

PAUL PREACHES ON MARS' HILL



AFTER Saul of Tarsus became one of Jesus' disciples he changed his name from Saul to Paul. The name Saul means "asked," possibly because it was the name of a very large man who became the first king of Israel at the request of the nation of Israel. I told you about King Saul in my story, "Israel's First King." Saul of Tarsus was so ashamed of himself for having caused the disciples of Jesus to suffer that he no longer felt important, so he changed his name to Paul, which means small, or "little." Paul is said to have been a small-sized man.

It is always wise to consider ourselves small and unimportant, just as Paul did. Actually however, Paul was a very important servant of God, and a faithful disciple of Jesus. It was always a great joy to Paul when he had an opportunity to tell the story of Jesus, and of God's wonderful plan for blessing the whole world through Jesus. An opportunity of this kind came to Paul while he was in the city of

Athens waiting for two of his companions to join him. These two friends were Silas and Timothy.

The city of Athens is in Greece, as you probably know.

There were some Israelites living in Athens at the time Paul visited the city, but most of the people there were Greeks. Paul mingled with the people in the market places and also visited the Jews in their synagogues, and wherever he went he told the story of Jesus, explaining that God had made him alive again, and that by and by God would also make the whole world alive again.

The people of Athens had never heard this before. They decided they would like to hear more about it, so they took Paul to a place called Mars' Hill, overlooking the city, and said to him:

“Thou bringest certain strange things to our ears; we would know therefore what these things mean.”

The place on Mars' Hill to which they took Paul was called Areopagus. It was somewhat like a large theater, only it was out of doors. The people of Athens were in the habit of gathering at this place to hear speeches and attend important trials, and no doubt there were many who heard Paul.

Paul certainly told the people of Athens some wonderful things about Jesus and about the plan of God. They were heathen, who worshipped idols. Paul found many idols there, and all but one had been given the name of a false god. But on one of the idols the people of Athens had written:

“To the unknown god.”

These heathen people seemed to realize that there was a God whom they did not know. At least, they wanted to make sure they weren't overlooking some other god, unknown to them.

When Paul started to preach on Mars' Hill he reminded the people of their idol to the unknown god, and then told them that this was the God he wanted to tell them about. He said:

“Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.”

Yes, this was the true God. Paul explained that this true God had made the worlds, and everything that was in the worlds. He said

that this God is “Lord of heaven and earth,” therefore “dwelleth not in temples made with hands.”

Paul also explained to the people of Athens that God had made “of one blood all nations of men.” You see, Paul knew what the Bible says about Adam and Eve, and that they are the “first parents” of everybody who lives on the earth. Adam and Eve received life from God, which means that all the people who came from them have also received life from God. Paul explains this, saying:

“In him we live, and move, and have our being.”

The people of Athens had never before been told about the true God, so that is why they didn’t know about him. Because they didn’t know about God they were not to be blamed for not worshipping, him. But Paul told them that a time is coming when God will expect them to worship the true God, because they will then know about him. Paul calls this time that is coming a day in which God “will judge the world.” The Bible also calls it the “day of judgment.”

To judge means to try, or to test.

God tested Adam and Eve while they were in the Garden of Eden, but they didn’t pass the test, did they? They did what God didn’t want them to do. Because of this they died, and everybody else has died, too. That is why people are dying today.

But, as I have told you before, Jesus died for Adam, and for all the people, and this means that they are to be made alive again, and that they will have another trial, or another chance, to live.

All are to be judged.

This is what Paul meant when he told the people of Athens that a day is coming in which God “will judge the world.” Paul also said that God has proved to us that this day of judgment is coming by making Jesus alive again. Jesus, you see, is to be the great Judge of the world. Won’t the people of the world be fortunate to have Jesus judge them!

Jesus will be able to judge the people because God made him alive again. Those people of Athens died hundreds and hundreds of years ago, but they will be made alive again and will have a chance

to do what God wants them to do. If they obey God they will not need to die again at all!

The Bible tells us that when the people heard what Paul told them about being made alive again, some of them mocked him. This was more than they could believe. Others said:

“We will bear you again about this.”

But there were some who believed what Paul told them. Aren't we glad that we are like those who believed! Isn't it grand to know that a time is coming when all who have died will be made alive again!

QUESTIONS

- What did Paul say to the people of Athens when he preached to them on Mars' Hill?
- Who was the unknown god that the people of Athens worshipped?
- Did the people of Athens believe what Paul told them about Jesus?