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Mars Hill (A Haibun)

Sara Ann Hook

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by Sara Anne Hook

Athens. History and legend connected with Athena, goddess of wisdom, handicraft, and warfare. The Acropolis, including the Parthenon, the agora, a modern city interspersed between ancient ruins, columns and statuary, Syntagma Square with its guards in traditional dress, pompoms on the tips of their shoes, sweet and savory food, including olives, baklava, feta cheese, music, dancing, skinny cypress trees and pink oleander. Monumental columns in pieces on the ground, which had once supported elaborate friezes. Greece - the birthplace of democracy - the foundation for much of Western civilization, including philosophy, science, mathematics, poetry, theater, and literature. And I was going to see it!

As I planned for my trip, I began to wonder whether any of the big-name people from the *Bible* had been in Athens. What about Jesus? What about the disciples? I was too embarrassed to ask my minister. The public library had a beautiful book which traced the route of Paul throughout the Mediterranean. Paul is credited with writing or overseeing many of the books of the New Testament, including his letters to new communities of early Christians. He had been in Athens, where he preached a sermon from the Areopagus (translated as Mars Hill), captured in the *Bible*, Acts 17: 16-34.

As I came down the hill from the Acropolis, I saw the plaque marking the spot, Mars Hill, exactly as shown in the photograph from the library's book. A rocky outcrop high above the city - steps worn by time and footsteps, although a metal ladder is now provided for tourists. I was in the footsteps of Paul, where he challenged his audience of scholars and citizens about their many gods and their worship of an Unknown God. Although it would be romantic to say that my feet burned with a holy spirit, I felt a certain peace descend and said a silent prayer before I hurried to catch up with the rest of the group.

High upon a hill

Paul stood for what he believed.

Let us do likewise!