

Acts 13:13-15 Chapter Study

- I. The Church At Jerusalem Chs. 1-7
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A. Paul's First Missionary Journey Chs. 13-14

- 1. The leaders at Antioch 13:1-3
- 2. Cyprus 13:4-12
- 3. Pisidian Antioch 13:13-48

13 Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.

From Paphos they sailed directly north to the southern coast of the Roman province of Asia, or as we call it, *Asia Minor*, modern day *Turkey*.

They landed at Perga where their assistant John Mark split & returned home.

Though no reason is given for his departure here, in Ch. 15 we learn he simply flaked out.

Paul saw it as nothing less than *desertion* & wrote John Mark off.

Why he left we're not told, but we can venture some guesses . . .

~~The~~ travel may have been too hard for him. Some people just aren't good travelers; they prefer to remain in a familiar environment, close to home.

~~He~~ was pretty young at this point so maybe he just got really homesick.

~~Or,~~ maybe he grew fearful in the face of growing opposition to the Gospel.

~~The~~ reason that most intrigues me is the possibility that John Mark disagreed with Paul's methods of preaching to Gentiles and bailed because he thought they ought to be telling Gentiles they needed to become Jews.

After all, that controversy is what awaits Paul & Barnabas when they return to Antioch after this trip.

14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.

They didn't preach in in the port of Perga because there was no synagogue there.

Instead they traveled north to Antioch where there was a large Jewish community.

Paul displayed a really sharp sense of strategy when it came to spreading the Gospel.

He went to the urban centers because he knew if a vibrant church could be planted there, it would result in the evangelization of the surrounding province.

Pisidian Antioch was a major trading center located on the main highway through this region.

To the north & east was a hilly region controlled by wild tribes the Persians & Greeks had never been able to tame.

The Romans had pacified the region only a generation before.

Antioch was the last *major* city along the road before it began winding through this wild area.

Because it was a *commercial* center, there was a sizeable Jewish community there.

As visitors, the apostles entered the synagogue & sat down to worship with their fellow Jews.

15 And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”

Since Barnabas & Paul were from Jerusalem by way of *Syrian Antioch*, they were invited to bring a greeting & share any pertinent news. They had news alright – really good news!

16 Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen:

This was a nod to the God-fearing Gentiles sitting on one side of the room.

17 The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. 18 Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness. 19 And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment. 20 “After that He gave them judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. 21 And afterward they asked for a king; so 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 for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.’ 23 From this man’s seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior— Jesus— 24 after John [the Baptist] had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘Who do you think I am? I am not He. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.’

Paul’s concern was to present Jesus as the Son of David, the long-awaited Messiah, so he gave a thumbnail review of their history.

He referred to John the Baptist because John was considered by the Jewish people as a prophet, on the same order as the prophets of old, like Isaiah & Jeremiah.

John said his ministry was to *prepare for the Messiah* who was coming *next* & that the people should *look for Him*.

Then John *pointed to Jesus* & said *He* was the One they were to follow.

26 “Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those

among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent.

Just as John pointed to Jesus as the Savior, *Paul* was now pointing to Him.

Would they respond in faith – or would they take the path John’s opponents, the religious leaders, had taken?

27 For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*.²⁸ And though they found no cause for death *in Him*, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death.²⁹ Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took *Him* down from the tree and laid *Him* in a tomb.³⁰ But God raised Him from the dead.³¹ He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people.³² And we declare to you glad tidings— that promise which was made to the fathers.³³ God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’

Paul says the *Incarnation* of God the Son had been *foretold* by the prophets.

Understand this: This was one of the earliest sticking points for the Gospel in answering Jewish critics.

The followers of Jesus maintained Jesus was *both human & divine*, that He was not only the *Son of God*; He was *God the Son*.

Unbelieving Jews considered the incarnation *blasphemous!*

Paul wanted to be clear & help them see that the Scriptures *foretold* the Incarnation.

He says it *early* in his message in Antioch to forestall the objection he knows will eventually come.

34 And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: ‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’³⁵ Therefore He also says in another *Psalm*: ‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.’³⁶ “For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption;³⁷ but He whom God raised up saw no corruption.

Along with the *Incarnation* as an *essential* of the Gospel is the *Resurrection*, which was *also* foretold.

The Psalms of David are the most consistent witness to the Resurrection.

Paul points out David could not have been referring to himself as the subject of resurrection since his grave was well known.

David was speaking of his greatest descendant – the Messiah.

38 Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins;³⁹ and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be

justified by the law of Moses.

What Paul says here is an important insight we've not encountered in the preaching of the Apostles before.

They certainly believed & taught it, but this is the first time we find someone SAYING that *justification comes through faith* in Christ, not through self-wrought righteousness & obedience to the Law.

Up to this point, we read of the Apostles teaching that faith in Jesus resulted in the forgiveness of sins.

This is the *first time* we've seen spelled out that *right standing before God* is based in faith, not the law.

For those Jews who'd tried to find an close relationship with God through the law, this would be good news.

But for those Jews who saw the law as a way to *prove* themselves *better than others*, Paul's message would be *infuriating*.

Some of the people in the synagogue really *wanted* to be close to God and all their lives had been told that by following the Jewish traditions they could secure His favor.

They knew from repeated personal experience they fell short of the standard, & instead of feeling *closer* to God for their efforts, felt *further away* because of guilt.

But others saw the law, not as a way to get closer to God, but as a means to elevate themselves above others whose adherence to the law was less strict.

These didn't concern themselves with their *failures*, they only prided themselves on their success.

Then along comes Paul with the message that in the end, *righteousness* is not about what one does, but about in Whom one believes.

That message is going to *comfort* those who are aware of their inability to obey while it's going to tick-off those who've deceived themselves into thinking they *have* obeyed.

40 Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you:

Then he quotes Habakkuk 1 -

41 'Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you.' ”

As Paul preached, he some listening were *hardening* in their opposition while others were being brought to faith. He *warned* those who were hardening to the message.

42 So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.

In a typical synagogue service, only adult Jewish males were allowed to speak.

The God-fearing Gentiles who were there *waited* till the Jews had left then gathered round Barnabas & Paul & *pleaded* with them that they would come back with more in a week.

43 Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to

them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

It wasn't just among the Gentiles that a positive response was garnered; a substantial percentage of Jews & Jewish converts also believed.

These followed the apostles around in the tradition of disciples & rabbis, which is what Paul was.

Paul had been trained under the famed Jewish rabbi Gamaliel, but had become a convert to Rabbi Jesus.

44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. 45 But when the Jews

Meaning the *unbelieving* Jews . . .

saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. 46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us:

And now they quote Isaiah, 42:6 & 49:6 -

'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'

It was important Paul & Barnabas *locate* their work among the Gentiles in the prophetic Word because many of the Jews bore a hatred of & prejudice toward them.

Some even said God had made the Gentiles as fuel for the flames of hell.

For such racist minds, the thought that Gentiles *could* be saved, let alone that they would be the *main focus* of Paul & Barnabas' outreach would be *maddening*.

Ministry to Gentiles & the question of their salvation will soon become the first great internal dispute in the Church.

48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

4. Iconium 13:49-14:7

49 And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.

This was part of the brilliance of Paul's strategy in going to Antioch; it was a hub for surrounding area.

The Romans had made it an outpost that controlled the entire region.

Located on the main highway, it was sure that whatever happened in the city would spread to the surrounding area.

50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.

Luke's mention of *prominent women* here is interesting since we know that the culture of this area readily accepted women in positions of influence.

There were many enterprising women who ran businesses & held important

leadership positions.

Because the Jews of this area were engaged primarily in commercial interests, they had access to the rich & powerful & used their connections to raise formal opposition to the Apostles.

51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Iconium was a smaller city about 80 miles SE from Antioch. Such a trip through this hilly region would be a 4 day walk for the Apostles.

1 Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.

The response at Iconium was great – many came to faith – but not all . . .

2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. 3 Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4 But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. 5 And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, 6 they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. 7 And they were preaching the gospel there.

What was it the hostile Jews could have said to the Gentiles & rulers that would incite their opposition to the Gospel?

Just this: Within the Roman Empire was an official policy of the *acceptance of traditional religions*.

The Romans knew the volatile nature of religion & held a policy of *allowing* traditional religions among the people they conquered.

What the Romans didn't allow was *new* religious movements.

These had proven to be nothing more than means by which some political rebel could gather a following and try to usurp the Roman control of one of their provinces.

So they *rejected* new religions & religious movements – in some cases using force or the *threat* of force to squelch them.

Jews who rejected the Gospel used this policy of Rome to gain support for their opposition to the Gospel.

And it's why Paul and with the later church fathers tried to show the Roman authorities that Christianity was **NOT** a new religion at all – it was the *embodiment* of all Judaism was meant by God to be.

5. Lystra & Derbe 14:8-20

Vs. 8-20 were the subject of the message a few Sundays ago.

6. Return to Antioch 14:21-27

21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city [Derbe] and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

Paul & Barnabas had rediscovered on this trip that while God was with them & gave proof to the power of the Gospel through an abundance of miracles, that did not mean life was a piece of cake.

The Holy Spirit does not come to make us *happy* but to make us *holy*.

The power of God is not a *trick* that makes things *easy* – it’s a *weapon* to wield in the midst of *war*.

Take note what they told the new believers in these brand new churches.

“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

If you listen to the health & wealth-prosperity preachers, you’ll be led to believe *real faith* means *smooth sailing*.

If love means never having to *say* you’re sorry, faith means having nothing to be sorry *for*.

Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin, Charles Capps, TD Jakes, Marilyn Hickey, Joyce Meyer, Benny Hinn & all the rest don’t have a tenth the faith the Apostle Paul had – yet he said the road to heaven was paved with difficulty.

What I want to know is, IF the Health & Wealth message is true - why don’t its chief advocates hop on a plane to Darfur or Calcutta, & hold a crusade there. Those poor souls need the message of a trouble-free, faith-filled life =

Desperately!

Why is it these hawkers of religions slogans & platitudes, these sanctifiers of materialism & greed, *stay in affluent countries*, preaching their message of unlimited prosperity to the *already affluent*?

We know why.

The fact is – faith is NOT an escape clause FROM trouble, it’s our sure-footed guide through it.

Faith in God is what guides us safely home through the storm.

When alchemy was an accepted science, the main pursuit of alchemists was the discovery of the lodestone, the material that would transmute base elements into precious metal.

Most alchemists searched for the lodestone that would turn lead into gold.

There is no such material is a lodestone – but there is a Spiritual lodestone.

Faith is the lodestone that turns trials into blessings.

It reconfigures the many tribulations and hardships that are a part of the human condition into valuable, character-shaping virtues.

Faith allows us to look at life from a different perspective.

Instead of growing bitter because life has dealt us a bad hand, faith in God convinces us that our loving, all-powerful, all-wise God is in control and has only allowed this thing to happen as the means to mold & shape us to the image of Christ.

Next time you’re sharing the Lord with an unbeliever and they reply that religion is just a crutch for the weak, you might want to consider sharing Acts 14:22.

Faith does not *exempt* us from pain. It simply *turns* it to our *advantage*.

23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

How mature could these *elders* be?

They couldn't be that mature compared to the churches of Antioch & Jerusalem.

But Paul & Barnabas knew these new churches would need some defined, designated *leaders*, so they looked for those who *already demonstrated* a level of maturity *above* their peers, & publicly recognized them by laying on their hands.

Because the apostles knew how important godly leadership is to the church, they fasted so they'd be in a spiritual state of mind to hear from the Lord.

24 And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.

Along the southern coast of Asia Minor.

25 Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

Right on the coast.

When they'd first been in Perga, they'd not preached probably because there was no synagogue.

But having been to the far reaches of Lystra & Derbe they realized they didn't need a synagogue; as long as there were lost people, there was a need to share the Good News.

26 From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. 27 Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

Their first missionary adventure complete, they returned to Antioch with a report of all the Lord had done, focusing on how fruitful the work had been among the Gentiles.

B. Controversy ! 15:1-35

- 1. Dispute over doctrine in Antioch 15:1-2**
- 2. To Jerusalem 15:3-5**
- 3. The Council 15:6-21**
- 4. Their finding 15:22-29**

We covered vs. 1-29 over the last 2 Sunday, so we'll skip them tonight.

Let me just say that what we find in Acts 15 is the first great theological & doctrinal crisis to confront the church and they handled it well.

The issue was whether or not Gentiles who were coming to faith in Jesus had to convert to Judaism and observe the Mosaic Law.

The Apostles & elders of the Jerusalem Church decided *they didn't*.

They knew that as Gentiles continued to walk in Faith with Jesus & applied themselves to the study of the Scriptures, they'd learn what God's will was.

But having settled the theological & doctrinal issue of what to do with Gentiles, they set out some guidelines to make sure Jewish & Gentile believers *could maintain close, intimate fellowship* with one another as brothers & sisters in Christ.

Last Sunday, there was one passage here that I mentioned we'd take a closer look at tonight.

It starts at v. 14 where James, acting as the leader of the council says,

14 Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. 15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:

He quotes the prophets Isaiah & Amos . . .

16 'After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; 17 So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD WHO DOES ALL THESE THINGS.'

We dissected WHY James used THESE passages last Sunday.

What I want to do this evening is ask you to take careful note of how he centered what they were seeing & hearing in God's Word.

He *located* their *experience* in the *proper perspective*, one drawn from the Word.

This teaches 2 important lessons . . .

#1 – James didn't interpret Scripture *through* what they were experiencing; it was the opposite – he interpreted what was happening through Scripture.

- a) As he listened to Peter, Barnabas & Paul share about what was happening among Gentiles, he looked for how God was *in* what they were saying.
- b) As he listened, passages came to mind, & he realized what he was hearing was their fulfillment.
- c) That's what *we* need to do – interpret, understand what we're seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking, in light of the Word of God.
- d) Unfortunately what we have today are a lot of Christians who're interpreting the Word *through the lens of their experience*.
- e) It's all a question of *what you take as your authority*: God's Word or Experience.
 - 1) Jamie wants a new car, a Bugatti Veyron. She wants it real badly.
 - 2) She read the verse that says, "Delight yourself in the Lord & He will give you the desires of your heart."
 - 3) Interpreting that verse through her lust for the Bugatti, she sees the means to acquiring it as Going to church and having a good time during worship.
 - 4) That's what she thinks delighting in the Lord means, to feel good & happy about God.

- 5) So she lifts her hands and sings and smiles and works herself into a state of semi-euphoria.
 - 6) As she leave the parking lot in the warmth of her happiness, she gets excited at the prospect of how soon she can expect to drive her own new car.
 - 7) I mean, surely God will grant her, her heart's desire now that she's delighted herself in the Him.
 - f) That's not what the Psalm 37:4 says – it says, if we delight in the Lord, the desires of our hearts will be granted by Him, they'll be implanted by His Spirit.
 - g) It's not that our desires will be **ANSWERED** so much as the **desire ITSELF** will take shape in us.
 - h) That's cool, because a *God-birthed desire*, in a *God-delighted heart*, is *God-pleasing* and will be *God-granted*.
- #2 – James knew it was *proper* to connect prophecy to current events & to see how they fulfilled the prophetic Word.
- a) He said what they were seeing taking place among the Gentiles *had been foretold*.
 - b) There are a number of cynics today, both within & without the church, who say us pre-millennial, pre-tribbers are wrong to read the newspaper with the attitude that today's headlines could very well be the fulfillment of prophecy.
 - c) Tell that to James.
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5. The Return to Antioch 15:30-35

³⁰ So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. ³¹ When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. ³² Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.

Judas & Silas were representatives of the Jerusalem Church who'd returned with Paul & Barnabas, to act as witnesses to the veracity of the letter from the Council.

Besides being elders of the Church at Jerusalem, they were prophets with a great ministry of bringing the people of God into great spiritual maturity.

³³ And after they had stayed *there* for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. ³⁴ However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there. ³⁵ Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

When it came time for Judas & Silas to head back to Jerusalem, Silas decided he wanted to stay.

He sensed his work wasn't complete and they he ought to stay, so stay he did. The community of Christ was growing so large in Antioch, it required a huge leadership & ministry team to make sure the flock of God was well tended. Imagine being in a church with a leadership & teaching team that included, Paul,

Barnabas, & Silas!

We'll examine the final vs. of ch. 15 Sunday.