

The Book of Acts Study Guide

Chapters 13-14

13:1-12

The scene shifts from Jerusalem back to Antioch. The Antioch assembly was better-equipped than Jerusalem to carry out the task of taking the Good News of Yeshua to the Gentiles. Antioch was the base of Saul, and Barnabas had come to be with him there to teach the believers for over a year.

- v. 1 – They were joined by a number of other gifted prophets and teachers who had a diversity of cultural backgrounds.
- v. 2 – The Holy Spirit set apart Barnabas and Saul to be the ones who lead this endeavor. This is an indication of the importance of God’s calling when it comes to missions. It is a holy (set-apart) undertaking, in which God’s calling must be evident. Therefore, not everyone is a missionary. But that does not negate the responsibility of all believers to be witnesses. It just affirms that God does set apart some believers for special purposes.
- v. 3 – The example here is that there needs to be a formal way of indicating that missionaries have been set apart and sent forth with the blessing of a local assembly.
- v. 4 – This is known as the first missionary journey. Their first stop was the island of Cyprus (accompanied by John Mark). But the first thing these “missionaries to the Gentiles” did was to witness to the Jews of Cyprus. In fact, everywhere that Saul went, he always stopped first at the local synagogue and proclaimed Yeshua. This shows that he never lost his passion for the salvation of his fellow Jewish people. And he set the example of including outreach to the Jewish people in church missions programs today. His example is not an either/or approach, but both/and.
- v. 9 – This is the first time the name Paul is used regarding Saul. This practice is different from the way that Simon became known as Peter. In Matthew 16:18, Yeshua declared that Simon would be known as Peter. Prior to that he was always identified as Simon Peter or “Simon who is known as Peter” (written after the fact by the Gospel writers for clarification). It is interesting to note that Matthew never refers to Peter as Simon again after that. So in his case, it was clearly a name change by the Lord. But no such occurrence is recorded here. It is all about Saul utilizing his Latin name Paul that indicated his rights as a citizen of Rome That would enable him to go to various Gentile communities and to find acceptance. It was a strategic move that was consistent with the way that he varied his message from one context to another (see 1 Cor 9:20-23).

But it is also important to note that even though he is identified with the name Paul in the rest of the New Testament, he never stopped being the Jewish man Saul whose heart’s desire was the salvation of his fellow Jewish people (Rom 10:1).

- vv 6-8 – At the far end of the island of Cyprus, they run into a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus (“Son of Salvation”), also known as Elymas (his Greek name). Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul or governor of Cyprus, wanted to hear the message of Paul and Barnabas. But Elymas tried to prevent this from happening because he knew that if the proconsul believed the message, his role, which may have had an official capacity, would come to an end. His actions illustrate the way that the motives behind opposition to believers may be personal in nature.

- vv. 9-11 – Paul exercised the divine authority given to him as an Apostle and Elymas is blinded (remember, according to 1:22 Apostles had to be a witness of the resurrection of Yeshua, and Paul was qualified in that way because Yeshua had appeared to him on the road to Damascus).
- v. 12 – The proconsul believed because of what he witnessed and the message that had been taught to him. It demonstrates the importance regarding witnessing of people needing to know the truth and to see the reality of that truth, especially in terms of making a difference in the circumstances of our lives.

13:13-41

- v. 13 – From Cyprus they sailed to the southern shore of central modern-day Turkey. But John Mark turned around and went back to Jerusalem.
- vv. 14-15 – Paul and Barnabas headed inland and observed Shabbat in the customary manner at the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. The *Torah* portion was read, followed by the *haftarah* (reading from the Prophets). Then Paul was given an opportunity to teach on what they had just read.
- vv. 16-22 – Paul began with a historical review from the Exodus to David.
- v. 23 – Then he connected David to Yeshua as the offspring of promise and the Savior.
- vv. 24-25 – He showed Yeshua’s relationship to John the Baptist, who was regarded favorably by most Jewish people.
- v. 27 – His referral to the people not recognizing Yeshua or the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath. It demonstrates how easy it is to have the truth right in front of you and not realizing it or believing it as truth.
- vv. 28-29 – Paul described the death of Yeshua in a non-judgmental tone, and did not assign condemnation on the Jewish people as a whole for Yeshua’s rejection by the leaders of Judaism. If God had intended a cursing on the Jewish people as some critics have promoted historically, this would be an appropriate place to mention it in Paul’s summary of the big picture.
- vv. 30-32 – But he did not do that and turned the focus to how God fulfilled His plan through Yeshua. as a “promise made to the fathers” (v. 32). He then used a series of verses in the Tanakh to show how Yeshua fulfilled God’s plan.
- v. 33 – Paul quotes from Ps 2:7 – showing that the Messianic prophecies had to be fulfilled through a rightful descendant of David who is also the Son of God.
- v. 34 – He refers to Isa 55:3, which brings out the everlasting nature of the one who would come through David.
- v. 35 – He quotes Ps 16:10 in order to show God’s plan required both the death of the Messiah and His resurrection.
- vv. 36-39 – He reminded them that David could not have been writing about himself, for he experienced bodily decay like everyone else. Only Yeshua avoided decay through His resurrection. In light of these things, Paul gets to the heart of the matter, stating that the people had two options: believing in Yeshua or continuing to observe Torah alone. But complete forgiveness of sin is only possible through Yeshua. In contrast, the Law of

Moses cannot bring about complete justification and people can never be freed from sin through its observance.

vv. 40-41 – Paul cites Habbakuk 1:5, which was a warning to the people of Judah prior to their captivity in Babylon. That warning from the prophet also applied to the Jewish people in Paul’s day because just as the Babylonian captivity was a judgment from God, but they had prophets warning them in advance, the present generation would likewise face judgment if they did not heed the message that they had been given.

13:42-52

vv. 42-43 – Some Jews and Gentile converts to Judaism believed their message and continued to spend time with Paul and Barnabas. They also encouraged them to return to the synagogue the next Sabbath, which they did.

vv. 44-45 – But would must have gotten out because a massive crowd showed up, meaning Gentiles, in addition to the Jews who would normally have been there on Shabbat. But the mere fact that a message of hope was being extended to Gentiles infuriated the Jewish leaders who were still under the false assumption that Gentiles were unclean in God’s eyes and thus not deserving of His grace. So they blasphemed (spoke evil) against Paul and Barnabas and clearly that represented the majority opinion of the community.

v. 46-47 – The conclusion of Paul & Barnabas established three key points:

- They had to speak the message first to the Jewish community because it was consistent with God’s faithfulness in communicating His message to the people of promise and the audience of the prophets?
- The repudiation of their message was evidence of the people judging themselves unworthy of eternal life. They had no excuse because the facts had been presented to them. That is a sad, but accurate reality when we witness to others. If they reject our message, they have at least been given an opportunity to believe it and they only have themselves to blame. The key, from our perspective, is to be careful to be clear and loving communicators of the Good News so that the rejection is of the message, not the messenger.
- Because Israel was called to be a light to the nations (Isa 49:6), but they were failing in that calling, Paul and Barnabas would accept that role. As a result, the Gentiles of the community reacted with much excitement. No doubt they had been told that they were unworthy of the blessings of the God of Israel and treated as second-class citizens. So hearing a different message would be greatly welcomed.

v. 48 – The phrase “as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” is evidence of the election of God regarding to those who are saved.

vv. 49-52 – Notice the reaction of those who rejected the Gospel message. It shows that people who consider themselves to be devout can still practice hatred, even persecution, likely justifying it as a way of defending your religion.

14:1-6

Some people have interpreted Paul’s reaction by turning to the Gentiles at the end of chapter 13 as a complete transfer of the message of the Gospel from Jews to Gentiles as a whole. But what

was the first thing Paul and Barnabas did when they arrived in Iconium? They went right to the local synagogue. So that means what took place in chapter 13 was a local turning to the Gentiles. They were still committed to taking the gospel to the Jews.

The response in Iconium was mixed. A number of Jews and Gentiles believed, while others rejected the message and prepared to stone Paul and Barnabas. That's when they decided to leave town.

14:7-19

- v. 7 – They went to the nearby town of Lystra and continued preaching the Gospel.
- vv. 8-10 – But what really got the attention of the people was Paul's healing of a man who was lame from birth (remember, as an Apostle, he had the authority to do such things).
- vv. 11-13 – The people called Barnabas, Zeus and Paul, Hermes because they were trying to explain the things they observed using their existing framework, which was Greek mythology. And according to that religion, the gods frequently came to earth and interacted with humanity. It also illustrates the way that people who have no biblical understanding try to interpret the things that we know are really from God.
- vv. 14-17 – Paul and Barnabas handled this attention effectively by deflecting it and making sure that the people understood they were mere men. Then they contrasted their human limitations with the reality of God, using an explanation of General Revelation—the existence of the true God reflected in creation. It is important to notice that they did not criticize the pagan belief system of the Greeks, but simply affirmed the truth they had come to know themselves. They were offering Good News (v. 15). This contrasted the Greek understanding that they gods blessed those who offered hospitality and sacrifices, but would bring harsh judgment on those who didn't. That explains why the people wanted to put garlands on them and offer sacrifices (v. 13). But Paul and Barnabas did not show the error or the bad news of that kind of belief. They simply proclaimed the Good News of Yeshua.
- vv. 18-19 – This great popularity suddenly dissipated when their opponents from Iconium, and Antioch showed up and agitated the crowd. This led to Paul being stoned and, presumed dead, his body was dragged outside of the city.

14:20

- v. 20 – But Paul survived and they went to the next town of Derbe.
- v. 21 – After making many disciples there, they turned around and retraced their steps to Lystra, Iconium, and (Pisidian) Antioch.
- vv. 22-23 – This time their purpose was not evangelistic, but ministering to the disciples in the new believing assemblies of those communities. They took care of administrative matters by appointing elders to shepherd the people. They also had a very specific message that was based on their recent personal experiences—continue in the faith in spite of the tribulations/persecution that will come your way. That message is consistent with what Paul would later write to Timothy: “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Messiah Yeshua will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12).
- vv. 24-25 – Then they made their way back onboard a ship to their home base in Antioch, and restored their fellowship with the believing community there.