

TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON ACTS (VOL II)

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Acts, Part II. It is good that you have the desire to continue the study of Luke's book, Acts.

As with Part I, the lessons were selected and the intent briefly stated for each. You are quite welcome, though, to use the material to your best advantage. The text is outlined according to Don DeWelts's outline in *Acts Made Actual*. Questions are with each lesson. Some of them are answered in the comments, some from the text itself, and some you will need to work on from other sources. This book is designed to help teach you to ask your own questions. The background material from lesson one is not repeated.

The section of Acts that you are now beginning to study, chapters 13-28, records the spread of Christianity in the major parts of the Roman World. It was mostly revealed through the "adventures" of one Saul of Tarsus who became Paul the apostle. The "Church in the Uttermost Part of the Earth" is the way DeWelt described this section, surely a most excellent description of the text before you.

LESSON ONE

The Church in the Uttermost Part of the Earth (13:1- 28:31)

The First Missionary Journey
(13:1 - 14:28)

At Antioch, 13: 1-3

13 *Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.*

2 While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

13:1 - We begin our study of this section of Acts with our "base of operations" switching from Jewish Jerusalem to Gentile Antioch, from Peter to Paul, from an ethnic religion and theology to a religion worldwide in scope and international in its theology. God had made two into one (Eph. 2), and men were slowly but inexorably coming to this understanding with the effects seen in their preaching and personal work.

We know nothing of the men Luke named except Saul and Barnabas/Joseph. We know not whether these men were all possessors of a special gift (a prophet plus a teacher), some had one gift, or even if "the teacher" was just a designation of a position that some were filling (even as we do today) with nothing of a special gift meant.

V. 2 - Two things characterized these men that seemed important to Luke: they served God, and they fasted. The word for worshipping is translated ministering (serving) in other versions (KJV, ASV, NASV, etc.). It does not mean to serve as a slave, but refers to any voluntary service to men or religious service to God.

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Fasting had been practiced for centuries, and is yet today. The O.T. day of fasting, appointed by God, was the 10th day of the 7th month, called the day of atonement. On this day, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sins of the people. Five days later, an eight-day feast began, called the Feast of Tabernacles, which was a feast of celebration and fellowship.

Some Christians in the early church fasted, though no command to do so was given. Fasting seems of more value when it is voluntary, deriving its worth from the attitude of the one doing it rather than being a prescribed ritual that is (perfunctorily) observed.

The announcement of the Holy Spirit, however it was made, indicated a special assignment for Joseph/Barnabas and Saul/Paul. The men were serving, but were to do so in a special manner. They were “to be separated” in the same sense that a person marks off an object from their objects (as Paul to the apostleship, Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:15). The word is also used in the Greek O.T., Lev. 20:26; Num. 8:11.

They were called to do the work of evangelization, especially to Gentiles, wherever they were, although they did not exclude the Jews. Saul will now begin to do largely what he was selected to do (9:15).

V. 3 - Just how binding the action of the Antioch church is regarding Saul and Barnabas is not clear, and thus a matter of some dispute. Since we do not know if the actions were commanded, or were just done by common consent, etc., it is difficult to decide how much or how little this example is to be followed today. It is surely doubtful that we can do everything the church did during the day of the apostles. The major thing we may be able to “restore” is the use of the apostle’s doctrine as the touchstone of our teaching. We may or may not consider their methods, etc. as anything more than “a” way to do God’s work.

We assume that the whole church sent the two out, as it is to the whole church they report when they return (14:26ff). However, it is possible that only some actually took part in the “laying-on” of hands. It should also be observed that Saul was an apostle, quite apart from this act (Gal. 1), though Barnabas was called an apostle (14:4, 14) while on this journey. The word used for “sent-off” is also used of divorce - hence, the men “split” from the church.

At Seleucia, 13:4

4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

V. 4 - We assume that at least the general direction for their work was given the two men by the Holy Spirit, though it is not explicitly stated. Cyprus had already been the place of preaching, 11:19, 20.

At Salamis, 13:5

5 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.

V. 5 - Salamis was the major city of the island, and a sizable group of Jews lived there. Jewish synagogues were readily available to Saul, and he used them well. We remember that Barnabas was from Cyprus, and that John Mark was a relative to him.

At Paphos, 13:6-12

6 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, named Bar-Jesus. 7 He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas, the magician, (for that is the meaning of his name) withstood them, seeking to turn away the proconsul from the faith. 9 But Saul, who is also called Paul,

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filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 10 and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? 11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind and unable to see for a time." Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. 12 Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

V. 6 - Paphos was the capital, and on the west half of the island (Salamis on the western half). An old city by the same name was eight miles south and east of this city, and famous for the worship of Venus (Aphrodite).

Bar-Jesus - Son of Jesus. His name was like that of Barnabas. He was also called Elymas, and was like many other religious men of his day (cf. Simon in Ch. 8) who made their living "advising" others.

V. 7 - **Sergius Paulus** = a proconsul, under the Roman senate. The island had formerly been (prior to 25 B.C.) under the Roman emperor, and thus a procurator served there, (as was Pontius Pilate, Felix and Festus). Gallio (ch. 18) was a proconsul. Such accuracy as this shows Luke to be a good historian. An inscription has been found with the title "proconsul" and this man's name.

We do not know whether to think Sergius Paulus was wise or not, when, though he summoned Paul and Barnabas, yet kept company with Elymas? Maybe he was "wising up"? Perhaps the influence of others in the Christian faith helped prepare the way for Barnabas and Paul. Certain it is that Luke's intention is to help us see that the gospel was being spread to everyone, more and more.

V. 8 - The term applied to Elymas is a rather broad one, including the likes of him as well as the men in Matthew 2, and Acts 8. It did not indicate, necessarily, something or someone bad, though this man was so.

Faith - Here the term was used to describe a body of truth or doctrine rather than a person's individual faith.

V. 9 - We note that Paul was described as being filled with the Holy Spirit. Since this term occurs in reference to many people, it seemingly denoted: 1) a given period of life at which time said people were used in a special way by God, or 2) it was a characterization of a life used of God (as of John the Immerser). Even the apostles, who were immersed by the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, were later said to be filled (Acts 4). So it was a generic term, covering a broad spectrum of ideas. Some would hold that Paul was specially aided on this occasion, and Luke was simply describing the matter for us.

V. 10 - It was a bit unusual for an apostle to treat anyone thusly, but certainly is not too unusual for men of God, as one views the whole gamut of Bible history. Many times men of God, even as Jesus, opposed those whose lives were given over to the devil, though they rarely treated them so badly. However, see II Kings 1; 2; 6; Peter in Acts 5; etc.

As we listen to Paul addressing Elymas, we cannot but suppose that Elymas, as a Jew, knew better than to be and do as he was doing. It is possible however, to be tricked by Satan (see II Timothy 2:24-26) until the "straight paths of the Lord" become perverted (turned away, aside). May we strive daily to know the truth and so teach it as it is, not in a perverted way. Note that Elymas was designated as a "son of Jesus" but had that changed to "son of the devil". See John 8:44, Matt. 23:15, 31-33.

Elymas was full of guile, (Matt. 26:4; Mark 7:22; John 1:47, II Cor. 12:16) and villainy - one who does things 'slickly' or 'easily' as a rascal or trickster.

Straight paths of the Lord - another way to describe truth is by "straight". Note Luke 3:4,5.

V. 11 - Elymas would recover his sight, although we are not told when. As is clear in v. 12,

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the action of God through Paul resulted in the conversion of Sergius Paulus.

V. 12 - The blinding of Elymas provided a means of sight for the proconsul. Faith comes by “hearing” God’s word. Paul displayed God’s righteousness in exposing what Elymas was. Sergius Paulus could “see” the truth of which Paul had been speaking. Hence, he rejected his past life and accepted the truth in Christ.

At Perga, 13:13

13 Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem;

V. 13 - Leaving the island, “Paul and company” sailed some 180 miles to the city of Perga (the seaport was Attalia, 14:25) in Pamphylia. Here, for reasons unknown to us, John Mark left and returned to his home. It later would cause Paul and Barnabas to become angry and separate, though each would continue to work, 15:36ff. It may well be that Paul later found Mark useful, if Col. 4:10 and II Tim. 4:11 are speaking of the same person. There is no point in talking about Mark’s leaving. Luke doesn’t say why and anything is a “guess”.

QUESTIONS

1. This second major section of Acts is characterized by what points?

2. What term would best describe the church at Antioch (i.e., were they mostly Jews, Gentiles, etc.)?

3. What had Paul and Barnabas been doing there? For how long?

4. What part do you think the local assembly had in the new work of Paul and Barnabas?

5. What previous Christian work had been done on Cyprus or by people from there?

6. Did political leaders in that time have men around who claimed to “speak divinely”?

7. Do you think Paul was out of order to speak to Elymas in such an (unloving??) way? Did Jesus or John the Immerser ever use such terms?

8. What did the proconsul do when he saw the Gospel in deed as well as in word?

At Antioch of Pisidia, 13:14-52

14 But they passed on from Perga and came to Antioch of Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. 15 After the

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reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." 16 So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: "Men of Israel, and you that fear God, listen. 17 The god of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. 18 And for about forty years he bore with them in the wilderness. 19 And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance, for about four hundred and fifty years. 20 And after that He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. 21 Then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. 22 And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king; of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.' 23 Of this man's posterity God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. 24 Before his coming, John had preached a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'

26 "Brethren, sons of family of Abraham, and those among you that fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. 27 For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning him. 28 Though they could charge him with nothing deserving death, yet they asked Pilate to have him killed. 29 And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb. 30 But God raised him from the dead; 31 and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. 32 And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, 33 this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, 'Thou art my son, today I have begotten thee.' 34 And as for the fact that he raised him from

the dead, no more to return to corruption, he spoke in this way, 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' 35 Therefore he says also in another psalm, 'Thou wilt not let thy Holy One see corruption'. 36 For David, after he had served the counsel of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption; 37 but he whom God raised up saw no corruption. 38 Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and by him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. 40 Beware, therefore, lest there come upon you what is said in the prophets:

41 'Behold, you scoffers, and wonder, and perish; for I do a deed in your days, a deed you will never believe, if one declares it to you'."

42 As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. 43 And when the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

44 The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered together to hear the word of God. 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted what was spoken by Paul, and reviled him. 46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us saying 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.'"

48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord spread throughout all the region. 50 But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. 51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

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V. 14 - We should not overlook the matter of travel, even if Luke doesn't bother to record the rigors of the journeys (note here II Cor. 11:26,27). Many ancient historians write about the various tribesmen who lived in the area between Perga and Antioch, and around the area. One of the greatest problems Alexander the Great had was taking his army through this area. From Perga to Antioch is some 90 miles; to Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, another 100 miles - and all through mountainous terrain (the Taurus mountains lay along the coast, with another mountain range to the north). However, Antioch was a great commercial center on a major trade route that ran eastward through Iconium, and past the adjacent cities of Lystra and Derbe. Antioch was situated on a plateau, surrounded by three lakes; and was used as a fortress city by the Seleucids against the Pisidian tribesmen in the years prior to the New Testament times. It became a Roman colony under Augustus, and thus boasted of many improvements, such as a great aqueduct. We should remember that this general area was the center of the Hittite empire (1850-1200 B.C.), which figured in several episodes of Bible times (remember Uriah the Hittite?, See also Gen. 15:20; Deut. 7:1; Josh. 1:4; I Kings 10:29, II Kings 7:6; Ezra 9:1). As is evident, many Jewish people inhabited the area, and had some friends among the local populace.

V. 15 - The text describes the basic content of a synagogue service. Luke 4 seems to indicate that the reading was done in a standing position, while the teaching sitting down. This may not have been universal but local, since Paul stood (assuming he did more than just stand up where he was and then sit down).

V. 16 - Paul's opening words may indicate what seems to be true: that those present were both Jews and Gentiles (perhaps of such as Cornelius and Lydia). Whether the term "God-fearers" was inclusive of Gentile proselytes as well as those who feared God (like Cornelius) is not definite.

His address was intended both to build on and amplify their understanding of Jewish history. He tried to show that the Jesus he proclaimed was the same person to whom their prophets bore witness; that he had come as a direct fulfillment of the law rather than a destroyer of such; and that his advent was heralded by John the promised forerunner; and finally, that the great stumbling block (the crucifixion) was naught but what God had determined would take place; hence he should not be viewed in an adverse light but instead as a stepping stone to faith in the true nature of the Messiah, such acceptance resulting in redemption for anyone.

V. 17 - Israel was God's chosen, and, as such he did great things for them, lifting them up as a people in adverse circumstances and despite their ignorance and rebellion (see Exodus 6:6, Deut. 5:15, Psalms 136:10-12). What was not clear to them, but was becoming clear, was that they were not automatically saved because they were Jews, and that the law was simply a forerunner for the Gospel.

V. 18 - He could have amplified this text, as in Heb. 3:7 - 4:13, but didn't. Moses remarked in Deut. 9:24 that the Israelites were constantly rebellious. Num. 14:22 records that Israel had tested God ten times before the wanderings even began.

V. 19 - God was closely and powerfully involved with Israel, Paul shows, building up the idea of what God did for them as a people, which included the realization of the land promised to them. They did not actually inhabit all the land God had promised, but they did control it all at times, and thus received the promise. See Joshua 21: 43-45; 23:14; I Kings 4:21.

V. 21 - This is the actual source for the length of Saul's reign, as the Hebrew text of I Sam. 13:1 is lacking and LXX omits the entire verse.

V. 22 - The big name in Hebrew history as relating to the Messiah was David, since God had made David the promise of a son to sit upon his

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throne, who was obviously to be the Messiah (see Matt. 22:41-42). David, God could see, would do all of God's desires/wishes, even to believing that God would keep his promises. David was not perfect in life, but he was faithful, which is what God asks and requires.

V. 23 - David's son was not only the Messiah, but also Israel's Savior, who was named Jesus, Paul stated. It is doubtful if his hearers had perceived where Paul was taking them in the discussion, especially since he equated Messiah/Savior/Jesus, which they probably did not do, mostly from ignorance of Jesus. Of course, the argument was not about the O.T. prophecies, so much as it was about what and who fulfilled them. Thus the presentation of Jesus of Nazareth as being the Messiah of God (cf Matt. 16:16).

V. 24 - The text of Malachi 3:1 was fulfilled in John and the specific preparation John made was the acts of immersion of people who were characterized by repentance. Of course, all knew about John's work, in general at least.

V. 25 - Many people mistook John for the Messiah, as Luke 3:15ff and John 1:19ff indicates.

V. 26 - Paul continued to build his case that in their own lifetime God's Messiah had appeared; thus there was no need to keep looking toward the future. Notice again he stated (if only subtly) the universality of the salvation in Christ (i.e., sons of Abraham, God-fearers - us).

V. 27 - Those in Jerusalem, Paul stated were ignorant of the message in the prophets, and thus condemned to death their promised Messiah. Peter stated the same point, Acts 3:17. See also I Cor. 2:8, I Tim. 1:13. The ignorance was willed in some, doubtless, but related to understanding, not outright rejection.

V. 28 - Several points needed emphasis, and one was that Jesus was innocent of any wrong doing. Another was, v. 29 that God had planned it just as it happened. Both items would be important

to those listening, since they needed to realize Jesus died, for sin, according to God's plan. That was much different than believing Jesus died for some wrong he had done.

V. 29 - Each fact is skillfully brought out: death, burial and resurrection (v. 30), and all as God ordained. We notice in Luke 24:13-43 that when the two men put all the facts together in proper relationship, they were changed men. The same thing was needed for all Jews whose ideas about the Messiah were mixed up.

V. 31 - To encourage trust in the facts, God had men bear witness to the resurrected Christ who had known him well, thus were not easily fooled, especially as the appearances were over a period of many (forty) days.

V. 32 - If the anticipation of the people in Antioch was comparable to that generally, these words would strike a most responsive chord within them: the long hoped-for advent of the Messiah had happened in their time.

V. 33 - Just how Paul meant "raised" to be understood is not so clear; it could be he had the idea of making him to be the Messiah rather than the physical resurrection. See Acts 2:36 again, and note 13:22.

The text of Psalm 2:7 is quoted in Hebrews 1:5 also, and applied there to Jesus. The expression was heard at Jesus' immersion and transfiguration. Evidently, it had to do with Jesus' whole life, as God's son, which included the resurrection; God not allowing his Son to remain in the grave, even though permitting him to die.

V. 34 - An important point: Jesus is alive, never to die again, as Peter asserted in 2:27ff.

The holy and sure (trustworthy) blessings of David were to be realized only in the Messiah, who could only bring such into being by the power of an endless life (Heb. 7:15-17; 25-28). The quote is

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from Isaiah 55:3; then from II Sam. 7:12-16. Gabriel quoted this to Mary, Luke 1.

This text and the one in v. 33 illustrate how prophetic statements are to be understood. The only sure interpretation is from the New Testament; all else is but guesswork.

V. 35 - Psalms 16:10, which, as v. 36 shows, could not be said of David, but only of David's son, the Messiah. "Corruption" is to be understood in the sense of "remain in the grave" versus "being raised from the grave."

V. 36 - **Corruption - death's decay and rottenness.** The same word is in I Cor. 15:52 in contrast to imperishable. Note that David "fell asleep" David died (a common euphemism in the Scripture, as in I Cor. 11:30; John 11; etc.). Christ brought to light life and corruption, putting death into "idle" II Tim. 1:10.

V. 38 - **Forgiveness of sins** - the Greek is like Acts 2:38. this (i.e., forgiveness of sins - justification/salvation, etc.) is what could not be obtained under the Mosaic law, though the law was, in itself, holy, righteous and good (Rom. 7:12). Only in Christ, by faith, could a person be justified (Rom. 5:1) and thus be uncondemned (Rom. 8:1). Since the law was weak through the flesh (Rom. 8:3), God did in his Son what the law could not do (see also Gal. 2:21; 3:19-22). As Paul would show in Rom. 1:17 (a fact that had also been true in the O.T. dispensation, Hab. 2:4) the "just live by faith" (not by law). The message of a Savior who could and would accept sinners was the great theme of the preaching in Acts (note 5:31; 10:43; 22:16; 26:18).

V. 39 - No reason existed now to continually offer sacrifices and observe the law, etc. However, a major struggle is evident all through Acts: To be unshackled from the law system, and trust in Christ for justification. The same struggle is still evident today, and in everyone's life, at times. For the Jews, then it was a great upheaval to leave the law behind and accept an entirely new system of serving God, and of being justified.

V. 40 - The text quoted is from Habakkuk 1:5; and not directly applied to this specific situation by the prophet. The sentiment in the prophet was about Israel in 600 B.C., in regard to their unbelief then. It was appropriately quoted by Paul and applied to his own time, since the same basic point was at issue: whether God's word will be accepted or not. Jews were punished for unbelief in Habakkuk's day; so it would be yet if they, as individuals, refused to believe what God had said.

V. 41 - The "one believing" in v. 39 is now in contrast to the "one not believing".

V. 43 - Since many were evidently very interested, the two men gave them encouragement "to continue" in the grace of God (i.e., the message of God, which would bring them salvation if they accepted it). Thus we see now a person is viewed from God's standpoint: one might not have complied with all that God has ordained, but if the willingness is present, one could "continue" in God's grace. Sure it is that a person can "grow" in grace, II Peter 3:18.

V. 44 - The interest was city-wide, even if many were not Jewish in descent.

V. 45 - The Jews who were unwilling to accept the grace of God as found in Jesus reviled/blasphemed (opposed) the apostles. Note Acts 26:11. they were unwilling to accept the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ of God (with the resultant voiding of all Mosaic law).

V. 46 - Paul was never one to run from an encounter, and the boldness was quite characteristic.

As is evident in other texts (Acts 1:8, Rom. 1:16, etc.), the Jews were the privileged recipients of the Good News - but it was never meant to be only for them - it was also to the Gentiles, as v. 47 (a quote from the Jews' own revelation!) will show.

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This text is one of the most interesting in the whole Bible in that it shows that one's worthiness (or lack of it) to receive redemption in Christ is directly related to what one does with Christ. One can "thrust" (push away; hence: reject/refuse) the message away (as some did conscience, I Tim. 1:19 or as the Jews did to Moses, Acts 7:27, 39). Such action places one in the "not believing" class, and brings condemnation and loss of eternal life.

V. 47 - The text in Isaiah 49:6 is concerned with the redeemer whom God was sending to Israel. Note Rom. 15:9-12 in this light. Now Paul applies the idea in relationship to himself and Barnabas, who were to carry the message of Israel's redeemer to the Gentiles. See Luke 2:32 as Simeon speaks to Mary.

V. 48 - The news as stated by Paul was good news to those listening who were Gentiles, and thus far had little hope of life eternal except through becoming a Jewish proselyte. Now they could avoid all such. They continued to rejoice in that fact and to glory in the word of the Lord.

We then have two classes of people: the Jews and others who refused the message, and the Gentiles and Jews who accepted the message. The difference was the decision of the mind; some were disposed to be worthy, others not so disposed.

From this perspective, we can view the expression: "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." The verb is a Greek verb and is often seen as a military term; with the idea of to arrange, or set in order. See the verb in Matt. 28:16, Luke 7:8; Acts 15:2, 22:10; 28:23; I Cor. 16:15. In each case, the individual set of the mind was the determining factor. God had ordained that salvation was in Christ; and the acceptance of Christ was totally based upon the free-will of the individual.

V. 49 - The converts carried the message to various places throughout the region over a period of time. Hence, some time elapsed before the events in v. 50.

V. 50 - The Jews in opposition stirred up people in "high places" and the former "heroes" were forcibly caused to leave the city. See here II Tim. 3:11.

V. 51 - As Jesus had instructed the disciples in Matt. 10:14 and Luke 10:11. A similar gesture is that of Paul in Acts 18:6.

V. 52 - The effect of such persecution only increased the joy of the disciples in Antioch, a normal reaction throughout the history of the church.

As we contemplate the message of Paul in Antioch, we can but get the distinct notion that Gentiles are on equal footing with Jews in respect to the most important matter of all: salvation in Christ. Perhaps this is not any surprise to you, but it surely was to countless people in the early days, despite all that had been said and written to the contrary. From the New Testament writings, however, it is evident from the following scriptures that God's purpose was to include the Gentiles in the plan of salvation which was brought through Christ, and in whom He made both Jews and Gentiles one, creating one new man in place of the two, Eph. 2:14-16. Notice:

- 1) Hosea 2:23 quoted in Rom. 9:25
- 2) Hosea 1:10 quoted in Rom. 9:26
- 3) Genesis 13:15; 15:5 as explained in Galatians 3:16-18, 29; 4:21-31; Rom. 9:6-9, John 8:39, 44
- 4) Isaiah 42:1-4 as explained in Matthew 12:15-21
- 5) Isaiah 40:3-4 by John in Luke 3:4-6
- 6) Amos 9:11-12 as explained by James in Acts 15:12-21
- 7) Psalm 18:49 quoted in Romans 15:9
- 8) Deuteronomy 32:43 as quoted in Romans 15:10
- 9) Psalms 117:1 as quoted in Romans 15:11.
- 10) Isaiah 11:10 as quoted in Romans 15:12

We thus conclude that the redemptive community (the church) does not equal Israel according to flesh, but the redemptive community equals Israel according to the spirit (or promise).

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Consider following passages carefully with their import about Jews and/or Gentiles:

- 1) Simeon's remark about Gentiles in Luke 2:30-35, plus the fall and rising of Israel.
- 2) Jesus implied in Luke 4:16-30 about God and Jewish/Gentile relations that God honored faith wherever he found it; that faith (like sin) made men equal.
- 3) Jesus taught that Israel by and large, was like wicked tenants in Matt. 21:33-45 (Mark 12; Luke 20; Titus 2:14).
- 4) The implication of the rejected invitations in Luke 14 and Matt. 22:1-14 was that the people who "made the feast" were those who willed to come, expressed by their obedience, regardless of who or what they were. Jesus used the expression, "So the last shall be first, and the first last" in Matt. 19:30, and explained it in 20:1-16, that God would honor his promises, not cease to be God; and that all would be treated fairly, whoever they were.
- 5) The implications of the various commissions given to the disciples just prior to the ascension of Jesus are that the whole creation (red, yellow, black, & white) is to share in the redemption. As others did, Peter had to learn some lessons, as expressed in Acts 2:39; 10:1-11; 11:18; 15: 6-11; Gal. 2:11-21, about the import of those commissions. Paul expressed it well in Acts 13:16b-41, 47; and in Acts 28:28. (Rom. 11:13b; Gal. 1:15-16; Acts 9:10-16 with 22:21 and 26:12-17, shows the major lesson about God's plan for Paul, and for Jewish/Gentile relationships in Christ.)
- 6) Eph. 2:11-18 contains important lessons about Jews/Gentiles: they are one in Christ.
- 7) I Cor. 10:11 says something is true about Christians (including Paul, the writer, a Jew) that is likewise mentioned in Heb. 1:1-2 (note Rom. 3:27ff here). Consider the personal possessive pronoun in I Cor. 10:1 ("our" fathers).

8) The "people of God" in Heb. 4:9 denotes a faithful people, who are exhorted, beginning with ch. 3:7, to not be unbelieving. God's people were promised a land in the O.T. times which typified heaven. The people who first received that promise of an *earthly* habitation were characterized by faith. So it will be with those who inherit the real heaven, regardless of whether they be Jews or Gentiles by physical birth. If either sort of person will become "reborn" into God's family "Israel" and thus a son of God and a joint-heir with Christ, Rom. 8:16ff; Gal. 3:25ff. Note the passage in Heb. 8:8-13 and connect that with I Peter 2:4-10.

QUESTIONS

9. Outline Paul's sermon, attempting to briefly set before your mind the main points of what he said.
10. Are God's promises always kept, or are some conditional?
11. Did Paul make some of the same points and use some of the same scriptures as Peter in Acts 2?
12. Would you say that v. 38,39 sum up the basic gospel message?
13. Does v. 40,41 indicate God could foresee the unbelief of some?

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14. Describe the exact spiritual status of those who were urged to continue in God's grace.

15. Have you ever opposed the truth because of jealous envy?

16. How does one judge oneself "unworthy of eternal life"?

17. What must one do to "glorify the word of God"?

At Iconium, 14:1-7

14 *Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue, and so spoke that a great company believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. 2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. 3 So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4 But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. 5 When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to molest them and to stone them, 6 they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country; 7 and there they preached the gospel.*

V. 1 - Iconium (modern Koniah) was also a Roman colony like Antioch, and thus enjoyed privileges many other cities did not. Any person born there was a Roman citizen, for instance.

Luke's term to describe the company of believers is like our "great multitude". As at Antioch, many of those who listened were persuaded/obedient. The procedure was the same as elsewhere: to the Jewish synagogue first, where access was yet readily available.

V. 2 - As at Antioch also, some were not persuaded/obedient. This really sets forth the crux of the whole Christian system: to so speak as to persuade people to trust in the gospel rather than in the system then held as trustworthy. If we fail to persuade them, then the result is disobedience. (Note John 3:36 and the contrast there; also Acts 14:19; 19:9; 29:24). The Jews made some Gentiles feel hostile toward the apostles. This did not result in cessation of the preaching, at least immediately.

V. 3 - Despite opposition, the apostles continued - at least until the authorities got into the act (v. 5). The Greek text indicates that signs and wonders were constant rather than just occasional. Doubtless it was such "helps" from God that gave pause to those opposing the gospel.

V. 5 - However, with the backing of the authorities, violence was in store for the men. There is a Greek term that means to "treat shamefully" (see Matt. 22:6; Luke 18:32). This and the plan to stone them, caused the men to leave.

V. 6 - The two cities and the surrounding areas were evangelized. God blessed both his messengers and those who believed them.

At Lystra, 14:8-20a

8 Now at Lystra there was a man sitting, who could not use his feet; he was a cripple from birth, who had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul speaking; and Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, 10 said in

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a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet". And he sprang up and walked. 11 And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, because he was the chief speaker, they called Hermes. 13 And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifices with the people. 14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out among the multitude, crying 15 "Men, why are you doing this? We also are men, of like nature with you, and bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. 16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways; 17 yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." 18 With these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

But Jews came there from Antioch and Iconium; and having persuaded the people, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. 20 But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city.

V. 8 - The physical condition of the cripple is specified, so that we might perceive the great news of the miracle which God did through Paul.

V. 9 - The hope in the man's eyes was there, because he evidently believed that God was with Paul and Barnabas.

V. 10 - At Paul's command, the man was healed, and proved it by springing up and walking around. Needless to say, the miracle was evident to all.

V. 11 - The crowd was correct in one sense. Only God's power could have performed the healing. The people were like Nicodemus in John

3, who knew that no mortal man apart from divine power, could do miracles. What was not known to Paul and Barnabas was what was being said by the crowd who saw the miracle.

V. 12 - Of course, Zeus (Jupiter) and Hermes (Mercury) were well known Greek gods in mythology, and clearly important in the religious life of these people.

V. 13 - Evidently the people communicated to their priests their conclusions in their native language which was unknown to Paul and Barnabas. The priests began the preparation for sacrifices to the "gods". The crowds certainly did not understand the nature of Christianity! Yet Cornelius tried to bow before Peter, and John attempted to do so before an angel, Revelation 22:8-9. All have much to learn about relationships, and whoever they are, wherever they live, no system compares with Christianity in the matter of personal relationships, either of God to men, or man to man.

V. 15 - Reacting in an arresting fashion (v. 14) and not like gods, the apostles made clear the distinctive of Christianity: God has made the only sacrifice necessary - all that needs to be done is accept it. Men are all alike: sinners, and are not to be made objects of worship. Only the God who made all is worthy of worship. We do well to meditate upon our views of people, and in what respect we see them. We may be guilty of doing "vain things" like those in Iconium.

V. 16 - Paul made it plain that the God whose handiwork was seen in the universe was the God who also had provided for their basic needs, and who had sent them to declare what else he had done for them in a greater and more important area than the material realm (see ch. 17 and Rom. 1:18ff).

V. 20 - Some think that one result of this stoning was the conversion of a young man named Timothy to the preaching ministry. See II Tim. 3:10-17. Some were not disobedient to the gospel message, but rather accepted the message of the

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revelation from God. Timothy was among those believers evidently.

At Derbe, 14:20b-21a

and the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. 21 When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples,

V. 21 - The men, going on to Derbe, preached much. Many were made disciples in Derbe. Thus the men fulfilled the commands of Matthew 28:19.

In Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, 14:21b-23

they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. 23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to Lord in whom they believed.

V. 22 - In view of the great opposition in these three cities, Paul apparently felt it necessary to make the disciples as stable in the faith as possible. Certainly his life should have been an inspiration to them. The disciples (their souls) were strengthened (as in 15:32, 18:23; Luke 22:32; Rom. 1:11; 16:25; I Peter 5:10) by Paul and he continually encouraged them to abide in the (their?) faith (note v. 23). See II Tim. 3:12; Rom. 8:17 for persecution, and the account in Hebrews 10:32ff; 12:1-17.

V. 23 - **appointed** - This word brings a question to mind which is not easily settled. The Greek word in question originally was used of voting through show of hands ; then to mean someone chosen by such a manner of selection, than to a simple act of appointment aside from any action by an assembly, etc. Acts 10:41 has the word used referring to God's appointed witnesses. We have had elders mentioned in the Jerusalem congregation (11:30), so such persons are not new.

It is evident that some oversight was necessary in each of the congregations, and this was God's answer to that need. We may wonder if or how these men measured up to such texts as I Tim. 3 and Titus 1, but some evidently did so. Perhaps some were given special gifts to aid them in their work. What is not so evident is the matter of how they were appointed to the eldership. No question but that Paul had the right to appoint men. What is the question is if the congregation(s) had any part in the matter. However, we are not told that what was done in these places was to be a pattern which all subsequent churches were to follow. So we must leave it at that. Every congregation had a plurality of elders, but it is not stated that such a fact was to be "the" pattern for all time; rather men were to be chosen who were qualified, as the individual congregation(s) desired. We do not know if these churches received any letters from Paul, but he later visited them all.

Through the Provinces of Pisidia and Pamphylia 14:24

24 Then they passed through Pisidia, and came to Pamphylia.

V. 24 - The return journey was over the same route, basically because it was one of the better ways to travel the country. Attalia was actually the seaport city, while Perga was inland.

At Perga and Attalia, 14:25 in Antioch, 14:26

25 And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, 26 and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled. 27 And when they arrived, they gathered the church together and declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they remained no little time with the disciples.

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V. 26 - **grace of God** - It is ever intriguing to notice how the expression “grace” is used in the Scriptures. This is one of the many varied uses of the term. See such texts as John 1:16, Gal. 1:15; Eph. 3:7; Philippians 4:23; II Thess. 1:12, 2:16; II Peter 3:18.

V. 27 - This is a good example of how relationships should be between congregations and those who are responsible to the congregation. The Church should do the sending, and those sent should be expected to be responsible to the congregation that sent them.

The apostles reported “many great things” that God had done through them, summed up in the idea that the door of faith had been opened to Gentiles, many of whom had stepped through it. Hence, the universal nature of the gospel message was clearly presented to all in Antioch. It is against this backdrop that Chapter 15 is to be seen.

It may be interesting to consider that no report was given to the church in Jerusalem. As records of historians will show, Christianity spread rapidly throughout the area, although much division and heresy was to take place in subsequent years.

V. 28 - As in 11:26; the men did much work in the local congregation. Surely it is true and right that “teaching” is equally important with “evangelizing” people. Paul did both, and made provision for others to do likewise.

QUESTIONS

18. Does 14:1-2 indicate the nature of Christianity - always in struggle with the unpersuaded of the world?

19. Have you ever considered the different way the message of salvation has been described in Chapters 13 and 14?

20. In consideration of the departure of Paul and Barnabas from Iconium in the face of persecution, how does one decide when to do such in like circumstances? Must one always stand “one’s ground”?

21. Is the Lyconian cripple a good illustration of verse 3?

22. Do you see people in your day who do “vain things” like those in Lyconia tried to do?

23. In what way did God allow nations to walk in their own ways, v. 16? Why would God choose to permit this?

24. Do people yet today not see any evidence for God in the universe about them?

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25. Is faith often changed (cf. v. 22)?

26. How could men who were of recent conversion be qualified for eldership? (We don't know that any were Jewish before becoming Christian. However being a former Jew would not necessarily make one a candidate for an elder by any means).

LESSON TWO (15: 1-35)

The Trouble Over Circumcision The Jerusalem Council

Without any controversy, this chapter is one of the most challenging in the whole New Testament. The reason the issue in question came up is one reason the chapter is important; and the decision of the council (both as to its significance for Paul and those who were adherents to one position or the other) and the stipulations which were laid upon Gentile believers are likewise important, since the understanding of the basic nature of the church was in question. That these issues are yet relevant is hardly in need of assertion. The matter of law versus grace is always in need of understanding and clarification. The specific items enjoined upon Gentiles are likewise timeless in importance. So we have a great chapter at hand.

The text of Galatians 2:1ff probably is the same event from Paul's perspective. It gives much important information about the meeting, such as the fact that God instructed him to go the meeting in Jerusalem. It is doubtful if Paul would have gone otherwise since his apostolic authority was in question. God evidently considered that the most appropriate place to settle the issue once and for all

was at the source of the trouble. Hence, the directions for Paul to go.

False Teachers Trouble the Believers, **15:1**

15 *But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."*

V. 1 - The divergent doctrines finally caused a sharp clash, which resulted in a "face-down" between the two groups. We will note that the Jerusalem group disclaims any responsibility for the Judaizers' teachings. We need to see that the issue was not a matter of fleshly circumcision. It was rather what that act meant: keeping of the law to be saved. It is significant that some from Jerusalem yet taught lawkeeping despite the experience of Peter in Acts 10 and his explanation thereof in the Jerusalem church. Evidently not everyone was willing to believe what Peter taught. Some years had intervened between the event in Acts 10 and Acts 15; perhaps the memory of some had failed, or new converts who did not understand the true nature of Christianity may have been responsible for the problem.

Paul and Barnabas Sent to Jerusalem, **15:2,3**

2 And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about the question. 3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, reporting the conversion of the Gentiles, and they gave great joy to all the brethren.

V. 2 - **Dissension** - The disagreement over circumcision caused discussions that were serious and extensive. The term for questionings is the ordinary word for seeking. All arguments among Christians should be seeking for truth and its