

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

WEEK FOUR

CHAPTERS 16 AND 20 THE EARLY CHURCH II



Read with your heart

As you listen to these verses about the development of church, how do you feel about your own experience of church and what place it has in your life? Are there similarities and differences to what you are hearing? If so, what are they? What does “church” (from *ekklesia* meaning *assembly*) mean to you, and can you recognise this in the way that the apostles are acting?

Read with your head

Today’s chapters focus on two aspects of the church developing: the travelling, growing; and the roles that are beginning to be organised for people. Troas – to Assos – to Mitylene – to Chios – to Samos - to Miletus.

This is in the middle of Paul’s third missionary journey – a total journey of 2,500 miles. Paul is heading for Jerusalem because he wants to be there at Pentecost. Luke describes this journey to Jerusalem in detail. He is setting out to present Paul as replicating Jesus “setting his face towards Jerusalem”

in Luke's gospel 9.51-1944. Paul sends delegates ahead of him, and is the doer of signs and wonders.

Chapter 20 Verse 7: "on the first day of the week" gives us evidence that the Christians are now perhaps regularly meeting on that day to "break bread". Routine is being established. Lots of detail in this story – the number of storeys in the house, the name of the young man, his position in the window, him gradually falling asleep. **Vv 14,15** Mytilene....Miletus. The boat is making its way by short stages from one coastal port to another in short one day journeys. Mytilene is on Lesbos, Chios is an island to the south, so is Samos. Miletus is on the mainland 30 miles south of Ephesus. So Paul sails past Ephesus and then asks elders from Ephesus to come to him. It's not completely clear why as he did visit Ephesus himself earlier - maybe because of some danger for him in Ephesus. **Verses 18-35** Paul is saying good bye to the elders of Ephesus. He has determined that he must go to Jerusalem. In verses 20 and 27 he justifies his actions "I did not shrink", "I did not hold back". A characteristic of Paul is that he talks about being "useful" or "helpful": it seems that he really wants to be these things (for example he says this a lot in his 2 letters to Christians in Corinth). In verse 22, he describes himself as "being bound by the Spirit"; this sentence construction in Greek means that we could understand this as a way of saying "I am determined". Or, more probable, given the mention of the Holy Spirit, that "I am obliged". He almost plays with this image, describing the "chains and afflictions" in verse 23 (*desma*) which bind him in a different way.

Verse 28: *episkopos* meaning "overseer". This is the only place Luke mentions this term. In contemporary usage, the word means a variety of social and political offices, including that of educator. Luke's understanding of *diakonos*, *presbyteros*, *episkopos*, from which we get deacon, priest, episcopal (bishop) is primarily administrative. But he also says that these roles are "appointed by the Holy Spirit", which has a strong legitimating effect.

This "Farewell Discourse" from Paul is reported by Luke, who uses literary conventions that are familiar to him as a Greek writer (for example, the prediction that evil will visit soon after the death of the hero: Paul's prediction of "wolves" devouring the "sheep") but still it's possible to hear

Paul's own voice, for example, in his linking of physical exertion with the spiritual journey in verse 24).

Chapter 16 Verse 6 -10. These verses are hotly contested by scholars, as to the meaning of "Asia". It is not clear where Paul actually travelled, but the detail here isn't so important to Luke's narrative as the fact that the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus are directing their journey. And sending them to Europe. This key expansion of the mission to Gentile lands mean that Luke will not really mention James and the Jerusalem church much more in his book. Also, Paul falls out with Barnabas and they sail in opposite directions. From now on, as far as Acts is concerned, it's all about Paul and his group and his journeys.

Lydia Philippi becomes an important centre for Paul from which to travel. Believers there supported him financially (Philippians 4. 15-18). Purple cloth is for the wealthy and the royal. She is head of her household and clearly rich. She could be Jewish or Gentile; it's not clear. She is from Thyatira (you might remember that in the Book of Revelation the church at Thyatira gets very harsh criticism). Her "heart is opened" and the narrative is very rapid here. We are reminded of Luke 24 when the disciples on the road to Emmaeus urge Jesus to stay with them that evening as she "urges" Paul and his friends "come and stay at my home"



Read with your feet



Keep in mind what you have been feeling and see what might happen in the week.

Christianity 'is about what kind of heart you have. It's about whether your heart makes your words and your feet work together. (Christianity) is not about right talk; it's not about right prayer; it's not about right theological doctrine, it's about right living whether your talk meets your walk and not just individually but in your communities.'

(Joan Martin – ordained Presbyterian pastor speaking at a conference 'Re-Imagining: A Global Theological Conference By Women: For Men and Women')

How do we help one another be disciples of Christ, or "led by the Holy Spirit" or prompted by the "spirit of Jesus" as part of our own church experience?