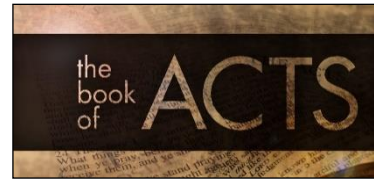


ACTS – Fall 2025 D-Groups

For Wednesday, November 12

Acts 18:23-21:14



The Big Picture - ACTS as a Whole

At this point in Acts, Luke tells the story of the Church's expansion *ethnically* (the Gentile mission) and *geographically* ("to the ends of the earth" as in 1:8). That's what we observed with Paul's first two missionary journeys. On the first, we see the Good News spreading into Asia (the regions of Galatia and Phrygia) - Acts 13-14. After the Jerusalem Council, Paul returns to those regions, but then eventually makes a shift into Europe in response to the Spirit's leading - specifically, the regions of Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea) and Greece (Athens and Corinth) - Acts 16:1-18:23. In the truest sense, these were very much evangelistic trips with a primary emphasis on sharing the Good News and establishing churches on the "spiritual frontier" ... unreached places.

In this week's text, Luke narrates events from **Paul's third missionary journey**. Here, we find follow-up visits to places where Paul has already been - more of a focus on encouraging these churches that he had recently established and the ongoing work of ministry (*e.g.* ~2+ years in Ephesus). He'll get to Rome at the end of Acts - albeit as a prisoner awaiting trial before Caesar - with aspirations to get to Spain eventually (Romans 15:23-29). It's all part of his heart to share the Good News with people in places yet to receive it (Romans 15:20-22). Yet, amidst that priority, Paul also cares about the ongoing life of discipleship ... as his letters, written to churches like these, make very clear. His heart went beyond just seeing people embrace Jesus for salvation; he also desired to see their ongoing lives of faith properly reflect Him. *[If you're not tired of the reference to Colossians 2:6-7 from this Fall's sermon series (or, even if you are), it's what he emphasizes there]*. Even more, he wanted to see churches established as communities of ongoing mission both externally in the world and internally within their spiritual families. It's a good reminder for us because Jesus' work is not always about the highlights of mass conversions amidst exhilarating evangelistic efforts; it's also about the mundane of everyday life, discipleship and ministry. Of course, even there, the Spirit is still at work!

The Close-Up for November 12 - Acts 18:23-21:14

(Make sure to read the text as part of this - 2-3 times, even)

Some notes on the overall flow this section:

18:23 ... Paul goes out yet again from Antioch to visit churches from his first journey.

18:24-28 ... a brief scene (one without Paul) where Apollos becomes a prominent figure. Paul's tent-making friends Priscilla and Aquilla - mentioned earlier in Acts 18 - play a role in helping to calibrate his understanding, sharpening his bold proclamation of the Good News. Apollos has a significant ongoing role in Corinth. *It's beyond just Paul and the other Apostles!*

19:1-41 ... Paul spends time in Ephesus. There's some powerful content in this chapter. While there, he helps believers to experience baptism in Jesus' Name and the ongoing presence of the Spirit. After being dismissed from the synagogue, he moved to a public lecture hall where

he spent two years preaching and teaching about Jesus. There's a powerful encounter with evil spirits - an event that led to the spread of the Lord's message and impact, including economic upheaval caused by the repentance of new believers. All of that led to a riot in Ephesus (19:23-41). It all points to the ripple effect as the Good News takes root there. Jesus' followers were turning the world upside down (17:6) and it all created quite a stir! Amidst the astonishing highlights of Ephesus, though, chapter 19 also points to a long-haul and even mundane approach to ministry - that's where much of ministry and discipleship happens.

20:1-12 ... a follow-up visit to Macedonia and Greece, then back to Asia Minor (Troas). This section involves the interesting story of Eutychus.

20:13-38 ... another return trip to the region near Ephesus. While there, Paul's heart for the church and its ongoing mission is on display through powerful words he shares with the Ephesian elders. There's so much rich material in this "farewell address" - much of it as Paul is passing the responsibility of caring for God's flock to these leaders.

21:1-14 ... Paul returns closer to home base in Syria on his way to Jerusalem - much in his story moving forward calls to mind Jesus' own trip there. Even as some were discouraging him from going to Jerusalem because of what awaited, this was Paul's intended destination.

Some of our KEY THEMES specifically on display in chapters 18:23-21:14 (as a reminder, we're not repeating the chart; however, there are separate sheets with it available in the foyer):

The emphasis on JESUS, the GOOD NEWS, CONVERSIONS, the CHURCH'S EXTERNAL MISSION, KINGDOM EXPANSION and OPPOSITION from OUTSIDERS ... These themes continue to be front-and-center even if not on the "spiritual frontier." Even as the church establishes roots in a location, it continues to impact its context.

The HOLY SPIRIT's activity ... He continues to be present in the story along the way.

The Church's INTERNAL COMMUNITY LIFE Together ... we don't necessarily see a whole lot of this within these chapters, but Paul's presence in Ephesus for 2+ years and his address to the elders from there - in which the content of the message has a lot to say about their care for God's flock - surely indicates the importance of this dimension of the Church.

Some additional questions to reflect on leading-up to next week's D-Group:

- ***Reflect together on the "mundane" - long-term work of faith, discipleship and ministry. Why does that easily get minimized? How does all of this fit withing God's overall mission?***
- ***What's the difference between making converts and making disciples? What does Paul's overall heart for the ongoing life of faith and ministry remind us about this important dimension of the church's mission?***
- ***We find ourselves within a context where the Good News is already established. What can we learn from Paul's experiences - especially with his time in Ephesus (chapter 19) and his address to the elders from there - about the ongoing mission in such a context?***
- ***What does Paul's address to the Ephesian elders emphasize about leadership in God's church? Reflect on some of the basic leadership principles we find in his words.***