

Acts 17-20 Summary

Acts 17–20 presents a gospel that engages minds, confronts idols, transforms cultures, and demands total allegiance. Paul’s ministry reveals that faithfulness often invites opposition, that God’s power is unmistakable in advancing His mission, and that true discipleship means embracing suffering with courage and joy. Like Christ, Paul sets his face toward Jerusalem—fully aware of the cost, yet unwavering in obedience.

Acts 17 highlights the gospel’s advance through reasoning, Scripture, and cultural engagement—often met with resistance. In Thessalonica, Paul reasons with the Jews from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead, and that Jesus is that Messiah. While some believe, others grow jealous and stir up trouble, accusing Paul and his companions before city officials of defying Caesar’s decrees by proclaiming another king—Jesus. This accusation reveals the political implications of the gospel: allegiance to Christ challenges all rival claims to ultimate authority. Forced to leave, Paul travels to Berea, where the response is strikingly different. The Bereans receive the message with eagerness and examine the Scriptures daily to test Paul’s teaching. Many believe, including prominent Greek women and men. Yet opposition follows again when Jews from Thessalonica arrive to stir up unrest, pushing Paul onward.

Paul then arrives in Athens, a center of philosophy and intellectual life. Distressed by the city’s idolatry, Paul engages philosophers by reasoning with them in familiar categories, pointing to the “unknown god” and proclaiming the risen Christ. Some mock, others are curious, and a few believe—demonstrating that the gospel both confronts and fulfills human searching, even in highly intellectual environments.

Acts 18 records Paul’s ministry in Corinth, where he initially faces resistance and discouragement. In a vision, the Lord reassures him: “Do not be afraid... for I am with you... because I have many people in this city.” Strengthened by this promise, Paul remains in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching the word of God. This chapter also introduces Priscilla and Aquila, faithful co-laborers who quietly disciple Apollos—a gifted preacher who knew the Scriptures and spoke accurately about Jesus but lacked a full understanding of the Spirit’s work. Rather than correcting him publicly, they invite him into their home and explain the way of God more fully, modeling humble discipleship and patient instruction.

Acts 19 shifts to Ephesus, where God works powerfully through Paul. Extraordinary miracles occur—so much so that even items that touched Paul are used by God to bring healing and deliverance. This dramatic display of power affirms the supremacy of Christ over spiritual forces. As the gospel transforms lives, many abandon magical practices, publicly burning their scrolls. The economic and spiritual disruption leads to a riot, as craftsmen who profit from idol worship—

particularly that of Artemis—fear the loss of their livelihood. The uproar exposes the gospel’s capacity to confront entrenched systems of idolatry and economic self-interest.

Acts 20 brings an emotional and theological climax as Paul prepares to journey to Jerusalem. In Troas, Paul preaches late into the night, and a young man named Eutychus falls asleep, tumbles from a window, and dies—only to be restored to life through Paul, reinforcing God’s power and presence. Later, Paul delivers a heartfelt farewell to the Ephesian elders, reminding them of his faithful ministry and warning them of future trials. Though others plead with him not to go to Jerusalem, Paul declares his readiness to suffer and even die for the name of Jesus. Knowing hardship awaits—and that they may never see him again—Paul presses forward, mirroring Jesus’ own resolve to go to Jerusalem. His journey is not driven by self-preservation but by obedience to God’s calling.

Reflection Questions

1. Paul was accused of proclaiming another King—Jesus. In what ways does your allegiance to Christ challenge the competing “authorities” or priorities in your life?
2. The Bereans examined the Scriptures daily to test what they heard. How intentional are you about grounding your beliefs and decisions in God’s Word rather than personalities, trends, or opinions?
3. Paul adapted his message for different audiences without compromising the truth. How can you communicate the gospel more clearly and faithfully within your own cultural or relational context?
4. Priscilla and Aquila corrected Apollos privately and humbly. How do you respond to correction, and are you willing to help others grow with gentleness and wisdom?
5. The gospel in Ephesus disrupted idolatry and economic systems. What modern “idols” might the gospel be confronting in your own life or community?
6. Paul’s ministry was marked by both extraordinary power and intense opposition. How do you hold together faith in God’s power with faithfulness during suffering?
7. Eutychus was restored to life in the middle of ordinary ministry. How does this story challenge your expectations of what God can do in the midst of everyday obedience?
8. Paul knowingly walked toward suffering for the sake of Christ. What fears or attachments might be holding you back from fully obeying God’s calling?
9. Paul’s farewell shows deep love and sacrifice for the church. How are you investing your life in others in ways that will outlast your own presence?