

## **Bible Reading Challenge 45: THE CHURCH – TO THE UTTERMOST PARTS OF THE EARTH**

At the end of last week's reading challenge, Paul and Barnabas had returned from the first missionary journey. They were prepared for a second, but after a disagreement both agreed to go on separate trips—two missions for the price of one. Paul's traveling companion for his next journeys will be Silas—also Timothy, Titus, and our author, Dr. Luke. A big milestone is passed this week, so quietly we don't notice it: a man appears to Paul in a dream and says "Come to Macedonia and help us." Seeing this as a sign from the Holy Spirit who continues to guide them, Paul packs up his team and heads west, crossing from "Asia" (modern-day Turkey) into Macedonia (today's Northern Greece). In other words, he's in Europe, which will soon become the home of Christianity for the next 1500 years.

Lots of excitement happens on this second missionary journey, as we'll see. That's true of the third missionary journey also, but unfortunately we won't have time to read it directly from Acts. Here's a summary: In Ephesus Paul found himself at the center of a riot and barely escaped a beating, brought a dead young man back to life, and was warned several times not to go to Jerusalem. But he went anyway, found himself at the center of another riot and barely escaped another beating, after which the authorities decided he'd better be kept in custody--for three years. The Jews were stirring up trouble again, and eventually brought Paul to trial the same way they did Jesus. But the ending was different because Paul was a citizen of Rome, and as a citizen he had the right to make his case before Caesar. That's exactly what Paul did, and when we take up the story in chapter 26 he's on his way to Rome.

Paul and his companions were accused of turning the world upside-down. In a way the charge was true, but Paul couldn't do any world-turning by himself. All along, as you'll see, they were led by the Holy Spirit pointing out one path and obstructing another, convicting and saving and (most importantly) reversing the curse of death. That's the point of both the statements you'll read this week: *Jesus Christ has risen from the dead*. The world, after centuries of death, destruction, and futility, has begun to turn the other way. Other religions of the time had stories of gods who died and came back to life, but it had either happened so far back in time nobody knew when, or it happened all over again every year. But the Christians were claiming that their God had come back to life within memory, and he would never die again—furthermore, everyone who believed in Him could have that same life!

The book of Acts ends abruptly. We'd like Luke to wrap it up with a conclusion, but maybe he wants to show us that the story goes on, and it's our turn now . . . .

**Reading for this week:** Acts 16-17, 25:13-28:31

**Further references:** II Corinthians 11:23-30; Acts 9:15

**Key verse:** "These men who have turned the world upside-down have come here also . . . saying that there is another king, Jesus." Acts 17:6b, 7b

### **Questions to Think and Talk about:**

1. Why didn't Paul and Silas escape after the earthquake? What was the result?
2. Find on a map all the places visited in these chapters.
3. How does the Lord's prediction of Acts 9:15-16 and Mark 16:17-18 come true in these chapters?
4. What was the Jews' accusation against Paul? (See Acts 24:5-7) What is Paul's version? (Acts 24:10-21) What does he say in his defense before the King?
5. How did all these events work together to get Paul to Rome? (See Romans 8:28-29)
6. Discuss why it is that some people believe and others, like Agrippa and Festus, don't.
7. Is Acts 28:24-27 a discouraging message? Why or why not?

### **Activities:**

- Draw a graphic-novel segment (about 4 panels) of Acts 26:9-18.
- Compare Paul's speech to Athenians (17:22-31) with his speech to Jews in Antioch (13:16-41): How does he get their attention? What quotes does he use? What conclusion?
- Write a radio play of Acts 27:13-44. Create parts for sailors, soldiers, and Paul's companions.
- Research ancient ships and sailing techniques and make a report.