

3 Agora

Names (also known as)

English: ‘the market’

Greek: ἀγορά – ‘agora’

Etymology

From the Greek: ἀγείρω ‘ageiro’ = to gather a place of public resort, by implication a market or thoroughfare.

Location/Description

The agora was the center of political and public life in Athens. It was a large open area surrounded by various buildings. The agora served as the business heart of the city with buildings and shops located on the four sides of the public square. The agora was utilized for commerce, political, religious and military activity. Meetings were held four times per month to enact legislation, to hear embassies, and deal with defense of the city-state. The law courts were located there, and anyone who happened to be in the agora could have witnessed the proceedings. Some the surrounding buildings were called ‘Stoas’. These were covered walkways open to the public, where artists could display their work, merchants could sell, or religious gatherings could take place. It is from these surrounding buildings that the term ‘Stoick’ is derived.

Scriptural references

Old Testament

None

New Testament

Acts 17:17 (translated ‘market’)

Famous characters

Paul

The Stoicks

The Epicureans

Brief history

The agora was a public meeting place where scripture records a number of things that occur: (1) business dealings – Matt. 20:3; (2)

buying and selling – Mark 7:4; (3) children playing – Matt. 11:16; (4) greetings – Matt. 23:7; and (5) trials – Acts 16:19.

The account of Paul in Acts 17 is an exhortation to us on the use of our time and our public witness. Paul was in Athens waiting for Timothy and Silas. Instead of wasting his time he continued his work of preaching, to the Jew first, in the synagogue of Athens, and also to the Gentiles, daily in the agora with those that would hear him. The utterly idolatrous city stirred Paul up and motivated him to Godly works, an excellent exhortation to us who live in a world that is much the same. Instead of wasting opportunities or excusing ourselves because we think no one will listen, we need to proclaim the saving message of the gospel.

In his preaching, Paul challenged the ‘wisdom’ of his day. He dealt with the Epicureans who believed that *‘true pleasure and not absolute truth was the end at which to aim; and experience and not reason was the test on which to rely’*, reasoning identical to the postmodern society in which we live. At the heart of the Stoick belief was pride in human ability to overcome passions and pain. The Epicureans saw no need for restraint, the Stoicks saw personal perseverance as the means to overcome. Certainly nothing is new under the sun. Paul’s example to us in the last days is to make profitable use of our time, and to persistently preach the gospel message to all who would listen. The societal challenges we face are similar to those that of Paul faced. We like Paul must tell those around us that *“the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:”*

Sources:

- The Holy Bible - Acts 17
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Agora_of_Athens
- Vines Expository Dictionary
- Smiths Bible Dictionary

(Compiler – Jeff Cooper)

