



Acts Facts – Part 3

A study in the Book of Acts. We go through Acts from chapter 10 verse 1, to chapter 16 verse 15. We take our study verse by verse.

This e-book is the third part of our study. In Part 4, we will complete our verse by verse study of the book of Acts.

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Author: Ron Graham

Verse by Verse Studies in Acts

—Author's Preface

Introduction and overview of the verse by verse exposition of Acts of the Apostles.

I have spent hundreds of hours putting together a complete verse by verse study of Acts. In this preface I explain some of the aims and attitudes behind this work, and how you might make the best use of it.

1 *The Paraphrase*

The text of Acts appearing in these studies is my own paraphrase. My main aims were to present Luke's text in a straightforward manner, keeping the language simple. I've done such things as (1) broken up long sentences into shorter ones; (2) replaced many pronouns with the nouns they refer to; (3) eliminated most instances of *And* where it starts or joins sentences; (4) Eliminated phrases such as "*it happened that*" which are stylistic but contain no information; (5) replaced some of Luke's terms with more understandable ones such as *commander* instead of his *chiliarch*.

Beyond these measures, I have frequently not reproduced the exact sentence structure and phraseology of Luke, but rather used my own words to express what he meant. That's what a *paraphrase* is. I realise that some *translators* will even take these liberties, but I have not attempted a *translation*. The paraphrase, is intended to be expository—to explain and bring out the meaning of the original text.

The symbol ¶ appears before each section of my paraphrase, to remind the student that I am not quoting from any translation but using my own words.

The paraphrase appears in discrete sections, but is also repeated in fragments with the comments. Sometimes the paraphrase will differ slightly in the fragment compared to the sectional reading. This is intentional.

My paraphrase loses much of the elegant style of Luke's penmanship. That's the sacrifice made for the sake of presenting Luke's narrative in a modern style that has a familiar feel to many readers and may be clearer to them. But my purpose is not to replace the many translations that do convey Luke's manner of story telling. Even Luke himself would consider that understanding and believing the story itself is more important than appreciating the skill and culture of the story teller. Of course, these are not mutually exclusive, but my purpose is to help primarily with understanding and belief.

Chapters and Verses

The paraphrase is presented in natural sections and logical paragraphs. The traditional "chapters and verses" are sometimes arbitrary and clumsy divisions that inappropriately break the flow of the narrative. They weren't part of the original scripture. Nevertheless I have included "chapters and verses" in the natural sections to provide customary reference. However I have made the verse numbers unobtrusive so they don't interfere with the natural flow and structure.

2 *The Notes*

Between the sections of the paraphrase, various notes appear. I've not attempted to deal with every matter that might arise. If a detail is merely academic and not necessary to a good understanding of the passage, then the note on that detail will be brief if it occurs at all. In other cases the notes will be thorough because the matter is important. The notes, like the paraphrase, are intended to be expository—to explain and bring out the meaning of the original text.

3 *The Maps*

I have some years ago prepared simple maps of the area covered in Acts. The appropriate maps are placed on each lesson so that the student does not have to go looking for them. There is a maps page with all the maps together, but it seemed good to me to place the maps on the lesson pages as well.

My Reservations

I have some reservations about presenting these expository or verse by verse studies. Paraphrasing scripture, and inserting one's own comments between the verses, could be viewed as a great impertinence: adding one's own words to the scripture. However expository teaching, if done honestly and carefully, is a very direct and powerful means of helping people understand, appreciate, and apply the scriptures for themselves. I urge all students to have their own Bibles at hand, and to read the whole passage for themselves, then turn to my paraphrase and notes as distinct from the scripture. I have taken much care with this work, and continue to check and edit it. It is by this care that I justify using the expository method.

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Author: Ron Graham

Acts 9:32-43

—Verse by verse

This page is a verse by verse study of Acts 9:32-43, about Peter's Miracles in Lydda and Joppa. Peter healed a paralyzed man and raised Tabitha from death back to life.

Peter's Miracles in Lydda and Joppa

Acts 9:32-43

¶³²Peter was travelling all around, and he came down to visit the holy people who lived at Lydda. In Lydda, ³³Peter came upon a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden with paralysis for eight years. ³⁴Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Rise up and make your bed.' Immediately Aeneas got out of bed. ³⁵All the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord." (Acts 9:32-35).

¶³⁶At Joppa, there was a disciple named Tabitha. Her name translated is Dorcas or Gazelle. This woman was full of good works and constant acts of mercy. ³⁷However, she fell sick in those days, and died. Her carers washed her and laid her in an upper room. ³⁸The disciples at Joppa heard that Peter was nearby at Lydda. So they sent two men to Peter, imploring him to come to them without delay. ³⁹Peter got up and went with them. On reaching Joppa, they brought Peter into the upper room. All the widows stood by weeping. They showed Peter the coats and garments that Dorcas had made while she was with them alive." (Acts 9:36-39).

¶⁴⁰Peter asked everyone to leave the room. He knelt and prayed. Then he turned to the body and said, 'Tabitha, arise!' Tabitha opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. ⁴¹He offered her his hand, and lifted her up. Then he called the holy ones and widows and presented Tabitha alive. ⁴²This miracle became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³Peter ended up staying many days in Joppa, as a guest of Simon, a tanner." (Acts 40-43).

1 *Peter's Miracle at Lydda*

Verse 32

¶ "Peter was travelling all around, and he came down to visit the saints who lived at Lydda." (Acts 9:32).



- **Saints** The disciples of Christ are called “saints” four times in the book of Acts. It means those who are *sanctified* or made holy, and this applies to all disciples (1Thessalonians 5:23-24). Instead of the word “saints”, we can use the term “holy people” —it means the same thing.

Verses 33-35

¶ "In Lydda, Peter came upon a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden with paralysis for eight years. Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Rise up and make your bed.” Immediately Aeneas got out of bed. All the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord." (Acts 9:33-35).

- **Immediately.** One characteristic of the healing miracles performed by the apostles was *immediacy*. The healing was not gradual with a period of convalescence. Nor was there any need to coax the healed into standing up and taking a few faltering steps. The healing was immediate and complete.
- **All saw him.** Another characteristic of the apostolic healing miracles is the quality of *testimony*. A large number of people saw the man healed, knowing first hand what condition he had been in before the healing.

2 Peter’s Miracle at Joppa

Verses 36-37

¶ "At Joppa, there was a disciple named Tabitha. Her name translated is Dorcas or Gazelle. This woman was full of good works and constant acts of mercy. However, she fell sick in those days, and died. Her carers washed her and laid her in an upper room." (Acts 9:36-37).

- **Good people die.** It's hard for us to understand why sickness and death inflict even those who are full of mercy and good works. The death of Dorcas, like the death of any righteous and beloved person, is sad and disheartening. It's hard to see the reason why. Trials and tribulations, sickness and sorrow, death and disappointment —these are facts of life that our faith must face. We rely on the promise of heaven: "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain..." (Revelation 21:4).

Verses 38-39

¶ "The disciples at Joppa heard that Peter was nearby at Lydda. So they sent two men to Peter, imploring him to come to them without delay. Peter got up and went with them. On reaching Joppa, they brought Peter into the upper room. All the widows stood by weeping. They showed Peter the coats and garments that Dorcas had made while she was with them alive." (Acts 9:38-39).

- **Peter nearby.** It seems that there was nobody in Joppa who could raise the dead. No surprise there. In the normal world, there is never anybody who can raise the dead once death is complete. But on this occasion there was, in a nearby town, an apostle of Jesus Christ who could raise the dead. Knowing this, the disciples at Joppa sent for Peter with urgency. He came to find Dorcas surrounded by women weeping. Since they were widows, this was not the first time death had caused them to weep. But weeping and lamenting, as appropriate as it was, wouldn't bring Dorcas back. However, Peter could.

Verses 40-42

¶ "Peter asked everyone to leave the room. He knelt and prayed. Then he turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, arise!" Tabitha opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. He offered her his hand, and lifted her up. Then he called the saints and widows and presented Tabitha alive. This miracle became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord." (Acts 9:40-42).

- **Tabitha, arise.** Tabitha's return to life must have been a joyful occasion. However she would some day die again and be wept over once more. There's a day coming when all the saints who have died, including Tabitha, shall rise from death never to die again (John 5:28-29, 1Corinthians 15:50-55, 1Thessalonians 4:13-18).

3 Peter's Ministry at Joppa

Verse 43

¶ "Peter ended up staying many days in Joppa, as a guest of Simon, a tanner." (Acts 9:43).

- **God's manifold grace.** The miracle at Joppa caused many to believe. Peter stays on so as to minister to these new believers. But preachers are not the only servants of use in the church. Simon the Tanner also served, by offering hospitality to Peter. So you see, we all have something to contribute: like Dorcas making

clothing for the needy; Peter making the gospel and power of Jesus known; Simon the Tanner offering hospitality to God's workers. Yes, we also serve. Peter himself says, "As each person has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1Peter 4:10).

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Acts 10:1-23

—Verse by verse

This page is a verse by verse study of Acts 10:1-23, about two visions, one experienced by the good man Cornelius, and the other by the apostle Peter. God prepares these two men, a Gentile and a Jew, to meet each other.

Cornelius and Peter See Visions

Acts 10:1-23

¶“¹In Caesarea, there was a man named Cornelius, who was a centurion of the the Italian Battalion as it was known. ²Cornelius was a devout man, who feared God and so did all his household. He gave generous gifts to the needy among the people, and he prayed to God often.” (Acts 10:1-2).

¶“³At about three o'clock in the afternoon, Cornelius saw a clear vision of an angel of God. The angel came to him, and spoke his name, 'Cornelius!' ⁴Cornelius was frightened, but he looked intently at the angel and asked, 'What do you want with me, Lord?' The angel replied, 'Your prayers and your gifts to the needy have gone up to heaven for a memorial before God. ⁵Now I want you to send men to Joppa, and call for Simon who is also called Peter. ⁶He lodges with another Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. Peter will tell you what you should do.'” (Acts 10:3-6).

¶“⁷When the angel who spoke to Cornelius had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him constantly. ⁸Having explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. ⁹Next day, while they were on their journey and nearing the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray. It was about noon.” (Acts 10:7-9).

¶“¹⁰On the housetop, Peter became hungry and desired to eat, but while a meal was being prepared, a trance came upon him. ¹¹He saw heaven opened and an object descending toward him. It was like a great sheet let down to the earth by four corners. ¹²Inside it there were all kinds of four-footed beasts of the earth. There were wild animals, reptiles, and birds of the sky. ¹³A voice came to him, 'Rise, Peter, kill and eat!' ¹⁴But Peter said, 'No way Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.' ¹⁵A voice came to him a second time, 'What God has cleansed, you must not call unclean.' ¹⁶This happened three times, then the sheet was drawn back up into heaven.” (Acts 10:10-16).

¶“¹⁷Peter was feeling very disturbed in his spirit about the meaning of this vision he'd just seen. At this moment, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's address, stood before the gate. ¹⁸They called out and asked whether Simon Peter, was lodging there. ¹⁹While Peter was still pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men seek you. ²⁰Arise, go down, and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.'” (Acts 10:17-20).

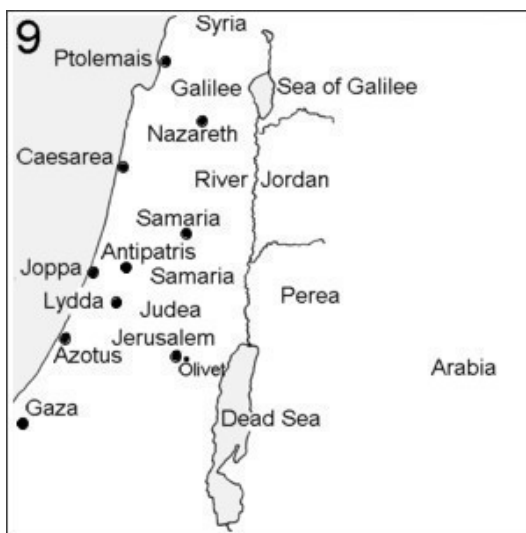
¶“²¹Peter went down to the men, and said, 'Look here, I am the one you seek. Why have you come?' ²²They answered, 'Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous man and one

who fears God, and well spoken of by all the nation of the Jews, was directed by a holy angel to invite you to his house, and to listen to what you say.' ²³So Peter invited the men inside and gave them lodging for the night. Next day Peter arose and set out with them for Caesarea. Some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him.” (Acts 10:21-23).

1 Cornelius's Vision at Caesarea

Verses 1-2

¶ "In Caesarea, there was a man named Cornelius, who was a centurion of the the Italian Battalion as it was known. Cornelius was a devout man, who feared God with all his household. He gave generous gifts to the needy among the people, and he prayed to God often." (Acts 10:1-2).



The Goodness of Cornelius

- Cornelius was a *centurion* (Acts 10:1). This means he was the captain of around 80 soldiers in the Roman army. His responsibility was to keep the peace and to enforce the law.
- Cornelius was a *devout* man and one who *feared God* (Acts 10:2). From the story, we gather that he was a Gentile. However certain Gentiles were God-fearers, meaning that they rejected pagan religion and worshipped the true God.
- His *household* also joined him in his devotion to God (Acts 10:2). His wife, children, and servants shared his godliness, and there were no idols in his house.
- Cornelius gave *many alms* to the Jewish people. He was generous in charitable gifts to the poor, and he did not distribute his alms with partiality or prejudice.
- He *prayed* to God continually (Acts 10:2). Cornelius gave thanks to God and sought help from God. He was seeking God always in his prayers. His prayers

and alms "ascended as a memorial before God" (Acts 10:4).

- Cornelius was a *just* man (Acts 10:22). He was not a man who thought evil, spoke evil, or did evil. He was a righteous man.
- He had a good *reputation* "well spoken of by the entire nation" (Acts 10:22).
- He received a *vision* from an angel of God (Acts 10:22, cf 10:3-4). That's a rare privilege.
- Cornelius and his household were *baptized with the Holy Spirit*, just as the apostles had been on the day of Pentecost! (Acts 10:44-45, 11:15).
- **A righteous man.** The more you think about this description of Cornelius, the more you realise how good he was. Peter said, "In every nation God welcomes the man who fears God and does what is right" (Acts 10:34-35). God did not despise the goodness of Cornelius. God did not look upon his righteousness as filthy rags. God noticed, honoured, and rewarded Cornelius for his goodworks.

Verses 3-6

¶ "At about three o'clock in the afternoon, Cornelius saw a clear vision of an angel of God. The angel came to him, and said, "Cornelius!" Cornelius was frightened, but he looked intently at the angel and asked, "What do you want with me, Lord?" The angel replied, "Your prayers and your gifts to the needy have gone up to heaven for a memorial before God. Now I want you to send men to Joppa, and call for Simon who is also called Peter. He lodges with another Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. Peter will tell you what you should do" " (Acts 10:3-6).

- **A clear vision.** Luke seems to emphasise that Cornelius's vision was not one of ghostly shadows. It did not take place at night while Cornelius slept. It was a "clear" vision in the day time when Cornelius was wide awake. And Cornelius "looked intently". This angel wasn't some flash at the corner of his eye. There are dubious visions, but this vision was clear and convincing.
- **Send for Simon Peter.** Cornelius, for all his righteousness, needed to have faith in Jesus Christ. So God sets about organizing for Peter to go to Cornelius and preach the gospel to him.
- **What do you want, Lord?** Cornelius was surprised and frightened by the angel's appearance, but his response was not in any way confused. "What is it Lord?" he asked (Acts 10:4). That is to say, "What is it Lord, *that you wish me to do?*" Cornelius knew that he was before a superior, and Cornelius was ready to obey orders.

Verses 7-9

¶ "When the angel who spoke to Cornelius had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him constantly. Having explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. Next day, while they were on their journey and nearing the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray. It was about noon." (Acts 10:7-9).

- **Two prayerful men.** Cornelius's prayers were effectual, and his obedience was prompt. However he was not the only one who prayed often to God and who was consequently caught up in God's plan and all-embracing providence. Peter retires to the roof garden to pray, and his prayer will also bring a vision.

2 *Peter's Vision at Joppa*

Verses 10-16

¶ "On the housetop, Peter became hungry and desired to eat, but while a meal was being prepared, a trance came upon him. He saw heaven opened and an object descending toward him. It was like a great sheet let down to the earth by four corners. Inside it there were all kinds of four-footed beasts of the earth. There were wild animals, reptiles, and birds of the sky. A voice came to him, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat!" But Peter said, "No way Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." A voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, you must not call unclean." This happened three times, then the sheet was drawn back up into heaven." (Acts 10:10-16).

- **Clean or unclean?** Under Jewish law, many animals were declared unclean and were forbidden as food (eg Leviticus 11). Jesus Christ taught that food goes into the stomach and passes through the body and out into the toilet, thus taking away what is bad. Food therefore cannot defile a person because it is purified by this process (Mark 7:18-20). Jesus taught Paul that all foods are clean (Romans 14:14, Colossians 2:16-17). Like Peter, people want to argue on this point, but God's statement to Peter is plain: the creatures in the sheet which Peter recognized as unclean had now been made clean. "What God has cleansed, do not call unholy" (Acts 10:12-15). Why do people argue when this passage, clearly in context, makes it undeniable that creatures once forbidden by Moses are now permitted by Christ?
- **The real lesson.** God is not merely trying to change Peter's belief about food, but much more importantly his beliefs about people. Peter later says, "It is thought unlawful for a Jewish man to visit or associate with one of another nation. But God has shown me that I shouldn't call any man unholy or unclean." (Acts 10:28-29). That was the real lesson of the vision. The bag of creatures symbolized the many nations of human beings. God shuns nobody who fears him and does what is right. So now Peter has learned that he should associate with Gentiles not just with Jews. God loves the whole wide world (John 3:16, 1John 2:2).

Verses 17-20

¶ "Peter was feeling very disturbed in his spirit about the meaning of this vision he'd just seen. At this moment, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate. They called out and asked whether Simon Peter, was lodging there. While Peter was still pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men seek you. Arise, go down, and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them." " (Acts 10:17-20).

- **The ordinary alongside the miraculous.** God is sending angels and visions and the voice of his Spirit. At the same time, men are doing things in the

ordinary manner, travelling to Joppa, finding the house, calling at the gate. The person who furthers God's cause in the ordinary way is no less respectable and important than the person moved by signs and wonders.

3 *Peter Goes to Meet Cornelius*

Verses 21-23

¶ "Peter went down to the men, and said, "Behold, I am he whom you seek. Why have you come?" They answered, "Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous man and one who fears God, and well spoken of by all the nation of the Jews, was directed by a holy angel to invite you to his house, and to listen to what you say." So Peter invited the men inside and gave them lodging for the night. Next day Peter arose and set out with them for Caesarea. Some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him." (Acts 10:21-23).

- **God uses people.** Since God sent an angel to Cornelius, why didn't the angel preach the gospel to Cornelius and instruct him what to do? Why go to all the trouble and inconvenience of sending men to Joppa to fetch Peter? God gave the great commission to human beings (Mark 16:14-16). In Cornelius's case, God is taking special action, because he has a point to make. However he still leaves it up to mere mortals to do the preaching. We human beings are allowed the dignity of having an essential role in the great plan of God to save us. We are not merely the souls being saved; we participate in the saving of souls.

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Acts 10:24-33

—Verse by verse

This page is a verse by verse study of Acts 10:24-33, about Peter the apostle going, by God's directive, to the house of Cornelius a Gentile.

Peter Visits Cornelius the Gentile

Acts 10:24-33

¶“²⁴On the next day they entered into Caesarea. Cornelius was waiting for them, having called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, fell down at his feet, and worshiped him. ²⁶But Peter lifted him up, saying, 'Stand up! I myself am also a man.' ²⁷As he talked with Cornelius, Peter went in and found many gathered together.” (Acts 10:24-27).

¶“²⁸Peter said to those gathered, 'You yourselves know that it is thought unlawful for a Jewish man to visit or associate with one of another nation. But God has shown me that I shouldn't call any person unholy or unclean. ²⁹Therefore I came without objection when I was sent for. I ask therefore, why did you send for me?'” (Acts 10:28-29).

¶“³⁰Cornelius said, 'Four days ago, I was fasting until this hour, and at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I was praying in my house. Behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing. ³¹He said, 'Cornelius, your prayer is heard, and your gifts to the needy are remembered in the sight of God. ³²So now send messengers to Joppa, and call for Simon, also known as Peter. He lodges in the house of Simon a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.' ³³Therefore I sent for you at once, and it was good of you to come. Now therefore we are all here present in the sight of God to hear all things that God has commanded you to say.'” (Acts 10:30-33).

I *Peter Corrects Cornelius*

Verses 24-27

¶ "On the next day they entered into Caesarea. Cornelius was waiting for them, having called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, fell down at his feet, and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up! I myself am also a man.” As he talked with Cornelius, Peter went in and found many gathered together." (Acts 10:24-27).



- **Peter comes to Cornelius.** It is interesting that Cornelius was not sent to Peter, but Peter to Cornelius. Perhaps God was looking out not only for Cornelius, but for his household and close friends, who were also wishing to hear Peter's message. It could also be that God was making Peter accept the Gentiles in practice, not just in principle, by sending him to a Gentile's house.
- **Joppa to Caesarea.** On the journey from Joppa to Caesarea, Peter was accompanied not only by the three men from Cornelius, but also six brethren from Joppa (cf Acts 11:12). That made a party of ten to safely travel together. Joppa is roughly 50km from Caesarea. Probably they made the journey on foot, because they started one day and finished the next (Acts 10:23-24). On horses, they could have made it in one day.
- **Cornelius worships Peter.** When Peter came into the house, Cornelius fell at his feet and worshiped him. Peter refused this worship. The only man people should worship is Jesus Christ, because he is also God (1John 5:20).

2 Peter Corrects Himself

Verses 28-29

¶ "Peter said to those gathered, "You yourselves know that it is thought unlawful for a Jewish man to visit or associate with one of another nation. But God has shown me that I shouldn't call any person unholy or unclean. Therefore I came without objection when I was sent for. I ask therefore, why did you send for me?" " (Acts 10:28-29).

- **The formalities.** Peter has been brought to this house to teach the gathered Gentiles the message of the gospel. However, Peter is only now being initiated into this ministry. This is a new experience for Peter. Before he does any preaching, he wishes two things to be established in the hearing of the gathering. Firstly, from himself, he offers what amounts to an apology in view of his new understanding that God cares as much for Gentiles as he does for Jews. Secondly, from Cornelius, Peter asks for a formal statement of the reason for asking him to come.

3 Cornelius Commends Peter

Verses 30-33

¶ "Cornelius said, "Four days ago, I was fasting until this hour, and at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I was praying in my house. Behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing. He said, 'Cornelius, your prayer is heard, and your gifts to the needy are remembered in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call for Simon, also called Peter. He lodges in the house of Simon a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.' Therefore I sent for you at once, and it was good of you to come. Now therefore we are all here present in the sight of God to hear all things that God has commanded you to say." " (Acts 10:30-33).

- **It was good of you.** Cornelius briefly recounts events leading up to this meeting. He then states the reason for the assembly. But in between he adds, "It was good of you to come." This accepts Peter's apology, with a commendation of Peter's willingness to act contrary to ingrained prejudice.
- **Here to hear.** Cornelius says, "We are all here present in the sight of God to hear all things that God has commanded". Not every crowd in a house is ready to listen to God's message through Jesus. But it can happen. When it does, God can do wonderful things.

Did Cornelius Contribute?

Something to think about...

Who decided Cornelius would be such a good man that God singled him out for special attention?

Who decided that Cornelius would obey the angel's instructions and send for Peter?

Who decided that Cornelius would gather together his friends and relatives to hear Peter's word from God?

Did Cornelius in any way contribute to his own salvation and that of his family and friends?

We know certainly that God contributed, and without God's contribution Cornelius could not have been saved, despite all his goodness.

But did Cornelius contribute? If so, could he have been saved without that contribution?

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Acts 10:34-48

—Verse by verse

This page is a verse by verse study of Acts 10:34-48, about Peter's preaching to Cornelius and his household, and the falling of the Holy Spirit upon them.

Peter Preaches to Cornelius's Household

Acts 10:34-48

¶³⁴Peter began his speech by saying, 'I truly understand that God does not show favoritism. ³⁵Rather, in every nation whoever fears God and acts rightly is acceptable to him. ³⁶He sent the word to the children of Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ who is the Lord of all nations.'" (Acts 10:34-36).

¶³⁷'You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached. ³⁸You know how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. You know how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.'" (Acts 10:37-38).

¶³⁹'We are witnesses of everything he did both in the country of the Jews, and in Jerusalem. And then he was killed and hung on a tree. ⁴⁰God raised him up the third day, and allowed him to be revealed ⁴¹—not to all the people, but to witnesses who were previously chosen by God, us included, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.'" (Acts 10:39-41).

¶⁴²'Jesus himself commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that this Jesus is the One appointed by God as the Judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him, that through his name everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins.'" (Acts 10:42-43).

¶⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking this message, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word. ⁴⁵The Jews who believed, all who had come with Peter, were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out also on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶For they heard them speaking in other languages and magnifying God." (Acts 10:44-46).

¶⁴⁷Then Peter said, 'Can any man forbid the water to prevent these people from being baptized who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?' ⁴⁸So he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for some days." (Acts 10:47-48).

1 *The Gospel is Equally for All People*

Verses 34-36

¶"Peter began his speech by saying, "I truly understand that God does not show favoritism. Rather, in every nation whoever fears God and acts rightly is acceptable to him. He sent the word to the children of Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ who is the Lord of all nations." (Acts 10:34-36).

- **Every nation.** The main point of Peter's new understanding, and of his speech to this gathering, is that it doesn't matter to God what nation you were born into or call your own. He is not interested in whether you are one of the circumcision or one of the Gentiles. What matters is your attitude and actions—do you worship and fear God and do his will?
- **Good news of peace.** The gospel or "good news" is for every nation and it promotes peace and reconciliation between all nations and God. This is beautifully stated by Paul (Ephesians 2:11-22). When Jesus was born, the angels said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people of good will" (Luke 2:14).
- **Lord of all.** Jesus is not just Lord of his countrymen, but Lord of all peoples. He is called "King of kings and Lord of lords" (1Timothy 6:15).
- More than half a century ago, some preachers from another country came to Australia on a campaign. On the opening night of the meeting, the campaign leaders and their preacher were at the door shaking hands and greeting people. A righteous Christian man, whom I knew, brought several of his friends. When this man came in with his friends, neither he nor his friends were offered a greeting or handshake. They were black people you see, Australian First Nation people, not a people these white preachers would welcome on behalf of God.

2 *The Gospel is Possible through One Man's Sacrifice*

Verses 37-38

¶"You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached. You know how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. You know how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him." (Acts 10:37-38).



- **You know...** Cornelius and his household knew about the activities of Jesus of Nazareth. Caesarea is on the coast between Judea and Galilee, not far from where Jesus was well known. Cornelius associated with Jews, and no doubt he'd heard tell of Jesus, even if he had not seen him personally.
- **Virtues of Jesus.** Peter makes three statements about Jesus: (1) God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power. (2) He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. (3) God was with him. These three statements refute the accusation that was made against Jesus—that he and his work was of the devil (Luke 11:14-20). It may have been that this sort of slander against Jesus had also come to the notice of Cornelius and his household.

Verses 39-41

¶ "We are witnesses of everything he did both in the country of the Jews, and in Jerusalem. And then he was killed and hung on a tree. God raised him up the third day, and allowed him to be revealed—not to all the people, but to witnesses who were previously chosen by God, us included, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead." (Acts 10:39-41).

- **Peter's testimony.** Peter is able to personally testify to the events of Jesus's ministry, his death, and his resurrection. Whilst Jesus has the testimony of the Old Testament prophets, of angels, and even of God himself, the testimony of his apostles was also very important and necessary. Jesus had said, "You shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). Here Peter is performing that very role.

Verses 42-43

¶ "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that this Jesus is the One appointed by God as the Judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him, that through his name everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins." (Acts 10:42-43).

- **Christ's commission.** Jesus commanded Peter and the other apostles to go out into the world and preach the gospel to all nations (Mark 16:15-16, Matthew 28:18-20). Peter is now doing this.
- **Christ's authority.** Jesus has been appointed by God as the judge of all people both the living and the dead (2Timothy 4:1-2). Peter is now declaring and preaching by that authority.
- **Christ's preordination.** All the prophets bear witness of him. Jesus Christ did not come into Judea as an upstart, as some new thing. Rather he came in fulfilment of ancient prophecy. This means that he was preordained. Peter says, "He was foreknown before the foundation of the world" (1Peter 1:20). On the day of

Pentecost Peter said, "He was delivered by the predetermined counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23).

- **Christ's power to save.** Through his name (his power and authority) believers will receive forgiveness of sins. This means *everyone* as Peter says. Forgiveness of sins is offered to all nations. Forgiveness is conditional upon becoming a believer, but any believer, of whatever nation, shall have *the right to become a child of God* and receive forgiveness (John 1:12).

3 *The Gospel is Confirmed by One Spirit*

Verses 44-46

¶"While Peter was still speaking this message, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word. Those of the circumcision who believed, all who had come with Peter, were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out also on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in other languages and magnifying God." (Acts 10:44-46).

- **The Holy Spirit fell.** This was not the first time the gospel was preached to non-Jews. Philip's work in Samaria is an example (Acts 8:4ff). God however had a point to make, and he now supports the vision he gave to Peter with a miracle never before seen except on the day of Pentecost when Peter himself was one of those on whom the Holy Spirit fell (Acts 2:1-4).
- **Pentecost repeated.** Now the Spirit was "poured out also on the Gentiles". Peter later recounts, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as upon us at the beginning" (Acts 11:15-16). So this was an outpouring of the Spirit previously unique to the apostles at Pentecost, but now repeated as a clear sign from God that God had as much regard for Gentiles who fear him as he has for Peter and his fellow apostles. Furthermore, there is one gospel for all. In repeating the miracle, there was but one difference: instead of the preachers receiving the outpouring, as on the day of Pentecost, it was in this case the hearers on which the Spirit was poured out.

4 *The Gospel is Obeyed in One Baptism*

Verses 47-48

¶"Then Peter said, 'Can any man forbid the water to prevent these people from being baptized who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?' So he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for some days." (Acts 10:47-48).

- **Peter commands baptism.** Previously Peter says, "Everyone who believes in Jesus will receive forgiveness of sins." (Acts 10:42-43). That these Gentiles were now believers could hardly be denied since the Holy Spirit had marked his recognition of their faith. Therefore, being believers, they had *"the right to become children of God"* (John 1:12). Peter therefore commands baptism in water in the name of Christ. This will allow them to come into Christ and by God's grace receive forgiveness through his death (Romans 6:3-6).

- **Baptism into Christ.** We note that it was in *water* baptism (not in the baptism of the Holy Spirit) that these believers came into Christ's death. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was not for the forgiveness of sins, but for convincing the skeptical and prejudiced that the gospel is true and God grants to Gentiles no lesser blessings than he grants to Jews. Immersion in water, in Christ's name is the "**one baptism**" that all believers must undergo (Ephesians 4:5). Peter shows us that no believer may be refused this baptism, and no believer may refuse it.

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Author: Ron Graham

Acts 11:1-18

—Verse by verse

A verse by verse study of Peter's own account of the Conversion of Cornelius. Through Peter's eyes we get some extra insights.

Peter recounts his experience with Cornelius.

Acts 11:1-18

¶“¹The apostles and the brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. ²When Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were strict Jews contended with him. ³They said, 'You went to visit uncircumcised men, and you ate with them.'” (Acts 11:1-3).

¶“⁴But Peter explained by relating the events in order from the beginning. He said, ⁵'I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. An object descended, like a great sheet let down from heaven by its four corners. It came right down to me. ⁶I gave it my undivided attention. I saw four-footed beasts of the earth, wild animals, creeping things, and birds of the sky.'” (Acts 11:4-6).

¶“⁷'I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter, kill and eat.' ⁸But I replied, 'No way Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered into my mouth.' ⁹But for the second time a voice came from heaven. It answered me, 'You must not call common what God has made clean.' ¹⁰This was done three times; then all the creatures were drawn back up into heaven.'” (Acts 11:7-10).

¶“¹¹'At that moment, three men stood outside the house where I was. They'd been sent to me from Caesarea. ¹²The Spirit told me to go with them and have no doubts about it. I was also accompanied by these six brothers. When we entered the man's house, ¹³he told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying to him, 'Send to Joppa, and get Simon, whose surname is Peter, ¹⁴who will speak to you words by which you will be saved, you and all your house.'” (Acts 11:11-14).

¶“¹⁵'I had not long begun my speech when the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he did on us at the beginning. ¹⁶I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John indeed baptized in water, but you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷So if, when they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who was I to stand in God's way?’” (Acts 11:15-17).

¶“¹⁸When they heard Peter's account, they took back their objections, and gave glory to God. They said, 'Then God has indeed granted repentance for life to the Gentiles also!’” (Acts 11:18).

1 *Peter Accused for Visiting Gentiles*

Verses 1-3

¶"The apostles and the brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. When Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were of the circumcision contended with him. They said, 'You went in to uncircumcised men, and you ate with them.' " (Acts 11:1-3).

- **You went to uncircumcised men.** Down on the coast, Peter had been enlightened. He'd come to understand that God treated all people, Jews and Gentiles, equally. But his Christian brothers back in Jerusalem still had their prejudices. They started a contention with Peter. He had mixed with non-Jews which they regarded as a wrong thing to do.

2 Peter Explains his Actions

Verses 4-6

¶"But Peter explained by relating the events in order from the beginning. He said, 'I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. An object descended, like a great sheet let down from heaven by its four corners. It came right down to me. I gave it my undivided attention. I saw four-footed beasts of the earth, wild animals, creeping things, and birds of the sky.' " (Acts 11:4-6).

- **Peter explained.** Peter didn't enter into an argument. He simply explained. That way, the Christian brothers he'd upset could judge for themselves and reconsider. He recounts the vision he'd seen while on the housetop in Joppa.

Verses 7-10

¶" 'I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter, kill and eat.' But I replied, 'No way Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered into my mouth.' But for the second time a voice came from heaven. It answered me, 'You must not call common what God has made clean.' This was done three times; then all the creatures were drawn back up into heaven.' " (Acts 11:7-10).

- **Clean or unclean?** Under Jewish law, many animals were declared unclean and were forbidden as food (eg Leviticus 11). Jesus Christ taught that food goes into the stomach and passes through the body and out into the toilet, thus taking away what is bad. Food therefore cannot defile a person because it is purified by this process (Mark 7:18-20). Jesus taught Paul that all foods are clean (Romans 14:14, Colossians 2:16-17). Like Peter, people want to argue on this point, but God's statement to Peter is plain: the creatures in the sheet which Peter recognized as unclean had now been made clean. **"What God has cleansed, do not call unholy"** (Acts 10:12-15). But this was not really a lesson about food.
- **The real lesson.** Peter had confessed what the vision taught him: "It is thought unlawful for a Jewish man to visit or associate with one of another nation. But God has shown me that I shouldn't call any man unholy or unclean." (Acts 10:28-29). That was the real lesson of the vision. The bag of creatures symbolized the many nations of human beings. God shuns nobody who fears him and does what is right. So now Peter has learned that he should associate with Gentiles not just with Jews. God loves the whole wide world (John 3:16, 1John 2:2). Will Peter's Christian brothers in Jerusalem take that on board?

Verses 11-14

¶ " 'At that moment, three men stood outside the house where I was. They'd been sent to me from Caesarea. The Spirit told me to go with them and have no doubts about it. I was also accompanied by these six brothers. When we entered the man's house, he told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying to him, 'Send to Joppa, and get Simon, whose surname is Peter, who will speak to you words by which you will be saved, you and all your house.' " (Acts 11:11-14).

- **Peter's witnesses.** Peter now adds other testimony to his own story. If these Christian brothers in Jerusalem doubt Peter, let them hear what others said.
- **The Holy Spirit.** Peter says, "The Spirit told me". The brethren in Jerusalem had no doubt that Peter, as an apostle, was guided by the Holy Spirit. To deny that the Spirit had spoken to Peter would be unthinkable to them.
- **Six brothers.** Peter says, "I was also accompanied by these six brothers". These were Jewish brothers apparently, so the brethren in Jerusalem had not Peter's word alone, but six of their own brethren to confirm much of the story.
- **Cornelius and the angel.** Peter says, "Cornelius told me how he had seen an angel". Cornelius was a Gentile, but a God fearer, not a pagan. He had the respect of the Jewish community in Joppa. He was a most upright man. Why should anyone not believe him? And if an angel stood in a Gentile's house, why would it be wrong for Peter to enter one?

Verses 15-17

¶ " 'I had not long begun my speech when the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he did on us at the beginning. I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John indeed baptized in water, but you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit.' So if, when they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, God gave to them the same gift as he gave to us, who was I that I could forbid God?' " (Acts 11:15-17).

- **The Greatest Testimony.** Now Peter, having given the background and supported it with testimony, comes to the clincher. The Holy Spirit confirmed the matter with a miracle that truly amazed everyone. The Spirit did to Cornelius and his household what he had done to the apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). After Pentecost, miraculous gifts, such as speaking in tongues, were passed to others "by the laying on of the apostles' hands" (Acts 8:14-19). But Peter had not laid hands on the household of Cornelius. They were given a baptism of the Holy Spirit *directly* from God. There is no record of such an event since Pentecost until that time, and Peter implies that none had occurred.

3 The Argument is Settled

Verse 18

¶ "When they heard Peter's account, they took back their objections, and glorified God. They said, 'Then God has indeed granted repentance for life to the Gentiles also!' " (Acts 11:18).

- **Objection withdrawn!** Being honest and reasonable men, they withdrew their objection. However we need to understand that it was much more than a mere objection they withdrew. It was an *ingrained belief* which they had been brought up with, and had practised their whole lives. They were giving up a *law* they had conscientiously lived by. They were giving up a *prejudice* that friends, family, and associates outside the church would still hold to. They were giving up a foundation of their *culture*. We have to admire their courage and integrity; and their readiness to so invert their thinking and their lives for the sake of the gospel of Christ.

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Author: Ron Graham

Acts 11:19-30

—Verse by verse

A verse by verse study of the establishment of a new church in Antioch Syria, and the involvement in this work of Paul and Barnabas.

The gospel goes to Antioch in Syria

Acts 11:19-39

¶“¹⁹Those who were scattered abroad by the oppression that arose about Stephen, consequently traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. They spoke the word to Jews only, ²⁰although some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene who came to Antioch, spoke to the Greeks, preaching the Lord Jesus.” (Acts 11:19-20).

¶“²¹The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. ²²The church in Jerusalem report head the report concerning these converts. The church sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. ²³When he got there, and saw the grace of God, he was glad. He exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they should remain near to the Lord. ²⁴Barnabas was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and many people were added to the Lord.” (Acts 11:21-24).

¶“²⁵Barnabas then left for Tarsus to look for Saul. ²⁶When Barnabas found Saul, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they were gathering together with the church. They taught many people. It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians'.” (Acts 11:25-26).

¶“²⁷At that time, prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸One of them named Agabus stood up, and indicated by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine all over the world. This famine happened in the days of Claudius. ²⁹All the disciples who were well off each determined to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea. ³⁰They sent their gifts to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.” (Acts 11:27-30).

1 *Preaching in Syria*

Verses 19-20

¶ "Those who were scattered abroad by the oppression that arose about Stephen, consequently traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. They spoke the word to Jews only, although some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene who came to Antioch, spoke to the Greeks, preaching the Lord Jesus." (Acts 11:19-20).



- Worldwide church planting.** Following the killing of Stephen, persecution scattered the Jerusalem congregation (Acts 8:1-4). This did not kill the church. On the contrary, over several years churches were planted, and became established, in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. The disciples, and their message, also began spreading to other places. Luke here records the spread north along the coastlands into Syria and its neighbouring island Cyprus. In a major advance, a church was established in Syrian Antioch, one of the world's biggest cities. The preaching was still limited mainly to the Jewish community, but that was all now changing.
- Two Antiochs** *Note:* Acts mentions two cities called Antioch, one in Syria and another in Pisidia.



2 *Barnabas and Saul Make “Christians” in Antioch*

Verses 21-24

¶ "The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. The report concerning them came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem. They sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he got there, and saw the grace of God, he was glad. He exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they should remain near to the Lord. Barnabas was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and many people were added to the Lord." (Acts 11:21-24).

- **The hand of the Lord.** We see, in this passage (Acts 10:21-24), the synergy between the disciples and God. God is working, blessing, and empowering; but the disciples are engaging themselves with God. People were believing and turning to God, making a decision. Preachers were going out converting and encouraging. We observe not only God's work with them, but the *human agency*, their *purpose of heart* in co-operating with God.
- **Barnabas** We have already met Barnabas. He was the one who helped Saul to be accepted by the church in Jerusalem (Acts 9:22-28). Barnabas was not one of the 12 apostles nor one of the seven deacons. Nevertheless, he was an active, capable, and trusted worker in the church. You don't need title and position to be such.

Verses 25-26

¶ "Barnabas then left for Tarsus to look for Saul. When he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they were gathering together with the church. They taught many people. It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called "Christians"." (Acts 11:25-26).

- **Barnabas finds Saul.** Saul had gone to his home town Tarsus, not too far from Antioch. Paul and Barnabas became devoted companions in evangelism, beginning with a year working together in the Antioch church.
- **First called "Christians"** Up to this point, converts to Christ were referred to in terms such as as believers, saints, and disciples. The name "Christians" originated in the city of Antioch. It was a name, not a nickname, and Peter says that we "*glorify God in that name*" (1Peter 4:16).

3 Prophets Come from Jerusalem: Agabus Predicts Famine

Verse 27-30

¶ "At that time, prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up, and indicated by the Spirit that there should be a great famine all over the world. This famine happened in the days of Claudius. All the disciples who were well off each determined to send relief to the brothers who lived in Judea. They sent their gifts to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul." (Acts 11:27-30).

- **Prophets came down.** In the beginning of the church there were not only apostles, but also prophets. These were preachers who were moved to speak by the Holy Spirit, rather than preaching only what someone else had taught them. One of the abilities of a prophet of God is prediction. Agabus predicted a famine which later came to pass during the reign of the Roman Emperor Claudius *circa AD41-*

54. If a prophet predicts something, and it doesn't happen, he or she is a false prophet (Deuteronomy 18:21-22).

- **Sending of gifts.** Knowing that a famine would hit Jerusalem hard, the Christians in Antioch made a plan to send aid. This gift was delivered by Barnabas and Saul. It reflected the fellowship which the disciples in Jerusalem themselves practised (Acts 2:44-45). Antioch took this fellowship to a new level—one church helping another church. This was an ongoing work. Other churches participated, and Paul picked up and delivered some of their gifts in his missionary journeys (eg 1Corinthians 16:1-4).
- **To the elders.** This is Luke's first mention of elders in the church. So far in our study of Acts we have seen apostles, prophets, deacons, and evangelists at work in the church. Elders also had an important place in a congregation's polity. Peter exhorts the elders in the churches to "**shepherd the flock of God among you**" (1Pe5:1-4). Paul did the same: "**Shepherd the church of God which he purchased with his own blood**" (Acts 20:28).
- **The church needs trustworthy people.** Agabus was trustworthy: his prophecy came true. The Christians at Antioch were trustworthy: they made good their promise to give aid. Barnabas and Saul were trustworthy: they delivered the money. The elders in Jerusalem were trustworthy: they administered and distributed the funds. The church members in Jerusalem were trustworthy: they didn't misrepresent their need or take more than their due. Without trustworthiness, the church cannot function.

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Author: Ron Graham

Acts 12:1-17

—Verse by verse

This page is a verse by verse study of Acts 12:1-17. These verses describe James's death, Peter's imprisonment and escape.

James dies, Peter is imprisoned and escapes.

Acts 12:1-17

¶¹Now about that time, King Herod laid hands on some of the church to persecute them. ²He had James, the brother of John, put to death by the sword. ³When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he also arrested Peter. This happened during the days of unleavened bread.” (Acts 12:1-3).

¶⁴When Herod had Peter arrested, he sent him to prison, with four squads of four soldiers each to guard him. He was intending to bring him before the people after the Passover. ⁵So Peter was kept in the prison, but the church prayed fervently to God for Peter. ⁶Now on the very night that Herod was about to bring him out, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains. Guards in front of the door kept the prison secure.” (Acts 12:4-6).

¶⁷And behold, an angel of the Lord stood beside Peter, and a light shone in the cell. The angel struck Peter on the side, and woke him up. He said, 'Quickly! Stand up!' and the chains fell from Peter's hands. ⁸The angel said to him, 'Get dressed and put your sandals on.' Peter did so. Then the angel said to him, 'Put on your cloak, and follow me.' ⁹Peter followed the angel out, but he did not know that the angel's actions were real. Peter thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰When they'd passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city. The gate opened for them by itself. They went out, and down one street, and then the angel departed from Peter.” (Acts 12:7-10).

¶¹¹When Peter came to himself, he said, 'Now I truly know that the Lord has sent forth his angel and delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from everything the Jewish people were expecting.' ¹²Having realised this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. ¹³When Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so excited with joy that she didn't open the gate. She ran inside, and told everyone that Peter was standing in front of the gate. ¹⁵They said to her, 'You're crazy!' But she insisted that what she said was true. They said, 'It must be his angel.'” (Acts 12:11-15).

¶¹⁶Meanwhile Peter kept knocking. When they opened up, they saw him, and were amazed. ¹⁷But he made a sign with his hand to be silent. He told them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. He said, 'Tell these things to James, and to the brethren.' Then he departed, and went to another place.” (Acts 12:16-17).

1 Herod Persecutes the Apostles

Verses 1-3

¶ "Now about that time, King Herod laid hands on some of the church to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death by the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he also arrested Peter. This happened during the days of unleavened bread." (Acts 12:1-3).

- **King Herod.** The Herod of Acts 12:1 was Herod Agrippa I. He was the grandson of Herod the Great who slaughtered the infants of Bethlehem, and nephew of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch who killed John the Baptist (Matthew 2:16, 14:1ff Luke 9:9).
- **James the brother of John.** The James of Acts 12:1 was James the son of Zebedee, and was one of the twelve apostles. There are four lists of the apostles in the New Testament (Luke 6:14-16, Acts 1:13, Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19). The following list combines these four sources. You'll note there was another apostle called James: James the son of Alphaeus.

The Twelve Apostles

- ☐ Simon Peter (Cephas)
- ☐ James the son of Zebedee
- ☐ John (the brother of the above James)
- ☐ Andrew (Peter's brother)
- ☐ Philip (not Philip the evangelist)
- ☐ Thomas
- ☐ Bartholomew
- ☐ Matthew the tax collector
- ☐ James the son of Alphaeus
- ☐ Simon the Zealot, the Canaanite
- ☐ Judas Thaddaeus son of James
- ☐ Judas Iscariot (the betrayer replaced by Matthias)
- **The Prophecy About James.** Jesus predicted that James and John would, like Jesus, be put to death. (Matthew 20:20-23). The prophecy is fulfilled for James by Herod, who has James killed by sword —probably beheaded.
- **Herod's purpose.** Herod acted out of a desire to please the Jews who were opposing the Christians. Now he arrests Peter, not for any just reason, but for political gain.

Verses 4-6

¶ "When Herod had Peter arrested, he sent him to prison, with four squads of four soldiers each to guard him. He was intending to bring him before the people after the Passover. So Peter was kept in the prison, but the church prayed fervently to God for Peter. Now on the very night that Herod was about to bring him out, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains. Guards in front of the door kept the prison secure." (Acts 12:4-6).

- **Sixteen Soldiers.** Herod was ensuring that Peter would be there for the show, nicely timed for when Jerusalem would be crowded. Herod has 16 soldiers assigned to guard Peter day and night. During the night, Peter has two soldiers bound to him by chains.
- **The church prayed.** The Christians didn't attempt to break Peter out of his heavily guarded prison. They resorted to prayer. This did not guarantee Peter would be set free. After all, James had not escaped death. As we shall see, however, God did rescue Peter, but the Christians who were praying for him couldn't believe it.

2 *An Angel Leads Peter Out of Prison*

Verses 7-10

¶ "And behold, an angel of the Lord stood beside Peter, and a light shone in the cell. The angel struck Peter on the side, and woke him up. He said, "Quickly! Stand up!" and the chains fell from Peter's hands. The angel said to him, "Get dressed and put your sandals on." Peter did so. Then the angel said to him, "Put on your cloak, and follow me." Peter followed him out, but he did not know that the angel's actions were real. Peter thought he was seeing a vision. When they'd passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city. The gate opened for them by itself. They went out, and down one street, and then the angel departed from Peter." (Acts 12:7-10).

- **An angel of the Lord.** Angels of God do things for people that people can't do for themselves. The angel made Peter's chains fall off, but he told Peter to put his clothes and sandals on all by himself. The angel led Peter through locked doors, past vigilant guards, and through an iron gate, but he still expected Peter to walk on his own two feet. The angel took Peter down one street only, then left him alone to use his own wits. Don't expect angels to do for you what you can do for yourself.
- **Thought he was seeing a vision.** The "laws of nature" operate in the real world. If we experience something against those laws, we assume it to be an hallucination, or a dream, or perhaps a vision, not something real. But Peter's escape from prison was all quite real.

3 *Peter Visits the Disciples, Then Flees*

Verses 11-15

¶ "When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I truly know that the Lord has sent forth his angel and delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from everything the Jewish people were expecting." Having realised this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together

and were praying. When Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so excited with joy that she didn't open the gate. She ran inside, and told everyone that Peter was standing in front of the gate. They said to her, "You are crazy!" But she insisted that it was so. They said, "It must be his angel." (Acts 12:11-15).

- **Think before you pray.** Peter stands knocking at a house where he expects brethren to be gathered. They are, and they are praying for Peter. But when their prayers are answered, they are not expecting it. The servant girl who comes to the door gets into such a state when she hears Peter's voice that she runs back inside not thinking to let him in. Then, when she tells the folk inside that Peter is outside, they can't believe it and think the girl is imagining things. Meanwhile Peter has to just keep knocking.
- **The door of the gate.** The door within a larger entrance, where you go in from the public street to the private house. The door would be latched at night.

Verses 16-17

¶ "But Peter kept knocking. When they opened up, they saw him, and were amazed. But he made a sign with his hand to be silent. He told them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. He said, "Tell these things to James, and to the brethren." Then he departed, and went to another place." (Acts 12:16-17).

- **No time for commotion.** When, after quite a delay, they open the door for Peter, their amazement bubbles over. But Peter signals for silence. The last thing he needs is a commotion to attract attention and waste more time. He quickly explains what happened, asks them to pass on the information to others, especially to James. Then he goes off to a refuge somewhere before his escape is discovered at the prison.
- **James.** As we saw above, there were two apostles named James. One was now dead. The other was James the son of Alphaeus.

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Author: Ron Graham

Acts 12:18-25

—Verse by verse

This page is a verse by verse study of Acts 12:18-25. These verses describe events after Peter's escape from prison. God strikes Herod dead.

Story of Peter Ends with Herod's Death

Acts 12:18-25

¶“¹⁸At break of day, there was consternation among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. ¹⁹Herod made a search for him, but didn't find him, so then he examined the guards, and commanded that they be executed. Herod then went down from Judea to Caesarea, and spent time there.” (Acts 12:18-19).

¶“²⁰Now Herod was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. Their country depended on the king's country for food, so they came to him with a united front to make peace—they'd been able to win over Blastus, the king's personal aide. ²¹On an appointed day, Herod dressed himself in royal clothing, sat on the throne, and made a speech to them. ²²The people shouted, 'The voice of God, and not of a man!' ²³Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he didn't give God the glory. He was eaten by worms and died.” (Acts 12:20-23).

¶“²⁴But the word of God grew and multiplied. ²⁵Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their service, also taking with them John whose surname was Mark.” (Acts 12:24-25).

1 Herod Cannot Find Peter

Verses 18-19

¶ "At break of day, there was consternation among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. Herod made a search for him, but didn't find him, so then he examined the guards, and commanded that they be executed. Herod then went down from Judea to Caesarea, and spent time there." (Acts 12:18-19).

- **The soldiers panic.** The guards outside seemed to notice nothing untoward during the night, even though Peter and the angel had walked right past them. The two guards inside, who had been chained to Peter, did not become aware of Peter's absence until dawn. How could this be? No wonder there was such consternation or “no small disturbance” as Luke puts it. The punishment for letting a prisoner escape was death. God's angel somehow delayed the discovery of Peter's escape to gain Peter some time to find refuge.
- **Where Peter went.** Luke doesn't tell us where Peter lay low so that Herod couldn't find him. But it wasn't at Mary's house. Peter went there only to bring

news of his escape, then he went elsewhere while it was yet night (Acts 12:12,17).

- **Peter's story ends.** This is where the book of Acts leaves the adventures of Peter and turns to the acts of Paul. Peter is mentioned only once more in Acts, when Paul goes to Jerusalem to meet with Peter and the other apostles and elders there, and Peter speaks in favour of Paul and his doctrine (Acts 15:1-12).

2 Angel Strikes King Herod Dead

Verses 20-23

¶ "Now Herod was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. Their country depended on the king's country for food, so they came to him with a united front to make peace—they'd been able to win over Blastus, the king's personal aide. On an appointed day, Herod dressed himself in royal clothing, sat on the throne, and made a speech to them. The people shouted, "The voice of God, and not of a man!" Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he didn't give God the glory. He was eaten by worms and died." (Acts 12:20-23).



- **King Herod.** Herod Agrippa I was the grandson of Herod the Great who slaughtered the infants of Bethlehem, and nephew of the Herod Antipas the tetrarch who killed John the Baptist (Matthew 2:16, 14:1ff Luke 9:9). These Herodian kings seem to have been especially nasty types. So when the coastland cities of Tyre and Sidon somehow angered Herod, there ensued a political scramble on their part to appease him, because he controlled the sources that supplied the cities with their food, and there was famine at that time (Acts 11:28-27-30, Acts 12:1). If Herod were to decree sanctions against Tyre and Sidon, the cities would starve.
- **Herod's stupidity.** Herod sat in the judgment chair, dressed to impress. He made a speech, but the people also had a message that they were anxious to get across to him. Most translations have them shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man". Josephus (a Jewish historian) also records this event, and leans in that direction. But some translations have, "The voice of God and not of man." The latter makes him a prophet of God, whereas the former makes him a god. Neither

case is fitting, and Herod should have raised his hands and silenced the people. He should have said something like, "I am a king. I am neither a god nor a prophet of God. God grants me power by his grace. I have no power of my own." But instead Herod accepted the adulation and didn't give God the glory.

- **Herod's nasty death.** An angel of the Lord caused Herod to be consumed by worms. Luke, a doctor, states that Herod was eaten by worms and died, not the reverse. And Luke doesn't say that he died the same day that the angel struck him with the fatal disease. We won't dwell on this terrible affliction. Enough is enough. The death by this affliction was meant to show clearly that God is God, and men are men. Even though men be worshiped as gods, they are mortal; and their bodies, no matter how gorgeously arrayed, are corruptible.
- **An angel of the Lord.** Josephus says that Herod saw an owl hovering above, which Herod supposed was an angel taking the form of an owl, and an ill omen. This may or may not be true.

3 *Luke's Progress Report*

Verses 24-25

¶ "But the word of God grew and multiplied. Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their service, also taking with them John whose surname was Mark." (Acts 12:24-25).

- **Barnabas and Saul.** Barnabas and Saul were last mentioned in Acts 11:29-30. They were sent from Syrian Antioch with the funds to help the Christians in Jerusalem survive the famine. They had now fulfilled that task and came back to Antioch, accompanied by John Mark who was to be their helper when they made what is known as Paul's first missionary journey.

END OF THE THIRD SECTION OF ACTS

With this progress report (Acts 12:24-25) Luke concludes his description of the spread of Christianity into the coastlands including Joppa, and up to Syrian Antioch. It begins with the establishment of a church in Antioch, describes the work and adventures of Peter, and includes the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 6:8 to 9:31). In the fourth section we will see Christianity spread into Cyprus and areas south of Galatia as Paul completes his first missionary journey.

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Author: Ron Graham

Acts 13:1-12

—Verse by verse

This page is a verse by verse study of Acts 13:1-12. Paul's first missionary journey begins, and he strikes Elymas the sorcerer blind.

Paul's First Missionary Journey Begins

Acts 13:1-12

¶¹In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²As they served the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Separate Barnabas and Saul for me, for the work to which I have called them.' ³So, when they had fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away." (Acts 13:1-3).

¶⁴Thus Barnabas and Saul, sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed to Cyprus. ⁵Reaching Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. They also had John as their helper." (Acts 13:4-5).

¶⁶When they had gone through the whole island to Paphos, they came across a certain sorcerer. He was a false prophet, a Jew named Bar-Jesus. ⁷He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus who was an intelligent man. Sergius summoned Barnabas and Saul, and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸But Elymas the sorcerer (as his name is translated) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith." (Acts 13:6-8).

¶⁹But Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his eyes on Elymas. ¹⁰Paul said, 'You who are filled with deception and fraud; you son of the devil; you enemy of all righteousness; will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? ¹¹Behold, now the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a season.' Immediately a mist and darkness fell on Elymas. He went about seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹²Then the proconsul, when he saw this happen, believed. He was amazed at the teaching of the Lord." (Acts 13:9-12).

1 *Barnabas and Saul Sent to Preach*

Verses 1-3

¶ "In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they served the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Separate Barnabas and Saul for me, for the work to which I have called them." So, when they had fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away." (Acts 13:1-3).

- **Church at Antioch.** The Antioch here is the great Syrian city. There is a smaller city also called Antioch. It is in Pisidia. Refer to the map on this page.
- **Prophets and teachers.** All prophets are teachers, but not all teachers are prophets. A prophet (or prophetess) is one who has been given the gift of prophecy and is able to speak words given directly by the Holy spirit. A prophet can confirm that he or she is genuine by predicting future events that will shortly come true but that are unlikely to be known or guessed beforehand. Agabas did this (Acts 11:27-28). A prophet's task however was to teach the word of God using the power of divine inspiration. This teaching can then be passed on by other teachers who are not prophets (2Timothy 2:2).. This is what teachers today do when they give lessons from scripture.
- **Herod the tetrarch.** This was Herod Antipas the tetrarch of Galilee (Luke 3:1). He killed John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1ff). His nephew was Herod Agrippa I, who killed James and jailed Peter (Acts 12:1). A tetrarch is any one of four governors who share the rule of a country or province. It is encouraging that although Manaen was brought up in this tyrannical family, he became a faithful disciple of Jesus.
- **Barnabas and Saul.** The owners of the first and last names on the list, having taken the famine relief money to Jerusalem, and returned with John Mark, are now given a mission by God. This preaching journey is known as "Paul's first missionary journey."
- **Fasted and prayed.** At certain times in life, we may wish to temporarily suspend normal physical activities such as eating, sexual intercourse, sleep, daily work, "that you may devote yourselves to prayer" (1Corinthians 7:5) and other spiritual activity. This is not a habitual or normal manner of life for the Christian. But in some circumstances it may be appropriate (Other examples: Esther 9:28,31; Acts 14:23; Luke 10:38-42). In the normal course of life, Christians are found "breaking bread from house to house and taking their meals together with gladness..." (Acts 2:46).

The value of fasting

The value of bodily deprivation is not intrinsic. When practised as though it does have value in itself, it becomes a problem (Colossians 2:20-23). The Lord does not encourage Christians to be ascetic and austere in their way of life, but rather to enjoy God's gifts, yet "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33).

- **The Holy Spirit said.** How did the Holy Spirit speak? The most likely answer is that the gift of prophecy was exercised—one of the prophets was moved by the Holy Spirit to speak. I grow weary of people saying, "God spoke to me recently and said..." In the early church, God generally spoke either through the scriptures or through prophets by their use of the gift of prophecy (1Corinthians 14:1-4). If people claim that God speaks to them, as many do, that is tantamount to claiming the gift of prophecy. Let them prove it by predicting something that will shortly come to pass, something that could not be guessed, like

Agabus did (Acts 11:27-28). If not, let us regard their claim “God spoke to me...” as humbug.

- **Laid hands on them.** The apostles laid hands on people to impart miraculous spiritual gifts to them, such as the gift of prophecy. Those given such gifts were not able, in turn, to lay hands on people for the same purpose. Philip, for example had miraculous powers which he demonstrated in Samaria. But it required the hands of an apostle to impart the gifts of the Holy Spirit to others (Acts 8:5-6,14-19).
 - ❑ Cornelius and his household were an exception to this; they received the gift of tongues directly from the Holy Spirit, without anybody laying hands on them, just as the apostles did on the day of Pentecost (Acts 11:15-17, Acts 2:4).
 - ❑ Hands were laid on the sick when healing them (Acts 28:8, Mark 8:23, Luke 4:40).
 - ❑ Hands were laid on people when blessing them as Jesus did to the little children (Mark 10:16). But that did have a flip side under the Old Testament. At the trial of one heard cursing God, witnesses were to lay hands on the blasphemer before stoning him (Leviticus 24:10-16, esp v.14).
 - ❑ Hands were laid on people when commissioning them as Moses did to Joshua (Numbers 27:18-19 cf Acts 6:6). The point of this was that the spirit of wisdom might be given to those commissioned (Deuteronomy 34:9). The wisdom can be requested of God through prayer invoking the providence of God (James 1:4-6). This is the most likely purpose of laying hands on Barnabas and Saul before sending them off on their missionary journey (Acts 13:2-3).
 - ❑ Note that the doctrine of the laying on of hands (briefly set out above) is one of the elementary or foundational teachings in the church, and all Christians should have an understanding of it (Hebrews 6:1-3).

2 *Barnabas and Saul Sail to Cyprus*

Verses 4-5

¶ "Thus Barnabas and Saul, sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed to Cyprus. Reaching Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. They also had John as their helper." (Acts 13:4-5).



- **Synagogues of the Jews.** Jews were now living all over the world. They had meeting places called synagogues where their local congregations met and were administered. The temple in Jerusalem was a place for festivals and pilgrimages, but the synagogue was the center of grass-roots religion and worship each Sabbath. It became Saul's practice, when he came to preach in a city, to first go to the synagogues. There he would hope to preach the gospel to the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles who worshipped God with the Jews.
 - One of Paul's mottos was, "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16, Romans 2:9-10). Paul saw this practice as "necessary" (Acts 13:46).
- **John as their helper.** This was John Mark whom Barnabas and Saul had brought with them from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 12:25). John deserted Barnabas and Saul when they sailed from Cyprus to the mainland, and he went back to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13).

3 *Elymas the Sorcerer Struck Blind.*

Verses 6-8

¶ "When they had gone through the whole island to Paphos, they came across a certain sorcerer. He was a false prophet, a Jew named Bar-Jesus. He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus who was an intelligent man. Sergius summoned Barnabas and Saul, and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (as his name is translated) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith." (Acts 13:6-8).

- **Elymas, sorcerer, Jewish false prophet.** Rulers like to have about their persons wise men who can lend them foresight into events important to their governance. Instead they get charlatans who consult the stars, the entrails of a chook, or the spirits of the dead. Even ancient kings like Nebudchadnezzar (in Daniel's day) or the Pharaoh of Egypt (in Joseph's time) did this. Sergius Paulus was intelligent, so he wished to have someone around him like Nathan (the prophet

king David consulted). Sergius hired Elymas, supposedly a Jewish prophet of God. But he was a false prophet practising the arts of the pagan magicians, and was no Joseph, Daniel, or Nathan.

- **Summoned Barnabas and Saul** Sergius heard of Barnabas and Saul, and thought it prudent (as indeed it was) to hear their word. Elymas tried to interfere.

Verses 9-12

¶ "But Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his eyes on Elymas. Paul said, "You who are filled with deception and fraud; you son of the devil; you enemy of all righteousness; will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? Behold, now the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a season." Immediately a mist and darkness fell on Elymas. He went about seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul, when he saw this happen, believed. He was amazed at the teaching of the Lord." (Acts 13:9-12).

- **Unquestionable superiority.** As Philip had done in Samaria where Simon the sorcerer practised (Acts 8:9-13), Paul also received the power of the Holy Spirit to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus Christ over sorcerers and their magic. The miracle that Saul did convinced Sergius Paulus to believe in Christ. If Sergius would serve Christ faithfully, Christ would give him wisdom and help to rule well. Sergius would no longer need the likes of Elymas at his side. Jesus would be there. More than this, Sergius would also have forgiveness of sins and eternal life!
- **Blind for a season.** I sometimes hear or read discussions on this passage about using miraculous power to harm people. In this case Paul caused Elymas no harm, only severe but temporary inconvenience. Furthermore, he taught Elymas a very valuable lesson which he needed to learn: *Jesus is the Lord; Bar-Jesus is a fraud.*
- **Saul also known as Paul.** Saul came to be known as Paul. Saul was the name of the Benjaminite who became first king of Israel (1Sam 9:15-17). Paul was also a Benjaminite (Philippians 3:4-5), and his given or circumcision name was Saul, after the king of old. The name "Paul" comes from the Latin for "little" (the root of our English words "pauper" and "paucity"). To give up the kingly name Saul and take up the name Paul meaning "small", shows humility.

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Author: Ron Graham

Acts 13:13-42

—Verse by verse

This page is a verse by verse study of Acts 13:13-42. These verses describe Paul's Synagogue Speech in Antioch Pisidia.

Paul's Speech at Antioch Pisidia

Acts 13:13-42

¶“¹³Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia. John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem. ¹⁴From Perga, they moved on to Antioch of Pisidia where they went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. ¹⁵After the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent someone to say to Paul and company, 'Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, you may speak'” (Acts 13:13-15).

¶“¹⁶Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, 'Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen. ¹⁷The God of this people Israel, chose our fathers and increased the people when they dwelt as aliens in the land of Egypt. With uplifted arm, he led them out of Egypt. ¹⁸For a period of about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. ¹⁹When he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he apportioned their land for an inheritance. This took about four hundred fifty years. ²⁰After that, he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet.'” (Acts 13:16-20).

¶“²¹'Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin. He reigned for forty years. When God removed Saul, he raised up David to be their king, to whom he also testified, '*I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my heart, who will do all my will.*'” ²³From this man's offspring, just as promised, God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus.'” (Acts 13:21-23).

¶“²⁴'Before the advent of Jesus, John preached the baptism of repentance to all Israel. ²⁵As John was fulfilling that course, he used to say, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he, but behold, one comes after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie'.²⁶Brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, the word of this salvation is sent out to you.'” (Acts 13:24-26).

¶“²⁷'For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, did not recognise him. Nor did they understand the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath. But they fulfilled these by condemning him. ²⁸Though they found no cause for death, they still asked Pilate to have him killed. ²⁹When they had fulfilled all things that were written about Jesus, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb. ³⁰But God raised him from the dead, and ³¹for many days he was seen by those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are his witnesses to the people. ³²We preach to you the good news that the promise God made to the fathers, ³³has been fulfilled for their children, in that God raised up Jesus, just as it is also written in the second psalm, '*You are my Son. Today I have begotten you.*'” (Acts 13:27-33).

¶“³⁴Now about this fact that God raised Jesus up from the dead, no more to return to decay, God has spoken thus: *'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David'*.
³⁵Therefore he also says in another psalm, *'You will not allow your Holy One to see decay'*.
³⁶For David served the purpose of God in his own generation. After that David fell asleep, was laid with his fathers, and saw decay.
³⁷But Jesus, whom God raised up, saw no decay.
³⁸Be it known to you therefore, brothers, that forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you through this man Jesus.
³⁹By him everyone who believes is justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.'”
 (Acts 13:34-39).

¶“⁴⁰Beware therefore, lest what is spoken in the prophets come upon you: ⁴¹*'Behold, you scoffers, marvel and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which you will never believe though one declares it to you.'*
⁴²So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.” (Acts 13:40-42).

1 A Visit to Antioch's Synagogue

Verses 13-15

¶ "Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia. John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem. From Perga, they moved on to Antioch of Pisidia where they went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. After the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, you may speak.”” (Acts 13:13-15).



- **John departed from them.** This was John Mark whom Barnabas and Saul had brought with them from Jerusalem to Antioch Syria (Acts 12:25). After they sailed from Cyprus to the mainland, John quit travelling with Paul and Barnabas. By this desertion, John lost Paul's trust (Acts 15:36-41).
- **Antioch of Pisidia.** There are two cities called Antioch: the Antioch in Pisidia, and the greater Antioch in Syria (where the current journey began). Refer to the

map above.

- **Went into the synagogue.** Jews were now living all over the world. They had meeting places called synagogues where their local congregations met and were administered. The temple in Jerusalem was a place for festivals and pilgrimages, but the synagogue was the center of grass-roots religion and worship each Sabbath. It became Paul's practice, when he came to preach in a city, to first go to the synagogues. There he would hope to preach the gospel to the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles who worshipped God with the Jews. Usually he was invited to speak, as in this case.

2 *Paul's Talks About David and Jesus*

Verses 16-20

¶ "Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel, chose our fathers and increased the people when they dwelt as aliens in the land of Egypt. With uplifted arm, he led them out of Egypt. For a period of about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. When he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he apportioned their land for an inheritance. This took about four hundred fifty years. After that, he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet." (Acts 13:16-20).

- **Paul stood up.** With his training and career as a Pharisee, Paul was able to address the synagogue according to its ways. He begins, after the customary niceties, by telling the old story that the Jews loved to hear. In a few crisp sentences he spans their history from Abraham to until the possession of the promised land in the time of the judges.

Verses 21-23

¶ "Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. When God removed Saul, he raised up David to be their king, to whom he also testified, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my heart, who will do all my will.' From this man's offspring, just as promised, God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus." (Acts 13:21-23).

- **A Saviour Jesus.** Paul continues his connected history, but the connection is between king David and Jesus Christ. Paul doesn't tell the intervening history of Israel. He joins the time of David to the present day. As the congregation would all know, God made a promise to David about the Messiah, and confirmed it with an oath.
 - Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, ¶ "David, speaking as a prophet, knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that, of the fruit of David's fleshly body, God would raise up the Christ to sit on David's throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke about the resurrection of the Christ..." (Acts 2:29-31).
 - The "throne promise" that God made to David is recorded in (2Samuel 7:12), and is made an oath in (Psalms 89:3-4) and (Psalms 132:11).

- God has now fulfilled this oath. Jesus is now King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1 Timothy 6:14-15). He said himself, "I have sat down with my Father in his throne" (Revelation 3:21). We have been ushered into his kingdom (Colossians 1:13).

Verses 24-26

¶ "Before the advent of Jesus, John preached the baptism of repentance to all Israel. As John was fulfilling that course, he used to say, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. But behold, one comes after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.' Brothers, children of the stock of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, the word of this salvation is sent out to you." (Acts 13:24-26).

- **John the Baptizer as witness.** Paul must, of course, support his assertion that Jesus is the promised Saviour and Christ. So Paul calls John the Baptizer as his witness. It was common knowledge that in this saying John was referring to Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:26-37).

Verses 27-33

¶ "For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, did not recognise him. Nor did they understand the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath. But they fulfilled these by condemning him. Though they found no cause for death, they still asked Pilate to have him killed. When they had fulfilled all things that were written about Jesus, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are his witnesses to the people. We preach to you the good news that the promise God made to the fathers, has been fulfilled for their children, in that God raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second psalm, "You are my Son. Today I have begotten you." " (Acts 13:27-33).

- **Other witnesses.** Of course most of the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem had taken no notice of John the Baptizer. These leaders did not recognize Jesus as the prophesied Messiah. Rather, they opposed Jesus and had him unjustly crucified. But God raised him from the dead and many saw him and could testify that Jesus was indeed alive again. Paul now adds their witness to support his claim.
- **Today I have begotten you.** This quote from Psalm 2:7 is about the resurrection of Christ, not his incarnation in Bethlehem. Jesus is called "the first begotten from the dead" (Revelation 1:5). Jesus was God's only begotten Son in both his birth and his death. He was born from both the womb and the tomb.

Verses 34-39

¶ "Now about this fact that God raised Jesus up from the dead, no more to return to decay, he has spoken thus: 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' Therefore he says also in another psalm, 'You will not allow your Holy One to see decay.' For David, after he had in his own generation served the purpose of God, fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and saw decay. But Jesus whom God raised up saw no decay. Be it known to you therefore, brothers, that forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you through this man Jesus. By him everyone who believes is justified

from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Acts 13:34-39).

- **Return to decay.** God said to Adam, "You shall return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:19). The expression "return to decay" (Acts 13:34) is equivalent to "return to the ground" (Genesis 3:19). It does not mean that Jesus *did* see decay. He died and was buried, and would have decayed to dust. However he was raised from the dead and will never again return. Jesus was not the first to be raised from the dead and not see decay. After all, didn't Jesus himself raise up his friend Lazarus who had died and been buried (John 11:43-44)? But Lazarus later on returned to decay and became dust. Jesus is unique in that he never more will return to decay like Lazarus.
- **David didn't prophesy about himself.** Paul makes the same point that Peter made on the day of Pentecost. David's prophecy, "You will not let your holy one see decay" could not be about David himself, because he died and was buried and he saw decay (Acts 2:25-32, Acts 13:35-37, Psalms 16:10). So the natural conclusion is that David was prophesying about the Messiah and that the resurrection and ascension of Jesus fulfilled that prophecy. "He whom God raised up saw no decay." (Acts 13:37).
- **Complete forgiveness and justification.** The point of all this is not simply to proclaim the resurrection of Christ, but more so to proclaim its consequence. A death from which one has risen, never to return, must have a marvellous purpose, and this is what Paul now drives home. Complete forgiveness and justification (*being made perfectly and permanently right with God*) is now possible for everyone. The law of Moses could not make this possible (Hebrews 9:8-15 etc).

3 Paul Issues a Warning

Verses 40-42

¶ "Beware therefore, lest what is spoken in the prophets come upon you: 'Behold, you scoffers, marvel and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which you will never believe though one declares it to you.' " So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath" (Acts 13:40-42).

- **A warning to heed.** Paul concludes with a warning that clearly presents a choice. When the gospel is declared to you, you must make a decision. Will you refuse to believe and perish, or will you believe and be justified? It would be ridiculous for Paul to speak this warning if his listeners had no choice. If God had already decreed before the foundation of the world who would believe, leaving the rest incapable of believing, then this warning would be meaningless. If you can beware lest destruction come upon you, then you must be both in danger of destruction and able to avoid it. The prophet foresaw that some of Israel would scoff and never believe, whilst some of the Gentiles would embrace the gospel (Habakkuk 1:5). This, however, was not because people did what they were predestined to do, but rather because they chose that course for themselves.

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Author: Ron Graham

Acts 13:43-52

—Verse by verse

This page is a verse by verse study of Acts 13:43-52. These verses describe how Paul and Barnabas are persecuted in Antioch Pisidia, and driven out of the city.

Paul and Barnabas Persecuted in Antioch Pisidia

Acts 13:43-52

¶⁴³Now when the synagogue meeting broke up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas. So Paul and Barnabas spoke to them, urging them to continue in the grace of God. ⁴⁴The next Sabbath almost the whole city was gathered together to hear the word of God. ⁴⁵But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted the things which were spoken by Paul, and blasphemed.” (Acts 13:43-45).

¶⁴⁶Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, and said, 'It was necessary that God's word should be spoken to you first. But since indeed you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷For so has the Lord commanded us, saying, *'I have set you as a light for the Gentiles, that you should bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.'*” (Acts 13:46-47).

¶⁴⁸As the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of God. As many as were designated for eternal life believed. ⁴⁹The word of the Lord was spread abroad throughout all the region.” (Acts 13:48-49).

¶⁵⁰However, the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, and stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and threw them out of their borders. ⁵¹But Paul and Barnabas shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. ⁵²The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 13:50-52).

I *Jews Reject Paul's Ministry*

Verses 43-45

¶ "Now when the synagogue meeting broke up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas. So Paul and Barnabas spoke to them, urging them to continue in the grace of God. The next Sabbath almost the whole city was gathered together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted the things which were spoken by Paul, and blasphemed." (Acts 13:43-45).

- **Devout proselytes.** A *proselyte* is a Gentile convert to Judaism who would renounce paganism and idolatry, be circumcised (if a man), keep the law of Moses,

and worship in the synagogue every Sabbath —becoming a Jew though not of Jewish descent. Jesus said to the Jewish leaders of his day, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, for you compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matthew 23:15).

- **Receiving or rejecting.** Paul's message in the synagogue (Acts 13:13-41) polarised the Jewish religious community. Many *followed* Paul and Barnabas, eager to hear more, and a huge crowd turned out the next Sabbath to listen. The rest, however, opposed Paul and Barnabas, unreasonably contradicting their teaching.
- **Blasphemed.** We might expect some of the Jews to contradict the gospel, but we would not expect them to blaspheme, even though angry and jealous. They regarded blasphemy as a sin worthy of death (Matthew 26:64-66). Perhaps Luke is not referring to blasphemy against God as such, but rather to *insulting* Paul and Barnabas. However I think Luke might well be thinking of blasphemy against God—in the person of Jesus. The Jewish opponents of Christ would be likely to say blphemous things against Jesus, but they wouldn't think it blasphemy, because they didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God.

2 Paul Turns to the Gentiles

Verses 46-47

¶ "Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, and said, "It was necessary that God's word should be spoken to you first. But since indeed you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so has the Lord commanded us, saying, 'I have set you as a light for the Gentiles, that you should bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.' " " (Acts 13:46-47).

- **To the Jew first.** Jews were now living all over the world. They had meeting places called synagogues where their local congregations met and were administered. It was Paul's practice, when he came to preach in a city, to first go to the synagogues. There he would hope to preach the gospel to the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles. One of Paul's mottos was, "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16, Romans 2:9-10). He saw this practice as "necessary" (Acts 13:46).
- **You thrust God's word from you.** Paul lays blame upon these jealous Jews. They were able to accept the gospel; their own scriptures spoke of Jesus Christ; but they thrust the message from them. This made them fully responsible for any judgment against them that they were not made worthy of eternal life. Pilate once asked a Jewish mob of the same ilk, "What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matthew 27:22). They wanted him crucified.
- **Behold we turn to the Gentiles.** Paul had done what was necessary for the Jewish community in Antioch. Now he could reach out to the pagan Gentiles and bring to them the light of the gospel. This mission had already been acknowledged by Peter and the apostles in Jerusalem, because of the experience with Cornelius. Peter said, "In every nation, the one who fears God and does what is right is accepted with God" (Acts 10:34-35). The point is that this can be true *without having to become a Jewish proselyte*. A Gentile would need to renounce paganism

and idolatry certainly. But being circumcised; keeping the law of Moses; and worshipping in the synagogue every Sabbath; these were not required of the Gentile Christian. That, however, was to cause Christianity's first serious controversy.

- **Salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.** Paul quotes from Isaiah 49:6. However this is also the great commission: "Go therefore, and make disciples of every nation..." (Matthew 28:19). "You will be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

3 *Gentiles Welcome Paul's Message*

Verses 48-49

¶ "As the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of God. As many as were designated for eternal life believed. The word of the Lord was spread abroad throughout all the region." (Acts 13:48-49).

- **Glorified the word of God.** The Gentiles were overjoyed that they could have salvation and life without the yoke of the Jewish law being laid on their necks. This gospel spread rapidly.

Appointed to Eternal Life

Special attention needs to be given to the use of *τασσω tasso* in Acts 13:48 by comparison with 1 Corinthians 16:15. In the latter passage, the household of Stephanas *devoted themselves* for ministry. In Acts 13:48 certain Gentiles at Antioch in Pisidia believed Paul's preaching because they *had been devoted* to eternal life. God fearing people, they were determined to seek light and salvation. Thus disposed, they were designated for eternal life, unlike those who had rejected the gospel, to whom Paul said, "You judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life" (Acts 13:46).

Some would falsely say that those who believed were "*indisposed*" to eternal life by their "*total depravity and inability*" to receive the gospel. Nevertheless they had been, before the foundation of the world, "*predestinated and foreordained*" to eternal life. Therefore the Holy Spirit by "*irresistible grace*" moved them to believe, against every inclination of their "*sinful nature*".

I leave it to you to compare that interpretation with what I have said above, and make up your own mind.

Verses 50-52

¶ "However, the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, and stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and threw them out of their borders. But Paul and Barnabas shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 13:50-52).

- Stirred up persecution.** Although Paul and Barnabas were now not preaching to the Jews but to the pagans, the Jewish leaders still perceived that they were suffering losses. Many Jews and proselytes would be delighted to take salvation to the Gentiles and to desert the synagogues in favour of the Christian assemblies. So the Jewish leaders used their influence in the city to have Paul and Barnabas driven out. The city officials would be more than happy to avoid a commotion or uprising—for which the Roman rulers would punish the city chiefs. So they forced Paul and Barnabas to leave town. Paul and Barnabas turned this persecution into opportunity: the work in Antioch can go on without them, because nobody could kick the Spirit of Jesus out of town! There are other towns anyway, so they went to Iconium.
- Shook the dust off their feet.** This was what Jesus had told his disciples to do when a city rejected them (Matthew 10:14-15). It was a symbolic act, as though to say, “We will leave this town; we are free of obligation to you now; and we won't carry with us any burden from you; not even the dust from your road that has got on our feet and sandals.”



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Author: Ron Graham

Acts 14:1-18

—Verse by verse

This page is a verse by verse study of Acts 14:1-18. These verses describe how Paul and Barnabas were persecuted in Iconium, and mistaken for gods in Lystra.

Paul and Barnabas in Iconium and Lystra.

Acts 14:1-18

¶“¹In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went together into the synagogue of the Jews. They they spoke so effectively that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. ²However, the disbelieving Jews stirred up and embittered the souls of the Gentiles against the brethren. ³For that reason, Paul and Barnabas stayed there a long time. They spoke boldly in the Lord who testified to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. ⁴But the population of the city was divided —part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles.” (Acts 14:1-4).

¶“⁵A mob of both the Gentiles and the Jews, with their rulers, were going to mistreat and stone Paul and Barnabas. ⁶However, Paul and Barnabas became aware of it, and escaped to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region. ⁷There they preached the gospel.” (Acts 14:5-7).

¶“⁸At Lystra a certain man sat with impotent feet, a cripple from his mother’s womb. He'd never walked. ⁹He was listening to Paul, who was speaking. Noticing this, Paul fixed his eyes on him, and saw that he had faith to be made whole. ¹⁰Paul said, with a loud voice, 'Stand up on your feet!' The man leaped up and walked.” (Acts 14:8-10).

¶“¹¹When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the language of Lycaonia, 'The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!' ¹²They called Barnabas Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³The priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and would have made a sacrifice, joined by the multitudes.” (Acts 14:11-13).

¶“¹⁴But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their clothes, and rushed into the crowd. ¹⁵They cried, 'Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men of like passions with you. We preach the gospel to turn you from these vain things to the living God, who made the sky and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them. ¹⁶In past generations he let all the nations go their own ways. ¹⁷Yet he didn't leave himself without witness. He did you good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons. He satisfied your hearts with food and gladness.' ¹⁸Even saying these things, they only just curbed the crowds from making a sacrifice to them.” (Acts 14:14-18).

I *Some Jews Cause Trouble in Iconium*

Verses 1-4

¶ "In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went together into the synagogue of the Jews. They they spoke so effectively that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. However, the disbelieving Jews stirred up and embittered the souls of the Gentiles against the brethren. For that reason, Paul and Barnabas stayed there a long time. They spoke boldly in the Lord who testified to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the population of the city was divided —part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles." (Acts 14:1-4).

- **In Iconium.** When thrown out of Antioch in Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas went to Iconium, the next town to the southeast (see map this page). Much the same things took place there as in Antioch: Paul and Barnabas first went to the synagogue; many believed their message, but others opposed them —in spite of the miracles which Paul and Barnabas did. Then came the persecution, as we see in the next passage.

Verses 5-7

¶ "A mob of both the Gentiles and the Jews, with their rulers, were going to mistreat and stone Paul and Barnabas. However, Paul and Barnabas became aware of it, and escaped to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region. There they preached the gospel." (Acts 14:5-7).

- **A mob were going to stone Paul and Barnabas.** In Antioch they'd been driven out of town. Now in Iconium, they were going to be killed. But someone told them about it, so Paul and Barnabas fled to the next towns southward, Lystra and Derbe. But they didn't stop preaching the word. In Lystra they had a quite different experience, as the next passage shows.



Verses 8-10

¶ "At Lystra a certain man sat with impotent feet, a cripple from his mother's womb. He'd never walked. He was listening to Paul, who was speaking. Noticing this, Paul fixed his eyes on him, and saw that he had faith to be made whole. Paul said, with a loud voice, "Stand up on your feet!" The man leaped up and walked." (Acts 14:8-10).

- **A man lame from his mother's womb.** This miracle performed by Paul is almost identical to the miracle that Peter and John did in Jerusalem (Acts 3). The one real difference is that the man whom Peter healed had no expectation of it, thinking Peter was going to give him some money. But this man in Lystra had faith to be made whole. He believed in the power of Jesus to heal, and he hoped that one of Paul's wonders and signs would be worked on him. Paul was glad to oblige. Like the man Peter healed, this man immediately leaped and walked.

Verses 11-13

¶ "When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the language of Lycaonia, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" They called Barnabas Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and would have made a sacrifice, joined by the multitudes." (Acts 14:11-13).

- **The gods have come down!** The reaction of the populace to this miracle was not anticipated by Paul. The purpose of working miracles was to confirm the word preached (Mark 16:20). Paul's miracle had another quite undesirable effect. Unlike Peter in Jerusalem, Paul was in a pagan city. Pagan reasoning took over: only gods can do wonders, so Paul and Barnabas must be gods. This story illustrates how miraculous powers needed to be used with great care; and helps to explain why they were granted only for a short time.
- **Zeus and Hermes.** These are the Greek names. The Latin or Roman names are Jupiter (for Zeus) and Mercurius (for Hermes). It was believed that Mercurius (Mercury) was the messenger of the gods.

3 *Paul Pleads With the Populace*

Verses 14-18

¶ "But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their clothes, and rushed into the crowd. They cried, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men of like passions with you. We preach the gospel to turn you from these vain things to the living God, who made the sky and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them. In past generations he let all the nations go their own ways. Yet he didn't leave himself without witness. He did you good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons. He satisfied your hearts with food and gladness." Even saying these things, they only just curbed the crowds from making a sacrifice to them." (Acts 14:14-18).

- **Why are you doing this?** Had Paul anticipated the reaction to his healing of the lame man, perhaps he would have spoken more emphatically on these things earlier, before the priest of Zeus brought out garlands and oxen for a sacrifice.
- **The living God who made the sky...** Paul and Barnabas's frantic message to the crowds comes down to this: your gods are lifeless; they are myths; they cannot do anything; and we are just mortals; don't worship us, but worship the true and living God.
- **Let all the nations go their own ways.** Paul would later write of the idol-worshipping nations, "God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity..." (Romans 1:21-25), "Having overlooked the times of this ignorance, God is now declaring to humanity that all people everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:29-31).
- **Only just.** This was a narrow escape. Paul would rather be stoned than be worshipped! Had Paul and Barnabas not managed to persuade the crowd to cancel the sacrifice, the two preachers would have been devastated and would not have forgotten the disaster in Lystra. Fortunately they were able to avert it.

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Author: Ron Graham

Acts 14:19-28

—Verse by verse

This page is a verse by verse study of Acts 14:19-28. These verses describe how Paul was stoned by opponents in Lystra. He then went from place to place encouraging the new disciples, and came back to Antioch Syria.

Paul Finishes First Missionary Journey

Acts 14:19-28

¶“¹⁹A group of Jews from Antioch and Iconium came to Lystra and won over the crowds. Then they stoned Paul, and dragged him out of the city, supposing he was dead. ²⁰But as the disciples stood around him, he rose up, and entered into the city. On the next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe” (Acts 14:19-20).

¶“²¹When Paul and Barnabas had preached the gospel to Derbe, and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. ²²They confirmed the souls of the disciples, urging them to continue in the faith. They taught that through much tribulation we must enter into the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:21-22).

¶“²³Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for the disciples in every church. With prayer and fasting Paul and Barnabas committed these congregations to the Lord, on whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23).

¶“²⁴Paul and Barnabas next passed through Pisidia, and came to Pamphylia. ²⁵When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. ²⁶From there they sailed to Antioch, whence they had been committed to the grace of God for the work which they had completed” (Acts 14:24-26).

¶“²⁷When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Antioch, they gathered the church together. They reported all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentile nations. ²⁸Paul and Barnabas stayed for a long time with the disciples in Antioch” (Acts 14:27-28).

I *Some Jews Cause Trouble in Lystra*

Verses 19-20

¶ "A group of Jews from Antioch and Iconium came to Lystra and won over the crowds. Then they stoned Paul, and dragged him out of the city, supposing he was dead. But as the disciples stood around him, he rose up, and entered into the city. On the next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe" (Acts 14:19-20).

- **They stoned Paul.** Having narrowly averted being treated as a god, Paul now faces the lesser evil of being stoned to death. He was indeed stoned; and dragged outside the city; and left for dead; the victim of misdirected religious zeal. Paul's

fellow disciples gather round Paul's body, Barnabas probably among them, expecting perhaps to bury Paul. But Paul is alive and able to walk; even to go to Derbe next day; apparently with no concussion or broken bones. This is remarkable, because the Jews were quite skilled at killing people with stones. Perhaps unseen angels were catching the stones just before they hit Paul's body!

2 *Paul and Barnabas Encourage Disciples*

Verses 21-22

¶ "When Paul and Barnabas had preached the gospel to Derbe, and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. They confirmed the souls of the disciples, urging them to continue in the faith. They taught that through much tribulation we must enter into the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14:21-22).

- **Confirming the souls of the disciples.** Paul and Barnabas preached at Derbe, the next town south of Lystra (see map on this page). They then bravely retraced their steps back to the cities where they were persecuted. However they went discreetly, and instead of preaching to the populace, they quietly spent time with the converts, encouraging and teaching them, drawing no attention to themselves.
- **Continue in the faith.** Some people believe that once you are saved you cannot possibly become lost again. Yet it must be possible to stop continuing in the faith, otherwise why would Paul and Barnabas urge people to continue doing something that they cannot stop doing? Now if you stop continuing in the faith, how can you continue to be saved by faith?
- **Through much tribulation.** Paul and Barnabas's theme is appropriate. They show the disciples that being a Christian is a hard road and that's something the Christian must accept and endure.
- **Enter the kingdom of God.** Paul and Barnabas were not suggesting that the disciples were not yet in the kingdom of God. However, the kingdom of God is the kingdom of heaven, and the disciples had not yet entered heaven itself. Christ's disciples enter the kingdom as citizens from the day they become disciples (Colossians 1:12-14, Philippians 1:20). However they do not dwell in heaven yet. They are heirs of the eternal kingdom, so it certainly belongs to them, and they to it (Romans 8:16-18). But they have not yet entered into their heavenly inheritance, but wait for it patiently, enduring sufferings meanwhile.

Verse 23

¶ "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for the disciples in every church. With prayer and fasting Paul and Barnabas committed these congregations to the Lord, on whom they had believed" (Acts 14:23).

- **Appointed elders for the disciples.** This does not mean that Paul and Barnabas chose and appointed elders without the churches themselves having any say in the matter. When deacons were chosen in Jerusalem, the congregation was involved in the selection (Acts 6:1-6). The appointment of elders would follow the same pattern. However, by having Paul and Barnabas direct and assist the

appointment, and probably lay their hands on the selected men, the credentials and authority of the men would be greatly strengthened.

- **In every church.** We notice also the words, "in every church" (Acts 14:23). It was the norm for churches of the first century each to have elders. It is a shame that in Australia today some churches of Christ have substituted that scriptural form of government with a different one, invented by men.
- **Prayer and fasting.** At certain times, we may wish to temporarily suspend normal physical activities such as eating "that you may devote yourselves to prayer" (1Corinthians 7:5) and other spiritual activity. This is not a habitual or normal manner of life for the Christian. But in some circumstances it may be appropriate (Other examples: Esther 9:28,31; Acts 13:3; Luke 10:38-42). The appointment of elders is a serious matter, made more serious in this case, since Paul and Barnabas had to move on and leave these new churches, with their new elders, in the hands of the Lord. Hence not only did they engage in prayer, but with fasting also.

3 *First Missionary Journey Ends*

Verses 24-26

¶ "Paul and Barnabas next passed through Pisidia, and came to Pamphylia. When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, whence they had been committed to the grace of God for the work which they had completed" (Acts 14:24-26).

- **First journey ends.** Luke here briefly records the end of Paul's first missionary journey between the two Antiochs. He and Barnabas come back to Antioch Syria, where the first journey started.



Verses 27-28

¶ "When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Antioch, they gathered the church together. They reported all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentile nations. Paul and Barnabas stayed for a long time with the disciples in Antioch" (Acts 14:27-28).

- **An amazing story.** In the days of Paul, there were no telephones or emails, and the mail service was probably not so good in the area they had been. Besides, Paul and Barnabas didn't seem to have much time to be writing long letters describing their adventures. So the church at Syrian Antioch probably had only a sketchy knowledge, if any, of what Paul and Barnabas had done. So as soon as they got back to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas got the church together and told them all the news. And what a story! Conversions among the Jews; unprecedented outreach to the Gentiles; miracles; adventures and narrow escapes. After such an exhausting journey and a long absence, Paul and Barnabas settled down for a time with the now well-established church in Antioch Syria.

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Author: Ron Graham

Acts 15:1-12

—Verse by verse

This page is a verse by verse study of Acts 15:1-12. These verses describe how Paul spoke to the council at Jerusalem.

Teachers of error come to Antioch

Acts 15:1-12

¶“¹Some men from Judea came down to Antioch, and told the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised as is the custom of Moses, you can't be saved.' ²So Paul and Barnabas had a big disagreement and discussion with them. Then the congregation appointed Paul and Barnabas, with some others of their number, to go up to Jerusalem and consult the apostles and elders about this question.” (Acts 15:1-2).

¶“³Paul and Barnabas, after being sent forth by the church at Antioch, passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, telling about the conversion of the Gentiles. They caused great joy to all the brethren. ⁴When they came to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and elders. Paul and Barnabas reported all things that God had done with them.” (Acts 15:3-4).

¶“⁵But some believers from the sect of the Pharisees rose up saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.' ⁶So the apostles and the elders gathered together to examine this matter.” (Acts 15:5-6).

¶“⁷When there had been much discussion, Peter rose up and said to the congregation, 'Brethren, you know that a good while ago God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentile nations should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸God, who knows the heart, testified about them, giving them the Holy Spirit, just like he did to us. ⁹He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:7-9).

¶“¹⁰Now therefore why do you tempt God, that you should put a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? ¹¹But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, just as they are' ” (Acts 15:10-11).

¶“¹²After Peter spoke, the congregation kept silence, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul reporting the signs and wonders that God had done by them among the Gentile nations” (Acts 15:12).

1 *Jews from Jerusalem Bring Error to Antioch*

Verses 1-2

¶ "Some men from Judea came down to Antioch, and told the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised as is the custom of Moses, you can't be saved." So Paul and Barnabas had a big disagreement and discussion with them. So the congregation appointed Paul and Barnabas, with some others of their number, to go up to Jerusalem and consult the apostles and elders about this question." (Acts 15:1-2).

- **Custom of Moses.** The church in Antioch Syria, and the churches Paul and Barnabas had established, were making disciples among the Gentiles. These converts were not required to be circumcised or to keep the law of Moses; nor were they required to become Jewish proselytes and attend the synagogue every Sabbath. People were accepted as complete Christians without practising Judaism or the Mosaic law. They were required only to keep themselves from pagan practices and to follow the gospel of Christ. Now trouble makers from among the Jewish Christians were contradicting that. This put in danger the new movement to take Christ to the Gentiles.
- **Men from Judea.** Paul and Barnabas had heated discussion with these intruders from Judea. The issue was not resolved. So the Antioch church decided to consult the Jerusalem church about the problem. Jerusalem is the capital of Judea. Since these teachers came from Judea, let Jerusalem sort out the problem before it spreads further.
- **To go to Jerusalem.** Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some others, to make the journey up to Jerusalem, and to put the question before the apostles and elders there. This isn't because the Jerusalem church had jurisdiction over the Antioch church, but simply because the trouble makers came from Jerusalem's region. The source of the problem is the first place to look for a solution.

2 *Paul Attends Council at Jerusalem*

Verses 3-4

¶ "Paul and Barnabas, after being sent forth by the church at Antioch, passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, telling about the conversion of the Gentiles. They caused great joy to all the brethren. When they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and elders. Paul and Barnabas reported all things that God had done with them." (Acts 15:3-4).



- **The journey to Jerusalem.** Paul and Barnabas visited churches along the way, to tell them about the Gentile conversions. They probably took the opportunity to emphasise that the Gentiles were converted to Christianity, not to Judaism. The news cause gladness. The light of the gospel was now shining among the nations.
- **Received by the church.** The delegation from Antioch received a welcome from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, and a meeting was quickly arranged. Rather than talk about the problem, Paul and Barnabas used this meeting to deliver the same report to Jerusalem that they had delivered to the other churches along the way. The first missionary journey had given a great impetus to the outreach among Gentiles. Nothing should be allowed to undo this important advance, especially because it was a work that *God had done*.

Verses 5-6

¶ "But some believers from the sect of the Pharisees rose up saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses." So the apostles and the elders gathered together to examine this matter." (Acts 15:5-6).

- **Some believers rose up.** Paul and Barnabas didn't have to raise the Antioch problem. Its protagonists in Jerusalem were quick to raise it themselves. They were saying, in effect, that Paul and Barnabas had got it wrong. They should have made their Gentile converts become not only Christians but also Jewish proselytes.
- **Sect of the Pharisees.** This sect believed in a resurrection from the dead (Acts 23:8) so some of them were able to accept that Jesus had risen. Hence they were believers. But they treated the Christian faith as a development within Judaism, not as a replacement for it. This was contrary to the message that Paul and Barnabas had preached on their missionary journey. So there it was. The controversy was on the table. So a second meeting was called to examine the issue.

3 *Peter Supports Paul and Silences Opponents*

Verses 7-9

¶ "When there had been much discussion, Peter rose up and said to the congregation, "Brethren, you know that a good while ago God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentile nations should hear the word of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, testified about them, giving them the Holy Spirit, just like he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:7-9).

- **Much discussion.** As in all such meetings, everyone put in his sixpence worth. Talk like this often goes up and down every garden path but reaches no conclusion. So Peter decides to bring it to a focus. He, in a few crisp sentences, reminds them of the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius and his household (Acts 11:15). Then Peter draws his conclusion as follows...

Verses 10-11

¶ "Now therefore why do you tempt God, that you should put a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, just as they are"" (Acts 15:10-11).

- **Saved by grace.** A few more crisp sentences from Peter, and the matter is made simple and clear. The law of Moses is a burden nobody needs to bear any longer. Not only can Gentiles be saved without it, so can Jews. Both Gentiles and Jews, without distinction, are saved by faith through grace. Moses is no longer necessary. The Christ (Messiah) has made all things new.
- **A yoke on the neck.** A yoke is a frame connecting the necks of beasts of burden, keeping them together sharing the load.

Verse 12

¶ "After Peter spoke, the congregation kept silence, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul reporting the signs and wonders that God had done by them among the Gentile nations" (Acts 15:12).

- **Kept silence and listened.** Peter's statement brought silence to the meeting—not that he put a dampener on discussion, but that he clarified the issue so that it was pretty well settled. Barnabas and Paul then relate the miracles God did to confirm their message. Just as Peter had signs from God to cite, so did Barnabas and Paul. The Pharisees opposing them had no signs from God to confirm their assertions. So it was game, set, and match. End of controversy.

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Author: Ron Graham

Acts 15:13-31

—Verse by verse

This page is a verse by verse study of Acts 15:13-31. These verses describe James's speech to the council at Jerusalem

James's speech to the council at Jerusalem

Acts 15:13-31

¶“¹³After Paul and Barnabas finished speaking, James answered, 'Brethren, hear me. ¹⁴Simon Peter has reported how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. ¹⁵This agrees with the words of the prophets. As it is written, ¹⁶*'After these things I will return. I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen. I will rebuild its ruins. I will restore it ¹⁷so that the rest of humanity may seek the Lord, all the Gentiles who are called by my name. Thus says the Lord, who does all these things' ¹⁸and he knows them from eternity'” (Acts 15:13-18).*

¶“¹⁹Therefore my judgment is that we do not trouble those who turn to God from among the Gentiles. ²⁰Let us write to them only that they abstain from the pollution of idols, from sexual immorality, from what is strangled, and from blood. ²¹For Moses, from generations of old, has in every city those who preach him, and read him in the synagogues every Sabbath'” (Acts 15:19-21).

¶“²²Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men out of their company, and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas Barsabas, and Silas, leaders among the brethren. ²³By their hand they sent this letter: 'The apostles, the elders, and the brethren in Jerusalem, to the brethren among the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia'” (Acts 15:22-23).

¶“²⁴We have heard that some have gone out from among us to trouble you with their words, unsettling your souls. They say, 'You must be circumcised and keep the law.' We gave them no such commandment. ²⁵So it seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to select men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷So we have sent to you Judas and Silas also, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth'” (Acts 15:24-27).

¶“²⁸For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay no greater burden on you than these necessary things: ²⁹that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these things, you will do well. Farewell'” (Acts 15:28-29).

¶“³⁰So, when Judas, Silas, Barnabas, and Paul, were sent off, they went to Antioch. They gathered the congregation together and delivered the letter. ³¹When they had read it, the congregation rejoiced because the letter was so encouraging” (Acts 15:30-31).

1 James's Speech in Jerusalem

Verses 13-18

¶ "After Paul and Barnabas finished speaking, James answered, "Brethren, hear me. Simon Peter has reported how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. This agrees with the words of the prophets. As it is written, 'After these things I will return. I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen. I will rebuild its ruins. I will restore it so that the rest of humanity may seek the Lord, all the Gentiles who are called by my name. Thus says the Lord, who does all these things and knows them from eternity'" (Acts 15:13-18).

- **The background.** The council at Jerusalem was examining the matter of Pharisees from Judea disturbing the church in Syrian Antioch. They had gone there teaching that Christians must be circumcised and must keep the law of Moses. Paul and Barnabas had come from Antioch to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders in that city. There had been much discussion, eventually silenced by a statement from Peter condemning the Judean teaching and supporting Paul and Barnabas. They then reinforced Peter's conclusions with stories of the miracles God had done to confirm the word they preached. James then made the above statement, supporting Peter, Paul, and Barnabas. They were carrying out what God had planned from eternity.
- **I will rebuild the tabernacle.** God was not speaking of building a physical temple. He was speaking figuratively of the church. Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). Paul speaks of the church as "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the head corner stone. In him the whole building is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you are being built together in the Spirit into a dwelling for God" (Ephesians 2:21-22). You'll notice, incidentally, no mention of Moses.

Verses 19-21

¶ "Therefore my judgment is that we do not trouble those who turn to God from among the Gentiles. Let us write to them only that they abstain from the pollution of idols, from sexual immorality, from what is strangled, and from blood. For Moses, from generations of old, has in every city those who preach him, and read him in the synagogues every Sabbath" (Acts 15:19-21).

- **James proposes a letter.** James proposes that Jerusalem should provide a letter contradicting the Judean teachers and showing that Christianity did not need to perpetuate the law of Moses or make any disciples for him. All that was required of Gentile Christians was to put away idolatrous practices and follow Jesus Christ.

2 The Church Sends a Letter to the Gentile Disciples

Verses 22-23

¶ "Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men out of their company, and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas Barsabas, and Silas, leaders among the brethren. By their hand they sent this letter: "The apostles, the elders, and the brethren in Jerusalem, to the

brethren among the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia — greetings" (Acts 15:22-23).



- **Judas and Silas.** Just as Antioch had sent others to accompany Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, so the Jerusalem church did in return. There is safety in numbers along the road. Moreover, it reinforced the letter to have representatives from Jerusalem speak directly to the churches affected by the error that the Judeans were teaching. Silas would later become, like Barnabas, a companion for Paul.

Verses 24-27

¶ "We have heard that some have gone out from among us to trouble you with their words, unsettling your souls. They say, 'You must be circumcised and keep the law.' We gave them no such commandment. So it seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to select men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who themselves will also tell you the same things by word of mouth" (Acts 15:24-27).

- **The preamble.** The first part of the letter (above) made it quite clear what had happened in Jerusalem. It also clarified that the troubling doctrine had no support whatever from the Jerusalem church or the apostles and elders there.

Verses 28-29

¶ "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay no greater burden on you than these necessary things: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these things, you will do well. Farewell" (Acts 15:28-29).

- **Terms of the letter.** The second part of the letter made Peter's point, that the Holy Spirit had testified about the Gentiles being welcomed by God without the law of Moses. The letter then repeats what James had said, about giving up pagan practices and simply following Christ. The letter is plain and simple. And so it goes on its way.

- **That you abstain.** The Gentile converts are instructed to abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. These refer to pagan rituals involving sacrifices and temple prostitutes. Christians don't have to make any concessions to the law of Moses, but on the other hand they do have to cut themselves off from involvement in paganism, and take into account the sensibilities of other Christians as Paul later had occasion to discuss (Romans 14, 1Corinthians 10:14-33).

3 *The Letter Brings Joy to Antioch*

Verses 30-31

¶ "So, when Judas, Silas, Barnabas, and Paul, were sent off, they went to Antioch. They gathered the congregation together and delivered the letter. When they had read it, the congregation rejoiced because the letter was so encouraging" (Acts 15:30-31).

- **Mission accomplished.** Not only had the Judean error been combatted in Antioch, but the letter could be taken to the other areas where Paul and Barnabas had been.
- **Lessons learned from Acts 15.** We learn some lessons from this episode: deal with error at its source; don't make concessions to its propogators; deal with the error quickly and decisively; keep the answer clear and focussed on the main point.

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Author: Ron Graham

Acts 15:32-41

—Verse by verse

This page is a verse by verse study of Acts 15:32-41. These verses describe the beginning of Paul's second missionary journey.

Paul's Second Missionary Journey Begins

Acts 15:32-41

¶³²Judas and Silas, prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with many words. ³³After Judas and Silas had spent some time there in Antioch, they were sent back to Jerusalem in peace from the brethren to the apostles ³⁴—however Silas thought it would be better to stay longer” (Acts 15:32-34).

¶³⁵Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching the gospel, the word of the Lord, with many others also. ³⁶After some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let's return now and visit our brethren in every city where we preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are going.' ³⁷Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them also. ³⁸But Paul insisted that they shouldn't take John, because he'd deserted them in Pamphylia, and not gone with them to the work.” (Acts 15:35-38).

¶³⁹The contention grew so sharp that they separated from each other. Barnabas took John Mark with him, and sailed away to Cyprus. ⁴⁰Paul chose Silas, and, commended by the brethren to the grace of God, ⁴¹they went out through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches” (Acts 15:39-41).

1 Ministry in Antioch Syria

Verses 32-34

¶ "Judas and Silas, prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with many words. After Judas and Silas had spent some time there in Antioch, they were sent back to Jerusalem in peace from the brethren to the apostles —however Silas thought it would be better to stay longer" (Acts 15:32-34).

- **Judas and Silas.** The letter from Jerusalem was reinforced by sending representatives in person as well. Judas Barsabas, and Silas were chosen to come back with Paul and Barnabas to Syrian Antioch. They spoke directly to the church to counteract the error that the Judeans were teaching.
- **Sent back to Jerusalem.** When Judas and Silas had completed their task, they were sent back to Jerusalem. However, Silas apparently didn't go back, since he thought it better to stay; and we find him there in Antioch a little later, when Paul sets out on his second missionary journey.
- **Prophets.** Judas and Silas were both prophets. They had received that miraculous spiritual gift that enabled them to speak with direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Paul discusses the spiritual gifts, including prophecy, in

1 Corinthians 12 and following chapters. He regarded prophecy as a higher gift than speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:20-33). Judas and Silas would speak with great authority, and their message would be highly respected, because they were spokesmen not only for the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, but for the very Spirit of God himself.

Verses 35-38

¶ "Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching the gospel, the word of the Lord, with many others also. After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's return now and visit our brethren in every city where we preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are going." Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them also. But Paul insisted that they shouldn't take John, because he'd deserted them in Pamphylia, and not gone with them to the work." (Acts 15:35-38).

- **Barnabas.** Barnabas is mentioned several times in Acts. He introduced Paul to the disciples and gained him acceptance among them (Acts 9:26-27). Barnabas is described as one who "encouraged all to remain in the Lord with resolute heart, for he was a good man, and filled with the Holy Spirit and faith" (Acts 11:22-26). His name was Joseph but the apostles called him Barnabas which means "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36).
- **Paul plans his second journey.** Paul talks over with Barnabas his ideas for a second missionary journey. But there is a disagreement about taking John Mark as a helper, because he'd deserted them on the first journey (Acts 13:13).

2 Paul and Silas in Syria and Cilicia

Verses 39-41

¶ "The contention grew so sharp that they separated from each other. Barnabas took John Mark with him, and sailed away to Cyprus. Paul chose Silas, and, commended by the brethren to the grace of God, they went out through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches" (Acts 15:39-41).



- **Barnabas goes with John.** Paul had intended to take Barnabas with him on the second journey. However, because of the disagreement over John Mark, Paul chose to take Silas instead. So they began Paul's second journey with the blessing of the church. Barnabas went his own way with John Mark, not in any attitude of

bitterness, but with the intention of encouraging and mentoring John in the ministry.

3 *List of Paul's Journeys*

Traditionally, Paul is said to have made three missionary journeys, plus a fourth journey to Rome. In the Acts Facts series, I have retained this traditional manner of dividing up Paul's several journeys recorded in the book of Acts. This enables you to more easily relate our studies with other studies, references, and maps, which most likely adhere to the same scheme.

The four journeys of Paul are...

- 1st missionary journey (Acts 13:4 to 15:35).
- 2nd missionary journey (Acts 15:36 to 18:22).
- 3rd missionary journey (Acts 18:23 to 21:17).
- Journey to Rome (Acts 27:1 to 28:16).

The first two journeys start and end in Syrian Antioch. The third journey starts in Antioch and ends in Jerusalem. The fourth journey starts in Jerusalem and ends in Rome.

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Author: Ron Graham

Acts 16:1-15

—Verse by verse

This page is a verse by verse study of Acts 16:1-15. These verses describe Paul's second missionary journey as far as Philippi, and the conversion of Lydia.

Timothy joins Paul and Silas in Paul's second journey.

Acts 16:1-15

¶“1Paul came to Derbe and Lystra. Behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy. His mother was Jewish and a believer. Timothy's father, however, was a Greek. 2The brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium spoke very highly of Timothy. 3Paul wanted Timothy as a companion on his journey. So Paul took Timothy and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts; for they all knew that Timothy's father was a Greek.” (Acts 16:1-3).

¶“4As Paul, Silas, and Timothy went on their way through the cities, they delivered the decrees which the Christians were to keep and which had been decided by the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem. 5So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.” (Acts 16:4-5).

¶“6When Paul, Silas, and Timothy had gone through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. 7When they had reached a point opposite Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not allow them to go there either. 8So, Passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.” (Acts 16:6-8).

¶“9At Troas, a vision appeared to Paul in the night. There was a man of Macedonia standing, begging him, 'Come over into Macedonia and help us.' 10When Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go out to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to the people there. 11So we set sail from Troas; we made a straight course to Samothrace; and the day following to Neapolis; 12and from there to Philippi. Now Philippi is a Roman colony and a major city of Macedonia. We stayed some days in this city.” (Acts 16:9-12).

¶“13On the Sabbath day we went outside of the city to the riverside, where we supposed that people would meet for prayer. There we sat down, and spoke to the women who had come together. 14One woman was named Lydia. She was a merchant of purple fabric. She came from the city of Thyatira. Lydia was one who worshiped God. When she heard us, the Lord opened her heart to heed the things which were spoken by Paul. 15When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and stay.' So she persuaded us.” (Acts 16:13-15).

1 *Timothy Joins Paul and Silas*

Verses 1-3

¶ "Paul came to Derbe and Lystra. Behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy. His mother was Jewish and a believer. Timothy's father, however, was a

Greek. The brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium spoke very highly of Timothy. Paul wanted Timothy as a companion on his journey. So Paul took Timothy and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts; for they all knew that Timothy's father was a Greek." (Acts 16:1-3).



- **Timothy.** This is the Timothy (or Timotheus) to whom Paul wrote the two letters that are included in our New Testaments. Timothy's grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice taught Timothy the word of God and faith in Christ (2Timothy 1:5, 2Timothy 3:15). Luke gives us the origin of Paul and Timothy's deep friendship (Acts 16:1-3), such that Paul calls Timothy his "beloved son" in the faith (2Timothy 1:2, cf 1Timothy 1:2).
- **Circumcised him.** Circumcision was practised by Jews because it was a covenant God made with Abraham (Genesis 17:10).

Note —**CIRCUMCISION:** To circumcise means to cut around and remove the foreskin of the penis. This was a covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17:9-14) so is practised by Jews as a religious rite.

Circumcision was not required by the gospel, because the gospel recognises an inward circumcision (Romans 2:25-29). When one becomes a Christian, one is enabled by Christ to put off the old person; the guilty conscience; the sinful desires. This is what counts.

- **Because of the Jews.** Why, if the gospel doesn't require physical circumcision, did Paul want Timothy circumcised? After all, hadn't he refused to circumcise Titus who had accompanied him to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:3-5)? Jewish Christians would be inclined to circumcise their sons because circumcision was a covenant with the descendants of Abraham and didn't originate with Moses (John 7:22). Paul would by no means allow any precedent for requiring circumcision of a Gentile like Titus, who wasn't the offspring of Abraham. On the other hand, Paul thought it prudent that a half Jew like Timothy should be seen to follow his Jewish side in preference to the Gentile ways of his father.

2 Strengthening the Churches

Verses 4-5

¶ "As Paul, Silas, and Timothy went on their way through the cities, they delivered the decrees which the Christians were to keep and which had been decided by the

apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily." (Acts 16:4-5).

- **The decrees.** These were the decisions written in the letter from Jerusalem (Acts 15:22-29). Note that these decrees contradicted the teachers who said that Gentile Christians must be circumcised.
- **Strengthened in the faith.** The result of the ministry of Paul, Silas, and Timothy was positive on two counts: they strengthened the churches spiritually and increased them numerically. I think it's no accident that Luke puts strength in the faith before increase in number. It is common today for ministers to weaken the doctrine so as to increase the numbers (2Timothy 4:1-5). "Contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3).

END OF THE FOURTH SECTION OF ACTS

With this progress report (Acts 16:4-5). Luke concludes his description of the spread of Christianity into Cyprus and areas south of Galatia. Paul has completed his first missionary journey and set out on his second. He has revisited churches in Syria and Cilicia. In the fifth section of Acts, Paul travels through Galatia. Paul is then directed by the Holy Spirit to go further afield, over into Macedonia and Greece.

3 Called to Macedonia

Verses 6-8

¶ "When Paul, Silas, and Timothy had gone through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had reached a point opposite Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not allow them to go there either. So, Passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas." (Acts 16:6-8).



- **The Spirit forbade them.** Paul wished to go and preach in a logical progression westward from city to city. But God had other plans. So Paul, Silas, and Timothy found themselves at Troas, all the intended cities left untouched. Paul

must have wondered why his plan had been frustrated by the Holy Spirit. But he soon got an answer.

Verses 9-12

¶ "At Troas, a vision appeared to Paul in the night. There was a man of Macedonia standing, begging him, "Come over into Macedonia and help us." When Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go out to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to the people there. So we set sail from Troas; we made a straight course to Samothrace; and the day following to Neapolis; and from there to Philippi. Now Philippi is a Roman colony and a major city of Macedonia. We stayed some days in this city." (Acts 16:9-12).



- **Luke joins Paul, Silas, and Timothy.** So far Luke's narrative has been about what other people did. Here, for the first time, Luke uses the pronoun "we" to include himself. So now Paul, Silas, and Timothy have another companion in Luke.
- **Philippi.** Philippi was a city founded by the Greek king, Philip II of Macedon, circa 356BC. It was now, as Luke tells us, a Roman colony. As such, it was not as multicultural as the cities Paul had previously evangelised. It had almost no Jewish community and no synagogue, so Paul did not have that convenience to start his work there.

4 Lydia Converted in Philippi

Verses 13-15

¶ "On the Sabbath day we went outside of the city to the riverside, where we supposed that people would meet for prayer. There we sat down, and spoke to the women who had come together. One woman was named Lydia. She was a merchant of purple fabric. She came from the city of Thyatira. Lydia was one who worshiped God. When she heard us, the Lord opened her heart to heed the things which were spoken by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and stay." So she persuaded us." (Acts 16:13-15).

- **Women together.** Somehow Paul and his companions found out that on the Sabbath, along the bank of the river Gangas, they would find a prayer meeting. This turned out to be a group of women, among them Lydia from Thyatira in Asia

who now lived in Philippi and ran her business. She was not a Jew, but worshipped God. Lydia was, apparently, Paul's first convert in Macedonia.

- **The Lord opened her heart.** The expression, "the Lord opened her heart" (Acts 16:14) is an acknowledgement of the presence, providence, and involvement of God in Lydia's conversion. Unfortunately the expression is grasped by some as a proof that a person's conversion is a special conviction of irresistible grace. This conviction arises solely from an unconditional choice made by God in favour of that person. This choice was made before the foundation of the world. This choice had no regard to any quality in the person. That's an awful lot to read into such a short and simple expression. God did not force Lydia's heart open anymore than he forced her to go to the riverside to pray. He opened her heart with her co-operation and with Paul's co-operation. Lydia thought of herself as "faithful to the Lord" (Acts 16:15), not as a puppet of the Lord.
- **When she was baptized.** Lydia referred to herself as faithful to the Lord after she had been baptized. She teaches us that those who refuse baptism, neglect baptism, or delay baptism, are not being faithful to the Lord.



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