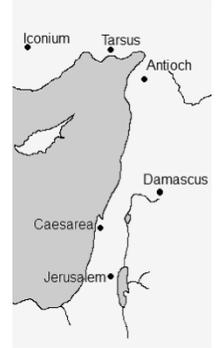


Chapter 9

Saul's Conversion (9:1-31)

So significant is Saul's conversion that Scripture records it three times (9:1-30; 22:1-6; 26:4-18). Saul was a Jew who was a Roman citizen. He was born in Tarsus (Acts 21:39), an important city in the Roman province of Cilicia. It was located where Asia Minor and Syria meet, not far from Antioch.



Saul's father must have been a Roman citizen, since Saul was a citizen of Rome by birth (Acts 22:28). Like his father before him, he was a Pharisee (Acts 23:6), who studied in Jerusalem under the most respected rabbi of his day, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).

His first appearance in Acts is at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58). He was a leader in the persecution of the church. His own testimony was *that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities* (Acts 26:9-11).

After chapter 8, which describes the ministry of Philip in outlying Samaria and Judea, the scene shifts back to Jerusalem.

Verse 1—*Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord*—Persecuting believers consumed him—it had become his whole life—he breathed hatred and death.

- ***went to the high priest***—Considered by the Romans to be the head of the Jewish state. The high priest had the authority over Jewish internal affairs such as this one.

Verse 2—*and asked for letters from him*—which would be an authority given to Saul to act on behalf of the high priest.

- ***to the synagogues***—they evidently began during the Babylonian captivity. With the Temple destroyed and the Jews dispersed in a foreign land, they became the gathering place, school for children, and place of teaching and reading of Scripture.
- ***at Damascus***—The ancient capital of Syria, about 60 miles northeast of the Sea of Galilee, it had a large Jewish population.
- ***so that if he found any belonging to the Way***—The early description of Christianity as *the Way* appears several times in Acts (19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).
- ***both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem***—*I [Saul] persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons* (Acts 22:4).

Verse 3—*As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him*—It happened about noon (22:6). *I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me* (26:13). Saul actually saw Jesus in glorious brilliance (Acts 9:17, 27; 22:14; 26:16; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8), while his companions saw only the light (Acts 22:9).

- The last person to see the resurrected, glorified Christ was Stephen. The man involved in Stephen's death is the next person to see the glorified Jesus Christ.

Verse 4—*and he fell to the ground*—*Saul and his companions fell into the dirt* (26:14).

- ***and heard a voice saying to him***—Those who traveled with Saul heard the voice of Jesus as Saul did, yet they did not understand the words spoken (9:7; 22:9; see also John 12:29).

- **“Saul, Saul**—The repetition of the name is for emphasis, as Luke does in other places (Luke 10:41; 13:34; 22:31).
- **why are you persecuting Me?**—By persecuting Christians, Saul inflicted blows directly on their Lord. Saul knew enough about the Christian faith to hate it and persecute it. He knew the apostles and Philip and Stephen had miraculous power over disease and demons. He knew about the truth, but here Jesus crushed him into the dirt, and he was made to believe it.

Verse 5—And he said, “Who are You, Lord?”—Saul knew this must be an appearance of God and called Him “Lord,” a recognition of deity.

- **And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting”**—There was no doubt who was speaking: (1) Jesus (2) whom you are persecuting. And Saul had just called him “Lord.”

APPLICATION—Paul’s own testimony is: *...even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy...and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life* (1 Timothy 1:13-16). Also, Saul’s conversion itself was a miracle. If God only wants converts, why not do this with everyone? No—this was a miracle that so **dramatically** completely changed a person’s life—it was further evidence of the truth of who Jesus was.

The genuineness of Saul’s conversion is seen when immediately he asked, *“What shall I do, Lord?”* (Acts 22:10). He humbly submitted himself to the will of the Lord he had hated.

Verse 6—but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do—In answer to Saul’s question, “What shall I do, Lord?”

Verse 7—The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

Verse 8—Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus—His entry into the city was very different than what he had anticipated. Instead of barging in as the conquering hero, the persecutor of the Christians, he entered helplessly blinded, being led by the hand.

Verse 9—And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank—Time to think.

Verse 10—Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias—Acts 22:12 says he was *a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there*. He was most likely one of the spiritual leaders in the Damascus church—someone who would have been one of Saul’s main targets.

- **and the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord”**—Reminding us of the child Samuel’s reply to God (1 Samuel 3:1-10).

Verse 11—And the Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul—This is a test for Ananias. He knew of Saul’s reputation (vv. 13-14). He would have no way of knowing of Saul’s conversion, since Jesus did not reveal it to him.

- **for he is praying**—This tells us what Saul was doing during his three days of no sight.

Verse 12—and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight—God had given Saul hope for receiving his sight. These two visions were about to bring together two men who were poles apart.

Verses 13-14—*But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name”*—He responded somewhat like Jonah responded when God told him to go preach in Nineveh. “But...” Ananias must have thought his life would be at stake.

Verse 15—*But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine*—God had a plan, and He chose Saul to be the tool or means God would use to make that plan a reality.

APPLICATION—Notice it wasn’t Saul’s idea. He was going about his business of persecution, and it was God who chose Saul and stopped him in his tracks. As Paul would later write to the Romans *...so that God’s purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls* (9:11). Galatians 1:1 says, *Paul, an apostle, not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead.*

- *to bear My name before the Gentiles*—Romans 11:13; 15:16.
- *and kings*—such as Agrippa (Acts 25:23ff) and possibly Caesar (2 Timothy 4:16-17).
- *and the sons of Israel*—Paul often preached to the Jews (Acts 13:14; 14:1; 17:1, 10; 18:4; 19:8).

Verse 16—*for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake*—First Corinthians 4:9-13; 2 Corinthians 11:23-29; 12:7-10 tell of some of Paul’s sufferings.

Verse 17—*So Ananias departed and entered the house*—Strengthened by a direct word from God and overcoming his fears, Ananias went to see Saul.

- *and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul*—Ananias is the first person to identify Saul as a brother in Jesus—he is now a member of the family of God.

APPLICATION—There are just two kinds of people in the world—those who are members of the family of God and those who are not. It is incorrect to say “we are all God’s children.” We are all God’s creation, *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name* (John 1:12).

- *the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight*—Ananias also said, *The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard* (Acts 22:14-15).
- *and be filled with the Holy Spirit*—The Spirit was already active in Saul’s life, convicting him of sin (John 16:9), convincing him of the lordship of Jesus (1 Corinthians 12:3), converting him (John 3:5; Titus 3:5), placing him into Christ’s body, the church, and indwelling him permanently (1 Corinthians 12:13). Now he was going to be filled (led, controlled) by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).
- Unlike the Jews (Acts 2:1-4), the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17), and soon the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-46), Saul had received the Spirit at his conversion. Because Saul was a Jew, there was no need to repeat the initial coming of the Spirit that occurred at Pentecost. Also, he was an apostle (though not one of the 12) in his own right and did not get his authority from the other apostles (Galatians 1:1; see also 1 Corinthians 9:1; 2 Corinthians 11:5; 12:11; Galatians 1:15-17). Nor was he subject to their authority. Like them, he was chosen personally by Jesus Christ to be an apostle (a “sent one”).

Verse 18—*And immediately*—after Ananias’ words.

- *there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight*—
- *and he got up and was baptized*—By this act, he openly identified with the very people he had hated and persecuted. His hated enemies became his friends, while his former friends instantly became his enemies (see v. 23). Just like the other believers in Acts, baptism followed his conversion.

Verse 19—*and he took food and was strengthened*—after his three days of fasting (v. 9).

- **Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus**—One of the evidences of conversion is a desire to be with other believers. As David said, *I am a companion of all those who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts* (Psalm 119:63).

APPLICATION—That does not mean that we have no contact with unbelievers (1 Corinthians 5:9-10). But a professing believer who *prefers* the company of the people of the world may still be one of them.

Verse 20—*and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God”*—Paul later said, *“Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel”* (1 Corinthians 9:16).

- **In the synagogues**—the very location from which before he would drag off Christians. Now he was there preaching that Jesus is God. The most zealous defender of Judaism now became the most zealous evangelist for Christianity. We cannot even imagine the reaction of both the Jews and the Christians.

APPLICATION—The synagogues provided a place for both Jesus and the apostles to preach, and evidently, a place where Christians also gathered (mostly to do evangelism). You may not agree with the theology of a particular religious institution, but you may find an opportunity to proclaim the Gospel or do discipleship there. But in that case, you would need to get teaching and fellowship with true believers from somewhere else.

Verse 21—*All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, “Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?”*—

Verse 22—*But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ*—Like Stephen, Saul openly debated the Jews about the deity and messiahship of Jesus.

- “That Saul was confounding the Jews in this dialogue should surprise no one. He had the finest education first-century Judaism could offer, and they could not hope to match his knowledge of the Scripture. Once he understood who Jesus was, he had the key that unlocked the whole Old Testament. He was then able to use his vast knowledge of those Scriptures and his Spirit-controlled brilliance, as well as the truth of Jesus’ miracles, words, death, and resurrection, to prove that this Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah” [MacArthur, *Acts*].

Verse 23—*When many days had elapsed*—Galatians 1:17-18 says, *Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem*

- **the Jews plotted together to do away with him**—In 2 Corinthians 11:32, Paul says, *...in Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city...in order to seize me.*

Verse 24—*but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death*—The only exit from the city was through the city gates.

Verse 25—*but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall [evidently from a house on the city wall] lowering him in a large basket.*

Verse 26—*When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple*—Perhaps they thought he was a wolf in sheep’s clothing, trying to trick them from within to destroy them.

- The verb translated *was trying* indicates repeated unsuccessful attempts to join with the disciples.

Verse 27—**But Barnabas**—The name given to Barnabas by the other believers. His name means “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36). He was a highly regarded elder in the church.

- **took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus**—With Barnabas vouching for him, Saul was finally accepted.

APPLICATION—This is often your best validation—someone who knows someone, who knows someone... When we moved to Grand Rapids in 1982, for example, Walt Henrichsen (who was on the board of Search Ministries, the organization we were part of at the time) came to Grand Rapids with Dave to introduce him to a group of believers here. It was on Walt's recommendation that we were accepted and welcomed to come to Grand Rapids.

Verse 28—*And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.*

Verse 29—*And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews*—Picking up where Stephen had left off, witnessing to the Hellenistic (Greek) Jews.

- **but they were attempting to put him to death**—as they had Stephen. Galatians 1:18 tells us he stayed in Jerusalem for fifteen days.
- In Acts 22:17-21, Paul describes what happened while there: *It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.' And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.' And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'*

Verse 30—[For Saul's own safety] **But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea** [on the Mediterranean coast] **and sent him away** [on a boat] **to Tarsus**—Saul's hometown in Cilicia. Between this time and when Barnabas found him in Tarsus and brought him to Antioch (Acts 11:25-26), Saul *went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia* (Galatians 1:21), continuing to proclaim the Gospel.

- In Galatians 1:23–2:1, we learn a bit more about what happened during that time: *Saul was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." And they were glorifying God because of me. Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas.*

Verse 31—*So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase*—another one of Luke's progress reports on the growth of the church.

- In John 16:7, Jesus said He would send the "Helper," i.e., the Holy Spirit. He is the *parakletos*, one who is called to one's aid, helper, comforter, encourager. Jesus left, but He did not leave us alone. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 1:3-11, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.*

Chapter 13

The First Missionary Journey (chapters 13–14)

Acts 13 is the turning point in Acts. Chapters 1–12 focused on the ministry of Peter. The remaining chapters will focus on the ministry of Paul.

Verse 1—*Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there*—Notice the believers are described as *the church* in the whole city.

- **Prophets**—Sometimes they received new revelation from God (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11), but in Acts, it seems they received practical, not doctrinal, revelation, and that function ended with the end of the temporary sign gifts (1 Corinthians 13:8). Before the Scriptures were written, the prophets, with the apostles, played a significant role as preachers of God’s Word (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; 4:11). Of course, the Apostle John was the last prophet.
- **Teachers**—giving others a clear understanding of biblical truth (see Nehemiah 8:8).
- **Barnabas**—a Levite from the island of Cyprus. His birth name was Joseph, but the apostles named him Barnabas, meaning “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36). He convinced the believers in Jerusalem that Saul’s conversion was genuine (9:27). The Jerusalem believers sent him to investigate that the Gentiles were saved in Antioch (11:22). He brought Saul to Antioch to get him involved with the ministry there (11:25-26). With Saul, he carried contributions to the believers in Jerusalem during the famine (11:30).
- **Simeon who was called Niger**—“Niger” means “black,” which suggests he was a dark-skinned man, an African, or both.
- **Lucius of Cyrene**—a city in North Africa.
- **Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch**—Herod Antipas, the Herod of the Gospels.
- **Saul**—who needs no introduction.

APPLICATION—Here are two boys, brought up together, Manaen, a Christian leader. And Herod, remembered for killing John the Baptist and the trial of Jesus. Sometimes the same environment or upbringing can have very different results.

Verse 2—*While they were ministering to the Lord*—God is the audience for all spiritual ministry (see Acts 20:19-20).

APPLICATION—If you make people the goal of ministry, you will compromise the Word of God in order to achieve that goal.

- **fasting**—Nowhere does the Bible command believers to fast, but Jesus assumed His disciples would fast (Matthew 6:17; Luke 5:33-35).

APPLICATION—Jesus said that if you do fast, it should be private, just between you and God. You should not do it for show, like the Pharisees did (Matthew 6:16-18).

- **the Holy Spirit said**—The Holy Spirit is a person of the Godhead. He is not a force or an “it.” He speaks. He can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30).
- **“Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them”**—Yes, Barnabas and Saul were specifically called by God for a certain ministry, but that does not mean anyone else gets a specific call from God for a certain ministry or a particular job.

APPLICATION—See the Relational Concepts’ brochure “The Call of God.”

Verse 3—*Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away*—Laying hands on them did not give them the Holy Spirit—they already had the Holy Spirit. It didn’t ordain them for ministry—they had already been active in the ministry for many years. But it was an identification with and a confirmation and support of their ministry by the other believers.

APPLICATION—Up to now, evangelism has been done by individuals (as it should be), but now we have the first “overseas missions.” The believers in Antioch are sending out missionaries. Both things are true. You should be doing evangelism as well as supporting missionaries who go out.

Verse 4—*So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia*—Located about 16 miles from Antioch, it was near the mouth of the Orontes River and was the port for Antioch.

- ***from there they sailed to Cyprus***—Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean, after Sicily and Sardinia. It is about 60 miles off the Syrian coast and would have been visible from Seleucia on a clear day. The main part of the island is 90 to 100 miles long and 60 miles wide. In New Testament times, Salamis was the chief port and commercial center [on northeast end] and Paphos was the capital [on the southwest end]. [MacArthur, *Acts*]

APPLICATION—Why start in Cyprus? It was Barnabas’ home and therefore familiar territory (4:36). It was an easy journey to there from Antioch. There was a large Jewish population there, making it a good starting point to preach the Gospel. It’s good to start ministry near where you are, where you are in familiar territory—know the customs, language, etc.

Verse 5—*When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews*—there were enough Jews in the city to have more than one synagogue. As was Paul’s custom, he went to the synagogues first, where there was an opportunity to speak God’s Word.



APPLICATION—Notice, local separate Jewish congregations in synagogue buildings existed. It was a model the believers had. Yet they chose to meet in homes and be called the believers in a city, and not divide the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:10-17).

- ***they also had John as their helper***—John Mark was a native of Jerusalem (Acts 12:12) and his mother’s house was where the believers gathered to pray for Peter in prison (Acts 12:12). He was Barnabas’ relative (Colossians 4:10). John is his Hebrew name and Mark is his Roman name. He is the writer of the Gospel of Mark.

Verse 6—*When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos*—Paphos was “a great center for the worship of Aphrodite [Venus] ... Extensive religious prostitution accompanied [Aphrodite’s] rites at Paphos” (Pfeiffer and Vos, *The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands*).

- ***they found a magician***—Originally, a magician was someone in Persia familiar with astronomy and astrology, who was often involved in the occult and interpreting dreams. Later the term was used for someone who practiced magic and the occult, often for evil purposes (see Acts 8:9-11).
- ***a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-jesus***—His name means “son of salvation.”

Verse 7—*who was with the proconsul*—There were two types of Roman provinces: (1) those governed by procurators, responsible to the emperor, and (2) those governed by proconsuls, under the senate. Cyprus had been governed by a proconsul since 22 B.C. [Jensen, *An Independent Study*, Moody Press]

- ***Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence***—The fact that he had a Jewish teacher with him shows he has an interest in Judaism.
- ***This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God***—Being a man of intelligence, he was interested in hearing the Word of God, and being the governor, he was interested in knowing about this teaching being spread across his island.

Verse 8—*But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated)*—Elymas was apparently the Greek transliteration of an Arabic word for “magician” (Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Acts*, Baker]

- ***was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith***—Bar-jesus saw Barnabas and Saul and their teaching as a threat to his own influence on the proconsul.

Verse 9—*But Saul, who was also known as Paul*—Paul is his Roman name.

- ***filled with the Holy Spirit***—controlled by the Spirit
- ***fixed his gaze on him***—unwavering, looked him in the eye.

Verse 10—and said, “*You who are full of all deceit*—concealing or misrepresenting the truth, a snare

- ***Fraud***—A word only used here in New Testament. Originally, it meant “ease or facility in doing; hence readiness in turning the hand to anything bad or good; and so recklessness, unscrupulousness, wickedness” (Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*).
- ***you son of the devil***—contrary to his name “son of salvation,” he is a “son of the devil.”
- ***you enemy of all righteousness***—he actively opposes all righteousness, that is, opposes God
- ***will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?***—God’s ways are straight (see Micah 3:9; Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3), they are truth. Satan’s ways are to pervert God’s way.

APPLICATION—Good and evil are not equal (not ying/yang). Good is like a window with no defects. Evil is a crack in the window. Genesis 1–2 tells us God made all things good. Genesis 3 tells us Satan opposed God, deceitfully and unscrupulously tempted Eve to bring evil into God’s good garden and good people.

Verse 11—“*Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time*”—The blindness would be temporary. Reminding us of Paul’s own temporary blindness.

- ***And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand***—We’re not told of any change in this man’s belief as a result of the blindness.

Verse 12—*Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord*—As in other places in Acts, God used the miracle to authenticate the message and the messenger. But it’s the *teaching of the Lord* that amazes the proconsul and caused him to believe. While his “spiritual counselor” Bar-jesus was plunged into physical darkness, the proconsul went from spiritual darkness into the light of the Gospel. “...from other literary sources...Sergia Paulla, the proconsul’s daughter was a Christian, as was her son Gaius Caristianus Fronto, the first citizen of Pisidian Antioch to enter the Roman senate” [Longenecker, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*].

APPLICATION—Abraham told the rich man in Hades, who wanted someone from the dead to go to his brothers and warn them about Hades, *They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them...if they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead* (Luke 16:27-31). If a person does not want to believe, a miracle will not create faith (Bar-jesus, for example). But if a person already has the Word of God and faith in Jesus, then the miracle confirms that faith (Sergius Paulus, for example).

Verse 13—*Now Paul and his companions*—We have moved now from “Barnabas and Saul” to “Paul and his companions.” By the Holy Spirit filling Saul to confront Bar-jesus, God moved Saul from the position of following to that of leading (except in Acts 14:2; 15:12, 25 for special reasons). From this point on “Saul” is known by his Roman name “Paul,” emphasizing that he was an apostle to the Gentiles (except when there is a reference to his previous life in Acts 22:7; 26:14).

- ***put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia***—Perga is a major city in the Roman province of Pamphylia, nearly 200 miles across the Mediterranean north in Asia Minor.
- ***but John left them and returned to Jerusalem*** (his hometown)—The reason John Mark left is not stated. His desertion did not stop the mission to the Gentiles, but it did split the successful team of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-40). Toward the end of Paul’s life, however, they are reconciled, and Paul writes, *Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service* (2 Timothy 4:11).

Verse 14—*But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch*—not Antioch in Syria, from which they originally set sail. Pisidian Antioch was about 100 miles from the port city of Perga. It was a treacherous journey through the Taurus mountains. Travelers also had to cross two flood-prone rivers. These mountains were known for robber bands, who plagued Alexander the Great and Augustus Caesar and were still active in Paul’s time. Possibly Paul referred to this when he wrote 2 Corinthians 11:26 [MacArthur, *Acts*].

- ***on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down***—As a visiting rabbi, Paul would have the right to speak in the synagogue. He used the common knowledge of the Old Testament as an opening to preach the Gospel to these Jews. As a Jew himself, he had a love of his fellow countrymen and his *heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation* (Romans 10:1).

Verses 15-16—*After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, “Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it”*—an open door to proclaim the Gospel. ***Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, “Men of Israel [Jews], and you who fear God*** [Gentile proselytes to Judaism], ***listen:***

This is Paul’s first (and longest) recorded sermon. Talking to Jews, Paul begins with an emphasis on God’s part in the history of Israel.

Verse 17—*“The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it*—Emphasis on God’s sovereignty—God chose, God made great, God led them out. Israel was created by God for God’s purposes—to be the God of the Jewish people.

APPLICATION—Why did God *chose us in Him before the foundation of the world* (Ephesians 1:4)? For His purpose—*...those who love God, ...who are called according to His purpose...He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son* (Romans 8:28-29).

Verse 18—*“For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness*—The manuscripts are equally divided between the Greek word *etrophophorasen* (“He put up with them”) and *etrophophorasan* (“He cared for them”) [Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*]. Both things are true. God cared for the Israelites in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 1:31; 2:7; 8:2, 4; 29:5; Nehemiah 9:21) and He put up with their rebellion (Nehemiah 9:16-19; Psalm 95:7-11; Amos 5:25-26; Hebrew 3:7-11, 17-18). God didn’t leave them in the wilderness, even though they were in a judgment situation.

Verse 19—*“When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan* (Deuteronomy 7:1), *He distributed their land as an inheritance—all of which took about four hundred and fifty years***—Four hundred years in Egypt, forty years in the wilderness, and about ten years to conquer and distribute the Land (Joshua 14:1ff). God destroyed the nations. God gave them the Land.**

Verse 20—*“After these things He gave them judges*—The judges were deliverers for Israel from the enemies who attacked for about 350 years. God delivered them from their enemies.

- ***until Samuel the prophet***—Samuel was both the last judge and the first prophet (spiritual advisor to the kings), who anointed the first king, Saul. Samuel links the time of the judges and the time of the kings.

Verse 21—*“Then they asked for a king* (1 Samuel 8:5, 7), *and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years***—[Saul/Paul was also from the tribe of Benjamin.] This is the only direct statement of the length of Saul’s reign in Scripture, and it agrees with the length of his reign given by Josephus [Williams, *New International Biblical Commentary: Acts*].**

Verse 22—“*After He had removed him*—Saul was disobedient, proud, and defied God’s explicit instructions. This led to his removal as king (1 Samuel 15:1ff), though God let him reign 40 years.

APPLICATION—“As I look back over my life, if God had given me what I wanted, my life would have been ruined. Each believer should have an understanding with God: ‘Lord, I will ask for many things, ...But I beg You, don’t give it unless it represents Your perfect will’” [Henrichsen, *Seeking to Understand the Christian Life*, p. 53].

- ***He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.’***

APPLICATION—It’s interesting the different verbs. God gave them Saul and God raised up David. “Gave” here in Gk is “to grant someone the opportunity or occasion to do something, to allow.” “Raise” in Gk means “to cause to come into existence, to provide.” So when the people asked for a king, God allowed them to have Saul as a king, a man who would do their will. Samuel said, ...*your wickedness is great which you have done in the sight of the Lord by asking for yourselves a king* (1 Samuel 12:17), and God gave them Saul. But God provided or caused to exist David, a man who would do God’s will.

APPLICATION—Here’s the answer to being a person after God’s own heart—*do all My will*. God said, *To this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My Word* (Isaiah 66:2). Jesus said this is how you should pray, *Our Father who is in heaven, ...Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven* (Matthew 6:10). In the garden, the night of His arrest, Jesus prayed, *Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done* (Luke 22:42).

Verse 23—“*From the descendants [sperm] of this man*—Mary was a blood descendant of David’s son Nathan (Luke 3:31).

- ***according to promise***—The Davidic Covenant of 2 Samuel 7:16: *Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever* (also see Jeremiah 23:5).
- ***God has brought to Israel—For you [Jews] first, God raised up His servant and sent Him...*** (Acts 3:26). Jesus’ last words and command, first—...*you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea...* (Acts 1:8).
- ***a Savior, Jesus***—At Jesus’ first coming, ...*God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him* (John 3:17). At Jesus’ Second Coming, He will not come to save the world but to judge it (Revelation 19:15).

Verse 24—*after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel*—This was not Christian baptism, which had not yet begun. John called for the people of Israel to repent and be baptized, as was prophesied in Malachi 3:1.

Verse 25—“*And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not He*—John was not the Messiah and never claimed to be the Messiah (John 1:19-23).

- ***But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie***’—The task of the lowliest slave. John had true humility.

Verse 26—“*Brethren, sons of Abraham’s family (Jews), and those among you who fear God [Gentile proselytes to Judaism], to us the message of this salvation has been sent*—As Paul also wrote, *to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek* (Romans 1:16).

Verse 27—“*For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers*—the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees

- ***recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath***—They did not understand the teachings of Scripture, so they didn’t recognize Jesus as the Messiah (Matthew 22:29; John 5:39). “Those who are ignorant of the written Word will inevitably be ignorant of the Living Word” [MacArthur, *Acts*]. They substituted rituals and traditions for the truth.
- ***fulfilled these by condemning Him***—they fulfilled the very prophecies of the Scriptures they didn’t understand.

Verse 28—“*And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed*—Fulfilling Isaiah 53:3 and Psalm 69:4.

Verse 29—“*When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him*—Some of those prophecies are: Psalm 22:18—John 19:23-24; Psalm 69:21—Matthew 27:34; Psalm 22:1—Matthew 27:46; Psalm 31:5—Luke 23:46; Psalm 34:20—John 19:33; Zechariah 12:10—John 19:34.

- *they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb*—Normally criminals were placed in a mass grave, yet Christ was put in a tomb, again fulfilling prophecy (Isaiah 53:9).

Verse 30—“*But God raised Him from the dead*—This is the greatest proof that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4).

Verse 31—*and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people*—There were more than 500 witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:6) and Paul himself was a witness (1 Corinthians 15:8).

Verse 32—“*And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers*—Paul next lists three of those promises:

1. **Verse 33**—*that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU’*—Quote of Psalm 2:7. The resurrection glorified Christ’s sonship.
2. **Verse 34**—“*As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: ‘I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY and SURE blessings OF DAVID’*—If Jesus remained dead, He could not have fulfilled the Davidic Covenant of someone to always be on the throne of David (2 Samuel 7:16).
3. **Verses 35-37**—“*Therefore He also says in another Psalm, ‘YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.’ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; but He whom God raised did not undergo decay*—Fulfilling Psalm 16:10. See discussion on this point in Acts 2:31.

Verse 38—“*Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you*—Forgiveness of sins was not available under the Law. *But in the sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins* (Hebrews 10:3-4). See also Romans 3:20-22, 28; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Galatians 2:16; 3:11.)

Verse 39—*and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses*—He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time... *For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified* (Hebrews 10:12, 14). The murder of the Messiah provided the sacrifice for all sin and the way of complete forgiveness of the sins of all who repent and believe.

Verse 40—“*Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you*—i.e., judgment on unbelieving sinners (see Psalm 2:12, for example).

Verse 41—‘BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH; FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU’—Quote from Habakkuk 1:5. These words were about God using the wicked Chaldeans as His instrument to bring severe judgment on wicked Judah. Paul used it to illustrate the destruction that the Old Testament pledges to sinners who refuse to repent and believe in Jesus.

APPLICATION—This is the choice every person faces. *...every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?* (Hebrews 2:1-3).

Verse 42—As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath—Initially, the response was favorable. Paul quoted the Old Testament. He talked of God’s choice and care of Israel and about Israel’s greatest king—David—and the prophets. At first, they seemed to kind of ignore what he said about Jesus.

Verse 43—Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes [converts to Judaism] followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God—They couldn’t wait until the next Sabbath. They wanted to hear more now of what Paul had to say.

Verse 44—The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord—After the initial positive response, the following reaction split along racial lines. The response of the Jews was negative and the response of the Gentiles was positive.

Verse 45—But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy—Jesus said, *Men loved darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil* (John 3:19). It was their own sin of jealousy that kept them from the light of the truth Paul was speaking.

- **and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul**—The imperfect tense of “contradicting” means they were continually speaking against Paul’s message, trying to prove he was wrong.
- **and were blaspheming**—By speaking evil of God and Christ, they rejected their only hope for salvation.

Verse 46—Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly—The anger of the crowd did not intimidate Paul and Barnabas. Rather, they were bold in their response.

- **and said, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first**—God’s plan was that salvation was to be offered to the Jews first (Acts 1:8; 3:26; Romans 1:16).
- **since you repudiate it**—refuse to accept it or deny the truth of it
- **and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life**—It was their own choice that brought this judgment. Jesus said, *...he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God* (John 3:18).
- **behold, we are turning to the Gentiles**—This is not only the command of Acts 1:8, it is the prophecy of the Old Testament. Paul quotes Isaiah 49:6—

Verse 47—“For so the Lord has commanded us, ‘I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.’”

Verse 48—When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord—What was a stumbling block to the Jews resulted in rejoicing among the Gentiles.

- **and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed**—Here is one of the clearest statements in the whole Bible putting together God’s sovereignty and man’s free will. God’s sovereignty in man’s salvation is described in many passages (John 6:65; Colossians 3:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1). Believers are called *the elect* (Matthew 24:22, 24, 31; Luke 18:7; Romans 8:33). Peter calls believers *those...who are chosen* (1 Peter 1:1). This choice by God was made in eternity past (Ephesians 1:4) when their names were written in the Book of Life (Revelation 13:8).

- *As many as had been*—not any more than and not any less than had been appointed
- *Appointed* is used in the sense of “to inscribe” or “to enroll” (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*). This enrollment is described as *the book of life* (Psalm 69:28; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19; see also Exodus 32:32-44; and Daniel 12:1).
- *Believed*—And with free will, *As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name* (John 1:12; see also John 6:29; 8:24; 20:31; 1 John 5:12-13).

APPLICATION—Who are saved? Those who are elect. If you are elect, is there any way you will not be saved? No. Is there any way I can lose my salvation? No, because that means you were not elect. What about those who have never heard about Jesus. Can they become saved? Yes. If they are elect, they will hear the Gospel and become saved.

Verse 49—*And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region*—Salvation comes through hearing the Word of the Lord (Romans 10:13-15).

Verse 50—*But the Jews incited* [to encourage or stir up violent and/or unlawful behavior] *the devout* [refers to those devoted to Judaism—see Acts 8:2] *women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated* [to initiate someone into doing something bad] *a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district*—mentioned by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:11.

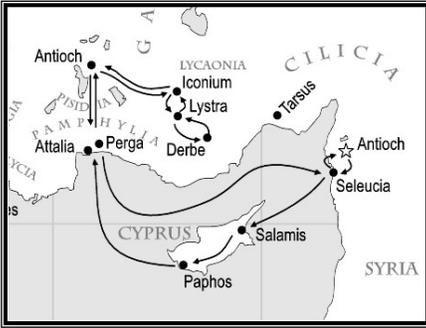
Verse 51—*But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them*—Jesus spoke of this symbolic act in Luke 10:10-12 when He sent out the 70. He said, *Whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, ... say, “Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you...*

- *and went to Iconium*—A city about 80 miles southeast from there.

Verse 52—*And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit*—So Paul and Barnabas left behind two completely different groups of people: rejecting hate-filled Jews and joyous Spirit-filled believers.

APPLICATION—God doesn’t give us a third alternative. There are only two kinds of people: those who reject Christ and those who accept Christ.

Chapter 14



Verse 1—*In Iconium*—Having been driven out of Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:50), about 80 miles NW.

- ***they entered the synagogue of the Jews together***—If they went to the Gentiles first, they would not be able to enter the synagogue.
- ***and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed***—As in the sermons recorded in Acts of both Peter and Paul, the message was based on the Old Testament and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Many believed because of the work of the Holy Spirit.
- ***both of Jews and of Greeks***—Greeks are in this area because it was

conquered by Alexander the Great in the 300s B.C. Then the Greek Empire was divided among his four generals. The Seleucids received this northern area of Syria from 312-65 B.C.

Verse 2—*But the Jews who disbelieved*—Also translated “disobeyed.” Since *God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent* (Acts 17:30-31), disbelief is a disobedience to God’s command.

- ***stirred*** [to intensify an activity] ***up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered*** [to cause someone to have hostile feelings of dislike toward someone] ***them against the brethren*** [believers—whether Jew or Greek, they now have a new identity—believers.

Verse 3—*Therefore*—The tension of v. 2 emphasizes the power of the Christian witness and the divine enabling behind it.

- ***they spent a long time there speaking boldly***—Gk. “to have courage or boldness in the face of opposition.” See also Acts 9:27-28; 13:46; 19:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:2; Ephesians 6:19-20.

APPLICATION—As with many of the Christian virtues, it takes opposition in order to practice the virtue. For example, you need to be in an impatient situation in order to practice patience. Someone needs to hurt you in order to practice forgiveness. Here it takes opposition in order to speak boldly in the face of the opposition.

- ***with reliance***—not in the text
- ***the Lord who was testifying to the word of His grace***—to provide information concerning that which the speaker has direct knowledge, i.e., miracles were not a substitute for the Word of God but a confirmation of the Word of God that Paul was preaching (see Hebrews 2:3-4).
- ***granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands***—as mentioned previously, miracles recorded in Acts were used to confirm the Gospel message to unbelievers.

Verse 4—*But the people of the city were divided*—The Gospel polarizes, it divides people. Paul wrote that the Gospel is *to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life* (2 Corinthians 2:16). What is good news to believers, is death news to unbelievers.

- ***and some sided with the Jews*** [i.e., *the Jews who disbelieved*—v. 2] ***and some with the apostles*** [Paul and Barnabas, men sent out with the Gospel]. Luke here refers to both Paul and Barnabas as *apostles*. It’s the Greek word *apostolos*, which means “messenger” or “sent one.” Neither one of these men would be considered as one of the “twelve,” a specific group with the qualifications of Acts 1:21-22. See the notes on 1:21-22.

Verse 5—*And when an attempt* [Gk *horme*, lit. “a rush” or “an assault,” with an emphasis on it being impulsive] ***was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat*** [with the idea of insolence, i.e., to look down on, with arrogance] ***and to stone them*** [shows the Jews were the instigators because stoning was a Jewish form of execution, usually for blasphemy—Acts 7:58].

Verse 6—*they became aware of it and fled*— There was nothing more to be done in Iconium, so they left. As usual, persecution merely pushed the Gospel into new regions.

APPLICATION—Yes, you can pray for relief from suffering, but realize that God’s purpose may require that suffering—purposes such as maturity, witnessing, evangelism, etc. For example, Mary had to have a virgin birth for the Messiah to be born, who would be the Savior. She suffered being a pregnant virgin to bring about God’s plan.

- *to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra*—about 18 miles south of Iconium. It was the home of Lois, Eunice, and Timothy (Acts 16:1; 2 Timothy 1:5). Perhaps they were saved during this visit.
- *and Derbe*—about 40 miles southeast of Lystra—*and the surrounding region*

Verse 7—*and there they continued to preach the gospel*—to Jews and to Gentiles

Verse 8—*At Lystra a man was sitting who [1] had no strength in his feet, [2] lame from his mother’s womb, [3] who had never walked*—Luke’s (as a physician) threefold description emphasizes the hopelessness of the man’s condition, and everyone in town knew it.

Verses 9-10—*This man was listening [the tense of the verb means to listen repeatedly] to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well—said with a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he leaped up and began to walk*—usually, a miracle like this provided an open door for the Gospel, but here it had a bizarre result.

Verse 11—*When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language [the local language Paul and Barnabas could not understand—they had probably been speaking in Greek, the “international” language of the time], “The gods have become like men and have come down to us.”*—Rather than turning to the one true God, they attributed the miracle to the gods they believed in—the Greek idol gods!

Verse 12—*And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus [distinguished impressive appearance] and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.*

Verse 13—*The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds*—the priest wanted to lead the worship

Verse 14—*But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it*—translated for them

- *they tore their robes*—Jewish expression of horror and revulsion at blasphemy (Matthew 26:65).
- *rushed out into the crowd, crying out*—to try to stop the people from worshipping them

Verse 15—*and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? (1) We are also men of the same nature as you*—that is, they are men, not incarnations of the gods

- (2) *preach the gospel to you*—they were there to tell these people about Jesus, the one true God, not about themselves
- (3) *that you should turn from these vain things*—this idolatry in Lystra (as well as all false religion) is vain, that is, empty, hopeless.
- (4) *to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM*—When Paul spoke to the Jews, he spoke of the God of Abraham because they knew the Old Testament. But to these Gentiles, he spoke of God as the Creator (see Romans 1:18-20; Psalm 19:1-6).

APPLICATION—God is the God of the supernatural but also the God of the natural. He is the God of the orderly, day-to-day events of our life.

Verse 16—“*In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways*—God allowed them “to conduct themselves without the restraints and instructions of a written law. They were permitted to follow their own reason and passions, and their own system of religion. God gave them no written laws, and sent to them no messengers” (Barnes, “Notes on the New Testament”). Since the coming of Christ, however, *although having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent* (Acts 17:30). The Gospel is now going out into the world.

Verse 17—*and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.*”—God is the source of rain and fruitful seasons, but also of gladness—in believers and unbelievers.

APPLICATION—Even though God let the nations go their own way, He still left them with a witness to Himself for them to respond to, so that they are without excuse (Romans 1:20; 2:13-15). But now, the Gospel was being proclaimed in its full form to the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas did not come to confirm the heathen worship of these people but to confront them with the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. All religions are works based. The Gospel says there are no works that will get you to God. Only faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, to come to God one must reject their religion, not become better at practicing their religion.

Verse 18—*Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them*—To be called a god was the highest honor imaginable in the Greek/Roman world and was much sought after (see Acts 12:22). Yet Paul and Barnabas fought against that very thing.

APPLICATION—To yield to the temptation of pride would be to destroy your usefulness to God. Those who seek glory for themselves are on the path to spiritual weakness and ineffectiveness.

Verse 19—*But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium*—it doesn’t say whether these were just Jews passing through Lystra or whether they were hunting for Paul and Barnabas (having driven them out of their own cities—see 13:50; 14:6).

- **having won over the crowds**—Luke doesn’t tell us how they did this, what arguments they used. But the very same people who one moment wanted to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods, now wanted to stone them to death. It reminds us of the crowd in Jerusalem who said Jesus was the Messiah at the triumphal entry and a few days later cried out, “Crucify Him.”
- **they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city**—Paul referred to this in 2 Corinthians 11:25. Luke doesn’t tell us why Barnabas wasn’t stoned. Perhaps they stoned Paul because he was the chief spokesman (see v. 12).

APPLICATION—The crowd changed their views: (1) they were influenced by people from another city who were already against Paul and Barnabas and (2) they welcomed Paul and Barnabas when they thought Paul and Barnabas were fulfilling their religion, but when they realized Paul and Barnabas were competing with their religion, they tried to get rid of them. The Gospel is often welcomed because it is misunderstood, but then it is resisted when its meaning and implications are made known. So when you hear someone’s response, ask yourself if they truly understand what the Gospel is about.

- **supposing him to be dead**—Some understand this to mean that Paul really did die, went to the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12), and then was resurrected. This is unlikely because:
 1. *Supposing* is from the Greek word *nomizo*, usually meaning “to suppose something that is not true” (see Acts 7:25; 8:20; 16:27; also Acts 17:29; 21:29; Matthew 5:17; 10:34; 20:10; Luke 2:44; 1 Timothy 6:5). The predominant New Testament usage of *nomizo* argues that Paul was not dead and the crowd’s supposition was incorrect.
 2. If Paul had died and been resurrected, why would Luke insert the word *supposing*? That would undermine the credibility of the miracle.

3. There are two other resurrections in Acts (Dorcas in 9:36-42 and Eutychus in 20:9-12), which are clearly presented as resurrections from the dead. If Paul did die and resurrect, why relate it in such a vague, uncertain way? Throughout Acts, supernatural signs point men to the truth. A confusing sign, however, points nowhere.
4. Paul's 2 Corinthians 12:2 third-heaven experience took place 14 years (A.D. 42 or 43) before he wrote 2 Corinthians (A.D. 56 or 57), way earlier than Paul's stoning at Lystra on the first missionary journey.

Verse 20—*But while the disciples stood around him*—some were converted in Lystra, and they came around Paul to see if he was dead or alive. Possibly Timothy (a native of Lystra—Acts 16:1), his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois (2 Timothy 1:5).

- ***he got up and entered the city***—The stoning was so severe, the crowd thought Paul was dead, and the believers gathered around him, but amazingly, he recovered enough to get up and go back into the city. Notice there seems to be no “miracle” here but certainly a sustaining and empowering presence of God.
- ***The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe***—Paul didn't even take a day off to recuperate—the next day he walked forty miles to Derbe. The door for ministry in Lystra was temporarily closed, so he moved on to the next opportunity.

Verse 21—*After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch*—These cities were dangerous places for them.

Verse 22—They didn't come back to these cities to do evangelism but to help the new believers to grow in their faith. This involved:

1. ***strengthening the souls of the disciples***—Gk. “to cause someone to become stronger in the sense of more firm and unchanging in attitude or belief,” done by knowing God's Word
2. ***encouraging them to continue in the faith***—give support, confidence, hope to remain or persist in the faith, i.e., to obey the Word
3. ***saying, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God”***—We are in a warfare with the forces of the kingdom of darkness (Ephesians 6:10f). Expect hardships and persecution—it's what Jesus promised (John 16:33). See also 2 Timothy 2:3; 3:12; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 5:10. Paul was a living example of this in their midst.

APPLICATION—Israel was promised physical prosperity in the Land if they obeyed God's Word (Deuteronomy 28). In our age, Jesus said, *in the world you will have tribulation* (John 16:33). We are not promised the physical prosperity Israel was. Ours is an age of spiritual warfare with Satan and his world system of education, government, entertainment, employment, etc. [If you do have prosperity in health, relationships, material goods, etc., it is a gift from God (James 1:17), not based on what you deserve but a stewardship from God—it's your opportunity to serve Him. And you will be judged by God someday for what you did with what He gave you.]

Verse 23—*When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting*—Paul and Barnabas' stay with them was brief, and they prayerfully appointed some to faithfully lead and care for the believers in each city.

- ***they commended*** [to commit or entrust to the care of] ***them to the Lord***
- ***in whom they had believed***—It was faith in Jesus Christ that saved them and He would take care of them (Acts 20:32).

Verses 24-25—*They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia. And when they had spoken the word in Perga* [evidently Paul did not speak the Word there the first time they passed through in 13:14), ***they went down to Attalia***—on the Mediterranean coast.

Verse 26—*From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished*—They are back “home” from where they were sent out.

Verse 27—*When they had arrived and gathered the church together*, i.e. the believers in Antioch

- *they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles*—Paul and Barnabas saw themselves as instruments through whom God accomplished His purposes, and all the glory went to Him.

Verse 28—*And they spent a long time with the disciples.*

Chapter 15

The Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)

The Jerusalem Council, described in this chapter, was the first and most significant of all church councils in history. It settled the question: What must a person do to be saved? The apostles and elders resisted the pressure to impose Jewish legalism and ritualism on the Gentile believers. That is, they refused to include works as part of salvation and affirmed for all time the truth that salvation is wholly by God's grace through faith alone, apart from any human effort.

As more Gentiles became part of the church, the Jewish believers became more disturbed. Many believed the Gentiles had to first become Jewish proselytes and then become Christians. They could not handle the fact that Gentiles could simply become believers on an equal basis with Jewish believers. That seemed unfair to those who had devoted their lives to keeping God's law. They also feared an increasingly Gentile church, where Jewish culture, traditions, and influence would be lost.

They thought the Gentiles would be part of a Jewish church. In reality, the Jewish believers were actually part of a Gentile church!!

Verse 1—*Some men came down from Judea*—Jews from the area around Jerusalem, i.e., *some of our number to whom we* [apostles and elders in Jerusalem] *gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls* (15:24)—disturbing, troubling, to shake up

- *began teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved”*—Gentiles who thought they were saved already through faith alone in Christ, now were being told their salvation was invalid. These men distorted the Gospel and divided the church.

APPLICATION—Peter wrote, *...there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies...* (2 Peter 2:1). Paul said, *...savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them* (Acts 20:29-30). The most destructive of heresies is the teaching that salvation is by human works, because it damns people to hell. It is the doctrine of all false religions and the longest-running heresy in the history of the church. Paul said, *there are some who...want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!* (Gal 1:8).

Verse 2—*And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension* [to have a heated quarrel] *and debate with them*—The inclusion of the Gentiles threatened to divide the church along ethnic lines and put an end to the Jewish mission in the Diaspora (witness to Jews living outside Palestine).

- [*the brethren*—these two words not in the Greek, the “they” refers to “them,” the previous word—so it would be these men who had come from Judea who demanded that men be sent to Jerusalem to determine the matter] *determined* [designated] *that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue*—Trustworthy men were sent to the leaders in Jerusalem, at this point, the headquarters of the church with the leaders whom Christ chose to start the church. Whatever was decided in Jerusalem would be true for the whole church. That would not be true if it was decided in Antioch.

APPLICATION—When a controversy arises, especially a doctrinal one, consult with more mature believers whom you trust, such as a person, through commentaries, or on-line (such as at www.bible.org).

Verse 3—Therefore, being sent on their way (south) by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia (modern-day Lebanon) and Samaria (modern-day West Bank in Israel).

- **describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles**—areas populated by Hellenistic Jews and Samaritans, who were more open to the Gentile conversions than the Judean Jews were.
- **were bringing great joy to all the brethren**—Paul was building support as he journeyed.

Verse 4—When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders—because the believers in Jerusalem were not aware of what these false teachers had done

- **they reported all that God had done with them**—as they reported in Antioch, ...**how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles** (Acts 14:27).

Verse 5—But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up—These are different than the men in verse 1 who were teaching another Gospel (*Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved*).

- **saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses”**— These Pharisees, the text tells us, were believers, but they thought believers were still obligated to keep the Law. To them, circumcision was not a means of salvation but an obedience required after salvation.

APPLICATION—Some of Jesus’ most harsh language was against the Pharisees. He rebuked them for their hypocrisy (see Matthew 19:3-12; 22:15-22, 34-46; 23:1-39; John 8:3-11). It seems like some of them became believers, but they did not abandon the legalism of this sect, thus trying to keep Christianity within the narrow boundaries of Pharisaism. People bring baggage (especially religious baggage) with them when they become believers. We must continually ask: Is this my religious baggage or is this really what the Bible teaches?

Verse 6—The apostles and the elders came together (privately) to look into this matter—Luke does not tell us what happened in that meeting, except **after there had been much debate**—This meeting had many learned men, men who had walked with Jesus. They were making a huge decision, impacting the church for the rest of history and into eternity.

The speeches of Peter, Paul and Barnabas, and James present six proofs that salvation is only by grace:

1. Past Revelation Proves Salvation Is by Grace

Verse 7—Peter stood up and said to them, “Brethren, you know that in the early days [when the church began, right after Pentecost]

- **God made a choice among you**—Jesus chose Peter as His instrument to begin the church (Matthew 16:19).
- **that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe**—By Divine direction, Peter brought the Gospel to Cornelius and his household (Acts 10) about ten years earlier, and God saved them apart from circumcision, law-keeping, and ritual (Acts 10:44-48).

2. The Gift of the Spirit Proves Salvation Is by Grace

Verse 8—“And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us—When they were saved, the Holy Spirit was poured out on them, and they spoke in tongues, *just as we did* (Acts 10:44-48). Peter even related the story to them, and they agreed that salvation came to the Gentiles (Acts 11:1-18). [The gift of the Holy Spirit belongs only to the truly saved—Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 12:13; Galatians 3:14; 4:6.] Therefore, the legalists had no right to require of the Gentiles what God had not. The matter was divinely settled.

Verse 9—*and He made no distinction between us and them*—between Jewish believers and Gentile believers (Romans 1:16; 10:12; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11).

3. Cleansing from Sin Proves Salvation Is by Grace

- *cleansing their hearts by faith*—Ephesians 2:8-9. Hebrews 10 clearly says that there is no cleansing of sin from the offering of the blood of animals. It is only through faith in the blood of Christ that cleanses. So if the Gentiles were cleansed from their sin by faith, of what value would keeping the Law and Jewish ritual be?

4. Inability of the Law to Save Proves Salvation Is by Grace

Verse 10—*“Now therefore why do you put God to the test”*—It is not their place or responsibility to challenge what God has already proclaimed to be true.

APPLICATION—This phrase “put God to the test” is first found in Exodus 17:2, 7 where the Israelites demanded that God prove Himself by giving them water. In other words, they refused to believe God was with them unless He gave them what they wanted, when they wanted it. **To put God to the test is to demand that He act as we want Him to.** Later God said, “*You shall not put the Lord your God to the test...*” (Deuteronomy 6:16). This command was given just prior to them entering the Land and prohibiting them from following the religion of the Land and practicing their idolatry (vv. 13-15). False religions are based upon a direct relationship between the god they worship and the prosperity of the people. Idolatry was always involved because the people want a visual symbol of their belief. God is warning His people about obedience based only on tangible, visible evidence of His blessings. The people of God should obey Him because He is God, not because He brings prosperity. Obedience and trust are not to be conditioned upon God’s performance according to **our** expectations and standards. That’s putting God to the test, and it is sin. It was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:9, they *...agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test.*

- *by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear*—None of the Jewish believers had been saved by the Law or received the Holy Spirit by the Law. If it didn’t work for the Jews, why would it work for the Gentiles? In fact, the Jewish Law condemned people, it didn’t save people (Galatians 3:1-14).
- The Judaizers wanted tangible proof of God’s presence among the Gentiles in order to believe God had saved them. The visible evidence they demanded was the Jewish Law, especially that which stressed external, outward action, such as circumcision—their demands put God to the test.

Verse 11—*“But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are”*—To keep the Jewish Law was sinful because (1) it demeaned the person of Christ, through whom is our salvation, security, and sanctification (Ephesians 1; Colossians 1). (2) It doubts the power of the resurrected Christ, for it is only in His power that we can live righteously (Romans 8:11). (3) It denies the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-9).

5. The Fact of Miracles Proves Salvation Is by Grace

Verse 12—*All the people kept silent*—Unable to refute Peter’s arguments, they kept silent.

- *they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles*—They taught that salvation was by grace, and God confirmed their message with miracles (Acts 13:38-39; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4). These Judaizers could not produce any miracles to support their teaching.

6. Prophetic Promise Proves Salvation Is by Grace

Verse 13—*After they had stopped speaking, James* [head of the Jerusalem church, Jesus’ half-brother and author of the book of James (the Apostle James having already been put to death—Acts 12:2), and brother of Jude] *answered, saying, “Brethren, listen to me.”*

Verse 14—“*Simeon [Peter] has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name*—What God began through Peter, He was now carrying out through Paul and Barnabas. This shows the continuity and unity between Peter’s offer of the Gospel to the Gentiles and Paul’s mission to the Gentiles. Both were initiated by God.

Verse 15—“*With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written*—The Old Testament foretold that God would save the Gentiles, as part of the Davidic Covenant, and James quoted Amos 9:11-12 to prove it. [While the words do not exactly match the Old Testament Hebrew words, under the inspiration of God, what James quotes is the sense of the passage as God intended it to be understood here.]

Verse 16—‘*AFTER THESE THINGS I will return,
AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN,
AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS,
AND I WILL RESTORE IT*—Obviously referring to the future Millennial Kingdom.

Verse 17—*SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD,
AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,*’—James is using this in the sense that, in the Kingdom, Gentiles are saved without becoming Jewish proselytes. They are saved Gentiles, an entity separate from Judaism. If they don’t have to become Jewish in the future Jewish Kingdom, then they don’t have to become Jewish in the present church age.

Verse 18—*SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO.*

The Decision

Verse 19—“*Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble* [as the Judaizers who went to Antioch and caused trouble did] *those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles*—The evidence for salvation by grace presented during the speeches was conclusive. As head of the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17), he gave his judgment that keeping the Law and Jewish rituals were not requirements for salvation.

APPLICATION—I want to stress this point—*They* were not deciding what was and was not salvation. They simply heard the evidence of what God had done: sent Peter to Cornelius, Cornelius was saved, evidenced by receiving the Holy Spirit and tongues, just as Peter and the group did in Acts 2, and the miracles God performed through Paul, also giving evidence this was of God. It is God who communicated that salvation was by grace and not by works. They simply recognized that fact.

Verse 20—*but that we write to them that they abstain:*

- **From things contaminated by idols**—This refers to food offered to pagan gods and then sold in temple butcher shops. Paul dealt with this in 1 Corinthians 8:8-13 and 10:14-33. Food in itself has no morals attached to it, but as soon as it has been offered to idols, it has some meaning. If either a believer or an unbeliever saw them eating food offered to idols, it would be a stumbling block to them. So don’t be a stumbling block.

APPLICATION—Beware especially of wearing jewelry that has religious significance (such as a ying/yang symbol) or practicing exercises from Eastern religions. When such things have religious significance, it sends the wrong message and can be a stumbling block to unbelievers and even to less mature, or young, Christians.

- **from fornication**—This is the Greek word *porneia*, referring to sexual sin in general (including pre-marital sex, adultery, homosexuality, lusting, etc.)—see 1 Corinthians 6:15-20.
- **from what is strangled and from blood**—This involved dietary laws, not only under the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 3:17; 7:26; 17:12-14; 19:26) but also as a command given to Noah when God said mankind could now eat meat (Genesis 9:4). Eating meat with blood in it contaminates the meat. But to the point here, it would be a stumbling block to any Jew, whether believer or non-believer, if they wanted to fellowship with them at a meal, such as the Love Feast Communion meal, if “Jewish” believers ate with “Gentile” believers.

Verse 21—“*For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath*”—To participate in those things would be to offend Jews, and there are Jews in every city. So to make table fellowship between Gentiles and Jewish believers possible and for the sake of the Jewish-Christian witness in the Diaspora, they asked that the Gentiles maintain love and abstain from these things. The point is to maintain a practical unity in the church.

APPLICATION—These are questions you need to ask: Is what I am doing an actual stumbling block to someone coming to Christ? Is it legalism (a man-made required rule)? Does it maintain or hinder practical unity among our brothers and sisters in Christ?

Verse 22—*Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch* [the center of Gentile Christianity] *with Paul and Barnabas* [else the Judaizers would accuse Paul and Barnabas of giving a biased account of the proceedings]—*Judas called Barsabbas* [possibly *Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus* of Acts 1:23 who was put forward in the selection of an apostle to replace Judas], *and Silas* [he accompanies Paul on his second missionary journey—Acts 15:40; 16:19, 25, 29; 17:4, 10, 14, 15; 18:5], *leading men among the brethren*—recognizing the vital importance of the mission, the Jerusalem church sent two of its best.

Verses 23-29—*and they sent this letter by them*

“The apostles and the brethren who are elders [from the Jewish believers]
To the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles [to the Gentile believers]

Greetings.

Since we have heard that some of our number [Jews] *to whom we gave no instruction* [they weren’t sent from the apostles in Jerusalem] *have disturbed* [lit. “to create fear”] *you with their words, unsettling* [a word used only here in the N.T., used of going bankrupt or of a military force plundering a town] *your souls* [teaching, “*Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved,*” therefore, telling the Gentile believers they were not saved after all], *it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well* [i.e., it is for evangelism, it is for not putting a stumbling block in front of others, it is for fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers—notice they did not say “you will be saved.”]

Farewell.”

APPLICATION—In using the words “disturbed” and “unsettling,” Luke describes in graphic terms the effect of false teaching among believers. No wonder there are so many warnings to be discerning. If you are deceived by a false teacher, it will create fear in your soul and he/she will bankrupt or plunder your soul. Jesus said they look peaceful and innocent (*in sheep’s clothing*) but inside they are *ravenous wolves*, wanting to devour you (Matthew 7:15). See also Romans 16:17-18; 2 Timothy 4:3. The Bible warns over and over, *Do not be deceived...* (1 Corinthians 6:9; 15:33; Galatians 6:7; James 1:16). It’s **your** responsibility for yourself. No one is watching over you when you read a magazine or book, listen to the radio or TV, talk to someone, go in the Internet, listen to a message, etc. The people in Antioch were new believers and perhaps more easily deceived, but the longer you are a believer, the more responsible you are.

Verse 30—*So when they were sent away, they went down* [it’s north, but everything is down from the hill of Jerusalem] *to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.*

The Result

Verse 31—*When they had read it, they rejoiced*—they celebrated the good news, lifting a load of worry off their shoulders

- *because of its encouragement*—they were reassured that they were indeed saved

Verse 32—*Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves*—Giving words from God before and during the time the Bible was written

- *encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message*—They added their own words of encouragement to the letter

Verse 33—*After they had spent time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out*—peace comes with security and assurance of salvation (2 Peter 1:2; 2 John 3).

Verse 34—*[But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.]*

Verse 35—*But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord*—They continued their ministry where they left off before traveling to Jerusalem. Now others joined them in teaching and preaching the Word of the Lord.

So the church survived its greatest challenge and established the doctrine of salvation by grace. Satan's attempt to insert false teaching into the church was prevented. And the attempt to split the church along racial lines and cultural lines was also prevented.

Peter is not mentioned again in Acts, and the Jerusalem church plays little or no role (Acts 21:15-26).

The Second Missionary Journey (15:36-41)

Verse 36—*After some days* [don't know exactly how long] *Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord* [on the First Missionary Journey—chapters 13–14], *and see how they are."* Paul told the Corinthians, *in Christ Jesus, I became your father, through the Gospel* (1 Corinthians 4:15). He cared for their well-being as a father would his own children. Paul was their spiritual father.

Verse 37—*Barnabas wanted* [Gk. persistent] *to take John, called Mark* [Barnabas' relative—Colossians 4:10—remember Barnabas was the name, meaning "encouragement" that the church had given him in Acts 4:36] *along with them also.*

Verse 38—*But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work* [13:13]

Verse 39—*And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus* [Barnabas' home—Acts 4:36]

Verse 40—*But Paul chose Silas*—Silas was a respected leader in the Jerusalem church (15:22), he was a prophet who could proclaim and teach God's Word (15:32), he was a Jew who would have entrance into the synagogues, and was a Roman citizen (16:37). He was a good person for the team.

- *left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord*—Usually prayer and laying on of hands, committing them to the Lord and committing themselves to pray for them.

APPLICATION— (1) It would have been unwise and difficult to take Mark along on the trip if Paul didn't trust him and expected him to bolt at any time. (2) Mark was not commended by the church. (3) God used this to have two teams, instead of one—it was great for Silas and it was a time to mature Mark. Later he became one of Paul's valued co-workers (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11). He also became close to Peter (1 Peter 5:13) and wrote one of the four Gospels. Paul later wrote well of Barnabas' ministry (1 Corinthians 9:6). While the manner of this split doesn't seem good, the fact of the split evidently had good results. Splits aren't always bad.

Verse 41—*And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia*—on the first journey, he went through Cyprus, but with Barnabas and Mark already there, he evidently skipped that place this time.

- *strengthening the churches*—of course, he means churches = believers (Ephesians 1:19, 22-23).

Chapter 16

Verse 1—*Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra* (14:6f)—on the first journey, they went to Lystra last. But this time he went there first.

- *And a disciple was there, named Timothy*—evidently, he became a believer on Paul's first visit (see 14:1).
- *the son of a Jewish woman [Eunice] who was a believer* [also his grandmother Lois was a believer—2 Timothy 1:5], *but his father was a Greek*—"The use of an imperfect tense verb, instead of present tense, ...suggests he was dead" (MacArthur, *Acts*).

Verse 2—*and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium*—As Paul later wrote to Timothy, a leader should be *above reproach* (1 Timothy 3:2, 10).

Verse 3—*Paul wanted this man to go with him*—As Silas replaced Barnabas, Timothy replaced John Mark in traveling with Paul.

APPLICATION—I imagine this would be a hard decision for Timothy's mother and grandmother, remembering when Paul had been in their area before, he was beaten and left for dead. It is possible that a similar thing might happen to Timothy. But it seems like the believers here in Lystra laid hands on him and sent him with Paul (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6).

- *and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek*—There is nothing here that implies Paul was circumcising Timothy as a requirement for salvation, which the Judaizers in 15:1 were teaching (in fact, Timothy was already a believer—v. 1). Paul wanted Timothy to be circumcised to avoid placing an unnecessary stumbling block in the way of Jewish evangelism. Timothy's circumcision would allow him full access to the synagogues he would visit with Paul and Silas. Later Paul wrote, *For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews...I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some* (1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

APPLICATION—Obviously, this has to be applied carefully. You must determine if the action is sin or against God's Word. Is it truly a stumbling block issue? Perhaps get advice about it. Paul's circumcising Timothy was avoiding giving any unnecessary offense. Paul's refusal to circumcise Titus was because there it was an issue of legalism (Galatians 2:3).

Verse 4—*Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe*—It states specifically that they were teaching what the Jerusalem Council decided—which, for sure, was that circumcision was not necessary for salvation. Again, stressing that Timothy's circumcision had nothing to do with salvation.