

Witness to the Ends of the Earth (cont.)

D. Witness to the Ends of the Earth (11:19 – 28:31)

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A Parenthesis on Judean Christianity

Herod, James, and Peter (12:1-24)

James is Martyred (12:1-2)

Herod takes up issue with church. He is no doubt jealous that Jesus is receiving glory and the heavenly kingdom is growing and his earthly kingdom is compromised. Herod displays his authority by the first martyring of one of the disciples, James.

Peter imprisoned and miraculous freedom (12:3-17)

- Herod, being a people pleaser, sees the death of James pleases the Jews so he captures Peter.

God is certainly not finished with Peter, he has much work to do with him yet.

Humanity, no matter how powerful, cannot stop the plan of the Almighty God!

- Peter remains in prison due to the timing of his capture. Herod knows that he cannot bring him on trial till after Passover because it was against Jewish custom.

Peter in prison is a gloomy picture, however Luke adds the hopeful note of the church earnestly praying for him (v.5). The word “earnestly” literally means “stretched out” and could thus mean

The unfolding drama of Acts is revealing Gentile Christianity as taking center stage, however God is still very active in the Jewish church.

continuous, in which case it carries a similar idea of the upper room at Pentecost, giving the idea of prevailing prayer.³⁹

- Peter is involved in such a miraculous rescue by one of the Lord's angels that he thinks it is a dream.
- Those praying do not believe he has been rescued, claiming it must be his ghost!

Herod's Death (12:18-24)

- Furious that Peter has escaped, His giant ego is deflated.
- Calls for the death of the guards. This is inevitably to boost the ego back up
- Further ego boost comes with the surrender of Tyre and Sidon to Herod for the sake of survival.

Herod speaks and the people respond "his is the voice of a god."

Consequences of receiving glory that belongs to God alone...

WRATH and DEATH

- He was struck down by the Lord and his body eaten by worms!

The First Missionary Journey

A Missionary Team is Sent Out (12:25 – 13:3)

Remember that Saul (also called Paul (13:9) – official name change) and Barnabas left to go to Jerusalem where Paul would face his former companions. They are now returning to Antioch from that mission journey and will begin what will officially be their first missionary journey.

Paul's name means "little", a clear reminder of how God is to be greater and he is to be less in the ministry he has been called to pursue.

Paul will dominate the remainder of the book of Acts giving the precedence and validation needed for his many letters that will follow to carry such authority among the church.

During a worship experience, there were prophets in their midst that received a word from the Lord.

³⁹ Ajith Fernando. The NIV Application Commentary. P362

“Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

- No ordinary work
- Going in the power of a call
- Sent out clothed in the power of the Holy Spirit
- Immediately meet with adversity from the devil
 - Sorcerer
 - Rebukes and sees conversion.

These harsh words spoken by Paul are told to be a result of “being filled with the Holy Spirit.” It was in keeping with Jesus words concerning causing others to fall into sin and having a millstone tied around your neck. Paul knows that false teaching results in lost souls and he will not stand for it.

Preaching in Pisidian Antioch (13:13-41)

- Redemptive Historical overview of their need for a savior.
- The message of salvation (13:26)

Paul has taken the prominent role as the missionary group has made its way to Pisidian. We know from external sources that the sorcerer, Sergius Paulus, has been converted and is part of a very wealthy family from the area of Antioch. It is likely he encouraged Paul to go here next in his journey to proclaim the message.

- Paul moves to apologetics arguing that indeed Jesus is the promised “Savior.”

Acts 13:38-39 ³⁸ "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹ Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.

- Paul’s explanation offers forgiveness and justification not by law

The Aftermath of Paul’s Sermon (13:42-52)

- Paul and Barnabas are invited to speak again on the next Sabbath.
- They are followed by many Jews and devout converts to Judaism (they want to hear more)
- He preaches first to Jews, if they reject, he preaches to the Gentiles.
 - He is hurt that the Jews would reject the message and yearns and prays for their salvation.
- Gentiles receive the word with gladness (v.48)
- The opposition is so great, they have to leave town

Despite Opposition:

Acts 13:52 - And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Ministry in Iconium (14:1-7)

- New town, same practice – they went first to the synagogue to teach.
- Some heard and accepted. Some heard and wanted to stone them.

No matter where you are there will be those ready to accept the message and those ready to stone you for the message. It is not up to us to determine which group each person falls under. It is our job to proclaim the good news to all who will hear.

Notice Paul and Barnabas did the job they were called to do and moved on to continue proclaiming the message. They did not stay to attempt conversion, that piece was left in the hands of the one greater than each of them...The Almighty God!

Ministry in Lystra and Derbe (14:8-21a)

Paul is preaching and see a cripple who is listening to the message. The interesting piece of the text is that when Paul looks at the man it says... **Acts 14:9-10** Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.



What was in the face of this man that showed he had faith?

- I. He listened
- II. He responded
- III. He received

Paul must have also had a sense given to him by the Lord whether he should pray for healing or not.

This city had never heard this message of Jesus and never experienced healing of this sort. There logical conclusion was that Paul and Barnabas are some sort of gods...major gods (Zeus and Hermes).

- Paul uses the platform of “god” as an opportunity to present the gospel.
- The Jews who oppose are following Paul...150 miles from Antioch to stamp out this effort.

Return Visits to Churches and Antioch (14:21-28)

3 primary reasons for the return visit (v22)

1. Strengthened the disciples
2. Exhorted them to remain in the faith
3. Warning of the coming hardship

This is a model for follow up with a new convert still today. We must not turn new believers loose without a proper follow up.

The Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)

A key question arises in this chapter concerning conformity to what has been expected for years...mainly circumcision! The Jews have begun to accept that the gospel is all including Gentiles but are still adamant of the customs of the faith. So adamant that Paul and Barnabas return to Jerusalem for a meeting with the apostles and leaders of the church.

Paul is not preaching this message but “some men” who seem to be without authority of the church are proclaiming this (v24).

- An official bylaw has to be issued on behalf of the church. This precedent continues even today in a hierarchical church.

Settling the Issue of Salvation and the Gentiles (15:5-19)

- Paul and Barnabas give a fantastic report of the happenings among the towns they have been ministering.
- It is squelched by this issue of circumcision.

Why such an issue?

In today's terminology it would be like telling the church there is a new entrance rite that is replacing baptism. It is all the Jews have ever known so it is a transformational shift in thinking that takes time for them to adjust and conform to.

- A letter is issued resolving the issue and speaking to the most important things of the law to follow. (this is after baptism has occurred)

Each of the disciples that spoke in the council had an experience. Each was in keeping with the scripture. Every conversion experience is different, but they always lead to the same conclusion...Following Christ!

Fellowship among Jewish and Gentile Christians (15:20-35)

- James does peacemaking and reconciliation
 - Assures the Jewish leaders that the torah is being read every week.
 - Issue is in the practice

Result is a rejoicing among the new converts.

Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience influence the formulation of theology. The foundation, the ultimate source of raw material for constructing theology, is SCRIPTURE. – John Wesley

The Second Missionary Journey (15:36 – 18:22)

The Team Breaks up (15:36-41)

- Paul and Barnabas part ways
 - They each wanted to take someone different, younger in the faith
 - Because they could not agree they parted ways

The “break up” is not one that causes quarrels among them but simply a differing of opinion. Both Paul and Barnabas are well equipped and supported by the church to go and do their separate ministries and so indeed that is what they do. God is bigger than human problems and he wills for his children to live in unity.

Paul took Silas and went through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches (v41).

Barnabas took Mark and went to Cyprus (v39).

The Macedonian Call (16:1-10)

- Paul and Silas carry the message of the Jerusalem council to the towns they have been ministering in.
- Paul meets Timothy
 - Timothy would become a very strong leader among the church and was no doubt a young man in comparison to Paul (see 1 & 2 Timothy). Paul would mentor Timothy in the faith.
 - Ironically Paul circumcises Timothy for the sake of the ministry to the Jews.
- The first of the “WE” passage occur, meaning that this may be where Paul met Luke and began ministry together.

The beginning of this second journey shows very clearly that human planning requires divine guidance.

Lydia’s Household Converted in Philippi (16:11-15)

- Paul preaches every opportunity he is given
- Lydia hears and accepts the message
- Paul baptizes them all.

A Slave Girl is Healed (16:16-24)

- She seemed to affirm Paul's ministry, in a very annoying way
- Clear that she was possessed
- Paul heals her, somewhat due to a frustration
- Owners of the slave girl have Paul and Silas brought before the court

Paul and Silas received a treatment that should not have been given to a Roman citizen. This will come back as a benefit for being able to proclaim the gospel.

A Jailer's Household is Converted (16:25-34)

Despite the pain and humiliation of being stripped, beaten, and flogged Paul and Silas begin to worship the Lord

- Worship and praise changes the situation
- People in your immediate circle pay attention
- Opportunities for sharing the gospel are presented.

Paul and Silas Released (16:35-40)

- Did not leave without protest
 - Could have set a dangerous precedent for both missionaries and Christians in Phillipi
- A public apology is insisted upon

Opportunity for the Gospel to be proclaimed!