new life but the certainty of judgment for those who refuse to repent.

### **The Athenians’ Response (Acts 17:32–34)**

The Athenians varied in their response to Paul’s proclamation of God, his confrontation of their idolatry, and his promise of future judgment if they failed to repent. Some Athenians mocked Paul for talking about the resurrection of the dead

(17:32). Neither the Epicureans nor the Stoics believed in a physical resurrection. Other Athenians postponed making a response, hoping to hear from Paul again (17:32). But “some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (17:34). Among those saved was the council member (“Areopagite”) Dionysius, who was convicted by Paul’s message and repented of his idolatry.

### Conclusion

Because of the Athenian’s background, Paul began by proclaiming the basics of who God is and how man has wrongly thought about God. He confronted the Athenians for their pride in thinking that they could decide what God is like and for presuming that God needed anything from them. He argued that they were responsible for their rejection of God, called upon them to repent of their independent thinking about God and warned that their judgment day was coming. Although peoples’ assumptions about God differ, man’s basic problem does not differ from the Athenians’. Man wants to be the one who decides what God is like and determine how he can please the god his imagination has created. Anyone who wishes to escape God’s judgment must submit to God’s revelation of Himself in Scripture, repent of being their own masters and place their faith in the resurrected Christ.

## POINT TO THE TRUTH

*“Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth.”  
—Psalm 78:1*

This section includes questions to review last week’s lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week’s lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



### Review Questions

What was wrong with the slave girl?  
*She was possessed with an evil spirit.*

What did Paul think of this?  
*He was really annoyed by the evil spirit and so he sent it from her.*

What did her owner’s think of what Paul had done?  
*They were very angry because the evil spirit in her was making them money.*

What did the town leaders do to them?  
*The town leaders beat them and put them into prison.*

What were Paul and Silas doing in the prison?  
*They were praying and singing hymns.*

What happened next?  
*There was a giant earthquake and all the doors were opened and all their chains fell off.*



What did the jailer ask Paul and Silas?

*“What must I do to be saved?”*

What did the jailer and his family do?

*They believed, were saved, and rejoiced in their salvation.*

### Difficult Concepts

**Idols/Altars:** Idols are objects used to represent a god. They are often carved out of wood or stone in the shape of animals or people. People pray to the idols and bring them gifts because they believe the idol can help them. Show a picture of a modern-day idol like a Buddha or Mary. Altars are platforms used to offer sacrifices on. People burn incense, food, or animals on altars in order to please their gods. Show a picture of an Old Testament altar.

**New Ideas:** The Athenians loved to discuss new ideas. They would gather to talk about new religions or philosophies or ideas. Imagine a school were every day a student gets up and announces a new thought. Every one would discuss his idea and decide if they liked it or not and if it was a good idea.

**Areopagus:** The Areopagus was a courthouse. Paul was not on trial, but he did stand before the officials of the court to state his religious views. Compare it to the Supreme Court, which has a panel of judges and not just one.

**Ignorance Overlooked:** God never excuses sin; however, He is often patient and longsuffering in withholding judgment. In the past, God was very slow to judge. Now that Christ has come and His message is clearly preached, however, God demands that people repent. A police officer may not give a ticket to a new driver for running a stop sign. However if he stops someone with multiple tickets he might make the driver pay. If a student is new to a Sunday school class, the teacher might not punish him for breaking class rules. If a student who has been in class for a long time breaks the rules, he will be punished because he ought to know better.

**Stoics and Epicureans:** The Stoics and the Epicureans were two distinct groups of philosophers, or deep thinkers. The Stoics taught that the goal of life was to become indifferent to pleasure or pain. The Epicureans taught that there was no God and the goal of life was to avoid pain. Both groups opposed the basic truths of Scripture and denied the reality of the true God.

**Resurrection from the Dead:** Normally when people die, their bodies are buried and life is over. Jesus, however, was raised from the dead on the third day. He came back from the dead. Ask the students if they have ever had a pet die. (Or possibly a family member) Have them imagine what it would be like if it came back to life. Some people might not believe it. The people Paul preached to did not believe Jesus rose from the dead either.

**Worship:** Worship is an action that is caused by a belief. Worship of God involves awe, fear, and joy in God. Worship demands allegiance and devotion. If you believe God is powerful, you will worship Him respectfully. If you believe God is love, you will worship Him lovingly. If you believe God is wonderful, you will worship Him enthusiastically. How do the students feel about their families? If they love their brothers and sisters, they will say nice things about them. If they respect their moms and dads, they obey them. What they believe about their families changes how they act.

**Saddened:** Sadness is an emotion, a feeling we have inside. We become sad when something is wrong, or when someone we care about is hurt. Sadness reflects what we care and think about. A student that loves his friend will be sad when the friend moves away.



### **Where God Lives**

Have the students tell you where they think God lives. Ask if He lives in church or a building. The people in Paul's day thought God lived in their temples.



### **What's an Idol?**

What is an idol, and what are various reactions to idols? Explain the concept of forming an object to represent a god. Ask if creating a statue can also create a god. Discuss those who worship idols, those who do not worship idols but are unconcerned about people who do, and those who, like Paul, become angered at idolatry.



### **Rock Craft**

Bring in small rocks or marbles for the students to color with glitter paint. Arrange the rocks on a piece of paper or scatter them throughout the room. During the lesson, point out the "idols" all over the room. Describe the culture filled with idolatry that Paul was in.



### **Gold, Silver, Stone**

Cover a brick with shiny gold paper and another with aluminum foil. Bring in a nice stone as well. Ask if we can make God out of these items. Do they look like God? Would God be happy if we thought He was identical with these items?



### **Idol Worship**

Tell the children about a time when you saw or heard about people who worshiped idols. The incident can either come from your personal experience, something you saw on television, or your readings in Scripture. Describe the scene to the children. Explain to the children how seeing the idols worshiped made you feel. Were you sad that the people were going to be punished, jealous that God was not being glorified, angry that God was not being worshiped, thankful that you were saved? You can then describe to the children the scene in Athens and describe how Paul felt when he saw the idolatry.



## PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

*“Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.” —Psalm 78:4*

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included that you can use to proclaim your worship to God. Use the lesson questions to check the students’ understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use alongside the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done right from the Bible.

### Bible Lesson

Paul continued on his missionary journey through many cities, preaching the Word of God and leading people to repent and come to Jesus Christ for their salvation. Paul got separated from his friends Silas and Timothy, and went to the city of Athens where he waited for them. He was going to start preaching the Gospel with his friends when they arrived, but Paul saw and heard things that made him so angry that he couldn’t wait for his friends.

As he went throughout the city, all he could see was people worshiping idols. There were idols everywhere: the streets were lined with them, every building was dedicated to a false god, and there were many temples for idols throughout the city. Paul was so angry because of the idols that he decided that he could not wait for his friends to get there to start preaching. So he went to the marketplace where many people gathered everyday, and talked with the Jews and Gentiles, explaining that salvation could only be found through Jesus Christ.

The city was full of very smart people who thought they knew everything, so when Paul came and started preaching this message that they had not heard before, they thought he was just babbling on and that he didn’t know what he was talking about. But, the people liked to talk and hear other people talk and argue about who is right, so they invited Paul to come with them to a place called the Areopagus and explain what he believed. Everybody there believed something different about God and idols, so they thought Paul’s message would be an interesting topic of conversation.

Paul took the opportunity to confront the people of Athens about their sin of idolatry and to tell them the good news about Jesus Christ and his resurrection. He told them that while he was walking around the streets of Athens, he saw all of the idols. He had even seen an altar dedicated to “the Unknown God”. The people of Athens were afraid that they might have forgotten or didn’t know about some god out there, so they made an altar to this god, so they could even worship the god they didn’t know about. Paul told them that he could tell them all about this God that they didn’t know; in fact, this God they didn’t know was the only real God. He told them all about God, that He had created the world, that he created all men equal, and that He alone controlled all of the nations of the earth. He continued on that God wants men to seek Him and find Him, and that He commands that all men repent of their sins because one day God will judge every man. Jesus resurrection gave hope to those who repented, and should put fear in the hearts of those who don’t.

When the people heard Paul preach of the resurrection of Jesus, some of them laughed at him. They thought Paul was crazy to think that someone could be raised from the dead. Others, however, said they wanted to hear more about what



Paul was teaching. Paul left the Areopagus, but those that wanted to know more followed and they believed Paul.

## Lesson Questions

Where was Paul in today's lesson?  
*Paul was in Athens.*

What did the people think when they heard Paul's message?  
*They said that this was something new that they had never heard.*

What object in the city did Paul use to teach about God?  
*Paul used an idol that was to the unknown God. He told them about the true and living God.*

What does God command all people to do?  
*God commands them to repent.*

What will God do to all people?  
*He will judge the world.*

What did the people do because of Paul's message?  
*Some mocked while some wanted to hear more and others believed.*

## Presentation Ideas



### A Beka Book® Flash-A-Cards®

Use appropriate A Beka Book® Flash-A-Cards® with the lesson.



### Betty Lukens Flannel Graph

Use appropriate flannel graph pieces with the lesson.



### Plant Illustration

To illustrate man needing God, bring in a potted plant. Show how the plant needs water, soil, and the sun to live. It cannot survive on its own. Humans are like that plant. We need things God gives us. God, however, does not need anything to survive.



### Egg Illustration

Belief does not change what is real. Just because someone believes something is true does not make it true. The people in today's lesson believed that a rock or piece of metal was god but they were wrong. Demonstrate that not everything that everyone thinks is real by asking the students to believe with you that the egg you are holding can float in mid air. Have them all agree with you that it really can. Then drop the egg into a bucket. Hold up the broken pieces of the egg and tell the class that belief cannot change reality. In the same way, because people believe that carved images are gods does not change the reality that they are not.



### Idols vs. God

Bring pictures into class pictures either of idols worshiped during Bible times or of idols worshiped today. (Pictures can be found in Bible encyclopedias, magazines

like National Geographic, or on the Internet.) Help the children list ways in which these idols are not like the one true God. For example, you can explain that God does not have a body, that He is all-powerful, that He knows the future, that He hears our prayers, etc. After you have helped the children think how God is different, lead the children in prayer as you praise God for who He is and pray that God will grant repentance to those who worship idols.

## Praise and Worship

*Knowing You (All I Once Held Dear)*

*As the Deer*

*Lord, I Lift Your Name On High*

## PRACTICE THE TRUTH

*“That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.” —Psalm 78:7*

Choose ideas from this section that review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



### Blindfolding Game

To illustrate mankind blindly groping after God, play “Blind man’s bluff.” Blindfold one student. Tell the others to hide throughout the room. Once the game is started, students cannot move from their hiding spots. They can crouch, swivel, or stand, but they cannot move. Alternatively, play “Marco-Polo” in the classroom. The blindfolded student calls out “Marco,” and the rest of the class answers “Polo.” Once the blindfolded student has tagged all the other students, the game is over.



### A Right Response

Discuss different responses to our knowledge that God exists. Point out that the people Paul talked to admitted there was a God they didn’t know. They were ignorant about God. Other people intentionally ignore God. Describe people who have heard about the Bible but reject it. Some people admit there is a God, but try to work their way to Him. The right response to God is to believe His Word and to look in it to find out what He is like.



### Ways to Obey Christ

Discuss with students what how they can obey Christ. Suggest actions like not fighting and obeying parents, as well as attitudes like being more concerned about others than themselves. Ask them for ways they don’t obey Christ, then discuss ways we ought to obey Him such as the following: be thankful, rejoice, do not be selfish, do not complain, do not be angry.



### Human Hands

Materials: construction paper, pencils, scissors, glue, Acts 17:25 printed on strips of paper

Directions: Trace and cut out children’s hands on colorful construction paper. Then children can glue the hands on another sheet along with the verse, Acts 17:25.



### **“We Move”**

Materials: copies of “We Move” craft page, brads (five per student), scissors, crayons  
Directions: Color the marionette and then cut out each piece. Attach the marionette’s legs, arms, and head to the body using brads.



### **“Three Responses”**

Materials: copies of “Three Responses” craft pages, scissors, tape, hole punch  
Directions: Cut out the shape on the solid lines. Fold the page in half and then into thirds, using the dotted lines as a guide. Tape the edges together to form a triangle. Punch holes where indicates on each edge. Look through the hole and read what’s inside.

### **Coloring Pages**

Give each student a copy of the coloring sheets at the back of the lesson. He or she can color the pages in class or take them home to color.



### **MEMORY VERSE**

“...but now [God] commands all men everywhere to repent...” —*Acts 17:30b*

# Three Responses

Look inside to find three responses to the Gospel from Acts 17:32, 34.

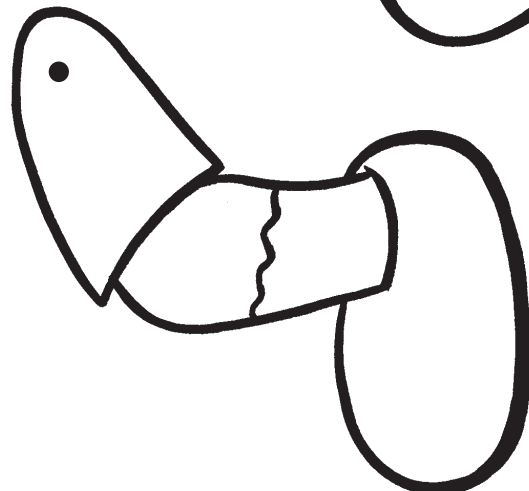
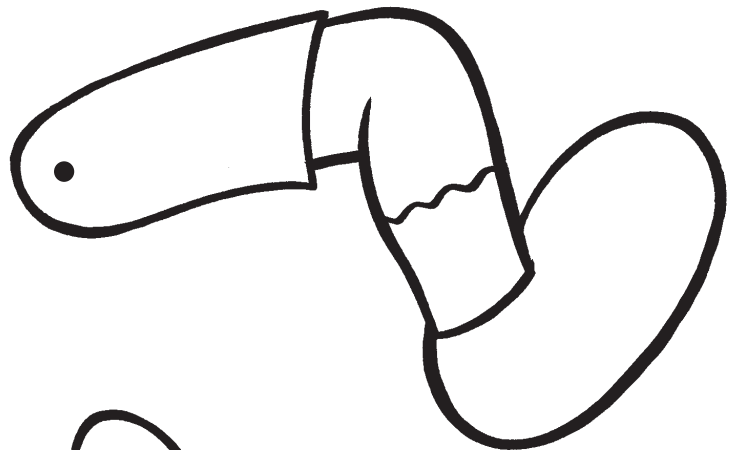
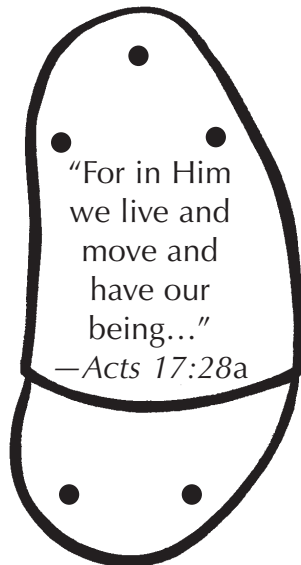
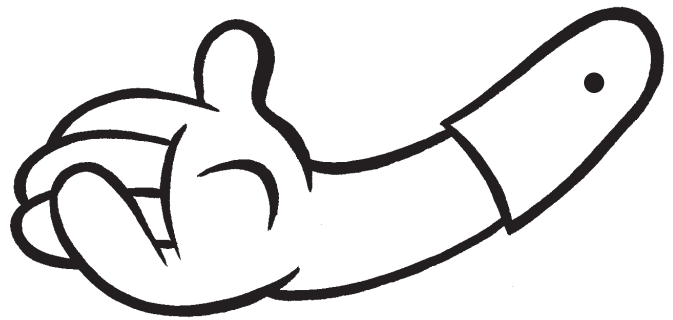
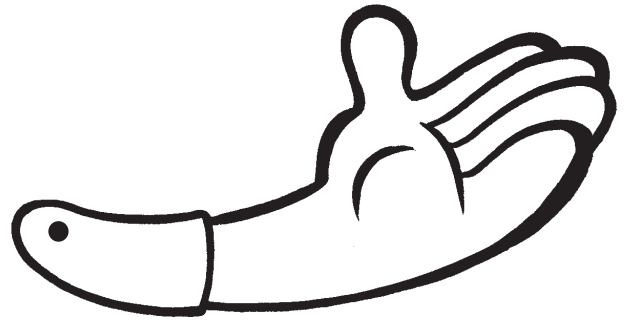
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some mocked...

Some waited...

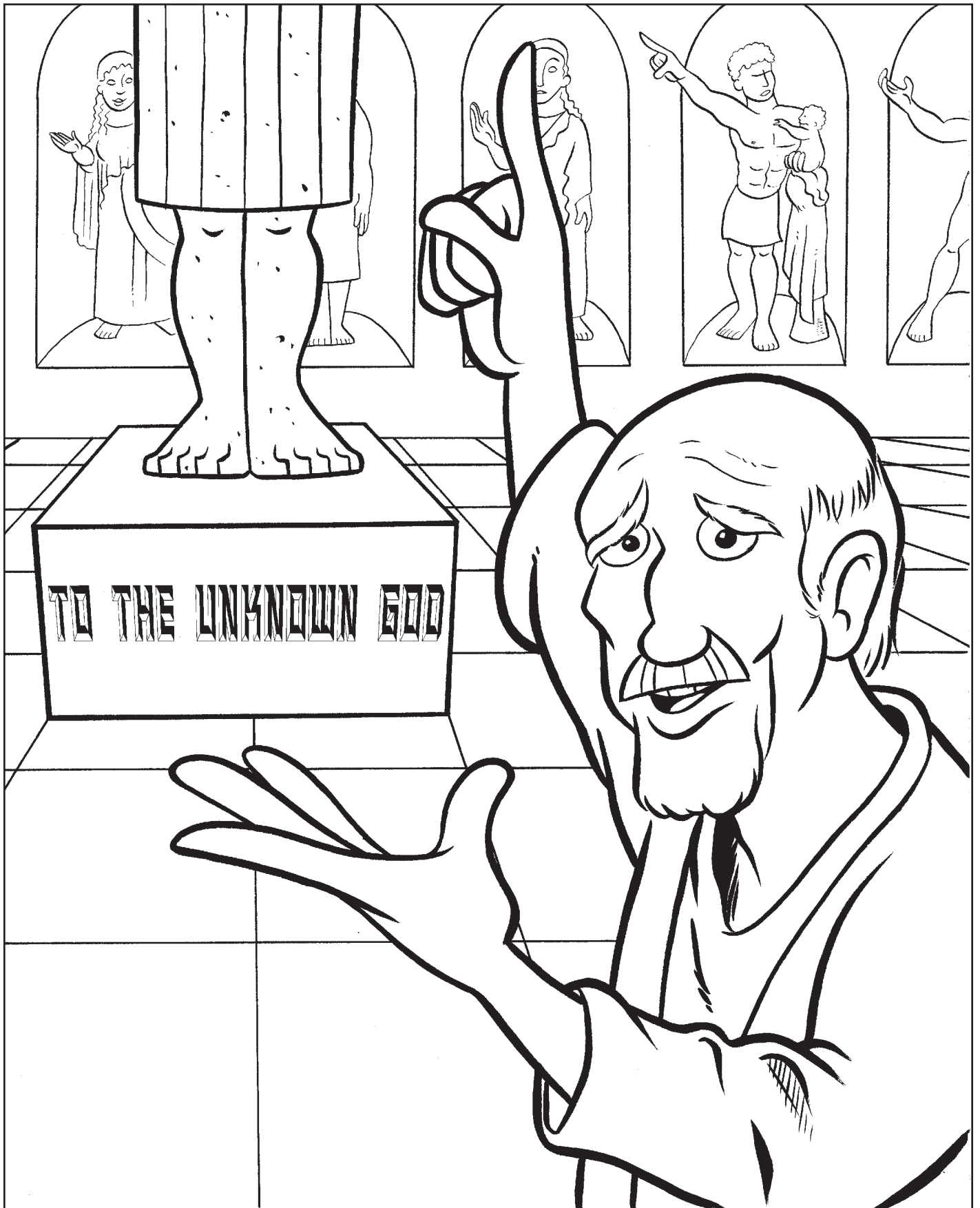


# We Move









**“...Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.” —Acts 17:23b–24**





**“Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.”**

**—Acts 17:29**

