

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 17)

The Antioch Church was blessed to send out history's first missionaries on their first missionary journey in Acts 13-14. At this point in the book of Acts, God is beginning to work marvelously among the Gentiles! In Antioch of Pisidia, they are so spiritually hungry that they literally BEG for the Word of God to be preached to them! But the Jews, who have history and heritage on their side, become ENVIOUS of what God is doing!

Acts 13:46 Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

The Jews stir up so much persecution against Paul and Barnabas that they are successful in expelling them out of the region. That brings them to Iconium, where the same thing happens all over again!

Acts 14:1-7 And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: And there they preached the gospel.

Persecution by the "unbelieving Jews" followed the missions team, because TRUTH ALWAYS DIVIDES. But even when they had to flee from persecution, it didn't stop them from preaching the gospel!

Acts 14:8-18 And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia,

The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

In Lystra, the superstitious crowd interpreted events through their own mythology. They saw Barnabas as Jupiter (Zeus), chief of the gods; and Paul, the speaker, as Mercury (Hermes), messenger of the gods. Jupiter was the patron deity of the city, so this let the priest feel important. Paul could have tried to use this "honor" to lead people to truth, but Apostolics don't use lies to promote truth! Paul and Barnabas opposed what they were doing and boldly told the people that their gods were "vanities."

Earlier Paul had addressed synagogue congregations, so he used Jewish history to establish common ground with them, and then used the Old Testament Scriptures to support his arguments. However, this time Paul's message was not based on the Old Testament, because this was a pagan Gentile audience. He started with the witness of God in creation. **The starting point was different, but the ending point was the same!**

Once again, the JEALOUS JEWS follow the missions team, even stoning Paul and leaving him for dead! It's amazing that Paul then returns home through the same cities where they had experienced such persecution!

Acts 14:19-25 And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia:

On their return trip to Antioch, the team did several important things:

- They made DISCIPLES (“taught many”)
- They STRENGTHENED the believers (“confirming the souls”)
- They encouraged them to CONTINUE in the faith (“exhorting them”)
- They told them to expect TRIALS (“through much tribulation”)
- They appointed ELDERS in every church (“ordained them elders”)

And finally, they reported back to their “sending church” on the great work God had done. They had been gone at least a full year. This shows us the critical importance of accountability to the LOCAL CHURCH.

Antioch was not a PARKING LOT, but a LAUNCHING PAD for Paul!

Acts 14:26-28 And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples.

Bob Pierce (Youth For Christ): "Others have done so much with so little, while we have done so little with so much!" (Gentiles, Jews)

The door of faith had now been opened wide to the Gentiles, and the legalistic Jews didn't like it! **In Acts 15, twenty years after the Day of Pentecost, the church had to act decisively to keep that door open.**

Acts 15:1-6 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

The law of circumcision was given to Abraham more than 400 years prior to Moses (Genesis 17:9-14), with no specific instruction other than doing it on the eighth day. To that basic commandment, the Jews had added many rules; as Jesus said, they taught as commandments the tradition of

men (Mark 7:9). This is why they are concerned that circumcision be done “after the manner (i.e. detailed procedures) of Moses.”

Mark 7:9 And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.

They are insisting that Gentile converts must become JEWS first, before they are even allowed to become CHRISTIANS (“ye cannot be saved”)! Circumcision is just an excuse to push their real agenda, that Gentiles should be forced to keep the WHOLE Jewish law (v. 5).

WHY IS THIS SO DANGEROUS?

- It mixes Law and Grace
- It tries to pour new wine into old wineskins
- It stitches up the rent veil, blocking the new and living way to God
- It rebuilds the wall between Jew and Gentile torn down on the cross
- It puts a heavy Jewish yoke on Gentile shoulders
- It asks the church to move out of the sunlight back into the shadows
- It demands that Gentiles become Jews before they can be saved
- It says that obedience to the gospel is not enough

The Apostles and elders of the church gather in Jerusalem to discuss the matter, not because Jerusalem is their “headquarters,” but because this problem was created by Jewish “Christians” out of Jerusalem! (Paul later calls them “false brethren” in Galatians 2:4.) **Three main speeches from this meeting are referred to in Acts 15 ...**

PETER

Acts 15:7-11 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

BARNABAS & PAUL

Acts 15:12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

JAMES

Peter, Barnabas & Paul give testimony of what God has been doing among the Gentiles; James anchors their testimony to the WORD.

Acts 15:13-18 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

What happened at Cornelius' household through the ministry of Peter ("Simeon") was not just about one family ... God was beginning to visit the entire Gentile race, "to take out of them a people for his name." It had always been God's will for the Gentiles to be in His church! The Jewish prophet Amos had spoken of this day ...

Amos 9:11-12 In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this.

On the day of Pentecost, when the Jews came into the church, Peter quoted JOEL. Now, as the Gentiles come in, James quotes AMOS.

At one point in Israel's history, there were TWO TABERNACLES in existence at the same time – the tabernacle of Moses in Mount Gibeon, and the tabernacle of David in Mount Zion.

2 Chronicles 1:3-4 So Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon; for there was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness. But the ark of God had David brought up from Kirjathjearim to the place which David had prepared for it: for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem.

The Ark of the Covenant, once it was taken out of the Tabernacle of Moses during the reign of Saul, never returned to that tabernacle (the glory had departed!). Instead, David brought the Ark back to Jerusalem and set it in a tent, the Tabernacle of David! The Tabernacle of Moses had an empty Holy of Holies, but the Tabernacle of David had a new order of worship ("sacrifices of praise") all centered around the Ark!

THE GENTILES WERE TO COME INTO THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID, NOT THE TABERNACLE OF MOSES! ACCESS TO THE ARK IS STILL AVAILABLE – BECAUSE THE DOOR IS STILL OPEN!