

STUDY GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS

The Journeys of Paul

Week 1: Week of January 19, 2020

Sermon Title: *The First Missionary Journey: Steadfast in the Midst of Suffering*

Text: Acts 13-14

(For Facilitators mainly - optional for the group)

The first phase allows Luke to speak to the following concerns:

- Every mission is undertaken at and in the inspiration of the Spirit (13:2, 4, 9, 52)
- There is confrontation with and victory over magic/sorcery
- The synagogue is the venue for initial mission. “First to the Jews, then the Gentiles”.
- Paul emphasizes continuity of Jewish heritage and hope through Jesus (13:16-41).
- Opposition from “the Jews” and tension between Jewish obligation and Christian identity.
- The spread of the word and disciples full of joy and the HS. (13:49,52)

Chapter 13 - **Barnabas and Saul commissioned by the Spirit and the church at Antioch**

- **13:1-3:** Like Peter, the heavenly vision has to be confirmed by the Spirit’s prompting (vs.2, 4) and like Peter, by the church’s confirmation (13:3). The most important is the will of the Spirit that is evident in the church. No one goes alone.
- **13:4-12:** The first outreach is immediate success:
 - Chief Roman official, is converted
 - In a confrontation between the gospel and a corrupted form of Judaism and magic, gospel succeeds (parallel with Peter.)
- **13:13-42 – Paul’s First Sermon** - 13-16 and 42-43 are the frame for one of the more substantial speeches to match Peter’s first speech (in 2:14-36, 38,39). The parallel is deliberate: Paul preaches the same message as Peter.
- **13:44-52 – First rejection by the Jews** - Luke now reveals the result of Paul’s preaching the gospel to Jews and Gentiles: “The Jews” reject it, Paul turns to the Gentiles in consequence and the Gentiles receive it (13:45-48) The point is not that Paul then turns his back on his fellow Jews and goes exclusively to the Gentiles. That’s too simplistic. On the contrary, Paul continues the same practice thereafter. The point is that the scenario repeats (18:6; 28:25-28). This is the character of the message and the lot of the preacher: the message is first and foremost for the people of Israel, and it must always be offered first to the Jews, even if only some of them accept it and the rest reject it. This is very Pauline: “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16; 9:24; 10:12). The alternative and unjustified conclusion is that God has abandoned his people because of their unbelief, is the first step towards Christian anti-Semitism. A subordinate theme is that it is the hostility and persecution of “the Jews” which forces

the Pauline mission to keep moving into new territory (13:50,51; cf. 8:4, 11:19; 14:19-20; 17:10, 13-14). God transcends human animosity to achieve his richer purpose.

Chapter 14 - Mission From Antioch: The patterns set in Antioch is repeated in south Galatians towns of Iconium and Lystra: initially the gospel message meets with enthusiastic response; but then hostility, particularly Jewish in inspiration, forces the missionaries to move on.

- The heart of the chapter (14:8-18) – Paul’s first encounter with pagan ideas about God. The dangers of confusing divine and human, God with human creation, have been a strong concern in Luke’s history (particularly 8:10 and 12:20-23). In Lystra, we read of a clash with the simple worshippers of the traditional gods and the belief that these gods could appear as men on earth. Luke takes the opportunity to show that the word preached to Gentiles was also a word about God: Jewish monotheism is a presupposition of the Christian gospel; God as not only the initiator and mover behind the mission, but also the content of the gospel. Rightly to receive the message about Jesus depends on a right understanding of God and of God’s relation to creation and to humankind.
- 14:1-7 – The word received and rejected in Iconium

Note: Jews and non-Jews are recorded as both accepting the message and as rejecting it. The fact that Luke does not speak uniformly of “the Jews” but varies the reference warns against any inference that Luke was intent on denigrating the Jewish community as a whole.

- 14:8-18 – The encounter with traditional religion in Lystra: Here the healing of a cripple by Paul and Barnabas provides the occasion of an encounter between the missionaries to the Gentiles and the representatives of the old gods of classical Greece. *The irony is striking; Jewish missionaries, rejected by their own community in Iconium, are now hailed as the gods of old Greece. But most important of all is that the episode gave Luke the opportunity to stress that the message of Paul and Barnabas is a message about the one God, Creator of all. He makes no attempt to portray Paul as going on to preach about Jesus*
- **Acts 14:19-28 – The return to Antioch:** Luke’s main objectives in narrating the mission from Antioch are now complete. The return home is narrated in brief terms with Luke filling in a few details and to confirm the character and success of the mission. (Good storytelling).

Discussion Questions

Opening Questions (optional – pick only the ones you want to choose).

What sort of things do you do to prepare for travel? How important is preparation for you?

What does the word “steadfast” mean to you?

Read Acts 13 & 14

- In the beginning of chapter 13, what does Luke want us to know about Paul and Barnabas and the church of Antioch?
- They traveled pretty far. When they got to Perga, Mark returned. Why do you think John Mark may have left them to go back?
- Look at Paul’s sermon. What are the key points he makes?
- List all the things Paul says God has done. How do God’s actions prepare the way for Paul to speak about Jesus in verse 23?
- What was the response of the people after his sermon? Why do you think they reacted that way? In what way is the gospel offensive to others?
- We are not all facing the kinds of situations that Paul and Barnabas faced. But what are appropriate Christian responses to the variety of supernatural beliefs and practices we might encounter today?
- Why were some Jewish leaders filled with indignation about the message and why are the Gentiles thrilled?
- If you were to emphasize one central truth about the gospel, what would it be? Why?
- How would you feel if you were constantly under attack like Paul and Barnabas? What kept them going under these circumstances?
- Why might Christians resist to include other groups/ethnicities that haven’t been part of the fellowship before?
- What are some misunderstandings about this new faith that the listeners had to overcome? See also Rom. 1:20-23, and I Thess. 1:9.
- In verses 21-28, Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch. After the kind of treatment they received in their travels, how were they received when they returned? How would you feel, if you were part of the church when you had heard they had come back? When have you had a similar feeling of completion and accomplishment after an intense period of giving yourself to others?
- Seeing Paul and Barnabas’s courage, faith, and steadfastness, how are you challenged or encouraged?