

Athens

Names (also known as)

In ancient Greek: Ἀθῆναι, Athênai)

Etymology

Ancients attribute the name Athens from Athena. In Greek mythology, she was the daughter of Zeus and Hera, the goddess of wisdom. Modern scholars suggest the reverse, that the goddess, as protector of the city drew her name from the city.

Location/Description



Athens is the capital and largest city of Greece. It is located in the fertile plains of Attika, near the Saronic Gulf and Aegean Sea. Its mild climate and fertile soil were the main reason the founders of the city chose to live there. The city is dominated by the Acropolis (see separate document), a rocky plateau on which are a cluster of temples including the Parthenon.

Scriptural references

New Testament

Acts 17:15,16,22; 18:1; 1 Thess.

Famous characters

The Apostle Paul

Damaris and Dionysius the Areopagite (the only Athenian converts mentioned)

Brief history

The city of Athens, Greece is one of the world's oldest cities with a history spanning approximately 3,400 years.

Athens reached its zenith in the 5th century BC, under the rule of Pericles in what is called the Golden Age. This ended in the mutually enervating Peloponnesian wars with Sparta.

By the mid-4th century BC, Athens was dominated by Macedon under Philip II and his son Alexander the Great. Rome ruled over Greece from the 2nd century BC and remained the governing power until Athens came under the sway of Constantinople, the Eastern Leg of the empire around 529 AD.

In 1204 the Fourth Crusade conquered Athens and the Latins ruled until 1453 when the city fell to the Ottoman Empire. They turned the Parthenon into a mosque. In 1687, it was being used by the Ottomans as an ammunition dump which blew up during a siege by the Venetians severely damaging the building and its sculptures. Greece won independence from the Turks in 1821. Athens was occupied by the Nazis in World War II. Greece joined the European Union in 1981.

Scriptural importance

Koine Greek is the language of the New Testament. It was the common language of the day - every traveller's default tongue.

Athens was the centre of humanism, the home of the Academy of Aristotle and Plato and it was 'wholly given to idolatry' (Acts 17:16).

Petronius (27-66 AD), in Nero's court, and contemporary with Paul, wrote of Athens, **'Our region is so full of deities that you may more frequently meet with a god than a man.'**

On his second missionary journey Paul visited this city (Acts 17:15; Cp. 1 Thess. 3:1), and delivered on the Areopagus his famous speech (Acts 17:22-31). Athens was a great trading hub, but as there is no mention of Paul's customary visit to the synagogue, there appears to have been no Diaspora there.

(Compilers – John and Cyndy Tierney)