

The
New
Testament
in a Year

Week 9

Acts 17-21

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If you've ever been on one of those trips where you arrive home and think, that was great, that was really interesting, but now what I need is a *vacation*, then these chapters from the book of Acts will really capture your imagination.

Try looking at a map of the missionary journeys, calculate the distance travelled, consider the hardship of travel in the ancient world and you will come to a new appreciation of both the dedication of those who are taking the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ to the whole world and the power and protection of the Holy Spirit in furthering and protecting their work.

Monday

Acts 17

Here in Thessalonica, Paul once again heads to the synagogue to preach, taking advantage of an already gathered audience and using their own scriptures to prove his case. And some are persuaded; once again, though, Paul is threatened by a mob stirred up by the unpersuaded.

When Paul goes to Athens, he tailors his message to a different kind of audience, a Gentile group, one that is influenced by Epicurean and Stoic philosophy. Paul quotes from their own poets, using the preconceptions and worldviews of his hearers as tools for making the gospel accessible and attractive to them.

When you move in various contexts, at work, in your community, among friends, how do you tailor the message of Jesus alive in you, so that it is accessible to different audiences?

Tuesday

Acts 18

Here Paul meets Priscilla and Aquila who will become very valuable to his missionary endeavours. Once, again he establishes his base in the synagogue where he persuades the Jews that Jesus is the long awaited Christ, but opposition propels him to a ministry to the Gentiles.

Verse 8 provides one of the proof texts for the practice of infant baptism as it describes the baptism of an entire household (which would always have included children.)

The vignette of Priscilla and Aquila with Apollos is instructive to the church in our time. Apollos' teaching is lacking, despite his learnedness and his familiarity with the Scriptures, because he knew only the baptism of John. Priscilla and Aquila invite him to a time of private instruction in their home "and explain the way of God to him more adequately." No conflict, no public humiliations, no debate, just gentle, loving teaching. *Would that we all learn from this example.*

Wednesday

Acts 19

Once again John's baptism of repentance and preparation to receive the gospel is contrasted with baptism into the name of the Lord Jesus. The outward sign of this latter baptism is the coming of the Holy Spirit, made visible by the gift of tongues and of prophecy.

Paul preaches from a base in the synagogue, and as usual, some receive his message while others violently reject it. Note that he invests two years in this project: it is likely that the church planted here at Ephesus became a strategic centre from which teams of evangelists radiated out to surrounding communities (v. 10 "all who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.")

There are many reasons why the gospel is rejected. In the story of Demetrius we see how the gospel can threaten business and trade. Isn't the solution to this uproar (from the city clerk in verse 35) just the sort of thing we would expect for a government solution?

Thursday

Acts 20

Here we meet Eutychus, the first person recorded as having been preached to death (that's a preacher's joke.) Paul's power to raise him from death, as is Peter's in raising Tabitha, is a sign of his authority as an apostle.

The farewell to the Ephesian elders is touching as Paul indicates his willingness to make every sacrifice to complete the task the Lord Jesus has given to him (v 24) and as he reminds the elders of their duties. Called variously overseers (episkopoi: bishops), shepherds (pastors) and elders these are warned to be on guard in their protection of the flock, even though it will be some of their own number who will distort the truth to draw disciples to themselves. Paul commits the elders to God and to the word of his grace, promising that they will be built up, and praying with them.

Friday

Acts 21

Paul continues on to Jerusalem, despite the pleading of the disciples who fear for his safety, despite the prophesy of Abagus indicating Paul's future imprisonment. Clearly, like the Master before him, Paul has set his face to Jerusalem. He is ready to be bound, to die, to do whatever is the will of the Lord.

When Paul arrives in Jerusalem, we see him carefully manage Jewish Gentile tensions in the Christian community. Accused of having set aside the law of Moses, Paul shows respect for the law and its rites and customs without sacrificing Christian principle: the law is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and those who are alive in Christ are not bound to the law. Paul's solution here is nuanced, respectful, honourable and practical.

The chapter ends with Paul's arrest, beating and his opportunity then to preach to Jerusalem in chapter 22.