



ANSWER GUIDE

Ancient: Episode 5

Challenges of a New Religion

Discussion Questions and Answers

1. Describe the importance of philosophy in ancient Greek culture.

Ancient Greece was the birthplace of philosophy and opened the doorway to modern thought. Some of the world's most influential thinkers and philosophers originated in Greece: Socrates, his student Plato, and Plato's student, Aristotle. In the ancient Agora, near the Parthenon and Acropolis in Athens, philosophers of ancient Greece often gathered to share their ideas with the general public. Ultimately, these ideas, theories, and thoughts played a fundamental role in molding the world as we know it today.

2. What was the purpose of the Acropolis in Athens?

The Acropolis, the highest point of the city of Athens, was once a military outpost covered in fortresses. However, Pericles built the Parthenon and converted the Acropolis into a stunning religious and cultural center that honored the most prominent gods and goddesses of ancient Greece.

3. What architectural techniques did the Greeks utilize in the construction of the Parthenon?

Unlike so many modern buildings, the Parthenon had no straight lines in its seemingly straight design. Examples of architectural techniques include:

- *The Doric-style columns at its perimeter were formed intentionally imperfect, bulging slightly in the middle, tapering at the top, and leaning slightly inward. The effect of these techniques is that, to the human eye approaching the temple at ground level, the columns appear perfectly straight, and significantly taller than they actually are.*
- *The fluting (vertical ridges of the columns) is shallower at the top, adding to the visual effect that the columns are taller.*
- *The foundations of the temple curve as much as 10 cm near the center, to offset the illusion that they dip in the middle.*
- *The roofline, steps, and pillar bases curve slightly, and the corner pillars were made larger so as not to appear smaller to the viewer.*

4. Describe why Saul of Tarsus fiercely resisted the belief that Jesus of Nazareth was Israel's true Messiah? Why did he persecute early Christians?

Saul (before he became "Paul") was a zealous Pharisee, a group who considered themselves guardians of Jewish laws and traditions. To Saul and the Pharisees, Christianity was a sinister perversion of the Jewish faith. They believed Israel's true Messiah, promised in the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament), would be a powerful king who would free the Jews and rule from an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem. The fact that Jesus was crucified by the Romans and rose from the dead, directly challenged Saul's religious expectations. Jesus' followers claimed that his suffering, death, and resurrection were events that actually fulfilled God's promise -- their freedom was not a political deliverance from the Romans, but a spiritual deliverance from sin and distance from God. Most disturbing for Saul, Christians also claimed these promises were available to all people, not just Israel. Therefore, Saul held a single goal: hunt down believers in Jesus Christ, both men and women, and haul them back to Jerusalem to be either imprisoned or killed. The Bible reveals how Saul participated in the murder of prominent Christian like Stephen, and traveled with the sole purpose of persecuting Christians.

5. Why is Saul's conversion to Christianity significant?

Saul's conversion, according to many defenders of Christianity, poses a real problem for skeptics of Christian history. What explanation is there for a man who so vehemently persecuted Christians to suddenly, and with no logical incentive, become a member of the same group he and others were attacking? Some skeptics, in an effort to deny the miraculous nature of Saul's encounter with Jesus, claim that it was a hallucination caused by the desert heat, or perhaps psychological self-doubt and intense internal conflict. However, evidence from both Scripture and tradition reveal a man who was not only of sound mind, but had a singular and relentless ambition to combat Christianity. Thus, the radical nature of Saul's conversion and his ultimate commitment to advocating for Christianity gives every indication that it was indeed a true encounter with the resurrected Christ.

6. Why was Paul able to speak directly to the Areopagus?

Paul's arrival in Athens is recorded in Acts, Chapter 17. Athens was a sophisticated and well-educated city, but brimming with pagan idols and beliefs. This distressed Paul, and he began to reason with local Jews and philosophers in the Athens marketplace. His public discussions caused enough commotion to win him a hearing before an elite group of Athens intellectuals, called the Areopagus.

7. What is Mars Hill? Why was it important?

Mars Hill, a large marble hill, was a place where Greek elites and philosophers could gather to discuss philosophy, religion, and ideas. It was also the site where Paul encountered the elite counsel called the Areopagus. Ancient Greek paganism has done little to influence the course of history throughout Western Civilization, but the ideas discussed by the great thinkers and philosophers on Mars Hill--and the words spoken there by the Apostle Paul--went on to change the world.

8. What was the Apostle Paul's main objective in his travels, and how did he spread his message?

Paul became the chief spokesperson for Christianity--not just to the Jews in Israel, but also to the Gentiles, because if Jesus was truly the Messiah, then he was the Messiah for all the nations. Paul embarked on a 22-year apostolic career, in which he traveled on-foot across the Mediterranean region to spread the truth of Christianity.