

February 22, 2026

Study Guide

Mission Possible – Acts 17:16–34

Passage Focus

Acts 17:16–34

Paul in Athens: Seeing a city full of idols, feeling a holy jealousy for God’s glory, and boldly proclaiming Jesus in a pluralistic culture.

Athens was the intellectual and cultural center of the ancient world. It was filled with temples, statues, and altars dedicated to many gods. Paul enters a city saturated in religious activity—but spiritually lost.

Key Groups Mentioned:

- **Epicureans** – pursued pleasure; believed the gods were distant.
 - **Stoics** – valued reason and self-control; believed in divine order.
 - The **Areopagus (Mars Hill)** – council evaluating new teachings.
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Opening Reflection

John Stott asked:

“Why is it that, in spite of the great needs and opportunities of our day, the church slumbers peacefully on...?”

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think sharing faith feels difficult in today’s culture?
 2. Do you think the mission of making Jesus known is truly possible? Why or why not?
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1 What Paul Saw (Acts 17:16, 22–23)

Paul saw:

- A **city full of idols**
- A people deeply religious—but spiritually misdirected
- An altar “To an Unknown God”

Discussion Questions

1. What stands out most about what Paul observed?
2. What “idols” might fill our culture today? (success, politics, image, comfort, etc.)
3. How do you typically view people who don’t follow Jesus?

Personal Reflection

- Are you more likely to see people through political, moral, or “Jesus” lenses?
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2 How Paul Felt (Acts 17:16)

Paul was:

- **Provoked in spirit** (deeply distressed)
- Jealous for God’s glory
- Broken for spiritually lost people

This word connects to Old Testament language describing God’s jealousy (Exodus 34:14).

Discussion Questions

1. What emotions do you feel when you see sin in culture?
 - Anger?
 - Judgment?
 - Apathy?
 - Compassion?
2. What’s the difference between being *bothered* and being *broken*?

3. How might holy jealousy differ from self-righteous anger?

What Paul Did (Acts 17:17–31)

Paul:

- Reasoned in the synagogue.
- Spoke daily in the marketplace.
- Engaged philosophers respectfully.
- Used their own altar (“unknown god”) as a bridge.
- Proclaimed:
 - God as **Creator** (v.24)
 - God as **Sustainer** (v.25)
 - God as **Sovereign Lord** (v.26)
 - God as **Father** (v.27–28)
 - God as **Judge** through Jesus (v.31)

Discussion Questions

1. What impresses you most about Paul’s approach?
 2. How does Paul model respectful engagement?
 3. Why didn’t Paul begin with condemnation?
 4. What can we learn from how he used cultural references?
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Gospel Logic in Athens

Paul:

- Observed carefully
- Listened thoughtfully
- Found a connection point
- Proclaimed Jesus clearly
- Trusted God with the results

Some mocked. Some were curious. Some believed (v.32–34).

Discussion Questions

1. What does this passage teach about results in evangelism?
 2. How should we respond when people reject the message?
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What We Learn About Mission

Big Idea:

Maybe we struggle to do what Paul did because we don’t feel what Paul felt—and we don’t see what Paul saw.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you see people as “sheep without a shepherd”?
 2. What would change if you asked God to break your heart for the lost?
 3. Who in your life needs Jesus right now?
 4. What is one practical step you could take this week?
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Application

See Clearly – Ask God for spiritual vision.

Feel Deeply – Pray for holy compassion.

Act Faithfully – Start conversations. Look for bridges. Share Jesus respectfully.