

Acts 16: 9 - 18

Psalm 67

Revelation 21: 10, 22 - 22:5

John 14: 23 - 29

Notes on the Lesson from the Acts of the Apostles

There are almost no adequate terms to describe the divide between Eastern and Western cultures. This fact is as true today as it was in the first century. People simply have different ways of thinking in the two. We in the west are more analytical and more literal. Those in the east are more poetic and metaphorical. It was this gap that Paul, a man of the east, was crossing when he traveled from Troas to Macedonia. The tension between these two cultures is evident in some of the issues that Paul discusses in his letters.

Note that the Jews of Philippi did not gather in a synagogue. This should not be taken as a sign of religious persecution but as an indication of the small number of Jews in the city. There must be ten Jewish males to make up a synagogue and apparently, the Philippian Jewish community did not even have that many.

The text states that the apostles “supposed there would be a place of prayer” by the river outside the city. This was apparently the custom for Jews in places that lacked the adequate number to form a synagogue. One theory as to the origin of this custom is that the people took guidance from the first verse of Psalm 137: “By the rivers of Babylon - there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion”. The traditional site where the events took place, the Gangitis River outside of Philippi, is shown in the photo to the right.



Notes on the Lesson from the Revelation to John

The book of Ezekiel describes a new Jerusalem in a vision that is somewhat similar to this chapter in the book of Revelation. The most significant difference is that Ezekiel devotes three chapters to the description of the new Temple whereas in Revelation there is no Temple in the city. Remember that the Temple was not primarily a place of worship. A temple was the house of the god to whom it was dedicated. The Temple in Jerusalem was “the House of the Lord”, which is how it is referred to throughout the Old Testament.

All near eastern temples had the same general design. There were zones of increasing holiness as one approached the home of the god. In the Jerusalem Temples, these were the Court of the Gentiles, the Court of Women, the Court of Israelites, the Court of Priests, and the Holy of Holies. The name of each court designated which group of people could go no farther. Jewish men, for example, could be in the Courts of the Gentiles, of Women, and of the Israelites, but

they were not allowed into the Court of the Priests. No human could enter the inner-most area, the Holy of Holies, for that was the home of God alone. Only on the Day of Atonement could the High Priest alone enter into the Holy of Holies. Imperfect people were kept separate from the holiness of God.

In the new Jerusalem, there is no temple. God does not need a house in which to live; a house that is separate from his people. Instead, “the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them.” The barriers that separate God from humanity will no longer exist. All creation is at one with the Creator.

Also found in the new Jerusalem is the tree of life; the tree from which Adam and Eve were barred after the Fall. All of the separation from God that followed that event is healed. The world is re-created and all is as God intended it to be.