

united kingdom

PAUL
IN ATHENS

the Kingdom story from creation to revelation

PAUL IN ATHENS

Based on NLT

Introduction

Paul continued to travel and teach the Good News about God's Kingdom in many different towns.

Acts 17:(15), 16-17

One time, while Paul was waiting for some other believers in a city named Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city. He ... spoke daily with the people there in the places of worship and the city square.

Acts 17:18

He also had a debate with some ... philosophers. When he told them about Jesus and His resurrection, they said, "What's this babbler trying to say with these strange ideas he's picked up?" ...

Acts 17:19-21

Then they took him to the *special meeting place* in the city where they discussed new ideas. ... They said, "You are saying some rather strange things, and we want to know what it's all about." (It should be explained that all the Athenians ... seemed to spend all their time discussing the latest ideas.)

Acts 17:22-23

So Paul ... addressed them. ... "Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious, ... *because* as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of *them* had this inscription on it – 'To an Unknown God.' This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I'm telling you about."

Acts 17:24-25, 27-31

"He is the God who made the world and everything in it. ... He doesn't live in man-made *places of worship*, and we can't serve His needs – *because He doesn't have any!* He Himself gives life ... and ... satisfies every need. ... His purpose was for the nations to seek after God ... though He is not far from any one of us. ... As some of your own poets have said, 'We are His *children*.' And since this is true, we shouldn't think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone. God overlooked people's ignorance about these things *before*, but now He commands everyone everywhere to *turn away from their disobedience* and turn to Him. *And God has appointed Jesus to judge the world with justice. He's proven that Jesus is His appointed one by raising Him from the dead.*"

Acts 17:32-34

When they heard ... *about Jesus being raised from the dead*, some laughed, ... but others said, "We want to hear more about this later." ... *And* some joined him and became believers.

TELLING THE STORY

Why this story?

God's Kingdom was always meant for the entire world, and Paul continues to carry out God's mission to restore the world to Himself by taking this message to far-away places and to different cultures. The way Paul interacts with people may change, but the message itself doesn't – God has given Jesus all authority, and it's through Him that we can be restored to God.

Paul travels on to other places and continues to share the message that God's Kingdom – His reconciliation plan – is for all peoples. Athens is particularly challenging, and Paul is distressed by the idols he sees everywhere. These people have no prior knowledge of the one True God, so Paul begins where they are – with their own altars and their own literature. He shows them that even in their culture there is room for and evidence of God. God wants a relationship with them, and He has made it possible through Jesus, the just Judge and King to whom He has given all authority.

Key concepts to include in your story

- Set the scene: Paul is traveling. He is waiting for some friends in Athens and he is wandering around the city. He sees many idols and shrines.
- Paul speaks to God-fearing people and others. He gets into a debate with some philosophers. The philosophers think that he is saying strange things but decide to take him to the main meeting place in town where people debate new ideas.
- Paul speaks to the people there:
 - He has seen their altars, and there is one to "an unknown god." Paul wants to speak to them about this God.
 - This God has made the world and has given life. We cannot serve His needs – He has none!
 - God wants the nations to seek after Him. In fact, in their own poetry it says that we are God's children.
 - God will no longer overlook the ignorance that makes us worship idols.
 - God commands us to turn away from our disobedience and turn to Him.
 - God has sent and appointed Jesus as a just Judge.
 - God has proven that Jesus is the Judge by raising Him from the dead.
- Some people laugh, some say they want to know more, and some become believers.

Notes about how the story was crafted

In this story we have included the city name **Athens** because our audience will most likely know that name and will not have a problem remembering it. We have not included the names of Paul's friends for whom he was waiting (they were Silas and Timothy).

Synagogues was replaced with **places of worship** as has been done throughout this story set. Paul made it a point to speak in both the Jewish places of worship to the Jews (God's chosen people) and in the public city square (to everyone else).

The special meeting place in the city where they discussed new ideas is the Court of the Areopagus, which had jurisdiction in matters of religion and morals. The Court of the Areopagus traditionally met on the "Areopagus," which means "Hill of Ares/Mars." By this time in history, however, the court actually met in a different spot. There is some debate as to whether Paul was on the Hill of Ares or in the Court of the Areopagus when he delivered this speech, but the outcome is the same. Paul was not on trial but was called before the leaders of the city to present his new ideas.

Paul's speech is not easy to remember, and therefore we have streamlined it in an effort to emphasise the main points of his speech. Because Paul is not speaking to a Jewish audience, he begins at the beginning – with a description of a Creator God who brings life and wants all nations to come to Him. He wants a relationship with people. Paul uses the Athenian culture – its poetry – to show that every culture can recognise this. Paul does not refer back to prophecy or Jewish historical figures because his audience

would not have known them. Then Paul gives the way to be reconciled to God – by turning away from disobedience and turning to God. God has appointed a Judge who will judge those who have done this – Jesus, the perfect and just Judge. God proved that He was able to do this through His resurrection.

Temples has been replaced by *places of worship*.

Children has been used in place of **offspring**, because it seems to be a more familiar term.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Retelling the story

- As your group practices retelling this story, help them see the different sections of this story.
 - Set the scene: Paul continues to travel and share the message about God's Kingdom
 - Paul's initial observations and conversations in Athens
 - Paul before the special meeting place where important matters are discussed; Paul gives a speech
 - God is Creator and wants all nations to come to Him
 - He wants a relationship with us; we are his children
 - We should turn away from our disobedience and turn to God
 - Jesus will judge us – He has been appointed by God, and He is a just Judge
 - God has proven that Jesus has authority by raising Him from the dead
 - Some laugh, some want to know more and some believe

Questions for discussion

You don't have to ask all of these questions in your discussion times. These questions are discussion starters, but you will find that often, once people feel comfortable, they talk about many of these things naturally. However, these questions are helpful to keep a conversation going where needed, and they provide a logical sequence of working through the story. Even if you don't ask all the questions in a group, try to ask people what this story means for them personally. You'll find that as you continue to interact with God's Word at a deep level, God's Spirit will reveal things for your life in a wonderful way!

- What do you like about this story?
- What bothered you about this story?
- What does this story show you about God?
- What does this story show you about people?
- What does this story mean for your life? How will you live your life differently having learned this story?
- How will you remember this story? (*Tell it!*)
- Is there anyone you would like to tell this story to? Or anyone you would like to practice with? E.g. Your children, your best friend, your wife, your husband, a mum at the school gate, your work colleague, your neighbour. (It's true that the best way to learn a story is to tell it. So why don't you give it a go and chat to each other next week about how you found it?)
- How does this story contribute to our understanding of the Gospel? How is this story part of the Gospel?

Questions people may have

This section can never be exhaustive. Remember that during your group discussion times, you want to focus on the above questions rather than get side tracked by deeply academic issues. Part of the joy of experiencing and studying God's Word in this way is allowing God's Spirit to teach us and reveal His truth to us through the narrative of the individual stories, and ultimately through the narrative of the larger story line. However, we understand that sometimes people feel they need some deeper answers. Sometimes, the storyline has to speak for itself, and we have to trust it to do so. However, if your group needs some deeper answers in order to go on, here are some basics that you can discuss. If you have unresolved questions, please come and ask, and we'll help you find the answers.

- Acts 17:30 says that "God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now He commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to Him." Does that mean that before Jesus everyone was "saved?"
 - God "overlooked" people's ignorance because they did not have the full revelation of Jesus. However, before Jesus, people were still held responsible to understand something of the divine nature of God – even if they were not Jewish and did not have a specific revelation of a Creator God (Romans 1:18-23). Romans 3:25-26 and Acts 17:30 also address this issue. These passages are not saying that God did not hold people responsible for their sins before Jesus. On the contrary, most scholars believe that these passages are saying that those who followed God before Jesus' sacrifice could not have possibly been perfect according to the law, even though they followed God. Therefore, they would have deserved death, because they would not have had Jesus' sacrifice to be a payment for their sins. However, God overlooked those sins because He was looking forward to the time when He knew that their sins would be paid for. He already knew what He was going to do.

We cannot fully understand the mystery of who would have been considered a follower of God before Jesus sacrificed His life. We simply have to trust that God knows the hearts of people. However, we have clear teaching that now, after the specific revelation of Jesus in the world, people are without excuse.

We are aware that this is a very simplified answer to a very real and complicated question. Please do not hesitate to ask more questions of church leadership if you would like more information!

PAUL IN ATHENS – for children

Based on NLT

Introduction

Paul continued to travel and teach the Good News about God's Kingdom in many different towns.

Acts 17:(15), 16-17

One time, while Paul was waiting for some other believers in a city named Athens, he was very upset by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city. (Idols were objects that people made to be worshiped like a god.) Paul ... spoke daily with the people there in the places of worship and the marketplace.

Acts 17:18

He also had a discussion with some ... *men who searched for truth and asked questions about how people should live and what they should believe.* When he told them about Jesus and *how He rose from the dead*, they said, *"This man has picked up some strange ideas. What is he trying to say?"* ...

Acts 17:19-21

Then they took him to the *special meeting place* in the city where they discussed new ideas. ... They said, "You are saying some rather strange things, and we want to know what it's all about." (*All the people of Athens* ... seemed to spend all their time *talking about new ideas.*)

Acts 17:22-23

So Paul ... *stood up before them and said*, "Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious, ... *because* as I was walking along I saw *the many objects you worship*. And one of them had *these words written* on it – 'To an Unknown God.' *You worship a god that you don't know, and this is the God* I'm telling you about."

Acts 17:24-25, 27-31

"He is the God who made the world and everything in it. ... He doesn't live in ... *places of worship built by people*, and we can't serve His needs – *because He doesn't have any!* He Himself gives life ... *and gives people what they need.* ... *God wanted people all over the world to search for Him* ... though He is not far from any one of us. ... As some of your own poets have said, 'We are His *children.*' And since this is true, we shouldn't think *that God is like something that people imagine or make* from gold or silver or *rock.* *In the past, people did not understand God, and He ignored this, but now God tells everyone in the world to turn away from their disobedience* and turn to Him. *And God has chosen Jesus to judge the world with fairness.* He's proven that *Jesus is His chosen one* by raising Him from the dead."

Acts 17:32-34

When they heard ... *about Jesus being raised from the dead*, some laughed, ... but others said, "We want to hear more about this later." ... *And* some joined him and became believers.

TELLING THE STORY – for children

Key concepts to include in your story

The story will need to be simplified at varying levels based on the age group of the children you are teaching. This means that many of the details in the story will need to be summarized. However, you should include the following concepts in your story.

- Set the scene: Paul is traveling. He is waiting for some friends in Athens and he is wandering around the city. He sees many idols and shrines.
- Paul speaks to God-fearing people and others. He gets into a debate with some philosophers. The philosophers think that he is saying strange things but decide to take him to the main meeting place in town where people debate new ideas.
- Paul speaks to the people there:
 - He has seen their altars, and there is one to “an unknown god.” Paul wants to speak to them about this God.
 - This God has made the world and has given life. We cannot serve His needs – He has none!
 - God wants the nations to seek after Him. In fact, in their own poetry it says that we are God’s children.
 - God will no longer overlook the ignorance that makes us worship idols.
 - God commands us to turn away from our disobedience and turn to Him.
 - God has sent and appointed Jesus as a just Judge.
 - God has proven that Jesus is the Judge by raising Him from the dead.
- Some people laugh, some say they want to know more, and some become believers.

Example of a simplified version of the story for children

Paul continued to travel and teach the Good News about God's Kingdom in many different towns. One time, in a city named Athens, Paul was waiting for some other believers to join him. He was really upset by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city. (Idols are objects that people make and worship like they are gods.) Paul spoke with the people everyday in the places of worship and in the marketplace. He also had a discussion with some men who searched for truth and asked questions about how people should live and what they should believe. When Paul told them about Jesus and how He rose from the dead, the men said, "This man doesn't know what he's talking about. He has some strange ideas." Then the men took Paul to the special meeting place in the city where they usually talked about new ideas. They said, "Paul, you are saying some really strange things. We want to understand what you're talking about." (All the people of Athens seemed to spend all their time talking about new ideas.) So Paul stood up in front of them and said, "Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious people, because I saw the many objects you worship. And one of them had these words on it: 'To an Unknown God.' You worship a god that you don't know, and this is the God that I'm teaching you about." He is the God who made the world and everything in it. He doesn't live in places of worship built by people, and we can't serve His needs – because He doesn't have any needs! He's the one who gives life and gives people what they need. God wants people all over the world to search for Him. He wants people to find Him, and He's not far away from any of us. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are His children.' And since we are His children, we shouldn't think that God is like something that people imagine or make from gold or silver or rock. In the past, people did not understand God, and He ignored this. But now God tells everyone in the world to turn away from his or her disobedience and turn to Him. And God has chosen Jesus to judge the world with fairness. He's proven that Jesus is His chosen one by raising Him from the dead." When they heard about Jesus being raised from the dead, some people laughed. Other people said, "We want to hear more about this later." And some people joined Paul and became believers – choosing to follow Jesus.

(FOR A YOUNGER AUDIENCE, SEE THE BELOW EXAMPLE OF A SIMPLIFIED VERSION OF THIS STORY.)

Paul was in a different country, and a different city, waiting to meet up with some friends. He wanted to tell the people in that city about Jesus. The people there had never heard about Jesus, and they didn't even know who God was. But the people in the city really wanted to worship something, so they found other things to worship. For example, they made statues out of gold or silver or rock, and they prayed to those objects. They also worshipped things they found in nature. Because the people were afraid they would miss something or make someone angry, they even worshipped something they called "the Unknown God" or the god with no name! Paul explained to the people who God is – the one they did not know. He was able to teach the people that they should worship the one true God – the God that made the whole world and everything in it. While Paul taught the people about God, he was also able to teach them about Jesus. Even though Jesus didn't look like a King, He was the Promised King who came to earth to teach us how to know God. Jesus died on the cross so we could be forgiven for all the bad things we have done, and then Jesus came back to life again. Paul taught the people in the city all about Jesus and how they could turn away from the bad things they had done and turn to Jesus. When the people heard about Jesus coming back to life, some people laughed at Paul. Other people said they would want to hear more about it later. But some people decided to follow Jesus and become believers like Paul.

The following activities can be used to vary your storying sessions with the children and keep the action fresh and exciting. They also help the children learn the stories in different ways. You'll find as children journey through this story set with you, they become more and more capable of learning even complicated stories quickly and well. Varying activities and keeping it fun helps the children write the stories on their heart so that they can pull them out of their toolbox whenever a situation comes up where they can use them!

- **Charades** – Have participants choose one line from the story and use actions to convey that line to the rest of the group. The child that guesses correctly goes next.
- **Skit** – Assign parts to groups and have them act out the story as you or a participant narrates. This can be done as a group or in smaller teams. If done in teams, you may choose to have each team act out the whole story, or assign sections and have them perform the skits in chronological order one after the other.
- **Song** – This activity seems to work best in small groups of older and more advanced students. If you believe your group would enjoy this activity, have them write and perform a song based on a story or a portion of a story. To make this task easier, have each group choose a song melody as their foundation and change the lyrics as needed, as opposed to starting from scratch.
- **Sign Language** – This is a great way to incorporate kinaesthetic learning into storying. Work with the participants to develop "sign language" for keywords in the story. This will help them to remember the order and progression of the story. This activity may also be done as a group or in smaller teams. If done in teams, have a participant from each team narrate as the group demonstrates their motions. The more creative, the more likely they are to remember it! Sign language is a good activity if younger and more inexperienced storytellers are part of the group.
- **Perspective Shift** – This creative and critical thinking activity works best later in the story set. Assign groups of children different characters in the story. They then adjust the story they have learned to the perspective of that character. For example, they could tell the Fall story from Adam and Eve's perspectives or the Abraham story from Abraham's perspective.
- **Memory** – The storyteller starts this activity by saying the first line of the story. The story then moves around the circle as each participant tells a line. An alternate method is to go back and forth between partners as they tell the story to each other.
- **Popcorn** – The storyteller also starts this activity. As children remember, they raise their hand. When ready, the storyteller yells "pop" and the name of someone with their hand raised. That person will then jump in until more hands are raised and they shout "pop" to pass the story to another child. You will likely need to demonstrate how this works.
- **Interview** – Children are assigned different characters. A child designated as "interviewer" asks the characters questions about what happened in the story and the character answers according to his or her role. For example, the interviewer could ask Adam about what he witnessed or the actions he took in the garden when he ate the fruit, and Adam would give his answer.
- **Action words** – Before telling the story, the storyteller gives instructions associated with particular words. Children listen for those words in the story, and must do appropriate action when heard. For example, the storyteller would tell the participants to wiggle their arm like a snake anytime they hear the word "snake." There should be multiple words associated with actions in the story. This activity also works well with a younger audience.

Children's Teaching Materials

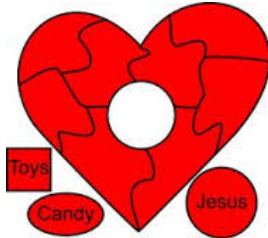
Sunday mornings will begin in the warehouse with a joint children's worship time led by a youth worship band followed by a storying session with the roving storyteller. Then groups will disperse to their usual meeting locations for the age-appropriate teaching of the story and activities that reinforce that story's message.

Sparks

10:30 Retell the story. Use a simplified version of the story – such as one of the examples given in these materials. Use puppets or other items to help teach the story.

Snack – rice cakes

10:45 Puzzle Heart Craft: Show that our hearts need to belong only to Jesus – not to all the things we love in this world.



Resources Needed:

- Story items (visuals)
- Rice cakes
- Red hearts pre-cut in puzzle pieces with a hole missing
- Red paper shapes (only one of them being a circle to fit the hole in the heart)
- Stickers that represent things children love (toys, candy, etc)
- Sticker or picture that represents Jesus

11:15 Music: "Lord, I Lift Your Name on High" (with actions)

- Music

11:20 Play

Little Flames

10:30 Begin with prayer. (Don't repeat a specific prayer, but follow the general idea of the prayer below.)

~ Say "Hi" to God, tell Him we're glad He's there with us and ask Him to help us see Him, hear Him and know Him. Invite Him into everything we'll be doing today.

Keep today's focus in mind: "I should only worship the one true God."

10:35 Retell the story. Use a simplified version of the story – such as one of the examples given in these materials. Use puppets or other items to help teach the story.

- Story items (visuals)

10:40 "Knowledge Harvest" conversation: (use similar questions as below)

- ~ What was Paul doing in another country/city?
- ~ What did Paul see while he was waiting for other believers?
- ~ Why was Paul upset?
- ~ What did Paul teach the people?
- ~ How did the people respond to Paul?

- 10:45 Biscuit break – Use this relatively calm opportunity for a little chat and prayer time. • Biscuits
- Discussion: "What is worship? Why should you worship the one true God? How do you know that Jesus is God's Son?"
- 10:55 Popcorn Prayer
~ Have simple prayers, popcorn style: "Thank you, Jesus, for _____!"
- 11:00 Game: Spot Tag • Stickers (coloured dots)
~ Share with the children how you are supposed to tell other people about Jesus. In this game, give each child a selection of little coloured dots (stickers) – between 10-20 each. Follow the usual rules for tag, but stick the coloured dots on people's backs as you tell them a phrase (such as "Jesus loves you"). Set some rules, such as not being able to remove stickers that are put on you. When everyone's stickers are gone, get them to count how many are on each person's back.
- 11:10 Sing: Choose one or two songs – perhaps "Lord, I Lift Your Name on High" (with actions) • Music
- 11:15 Learn the words of the week: "I should only worship the one true God." Use visuals for the kids to help them learn the words. • Visuals to help learn the phrase
- 11:20 Craft: Illustrate that there is only one God • Pre-cut handprints (on coloured paper)
• Decorations, markers, crayons, etc
• Optional: extra coloured paper, hole punch and string
- ~ Trace or pre-cut handprints. Allow the children to fold the fingers to show that there is only one God. They may decorate the hands.
~ Optional: attach a Bible verse (or the "words of the week") to the bottom of the hand as a reminder for the children.
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- The left handprint is purple and pink, with a string attached to the bottom. The right handprint is blue and yellow, also with a string attached. Both strings are tied to small rectangular cards with text.
- 11:30 If there is any remaining time (or the previous activities finish early), allow the children to freely choose to do whatever they want to do. Play story-relevant music in the background. Leaders should engage with the children during this time: celebrate them, pray for them, love them. • Story-oriented toys
• Play-dough
• Colouring sheets
• Blank paper
• Crayons
- ~ Play with story-oriented toys
~ Role play
~ Play-dough creations
~ Colouring station

Resources Needed:

10:30 Share the rules, review last week's story and retell today's story

10:35 Activity to learn the story:
~ Split the kids into groups and have them pass a "hot potato" around the circle.
Whoever has the "potato" says the next sentence in the story.

- Object to be used as a "hot potato"

10:45 Split into small groups for the discussion questions
Discuss the questions:
~ What do you like about this story?
~ What bothered you about this story?
~ What does this story show you about God?
~ What does this story show you about people?
~ What does this story mean for your life? How will you live your life differently having learned this story?
~ How will you remember this story? *Tell it!*
~ Whom will you tell this story to?

Talk through different ways the children can tell their friends about Jesus.
Pray for who they want to share the story with.

11:05 Game: Spot Tag
~ Before the game, ask the kids if they know what the Gospel is. Explain it to them, and come up with a one-sentence explanation of the Gospel that they can use during the game.
~ Share with the children how you are supposed to tell other people about Jesus. In this game, give each child a selection of little coloured dots (stickers) – between 10-20 each. Follow the usual rules for tag, but stick the coloured dots on people's backs as you tell them a phrase (such as "Jesus loves you" or the one-sentence explanation created above). Set some rules, such as not being able to remove stickers that are put on you. When everyone's stickers are gone, get them to count how many are on each person's back.

- Stickers (coloured dots)

11:15 Craft: Illustrate the need to share Jesus with the world



~ Have children trace their hands on a piece of paper and cut out the hands.
~ Use a paper plate and tissue paper to create the world. (Optional: Use coloured paper to make a cross to put in the centre of the world to illustrate the need to share Jesus.)
~ Glue or tape the cutout hands (bent) to the world (as seen in the photo).

- Coloured paper (for hands and cross)
- Paper plates
- Coloured tissue paper (green and blue)
- Scissors
- Tape or glue

11:30 Circle Time: praying, reflection, responses and offering
~ Activity pages (if needed) for extra time

- Offering box
- Activity pages

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