



North Christian Church
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Self-Guided Study

Topic

The Book of Acts – Chapters 13-15

Background

- See previous Self-Guided Study outlines for additional details
- Paul’s “First Missionary Journey”: AD 46-48 (**Acts 13:4 – 14:28**) (see available diagrams)
- Zeus: considered the “king” of the Greek Gods; Hermes: considered the “messenger” of the gods
- “Bar-jesus”: translates “son of” + “Joshua”; was a false prophet
- “Elders”: *presbuteros* (Gr.); are pastors in the NT; there’s an OT analog that the early church would’ve been comfortable with in understanding/adopting the NT office
- John (not the apostle, aka “Mark”): friend of Barnabas, took Paul some time to fully appreciate him (**Acts 15:37** vs. **2Ti 4:11**); he also wrote the Gospel of Mark

Critical Thinking Questions (pre-reading)

- Why were missionaries typically sent out in twos, at least, and sometimes even more? (cp **Ecc 4:12**)
- How critical was the presence of encouragement in the early church? Who needed to be encouraged, and how? Was playing “second fiddle” a less honorable post?
- Who were consistently the main antagonists to the spreading of the Gospel? (cp **Acts 14:2**)
- How significant is it that Paul’s first missionary journey was ~1600 miles long and took ~2 years to complete? Can we sometimes forget about such context? If so, what are the negative repercussions?
- Where was the center of Christianity and what’s the significance of its location and who was leading the charge? Is there a “center” today?

- Was everything “perfectly” ironed out in the early church? If not, why not? Are there remnants of this issue even today? If so, why?
- How strong might the convictions of those leading the early church have been? How were leaders chosen? How does that compare to today?

Reading Outline

- Read chapters 13-15 in the Book of Acts
- Read more deliberately, but never stalling, than you would if you were reading the whole book for big-picture
- Don’t lose sight of the overall purpose of the book, the “big-picture” themes, and any sweeping concepts
- Have FUN while reading and do not get frustrated...EVER!
- ALWAYS keep the Gospel reality at the forefront of your mind (eg: remember God’s ultimate purpose for authoring the Bible – to reveal His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ)

Post-Reading Questions/Conclusions

- **v12:25 (for context)** - who is “Mark” and how qualified might he have been to actually pen the Gospel after his name? What is the significance of his being a first-hand partaker in Paul’s First Missionary journey (at least part of it)?
- **v13:2** – what is the significance of WHO chooses missionaries (cp **v4**)? Is it a local church that chooses or the Holy Spirit? How does this relate to spiritual gifts, in general (**1Co 12**)? Is there a general case of application for ALL spiritual gifts here? If so, what is it?
- **v13:3** – what do we call the “laying on of hands” today? What is the significance of it?
- **v13:5** – who did the missionaries go to first with the Gospel (cp **Rom 1:16**)? Is this a pattern that we see in the Bible? (cp **Rom 2:9-11**)
- **v13:7** – what is the significance of the “intelligent” proconsul wanting to “hear” the word of God? Why does the Bible describe him as intelligent?
- **v13:8-12** – how might this display of power have established Paul’s authority and apostleship?
- **v13:13a** – following the scene in **v8-12**, do you notice a change in the way the Bible refers to the group? (cp **v13:2**)
- **v13:13b** – why might John (aka Mark) have decided to leave them? Does this act go over well with Paul and Barnabas? (cp **v15:37-38**) Do such things occur in the ministry even today?
- **v13:14** – what is the significance of the day they chose to sit in the synagogues of the Jews? What might the Jews’ perspective of these men be at the time? How might Jews even today receive a Gospel-bearing Christian into their synagogues on the Sabbath? Would they be inclined to as such visitors to speak freely?

- **v13:16** – why did Paul make a point of addressing both Jews and Gentiles?
- **v13:20** – do you ever take the time to REALLY think about the timeframes in which the Lord God chooses to work? What portion of righteous perspective might we lose by not considering such things?
- **v13:23** – how significant is the phrase, “as he promised”, to the Jews who were waiting for their Messiah? (cp **v27**) Is it possible, also, that the Jews knew of Paul’s former prominence as a Pharisee under the “great” Gamaliel? Why would that have mattered in context here?
- **v13:26** – what do you see in Paul’s addresses to the crowds? How does he address the Jews versus the Gentiles? Why not clump them together?
- **v13:32-36** – how appropriate and powerful is it to have Paul (formerly Saul the “Pharisee of Pharisees” – **Acts 23:6**) quoting OT scripture in the presence of the Jews? How does this differ from his greater dissertation with the Gentile Corinthians in **1Co 15**? Is there a different tact Paul uses, depending on audience? (cp **1Co 9:22**; **1Co 10:32-33**)
- **v13:38-41** – how might the Gospel message been confusing to the Jews? Would it be somehow less of a stumbling block to the Gentiles, or did they have their own obstacles to overcome? (cp **1Co 1:22-24**)
- **v13:43** – how is the “grace” message different than what devout Jews at the time would’ve been familiar with? (cp **2:15-21**; **5:2-11**)
- **v13:44-45** – what do you see here? Why are the Jews “filled with jealousy”? Is this jealousy warranted? Is it blinding? Have you ever tried to give the gospel truth to a religious person, only to be attacked and discredited?
- **v13:46-48** – might this be a clear indication of Paul’s change of policy in his mission?...from “Jews first” to Gentile focus?
- **v13:49-50** – do we see this kind of strategy played out even today? Is this politics, essentially, being used to accomplish a religious agenda? Was the Jewish way of life political? (cp **v14:2**)
- **v13:51-14:1** – how encouraged ought we be by this even today?
- **v14:3** – what is the significance of signs here? (cp **1Co 1:22**)
- **v14:9** – how might you explain Paul’s ability to “see” the lame man’s faith? Are we able to “see” such things or is this a function of a spiritual gift? Is it feasible that certain spiritual gifts are given supernatural discernment even today?
- **v14:11-13** – Yowza! – what happened here? How might Paul and his companions received this response?
- **v14:16-17** – what is Paul saying here? How does this amplify the “gentile perspective” that the Spirit has taught us in the past from the pulpit? (cp **Rom 1:20**; **Rom 2:14-16**)
- **v14:19-20** – is it ironic that Paul suffers the same fate as Stephen (**v7:54-60**)? Did the Jews typically stone people inside the city or was there another place? Was Paul really dead? If so, was there a miracle witnessed here? How powerful was this scene to others...even today?

- **v14:22a** – why do you think there needed to be persistent encouragement in the early church? As our own society spirals away from Christ, might we expect the need for increased encouragement also? Where might we find it? (cp **Heb 10:25**)
- **v14:23** – who are these “elders”? What is their function in the Church?
- **v14:27** – how important/edifying would Paul’s ~2 year debriefing to the disciples in Antioch been at the time? What about the news of his policy change to focus on the Gentiles?
- **v14:28** – what might the benefit of staying a “long time” had been to Paul and his companions?
- **v15:1** - how relentless are religious people? Do we still have to deal with such things even today? Have you dealt with “salvation by works” with others? Was this a one-time issue or something that Paul had to deal with throughout his lifetime? (cp **Gal 5:7-15**)
- **v15:2** – what is the significance of their special trip back to the “Jewish hub” of Jerusalem? Is this a show of humility? (cp **1Co 15:9; 2Co 11:5**)
- **v15:3** – how did Paul and Barnabas “make the most of their time”, even while traveling? What might WE learn from their actions?
- **v15:5** – given that these believers are wrong about works, what might we say about believers even today? Is it possible to be saved and then adopt a false doctrine on salvation itself? How does this relate to the doctrine of eternal security?
- **v15:7-9** – how critical are Peter’s statements here?
- **v15:10** – how does this statement compare to **Gal 5:1**?
- **v15:11** – cp **Eph 2:8-9**
- **v15:12** – who might be perceived here as encouraging the group? Who is stated first, Barnabas or Paul? What was Barnabas’ nickname (**Acts 4:36**)?
- **v15:13-18** – how significant is it that James, Jesus’ brother, added to Peter’s previous words, adding specifically OT scripture? What kind of “street credibility” did James have in the early church?
- **v15:19-21** – what is the purpose of James’ final judgment? If Gentiles weren’t under the Law, proper, then why suggest they follow a portion of it? Could this have something to do with living side by side with Jewish unbelievers who they might be trying to evangelize?
- **v15:31** – is this the reaction that you would have expected?
- **v15:35** – why might Paul and Barnabas have chosen to stay in Antioch?
- **v15:36-41** – what is Paul’s heart here? How about Barnabas’? Is it possible that God used something unpleasant for His own glory? Does this happen even today in the churches? How does grace “save the day” here? Does the church take sides or do they leave it in the hands of the Lord? How might this be a lesson for churches today who suffer such contentions and split up? (cp **1Co9:6; Gal 2:11-13; Col 4:10; Phm 24; 2Ti 4:11; 1Pe 5:13**)

Useful Resources (furnished upon request)

- Maps: Paul's, Philip's, and Peter's journeys; geographic reach of Acts
- Timelines: harmony of the Gospels, Acts, and remaining books of NT; Paul's life
- Pictures: of places mentioned in Acts (eg: Rome); the Temple at Jerusalem