
Book of Acts – Course B

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If you have not already done so, save this lesson to your computer using the "save" feature of your browser or PDF reader. Then print out the lesson (or at least open it in your browser or PDF reader **offline** – not on the Internet). Read the lesson and **study in your Bible the passages indicated >>> Scripture <<<**. Following each passage, study each question that has a number enclosed in asterisks (*1*, *2*, etc.), and **write down your answers on paper**. Some questions include more than one number because they have more than one blank to fill in. ("Think" questions should be carefully considered for your own benefit, but your answers will not be submitted to us.) Please take your time, study each passage carefully, answer the questions honestly, and consider the applications to your own life (John 12:48; 2 Tim. 2:15).

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Thank you for your interest, and God bless your study of His word.

Antioch Spreads the Word – Acts 11:27–13: 52

Lesson 1

Introduction:

In Acts 11 the church in Antioch had begun. In this study, the focus will return briefly to Jerusalem, then we will observe as the Antioch church begins its work of spreading the gospel.

I. Caring for the Needy – Acts 11:27–30

>>> Please read Acts 11:27–30. <<<

1 What problem did Agabus predict would occur? He predicted (a) a famine (dearth), (b) Jesus' second coming, (c) a flood, (d) a plague of grasshoppers, (e) a fire, (f) all of the preceding. Answer: _____.

2 What did the Antioch church do about it? Answer: Antioch sent relief to the _____ in Judea.

3 To whom were funds sent? (a) central headquarters, (b) a benevolent society, (c) elders of the churches in Judea, (d) all of these. Answer: _____.

Comments: We have earlier read about local churches helping needy disciples (Acts 2:44,45; 4:32–35; 6:1–7). We remember that churches emphasized the spiritual work of helping souls please God. Churches did help the needy, but as discussed in Acts 6, they did not let this divert their focus from their spiritual work. They did this by limiting their benevolent work to needy disciples. Individual Christians helped relatives and other needy people, but local church benevolence was always to brethren in Christ (cf. 1 Tim. 5:3–16).

The Antioch church gathered funds, each person giving according to his ability (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1,2; 2 Cor. 9:6,7). The funds were sent to the elders of the churches in Judea. This is our first introduction to the work of elders. We will see later that this term refers to men in each local church who were appointed to oversee the church's work (Acts 14:23; 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1–3). They were mature, experienced Christians who possessed leadership qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9.

Since these men were appointed in each local church, it follows that each church in Judea would have had its own elders. This in turn demonstrates the concept of independence among local churches. Notice in Acts 11:22–30 that each local church functioned without any central organization or governing body of any kind. The Jerusalem church sent a preacher to Antioch (v22) and the Antioch church spread the gospel (v24–26) without the guidance or control of any missionary board. Likewise, needy members were cared for without the need for any central benevolent institutions. Local churches supervised their own work, but never sent financial donations to any central institutions of any kind.

As illustrated here, local churches did cooperate, but only in ways that respected local church independence according to God's will. We will learn more later, but note here that churches sent funds to other churches only in cases of emergency to help needy saints in the receiving church. And even then each church was free to oversee its own work under its own elders. Never did one church or one eldership oversee the work of another church or a centralized work for many churches.

We will return later to learn more about this Antioch church.

II. Persecution in Jerusalem – Acts 12:1–19

James Slain and Peter Arrested

>>> Please read Acts 12:1–5. <<<

4&5 Who caused the next persecution, and whom did he kill? Answer: A king named _____ killed _____, the brother of John.

6 What did he do to Peter? (a) killed him, (b) imprisoned him, (c) beheaded him, (d) beat him, (e) all the preceding. Answer: _____.

Comments: The Herods were a family of Jewish kings. The Romans ruled Palestine, but they allowed some Herods to remain in power if they were cooperative. This Herod was Agrippa I.

Herod raised a persecution against the church, killing James the brother of John (cf. Matt. 4:21,22). This was the first recorded death of an apostle. Herod then imprisoned Peter in the charge of four

squads of soldiers. Imagine how severely this would affect the Jerusalem church!

Verse 4 in the KJV refers to "Easter," however this has nothing to do with the modern religious holy day of that name. Rather, it refers to the Jewish feast of the Passover. (1) V3 calls it the "days of unleavened bread," which was the Passover (Ex. 12). (2) All modern translations say "Passover." (3) The original Greek word is everywhere else translated "Passover." (4) There is no indication in the context that this was a Christian holy day. Why would Herod, as a Jewish enemy of the gospel, have any respect for a Christian holy day?

An annual holy day in celebration of Jesus' resurrection is unknown in the Scriptures. In fact, Christians kept no annual holy days of any kind. Instead, they remembered Jesus' death in the Lord's supper on the first day of each week (Acts 20:7). The modern holy day of Easter was originally a pagan holy day, which was later adopted by Catholicism (see any encyclopedia). All annual religious holy days exist without Bible authority (cf. Galatians 4:8–11; 1:8,9; Matthew 15:9,13; 2 John 9–11).

Peter's Release

>>> Please read Acts 12:6–11. <<<

7 How was Peter held captive? (a) two chains, (b) two soldiers, (c) guards outside the door, (d) all the preceding. Answer: _____.

8 Who released Peter and led him out of the prison? Answer: An _____ awoke Peter and led him out.

Comment: As Peter lay sleeping in the prison, an angel awoke him and released his chains. The angel led him past the guards and out the iron gate, which opened by itself. The angel led him a ways from the prison and then left him. For other examples of miraculous releases from prison see Acts 5:17–25; 16:19–34.

Peter Finds the Disciples

>>> Please read Acts 12:12–19. <<<

9&10 Where did Peter find the disciples, and what were they doing? Answer: He went to the home of _____ where people were _____.

11&12 Who answered the door, and what did people say of her story? Answer: _____ answered. When they heard her story, people thought she was _____.

Comments: Peter went to the home of Mary, the mother of Mark. Christians had gathered there to pray, presumably for Peter. Yet when he appeared, at first they did not believe the answer to their own prayer! After telling them what had happened, Peter went elsewhere.

Next day, Herod and the soldiers were shocked that Peter was gone. The penalty for losing a prisoner in those days was death.

III. The Death of Herod – Acts 12:20–25

>>> Please read Acts 12:20–25. <<<

13&14 What caused God to be angry with Herod? Answer: He allowed people to call him a _____, not a _____.

15 What happened to Herod? (a) God killed him, (b) he lived to a ripe old age, (c) his son assassinated him, (d) nothing happened to him. Answer: _____.

Comments: Herod made a speech for the people of Tyre and Sidon. To please him, they said he was a god, not a man. God killed him for allowing this, instead of giving glory to God. God is never pleased when people worship religiously anyone but Him (Matt. 4:10). This confirms our previous conclusion that we should not honor men religiously in ways that only God should be honored (Acts 10:25,26).

This ends the second major section of the book of Acts. The gospel had been spread from Jerusalem throughout Judea and Samaria. Next we will see it spread to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8).

IV. Start of Paul's First Journey – Acts 13:1–12

(Note: A Bible or Bible atlas with good maps will be helpful in tracing Paul's journeys throughout the rest of the book of Acts.)

>>> Please read Acts 13:1–12. <<<

16 Who called Barnabas and Saul to their work of preaching? (a) a missionary society, (b) the Holy Spirit, (c) the earthly headquarters. Answer: _____.

17&18 What two men did they meet on the island of Cyprus? Answer: The proconsul _____ wanted the truth but a sorcerer named _____ opposed it.

19 What was Elymas guilty of? (a) deceit, (b) opposing righteousness, (c) perverting God's ways, (d) all the preceding. Answer: _____.

20 What happened to him? Answer: Paul struck Elymas with temporary _____.

Comment: The church in Antioch of Syria had a major role in the work of preaching throughout the world. The Holy Spirit began the work by instructing Barnabas and Saul to go on a preaching journey.

They first traveled to Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean Sea southwest of Antioch. There they met a Roman ruler named Sergius Paulus, who wanted to hear the gospel. But a sorcerer named Elymas withstood the truth. The truth has always had opponents, and as in the case of Simon in Acts 8, the opponent in this story was a sorcerer.

Note that Saul is called "Paul" for the first time in v9 ("Paul" is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Saul"). Paul firmly rebuked Elymas for his deceit and error. Sorcery is clearly identified in Scripture as being opposed to truth and based on deceit (cf. Gal. 5:19–21). Faithful preachers have always firmly rebuked error (2 Tim. 4:2–4; Rev. 3:19).

Paul did a miracle by striking Elymas temporarily blind. As in Acts 8:5–13, true prophets, who had the power to do true miracles, were perfectly willing to use their power in the presence of unbelievers and false teachers. They did so to validate their message by proving the superior power of true miracles over the power false prophets.

Note that not all miracles gave physical benefits to people. Some actually caused problems as punishment for sin. But all served the purpose of confirming a message or teaching to be from God (Acts 14:3). What modern "faith healer" will do miracles today like the one Paul did here?

Note that, on the basis of the evidence of the miracle, Sergius Paulus did in fact become a believer.

V. Sermon in Antioch of Pisidia – Acts 13:13–52

The Sermon

>>> Please read Acts 13:13–22. <<<

21 In what city did Paul preach the sermon found in vv 14ff? Answer: Paul preached in _____.

22 What had God done when Israel was enslaved in Egypt? Answer: God brought them from Egypt to the land of _____.

23 What rulers did God give Israel at first? (a) kings, (b) Caesars, (c) judges, (d) presidents, (e) all the preceding. Answer: _____.

24 Why were they eventually given kings? Answer: They received a king because the people _____ for a king.

Comments: From Cyprus the company sailed northwest to Perga in Asia Minor (see a map). There John Mark left the company. This later became an occasion of conflict between Barnabas and Saul.

They traveled from there to Antioch in Pisidia (as distinguished from Antioch in Syria). There they entered a synagogue to find an opportunity to teach. Note that, in Paul's preaching trips, in every new city he would go first to the Jewish synagogue. This almost always led to teaching opportunities.

Some try to use the example of Paul to prove that Christians today must observe the seventh-day sabbath. However, these were not assemblies of Christians, but assemblies of unconverted Jews. They observed the sabbath, because the Old Testament was given especially to the Jews (not to all nations – Ex. 31:13–17), and they did not know the Old Testament had been removed by Jesus (Col. 2:14–17; Heb. 10:9,10). Paul knew the law had been removed, but he attended the synagogues to find a good place to begin teaching the gospel.

Given an opportunity to speak, Paul reviewed the Jews' history as recorded in the Old Testament, much like Stephen did in Acts 7. He told how God had freed Israel from Egyptian slavery and gave them the land of Canaan. They were ruled by judges until they insisted that God give them a king (1 Sam. 8). Their first two kings were Saul and then David.

>>> Please read Acts 13:23–31. <<<

25 Jesus was sent in fulfillment of a promise to whom (vv 22,23)? Answer: Jesus was promised to be a descendant of _____.

26 Who came before Jesus to prepare the people for Him? Answer: _____ came before Jesus and prophesied of Him.

27 Why did Jews condemn Jesus to death? (a) they did not know Him, (b) they misunderstood the

prophets, (c) both of the preceding. Answer: _____.

Comment: In fulfillment of a promise He had made to David, God sent Jesus to be a Savior to Israel. This states the main thesis of Paul's sermon, as it was in most sermons among unbelievers: Jesus is the Savior of mankind and the appointed Ruler (Christ) of God's people.

Paul then began to accumulate evidence to support his claims regarding Jesus. John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus, and He testified that Jesus was greater than John himself. Nevertheless, the Jewish people and their leaders killed Jesus, thereby unknowingly fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. But God raised Jesus from the dead, and He then appeared to many witnesses who were sure to know Him since they had known Him for years beforehand.

Paul here lists three proofs to sustain His claim that Jesus was sent by God to give people salvation: (1) the testimony of John, (2) fulfilled prophecy, (3) the resurrection.

>>> Please read Acts 13:32–41. <<<

28 Who fulfilled the prophecy that he would see no corruption? (a) David, (b) Paul, (c) Peter, (d) Jesus, (e) all the preceding. Answer: _____.

29 What blessing did Jesus bring for the people (vv 38,39)? Answer: Through Jesus _____ was proclaimed to the people.

30 With what warning did Paul conclude his sermon (vv 40,41)? Answer: Paul warned that they might not _____, even though the message was told to them.

Comments: As Paul drew toward the end of his sermon, he continued quoting other prophecies that Jesus had fulfilled. One of them predicted that He would not see corruption. Just as Peter had done in Acts 2, Paul said this could not be a prophecy about David himself (who spoke it), because David saw corruption. The fulfillment was that, though Jesus died, yet He was raised from the dead. This fulfilled the prophecy and was a great miracle of itself.

These proofs confirmed Paul's claim that Jesus was the Christ whom God had sent. The blessing the people could receive as a result was forgiveness of sins (v38). They could be truly justified from sin, a blessing that the Old Testament law could not provide (v39). Hebrews 10:1–18 explains this point further. The law gave people commands to obey and then condemned them for disobeying (Rom. 3:10–23). Yet the animal sacrifices it required could not give lasting forgiveness; rather, sins were remembered again a year later. The blessing of Jesus' sacrifice is that it can forgive sins so they are never remembered again. This is the great blessing that God had planned throughout history to bring upon all Jews and Gentiles through Jesus.

But this blessing can only be received by those who are willing to meet the conditions that God has ordained. The first of these conditions was that people must believe in Jesus (v39). This condition would, in turn, require several other specific conditions as shown in other examples (repentance, confession, and baptism), but Paul emphasized faith here because these were unbelieving Jews. He then concluded the sermon by warning them of the danger that they might not believe, even after God's work had been explained to them. This too had been prophesied in the Old Testament.

The Effect of the Sermon

>>> Please read Acts 13:42–52. <<<

31 Who wanted to hear the gospel the following sabbath? Answer: Nearly the whole _____ came to hear the message.

32 How did the Jews react to this response by the city? Answer: Jews were filled with envy and _____ the teaching.

33 What did Paul and Barnabas say they would do next? (a) nothing, (b) preach to Gentiles, (c) go home, (d) all the preceding. Answer: _____.

34 Why did they eventually have to leave town? Answer: They left because the Jews instigated _____ against them.

Comments: In response to Paul's sermon, many Jews and proselytes (Gentiles converted to Judaism) continued to learn the message. The following week nearly the whole city came to hear. This aroused the Jews to such jealousy that they opposed and contradicted the teaching, so Paul and Barnabas determined to preach primarily to the Gentiles.

Note in v46 that those who reject the gospel have judged themselves to be unworthy of eternal life. By contrast, those who were receptive to the gospel were appointed to eternal life (v48). Some conclude this refers to Calvinistic unconditional predestination of people regardless of their choice or character. But people are often appointed or ordained to a position conditionally based on their characteristics (cf. Acts 14:23 to 1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). Unconditional election would constitute respect of persons (cf. Acts 10:34,35; Rom. 2:6–11). We have seen throughout Acts that people choose for themselves how to respond to the gospel.

Jewish persecution finally compelled Paul and Barnabas to flee.

Personal application questions:

(These questions are for you to ponder. Your answers will help us understand your thinking, however they will not affect your "score.")

35 Do you attend a church that is affiliated with a centralized organization? _____

36 What would God think of people today who allow others to bow to them or speak of them as God? _____

37 Should faithful preachers today firmly rebuke people who sin? _____

When you have carefully studied this lesson and written down answers to all the questions, click on this link to submit your answers.

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