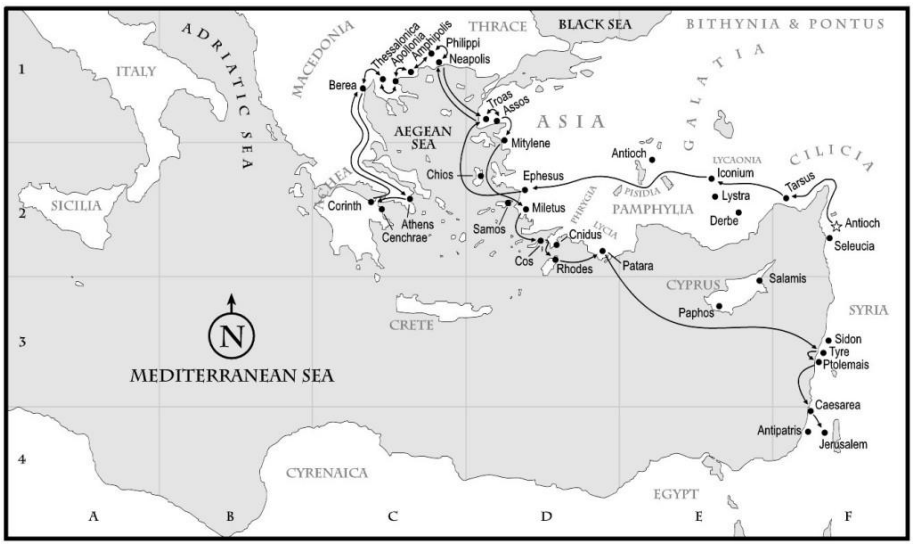
WEEK 9—Acts 18-28; Galatians

After an extended stay in Corinth, a significant city in southern Greece (grid 2C on the map below), Paul returned to his 'home base' of Antioch (Acts 18:22-23). From there, he left for his third missionary journey, revisiting places he'd been on earlier trips. One of those was Ephesus (grid 2D on the map), where Paul stayed about 3 years. His time there came to an abrupt end when a riot broke out, led by supporters of a local deity—Artemis—who saw Paul as a threat.

Paul left (Acts 20:1), traveling west, into Greece. Following a tour of that area, Paul wanted to return to Jerusalem—against the counsel of others. They were concerned for his well-being, but Paul persisted. As the next chapters indicate, their concern was well-founded: Paul was arrested and jailed in Jerusalem. The religious leaders (a group in which Paul had been a rising star) wanted more than a simple trial for him, but their plotting and efforts were no match for the Lord's care. Paul remained in prison, but had opportunity for sharing the Gospel—which the Lord Himself encouraged of Paul (Acts 23:11; look also at 9:3-6).

Luke closes Acts with the story of Paul's trip to Rome, and his time under house arrest while there. There is speculation that Paul was released from this and made his way to Spain (see Romans 15:19-24 for Paul's account of his work, and his interest in Spain); reliable tradition tells us that Paul eventually met his death in Rome some time later. But Luke tells us about neither of these; remember: Acts is a story about the church's early formation and spread among Gentiles, more than a collection of biographies. By the time we reach the end of Acts 28, we can see quite clearly that what Jesus had predicted—back in Acts 1:8—has come to pass.

Once you finish Acts, the schedule moves you into *Galatians*, a letter Paul wrote to a group of churches (Galatia was a region, not a specific city—see grid 1E on the map). This is one of Paul's sternest letters, as you'll notice (see 1:6 and 3:1). Apparently, these people had drifted from Paul's teaching, and he wanted them to "give careful thought to their ways" (this phrase is from the prophet Haggai [Haggai 1:5, 7; 2:15], but it's one with which Paul would have agreed).

One of the problems in Galatia seems to have their willingness to listen to teachers who urged following a checklist for specific behavior, rather than trusting God's grace for living in a God-honoring way. Paul insists on the freedom they have in Christ (Gal 5:1)—not freedom to do whatever they please (remember: 'give careful thought to your ways'), but rather, freedom to live in ways that bless others and honor God (see 5:13).

Paul points them to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit who can help them with this, and he urges them to "keep in step with the Spirit" (5:25). This emphasis on the Spirit is, for Paul, the way to life in Christ that bears good fruit.