

# Travels with the Spirit: A Summer Travelogue Through the Book of Acts Travel Testimony

## “Understanding Scripture Through the Impact of Travel”

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Decades ago In the 1950's when I was in the Fifth Grade, our teacher introduced the concept of evolution to the class, using the creation story as reference. Raised in a conservative Lutheran home where the literal interpretation of the Bible was taught, this was a surprise and to me, a heresy. When I challenged this theory, the teacher clarified that the word “days” in Genesis could be interpreted in many ways including as “years” or other units of time. In fifth grade terms, she explained the theory of evolution. The impact of that lesson was far-reaching since for the first time, I encountered another point of view about the creation story so familiar to us from the Old Testament. Suddenly my belief in the Bible, the inspired word of God that I had been taught to believe in without reservation, became filled with questions.

Later in my life after years of education I learned that virtually every culture tells a story about the origins of humankind. For example, in the Norse tradition the gods turned an ash tree and an elm tree into man and woman and gave them life. The Old Testament tells us that God “formed man from the dust of the ground” and woman from the man’s rib. The origin story we tend to believe today describes the development of modern humans in Africa about three hundred thousand years ago.

Two recent trips with my family 8,600 miles apart to two different continents reinforced my thoughts about the creation story, how I interpret scripture and nourish my faith. The first trip was to the Galapagos Islands off the coast of Ecuador in South America in 2018. This was the site of Charles Darwin’s 19<sup>th</sup> century explorations which finalized his theory of evolution. Through his observation of finches, he wrote **that species change over time, give rise to new species, and share a common ancestor**. Stepping around sea lions on beaches, observing varieties of giant tortoises, and hiking next to nesting birds, I marveled at what Darwin observed and the conclusions he reached. This national park, although heavily visited, had been maintained much as Darwin saw it when he visited over 150 years earlier.

The second trip we took right before Covid hit in early 2020 was to Tanzania in east Africa. As part of the trip, we visited Olduvai Gorge, the site of the archeological digs of Mary and Louis Leakey and their sons, Richard and Jonathan. The gorge is 30 miles long, located in the eastern Serengeti Plains. A monument and museum have been built there on the rim which provides educational exhibits related to the gorge and its long history. At the gorge, the Leakeys discovered the fossilized remains of early hominids, species that led to the evolution of us, homo sapiens. These conclusions had been predicted by Darwin years earlier in his 1871 book

*Descent of Man.* As I looked over that scalding hot valley, a desert now devoid of any observable life, I was moved by the thought of those long-ago ancestors whose fossilized remains and stone age tools can still be seen.

So what did these two travel experiences mean to my faith? My faith was certainly strengthened as I was awed by the natural wonders created by God on these distant continents, so far removed from my comfort zone of Iowa. My faith was reinforced in another way too as I tried to answer the question, what did this travel do for my understanding of the Bible, the central religious text for Christians? As Rev. Svanoe said last week, "travel changed how I read scripture." To me, the Bible does not literally predict the future. It is not in conflict with science. It does not contradict evolutionary creation. Instead the Bible is a guide, inspiration, history and comfort, teaching and providing a moral compass through stories, allegory and parable. Travel reminded me to continually open and expand my thinking and imagination as I continue to read and study that text for all the truths it contains.