

# THE BOOK OF ACTS

## *Part 8 – Paul’s 1st Missionary Journey & Jerusalem Council (chs. 13-15)*

(No. 1119.8 – - NLC)

### I. BARNABAS AND SAUL SENT OFF

**Acts 13:1-3:** *<sup>1</sup>In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. <sup>2</sup>While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” <sup>3</sup>So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*

- A. The Antioch church (modern Syria) was and is a model for modern churches to study very carefully—there was a plurality and rich diversity of gifted leaders, and no one was the “chief pastor in charge”—it is quite apparent that the *Holy Spirit* was in charge of this church.
- B. How unlike this model is the typical Christian ministry today, where there is a president or senior pastor who operates more like the CEO of a corporation and in many cases is given almost unlimited governing power!
- C. What a terrible mistake is made in many of today’s churches where one man is expected to possess all the necessary gifts for leadership, preaching, counseling, etc. No wonder so many pastors quit the ministry or end up in complete burnout!
- D. “In the church at Antioch there were **prophets and teachers**: Barnabas, Simeon..., Lucius..., Manaen... and Saul.” (v.1)
  - 1. God had wonderfully blessed and enriched this church with various ministry gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11, and two of these men were about to become apostles.
  - 2. **Prophets** - As previously mentioned [see *Section VII.F* of Part 7, p.121, the first prophets in the early church had come from Jerusalem to Antioch, including the prophet Agabus (Acts 11:27-30);

- a) “Prophet” [Gk. *prophetes* = “a foreteller; literally to show, make known, speak or say before; by analogy, an inspired speaker;” see Acts 3:24 – “prophets... foretold”];
- b) Prophets (and prophetesses – both sexes are mentioned in the Scriptures) were specially gifted by the Holy Spirit to receive revelations directly from God and to preach them to others; in a real sense, the prophets were mouthpieces for the Lord, and could often foretell coming events.
- c) Prophets are second to the apostles in Paul’s lists (1 Cor. 12:28-29; Eph. 2:20; 4:11).

### 3. Teachers

- a) “Teacher” [Gk. *didaskalos* = “an instructor; doctor, master, teacher”];
  - b) This is the first and only direct reference to teachers in the book of Acts, although the Gk. verb “to teach” (*didasko*) is often mentioned in connection with the ministries of the apostles and others (see Acts 4:2,18; 5:21,25,28,42; 11:26; 15:35; 18:11,25; 20:20; 28:31).
  - c) Teachers were men to whom the Holy Spirit had given the ability to expound and explain the Word of God to others in a simple and understandable manner.
  - d) Teachers are third in Paul’s list in 1 Cor. 12:28-29, but last in Eph. 4:11.
4. The names of these ministers are given, indicating that their graces were quite evident and manifest to the entire church body; Barnabas is listed first, perhaps because he was the eldest and Saul last, probably because he was the youngest, but the last would soon become the first!

E. “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.’” (v.2)

- 1. “Worshipping the Lord and fasting” – perhaps this was a regular practice in the Antioch church (and should be in our present-day churches as well!).
- 2. Paul’s first apostolic mission didn’t result from a board meeting or planning session—it was initiated by the Holy

Spirit as the ministers fasted, prayed and worshiped. This is huge!

3. “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul” – the Holy Spirit singled out these two men for a definite purpose.
  4. We are not told how the Holy Spirit conveyed this message, but it is likely that He spoke through one of the prophets who were there.
- F. “So after they had fasted and prayed, **they placed their hands on them** and sent them off.” (v.3)
1. NLT: “So after *more* fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.”
  2. Fasting in Acts: Acts 10:30; 14:23;
  3. Barnabas and Saul had already been in the work of the Lord for about eight years before this time—they were not novices in the service of Christ. They were commissioned and released for their new service, being sent away with the church’s blessing and goodwill.
  4. The laying on of hands in this instance imparted to Barnabas and Saul no spiritual gift or authority that they did not already possess; the church of Antioch, through its leaders, was simply expressing its fellowship with them and recognizing them as its delegates or “apostles” (Acts 14:4).
  5. They were sent out by the whole church, and it was to the whole church that they made their report when they returned to Antioch (Acts 14:26-27).

## II. BARNABAS AND SAUL ON CYPRUS

**Acts 13:4-12:** *<sup>4</sup>The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.*

*<sup>5</sup>When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.*

*<sup>6</sup>They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, <sup>7</sup>who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because*

he wanted to hear the word of God. <sup>8</sup>But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.

<sup>9</sup>Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, <sup>10</sup>“You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? <sup>11</sup>Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.” Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. <sup>12</sup>When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

A. “The two of them, **sent on their way by the Holy Spirit**, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.” (v.4)

1. “**Two of them**” – it was customary to go “two by two”:

a) **Mark 6:7**: *Calling the Twelve to Him, He sent them out **two by two** and gave them authority over evil spirits.*

b) **Luke 10:1**: *After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them **two by two** ahead of Him to every town and place where He was about to go.*

c) Examples:

(1) Peter & John (Acts 3:1; 4:3; 8:14-17)

(2) Barnabas & Saul (Acts 11-15)

(3) Judas & Silas (Acts 15:22)

(4) Paul & Silas (Acts 15:40; 16:25)

2. The Holy Spirit *called* them, *set them apart*, and *sent* them.

3. This marks the beginning of Paul’s First Missionary Journey and extends to Acts 14:28; the mission would focus mainly on evangelizing Asia Minor.

4. Their first stop, Cyprus, was Barnabas’ birthplace (Acts 4:26);

B. “When they arrived at **Salamis**, they **proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues**. John was with them as their helper.” (v.5)

1. We have already mentioned earlier in this study [see *Section II.I.4* of Part 4, p.44] how it was the apostles' practice whenever they visited a new city to always go to the synagogue first in order to proclaim the gospel to the Jews there.
  2. John Mark, a cousin of Barnabas (Acts 12:12,25; Col. 4:10), went with them as a "helper" [Gk. *huperetes* = "literally an under oarsman, that is, a subordinate, assistant, sexton"], and would quickly desert them and return to his home in Jerusalem (v.13).
- C. The **false prophet Elymas (Bar-Jesus)** and his opposition to the gospel at Paphos (vv.6-12)
1. Elymas was a Jewish wizard or sorcerer and false prophet, an attendant to the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus;
  2. Note the parallels with Philip and Peter's ministry in Samaria and their encounter with Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24)—Satan always tries to resist the introduction of the gospel into new regions.
  3. "The proconsul, **an intelligent man**, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he **wanted to hear the word of God.**" (v.7)
    - a) AMP: "He was closely associated with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, who was an intelligent and sensible man of sound understanding; he summoned to him Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the Word of God [concerning salvation in the kingdom of God attained through Christ]."
    - b) Intelligent and sensible people want to listen to God's word, *NOT* close their ears to it!
  4. "But **Elymas** the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) **opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.**" (v.8)
    - a) What horrifying judgment awaits those false teachers, prophets and professors who not only destroy themselves, but insist on corrupting as many others as possible; there is a great deal in Scripture about such people.

- b) Note how the devil is especially busy with governing authorities and men of great influence and power—to keep them from becoming true followers of Christ—because he knows that their example, whether good or bad, can have a profound effect upon many; and those who are in any way instrumental in trying to turn people against the truths and ways of Christ are without doubt doing the devil's work.
- c) Years after his experience in Paphos, Paul would write to Timothy about those like Elymas who oppose the truth:

**2 Tim. 3:8-9:** <sup>8</sup>*Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men **oppose the truth**—men of **depraved minds**, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. <sup>9</sup>But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.*

- 5. “Then **Saul**, who was also called **Paul**...” (v.9)
  - a) “Saul” [means “asked of God”] was his given Hebrew, Jewish name; “Paul” [means “little”] would be his Roman, Hellenistic name;
  - b) Henceforth he would always be called Paul in the book of Acts.
- 6. “Then **Paul filled with the Holy Spirit**, looked straight at Elymas and said, ‘You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now **the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind**, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.’ Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand.” (vv.9-11)
  - a) Whew! Lest anyone be tempted to criticize Paul or accuse him of being too harsh or in the flesh, it is explicitly stated that he was “filled with the Holy Spirit.”
  - b) Realizing that the proconsul was a sincere seeker of truth and Elymas a satanically-inspired enemy of truth,

Paul announced God's four-fold indictment against the false prophet:

- (1) You are a child of the devil (though called Bar-Jesus, lit. "son of Jesus");
  - (2) You are an enemy of everything that is right;
  - (3) You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery (showing he was indeed like his father, the devil – Gen. 3:1; John 8:44);
  - (4) You will never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord (he was misrepresenting the ways of the Lord to discourage people from embracing them);
- c) The **"hand of the Lord"** [see Acts 11:21 – often represents the presence of God's power to assist, bless, and work signs and wonders] came against Elymas (Paul didn't have to lift a hand!), bringing temporary blindness upon him;
- (1) As Paul had once been blinded (Acts 9:8-9)!
  - (2) This was a fitting punishment, as Elymas had tried to keep sincere souls like Sergius Paulus in spiritual darkness and blindness (2 Cor. 4:3-4); far worse is reserved for Elymas and his kind if they cannot find repentance (Jude 13).
  - (3) Elymas' blindness would be "for a time," perhaps an allusion to the temporary blindness that has come upon Israel (Romans ch.11), not only unwilling to accept their Messiah Jesus, but seeking to prevent others from doing so as well. As a result, Israel has been judicially blinded by God, but only for a time. Eventually a repentant remnant of the nation will turn to Jesus as Messiah and be converted.
- d) "He [Elymas] groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand."
- (1) He can no longer pretend to be a guide to the proconsul or anyone else!
  - (2) Where are all of his magical powers of sorcery now—he can neither find his own way or even a friend to help lead him?

7. “When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.” (v.12)
  - a) The proconsul was astonished by the display of God’s power;
  - b) He believed—he became a Christian, the firstfruits of Paul’s ministry in Paphos, and possibly his first trophy of grace on this, his first missionary journey.
  - c) The apostles were given great power and authority even in dispensing divine punishment, as seen here and in Acts 5 with the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (see also 1 Cor. 4:18-5:5; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:2,10; 1 Tim. 1:20).

### III. PAUL AND BARNABAS AT PISIDIAN ANTIOCH

**Acts 13:13-52:** <sup>13</sup>*From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.*

<sup>14</sup>*From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. <sup>15</sup>After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.”*

<sup>16</sup>*Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: “Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! <sup>17</sup>The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; He made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power He led them out of that country, <sup>18</sup>He endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert, <sup>19</sup>He overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to His people as their inheritance. <sup>20</sup>All this took about 450 years.*

*“After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. <sup>21</sup>Then the people asked for a king, and He gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. <sup>22</sup>After removing Saul, He made David their king. He testified concerning him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse a man after My own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.’*

<sup>23</sup>*“From this man’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as He promised. <sup>24</sup>Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. <sup>25</sup>As John was completing his work, he said: ‘Who do you think I am? I*

*am not that One. No, but He is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'*

<sup>26</sup>*"Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. <sup>27</sup>The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning Him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. <sup>28</sup>Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have Him executed. <sup>29</sup>When they had carried out all that was written about Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. <sup>30</sup>But God raised Him from the dead, <sup>31</sup>and for many days He was seen by those who had traveled with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now His witnesses to our people.*

<sup>32</sup>*"We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers <sup>33</sup>He has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.' <sup>34</sup>The fact that God raised Him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.' <sup>35</sup>So it is stated elsewhere: 'You will not let your Holy One see decay.'*

<sup>36</sup>*"For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. <sup>37</sup>But the One whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.*

<sup>38</sup>*"Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. <sup>39</sup>Through Him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. <sup>40</sup>Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: <sup>41</sup>'Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.'"*

<sup>42</sup>*As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. <sup>43</sup>When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. <sup>44</sup>On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the*

word of the Lord. <sup>45</sup>When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.

<sup>46</sup>Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup>For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” <sup>48</sup>When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

<sup>49</sup>The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. <sup>50</sup>But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. <sup>51</sup>So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. <sup>52</sup>And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

#### A. John Mark returns to Jerusalem (v.13)

1. John’s departure would become a major issue of contention between Paul and Barnabas later on (Acts 15:36-39), where Luke uses stronger language to describe John’s action (v.38): “Paul did not think it wise to take him [John Mark], because he had **deserted them** in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.”
2. We are not told why John left them, but we will examine this further in Acts 15 when we study the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas concerning the matter.

#### B. **Paul’s message in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch** (vv.14-41)

1. Once again, the apostles take the message of salvation *first* to the Jews [see *Section II.B* on p.132].
2. “After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them [Paul and Barnabas], saying, ‘Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.’” (v.15)
3. Paul was always ready “in season and out” to preach the gospel, and this was not an opportunity to be passed up!

4. In his message, Paul first traced their Jewish history from Egypt, through the judges, and then on to their first two kings, Saul and David (vv.17-22);
  5. He then explained how God brought the Savior Jesus from David's descendants, and he presented the good news of Christ to them, emphasizing His death, burial and resurrection (vv.23-37); [Note the similarities with Peter's sermons recorded earlier in the book of Acts].
  6. Paul's final appeal to his audience (vv.38-41):
    - a) There is **forgiveness** of sins through Jesus (v.38);
    - b) There is **justification** for everyone who believes, a justification that could not be obtained through the Law of Moses (v.39); Paul would later expound in much greater depth on the doctrine of justification in his epistle to the Romans;
    - c) A **stern warning** not to fulfill the words of the prophet Habakkuk (Hab. 1:5) by scoffing and rejecting the good news through unbelief (vv.40-41);
- C. Mixed response to the apostles' ministry in Pisidian Antioch (vv.42-52)
1. Many Jews and converts to Judaism embraced the apostles' message, inviting them to return the following Sabbath (vv.42-43)
  2. "On the next Sabbath almost **the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord**. When the **Jews** saw the crowds, they **were filled with jealousy** and talked abusively against what Paul was saying." (vv.44-45)
    - a) What an impact Paul's message had!
    - b) But once again we return to the familiar refrain: God moves, hearts are touched, and opposition forms—all because of JEALOUSY!
    - c) Certain Jews in leadership would have felt threatened when they saw the crowds leaving them and flocking toward the apostles, which led them to vehemently oppose them:

- d) NKJV: “But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and **contradicting** and **blaspheming**, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.
3. “Then Paul and Barnabas **answered them boldly**: ‘We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and **do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life**, we now turn to the Gentiles.’” (v.46)
- a) Note yet again the *boldness* of God’s apostles—they were not well-versed in soft-speak or political correctness!
- b) The apostles’ indictment against those who were rejecting the good news of Christ: “You judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life” (NAS)—God offered them salvation, but they had disqualified themselves!
- c) “Consider” (judge) yourselves [Gk. *krino* = “to decide (mentally or judicially); by implication to try, condemn, damn, decree, determine, esteem, judge, ordain, sentence”]; these Jews had literally decreed, ordained and damned themselves unworthy or unsuitable of eternal life!
- d) AMP: “And Paul and Barnabas spoke out plainly and boldly, saying, ‘It was necessary that God’s message [concerning salvation through Christ] should be spoken to you first. But since you thrust it from you, **you pass this judgment on yourselves that you are unworthy of eternal life** and out of your own mouth you will be judged. [Now] behold, we turn to the Gentiles (the heathen).’”
4. Because of the Jews’ rejection, the apostles announced that they would now turn to the Gentiles with the message of salvation, citing Isaiah 49:6 as their mandate (vv.46-47):
- a) “**We now turn to the Gentiles**. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord.”
- b) Interestingly, in Isaiah 49:6 God is speaking to the Messiah when He says, “I have set You as a light to the

Gentiles, that You should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.” But the Spirit of God permits the servants of the Messiah to apply these words to themselves, since they were His instruments in bringing light and salvation to the Gentile nations.

- c) The apostles’ announcement no doubt infuriated the Jews, but it brought great joy to the Gentiles.
5. “The **word of the Lord spread through the whole region**. But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” (vv.49-52)
- a) In spite of the Jews opposition, the word of God continued to spread throughout the land.
  - b) Paul and Barnabas were forcibly evicted from the area, and in accordance with the Christ’s instructions, they **shook off the dust from their feet**:

**Luke 9:5:** *If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them.*

**Luke 10:10-12:** <sup>10</sup>*But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup>“Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.” <sup>12</sup>I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.*

- c) The original idea behind this gesture was that the community against which it was directed was doomed (possibly self-doomed) to destruction—a destruction so thorough that it extended to its very dust, which must therefore be removed. It was a sign of repudiation for their rejection of God’s word and a severance of responsibility on the part of the apostles.
- d) The apostles’ shaking off the dust from their feet did not in this instance imply a complete break in their

relations with Pisidian Antioch, for they had left a body of believers there whom they would be visiting again some months later on their return to Antioch (Acts 14:21).

- e) Rather than leaving in defeat and dejection, all were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit (v.52).

**D. Special notes on v.48:** “When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and **all who were appointed for eternal life believed.**”

1. AMP: “As many as were **destined** (appointed and ordained) to eternal life believed.”
2. NLT: “All who were **chosen** for eternal life became believers.”
3. KJV: “As many as were **ordained** to eternal life believed.”
4. The phrase, “all who were appointed to eternal life believed” has been the subject of much controversy.
5. The debate centers on the words “appointed” and “believed,” and more specifically, the order—which comes first, the *appointing* or the *believing*?
6. “**Appointed**” [Gk. *tasso* = “to arrange in an orderly manner, that is, assign or dispose (to a certain position or lot); to appoint, determine, ordain, set”]; the essence of the word’s meaning is to place something in a certain rank or order and is derived from arranging or disposing a body of soldiers in regular military order.
7. The word *tasso* is used only eight times in the New Testament:
  - a) **Mat. 28:16 (NKJV):** “To the mountain which Jesus had **appointed** for them”;
  - b) **Luke 7:8 (KJV):** “For I also am a man **set** under authority”; appointed, or designated as a soldier, to be under the authority of another;
  - c) **Acts 15:2 (NIV):** “So Paul and Barnabas were **appointed** [by the church], along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem”;

- d) **Acts 22:10 (NKJV):** “You [Paul] will be told all things which are **appointed** [by the Lord Jesus] for you to do”
  - e) **Acts 28:23 (NKJV):** “So when they [the Romans] had **appointed** him [Paul] a day”
  - f) **Rom. 13:1 (KJV):** “The powers that be [civil authorities] are **ordained** of God”;
  - g) **1 Cor. 16:15 (NIV):** “They have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.”
8. In the Scripture references listed above, the word is used to denote the following:
- a) To command or designate (Mat. 28:16; Acts 22:10; 28:23);
  - b) To institute, constitute, ordain or appoint (Rom. 13:1)
  - c) To determine, appoint or resolve (Acts 15:2);
  - d) To place or subject under the authority of another (Luke 7:8);
  - e) To devote to (1 Cor. 16:15);
9. Some have suggested that the real meaning of the expression “**all who were appointed for eternal life believed**” simply states that they had the *internal disposition* or inclination within themselves to believe and receive eternal life. But the word *tasso* is never used to denote an internal disposition or inclination arising from one’s own self. The word uniformly conveys the idea of an ordering, disposing, or arranging from *without*; that is, from an outside source or authority, not the individual himself;
10. Being appointed for eternal life does not properly refer to an eternal decree, or directly to the doctrine of election, though some infer that; it simply refers to their being *disposed* to embrace eternal life. **They were then inclined by an influence outside of themselves that disposed them to embrace eternal life.** That this was done by the influence of the **Holy Spirit** and the operation of **God’s grace** is clear from many parts of the New Testament:

- a) **Tit. 3:3-5:** <sup>3</sup>*At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.* <sup>4</sup>*But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared,* <sup>5</sup>**He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and *renewal by the Holy Spirit.***
- b) **John 1:12-13:** <sup>12</sup>*Yet to all who **received Him**, to those who **believed in His name**, He gave the right to become children of God—* <sup>13</sup>**children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.**
- c) **John 6:37,44,63-65:** <sup>37</sup>*“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away...”* <sup>44</sup>**No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day...** <sup>63</sup>*The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.* <sup>64</sup>*Yet there are some of you who do not believe.”* **For Jesus had KNOWN FROM THE BEGINNING which of them did not believe and who would betray Him.** <sup>65</sup>*He went on to say, “This is why I told you that **no one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled him.**”*
- d) **Eph. 2:4-9:** <sup>4</sup>*But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,* <sup>5</sup>**made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved...** <sup>8</sup>*For it is by grace you have been saved, **through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—*** <sup>9</sup>**not by works, so that no one can boast.**
11. As noted in Part 7 of this study [see Section VI.G. on p.117], even **repentance**, man’s first response to God’s invitation to salvation, **must be granted by God Himself**; it is God who opens the heart, enabling the sinner to turn to Him:
- a) **Acts 11:18:** *When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, **God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.**”*

- b) **2 Tim. 2:24-26:** <sup>24</sup>*And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. <sup>25</sup>Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, **in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,** <sup>26</sup>and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.*
- c) **Acts 16:13-15:** [In Philippi] <sup>13</sup>*On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. <sup>14</sup>One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. **The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.** <sup>15</sup>When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.*

12. Being appointed to eternal life does seem to *imply* **sovereign election:** God *disposed* them to embrace eternal life. Many view this verse as a simple statement on the sovereign election of God, emphasizing that it should be taken at its face value and believed. The Bible definitely teaches that God chose some before the foundation of the world to be in Christ, and He gave them to Christ and enabled them to come to Christ. That God does this according to a plan in His own mind—a plan which is unchangeable as He Himself is unchangeable—is clear from numerous Scriptures:

- a) **Rom. 11:5-6 (NKJV):** <sup>5</sup>*Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the **election of grace.** <sup>6</sup>And **if by grace, then it is no longer of works;** otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.*
- b) **2 Tim. 1:8-9:** <sup>8</sup> ... God, <sup>9</sup>*who has saved us and called us to a holy life—**not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace.** This*

*grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.*

- c) **Eph. 1:4-13:** *<sup>4</sup>For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love <sup>5</sup>He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will—<sup>6</sup>to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves... <sup>11</sup>In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, <sup>12</sup>in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory. <sup>13</sup>And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.*
- d) **John 17:6,9:** *<sup>6</sup>I have revealed You to those whom You gave Me out of the world. They were Yours; You gave them to Me and they have obeyed Your word... <sup>9</sup>I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those You have given Me, for they are Yours.*
- e) **Rom. 8:28-30:** *<sup>28</sup>And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup>And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified.*

13. Jesus and the apostles make frequent references to God's "elect" or "chosen" in the New Testament; in every case, it is God who is doing the choosing or electing. Regardless of our difficulty in understanding the concept of divine election, we simply cannot ignore or dismiss these Scriptures as irrelevant:

- a) **"Elect"** or **"chosen"** [Gk. *eklektos* = "From *eklegomai* = "to select, choose (by implication favorite); chosen, elect"]

- b) **Mark 13:20,22,27:** <sup>20</sup>*If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the **elect**, whom He has **chosen**, He has shortened them...* <sup>22</sup>*For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the **elect**—if that were possible...* <sup>27</sup>*And He will send His angels and gather His **elect** from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.*
- c) **Mat. 22:14:** *For many are invited [“called”], but few are **chosen**.*
- d) **Luke 18:7:** *And will not God bring about justice for His **chosen ones** [“elect” – KJV], who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off?*
- e) **John 15:16:** *You did not **choose** Me, but I **chose** you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in My name.*
- f) **Rom. 8:33:** *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has **chosen** [“God’s elect” – KJV]? It is God who justifies.*
- g) **Col. 3:12 (NKJV):** *Therefore, as the **elect** of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;*
- h) **2 Tim. 2:10:** *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the **elect**, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.*
- i) **Tit. 1:1:** *Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's **elect** and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness...*
- j) **1 Pet. 1:1-2 (NKJV):** <sup>1</sup>*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup>**elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.***
- k) **Rev. 17:14:** *They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is Lord of*

*lords and King of kings—and with Him will be His called, **chosen** and faithful followers.*

14. However, the Bible teaches with equal emphasis that **man is a free moral agent** and that if he will accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, he will be saved. Every man, woman and child must give an account before God, and **all will be judged according to what they have done** (Rev. 20:12-13), not according to their election! God would be unjust if *He* were to blame for someone not believing in Christ and ending up in eternal damnation.
15. **Divine election and human responsibility are both scriptural truths, and neither should be emphasized at the expense of the other.** While there seems to be a conflict between the two, this conflict exists only in the human mind, and not in the mind of God.
16. Men are damned by their own choice and not by any act of God; those who go to hell disqualified themselves, or as the apostles stated in v.46, they have “judged themselves unworthy of eternal life.”
17. It is no coincidence both divine election and human responsibility are juxtaposed in the same passage of Scripture, and the two points in question are (1) eternal life (2) their response to the word of God (vv.46-48):
  - a) The **Jews** had judged, decreed, ordained and damned THEMSELVES unworthy of eternal life by rejecting the word of God: this clearly emphasizes human responsibility in salvation [see *Section C.3* on p.139]: they rejected the word of God, they disqualified themselves—they brought this on themselves, and no outside influence is implicated;
  - b) The **Gentiles** honored the word of God and believed because God had decreed/appointed these unworthy Gentiles to inherit eternal life: they responded positively to the word of God and believed.
18. If all mankind received its just due, then all would be lost. But God in grace stoops down and saves some. Does He have a right to do this? Of course He does. The doctrine of the sovereign election of God is a teaching that gives God His proper place as the Ruler of the universe who can do as

He chooses and who will never choose to do anything unrighteous or unkind. Many of our difficulties with this subject would be solved if we would remember the following: “The sovereignty of God is absolute; yet it is never exercised in condemning men who ought to be saved, but rather has resulted in the salvation of men who deserved to be lost.” Paul expounds on this in a very difficult and challenging passage of Scripture:

**Rom. 9:9-24:** <sup>9</sup>For this was how the promise was stated: “At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.” <sup>10</sup>Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. <sup>11</sup>Yet, **before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand:** <sup>12</sup>not by works but by Him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” <sup>13</sup>Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” <sup>14</sup>What then shall we say? **Is God unjust? Not at all!** <sup>15</sup>For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” <sup>16</sup>It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. <sup>17</sup>For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display My power in you and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” <sup>18</sup>Therefore God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden. <sup>19</sup>One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who resists His will?” <sup>20</sup>But **who are you, O man, to talk back to God?** “Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it, ‘Why did You make me like this?’” <sup>21</sup>Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? <sup>22</sup>What if God, choosing to show His wrath and make His power known, bore with great patience the objects of His wrath—prepared for destruction? <sup>23</sup>What if He did this to make the riches of His glory known to the **objects of His mercy, whom He prepared in advance** for glory—<sup>24</sup>even us, whom He also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

19. God has made it very clear in His word that **it is never His will for anyone to perish** in eternal damnation and it is His will that *all* come to repentance:
- a) **John 3:16:** *For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that **WHOEVER believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.***
  - b) **2 Pet. 3:9 (NKJV):** *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, **not willing that ANY should perish but that ALL should come to repentance.***
  - c) **1 Tim. 2:3-4 (KJV):** *<sup>3</sup>For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; <sup>4</sup>who will have **ALL MEN to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.***

#### IV. PAUL AND BARNABAS AT ICONIUM

**Acts 14:1-7:** *<sup>1</sup>At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. <sup>2</sup>But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. <sup>3</sup>So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of His grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. <sup>4</sup>The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. <sup>5</sup>There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. <sup>6</sup>But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, <sup>7</sup>where they continued to preach the good news.*

- A. “At **Iconium** Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.” (v.1)
- 1. As noted repeatedly [see *Section II.I.4* of Part 4, p.44, *Section II.B* on p.132 & *Section III.B.1* on p.138 of Part 8], the apostles once again followed their usual practice of

going *first* to the Jews at their synagogue to deliver the good news of Jesus Christ.

2. They spoke so effectively [“with such power” – AMP] that a great number [“multitude” – KJV] of Jews and Gentiles believed.
  - a) Interestingly, this comes right on the heels (no pun intended!) of the apostles shaking the dust off of their feet at Pisidian Antioch;
  - b) But here at Iconium, large numbers embrace the preaching of Paul and Barnabas.
- B. “But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.” (v.2)
  1. “Refused to believe” [Gk. *apeitheo* = “to disbelieve (willfully and perversely); disobedient”] – they were willfully refusing to believe.
  2. Throughout the Book of Acts, it was the unbelieving Jews who were most often the instigators of opposition against the apostles, though they themselves were not always the persecutors—they were masters at stirring up the Gentiles to carry out their wicked schemes.
- C. “So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the **Lord, who confirmed the message of His grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.**” (v.3)
  1. Despite the opposition and obvious trouble that was brewing, the apostles remained in Iconium for a long time, preaching boldly in the Lord.
  2. They preached the message [“word” – KJV] of His grace [see Acts 20:24, 32].
  3. God confirmed the apostles’ ministry with miraculous signs and wonders:
    - a) NLT: “The Lord proved their message was true by giving them power to do miraculous signs and wonders.”
    - b) See Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3-4; 2 Cor. 12:12.

D. When the apostles (**Paul and Barnabas** are both called apostles in vv.4 & 14) learned of a plot amongst some Jews and Gentiles to assault and stone them, they **fled to Lystra and Derbe**, cities of Lycaonia. (vv.4-6)

1. On this particular occasion, the apostles *fled* from impending danger; in many other instances, the early Christians took their stand (even unto death, as with Stephen) and seemed to remain in a place in spite of persecution and danger.
2. Why did they escape at times and stand their ground at others? There is no clear explanation.
3. Jesus taught His disciples to be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves,” and “when they persecute you in this city, flee to another;” but He also told them “not to fear those who kill the body” (Mat. 10:16-28).
4. In other words, there is no set code of conduct or blanket rules concerning these matters. The overarching principle throughout the Book of Acts is the fact that the Christians were led, guided and controlled by the Holy Spirit.

E. “Where they continued to preach the good news.” (v.7)

1. Even when persecution scattered the Christians, they “preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4).
2. Paul and Barnabas did not lay low, hide out or sit still—they kept right on preaching the gospel!
3. Whenever one door closed, they moved on to the next open door and continued taking the message of God’s grace.

## V. PAUL AND BARNABAS AT LYSTRA AND DERBE

**Acts 14:8-20:** <sup>8</sup> *In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked.* <sup>9</sup> *He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed* <sup>10</sup> *and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.*

<sup>11</sup> *When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!”* <sup>12</sup> *Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes*

because he was the chief speaker. <sup>13</sup>The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

<sup>14</sup>But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: <sup>15</sup>“Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. <sup>16</sup>In the past, He let all nations go their own way. <sup>17</sup>Yet He has not left Himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” <sup>18</sup>Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

<sup>19</sup>Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. <sup>20</sup>But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

A. In Lystra, a **man crippled from birth is miraculously healed.**  
(vv.8-10)

1. Paul “saw that he had faith to be healed” (v.9)—obviously a supernatural discernment given to Paul by the Holy Spirit, possibly through a word of knowledge or the discerning of spirits [see 1 Cor. 12:7-11].
2. Paul called out [“said with a loud voice” – KJV], “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

B. “When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, ‘The **gods have come down to us in human form!**’” (v.11)

1. Since the miracle had been performed openly, and since Paul had attracted considerable attention by speaking in a loud voice, the crowd was greatly impressed.

2. These Lycaonians were so given to idol worship that they believed their ‘gods’ had now visited them in the human form of Paul and Barnabas!
- C. The crowd thought Barnabas was the god Zeus, and Paul was the god Hermes; they were actually making preparations to offer sacrifices to them. (vv.12-13)
1. Zeus, the Greek mythological god believed to be the father of all the other gods and men, was the patron god of Lystra and his temple was there; it is apparent from the text that they had a priest and the people offered animal sacrifices to him.
  2. Hermes was believed to be the messenger of the gods, and they assumed Paul was Hermes “because he was the chief speaker.”
  3. When God uses one of His servants, particularly in working miraculous signs and wonders (as with Paul in the healing of the cripple here), there is a subtle danger far more pernicious than all the other forms of persecution or opposition—it is worship! Not the worship of God, but the tendency for people to idolize and exalt the human instrument beyond proper measure. They begin to focus their attention, not on Christ, but on His servant.
  4. The Scriptures explain that one of our greatest tests is not suffering, but praise:
    - a) **Prov. 27:21:** *The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but **man is tested by the praise he receives.***
    - b) We saw earlier in **Acts 12:21-23** how Herod failed such a test and it resulted in his untimely death [see *Section X.C.* of Part 7 on p.126]:
 

*<sup>21</sup>On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. <sup>22</sup>They shouted, “**This is the voice of a god, not of a man.**” <sup>23</sup>Immediately, **because Herod did not give praise to God**, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.*
  5. The apostles were always very careful to turn any such glory or praise immediately and directly back to God:

- a) Acts 3:11-12 – [Peter, after the healing of the crippled beggar at the temple]: “**Why do you stare at us** as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” [see *Section II.B* of Part 4 on p.41];
  - b) Acts 10:25-26 – [Peter, when Cornelius fell at his feet in reverence]: “Stand up... **I am only a man** myself.” [see *Section III.B* of Part 7 on p.109].
- D. And when the Lycaonians were about to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, they vehemently urged the crowd to stop and turn to the living God. (vv.14-17)
- 1. “But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they **took their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting**: ‘Men, why are you doing this? **We too are only men**, human like you.’” (vv.14-15)
  - 2. “We are bringing you good news, telling you to **turn from these worthless things to the living God**, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.” (v.15)
    - a) Putting men on a pedestal is folly—the apostles warned them that such activities are worthless and vain.
    - b) They were bringing the good news of a living God, the Creator of the universe.
  - 3. It is significant to point out that Paul and Barnabas, when addressing these Gentiles, did not directly quote the Old Testament Scriptures (sometimes referred to as *special revelation*) as they did when speaking to Jews; they merely pointed to creation and the evidence of the existence of God in creation (known as *general revelation*). Then they reminded them of the goodness of God expressed through His loving providence of rain, fruitful seasons, and food for them to eat and enjoy.
  - 4. “In the past, He let all nations go their own way.” (v.16)
    - a) This statement is similar to one Paul would later make to the idol-worshiping Greeks in Athens in Acts 17:30 that “in the past God overlooked such ignorance” (making images of the divine being out of gold, silver or stone) before the full revelation of His will.

- b) Paul would later write to the Roman Christians that God has given a clear revelation of Himself to all nations through His creation, leaving men without any excuse:

**Rom. 1:19-20:** *<sup>19</sup>Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, **being understood from what has been made**, so that men are without excuse.*

- 5. “Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.” (v.18)
  - a) The Lycaonians were convinced that Paul and Barnabas were “gods come down in human form” and were bent on worshipping them with their sacrifices.
  - b) With great difficulty the apostles finally prevailed in convincing the crowd to stop their folly.
- E. “Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They **stoned Paul** and dragged him outside the city, **thinking he was dead**. (v.19)
  - 1. The same troublemakers from Pisidian Antioch (not Antioch in Syria) and Iconium (Acts 13:50-51; 14:2-6) caught up with Paul and Barnabas in Lystra.
  - 2. The very crowd that had previously wanted to honor the apostles as gods now wanted to stone them—how fickle is the heart of fallen man! One minute the crowds are laying down palm branches exclaiming, “Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel!” and a short while later they are screaming, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”
  - 3. It is quite possible that the people of Lystra were offended by the apostles’ refusal to accept their divine honors, sacrifices and worship; this would have made the Lystrans look foolish and so their “love” quickly turned to hatred!
  - 4. They stoned Paul, thinking he was dead (v.20)
    - a) This was a severe beating which left Paul unconscious;
    - b) This is undoubtedly the event Paul includes in his list of sufferings and hardships where he says “once I was

stoned” (2 Cor. 11:25), and it had likely produced some of the “marks” Paul bore in his body for the sake of Christ (Gal. 6:17).

F. “But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. (v.20)

1. The disciples gathered around Paul, presumably to offer earnest prayer for his healing and restoration;
2. Their prayer was quickly answered, as an obvious miracle had taken place in Paul’s complete recovery—he “got up” [Gk. *anistemi* = “to stand up, raise up (again), rise (again)”]—suggesting he had been raised back to life!
3. It is quite possible that one of the disciples present that day was young Timothy, who lived in Lystra (Acts 16:1):  
**2 Tim. 3:10-11:** <sup>10</sup>*You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, <sup>11</sup>persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured.*
4. Paul went back into the city!
  - a) With no concern for his own safety, Paul was able to walk right back into the city where he had been stoned!
  - b) This was so that his persecutors might see the mighty power of God manifested in his restoration, and the faith of the young converts would be strengthened.
  - c) As discussed previously [see *Section IV.D* on p.151], on certain occasions, the apostles would flee from persecution and danger, but on others they would walk right back into danger! They were always ready and willing to make the ultimate sacrifice of losing their lives for the sake of the gospel!
5. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

## VI. PAUL AND BARNABAS RETURN TO ANTIOCH IN SYRIA

Acts 14:21-28: <sup>21</sup>*They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, <sup>22</sup>strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to*

remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said. <sup>23</sup>Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. <sup>24</sup>After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, <sup>25</sup>and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

<sup>26</sup>From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. <sup>27</sup>On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. <sup>28</sup>And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

- A. “They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said. (vv.21-22)
1. The apostles’ ministry bore much fruit in Derbe, winning a large number of disciples there.
  2. They then **returned to Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch**—all places where they had met with fierce opposition—but behold the boldness and courage of these men, risking their very lives for the sake of the gospel!
  3. The apostles had begun their journey back to Antioch in Syria, but not by the shortest route; they backtracked through each city where they had established churches to follow up on all of the disciples there. Apostolic ministry involves both the planting of seed and subsequent watering of it (see 1 Cor. 3:6-8).
  4. They encouraged and strengthened all of the Christians, but they did not “sugar-coat” their message—they made it very clear that they would have to endure many hardships and persevere in their faith to enter the kingdom of God.
- B. “Paul and Barnabas **appointed elders** for them **in each church** and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.” (v.23)

1. This is the second mention of elders in the Book of Acts, mentioned first in Acts 11:30 where a financial gift was sent to the elders in Judea. Elders are local church ministers (ordained by the apostolic ministry).
2. “Each church” needed elders (always plural, as explained further).
3. Note that the apostles did not appoint elders on their initial visit when the church was first founded. Rather, it was after the passage of time when the churches were revisited that this was done. During the intervening time, there was opportunity for those who had been made elders by the Holy Spirit to become manifest.
4. **Elders** (syn. with bishops, overseers, shepherds or pastors) – local leaders who care for, watch over, and direct the affairs of the church, feeding the flock through teaching and preaching sound doctrine:
  - a) **Acts 20:17, 28:** <sup>17</sup>*From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church... <sup>28</sup>Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the **Holy Spirit** has made you overseers. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood.*
  - b) **Tit. 1:5-9:** <sup>5</sup>*The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint **elders** in every town, as I directed you. <sup>6</sup>An **elder** must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. <sup>7</sup>Since an **overseer** is **entrusted with God's work**, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. <sup>8</sup>Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. <sup>9</sup>He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he **can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.***
  - c) **1 Tim. 3:1-8:** <sup>1</sup>*Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an **overseer**, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup>Now the overseer must be above reproach, the*

husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup>not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup>He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. <sup>5</sup>(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he **take care of God's church**?) <sup>6</sup>He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. <sup>7</sup>He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. <sup>8</sup>**Deacons...**

- d) **1 Tim. 5:17-18:** <sup>17</sup>The **elders** who **direct the affairs of the church** well are worthy of double honor, especially those **whose work is preaching and teaching**. <sup>18</sup>For the Scripture says, “Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his wages.”
- e) Paul was likely referring to the same group in his second letter to Timothy:
- 2 Tim. 2:2:** And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to **reliable men** who will also be **qualified to teach others**.
- f) **Phil. 1:1:** Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the **overseers and deacons...**
- g) **“Elders”** [Gk. *presbuteros* = “a senior; presbyter;” found in Acts 11:30; 14:23; **15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4** – “apostles & elders;” 1 Tim. 5:17, 19; Tit. 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1]
- h) **“Overseers”** [Gk. *episcopo* or *episkopos* = “inspection; by implication superintendence; the office of a bishop or superintendent, that is, a Christian officer in general charge of a church; bishop, overseer;” used in Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; Tit. 1:7]
- i) **“Shepherds”** [Gk. *poimaino* = “to tend as a shepherd; to feed, rule;” used in Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2]

- j) NOTE: In EVERY instance where elders or overseers are mentioned in the NT, there is a *plurality*—never just one!
- C. After preaching in Pisidia, Pamphylia and Perga, the apostles went down to Attalia to sail back to Antioch. (vv.24-25)
- D. “From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.” (vv.26-28)
1. This marked the end of their first missionary journey (after the better part of a year or more)—back to home base where they had first been commended to the grace of God—their work was now finished.
  2. After the completion of their mission, as was their custom [see *Section IV.A.2* of Part 4 on p.50], the apostles gathered the Antioch church together to **report all that “God had done through them,”** *NOT* to boast about all that they had done for God!
  3. **God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.**
    - a) Faith is the only door or entrance into the kingdom of God, and God is the doorkeeper—He must open the door.
    - b) This is similar to the statement made by the apostles and elders in the Jerusalem church after hearing Peter’s testimony about his ministry at the house of Cornelius: “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.” (Acts 11:18)
    - c) This places profound emphasis on what had happened at Pisidian Antioch, where the apostles declared that they were officially turning to the Gentiles with the message of salvation:  
**Acts 13:46-48:** *“Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.”*

<sup>47</sup>For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' ” <sup>48</sup>When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and **all who were appointed for eternal life believed.**

d) Paul would later expound on this mystery in his epistle to the Romans, explaining that because of Israel's rejection of the gospel, a *temporary hardening* or blindness came upon them and a *temporary opening* of the door of salvation was being granted to the Gentiles:

(1) **Rom. 11:11-12, 25-26:** <sup>11</sup>Again I ask: Did they [Israel] stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, **because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.** <sup>12</sup>But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!... <sup>25</sup>I do not want you to be ignorant of this **mystery**, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening **in part** ["partial, temporary"] **UNTIL THE FULL NUMBER** ["fullness" – KJV] **OF THE GENTILES HAS COME IN.** <sup>26</sup>And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob."

(2) God opened to door of faith to the Gentiles, and He will close it when the last Gentile member is saved, added to the church, and the church is taken up in the rapture (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

e) As discussed at length in *Section III.D* on p.141, there is a mysterious interworking of God and man in the whole process of salvation: God opens the heart of the sinner (because of man's fallen, depraved nature) and disposes him to repent and believe; yet, He commands all men everywhere to repent and believe in order to be saved!

4. Paul and Barnabas would remain in Antioch for considerable time—estimates vary between one and two years (see Acts 15:35).

## VII. THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

**Acts 15:1-21:** <sup>1</sup>Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”

<sup>2</sup>This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. <sup>3</sup>The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. <sup>4</sup>When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

<sup>5</sup>Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.” <sup>6</sup>The apostles and elders met to consider this question. <sup>7</sup>After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup>God, who knows the heart, showed that He accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as He did to us. <sup>9</sup>He made no distinction between us and them, for He purified their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup>Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup>No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

<sup>12</sup>The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. <sup>13</sup>When they finished, James spoke up: “Brothers, listen to me. <sup>14</sup>Simon has described to us how God at first showed His concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for Himself. <sup>15</sup>The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: <sup>16</sup>‘After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, <sup>17</sup>that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear My name, says the Lord, who does these things’ <sup>18</sup>that have been known for ages.

<sup>19</sup>“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. <sup>20</sup>Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. <sup>21</sup>For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

- A. Luke understood the profound significance of the controversy that occasioned this meeting of the Council in Jerusalem; thus, he reports its proceedings in great detail in this chapter.
- B. “Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: **“Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”** (v.1)
1. These men were likely from the “party of the Pharisees” (v.5); they were legalistic Judaizers who insisted that true Christians had to keep the Law of Moses, and the proof of such compliance was the rite of circumcision.
  2. In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul goes into great depth on this issue, explaining that salvation is based solely on faith in Christ, and any attempt to achieve salvation through works or observance of the Law of Moses is under a curse. He pronounced a curse on any Judaizers, calling them “false brothers” who were perverting the gospel of Christ:
    - a) **Gal. 3:10-12:** <sup>10</sup>*All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”* <sup>11</sup>*Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.”* <sup>12</sup>*The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them.”*
    - b) **Gal. 1:6-9:** <sup>6</sup>*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the One who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—* <sup>7</sup>*which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.* <sup>8</sup>*But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!* <sup>9</sup>*As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is*

*preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!*

- C. “This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.” (v.2)
1. Paul and Barnabas immediately recognized this to be a serious issue that challenged the very foundations of the Christian faith—it was a frontal attack on the gospel of grace: “*And if by grace, then it is no longer **by works**; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.*” (Rom. 11:6)
  2. The false teaching brought the apostles into **sharp dispute and debate** [“fierce protest” – MSG; “arguing vehemently” – NLT] with the Judaizers. [NOTE: Thank God for Christian leaders like Paul and Barnabas who are passionate and zealous for the essential truths of the gospel!]
  3. Paul and Barnabas, the apostles [“sent ones”], are again *appointed* and *sent* by the Antioch church to go to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the apostles and elders there.
- D. On their way to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas visited the churches in Phoenicia and Samaria, strengthening the believers there and testifying about the conversion of the Gentiles. (v.3)
- E. “When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the **church** and the **apostles** and **elders**, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.” (v.4)
1. This is the second reference to the *elders* in Jerusalem [see Acts 11:30 and *Section VI.B* on p.158].
  2. As was their custom, the **apostles gave a detailed report** of everything “**God had done** through them” [see *Section IV.A.2* of Part 4 on p.50].
  3. It seems that from this point onward, it was an open meeting with the entire church present, for “the whole assembly” is mentioned in v.12.
- F. “Then some of the believers who belonged to the **party of the Pharisees** stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be

circumcised and required to obey the Law of Moses.” The apostles and elders met to consider this question. (vv.5-6)

1. These were Christian believers; yet, because of their loyalty to the Pharisee party, they insisted that faith in Christ alone was not sufficient—Moses must also be followed.
  2. Luke again expressed the crux of the matter: Should Gentile believers be required to keep the Law of Moses?
  3. This was the question the apostles and elders met to consider.
- G. “After much discussion, **Peter** got up and addressed them: ‘Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that He accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as He did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for He purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.’” (vv.7-11)
1. **Four leaders** would address the controversy openly in the Council meeting: **Peter**, then **Paul and Barnabas**, and finally, **James**.
  2. Peter used the testimony of his ministry in the house of Cornelius to make several important points:
    - a) They simply heard the gospel message and believed without being circumcised or trying to follow the Law of Moses;
    - b) God gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit before they had an opportunity to take water baptism or perform any religious work, openly showing that He had accepted them just as they were;
    - c) God made no distinction between these Gentiles and the Jews;
    - d) He purified their hearts, not by observance of the Law, but by faith;

3. Peter charged the Judaizers with “testing God” and putting a heavy yoke of bondage on the necks of disciples which neither they nor their Jewish fathers had been able to bear. Perhaps Peter was remembering the words of the Lord Jesus:
  - a) **Mat. 23:1-4, 13:** *<sup>1</sup>Then Jesus said to the crowds and to His disciples: <sup>2</sup>“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. <sup>3</sup>So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. <sup>4</sup>They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them... <sup>13</sup>“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! **You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces.** You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.*
  - b) **Mat. 11:29-30:** *<sup>29</sup>Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For **My yoke is easy and My burden is light.***
4. Peter concluded his remarks with a simple yet powerful summary of God’s answer to the whole question: “We believe **it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved**, just as they are.” (v.11)
  - a) Grace and grace alone—grace intermingled with works is no longer grace!
  - b) “We are saved just as they [Gentiles] are,” reinforcing his argument a second time that God now makes NO DISTINCTION between Jews and Gentiles.

H. “The **whole assembly became silent** as they listened to **Barnabas and Paul** telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.” (v.12)

1. The crowd had become silent after hearing Peter’s appeal, and continued spellbound, as it were, listening intently to Barnabas and Paul’s amazing testimonies.

2. Barnabas and Paul (note the change in the order of the names in the Jerusalem setting, Barnabas being better known there) would support Peter's arguments with much more evidence from their recent missionary journey to Cyprus and Asia Minor.
  3. No doubt, Barnabas and Paul went into great detail about their first apostolic mission, but Luke spares the details, having reported them quite thoroughly in chapters 13 and 14 of Acts.
  4. Certainly the speeches of Peter, Barnabas and Paul had clarified the controversy in many minds, but one final voice still needed to be heard...James would give the "closing arguments!"
- I. "When they finished, **James** spoke up: 'Brothers, listen to me.'" (v.13)
1. This is James, the Lord's brother, a leader in the Jerusalem church and author of the epistle that bears his name.
  2. He is not to be confused with James, the son of Zebedee (the apostle John's brother) who was executed by Herod [see Acts 12:2 and *Section IX.G* of Part 7 on p.125].
- J. "Simon has described to us how **God at first showed His concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for Himself.**" (v.14)
1. James masterfully takes Peter's words and wields them as a double-edged sword on his predominantly Jewish audience;
  2. Basically, what he was stating was that, just as God had lovingly taken the nation of Israel to be His people out of all the nations [Heb. *goyim* = "Gentiles"] of the earth (Ex. 19:4-6; Deut. 14:2), so now He was showing His concern for the Gentiles by taking from all the Gentiles a people (Christian believers) for Himself.
- K. "The **words of the prophets are in agreement with this**, as it is written: 'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear My name, says the Lord, who does these things that have been known for ages.'" (vv.15-19)

1. James quotes an obscure and fascinating passage of Scripture from Amos 9:11-12 that centers on two main points that pertain to the issue at hand: 1) the rebuilding of David's fallen tent or tabernacle; 2) so that Gentiles may seek the Lord.
2. When the Ark of the Covenant was finally brought back to David in Jerusalem, it was placed, not in the Tabernacle of Moses, but in **David's Tabernacle**—a simple tent which he pitched:
  - a) **2 Sam. 6:16-17; 7:1-2:** <sup>16</sup>*As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart. <sup>17</sup>**They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD...** <sup>1</sup>*After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, <sup>2</sup>he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while **the ark of God remains in a tent.**"**
  - b) The Tabernacle of Moses was an extremely complex structure with a very complicated order of worship; it was strictly for the Jewish people, and only priests were allowed inside the Tabernacle proper; furthermore, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year to stand in the presence of God;
  - c) By contrast, David's Tabernacle was greatly simplified—it was just a tent with the ark inside; David was not a Levite or priest, yet he would go right into the tent to enjoy the presence of God there any time he wanted to seek the Lord!
3. It was easy for David to come into the presence of God in his tent, and this is the real sense that James expressed in his interpretation of Amos' prophecy...
4. In a broader sense, throughout the Book of Acts, it has been repeatedly emphasized that through the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, the Son of David, God fulfilled his

dynastic promises to David (see Acts 2:25-36; 13:23, 32-37). This may also be what is understood by the rebuilding of David's fallen tent.

- L. "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should **not make it difficult for the Gentiles** who are turning to God." (v.19)
1. "Not make it difficult" [Gk. *arenochleo* = "to harass, annoy, trouble"].
  2. God in His grace had made a new and living way into the Holiest of All through the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19-20)—an easy approach by simply coming in "full assurance of faith," not by burdensome religious works.
  3. So why make it difficult and burdensome (similar to Peter's argument about putting a heavy yoke of bondage on the necks of Gentile disciples)?
  4. James didn't directly address the matter of requiring Gentiles to be circumcised, but those present who had ears to hear understood that they needed to stop troubling and harassing new Gentile believers with Moses' demands.
  5. God never intended for the Christian life to be grievous, oppressive or burdensome for anyone (1 John 5:3). That is good news!
- M. "Instead **we should write to them**, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood." (v.20)
1. It might seem at first that James was reversing his position, enforcing a form of legalism. But he was not putting them back under the law—his advice had nothing to do with the question of salvation—that issue had already been settled.
  2. But this advice had to do with the very practical matter of table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers. Two of his three directives dealt with forbidden foods:
    - a) Food polluted by (offered to) idols (see 1 Cor. 8);
    - b) Meat of strangled animals and blood – this prohibition was given long before the Law of Moses (Gen. 9:4), and thus applies to all mankind, not just the nation of Israel;

3. While obedience to these instructions was not a condition of salvation, it was certainly of great importance to avoid being a stumbling block to another brother or causing divisions and conflicts in the early church.
  4. In most cities, Gentile believers had to live alongside Jewish believers who had been brought up to observe the Levitical food restrictions and to avoid contact with Gentiles as far as possible. If there was to be free association between these two groups, certain guidelines were needed to see that they lived together in harmony.
  5. **Abstinence from sexual immorality** is quite different from the other food matters; nowhere in Scripture is this command ever revoked. Paul would later write to the Corinthians that such sins are in a class all their own, bringing defilement to the body which is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:9-20)
- N. “For **Moses has been preached in every city** from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.” (v.21)
1. This explains the advice given in v.20. There were Jews in every city that for generations had been taught that it was wrong to do these things that James warned against.
  2. Gentiles would need to cultivate sensitivity to their Jewish brethren so as to avoid offending them.

## VIII. THE COUNCIL’S LETTER TO GENTILE BELIEVERS

**Acts 15:22-35:** <sup>22</sup>Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers. <sup>23</sup>With them they sent the following letter:

*The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings.*

<sup>24</sup>We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. <sup>25</sup>So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—<sup>26</sup>men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>27</sup>Therefore we are sending Judas

*and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. <sup>28</sup>It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: <sup>29</sup>You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.*

*Farewell.*

<sup>30</sup>*The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. <sup>31</sup>The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. <sup>32</sup>Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. <sup>33</sup>After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them, <sup>34</sup>[but Silas decided to remain there.] <sup>35</sup>But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.*

- A. “Then the **apostles and elders, with the whole church**, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers.” (v.22)
1. The outcome of the Council was clear: it had been definitely resolved that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised or observe the Law of Moses in order to be saved.
  2. It is worth noting how wonderfully the Holy Spirit united the church and helped them move past what could have ended in a disastrous church split or division: “the apostles and elders, with **the whole church**, decided...” Once again, they were “one in heart and mind” (Acts 4:32).
  3. **Judas** (Barsabbas) and **Silas** were chosen to accompany Paul and Barnabas on their return to Antioch:
    - a) They were both “leaders” and “prophets” (v.32) in the Jerusalem church;
    - b) This was to show that the decision being delivered from the Jerusalem Council was genuine and fully accredited by the Jerusalem church. Since trouble had arisen because of the unauthorized activity of the

previous Jerusalem visitors to Antioch (vv.1, 24), it was necessary to emphasize that the present delegates, whose business it was to undo the damage caused by those earlier visitors, were coming under the full authority of the Jerusalem church.

- c) Judas had the same surname as that of Joseph Barsabbas, one of the two proposed to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:23), and the two may have been brothers.
  - d) Remember the name Silas, for he will take on a very significant role later on when he replaces Barnabas as Paul's companion on his second missionary journey.
- B. "With them they sent **the following letter**: The apostles and elders, your brothers, **To the Gentile believers** in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings." (v.23)
1. Luke gives the contents of a letter from the Jerusalem Council which Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas were commissioned to deliver to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia.
  2. There was no need to send such a letter to the Jewish believers there for the law had already taught them these things (v.20)
- C. "We have heard that **some went out from us without our authorization** and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said." (v.24)
1. The Judaizers had acted on their own, without the authorization of the apostles, elders or church; that is not how things were done in the early church! We have seen time and again how even the apostles had to be *sent* by the church—no one was acting on their own authority.
  2. They had brought confusion with their false teachings; disturbing, unsettling and troubling the Gentile believers' minds [see *Section VII.L* on p.169].
- D. "**So we all agreed** to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing.” (vv.25-27)

1. “So we all agreed” [“it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord – NKJV] – note once again the wonderful unity that had resulted from their council meeting—they were in unanimous agreement!
  2. “Our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
    - a) The selfless character of Barnabas and Paul was widely known;
    - b) Having risked their very lives for the name of Jesus Christ, they could be trusted now in this very important matter.
  3. As further confirmation, Judas and Silas would give verbal testimony to the truth of the Council’s decisions.
- E. “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell. (vv.28-29)
1. **“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us…”**
    - a) This is a Scripture of profound significance: the leaders of the early church knew the Holy Spirit and what He wanted—they were accustomed to being led by the Spirit, listening to the Holy Spirit, and discerning what seemed good to Him!
    - b) Whatever the Holy Spirit wanted, they wanted; whatever seemed good to the Holy Spirit seemed good to them as well! This is the real secret to church unity—not some human, ecumenical attempt to come into oneness—it is everyone being tuned in to the same “frequency” of the Holy Spirit!
    - c) No wonder many modern church leaders end up in conflicts with one another, quarreling and bickering over *what seems good to them!*
- James 4:1-3: <sup>1</sup>What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? <sup>2</sup>You want something but don't get it.**

*You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. <sup>3</sup>When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with **wrong motives**, that you may spend what you get on **your pleasures**.*

- d) It is paramount that the church learns this lesson, for Christ is coming for a bride who is one with the Holy Spirit—she and the Holy Spirit have one voice, one single desire:

**Rev. 22:17:** *The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.*

2. “**Not to burden you** with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.” (vv.28-29)
- a) The letter emphasized the Council’s decision that salvation is by grace, and the good news is that God’s way is not heavy or burdensome.
- b) It then listed the same guidelines given by James, encouraging the Gentiles that they would do well to follow them.
- F. “The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.” (vv.30-31)
1. The Council’s message was liberating and encouraging—good news brings gladness and freedom!
2. Great relief and consolation had replaced the harassment and trouble brought earlier by the legalistic Judaizers.
- G. “**Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets**, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them, [but Silas decided to remain there.]” (vv.32-34)

1. The prophetic ministry of Judas and Silas brought great blessing to the Antioch church.
  2. Judas and the others would return to Jerusalem, but God had other plans for Silas!
- H. “But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.” (v.35)
1. Paul and Barnabas would continue their ministry in Antioch, possibly for 1-2 years between the time of their return from the first missionary journey and the next.
  2. This was an exciting time for the Antioch church—a time of great growth and encouragement.

## IX. PAUL AND BARNABAS SEPARATE

**Acts 15:36-41:** <sup>36</sup>Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” <sup>37</sup>Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, <sup>38</sup>but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. <sup>39</sup>They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, <sup>40</sup>but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. <sup>41</sup>He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

- A. “Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us **go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached** the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.’” (v.36)
1. What a love Paul had for the church—he carried a deep concern for all the churches in his heart daily (2 Cor. 11:28).
  2. He understood the importance of going back and visiting all of the converts in each town where he had preached, watering the seed that had been sown and confirming the souls of the believers.
  3. Paul was ready and willing to risk his own life and go back to “all the towns where we have preached”—towns where they had met fierce opposition, and at least one town where he was stoned and left for dead!

- B. “Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. **They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company.**” (vv.37-39a)
1. Contention arose between Paul and Barnabas over taking John Mark, Barnabas’ cousin, with them on their next apostolic mission; Mark had deserted them at the beginning of their first missionary journey [see *Section III.A* on p.138], and Paul probably feared he would do the same again. So sharp was their dispute that they parted company, never to work together again!
  2. This story of the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas does not make pleasant reading, but Luke’s realism in recording it helps us to remember that the two men, as they themselves said to the people of Lystra, were “only men, human like you” (Acts 14:15).
  3. Paul would later write that “neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything” (1 Cor. 3:7) and that we must be very careful not to exalt human flesh—even if they are apostles!
 

**1 Cor. 4:6-7:** *<sup>6</sup>Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will **not take pride in one man over against another.** <sup>7</sup>For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?*
  4. Luke does not relate the dispute in such a way as to put Paul in the right and Barnabas in the wrong. The question, however, inevitably arises, “Who was right, Paul or Barnabas?”
  5. As in almost every dispute, there is usually fault on both sides.

- a) Barnabas was probably swayed in his judgment by his carnal relationship to Mark and his natural affection for him.
- b) Paul may have been too harsh, not willing to give Mark a second chance; perhaps Paul regretted his actions later in life (see below).
- c) Verse 39 indicates that there was sharp contention between Paul and Barnabas. Prov. 13:10 clearly states that all strife, contention and quarrels come only “by pride,” so in that sense, they were both guilty of pride and stubbornness.
- d) Those who take Paul’s side point out that Barnabas disappears from the story, never to be heard from again. Also, Paul and Silas were commended by the brothers to the grace of God, but there is no mention of that concerning Barnabas and John Mark.
- e) In any event, it is heartening to see that in his latter days, Paul had a change of heart concerning Mark. It is quite possible that Mark had also experienced a change of heart, maturing under the tutelage of his uncle Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement, and winning the confidence of Paul once again:

(1) **2 Tim. 4:11:** *Only Luke is with me. **Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.***

(2) **Col. 4:10:** *My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does **Mark**, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; **if he comes to you, welcome him.**)*

C. “Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.” (vv.39b-41)

- 1. Interestingly, both Barnabas and Paul leave for their homelands—Barnabas to Cyprus and Paul to Cilicia (where Tarsus was located).
- 2. Paul and Silas got right to work “strengthening the churches;” sadly, nothing more is ever heard of Barnabas.

## X. CONCLUSION

- A. In Acts 13 & 14, Luke records the details of the first apostolic mission sent forth from the Antioch church. From start to finish, it was the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. When Paul and Barnabas returned from their trip, they would report to the church “what God had done through them.”
- B. In Pisidian Antioch, a watershed moment took place where the apostles officially turned from the Jews to the Gentiles. They would later summarize the event with these words: “God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.”
- C. The pattern we have seen in previous chapters of Acts continued throughout Paul’s 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey: the preaching of the word with great power and boldness, God confirming His word with miraculous signs and wonders, multitudes of new converts turning to Christ, more and more churches being established, and great opposition and persecution!
- D. In Acts 15, the entire church had to come together to address a serious doctrinal question that had arisen: Should Gentile believers be required to follow the Jewish laws and customs of Moses? After meeting together in Jerusalem, the apostles, elders and church came to a unanimous decision that resolved the controversy. They all agreed that Gentiles should not have to be under the yoke of Mosaic Law, affirming that salvation is by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. A letter was drafted with a few simple guidelines concerning forbidden foods and sexual conduct.
- E. As Paul and Barnabas made preparations for their 2<sup>nd</sup> apostolic mission, there arose a sharp disagreement over whether or not they should take John Mark with them. Unable to resolve the matter peacefully, Paul and Barnabas parted company. That such embarrassing and unpleasant matters are recorded in Scripture is actually one of the greatest proofs that the Bible is the word of God, not man. If the writings were inspired by man, he would have left out all of the bad stuff. He would not have told about Adam and Eve’s disobedience and fall, Noah’s drunkenness, Abraham’s lying, Jacob’s trickery and deception, David’s adultery and murder, Peter’s three denials of Christ, and on and on we could go!

- F. Technically, Paul's second missionary journey, the subject of Part 9 in this study, commences in Acts 15.40 with his departure through Syria to Cilicia. More about that next time...