

2020-2021 Bible Study

#12

12/8/20

Acts 13 (Cont)

Review of Last Week

- Last week, we looked at Acts 12 and most of Acts 13
- We saw Herod Antipas put James, the brother of John to death and then arrested Peter to please the Jews
- Peter, after being released from confinement, went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark before leaving Jerusalem
- Herod was upset, traveled to Caesarea, was lorded by the people of Tyre and Sidon, and struck down by an angel
- Next, we witness the rise of Antioch (in Syria) as the center of the faith where the Holy Spirit selected Paul and Barnabas to go on the 1st Missionary journey (to Cyprus)

Review of Last Week (Cont)

- John Mark began this journey with them, but then left them as they left Cyprus and returned home
- Paul and Barnabas ended up defeating a local magician and attracting the attention of the Roman Proconsul Sergius Paulus
- The two then sailed for Asia Minor, and arrived in Antioch of Pisidia where they met with and preached to the Jews on the Sabbath
- We read Paul's impressive message (kerygma) which attracted many to show interest in this "New Way"

Acts 13 (Cont)

- **Acts 13:46-52** *“And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly,...And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit”*
 - This passage is basically saying that Paul turned to the Gentiles after the Jewish leadership had forced them to leave
 - Paul and Barnabas went into the city market place and proclaimed that a man (Jesus) had come into the world to judge the heavens and the earth
 - What is strange is that Paul should have received a favorable response from the Jews who were waiting for the arrival of the Messiah
 - At the same time, no one in the market place was looking for someone to judge the heavens and the earth

Acts 13 (Cont)

- Father pointed out that once Paul and Barnabas went to the market place (where their message was well-received), the local Jews forced them to leave their town
- So, they moved on and practiced the same set of events there
- We will see this scene play out over and over again throughout Asia Minor
- When the Jews began to persecute them, they shook the dust from their feet and moved on to Iconium
- We can get a glimpse of Paul's message in **Acts 14**

Acts 14

Acts 14

- **Acts 14:1-14** *“Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue,...they tore their garments and rushed out among the multitude crying”*
 - Initially, Paul and Barnabas had success at Iconium among both Jews and Greeks until the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles (dividing the people of the city which led to a plot to kill them)
 - With this news, Paul and Barnabas fled to Lystra and later Derbe
 - It was in Lystra that they healed a cripple (causing the people to believe they were Greek gods)

Acts 14 (Cont)

- **Acts 14:15-22** *“Men, why are you doing this?...and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God”*
 - As Paul and Barnabas were trying to preach the gospel to the town’s people, they were trying to offer sacrifices to them
 - Then, the Jewish leaders from Antioch and Iconium arrive and this time were successful in stoning Paul causing them to flee to Derbe where they had limited success in establishing a community
 - This ended the ministry of the 1st missionary journey and they decided rather than going straight back to Antioch (in Syria) they would double back and check on the progress of the churches in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Presidia)
 - By this journey, they established that those entering into the new way would experience many tribulations before entering the Kingdom of God
 - Tribulation was to become a welcome part of their new job description

Acts 14 (Cont)

- **Acts 14:23-28** *And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed...And they remained no little time with the disciples”*
 - Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for every church with prayer and fasting
 - The Greek word for “appoint” means to stretch forth the hand
 - This word is still used today in the Greek church to ordain priests, bishops and deacons
 - Father said that Paul ordained individuals to strengthen them and not leave a church without the ability of their having access to the sacraments
 - Therefore, at every church, he ordained elders (*Presbuteros*)
 - Later on *Presbuteros* will be the title for “priests”

Acts 14 (Cont)

- At the beginning, there were only two levels of clergy: Apostles and Bishops
- An Apostle (*Apostolos*) was one who went from town to town preaching the Good News
- A Bishop (*Episkopos* “an overseer”) was one who remained to administer to a church
- Both were assisted by deacons
- At this stage, there were only two kinds of clergy: Apostle or Bishop, and Deacon
- The later developed rank of Priest (above a deacon but beneath an apostle) came about in the latter part of the 1st Century
- At this point, Luke is stressing that Paul had opened the door to the Gentiles

Acts 15

Acts 15

- **Acts 15:1-3** *“But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved...gave great joy to all the brethren”*
 - Remember, biblically, one always went up to and down from Jerusalem rather than N, E, S, and W
 - The point in this passage is that these men came from Jerusalem to Antioch and preached that one had to be circumcised and practice Kosher in order to be saved
 - The problem was that most of the Antioch Christians were Gentile converts
 - Further, Paul and Barnabas had not made this a stipulation for their conversion
 - Yet, here were these men from Jerusalem in the absence of Paul and Barnabas teaching these things
 - When Paul and Barnabas heard this, they decided to take the matter to Jerusalem for a resolution

Acts 15 (Cont)

- **Acts 15:4-5** *“When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcome by the church and the apostles and the elders,... It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses”*
 - The Apostles here included Peter, John, and James the Bishop of Jerusalem
 - They were the bishops, elders, the Presbuteros (the clergy in Jerusalem)
 - Today this could be translated as “the clergy” (which at that time did not include those we call today “the priests”)
 - Most likely, half of the baptized Christians in the church in Jerusalem were Pharisees
 - They said that it was necessary for a Christian to be circumcised and keep the laws of Moses to include Kosher, and everything that followed from there to be saved
 - They were adding something to what Paul had been preaching
 - Father said that this was an important theme which we are going to hear Paul talk about as being beyond what was necessary for salvation

Acts 15 (Cont)

- **Acts 15:6-12** *“The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter...And all the assembly kept silence and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles”*
 - At this point, it is obvious that a debate was on going within the church
 - Peter related how the Holy Spirit descended upon Cornelius and his family (just as it had occurred on the Apostles at Pentecost)
 - It would appear that the Holy Spirit made no distinction between the circumcised and the uncircumcised
 - He observed that God made no distinctions or partiality based on these differences
 - Paul related what had happened to them at Lystra and Derbe (where God worked miracles among the Gentiles)
 - He reminded them that he and Barnabas even healed a Gentile in Lystra

Acts 15 (Cont)

- **Acts 15:13-18** *“After they finished speaking, James replied, brethren, listen to me...the Lord has made these things known from of old”*
 - This is the James (the lesser) who was the Bishop of Jerusalem, not James (the greater) who was the of Zebedee, the brother of John and the first apostle to be martyred by Herod Agrippa
 - Symeon is Simon Peter
 - Father pointed out that the prophets had said that the Gentiles were going to come into the new kingdom when it was restored, but they did not say how that was going to happen
 - At that time, a first century Jew would have assumed that it would have been by becoming a proselyte (being circumcised and keeping the Law)
 - But, none of the prophets indicated that was the way it would happen
 - At this point, based on the evidence from Peter, Paul and Barnabas, James makes his next point

Acts 15 (Cont)

- During the heated debate Peter again presents his beliefs as related to the conversion of Cornelius
- Paul and Barnabas then present their successes among the Gentiles whom they had baptized
- The elderly James, Bishop of Jerusalem:
 - Agrees with Peter, Paul and Barnabas
 - Reminds the council that the coming of the Gentiles into the kingdom was prophesied by many prophets
 - Quotes from the Prophet Amos

Acts 15 (Cont)

- James provided the solution by quoting from the “**Holiness Code**” from **Leviticus 17:8 -18:30** stating that the Gentiles could be baptized into the Church so long as they abstained from:
 - What has been sacrificed to idols
 - Blood
 - What has been strangled
 - *Pornea*
- The council agreed
- Paul, Barnabas Judas (called Barsabbas), and Silas were instructed to take a letter containing this decision and read it to the Church in Antioch

Acts 15 (Cont)

- **Acts 15:19-22** *“Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from chastity, and from what is strangled and from blood...with the following letter”*
 - This meant that the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised and keep kosher
 - He directed that the council should write to these Gentile converts and tell them that all they must do is avoid the pollution of idols, unchastity, strangled, and blood
 - Peter explained that to avoid the pollution of idols meant that they could not eat food that had been offered to an idol
 - The Jews would see doing that as participating in the worship of a pagan god (like the temple of Zeus)
 - James was saying that one could no longer eat meat that had been offered to a pagan god (that was the main source for acquiring meat)

Acts 15 (Cont)

- The second prohibition concerned unchastity (*porneia*)
- This was a general Greek word for sexual licentiousness to include cult prostitution and also unlawful marriage
- James also prohibited eating an animal that had been strangled and still had blood within it (prime ribs)
- As mentioned these prohibitions came from the **Holiness Code** in **Leviticus 17, 18**
- When Moses gave the Jews the Law, it also included instructions for God-fearers (they did not required them to be circumcised or keep kosher)

Acts 15 (Cont)

- **Acts 15:23-29** *“with the following letter...you will do well. Farewell”*
 - This section contains the letter prepared by the council to be presented to the Gentile churches

Acts 15 (Cont)

- **Acts 15:30-41** *“So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch;...strengthening the churches”*
 - The purpose of the second journey was to check on the Churches that they had established on their first journey
 - Barnabas wanted to take his cousin John Mark again, but Paul thought best not to take him because he had bailed out on them earlier
 - After a bit of a heated debate, Paul and Barnabas decided to go on separate journeys
 - Barnabas and Mark went back to Cyprus
 - Paul and Silas (also called Silvanus who had come with Paul from Jerusalem to Antioch) headed off by land on what became known as the second journey
 - They went by land because it was easy to start in Derbe after going over the mountains from Tarsus, and then traced the churches back to Antioch in Presidia
 - Paul will go on to establish new churches on this journey
 - Barnabas and Mark traced the churches in Cyprus

Acts 15 (Cont)

- The Torah said that every descendant of Abraham had to be circumcised, but these guys were not descendants of Abraham
- All that the Law required of God-fearers who dwelt among the people of Israel was that they may not eat food offered to an idol, engage in incestual marriage, eat blood, or meat from strangled animals
- This became the source for the official theological declaration from the council
- These were given by the church at a time when most of her members were Jews who were still going to the synagogue on the Sabbath
- In **Acts 15:22**, the council writes a letter containing these restrictions which they gave to Paul and Barnabas to be taken to Antioch
- Father pointed out that the order of these four regulations in **Acts 15:29** is different than that found in **Acts 15:19** and **20** because James was quoting them from memory when speaking to the council versus them being formally quoted from Leviticus when written down
- Father said this shows the historicity of the **Book of Acts**