

## 2 Areopagus

### Names (also known as)

English: The **Areopagus** is the composite form of the Greek name **Areios Pagos**, translated "Ares Rock".

KJV: Acts 17:19 called “Areopagus”; Acts 17:22 called “Mars Hill”.

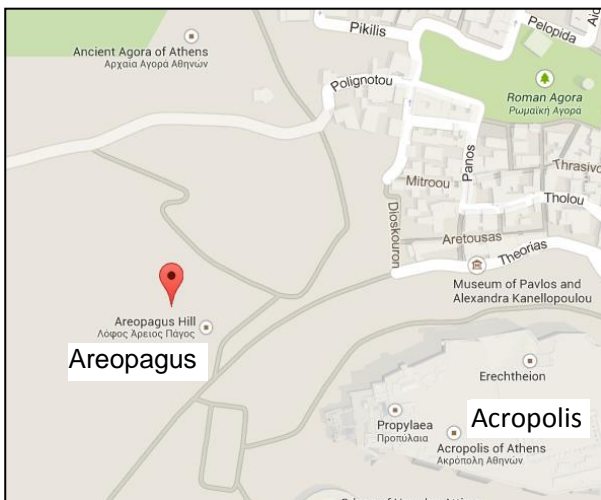
### Etymology

Strong’s number G697 - *Areios Pagos* -From *Ares* (the name of the Greek deity of war) and a derivative of G4078; rock of Ares, a place in Athens.

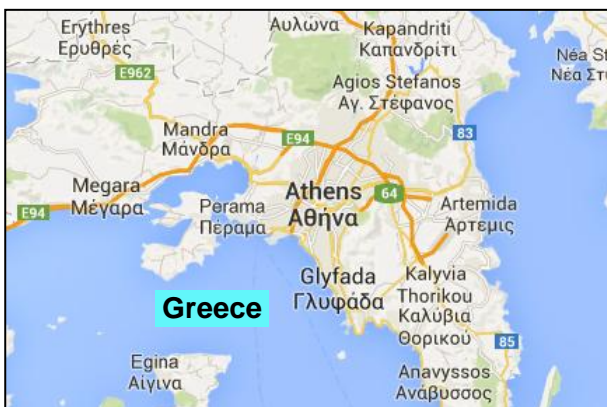
Thayer Definition: Areopagus = “martial peak”.

### Location/Description

It is 250 metres north-west of the Acropolis in Athens.



In ancient Greece, it functioned as the high Court of Appeal for criminal and civil cases.



Pagus refers to a hill or rocky outcrop as the following photograph shows it to be.



### Notable connections

**Paul** the Apostle – see notes below.

**Epicurus**, who lived about 300 years before Christ. His followers denied that the world was created by God, and that the gods exercised any care or providence over human affairs, and also the immortality of the soul. One of the distinguishing doctrines of Epicurus was that pleasure was the chief good, and that virtue was to be practiced only as it contributed to pleasure. By pleasure, however, Epicurus did not mean sensual and grovelling appetites and degraded vices, but rational pleasure, properly regulated and governed.

**Zeno** of Citium (a city-kingdom on the southern coast of Cyprus), who taught in a stoa or porch at Athens – founder of the Stoics (signifying “of the portico” or *stoa*). The doctrines of the sect were, that the universe was created by God; that all things were fixed by Fate; that even God was under the dominion of fatal necessity; that the Fates were to be submitted to; that the passions and affections were to be suppressed and restrained; that happiness consisted in the insensibility of the soul to pain; and that a man should gain an absolute mastery over all the passions and affections of his nature. They were stern in their views of virtue, and, like the Pharisees, prided themselves on their own righteousness.

### Scriptural references

**New Testament**

Acts 17:19,22.

### Brief history

The Areopagus was a hill not far from the Acropolis where the supreme court of justice was held; one of the most sacred and reputable courts that had ever existed in the Gentile

world. It had its name, Ἀρειος πάγος, Areopagus, or the Hill of Mars, or Ares, from the circumstance, according to poetic fiction, of Mars being tried there, by a court of twelve gods, for the murder of the son of Neptune. The justice administered in this court was so strict and impartial, that, it was generally allowed, both the plaintiff and defendant departed satisfied with the decision. “Innocence, when summoned before it, appeared without apprehension; and the guilty, convicted and condemned, retired without daring to murmur.” The place in which the judges sat was uncovered; and they held their sittings by night, to the end that nothing might distract their minds from the great business on which they were to decide; and that the sight of the accused might not affect them either with pity or aversion. In reference to this, all pleaders were strictly forbidden to use any means whatever to excite either pity or aversion, or to affect the passions; everything being confined to simple relation, or statement of facts. When the two parties were produced before the court, they were placed between the bleeding members of victims slain on the occasion, and were obliged to take an oath, accompanied by horrible imprecations on themselves and families, that they would testify nothing but truth. These parties called to witness the *eumenides*, or furies, the punishers of the perjured in the infernal world; and, to make the greater impression on the mind of the party swearing, the temple dedicated to these infernal deities was contiguous to the court, so that they appeared as if witnessing the oaths and recording the appeal made to themselves. When the case was fully heard, the judges gave their decision by throwing down their flint pebbles, on two boards or tables, one of which was for the condemnation, the other for the acquittal, of the person in question.

This court took cognizance of murders, impieties, and immoralities; they punished vices of all kinds, including idleness; they rewarded the virtuous; they were especially attentive to blasphemies against the gods, and to the performance of the sacred mysteries of religion. It was, therefore, with the greatest propriety that Paul was brought before this tribunal, as being regarded as a setter forth of strange gods, and as being supposed to wish to introduce a new mode of worship.

## Paul’s speech on the Areopagus

The Apostle’s speech to the Stoicks and Epicureans (“a helper: defender”) on Mar’s Hill has sometimes been characterised as a low point in the missionary work of Paul.

Troubled by the growing persecution of the new converts in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-9) and Berea (Acts 17:13-14) and now alone in Athens (Acts 17:15), his spirit was deeply troubled by the prevalence of idolatry on every hand (Acts 17:16). Stirred to challenge the pervasive superstitions of the city, he engaged the philosophers who frequented the Agora – the market place just below the Areopagus and Acropolis and near the Stoa of Attalos.

In his defense Paul quotes from a Greek poet, probably Aratus (circa BC 277) of Cilicia the native place of Paul, who uses the precise expression. Some see this and the meager outcomes of his preaching as evidence that Paul had stooped to a human approach. This is not true. Paul quotes from Deut. 32:8 (Acts 17:26) and Ps. 9:8 (v.31) both of which are firmly based on Gen. 14 – the first place in Scripture which sets forth in type the events and outcomes of Armageddon. Paul warns of the coming of the day of judgement on all idolatry and human philosophy. Comparing Ps. 9 with the content of the speech will show where Paul’s mind was.

Melchizedek priest of the Most High God (the title used in Ps. 9), the type of Christ in Gen. 14 prefigured his work of judgement. The Melchizedek king-priesthood has two essential qualities – one moral (righteousness), the other physical (immortality). These are seen in Christ (Heb. 7), and Paul highlights them in Acts 17:31.

### Sources:

The Holy Bible – Acts 17  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Areopagus>  
 Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible  
 Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible  
 (Compiler – Jim Cowie)



View of the Acropolis from the Areopagus hill