

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts

(SB_Acts 14_Paul's 1st Missionary Journey - Continued)

Introduction

In our previous study of chapter 13, Paul and Barnabas began their first missionary journey into largely Gentile populated regions. We noted the following during the course of our study of this first journey:

- Barnabas was affiliated with the church in Jerusalem and was effectively their agent (Acts 11:22) to investigate the news of many people becoming believers in Antioch as a result of the mini-diaspora that resulted from the persecution of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60 cf. 11:19)
- The disciples who studied under Barnabas and Saul for a year in Antioch were the first to be called “Christians” (11:26)
- Some “prophets” went from Jerusalem to Antioch and one of them named Agabus predicted a famine throughout the known world which prompted the believers in Antioch to send relief to the believers of Judea (Acts 11:27-30).
- Barnabas and Saul were commissioned by the church in Antioch to take the money to the “elders” of the churches in Judea (Acts 11:30)
- Herod died in A.D. 44, so his persecution of the leaders of the Jerusalem church (notably the murder of James, the brother of John, and the persecution of Peter) that is documented in Acts 12, occurred just before his death.
- No doubt, this persecution caused further flight from Jerusalem and Judea to the surrounding regions and cities such as Antioch
- The *ekklesia* or local church in Antioch of Syria was becoming the more prominent hub of evangelistic activity and outreach.
- James, the half brother of Jesus, and leader in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:13), wrote his epistle around A.D. 46. (James, the half-brother of Jesus, was stoned to death at the insistence of the high priest in A.D. 62. He was one of the pillars of the Jerusalem church per Galatians 2:9 and he did not become a believer until after the resurrection of Jesus per 1 Corinthians 15:7).
- The missions activity that was sanctioned by the leaders of the church in Antioch occurred around A.D. 47.
- Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, wrote his epistle to the Galatian churches founded on his first missionary journey around A.D. 48.
- On their first journey, Barnabas and Saul traveled from Antioch to the island of Cyprus, Barnabas’ home land
- In the second city on the island that they visited (Paphos), the Roman procounsul, Sergius Paulus, became a believer and it is likely that Saul adopted the Gentile name of Paul that he would use for the rest of his life from this man’s name
- Paul and Barnabas then traveled from Cyprus to Antioch of Pisidia where they spoke in the synagogue on two consecutive Sabbaths (Acts 13:42-52)
- The result was that many Gentiles and some Jews believed their message, but the religious Jews, the Judaizers, stirred up opposition to them and forced them from the city (13:50). Note that the Judaizers leveraged the people of the region who had wealth, prestige and social influence to oppose the spiritual Truths being proclaimed. Ultimately, “religion” (vs. true spirituality) will always combine with money and politics to wield its power and impose its will.
- Some have speculated that it is quite possible that the “prominent women” to whom Luke refers were wealthy matrons and widows since the area of Asia Minor had a higher

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percentage of such women than other areas. If they were Gentiles, then they would have been among the category of people referred to as “*God-fearers*” – those who followed Judaism in a pursuit of God, yet who had not been exposed to or accepted the truth of the Gospel taught by such missionaries as Paul and Barnabas. They could have also been Jewish *proselytes* – Gentiles who had submitted to the rite of circumcision.

- Paul almost always preached the gospel to the Jews first in the towns he visited (cf. 13:50-51; 14:2-6; 17:5, 13-15; 18:6; 19:8-9; 28:23-28; Rom. 1:16). The Jews' rejection of the gospel led him to offer it next to the Gentiles.
- Next, Paul and Barnabas traveled to Iconium and that is where we resume in Chapter 14.

Paul and Barnabas in Iconium (14:1-7)

Antioch of Pisidia was a Roman colony, as were Lystra, Troas, Philippi, and Corinth. Roman colonies stood at strategic places in the empire along frequently traveled roads. As such Antioch would have been a good place to plant a church. The Via Sebaste, the Roman road that ran from Ephesus to the Euphrates River, passed through this Antioch.¹ It was founded by Seleucus I Nicator about 281 B.C. as one of the sixteen cities he named in honor of either his father or his son, both of whom bore the name Antiochus.²

Iconium was a Greek city-state in the geographic region of Phrygia. “Iconium” comes from *eikon*, the Greek word for “image.” According to Greek mythology, Prometheus and Athena recreated humanity there after a devastating flood by making images of people from mud and breathing life into them.³ Iconium was, “. . . a garden spot, situated in the midst of orchards and farms, but surrounded by deserts. . . . Iconium, too, owed its bustling business activity to its location on the main trade route connecting Ephesus with Syria and the Mesopotamian world, as well as its orchard industries and farm produce.”⁴

In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas continued their practice of taking their message to the Jewish synagogue first. They had the same experience – “a great multitude of both Jews and of the Greeks [Gentiles] believed;” however, the unbelieving element of the Jews incited the Gentiles against them. These religious Jews “poisoned” the Gentile minds against Paul and Barnabas. Nevertheless, even though Paul and Barnabas faced opposition, they continued to “speak boldly in the Lord” and bore witness to the Truth with “signs and wonders” performed at their hand.

In time, the city was split in what they accepted as Truth. Some believed the Judaizers and others believed the apostles. Some believed that at least some aspects of the Mosaic Law needed to be kept for salvation to be attained; others believed that salvation was a free gift of God apart from any works of righteousness we might have done (Tit 3:5). Eventually, the religious crowd desired to resort to violence (Acts 14:5) and when Paul and Barnabas became aware of it, they fled the city to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia and the surrounding region (Acts 14:6) where they continued to preach the gospel.

¹ Thomas Constable, “Notes on the Book of Acts”, www.soniclight.com

² Richard N. Longenecker, “The Acts of the Apostles” in John-Acts, Vol. 9, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. 12 vols. edited by Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 422 quoted in Constable, “Notes on Acts.”

³ Ibid, 431-432.

⁴ Merrill F. Unger, “Archeology and Paul's Visit to Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 118:470 (April-June, 1961): 107-108 quoted in Constable, “Notes on Acts.”

Observations, Principles and Applications:

Observation: Paul and Barnabas did not become permanently discouraged to the point of quitting their God appointed mission for their lives.

Principle: The ultimate test that determines the depth of the believers' walk with Christ is how the believer deals with discouragement and opposition when ministering to others.

Application: Are you facing spiritual opposition or are you a source of spiritual opposition to those in ministry to others? Are you involved or just a spectator? Are you permanently discouraged and never give thought to the fact that God has a spiritual gift He expects you to develop and avail yourself to ministry?

Application: Do you encourage those who are involved in spiritual ministry with prayer? With participation or involvement? With encouraging words? With support emotionally, financially, gifts, letters, cards, emails, etc?

Application: If you are a believer who is involved in spiritual ministry to others, do you expect or require encouragement from others? (If so, the depth of your spiritual walk will only be as deep as your level of tolerance for not receiving encouragement from others).

Observation: The religious crowd will always consist of those socially acceptable and prominent types in contrast to the spiritually meek, lowly and humble. Paul and Barnabas were meek, lowly and humble men in a spiritual sense – different from the worldly meaning of those terms.

Principle: God uses the spiritually meek, lowly and humble – the weak in the world's means – to accomplish his will.

Application: Have you come to understand the depth of your depravity and plight apart from the grace of God?

Application: On what do you depend for your self-esteem in life? The pride of life (1 Jn 2:15-17). Your professional accomplishments? Your possessions? A beautiful wife? A handsome husband? Some worldly accomplishment? Praise from others? Acceptance from others, especially those in select circles? Are you a slave to the world or a slave to Christ?

It is important to note again and emphasize the fact that the book of Acts documents the historical transition that is occurring in the early to mid-First century A.D. Baker makes some salient points that we should pause to consider.

It should be remembered that the Jews require a sign (1 Cor. 1:22) and that the sign gifts were active as long as God was dealing with the Jews. God did not cut off His dealings with the Jews all at once: the cut-off was progressive. The first we read of God turning away from Israel was at the end of the last chapter. Then progressively as we trace Paul's ministry throughout the latter half of the Acts we find the turning away becoming more complete. Finally, when we come to the end of the Acts it seems that the turning away from Israel becomes final, and no doubt God ceased giving these sign gifts. We find no references in Paul's epistles written after the Acts period of these sign gifts: instead, we discover just the opposite. The gift of healing, for example, was prominent during the Acts period, but after the end of Acts Paul had to leave Trophimus, one of his faithful fellow-workers, at Miletum sick (2 Tim 4:20), and another fellow-worker,

Epaphroditus, came near dying and it was just the mercy of God that he recovered, not an act of instantaneous, miraculous healing (Phil. 2:26, 27).⁵

Paul and Barnabas at Lystra (14:8-20a)

Like Antioch of Pisidia, Lystra was a Roman colony and it was located about 20 miles south of Iconium – a normal day's journey within the Roman Empire at this time where roads were well constructed. Lystra was the eastern-most fortified city within the region of Galatia.

Important note regarding no mention of a synagogue – Luke did not mention any evangelism within the synagogue in Lystra – a fact evidently due to only a few number of Jews residing there. To Paul and Barnabas, this must have seemed as if they were on the outer fringes of civilization itself. In their lives up to this point, they had probably never traveled anywhere that did not have a synagogue – that tangible symbol of a connection to the God of Israel. If they had not pressed the limits of their comfort zone by now, they certainly did so by journeying to Lystra.

Important note regarding Luke's purpose for including the details of the man's healing – Luke had a purpose in inserting this detailed description of the healing of the man who was crippled from birth. Note the following points:

- During His earthly ministry, Jesus performed many miracles of healing and physical restoration as recorded by Luke and the other Gospel writers (Lu 7:22)
- The Lord had vested His Twelve Apostles with the power of healing and physical restoration (see Matt 10:5-15 cf. Lu 9:1-6; Jn 14:12)
- Peter, considered the chief Apostle by the early “church” (cf. Matt 16:15-19; Acts 2:14), healed a man who had been lame from his birth (see Acts 3:1-8)
- Luke is presenting the evidence to validate Paul's claim to be an Apostle with Apostolic authority since Paul performed miracles of healing identical to Jesus, the Twelve and especially Peter, the chief Jewish Apostle.

Important note regarding the man's faith – Luke chose interesting phraseology to describe this man's faith. Luke notes that Paul saw that the man “had faith to be healed.” Luke does not say that the man had faith that Paul would heal him. Luke's phraseology seems to imply that the man had faith that Paul had healing powers bestowed upon him by God Himself. There is a difference between believing that Paul *would* heal him and believing that God *could* heal him through Paul. When Paul saw that the man had faith that God could heal him, Paul interpreted that faith as true belief.

Principle – The object of one's faith is vitally important and the object of one's faith or trust has eternal consequences. (If the man had trusted in Paul, he would have not been physically healed and he would have been eternally lost. If the man trusted in the God that Paul proclaimed, the man had genuine faith and in this case received physical healing as well as eternal life). Compare Matthew 9:28-29 where Jesus heals two blind men on the basis of the object of their faith and Mark 6:5-6 where Jesus could perform very little healing in his home city of Nazareth because of unbelief.

Application – What is the object of your trust or faith? For eternity? For the temporal things in life? What are you trusting Christ for today?

Luke notes that the people spoke in the Lycaonian language (v. 11) for a reason. It was probably to highlight how the people were able to get as far as they did before Paul and Barnabas objected their attempts to worship them. People who lived in Asia Minor spoke three languages:

⁵ Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Bible Publications, 1981), 86.

Latin (the official administrative language), Greek (the *lingua franca* of the empire), and the native vernacular, which in this case was Lycaonian.

The Roman poet Ovid told of an ancient legend in which Zeus and Hermes came to the Phrygian hill country disguised as mortals seeking lodging. After being turned away from a thousand homes, they found refuge in the humble cottage of an elderly couple. In appreciation for the couple's hospitality, the gods transformed the cottage into a temple with a golden roof and marble columns. All the houses of the inhospitable people were then destroyed. This ancient legend may be the reason that the people treated Paul and Barnabas as gods. After witnessing the healing of the cripple, they did not want to make the same mistake as their ancestors.⁶

Archaeology has turned up evidence of a legend in Lystra that Zeus and Hermes once visited an elderly couple who lived there, a man named Philemon and his wife Baucis. This supposedly took place before Paul and Barnabas' visit. Apparently the populace concluded that these gods had returned. Zeus was the chief god in the Greek pantheon, and Hermes was his herald. The residents of Lystra identified Barnabas with Zeus (whom the Romans called Jupiter), probably because he looked dignified and authoritative. They called Paul Hermes (the Roman Mercury) because he was the chief speaker.⁷

Hermes (Gr.) or Mercury (Latin) was the messenger of the gods and Zeus (Gr.) or Jupiter (Latin) was the father of the gods.

Important note regarding distraction in ministry – If Satan (i.e. Satan's cosmos diabolicus) cannot discourage and drive the believer from ministry through persecution and adversity, he will resort to an appeal to the believer's pride. Paul and Barnabas faced a great and subtle form of temptation here. The power of healing that the Lord had granted them could have easily become the source of personal pride. They could have easily begun to appropriate the praise belonging to God alone. When the believer in ministry hears words of appreciation and praise for his/her efforts over a period of time, the temptation to appropriate that praise to oneself is ever so subtle. That is what makes it so insidious.

Note regarding the content of Paul's speech at Lystra – This speech is only one of two examples we have of Paul's approach to dealing with a "pagan" Gentile audience. (The other is a speech to the Athenian philosophers recorded in Acts 17:22ff). It reflects a completely different approach than the approach Paul used with those audiences that contained a significant Jewish element who were familiar with Hebrew Scripture (cf. Paul's address in the Jewish synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia in Acts 13:16-41). As such, it reflects Paul's ability to present the gospel based upon the frame of reference of his hearers. Here, as at Athens, his logic follows a pattern built upon the evidence provided by natural revelation—the providential order of the universe—which ought to lead men's thoughts from the cult of idols to the worship of a living God, Creator of all that exists. Paul develops this flow of logic more fully in Romans 1:19ff and 2:14ff. Evidently, this

⁶ Earl D. Radmacher, general editor, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1652.

⁷ F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on The Book of Acts*. New International Commentary on the New Testament series. Reprint ed. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984, 291; Howard I. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series, reprint ed. (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press and Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 237. Longenecker, p. 435. All cited by Thomas Constable in "Notes on the Book of Acts" – www.soniclight.com. Most of the better commentaries have extensive information about this legend that appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

approach was successful on occasion based upon Paul's testimony in I Thessalonians 1:9 where he states of that others had observed of the Thessalonian believers that it was obvious that they had "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."

A mob is always fickle and driven by emotion and frenzy rather than sound, logical judgment. We don't know how long it took for the Judaizers to reach Lystra from Antioch and Iconium. It probably didn't take too long though because of their desire to squash what they perceived to be a threat through the lens of their religious fanaticism. Believers should never resort to persecution of others in any way. God is powerful enough to deal with error. All we are required to do is to present the Truth and expose the error in love. Love is more powerful than persecution anyway.

It was important for Paul to return to the city. If these people really believed that he had been killed, they should have been convicted of the Truth by seeing Paul resurrected by the power of God – the same phenomenon and power that He was proclaiming in regard to Christ.

Paul and Barnabas Travel to Derbe (Acts 14:20b-21a)

Paul and Barnabas next moved about 60 miles farther to the southeast to Derbe – a name meaning juniper. Derbe was located on the eastern border of the Galatian province. Many more people became believers and disciples there (cf. 20:4). Luke did not record what the apostles experienced there, but this was the home of Gaius, one of Paul's later companions (20:4). Perhaps Gaius became a convert at this time.

The larger towns of Antioch and Iconium seem to have produced more influential churches, but the smaller ones of Lystra and Derbe contributed more young men who became leaders.

Paul and Barnabas Retrace Their Journey (Acts 14:21b-28)

Paul and Barnabas retraced their journey back through some of the cities they had previously visited with the exception of the island of Cyprus. They returned to Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, Pamphylia, Perga, and Attalia (vv. 21 & 24-25).

Apparently they did more discipleship than evangelism on their return trip to the cities where the apostles' lives had been in danger. They warned the new converts that they too should expect persecution (cf. Gal. 4:13; 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:11). The "kingdom of God" evidently refers to the messianic kingdom; however, the reference here to the "kingdom of God" does not mean that Paul was preaching the kingdom gospel proclaimed by Jesus and the Twelve. Even in Paul's later epistles which deal with that body of doctrine peculiar to the Body of Christ and the dispensation of the mystery, Paul still mentions the kingdom of God (see Eph 5:5 and Col 4:11). Furthermore, Paul instructs us in Romans 14:17 that the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, i.e. ordinances associated with the Law that governed the Jews in the Age of Israel, but "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." Therefore, I believe this reference to the kingdom of God is a reference to the spiritual aspects of the messianic kingdom that are similar between the believers of the Age of Israel who will one day enter that literal kingdom on earth and believers of the present age who have similar spiritual assets available to them. Though Christians will not go through *the* Tribulation, we will experience tribulation before we enter the Millennium (2 Tim. 3:12).

The elders (plural) in every church (singular) that the apostles appointed must have been the more mature Christians in each congregation. Note that each of these churches had more than one leader (cf. 20:17; Phil. 1:1). We do not know whether there was more than one local assembly in each of these towns at this point or not.

It is quite possible (and in my opinion probable) that elders from the synagogues in these communities who had become Christians became elders in the local churches. Elder qualifications probably developed and became more defined as time passed. Paul later states the qualifications for the office of elder in his pastoral epistles (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1).

The text isn't entirely clear as to how the "elders" were selected. The Greek word used here originally meant to elect by a vote of raised hands. Also, we see some type of precedent established years earlier in Acts 6:1-7 where the disciples in the "church" at Jerusalem selected from among them seven men who became deacons to serve the needs of the Hellenist widows. However, due to the importance of the position and need for stability and doctrinal continuance in these early outposts of Christianity, I believe that Paul as an Apostle appointed these "elders" personally.

The chronological references in Acts and the Pauline epistles make it difficult to tell just how long it took Paul and Barnabas to complete the first missionary journey. Commentators estimate it took them between the better part of one year and almost two years. They travelled a minimum of 500 miles by sea and 700 by land.

Important note regarding verse 27 – In this verse Luke notes that when Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, they reported how the door of faith had been opened to the Gentiles. This statement should not be understood as simply a statement that some more Gentiles had been saved.

Not only is it that Gentiles are being saved, but they are being saved entirely apart from Israel's covenants and promises. In fact, the main significance of this open door is that for the first time Israel has been turned away from. From now on the Jew must come in on the same basis as the Gentile, entirely apart from his covenant priority.⁸

There are many ways in which Paul's ministry and Peter's corresponded. Here are a few of the correlations that Luke recorded to validate and establish the credibility of Paul's ministry that was mainly to the Gentiles and highly controversial among the Jews. Peter's ministry was primarily to the Jews.

1. Both Peter and Paul engaged in three significant tours or journeys recorded in the Book of Acts. *Peter*: Samaria (8:14ff); Lydda and Sharon along the coast west of Jerusalem (9:32—11:2); and Syrian Antioch (15:1-14 cf. Gal. 2:11); *Paul*: 13:2—14:28; 15:36—18:22; 18:23—21:17.
2. Early in their ministry both healed a lame person. *Peter*: 3:2ff; *Paul*: 14:8ff.
3. Both saw extraordinary healings take place apart from physical contact with the afflicted individual. *Peter's* shadow in 5:15; those who brought handkerchiefs and aprons to *Paul* in 19:11. [The text does not say Peter's shadow was God's instrument in healing people.]
4. Both were God's instruments to bring judgment on those who hindered the growth and purity of the infant church. *Peter* condemned Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11); *Paul* smote Elymas with blindness (13:6-11).
5. Each had at least one long discourse that was reproduced in full which gives a summary of his preaching. *Peter* at Pentecost (2:14-40); *Paul* at Antioch (13:16-42).

⁸ Baker, *Acts*, 90.

6. Both made the resurrection a primary emphasis in their proclamation. *Peter*: 2:24-36; 3:15, 26; 5:30; 10:40, 41; *Paul*: 13:30-37; 17:3, 18, 31; 24:15, 21; 25:19; 26:8, 23.
7. Both exorcised demons. *Peter*: 5:16; *Paul*: 16:18.
8. Both communicated the gift of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. *Peter*: 8:17 ; *Paul*: 19:6.
9. Both had triumphant encounters with sorcerers. *Peter*: 8:18ff; *Paul*: 13:6ff.
10. Both raised the dead. *Peter*: 9:36ff; *Paul*: 20:9ff.
11. Both received visions to direct them into critical witnessing efforts. *Peter*: 10:9ff (Peter's vision of the sheet with all kinds of animals with a command to eat); *Paul*: 16:6ff (Paul sees vision of man in Macedonia urging him to come) .
12. Both experienced miraculous deliverances from prison. *Peter*: 12:7ff; *Paul*: 16:25ff.⁹

⁹ Harm, p. 40 cited by Thomas Constable in "Notes on the Book of Acts" at www.soniclight.com